INTERVENTIONS

DECONSTRUCTING INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

MICHAEL DILLON
DECONSTRUCTING INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

Michael Dillon is internationally regarded for his contributions by political philosophers, international relations scholars and security studies experts, as well as by philosophers more broadly. It is difficult to overrate his importance to the development of critical deconstructive approaches, not only in challenging traditional scholarship and addressing contemporary politics but in articulating new approaches and new thinking.

This book draws together some of his key works and is framed by an introduction written specially for the volume. It is the first full-length work to draw on the insights and techniques of deconstruction to analyse international relations. Influenced primarily by Derrida, it critiques the cornerstones of international relations such as modernity, the state, the subject, security and ethics and justice.

This volume will provide an invaluable resource for teaching at undergraduate and postgraduate levels on traditional international relations courses and on the increasing number of specialised courses in critical approaches. Well designed and structured, it is accessible to the novice as well as challenging for the specialist.

Michael Dillon is Emeritus Professor of Politics at the University of Lancaster, UK.
Interventions

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Deconstructing International Politics
Michael Dillon
DECONSTRUCTING INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

Michael Dillon
For
Isaac and Charlotte

With love from
Papa

(Lancaster, April 2012)
Cuan Sound

Gale blasted
Yellow girt light,
Settling sea.
Frozen fisted round the amber cool glass.

(July 1999)
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Deconstructing International Politics is deeply influenced by a turn in western thinking that goes back at least to Nietzsche, but it draws no system of thought from that turn. The essays reprinted here are experiments in trying to theorise our modern condition politically, and they describe an intellectual journey, imprinted by the horrors of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, that shuttles between the discourse of international politics and security and the questioning of continental philosophy. They are apprentice pieces. The predominant influence at work within them is the work of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, hence the book title. I therefore hope that the book will be of interest to those now teaching and researching the many critical approaches to politics and international relations that emerged from the 1990s onwards. I thank the original publishers for permission to republish the essays here.

Ordinarily, a good apprentice would be the product of a good master. But none such were available at the time that I did the reading and the writing for these essays. There were no reliable rules to follow and no well-defined field of thought to circumscribe the questioning. The thinking to which these essays are indebted is therefore given over more to pluralising modes of questioning than it is to disciplinary map-making. If there were no roadmaps then there was instead the unquenchable unruliness of questioning and the excitement of the reading and thinking that fuels it. I hope that in its turn the book may stimulate such questioning and thinking and, in however small a measure, return the intellectual openness and excitement from which these essays first grew.

The autodidactic character of the new learning displayed in the essays is nonetheless painfully evident to me, as it must remain to those who were trained in continental philosophy, in particular, but had the generosity to welcome my curiosity. I am not as disappointed in them as I thought I might be when my editor Jenny Edkins first proposed that I put this collection together. I wish that I could have
done much better, but for all their frailties this was the best that I could do. Jenny, like others I have befriended on this journey, had more faith in me than I had in myself. I am deeply thankful for her support, as I have been for that of many distinguished scholars, as well as students, without whom I am not sure I would have survived the journey. And so, I am embarrassed by the extent of my indebtedness to the legion of quite singular individuals that I encountered on the way. I set out to list them all. It was impossible. I was bound to forget someone, and that one would be one to whom I would have owed the most special debt. I abandoned the effort and took comfort in the following. Derrida teaches that a gift is only a gift if it is not returned. I have been fortunate in being offered the gift of intellectual friendship by colleagues worldwide as well as at home in Lancaster. I do not want to spoil the bonds of those friendships by translating them into an economy. Suffice it to say, then, that the joy of my work has been the wit and generosity of the very many individuals whose company I shared.

That said, a journey like the one recorded here levies its greatest toll on those closest to you. My heartfelt love and thanks, then, go to Jeannette, Jayne and Sarah. Without their forbearance, humour and love, it simply would not have been possible. The book is dedicated to my grandchildren, Isaac James McHugh and Charlotte Jayne McHugh.
INTRODUCTION

Derrida

Jacques Derrida was born in Algeria on 15 July 1930. He died in France on 8 October 2004, aged 74.

At school during the Pétain regime of the early 1940s, Derrida experienced the anti-Semitism of the collaborationist government. Subsequently expelled from the Lycée de Ben Aknoun, he was sent to another institution staffed by Jewish teachers, who had themselves also been expelled from the public education system. Derrida skipped school, failed exams and read. One wonders how much this was a helpful preparation for independent thought. In our tradition of Western philosophy we think the political in the way that we do because of the way that we think. In reading and writing in the ways that he did, Derrida established his own singular way of thinking. He thereby changed the way that we think. After Derrida, it is possible to think about politics, government and rule differently. Derrida's thinking leads to the reproblematisation of thinking politically as such.

Having made it through school and into the mainland French system, Derrida worked with the Marxist thinker Louis Althusser at the École Normale Supérieure. Thereafter he taught at the Sorbonne, where he met Michel Foucault, later returning to the École where he taught for twenty more years. In 1979, with other colleagues, he founded the Estates General of Philosophy at the Sorbonne. He was also involved in the founding of the Collège International de Philosophie in Paris in 1983, and he became its first Director. He was then elected as directeur d'études at the Écoles des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociale in Paris, where he remained until his retirement at the age of 67. This represents quite a lot of philosophical institution building for one reputed to care so little about the world of practice. Like all great philosophisers, he was a dedicated pedagogue as well as a thinker.

Derrida was also an itinerant scholar, travelling widely and holding visiting appointments in the United States, notably at Yale, Johns Hopkins and the
University of California, Irvine. He made his ‘debut’ at a conference held at Johns Hopkins in 1966. There he presented a remarkable paper ‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’ (1981). The following year he published three key texts: *Writing and Difference* (1981a), *Of Grammatology* (1976) and *Speech and Phenomena* (1973). Central to all his thinking was a concern with the excess or supplementarity that not only deconstructs thinking but also haunts existence.

My first encounter with Derrida concerned what is arguably one of the most important, if simplest, things that Derrida taught: how to read and write. It is so important that it has the power to radicalise how we think when we think about politics, about how politics is practised and about the hopes we invest in it. Derrida’s own reading and writing deliberately stops us in our tracks and makes us pay renewed attention to the assumptions we make about reading and writing politically.

**In Media res**

Reading any great thinker can prompt a kind of epiphany. A certain Derridaean epiphany arrived for me through teaching. Such things often do. My students asked me how defence decisions were made, since that is what I claimed to study. I found myself saying, ‘They talk and they write things down’. This was the smart response of the insider manqué to the impressionable outsider. I found myself recycling this and other epithets. But I was faking it. They were clichés. Clichés that helped to defer seriously posing and answering questions concerning one of several things I was becoming unable to ignore; the role of the political economy of the sign and the deeply textual and inter-textual nature of rule. If I was concluding that ‘they’ talked and wrote things down, it was time to take the relationship between language and politics seriously.

I began reading Derrida in the middle of my career. It happened that I was stuck at the time. I found myself without the analytical and conceptual resources to articulate some of the things that I had learned up to that point. Indeed, the very intellectual vocabulary with which I had earlier been equipped seemed to be a positive impediment to speaking about the things I had begun to learn during the course of my early research.

In retrospect something like this seemed to have happened. When first being interviewed for admission to a PhD programme I was asked what I wanted to do. I said I wanted to research Western defence and security policy, that of the UK in particular, by analysing the organisation of defence decision-making. After that I went on to write my PhD on a case study in UK nuclear weapons acquisition. Since my research was conducted broadly in the context of international relations, I more or less skipped political theory, for this was then regarded as a positive impediment to the serious business of international policy analysis. I did, however, read a lot of organisation theory, which struck me even at the time as a kind of political theory without the politics. My route to political theorising was therefore a peculiar and autodidactic one. I don’t recommend it. But there are things to be learnt from it.
I was following an intuitive course, and getting into deep intellectual water. From organisation theory I found my way to continental philosophy, and from continental philosophy I found my way to theorising politically. Bizarre? Probably. But I wonder how many others have done that. In any event it was clearly an idiosyncratic way of beginning to theorise about politics, government and rule. If I think of myself now as a kind of political theorist, I nonetheless still find it hard to call myself one. I was never trained in the canon of political thought, and there are huge and embarrassing gaps in my learning. Political theory is one thing; however, theorising politically with and against the tradition is another. The one is largely concerned with exegesis. The other operates outwith the canon of political thought and its indebtedness to favoured philosophical traditions, while trying to theorise the politics, government and rule of the times in which you find yourself.

Having begun academic life as a participant observer of British defence decision-making, my research experience progressively conflicted with my research training. I became acutely aware of a deep mismatch between the way things got done and how they were said to get done. How things were done was mechanical or technical. How things were said to get done was at that time said to be based upon a realist account of political affairs. In fact, much of it was a recycling of pop metaphysics. I could not have used the term metaphysics at the time. I didn’t know it. But that is what it was. The higher I went in the organisations involved, and I was privileged to go high, the more evidently my interviewees also appreciated the mismatch. Curiously enough, also, if, as Derrida noted in *Politics of Friendship*, the decision must ‘surprise the very subjectivity of the subject’, I found defence decision makers continuously surprised and surprised in their subjectivity in similar ways (Derrida 1995c: 68). I did not first gain these and other insights from outside. Neither did I gain them from reading theory. I learnt them from the inside, and prior to reading almost any theory. I do not think Derrida would have been surprised by my experience.

It was recognising this and other kinds of mismatch, especially those to do with what I would come to call the political economy of the sign, which propelled me towards theory. It was the accident of therefore finding myself stuck in the middle of things that launched me down the track of Derrida, among many other continental thinkers. They seemed to have something to offer to someone still preoccupied with how things were done but now thoroughly disbelieving of how things were said to be done.

**The political economy of the sign**

Whatever we speak and write, and however we do it, we are thrown into language. Perhaps it is better to say that we are thrown up by language. Language precedes and survives us. We come to presence in it as we pass through it. It makes and changes us, as much as we make and change language.

We also know from our language use that this ‘we’ that I have been using arises in language, and that however much, in sharing a language, we cannot escape invoking
the ‘we’, we nonetheless also know that the ‘we’ is irredeemably problematic. We know that the ‘I’ of the individual speaking subject is equally as problematic as the ‘we’. And yet, especially in matters concerning modern politics, government and rule, we do not seem to be able do without either ‘we’ or ‘I’. Among other things, it is the everyday operation of language that teaches us these lessons.

Derrida was notoriously preoccupied with language and the sign. What he taught nonetheless seemed to me to concern what we already knew and understood. Take words, for example; but the same can be said about signification in general. We know that we do things with words. We know that words not only do things for us but also do things to us and with us. We know that words fail to reach their targets. That they break up and break off, and that because they do so they fail to exhaust the meaning of what it is we wish to say through them. We also know that we can exploit this, the very defining feature of language. Poets do it. Playwrights do it. Comedians do it. Children do it. And governments do it. It is the very wonder of language. Our relation to language is thus an uncanny one. We think we have language but we also know that language has us. If you have ever appreciated a joke, particularly against yourself, you have enjoyed the experience of being ‘had’ by language. We therefore already know that we always say much more and less than we intend, and that we struggle to bend language to our will in the hope that we can make it say only what we want it to say; even when we are using it to lie. In governing language we seek simultaneously also to govern ourselves, and others. The language of rule, we might say, is thus intimately related to the rule of language.

Some of this can be learnt from others, such as John Austin (1962). All of this, and much more politically and ethically, can be learnt from Derrida and that was one of the reasons I was first attracted to him. There is, however, no single or privileged point of entry into Derrida’s work. You begin where you find yourself, as I did, in the middle of things. Some autobiography concerning how, finding myself in the middle of things, I first encountered Derrida therefore serves as my entry point here. It tells of how it changed my thinking. It is a cautionary story concerning the advantages and disadvantages of teaching yourself, and it is a cautionary story in as much as the modern Academy seldom proves charitable to changes in thinking. Fortunately, the Academy remains a place where the thinking it makes fugitive remains possible.

What encapsulates language for Derrida, what operationalises the political economy of the sign, is writing. I also first learnt this lesson on the inside, sitting in on a UK Ministry of Defence working party tasked with drafting a UK Annual Defence White Paper. Those drafting it knew the stakes at issue in the production and circulation of such a text. They knew that words counted and that, however much they tried to make provision for it, the text would eventually escape the finite horizons of its authors. Technically, I doubt that they would have been much fazed by the way that deconstruction was first assimilated into the Academy as a certain kind of analytical device, emphasising the way in which texts work through reliance upon something unavowed but integral to the text. The unavowed, for them, took the
form of the disguised service or departmental interests buried in their texts. But it also took the form of an obsession with how the text would be read once it went into circulation, no matter how restricted that circulation might be. A Defence White Paper was, of course, meant to have the widest possible circulation and so the text was obsessively interrogated because everyone knew it had the power to backfire. These drafters knew that texts acquire a life of their own, and that there is ultimately no governing how they are finally read and put to use.

For Derrida much wider implications were, however, in play. 'In order for my “written communication” to retain its function as writing, i.e. its readability', he wrote in *Limited Inc.* (Derrida 1988):

> it must remain readable despite the absolute disappearance of any receiver, determined in general. My communication must be repeatable – iterable – in the absolute absence of the receiver or of any empirically determinable collectivity of receivers. Such iterability (... the working out of the logic that ties repetition to alterity) structures the mark of writing itself, no matter what particular type of writing is involved.

(Derrida 1988: 7)

In other words, the condition of the possibility of writing – taken as the condition of all significations – is the possibility of repetition in the absence of another receiver. It is not simply that this logic of the possibility of repetition structures the possibility of signification as such. It is crucial to understand that the logic depends upon something that is absent. Signifying to another ‘one’ does not secure the possibility of signification as such. It only secures the possibility of signification in the presence of another one receiving the signification.

If, for Derrida, signification is to signify as such, independent, so to speak, of another one receiving the signification, then, logically and structurally, it has to signify in the presence of the absence of a receiver. More than that, it has to signify in terms of the structural possibility of the radical absence of a receiver. The readability of the sign on any one actual occasion, he says, is possible only if another repetition is always possible without the presence of a receiver: ‘For a writing to be a writing it must continue to “act” and to be readable even when what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written... The situation of the writer is, concerning the text, basically the same as that of the reader’ (Derrida 1988: 8).

One thing that follows from this, politically, is that signification can never be a wholly private act. By virtue of Derrida’s account of the structural possibility of signification, signification is always already ‘public’. Signification must structurally therefore be for every possible language user in general. Even when talking to ourselves, the operation of signification teaches that we are up to our necks in an uncanny form of life: a life that we share in common courtesy of language. Once again, this absence that is present he calls the Other. That is what he means when he says that the structural possibility of signification is the tie to alterity. Another
thing followed from this account of the operation of language and the sign: the
one was always already more and less than one. It was never whole. The whole was
always already split wide open. This was not a matter for regret. It was why there
was anything at all. This was also not an abstract matter. It was no mere condition
of possibility. It conditions the everyday operationality of human existence.

Deconstruction is therefore not merely an analytical device. It names some-
thing that takes place in every act of signification because every act of signification
depends, for Derrida, upon this absent presence of what defies signification and
calculation within the domain of signification and calculation. It is what actually
enables there to continue to be signification and calculation. For Derrida, then, it
was not simply that something goes on in language that defeats our ambition to
make everything intelligible, or to make everything add up. Nor is it that some-
thing goes on that defeats our attempts to be purely ‘me’, purely ‘you’, or purely
‘us’, the exclusively self-willing and interest-driven authors of ourselves, singly and
collectively. Without that something we would not be anything at all. You have
to understand this supplement, therefore, not only as a condition of possibility but
beyond even how it conditions our very operability as language users. For Derrida,
it governs our existence. Some people react violently against this teaching because
it appears to deny us all power of judgement, both ethical and political. Conversely,
however, the very power of Derrida’s thought lies here. It is this that radicalises
decision and judgement, both ethically and politically.

Doing and deciding

We therefore know that we have to do and decide things while caught up in the
middle of things. We can never find a simple origin from which to take our bear-
ings. We create or recreate such origins as I am doing. But we also know that we
cannot escape deciding even when we cannot unravel the puzzles in which we are
cought up by going back to the beginning. Origins are like the pot of gold at the
end of the rainbow. The more we approach them the more they recede from us.
So, we never quite get to the bottom of things and things seldom, if ever, stack up.
The same can also be said of the story I am telling here. It is only a partial story.
In doing and deciding there are always oversights, leftovers, uncertainties and risks,
as well as the simple matter of not knowing, and not being able to know. In the
event we decide without knowing everything. Derrida calls this ‘the madness of
decision’. I doubt that there is anyone who has not experienced this madness of
decision.

In a novel observation about such ‘madness’, Derrida also noted that the respon-
sibility for decision-making arises precisely with this shortfall. We have to be
prepared to pick up the tab or cost of what we decide to do even when it was
not possible for us to calculate the outcome with final precision. A new sense
of accountability and responsibility arises here. It seems counter-intuitive. How
can one be held accountable for what one could not have known? And yet one
must always be so, since everything that we do is filled not only with risk and
uncertainty but also the not knowable. We can never know enough and, yet, we remain responsible in our ignorance. Knowing is never enough, but deliberately not knowing is irresponsible, or a deliberate avoidance strategy.

I tried at first to avoid reading Derrida and other continental thinkers. There were good reasons for doing so, not least the astonishing hostility they engendered within certain parts of the Academy, then as now. There is, therefore, no getting to the bottom of how I started or why I persisted. But I did, and it ‘responsibilised’ me in new ways, not least in respect of what I taught, the truths I thought needed telling and how I taught them. I struggled to become a different kind of truth-teller.

My PhD interviewers thought, however, that I was mad from the very beginning. Defence decision-making was surrounded by secrecy and confidentiality. The archives were closed. So was the circle of insiders. No one would tell me anything, anything useful anyway. It was not possible to penetrate the *arcana imperii* of policy-making until the issues and those involved in them were safely dead. I had to wait until the facts became available. Admittedly, I was applying to a History department and, given their understanding of history in those days, I thought that they might say that.

I applied to a Politics department as well. Its members seemed less epistemologically fastidious. They realised that things had to be dealt with while they were still underway and their practitioners still alive. They also dealt in abstractions – approved abstractions – such as *raison d’État*, national interest, rational actors, game theory, satisficers and levels of analysis. Institutional analysis was big. So also were behavioural politics and social science statistics. Bureaucratic politics was also coming into vogue, as were its many savvy epithets: ‘where you stand depends upon where you sit’; ‘You don’t know what you want until you know what you can get’; ‘The best is the enemy of the good’. Such things were said to me. I read them in books later.

Policing the study of politics was, nonetheless, what departments of politics seemed best at doing. Only later did I realise how far back into classical political thought that policing went. Even in the course of my early research I found that, if you wanted to study politics, government and rule as it was practised, you had to break some of the conventional rules that seek to define the nature of politics, government and rule. It turns out that it, too, is a common insight.

Everyone, even an empiricist, has to deal in abstractions. A common charge levelled at deconstruction, however, has long been the complaint that it is too abstract. As my story indicates, it never seemed much like that to me. I figured it was talking about what I had been learning through conducting a kind of political anthropology of defence establishments. The problem with the charge was also immediately clear to me. Deconstruction dealt in the wrong or the proscribed abstractions: those that made many of its critics politically as well as intellectually and ethically uncomfortable. Such objections were themselves often both contradictory in their claims and viscerally obscure in their motives. Dismissive remarks were most often made to me by those happy to admit that they had not read any of the texts. Secondary literature was enough to tell them that these thinkers were ‘apostates’. I could
never understand, either, how something that was said to be impossibly obscure and difficult to understand was simultaneously condemned for its widespread and pernicious influence. Of course I did understand. What I could not understand was how this could be said to be a reasoned, let alone a reasonable, response, as it had nothing to do with reason. The visceral reactions prompted by continental thinkers had to do with many other things. I tired of pointing this out and went back to renewing my reading and writing.

The apostasy also attracted me. Even those who wore their ignorance as a badge of pride were correct. In the degree to which they take the message of Western reasoning seriously, and seriously engaged with it, Derrida and the others were apostates. Apostates are usually comprised of those who take the truth of their tradition beyond the institutional policing of it. Lumped together under some misconceived label or other, the profound differences between such thinkers were also elided. But then, if you don’t read the texts you can hardly be expected to appreciate how different the thinking was, and how much of an argument was going on between them. The apostasy attracted rather than repelled me. I think it was the influential German theologian Karl Barth who said that heretics were always the most interesting thinkers (Lazier 2008).

Similar criticisms were made about the relativism and nihilism of Derrida and the others – a supposed dismissal of universals and transcendentals. Arguably, where Derrida is concerned, we might say that he did not wish to do away with transcendentals so much as he thought that the prevailing transcendentals were simply not good enough. Deconstruction is therefore as much an ontological observation as it is a technique. For Derrida, it was first and foremost an uncanny fact of life that came out originally in his reading of the classics: ‘there is a deconstruction at work in Plato’s work, for instance’ (Derrida 1997a: 9). ‘Deconstruction’, he wrote, ‘is not a method or some tool that you apply to something from the outside. Deconstruction is something that happens and which happens inside’ (Derrida 1997a: 9).

I acquired a basic proficiency in the main variants of rational actor theory, in the theory of satisficing and in organisational theory, as well as in the canon of international relations theory. I also learnt about game theory and the practices of crisis management and bureaucratic politics. In the process I was taught the international history of the twentieth century and in particular the geopolitical history of the Cold War. It turned out that a lot of defence decision makers did talk to me. It also turned out that there was a lot in the archive that could also be accessed one way or another. I travelled widely through defence institutions. I interviewed a lot of senior people. I continuously criss-crossed the so-called civil–military divide, and discovered that it was a powerful and mutating space of intersection. Here, again, another vocabulary seemed required to explain what was clearly a politically and commercially dominant, self-reproducing resonance machine, for which even the term military–industrial complex is now inadequate. I spoke with defence industrialists, techno-scientists, parliamentarians and defence correspondents in the media. I read files where these were made available or landed on my doorstep. I thought
I was acquiring a good sense of how things worked. In one sense I was. In another I was just preparing myself for pursuing questions that did not occur to me when I first set out. Once they began to arise, however, I found their force irresistible. Others did not, of course, and many continue to resist them. Some of those issues and questions are addressed in the chapters that follow.

It was only after reading Derrida, especially on the madness of decision, that I understood the way in which I had set out as ‘mad’. From Derrida I came especially to understand that the moment of decision by which I was so intrigued in my early years was the moment of undecidability when the legible, the sayable and the calculable emerge as infused throughout with the illegible, the unsayable and the incalculable (Derrida 1992a: 26; Derrida 1995a: 65).

However careful one is in the theoretical preparation of a decision, the instant of the decision, if there is to be a decision, must be heterogeneous to the accumulation of knowledge. Otherwise, there is no responsibility. In this sense, not only must the person taking the decision not know everything but the decision, if there is to be one, must advance towards a future which is not known, which cannot be anticipated (Derrida 1994: 37).

I didn’t have the resources to put it like that then. The chapters that follow are a record of how I struggled to find a way of writing about how this, and related matters, were part of the warp and weft of international politics in general and of security politics in particular. I also began to appreciate how such issues were deeply embedded, more generally, in the complex history and character of modern politics. Much of what follows in these chapters therefore became a reflection also on the very periodising of the modern, the assumptions that go into this periodising and the categories of politics, government and rule said to comprise political modernity, in which international relations theory plays a regional part.

I therefore didn’t begin to find the resources for which I began intuitively to search until I was an established academic researcher running out of resources. For a while I fled from thinkers in the continental tradition. I had good reason to do so. I was warned off them. I was told that reading Derrida, Heidegger, Foucault and the other suspects could damage your health. It was true. It still is. Many colleagues appeared to be scandalised by them. I concluded that they were frightened. So was I. It was not a matter of picking up a few new analytical tools. I had to learn a new language of thought. You find you cannot say very much when you are learning a new language, and that the little you can say makes you sound stupid. Not a cool thing for a mid-career academic. However, when you learn a new language a new world also opens up to you. The intellectual excitement going on in that world was infectious. It continues to excite me. I cannot pretend, therefore, that I was drawn into it solely because it explained the world in a better way for me. I think it did. But I also confess that I was captured by the very excitement of thinking as such. No shame in that; rather, a certain exhilaration in coming to embrace the joy of learning and thinking for its own sake. The only advice I would offer others from my experience is this: do it sooner rather than later.
In particular, I began to appreciate one of the foundational points. The tradition of Western thinking is called metaphysics. Another name for it is onto-theology. Metaphysics privileges presence, or that which is. That which is, is, in principle, also said to be one: both undivided and knowable. It adds up. And it adds up because it is said somehow to have secure foundations: typically in God, nature or reason. However, from Derrida I learnt that that which is does not add up. In fact, it cannot add up if there is to be space for anything to be at all, especially anything new. (There are other political thinkers, such as Jacques Rancière, from whom you can now learn something much more politically focused like this, albeit in different ways and with different implications.) Via the term deconstruction, Derrida demonstrated that it did not add up. He showed, instead, how that which is depends upon a peculiar structure of presence and absence. What is depends also upon what is not; in the same way, the self depends upon the Other. That which is has a temporal structure for us. What the controversial German philosopher Heidegger had called the Being of being renders us continuously open to the advent of a future that is always on its way to us. Caught in the middle of things, we are always on the way to something else that never arrives quite how we plan it. In Derrida’s terms it is always ‘to-come’.

If you wish to rule, and police the implementation of rule, go ahead. You might say it has to be done. It has. But not everyone has to do it, or be turned into a standing reserve to fuel it. Well, perhaps. For whether or not someone or something has to rule, rule there has always been. But one can say with equal force and intensity something entirely other than this. That there have always been senseless acts of kindness, or that there has always been art: that the impulse governing kindness and art is one entirely other than the impulse to rule; that there therefore also has to be the senselessness of art and kindness as well; that someone has to do it; that such senseless expressions of human being also arise in and from extremis; that these are also expressions, contra Hobbes and Schmitt, of the limit situation, of states of exception and exceptional states quite differently conceived; and that, finally, there is a civility here entirely outwith that of citizen and polity, subject and state, one that has troubled politics, government and rule from their very inception. It takes a tragic sensibility to give such equally compelling considerations their political due, which is what makes tragedy an indispensable aid to theorising politically.

Since there seemed to me no way of denying these and the many other insights I was drawing from Derrida, in particular, and continental philosophy in general, I concluded at first that it was just as important to pursue and champion these insights. I was naïve. I was headed into the maelstrom of debate concerning the very nature and ethics of political modernity itself. The issue was clearly the classical one of how to live, but close coupled to a deep suspicion of the precepts by which we moderns are currently ruled and live politically. That was why continental thought repelled those who responded to it with such visceral hostility – a visceral hostility conditioned by indebtedness to the very sovereign vanities and violences targeted so devastatingly by continental thought.
In being drawn to Derrida and many of the others, notably Michel Foucault, I did not think, however, that I was being drawn away from my major area of concern. On the contrary, it seemed to me that this was an enormously powerful means of being more intimately drawn into it. Although Foucault is not the primary influence in the chapters that follow, he does recur throughout them because I was especially impressed by what Foucault had to say, especially about power. He was the first author I had ever read who understood the operation of power relations in the ways in which I had been experiencing them in my travels through defence institutions. Of course power was not a commodity. Of course it was a matter of network relations. Of course it functioned through discourses. Of course it was a plural, diverse and mutating phenomenon. Of course the metaphysics of sovereignty had to be differentiated from governance. Once more I had come to appreciate this before I found the means of expressing such insights and pursuing their wider ramifications and implications. I was on a slippery slope and many times came to grief. Reading Foucault nonetheless engendered another kind of epiphany. Different epiphanies indicated that there was also a profound argument going on here between the two thinkers, as there is throughout continental philosophy, and not some simple concordance of thinking.

I was therefore being drawn more intimately into what had long concerned me. But I was also being drawn into it in ways that progressively distanced me from the ways it was traditionally analysed and taught. I found that while I appreciated how and why decision makers and their fellow-travelling academics were instrumentally driven and technically minded in the sense that Heidegger understood technology, the techne of instrumentality was not what came to interest me most. I became more interested in the conditions of possibility and operability that furnished the functional presuppositions instituting such a drive towards instrumentalisation.

I thereby became much less interested in how to play the game, or improving the playing of it, and more interested in how it had become the only game in town. This was especially the case when I could see that it was not, and that its claim to universality relied upon assumptions that were clearly historical rather than universal. In other words, it was perfectly evident to me that so many other things were going on as well, that it was possible to think otherwise and that to do so required new ways of speaking as well as thinking. Ultimately, as these taught me to understand human being and human affairs differently, I came to reject the strategically instrumental game entirely as radically self-destructive and dangerous to human wellbeing. In the early days, especially, however, I mostly found myself stammering and stuttering.

The chapters that follow, written between 1989 and 2010, are, therefore, apprentice pieces. They change their tack. They do not stack up. They offer no system of thought. In particular, they are not an exegesis of Derrida and his relevance to political thinking. Those who know Derrida's work will recognise just how much of it is left out of account here. No doubt, also, there is much to dispute about how I put him to work. The later chapters clearly also question Derrida as much as they make use of him to question other things. I have revised some of
papers for publication here, mainly by providing a more up to date introduction to the earliest essays. However, they remain substantially the essays that were first published. If, overall, they lack system and regimen, I can see in retrospect that they are nonetheless obsessive, and that their obsessions are few and focused: language and politics; sovereignty and rule; signification and security; justice and otherness.

In preparing the essays for publication I have continually had to ask myself in what, then, do these essays constitute an apprenticeship? Forcing myself to give an answer, I concluded that they were an apprenticeship in coming to theorise politically about factual freedom, and in ways that admit the continuing political relevance of tragic insight to the intensification of the rage for behavioural regulation, global exploitation and the securitisation of rule which threaten to betray the promise of factual freedom. However late and poor the start I made with these essays, their untimeliness reinforces the message. It should be done sooner and better. More power, then, to the very many more young scholars in international politics now working at doing just that.
MODERNITY, SECURITY AND DETERRENCE

Periodisation

Periods are made, not discovered (Davis 2008). In fitting us into a universe, or cosmos, a periodisation does not simply seek to ask about the nature of that universe or cosmos. In doing so it also seeks to pose and answer a very specific temporal question. Or, rather, it poses its questions about the universe or cosmos in which we are said to live in a temporal and practical way. It asks ‘what times are these in which we live?’ There could be no more politically loaded question, for the answer given will specify how we should conduct and govern our lives given the nature of the times in which we are said to live. The nature of the times, and what the times demand of us, are supremely political questions. They not only concern the problematisation and institution of government and rule but also they reach down into the very fabric of what Michel Foucault called ‘the conduct of conduct’.

A period is, therefore, less a reified object of analysis than a complex and diverse project never fully realised or achieved. Think of it as a continuously contested field of formation and intervention, the very boundaries and composition of which are a focus of constant struggle. Such struggles are what periodisation itself consists in. Among other things, these struggles concern modes of enunciation and circulation. These, in turn, not only depend upon prevailing conceptions of language as well as of time and motion but also reflect the mechanical means as well as the norms of behaviour upon which the practices of reading, writing and communicating rely (Kittler 1990; 1999). One has only to reference the digitalisation of information and communication today, or successive transformations of reading and writing practices throughout the changing institution of the Western University, to appreciate the power of the point (le Goff 1993; Readings 1996).

A period is also a matter of corporeal formation. It individuates and relates bodies at once biological, corporate and virtual. During the Christian era, for example,
prevailing beliefs and practices associated with the very idea of what it means to be embodied linked the body of Christ to the body of the king (Kantorowicz 1957), a suffering Jesus to a suffering humanity, stigmata to sainthood and the ecumenical body of the Roman Church, and the worship of a God (sacrificed in the corporeal form of a man) to the resurrection of the body and the securing of eternal life for all mankind. Together with cultural formations of fashion, style and comportment, along with racialising, sexualising, gendering and transgendering practices, corporealisations helps comprise the business of periodisation. Various forms of disembodiment – or of para-embodiment, from angels to the body without organs (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) – are, of course, of no less concern than embodiment itself.

Modernity has perhaps been the paradigmatic periodising project since it is nothing but a changing, plural and diverse – indeed, continuously contending – body of discursive practices and dispositifs of power relations self-consciously seeking to institute and legitimise themselves as ‘modern’. Discourses of the modern invented the feudal and the medieval as they differentiated the feudal and the medieval from, thereby inventing, the modern (Davis 2008). None of this makes periods, such as that of the modern, any the less real. It is commonly the case that, in order to become ‘real’, periodisations efface the complex process of their own emergence (Davis 2008: 59). This, then, is the very nature of their reality; specifically, their political reality. For periods are highly charged and politically salient categories. Indeed, they are as much concerned with the struggle to determine how politics arises, and how questions of government and rule are to be problematised as well as resolved, as they are with what is moral, or what is courageous and beautiful, and how conduct is to be regulated tout court. A period thus has its ethos as well as its techne.

Periodisation and war

With periodisation we are therefore talking about a changing political economy of making, desiring and behaving as much as we are a distributive political economy of material welfare concerning who gets what, where, when and how. Along with aesthetics, techne and ethos, force, violence and aggression are all part of its make-up as well. An age is thus comprised by its violent practices as much its modes of civil organisation: military dress and, indeed, modes of address relate intimately with their civilian counterparts to produce and reproduce civil–military relations as well as distinctions. Forms of war and forms of life are thus intimately correlated. No more so than in the ‘modern age’.

Discourses of war have therefore always been central to periodising, not least the periodising of the modern. No modernity, no ‘modernisation’. No modernisation without modern war and the changing strategic discourses of modern warfare. Such discourses have encompassed many elements, including, for example, the socio–technical scientific transformation of war together with allied transformations of military strategic doctrine such as those of the nuclear deterrence policies and doctrines of the Cold War that concern the analysis of this chapter. But we
have also to include the formulation of operational concepts and doctrines; the organisation and training of armed forces; changing interpretations of the requirements of military leadership and command; the development of long-range military procurement processes, including especially the incorporation of science and technology into the research, development, design and acquisition of complex weapon systems and, latterly, highly integrated and globally deployed command, control, communication, surveillance and information systems; and the development of a global market in weapons sales and acquisition which is as important to the techno-scientific economies of the advanced industrial powers who sell them as it is to political regimes that buy them. Of concern also is the generic indoctrination of military cadres and publics alike into the causes, conduct and legitimation of war, alongside the development of novel international legal instruments for the restriction of warfare and the prosecution of political and military leaders accused of illegal acts of war and war crimes. But the discourse of modern warfare is comprised of many other issues as well.

Many of these discourses also seem to be driven less by the exigencies of warfare than by those of modern global market economies. If modern politics is the extension of war by other means, as Foucault, neatly reversing Clausewitz, claims that manifestly it is, the very coincidence of modern civil–military organisation and managerial ideologies substantiates his point; a point well made, of course, in Foucault's account of the rise of the disciplinary societies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (1977). Hence military strategic discourse is preoccupied with many of the same kinds of concern as, and uses much of the language characteristic of, transnational corporate enterprises, among which we have also to include the modern University. It is pointless to ask which comes first here, the chicken or the egg, since the very differentiation and individuation of the civil and the military as well as their tight reintegration is a function of modernising dynamics to which each gives its own expression.

Thus the very distinction between civil and military is an integral part of the discourse of the modern. But so also is the very contrary development of globally operating and tightly integrated techno-scientific and military–industrial complexes. These run entirely counter to the modern political idea of distinct civil–military relations. Understanding them and their dynamics calls for radically different accounts of the nature of modern power relations. These, in turn, must draw upon quite different assumptions concerning the nature of historical existence, and of modern political existence in particular, that prevail within the discourses of the modern itself: not least those that have hitherto defined political modernity in terms of stable states of representative and accountable government and efficiently functioning market economies nationally and internationally. Here modernisation seems to be largely comprised, instead, of a commercially driven military–industrial techno-science that tightly weaves economic consumption globally into very many varied types of rule as well as of state and inter-state warfare.

The periodisation of war therefore makes a pivotal contribution to the periodisation of the modern. It has an equal, if not greater, impact on defining what is
modern about modern politics, government and rule as economy, law and political theory. Hence, the dispute about the way the modern poses the question ‘what times are these in which we live?’ itself remains a battlespace. The discourse of nuclear deterrence was, however, a particular episode in the periodising of war as modern war. It was one in which many of the key features of the alliance of security and subjectivity, and of reason and war, as well as of the growth of the governmental, intelligence and policing powers of the modern state, were brought into play, in doing so helping to disclose the profound contradictions at work throughout some of the key tropes of political modernity, notably those of the subject, reason and decision. In modified and refined form many of the same tropes remain in play throughout the contemporary global war against terror.

**Modernity**

It seems that the necessity of distinguishing ‘the signs of the times’ is most directly and most powerfully at play in matters of life and death. As one notable post-war international relations textbook described it, the ‘essence of decision’ is a central organising category in the discourse of modern politics of security and war (Allison 1971). Modern political and military leaders alike are driven by the sovereign necessity to know and understand so as to be able to take decisional command of their times. Most modern military historians and strategic analysts routinely advance the commonly repeated claim that it is reason – the reason of *raison d’état* – that distinguishes modern warfare as modern.

Sovereign state power is, however, un-derived power. To make the law (*nomos*) the sovereign has to be outside law. To reason in a sovereign way, the sovereign has also to be outside the law of reason as well. By definition, the sovereign is thus profoundly antinomic. This applies as much to the *logos* as it does to the *nomos* of the sovereign. Rather than settling what is at stake in political discourses of the modern, as many international relations theorists, strategic historians and policy analysts commonly maintain that they do, the aporias, contradictions and enigmatic character of modern politics, security and war are deepened instead.

As Carl Schmitt put it in relation to the trope of decision, itself a key trope in the sovereign understanding of politics, ‘Looked at normatively, the decision emanates from nothing’ (Schmitt 1988b: 31–2). Sovereignty is not locatable, not even within the *raison d’état* that is commonly claimed to distinguish its modern variant. It has no source outside of the mythologising that periodises the modern and the *creatio ex nihilio* that is said, paradigmatically, by Schmitt to characterise the ‘miracle’ of sovereign decision. It is in fact the very discourse of the modern – including its discourse of rational instrumental decision-making – that serves not simply to found the modern, in contradistinction to the feudal, but to institute sovereignty as modernity’s defining problematisation of politics, government and rule. To say this, and to add that what distinguishes modern warfare is *raison d’état*, is ultimately to extend to modern warfare as well as modern politics, security and reason the very defining antinomic feature of sovereignty as such.
There seems, therefore, to be an especially powerful inter-discursive and inter-textual dynamic at work in the discourses of modernity, security, subjectivity and war. Some additional features of this analytic are explored in the other chapters in this book: for example, ‘Lethal freedom’, ‘Signifying power’, ‘Modernity, security and deterrence’ and ‘Deconstructing the military body’. This chapter explores these in relation to military strategic discourse in general and that of the once defining military strategic discourse of nuclear deterrence in particular.

*Raison d’état*

Modernity is commonly said to have begun with the Enlightenment. Others claim that it began with the Scholastic William of Ockham. In truth, there are no ‘origins’, only preliminaries. Preliminaries amount to an origin – in fact, they only amount to preliminaries – via the struggle to periodise. In any event, the distinguished military historian Michael Howard nailed his periodisation of modern war and politics to ‘the state’, observing that modern war is ‘only a particular kind of conflict between a particular category of social groups, sovereign states’ (Howard 1984b: 11). He further maintained that for Frederick the Great, war was to be pre-eminently a function of *Staatspolitik*, and so it has remained ever since’ (Howard 1984b: 3). Its objective is the power to control the environment, that capacity upon which ‘the independent existence of . . . states and often the cultural values of their societies depend[s]’. In short, in a revealing statement that links reason with the state (*raison d’état*), he remarked, ‘in general men have fought during the past two hundred years neither because they are aggressive not because they are acquisitive animals but because they are reasoning ones’ (Howard 1984b: 5). Finally, he backed this up with the traditional quote from Clausewitz:

> War is only a branch of political activity; it is in no sense autonomous . . . [it] cannot be divorced from political life – and wherever this occurs in our thinking about war, the many links that connect the two elements are destroyed, and we are left with something that is pointless and devoid of sense.

(Howard 1984b: 140)

Passing over this modern reduction of politics to war for the moment, the point is that appeal to reason has been the meta-narrative of modern conflict, the grounds for its legitimation. Howard effectively admits, therefore, what Foucault observed in his reversal of Clausewitz. In the modern age politics is the extension of war by other means: an extension that takes place under the sign of the state on the one hand and that of modern instrumental strategic reasoning on the other.

*Strategy*

Wars have, of course, been fought for many reasons, including national aggrandisement, the recapture of lost territory and the extension of territorial boundaries, to open and close markets, to propagate a faith or to destroy a people. They have also been fought by mistake. But the basic reason why war in the modern age can find
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legitimation only as a rational instrument of state policy lies in modern political theorising about the state itself. Ever since Hobbes inaugurated the modern conception of the state and its politics it has been generally accepted that the security of the state and its people is the primary function of the state, its principal *raison d'état*. As Hobbes maintained, in the Preface to *Leviathan*, ‘This great Leviathan which is called the state, is a work of art; it is an artificial man made for the protection and the salvation of the natural man’ (Hobbes in Oakeshott 1960: LXIV). It followed that it could not protect or perfect man unless it could first preserve its own security. This it was to do by means of ‘right reckoning’. Once this modern conception of the state was allied to the equally enigmatic idea of a nation or a people, the related conception of ‘national security’ arose. The primary responsibility of the state, and more specifically its governmental apparatuses of power, was to specify and to realise national security goals.

As war became expressed in terms of *raison d'état*, so the instrumental rationality of strategic reasoning was elevated over all other aspects of reasoning. This move also simultaneously reinforced the modern idea of the subject as an agent of sovereign self-realisation and strategic command of its existence. In Heideggerian terms, the discourse of modern warfare thus became a direct contributor to the hegemony of technical rationality and its equation with modernisation as such (Bradley 2011). As Booth and others have argued, this can be said to be an ethnocentric view. More than that, however, it is quintessentially a modern view.

With the advent of nuclear weapons, however, a new link has arisen between the state, security and war. This link has begun to take precedence over all other previous considerations of how these three were to be triangulated through the exercise of instrumental rationality. Since the introduction and global dissemination of nuclear weapons, modern war progressively acquired the potential to threaten species existence. Thus the national security problem of the modern state became a global security issue. Bernard Brodie was more correct than he knew when he maintained in a very early study, *Strategy in the Missile Age*, that ‘[i]t is our major dilemma in thinking about war and peace today that we do so with an intellectual and emotional framework largely moulded in the past’ (Brodie 1965: 391). The contradictions of nuclear deterrence discourse did not simply introduce a level of analysis problem, shifting the preoccupation with security from national to global security. It exposed something deeply threatening and subversive about the very rationality of the strategic reasoning upon which national security strategy is based.

The past to which Brodie referred was the past of early discourse of political and military modernisation theories in which strategic rationality, statecraft and securitisation had become intimately allied. What discourses of nuclear deterrence did, however, was to expose the supplementarity of irrationality at work in the political exercise of instrumental rationality. More than that, it also exposed how the security that states sought through such strategic rationality served ultimately to secure only a radical insecurity for all. With the institution of national security policies of nuclear deterrence, and in terms made available by Giorgio
Agamben’s later discussion of sovereignty (1998), an ineliminable deconstructive point of indistinction became exposed within the politically defining triangulation of security, modernity and reason.

**Realists and idealists**

The conception of war as a function of reason also found expression in the realist discourse of international relations. There, domestic and international politics were distinguished along the lines of community and anarchy. The sphere of domestic politics, according to the realist perspective, constituted the realm in which community and order was realised (Ashley 1987). According to a modernist such as Wight (1966), it is the realm of the ‘good life’. But, according to a critic of modernity such as Richard Ashley, it is

the natural home of the *modernist narrative* – the multifaceted historical narrative rooted in the Enlightenment, dominant in Western society, expressed in rationalist theory, and centring on the progressive unfolding of universalizing reason and social harmony via science, technology, law and the state.

(Ashley 1987: 412)

International politics was thus conceived, conversely, as a domain of anarchy, the other of domestic order, a chaos of contending and warring interests. Community on the inside, anarchy on the outside, was the message of all realist theory and politics, the boundary between the two represented as a barrier to be preserved and protected because it is always in danger of being penetrated, pierced or transgressed (Ashley 1987; Walker 1987). And the task of realist statesmen was said to be to ensure that the domestic as well as international practices of their countries were disciplined enough to maintain the boundary between order and anarchy.

Not only was community presented in realist arguments ‘as a timeless and universal identity . . . an autonomous and original social space’, the historically constituted boundary producing and reproducing it had constantly also to be secured and policed. In this respect there was little if anything to choose between the realists and their so-called idealist opponents. Each was equally committed to political rationality as the other, and each was equally committed to the realisation of sovereign self-realisation based foundationally upon the securing of security. At the same time, however, albeit differently, each foreclosed debate about the nature of the national and, indeed, international communities to whose formation they directly contributed. In this regard they displayed a feature common both to idealist as well as realist (emancipatory as well as power political) views of international relations: a propensity constantly to close discussion about security. Each of them worked with taken-for-granted assumptions about the nature of political modernity as much as they did with its key terms of political art: rationality, sovereignty and subjectivity. If they disagreed about the relation of the individual to the collective, the level of analysis problem thereby instituted did nothing to address common
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complicity in the periodising practices of the modern: most notably, its grounding in a subjectivity existing outside the practices that constituted it, exercising a rationality dependent upon an excess beyond its accounting in pursuit of a security which exposed it to mounting insecurity. To the degree that one of the foundational objectives of modern warfare was the pursuit of security, the pursuit of security was quintessentially where both reason and the reasoning subject came to grief.

The subject of security

A widely acclaimed study of security by Barry Buzan (1983) asked: what is the basic referent of security? It is clear that both the realist and the strategist would answer by referring to the political community, as it is represented by the state. Buzan’s own analysis, however, notes the difficulties of taking either the state or the political community for granted, remarking quite problematically that ‘while we can identify individuals with ease and be fairly certain about meaning and threats to them, the same exercise cannot as easily be applied to collective units like nation states’ (Buzan 1983: 36). Buzan concedes, therefore, that the state and the political community cannot be regarded as autonomous agents. Actors in the international community, they are complexly constituted plural entities that are also acted upon by the international community and shaped in the process. If the state makes war (‘reasonably’), war has undoubtedly made the state (and threatens now to unmake it). And all states are more or less penetrated by the influences and dynamics of the international community that they help to constitute.

Whereas Buzan accepts that neither the state nor a social group can be taken as unproblematical security referents, however, he refuses the same contingent and problematic status to the individual. He continues, in other words, to adopt the view that the ‘individual’ remains an autonomous and stable essence, apparently untouched by historical or cultural circumstances. A biologically determined reasoning agent, in Buzan’s analysis, this entity, bizarrely, remains self-evident, ‘whereas individuals define themselves in strict biological terms – problems of soul, severe mental retardation, and definition of death aside – states do not make such a self-evident category’ (Buzan 1983: 40). Buzan merely substitutes the biological for the political. It is a tired and unconvincing manoeuvre. Not even biologists think that biology is self-evident. Whatever it is, biology has a history. It is therefore not what it once was. We can also be sure that it will become something other than what it currently is. ‘While biologists continue to debate whether or not a virus is living’, observes a more recent and incomparably more informed engagement with the deeply problematic notion of an unproblematically natural individual biological entity, ‘the advance in genetic engineering and artificial life have, in different ways, deconstructed the idea that life is exclusively natural or biological’ (Thacker 2010). Biology is not a datum. It offers no more secure a ground for security than nature or the subject (Dillon and Reid 2009). The impulse to think otherwise does not, however, come from biology. Its roots are classical and religious.
Whether that subject is the domestic community of the realist school of international relations, the nation-state of the strategists or Buzan’s biological individual, the basis of the reasoning remains the same. Each agent, however conceived, is a sovereign monad, born or contrived makes little difference, since sovereignty is the prevailing model of what it is to be an ‘agent’ whose identity is regarded as self-authorising seeking to realise itself in the world (Silverman 1983). Subjectivity, from this perspective, inheres in the essence, the reasoning nature or the consciousness of the subject itself, which in turn is regarded as a privileged part of a binary divide (self/other, community/anarchy) (see Figure 2.1). Its properties are supposed to precede the differentiating practices signalled by the boundary that is thought to separate rather than individuate the two. Transaction across the boundary displaces interrogation of the nature of the relationality signalled by the boundary itself. This twinned manoeuvre – reduction of human being to a subject with pre-formed properties, reduction of the relationality constitutive of human being to the economy of transactional analysis – excludes what might be thought to be the very heart of international relations theory: the ‘inter’ as such. The question of the inter of international relations is thereby also posed in terms of a level of analysis problematic; that of the relation between two entities each conceived as existing prior to the relationality of which they are comprised against a background of ontological assumptions that largely poses them in the same historically unconditioned ways. On the one hand the individual, on the other the ‘community’. In this schema there is no place and no thinking of the ‘with’ as such except in terms of transactional

![Figure 2.1 Binary and bounded division of self/other, community/anarchy](image-url)
inter-subjective relations of the interest said to be the defining property of the subject or subjects presumed to pre-exist such transactions and their effects.

By this I mean something like what Heidegger, for example, calls the being-together, the Mitdasein, of human being; its very relating and relationality in a world which is prior to the ways in which it is subjectivised, and its inter-subjectification rendered down into a calculus of self-interested will. Of course, this requires a quite different start point for the understanding of what it is to be human in the first place: for example, what Heidegger calls Dasein. It follows that this offers a different starting point also for what it means to be in relation, to be inter. This is no easy matter, in Heidegger especially, and as Jean-Luc Nancy has long observed (Nancy 2008). It gives rise to different possible understandings of what is ‘common’ here: a commonality does not simply rely on the commonly held view of the subject as a transactional entity in possession of reason and will that transcends both time and place, without paying attention to how it is supposed to have both the reason and the will in the ways in which it is said to have them. Take will, for example. As Jean-Pierre Vernant explained, the will, ‘is a complex construction whose history appears to be as difficult as, multiple and incomplete as that of the self, of which it is to a great extent an integral part’. Put simply, and like biology: ‘the will is not a datum of human nature’ (quoted in Leonard 2009: 33).

In sum, security discourse is premised upon a conception of the subject (individual, group or state) comprised of pre-formed properties, an authentic reasoning self whose ambitions are realised in time and space according to the instrumental plans, strategies and tactics which constitute its politics. These are, however, precisely the properties that turn it into governable material subject to rule, instead of merely being subjects that rule. Such politics takes place in a domain of power, where power is thought to inhere in sovereigns constituted by law (if sovereigns are conceived as states), or rights (if the ‘individual’ is sovereign – the rights of man and the sovereignty of the people) (Connolly 1987; 1988).

The critical turn

If war in the modern age is a function of raison d’état, then the modern reasoning upon which its legitimisation relies ought to be a matter for interrogation. And indeed it has been, in the deconstructive and archaeological and genealogical strategies practised, for example, by Derrida and Foucault. These authors have exposed, diachronically, how reason in history constitutes the power/knowledge structures of modern societies (Foucault), and, synchronically, how the structure of reasoning always leaves gaps, contradictions and aporias through which it works and through which it self-deconstructs (Derrida).

Foucault’s genealogy discloses the historicity of reason, of how things come to be presented and represented in specific discourses of reason, whereas Derrida’s work, in examining the structure of reason, discloses the closure and supplementarity that characterises the way it operates. What these forms of analysis do (pace the difference between Foucault and Derrida, which, in respect of time and temporality especially,
are considerable) is focus attention on the meaning- and value-producing practices of language instead of the notionally transparent relationship between utterances and their references, signifiers and the signified, words and things. Both authors recognise that reasoning and language imply one another, in that we have no means of reasoning without forms of signification and representation. Moreover, they suggest that the reasoning subject can be conceived quite differently, not as a presence waiting to be discovered and seeking to be realised, but as a character in endless formation through the interplay of difference. That conception of identity might be used to interrogate the way in which security operates as an all-pervasive principle of formation and intervention for modern politics, government and rule.

This section can provide no more that a sketch of how the genealogical and deconstructive strategies can be applied to the discursive practices that constitute modern security politics as a concept and security policy as a practice. The first step is, however, to establish that we can apply the genealogical method to the growth of the state apparatus as it has come to deal with questions of security and international relations. The second is to indicate how we might observe deconstruction at work, specifically in nuclear deterrence theory, for deterrence was a powerful expression of rationalist discourse about military strategic conceptions of security that once dominated international relations and security studies.

**Genealogies of defence decision-making**

In his works *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and *The History of Sexuality* (1984), Foucault adopted what he called a genealogical approach to analysing power relations in modern societies. There, too, he distinguished between traditional and disciplinary modes of domination. For Foucault, genealogy is concerned with locating traces of the present in the past, not with reconstructing the past, and it is informed by a Nietzschean scepticism in which truth claims often also operate as disguises for the exercise of will.

Traditional modes of domination depended on the idea of public space and of a public authority, which made its majesty known in that space by overawing its subjects with the object of relegating them in status to itself. Foucault’s opening account (in *Discipline and Punish*) of the horrific execution of the regicide Damien on 2 March 1757 is presented as emblematic of this traditional mode of domination. But the purpose of that study was to explore, by contrast, modern modes of domination that become directed not to the body but first to the soul, then the mind and, ultimately, the will of the subject. As extremes of physical violence disappeared they became replaced by more complex and subtle forms of correction and training, the object of which, by constituting individuals as autonomous knowing as well as willing beings, was to subject such subjects to surveillance, categorisation and, finally, a discipline which they would exercise over themselves. (Not a bad description, also, of the ways in which nuclear deterrence and containment were said to operate.) Emblematic of this form of power was Jeremy Bentham’s design for a Panopticon. This was a plan for a building comprised of a central observation
tower from which inmates (workers or prisoners) could be constantly surveyed at work or sleep without being able to observe their observers.

In the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault explored this theme further, noting ultimately how contemporary modes of power and domination, depending upon knowledge, became internalised by individual subjects so that individuals came to watch themselves. Modern self-governable subjects, according to Foucault, are thus constituted by a complex power/knowledge grid which does not so much work its way over them, through explicit and brutal displays of its majesty, as it works its influence through them, by constituting each of them through subtle regimes of discipline, order and knowledgeability.

Thus disciplinary power is not a negative power, a series of prohibitions, delimiting, prescribing and discouraging activities. Discipline is a positive power that creates organised, ordered, informed, useful and docile subjects. By positive Foucault does not mean estimable. He simply means that power/knowledge is productive. The application of knowledge constitutes such a subtle form of power because it imposes order on a world that is not designed to receive either power or knowledge, creating governable subjects whose reasoning thus produces and reproduces the order that individuates them as the subjects that they are. Power is not something that can be possessed. It is not a thing or substance. It is a force that arises in relations between factically free and finite beings. Power is therefore a relational phenomenon for Foucault. Apparatuses or *dispositifs* of power are therefore apparatuses of power relations. These in turn constitute what he calls fields of formation and intervention in which different problematisations of government and rule operate. Through them modern society has become a disciplined society, based upon increasingly pervasive surveillance and knowledge systems. Thus, ‘Power no longer appears, it is hidden, but the lives of all subjects are now under security’ (Taylor 1984: 157). Later, referencing cybernetics and the digitalisation of communication and information, his friend and colleague Gilles Deleuze was to call this ‘Control Society’ (1995).

The relevance of the genealogical method and its understanding of power to our concern with security is two-fold. First, it offers a way of reconceiving the traditional conception of power that has dominated international relations and strategic studies. Second, the genealogical method can be applied to the development of military organisation, military sociology and the defence-decision processes of modern states: precisely, in other words, to their military–industrial and power/knowledge networks.

Foucault remarks, in advancing his argument concerning the growing disciplinary nature of power during the nineteenth century, that ‘Prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons’ (Foucault 1977: 83; emphasis added). He goes on to note the striking resemblance between the new prisons of that period and other organisations of the disciplinary age. Much comparative historical analysis remains to be done, therefore, in researching the link between civil and military styles of organisation as these became modernised through the early twentieth century, in accordance, for example, with the principles of Taylorism, Scientific Management and Human Relations Theory, and as
these in turn continued to evolve under the managerial ideologies of information and communication theories.

What I am suggesting here is that part of the genealogy of security in the modern state is the evolution of its institutional practices from the conscription, mobilisation planning and early disciplinary methods of nineteenth-century armies to the more advanced cybernetical modernisation of the organisation and training of armed forces in the twentieth century (Dandeker 1994; Dillon and Reid 2009). Such a Foucauldean theme, of the extension, increasing sophistication and internalisation of disciplinary power/knowledge structures in the military, may provide a revealing account of the evolution of the sociology of armed forces from mass levies to professional managers of the means of violence; from the heroic to the managerial conception of military leadership and military virtues. It would relate these developments also, via complementary changes in civil society, to the wider epistemological and political themes concerning political modernity, and provide an alternative to the rationalist histories that have so far accounted for the revision of the military management of advanced industrial societies in the latter part of the twentieth century.

This genealogical approach may therefore also be applied to the institutions of defence decision-making. Throughout the twentieth century all modern states have rationalised their defence policy processes. The narrative ordinarily advanced for this development is also one that pre-supposes a progressive historical impulse in which defence decision-making, initially portrayed as disorganised, unsystematic and pre-modern, is subjected to successive reorganisations which advance the system towards some ideal of rational management.

Several themes have distinguished this recurrence of reform. They include the increased centralised control and management of defence decision-making, which, pari passu with the modernisation of the military itself, changed the composition and character of civil–military relations in ways that made the usual liberal theories of civilian control both inaccurate, as a representation of the relationship between the two, and ineffective, as a guide to how it should be understood. A second theme has been the introduction and refinement of many administrative technologies of instrumental rationality. These have ranged from econometric analysis and various strategies of management by objectives to operational research and systems analysis. The process has taken on another form of life with the digitalisation of information, surveillance and communication systems and network thinking.

There are other points worth noting about these developments. First, they were not confined to one modern state. They were common to all major NATO powers, and to the former Soviet Union as well (Dillon 1988; Dandeker 1994). Second, they exhibited a common disciplinary impulse. Third, rationalisation never realised the stated goals of institutional reform.

A fourth observation constitutes a plural theme in itself, and reveals the inadequacy of prevailing analytical interpretations of what has been going on in this area. Despite the search for ‘rationality’, and despite the successive waves of reforms designed to make progress towards some rational and efficient ideal, the structures
and practices of defence decision-making have remained quite immune to the rationalist’s call. Procurement processes, for example, remain costly and often corrupt, and there is abundant evidence in weapons acquisition studies especially – as well as in some studies of institutional reform – to support the observation that rationality is only one among the many language games played by defence policy-making communities (Broadbent 1988).

A genealogical approach therefore alerts us to the idea that many things were taking place under the sign of rationalisation and strategic calculation. There has, in addition, been a transformation in the nature of military strategic power relations themselves. This has impacted at least as much on the states and societies claimed to wield strategic rationality as it has on the battlespace of geopolitical rivalry throughout which strategic rationality is said to operate. The same approach would also direct attention to what is continually suppressed in this rationalising enterprise: namely, a rich and well-grounded interpretation of the politics of security. Finally, it would also indicate what subjects (‘decision makers’ and agents), objects (policies and practices) and political spaces have been privileged in the process.

The deconstruction of deterrence

Its proponents have, of course, portrayed the emergence and practice of nuclear deterrence as an entirely natural progression in the subjection of military force to reason, something that was rooted in both history and common sense. Brodie’s first enunciation of the argument remains exemplary. ‘Deterrence as an element in national strategy or diplomacy’, he argued, ‘is nothing new . . . The threat of war, open or implied, has always been an instrument of diplomacy by which one state deterred another from doing something of a military or political nature which the former deemed undesirable’ (Brodie 1965: 271). Thus, the genealogy of deterrence is part of the modernising discourses of security and war and their allied military–political institutions. This genealogy also needs to be traced. But what concerns me here is not so much recovering the antecedents of deterrence, in order to establish how it has emerged as a paradigm of the pathologies of modern instrumental reasoning, as considering how and why it has gained such widespread currency. In other words, albeit the genealogy of deterrence is a chapter in the military periodisation of the modern, the discourse of deterrence also has a structure. It is the discursive structure of deterrence theory that helps account for the rapid and widespread currency that it attained throughout the military–political institutions of the Cold War.

One way in which genealogy is related to structure is through the notion of inter-textuality. Inter-textuality refers to the process by which one discipline or discourse is intimately connected with, speaks to and finds echoes in, other discourse and disciplines (Culler 1983). Each discipline may have its own genealogical history, but in as much as deterrence is a product of periodising discourses of modernity, its genealogical development has common ancestry with all other genres of instrumental reasoning. It is precisely because of this genealogically emergent inter-textuality that the language of deterrence became so widely accepted. It meshed well with
other modern discourses, contributed in practical terms to their advancement, was intelligible in their terms and spoke to their needs. For example, the discourse of deterrence interlinked very clearly with that of managerial and economic reasoning. Again, this was a link identified by Brodie from its inception. Indeed, he titled the final chapter of his seminal work on deterrence ‘Strategy Wears a Dollar Sign’. And of course it continues to do so. He was the first to note that deterrence now means something as a strategic policy only when we are fairly confident that the retaliatory instrument upon which it relies will not be called upon to function at all. Nevertheless, that instrument has to be maintained at a high pitch of efficiency and readiness and constantly improved, which can be done only at high cost to the community and great dedication on the part of the personnel directly involved.

(Brodie 1965: 273)

Many have also noted the contradictions and paradoxes of deterrence, and volumes have been written on its various transformations from Massive Retaliation through Mutual Assured Destruction, Graduated Deterrence, Extended Deterrence and Flexible Response, to the Counter-force debates and War-fighting strategies of the 1970s and 1980s (Freedman 1981). All those who favour the discourse acknowledge these features, making a virtue out of them. But why is the vocabulary of deterrence so convertible yet so pervasive, so shifting yet so widely disseminated? Put another way, given that any discourse is an asset, a kind of discursive capital, and given also that it constitutes a discursive economy specifying and assigning values to speakers, hearers, arguments and sites for discussion, what was it about the discursive economy of deterrence that made it such a widespread and powerful currency in the discourse of security in the post-war world? One persuasive answer comes by way of applying Foucault’s approach to evaluating the discursive economies of language. ‘To analyze a discursive formation’, he argued,

is to weigh the ‘value’ of statements, a value that is not defined by their truth, that is not gauged by a secret content but which characterizes their place, their possibility of transformation, not only in the economy of discourse, but more generally in the administration of scarce resources.

(Foucault, in Shapiro 1988: 11)

The discourse of deterrence originated not only with the discovery and application of atomic power but also, historically, with the emergence of the United States as a global superpower willing and able to exercise its capacity for influence in the restoration of the post-war world after 1945 via the construction of an American hegemony in Western Europe. Although that was part of Washington’s containment strategy for dealing with the Soviet Union, it was also a device for ensuring the continued post-war prosperity of the United States. By and large this
was welcomed – indeed actively sought on the part of British decision makers – by Western European governments.

A deterrent strategy was, therefore, articulated not only as a means of responding to nuclear power, according to the logic of war perceived as an instrument of state policy, but also as an instrument of the politics of an alliance by which United States power was extended to Western Europe. While it was a means of bringing some sort of meta-narrative discipline to the domestic processes of national security policy-making in the United States, it became a vital strategic meta-narrative for the alliance as well, a device to bind its members to a common strategic vocabulary and common strategic commitments (Extended Deterrence and integrated military command structure, and ultimately a common alliance strategy of Forward Defence and Flexible Response). In short, and without rehearsing too much post-war history, one of the reasons why the discourse of deterrence became widespread was not because it was ‘true’ but because it was a convertible political currency discursively and because it thereby also served many geopolitical interests as a significant geopolitical stage in the development of international relations in general, and of the security policies of certain members of the Atlantic Alliance in particular (notably the United States, Britain, France and the Federal Republic of Germany).

It is never possible to say precisely what ‘deterrence’ is. To expect such a definition is to misconceive the nature of language in general and the discursive practice of deterrence in particular. As a complex and constantly evolving form of military strategic political discourse, finding expression in many centres of articulation, only certain strategic theorists given to abstraction thought that deterrence might be made precise and unambiguous. And they were more concerned with rigorous instrumental logicality than with political practicality. Treated with greater or lesser degrees of scepticism by many of those who actually wielded power in the decades after 1945, the ‘high priests’ of deterrence theory continued to be used and abused by power holders according to the shifting requirements of their changing politics of security. The very mutability of deterrence thus constituted its political force and attraction. As the discourse of deterrence served the interest of United States power and the security politics of a multilateral alliance, so it also proved to be an enormously valuable discourse in providing a cosmological justification for all the local instrumental rationalities of the defence decision-making structures of these states (Pearton 1982).

Defence decision-making processes were therefore rationalised in order to meet the demand that deterrence be provided efficiently. Economic instruments were also required in order to regulate the budgetary process of large standing forces, overseas bases and defence establishments. Such reforms were advanced for all sorts of other reasons as well, not only as an aid to efficient management, for example, but also for the provision of effective political accountability to elected congresses and parliaments. Naturally, the growth and successive rationalisations of state security apparatuses were driven by all manner of local ambitions, rivalries and dynamics, as bureaucratic political theorists, military–industrial complex analysts and students of inter-service rivalry have argued. The point is, however, that, in the competing
pluralisms which constitute the modern state apparatus, the vocabulary of deterrence provided a common vocabulary of symbolic generalisations to which all could appeal and which all could use with varying degrees of sophistry, because it was a discourse which claimed to make sense of the entire burgeoning security enterprise.

These are some of the reasons, therefore, which account for the widespread appeal of the discourse of deterrence. I have taken no account of the reservations that many had about it, even within policy communities, and neither have I attempted to distinguish its various national idioms (French, British, United States and Alliance, for example). These issues, however, need not detain us here. Instead, the observation I wish to register is this: just as a discursive economy privileges certain subjects and objects, that of deterrence allocated discursive resources in a way that had direct appeal to existing powerful interests. Their positions were served by it, and so they found it useful to embrace its vocabulary when addressing private and public audiences alike: Mutual Assured Destruction, for example, was conceived during McNamara’s tenure as US Secretary of State for Defense partly as a device to assist in capping burgeoning demands from the US armed services for nuclear capability. Flexible Response was a delicately crafted formula to which sixteen diverse allied nations were persuaded to subscribe politically, without much having to respond practically to the worries of their hegemonic partner when first confronted its own nuclear vulnerability. Deterrent defence thus rapidly became a widely consumable device to sell defence policies far more complex, and complexly driven, than the military strategic discourse of the strategy itself suggested. Deterrence was therefore no self-evident truth but a certain kind of truth-telling practice producing a convertible currency of rationalist discourse which appeared not only to hold but also to increase its political value the more it circulated.

After the dissolution of the Cold War, new forms of strategic truth-telling and new truths were subsequently sought, as a fresh market for strategic ideas began to trade in newly emerging global threats. Deterrence had an afterlife but its centrality as the governing discourse of security policy waned. Via the discourse of nuclear deterrence, the logic of national security became explicitly premised on the threat of national self-destruction. Pursuing national security rationally required an irrational security posture. Such a strategy could, however, retain its persuasive force only in circumstances of the highest threat perception. With the dissolution of the Cold War these seemed no longer to apply. Nonetheless, something fundamentally disturbing about the very logic of the national security state was exposed with the adoption of deterrence-based security policies. The nuclear age only made explicit a contradiction that was implicit in the logic of national security itself. Premising politics, government and rule on the provision of security ultimately demanded the self-sacrifice of the political subject so premised.

Moving on to Foucault’s second point, we need also to consider transformations that took place within the discourse of deterrence. The more central a term is politically, the less stable and definitive it seems it has to be conceptually. To be an effective discursive device, deterrence had to be capable of bearing many
significations simultaneously. The undecidability of deterrence seemed to furnish its discursive utility. It rapidly became a discourse about discourses (communication within national policy communities), addressed to discourse (communication with the Soviet Union). Its meanings were constituted entirely by inter- and intra-discursive dynamics, bearing out the structuralist and post-structuralist theses about the nature of language in general: that is, that the meaning of terms derives less by reference to an objective reality than from the interplay of difference and differentiation within linguistic systems themselves. To adapt a Bakhtinean observation used by Todorov, every word of its discursive corpus gave off

the scent of a profession, a genre, a current, a party, a particular work, a particular man, a generation, a day and an hour. Every word smells of the context and contexts in which it has lived its intense social [and political] life.

(Todorov 1984: 56)

Polysemous, its power seemed to derive from its radical inter-textuality.

Deconstructing strategy

There are two basic moments in the strategic conception of war as an instrument of state policy that open it up to the logic of deconstruction. The first, accepted even by those who are also willing to accept that war is an integral part of raison d’état, is that war made the state as much as the state made war. The instrument – the means – had as much, if not the greater part, in fashioning the subject and its values as did the subject itself. The point is well made historically and hardly needs labouring (Giddens 1985). In general, the European state system was born out of war, and the domestic character of individual countries was extensively shaped by it. Take Michael Howard again: ‘War thus contributed to the creation of European society in two ways. In the first place it defined its boundaries’ (1984b: 73), and in the second it contributed to its social and economic development, up to and including the development of anti-capitalist ideologies: ‘a very convincing thesis could be argued that the cause even of socialism has been most powerfully, if indirectly, furthered by the great wars of the twentieth century’ (1984: 171).

The growth of collectivism in British politics helps provide a further illustration (Greenleaf 1983; Middlemas 1979), but the point applies to all European states. The reasons are not hard to find. The mass mobilisation and central state planning required for total war provided as much of a model for collectivist planning (and practical experience of its successful employment) as military organisations did for civil organisations. The relationship between states, war and reason is far more complex, therefore, than that which the strategic thesis suggests. Reason itself, certainly the advance of the instrumental zweckrationalität castigated by Weber and the Frankfurt School, was as much a function of the exigencies of conflict as war was the reasoned choice of statesmen.

Second, John Herz, for example, long ago noted another basic contradiction at the heart of the rationalist thesis concerning war. Identifying what he called
the security dilemma, he observed that the more states pursue security by military means the less secure they become because their military ambitions induce fear in others (Herz 1951). The dilemma is, however, more profound than Herz observed. The more states pursue security the more they render themselves insecure (Dillon 1996). Just as the relationship between war and reason is subtler than Clausewitzeans and realists have maintained, so is that between war and security. No simple means–ends schema comprehends the relationship between either of them. Moreover, if we take some accounts from the vast post-war literature on international conflict and diplomacy we discover these basic reversals repeated in some of the classic texts.

Henry Kissinger is a useful case in point. His influential *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* puts the strategic argument succinctly: ‘It is the task of strategic doctrine to translate power into policy’ (Kissinger 1957: 7). Power here, of course, is that classic pre-Foucauldian conception of power as a commodity, the container of which is said to be the state. Kissinger’s thesis is that ‘strategic analysis is purely instrumental, concerned with how our political and military doctrines can be harmonized, how our power can give impetus to our policy rather than paralyse it’ (Kissinger 1957: 13). But, in a further revealing statement, he again shows how the instrument necessarily has a central role to play in shaping the subject and its ambitions, suggesting that the subject (in this instance the state) is by no means an autonomous self-realising agent. It emerges, instead, as a direct construct of strategic discourse:

> Whether the goals of a state are offensive or defensive, whether it seeks to achieve or to prevent a transformation, its strategic doctrine must define what objectives are worth contending for and determine the degree of force appropriate for delivering them … The crucial test of our strategic doctrine is, therefore, what it defines as a threat.

(Kissinger 1957: 8)

There can be no more politically loaded or identity-defining activity than specifying what we are enjoined to fear – the other against which we seek protection but through which we come to a certain knowledge of ourselves. Kissinger’s thesis is clear. What he offers, under the guise of strategy and calculative disinterested rationality, is an ideology, a political statement about the value of a certain account of international order, about how states should be constituted and how they should act. It is political theory disguised as instrumental rationality, which displaces and represses politics itself by reifying the state and demanding that political discourse about its values and conduct should close; to give way to strategic calculations that privilege the use of force and the position of the state’s security managers. Another classic in post-war studies of security is Samuel Huntington’s *The Common Defence* (1961). He offers a pluralist version of Kissinger’s thesis. Recognising the essentially Janus-like character of security policy, and the complex plural domestic interplays that produce it, he concedes that ‘military policy is not the result of deductions
from a clear statement of national objectives. It is the product of the competition of purposes within individuals and groups and among individuals and groups’ (Huntington 1961).

Cognate British studies also continue to maintain that strategy is an instrumental and de-politicised process of reasoning, one which, according to its logic, should take values and objectives as given, but which as a necessary reversal of its logic has to provide those values in accordance with its own image of the nature of the state and of international relations (Booth 1979). Even as acute and intelligent an observer as Lawrence Freedman considers strategy to be a ‘supremely practical’ activity, concerned with how to achieve objectives in an often uncertain and complex environment in the face of a calculating and resourceful opponent. In fact, strategy simply recycles the same old pop metaphysics of sovereign presence. Strategic studies has recently come to represent itself more generally as a branch of policy science (Gray 1982b), though ‘policy science’ has long been discredited for many of the same reasons advanced here against strategic analysis (Tribe 1972). The same point applies equally to those organisation theorists, such as Herbert Simon, who recommended a ‘reasonable rationalism’, and his followers in the field of foreign policy analysis such as Allison (1971) and Halperin (1974), as much as they do to those who have retained an unqualified faith in the calculi of instrumental reasoning (Storing 1962).

What then, from a Derridaean perspective, does the discourse of deterrence displace, defer and leave out? What, also, does it surreptitiously include – its supplementarity – in order to work as the ‘fabulously textual’ process of ‘rhetorical–strategic escalation’ that characterised its heyday (Derrida 1984)? There seems to me no doubt that the existence of nuclear weapons has played a large part in deferring war between East and West. In the process, it has also deferred nationalist rivalries and conflicts within Europe, and displaced war from the cockpit of superpower rivalry to other parts of the world; a new spatial mapping of power ensued. Even more profoundly, deterrent defence has been part of that process by which power has, so to speak, gone underground in our societies and been absorbed into the knowledge and subsistence chains of individuals and populations in civil society. In the process it has also operated to demote politics in the discourse about peace and war, offering, as an escape from politics, the seductive rigour and certainty of military rationalism.

How, finally, does deterrent defence deconstruct itself, and what are the implications of that deconstruction? Deterrence deconstructs itself on the basis of its cardinal principle. In seeking peace through the rational employment of force, it threatens a wholly irrational act. In seeking to preserve the security of its subject (individual, group or state), it threatens that subject’s survival. In order to be rational it calls upon the irrational. In seeking certain control over events, it came to champion radical uncertainty. Indeed, its central proposition is a classic Derridaean self-contradictory couplet, allowing endless interplay between its twinned poles. Whether it speaks with an American, British or French accent, deterrence threatened a certain nuclear
response, at an unspecified nuclear level, in undefined circumstances, with incalculable results. Its supplementarity, therefore, is its other: irrationality. It also required the deterred to be more rational than the one seeking to deter in calculating that its opponent was irrational enough to accept self-annihilation.

As the apogee of modern discourse on the nature of security (the rational use of force), deterrence exposes the absurdity of that discourse. For deterrence takes rationality to the limit, and starkly exposes what Derrida has argued in general about modern forms of reasoning: that they are textual and rhetorical, and that they always incorporate that which they ostensibly seek to exclude from their rationality. The discourse of deterrence does not merely deconstruct itself on the basis of its central contradiction; it is a paradigm of the deconstruction latent in all modern forms of reasoning. It is the modern age come of age, exposing the dangers and perhaps terminal frailty of its modernising project. Listen to Foucault: ‘a society’s “threshold of modernity” has been reached when the life of the species is wagered on its own political strategies . . . modern man is the animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question’ (Foucault 1984: 143).

The political irony signalled by the nuclear age is that the very existence of nuclear weapons, and now other globally disseminated weapons of mass destruction, provides the most profound deconstructive reversal for modern conceptions of security. Just as the weapons themselves were the product of scientific knowledge, nuclear deterrence was the product of reason applied to war. Together they have brought us to the edge of the abyss. The very subject of security, in all the senses used here, needs rethinking.

**The subject of security revisited**

It follows that, if the idea of the subject was first conceived in discourses dominated by the referential view of language (and its correspondence theory of truth), in which words referred to things or essences, the identity of the subject should also be conceived as comprising a pre-formed essence as well: something autonomous, standing outside language and beyond our way of representing it, but which our modes of representation should seek as accurately as possible to reflect. It also follows that, as we have come to recognise that language is a vastly complex and immanently creative system in which words are arbitrary signs deriving their meanings from their locations within the system and through their constant interplay with other signs, we should similarly revise our conception of the subject and the process by which the properties that the subject is said to possess, a-historically, are instituted by and through history. Less a matter of enumerating its pre-formed properties, the question of the subject is then posed in terms of the processes of differentiation that individuate it as the historical subject it comes to be. Processes of differentiation operate through the institution of boundaries.

The boundary preserving internal order from the disorder of the external world thereby takes on a different quality. Let us begin with an obvious point not derived from so-called structuralist and post-structuralist propositions about language. If we refer to Figure 2.1, representing a simple binary division, the line clearly separates.
But it also joins. In fact, it is the act of separation – of differentiation – that paradoxically creates the perception of something that is whole or unitary. Refer, then, to Figure 2.2. It is clear that the separate faces have the same profile (share a mutually defining boundary), yet at the same time they necessarily repress each other, in the sense that the perception of one face is always at the expense of the other. In effect, one defines the other and *vice versa*, but, whichever way you view it, in order to discern one identity the other has somehow to be pushed into the background or effaced altogether.

Traditional conceptions of identity, just like traditional conceptions of systems in social and management science, attribute order and unity to the inside, privileging and valuing it above the disordered outside. Yet it is the boundary that ‘differentiates between inside and outside’, and hence the boundary should be elevated in our attention because it is the structure which produces mutually defining perspectives. Though the boundary is commonly thought to belong to the system (individual, group or state), giving it shape and form, it necessarily also shapes the environment. Hence the system is just as much inside the environment (actively shaping it) as the environment is inside the system (actively shaping that too). The boundary has therefore to be conceived not as an inert thing belonging either to the system or its environment, ‘but as an active process of differentiation which serves system and environment equally’ (Cooper 1985). Neither the inside (order, community, identity or system) nor the outside (disorder, anarchy, plurality or environment) can be regarded as the source of identity. It is the process of differentiation that counts.

![Figure 2.2: The interfaces of identity](image-url)
**Difference and identity**

This crucial point can be made in a different way. Persse McGarrigle, a naïve young lecturer in a novel about academic life in Britain (Lodge 1984), asks a panel of distinguished professorial contenders for a highly remunerative and prestigious (though fictitious) UNESCO chair in Literary Criticism: ‘What follows if everybody agrees with you?’ The ageing doyen of the profession assured him that if everybody agreed with you they would have to do and be the same as you. That, however, would be the end of things. To win would somehow also be to lose. To realise a pure form of life would be to lose it. What matters, therefore, is not ‘truth’ (in the sense of correspondence), ‘order’ (in the sense of fixed regularity) or ‘identity’ (in the sense of pre-formed autonomous essences), but what each and all of these, in their different manifestations, depend upon, différance. Such difference and deferral is not merely a product of material distinctions. It is a function at root of the imagination. Difference, therefore, constitutes knowing, and knowing constitutes identity. Identity, therefore – knowing oneself and the world through encounters with others (even that other with whom we hold our mental conversations) – is an artifice, a necessary artifice, experienced always at the margin, on the boundary of the self. Without difference, there is no identity. In order to indicate how complex an artifice it is, how multi-faceted the ‘boundaries’ of difference can be, consider Figure 2.3.

The boundary between the old woman and the young woman, visible at different times in Figure 2.3, is no mere linear divide or uniform space. In order to see meaning here we have to construct form out of difference. Each identity is thus constituted through a complex web of boundaries that, construed differently by whichever way we look at it, reveals one or other face. All identity, the figure suggests, is constituted not by one external boundary but by a multiplicity of boundaries, manifold distinctions and differences, which textually give shape and form. Equally, the process involved in making one face manifest at the expense of the other is no simple matter of suppression. It entails a positive conjuring-up of one identity as much as it does the overpowering or effacement of the other.

Difference may then be suppressed through the threat or use of violence, ostensibly according to the dictates of Enlightenment rationalism but often as part of a larger project to escape history and politics (Walker 1987). Yet the creation of otherness and the determination to contain or destroy it by the threat of nuclear violence jeopardises the very possibility of life. We have to turn back, then, to reconsider how identity and difference can live continuously and contiguously in more ambiguous and tolerant relationships. This suggests a quite different politics of security than that bequeathed to us by modernity. For the urge to translate difference into otherness is a common one, confined neither to West nor East. If I am tolerant of different identities there is no guarantee that they will be equally tolerant of me. An identity that differs from mine may well constitute me as other, and I may have to try to fend it off. To establish or renew itself, my identity might also require that I, in turn, construe some difference as otherness. From this perspective the study of security is concerned with the construction of identity through the
interplay of difference and the imposition of otherness. But, somehow, our practices of security have to transcend the caricaturing of identity and the negation of self and reason entailed in national security discourse and the practice of nuclear deterrence.

While modern conceptions of security seek to squeeze the ambiguity and indeterminateness out of identity, continental thought reinstates them because identity is not an essence but the site of semantic contestation located in space and time. That semantic space is inscribed by discourses which, in addition to creating subjects and objects, specify the nature of time (e.g. privileged political times from epochs to electoral cycles, and management time scales) and the nature of space (including, for example, spatial political concepts such as national and geopolitical spaces, as well as political institutions such as Legislatures, Executives, Alliances and many other national and international political forums). Thus, from a genealogical standpoint,

There are no subjects, no fully formed identical egos, having an existence prior to practice and then implicated in power political struggles. Like fields of practice, subjects emerge in history. The ‘possessive individual’, the ‘pious
Christian’, the ‘yuppie consumer’, the ‘feminist father’, the ‘bold and decisive President’ and all other modes of subjectivity emerge on the plane of historical practice, and they emerge in consequence of the power political struggle among concepts, themes, and modes of practice. As such, the subject is itself a site of power political contest and ceaselessly so.

(Ashley 1987: 410)

One has only to think of ‘The United States of America’, ‘Great Britain’, the ‘Soviet Union’ or ‘NATO’, to realise the force of this description: ‘Man has no internal sovereign territory, he is all and always on the boundary’ (Bakhtin in Todorov 1984).

That boundary is not so much out there as constitutive of the inside. It is less a place than a process, a liminal and creative site of differentiation and individuation (Turner 1974, 1981). Here, the logic of Derrida’s point about the operation of the supplement is that we need difference even in the moment of suppressing it.

How, then, might we constitute a form of political life and a form of political judgement on the basis of the undecidability or indeterminateness of identity, and the necessity of difference? For the obligation to judge remains, even after the discrediting of the meta-narratives that have previously legitimated knowing and living (God and Reason). That the terms and conditions of our understanding of knowing and criticism have been dramatically challenged by continental philosophers such as Nietzsche, Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard (1986) does not release us from continuing with the enterprise of applying critical knowledge to our forms of life. If we are not simply to reject their arguments by restoring our faith in either God or Reason we face the task of discovering how to proceed with living and judging in the light of what these authors have had to say. Consequently,

the conflictual pluralism that such a crisis in theory and legitimating procedures is itself regulated by the problem of justice and the obligation to judge, to differentiate, to take a stand in terms of conflicting ‘opinion’, critical strategies and theories.

(Carroll 1987: 184)

From this conclusion profound new intellectual and political challenges arise for those who study modern politics security.
3

SIGNIFYING POWER

Le portrait de Cesar, c’est Cesar.

(Port-Royal saying)

... a detail insignificant in appearance, but what is insignificant in politics? The Innumerable edifices that I shall construct must be marked with my name, they must contain attributes, bas reliefs, groups which recall a theme of my history. My arms, my monograms, must be woven-in everywhere. In one place there will be angels who support my crown, in another statues of justice and wisdom which bear my initials... For the same reason I want my statue, my bust, my portraits to be in every public establishment especially in the auditorium of the courts; I would be represented in royal costume or on horseback... These points are of utmost importance. I consider them essentials.

It is by these signs, by these emblems, that the person of the sovereign is always present; one lives with him, with his memory, with his thought. The feelings of his absolute sovereignty enters into the most rebellious spirits as the drop of water which falls unceasingly from the rock hollows-out even granite.

Maurice Joly, Dialogue in Hell Between Machiavelli and Montesquieu

Introduction

The epigraphs that head this chapter serve to divert us away from the question: what is sovereign rule? They invite us to ask, instead: how does sovereign rule operate?

Asking this question turns our attention away from the metaphysics of sovereignty which preoccupied early modern political theory, and international relations theory indebted to it – sovereignty as political metaphysics – to the
Signifying power

mechanics of sovereignty and its operationalisation as a form of rule. For many, posing this ‘how’ question offers a means of unmasking sovereignty. I share a measure of sympathy with them, because to some degree it does: there is no doubting the ideological effect deliberately cultivated by discourses and institutions of sovereign power. But I do not think that such unmasking or de-mystification settles the question. For one thing, it may presuppose a reality lying behind the ideological effect, a reality that is presumed to become transparent once ideology critique completes its unmasking. I do not think that it is possible for a reality to be materially manifest without the operation of the sign. In that case the medium is inseparable from the message and you cannot then fail to ask about the interlocution of medium and message. That is why I am intrigued not just by how politics as metaphysics (sovereignty) becomes politics as mechanics via the very operation of the sign, but also by the nature of signification. To put it simply, if you want to get into the mechanics as well as the metaphysics of rule it is impossible to do so without getting your hands dirty by dealing with the slippery matter of the sign. Signification is a material business.

Every sovereign requires to operationalise the miracle of unity and creation ex nihilo of which it is said, onto-theologically, to be comprised. The who, and the what, of sovereign rule cannot, therefore, be divorced from the how. Sovereigns never take themselves for granted. They continuously, even obsessively, seek to manifest and indeed corporealise themselves to and for themselves but also to and for other sovereigns. Equally, however, sovereigns never take their subjects for granted either, similarly, continuously seeking to materialise and corporealise their subjects. Sovereign political subjectivity requires not only one capable of ruling in a sovereign manner, therefore, but also one capable of being ruled in a sovereign manner. Each, in turn, sovereign and subject, is a function of mutual informing material practices of signification that manifest the sovereign as sovereign and the subject as subject.

In short, the operationalisation of sovereignty is not simply a matter of signifying sovereign power into the everyday presence of an operational political economy of government and rule, as if all that was required was to pull off the trick of staging Leviathan’s persona ficta. The ‘how’ of sovereign power also obsessively concerns the continuous rendering of human being into governable material, material amenable not only to being ruled but being ruled under the sign of sovereignty. Althusser talks about how the subject is hailed ideologically by the sign of the state. Foucault speaks about how the modern political subject of Man is discursively both subject and object of his self-government and rule. Derrida, however, teaches a different lesson concerning the sign, and it is Derrida’s lesson concerning the différence of signification that I wish to pursue and apply here because it helps to re- pose the question of the spectacle of rule. Pace Foucault, the question of the spectacle of sovereign rule remains vitally important today, and precisely because of the ways in which it differs from the spectacle of sovereignty displayed in the execution, in 1757, of the attempted regicide Damiens, with which Foucault begins Discipline and Punish.
Signifying power materialises both the sovereign and the subject. Therefore, there can be no rule of sovereignty without political economies of the sign in which ruler and ruled are differentiated and individuated in relation to one another, and thereby make their appearance in a world of government and rule. In the process, however, neither becomes transparent or fully present to themselves or to each other. I hope to show instead that the very operation of the political economy of the sign, through which both sovereign and subject make their appearance and sovereign rule finds its materialisation, somehow also preserves the enigma of both, and that it does so because of the very deconstructive character of signification.

The political economy of the sign may therefore be the very mechanism by which the modern metaphysics of sovereignty becomes the everyday governmental realisation of sovereign power. But, by virtue of the deconstructive power of the sign, the political economy of the sign operates without dispelling the brutally powerful, if sometimes also astonishingly brittle and fragile, specular enigma of rule. Instead, the political economy of the sign translates the mystery of the sovereign and the subject alike—a mystery to themselves as much as they are to one another—into the enigmatic spectacle of which modern rule is also always comprised (Debord 2006).

It is important, therefore, to note from the outset that, while political economies of signification constitutively differentiate and individuate as they relate and regulate sovereigns and subjects in the operation of an economy of government and rule, the subject remains no less opaque to the sovereign than the sovereign does to the subject. If the one were in fact capable of being fully present and transparent to the other, there would be no need for the political economy of signification to manifest both ruler and ruled to themselves and to each other at all: and to manifest in material forms, forms detailing expectations and imaginaries as much as distributions of rights, duties, honours, privileges, legal titles to property, usages and all the other myriad details of what Foucault calls governance of the conduct of conduct.

Political economies of the sign remain as integral, therefore, to the materialisation of modern sovereign rule as they were to the materialisation of God’s rule via the governmental oikonomia of divine providence and Mother Church (Agamben 2011; Mondzain 2005). In respect of the materialisation of divinity on the one hand, and of the materialisation of modern sovereignty on the other, we are also dealing, however, with, ‘fulfilment, which is always and everywhere enigmatic and specular’ (Mondzain 2005: 34). If the sacralised mystery of sovereignty finds onto-theological expression throughout the philosophical traditions of Western political thought, it becomes operational through shifting political economies of the sign.

But signification performatively brings to presence, rather than simply revealing, a world. That performatively bringing into presence is always and everywhere a matter of appearance and spectacle in which what is made to appear never becomes fully present. It is as if whatever appears can only ever appear in its constant deferral, as constantly deferred. This is not necessarily a matter of the failure of
signification, or of those orchestrating the spectacle; but it is a function of the *différance* characteristic of the operation of signification as such.

It may, therefore, be the political economy of the sign that mediates the passage from the metaphysics of political thought into the mechanics of power relations. But signification is no mere neutral operational device. The *différance* of signification contributes to the passage ‘from a regime of mystery to one of enigma’ (Mondzain 2005: 37). The mystery of the sovereign’s very locus and identity (God, people, nation or state), including also the operational mystery of the miracle of its creative power *ex nihilo*, becomes material in the many enigmatic spectacles constitutive also of modern political economies of government and rule.

In neither instance – that of modern political economies of the sign or the early Christian conception of *oikonomía* – are the mysteries that each operationalises made transparent or fully present. The mysteries posed by the enigmas of modern political spectacle – elections, for example – are certainly not dispelled by the application of modern instrumental reasoning, for at least two reasons. First, mystery and enigma deal in the order of things that are not resolvable. Modern instrumental reasoning seems to contribute towards rather than detract from mystery and enigma. Faith in modern reason is no less faith for the reasoning that it does. Perhaps it is therefore better to say that instrumental reasoning contributes its own mystifying and enigmatic share to the operation of modern power relations. Second, just as modern instrumental reasoning is said to distinguish the sovereign reasoning subject, so also is it contaminated by the foundational antinomism of that subject; creation *ex nihilo* outwith the law, and that includes the law of reason. In each instance of religion and modern politics, therefore, the purpose of the economy of the one or the *oikonomía* of the other is to materialise as performative enigma the specular power of its respective mystery – the sovereign God of theological absolutism or the sovereign of modern politics. What each produces is a performative enigma whose very governing force thereby also becomes operational throughout our everyday existence. What this chapter specifically tries to do, therefore, is look in detail at how modern sovereign subjectivity signifies itself into power. In so doing it also explores how, through the *différance* of the sign, human beings are rendered not simply governable but governable via the enigmatic spectacle of the sign of the sovereign.

**Modernisation**

This, then, is one of the distinguishing challenges posed by, and to, political modernity: how to fashion sovereign self-governing political order without the benefit of the Christian God. It has been with us in its present form since the dissolution of the Christian political imaginary posed the question of how to establish political order outside the discursive framework of scholastic thought and in the absence of the mysteries of divine foundations. Taking its bearings first from a recovery of the Classical Age and thereafter from Science and Enlightenment, modernising humankind has been engaged in a continuous struggle to reproblematise politics,
government and rule without any external guarantor or determination of how these should be grounded. It lacks the supposed security of the onto-theological fixes that are said to have oriented the Christian imaginary. Given Christianity’s record of internal dispute over every significant aspect of belief, however, one wonders how secure these actually were. No doubt they seem more secure in retrospect than they were in practice.

For the medieval Christian, reality consisted in the presence of divinely created things comprised of finished products whose beauty or purpose derived from their location in the order of divine providence. The social and natural order of things were given to man. Thus natural law, for example, was said to be discovered, or discoverable, rather than made. The discursive economies of Christian belief also construed the secular and the spiritual in particular ways, staging their power relations through the means provided by the disputed corpus of the Christian interpretation of God and his plan. As Pocock and many others have shown, a redeeming politics issued out of the Christian universe of eternal salvation (Pocock 2006; Wolin 1961; Kaufman 1990).

The redeeming politics of the Christian world was no more peaceful, however, than the security politics of the modern world. Just as it never settled the question of faith, so also religion never settled the question of politics, government and rule. Comprised of a vast store of imagery and symbolism, as well as liturgy and doctrine, the Christian world might best be understood, therefore, as a complex field of formation and intervention riven by many conflicting theological and political problematics. These ran along well-established fault lines that continuously intersected with one another. However ordered God’s rule was said to be, it certainly did not issue in an equally well-ordered political universe. The very nature of spiritual as well as temporal power was always, and violently, at stake. The crisis into which Christianity entered via the Reformation led to the reproblematisation of politics, government and rule.

A reality emerged that was equally, if differently, problematic, since it continued to appeal to onto-theological roots – in the form of political sovereignty, for example – that had themselves been deeply problematised by the fall of the Christian Churches into faction and irresolvable doctrinal dispute. In as much, then, as political modernity continues to invoke onto-theological warrants to ground politics, government and rule, it is seen to be a form of secularisation. In as much, however, as political modernity appeals to a rejection of such grounds it is said, conversely, to be characterised by rootlessness. Damned if it does and damned if it doesn’t. This, it has nonetheless to be said, is a peculiar form of rootlessness: rootlessness in respect of the standards set by the very transcendental assumptions that successive iterations of onto-theology, themselves, failed to establish. The modern political condition is said to remain characterised by this rootlessness, as its substitute foundations for grounding political order – in nature, nation and reason – failed to deliver the peace and security they promised. The world wars of the twentieth century profoundly amplified a rootlessness instituted first by an absented God and then by the fruits of modernisation itself – not least the industrialisation, massification and nuclearisation
of warfare, the continuous preparedness for which transformed the very institutions, ideologies and techno-scientifically driven economies of the modern state and its so-called civil societies.

In the transformation of political order that accompanied the transition from the medieval to the modern age, the sovereign state became dominant. New systems of representation and new semiotic and symbolic orders, required to give signifying life and power to this newly emerging political entity, were also instituted. A new modern political vernacular began to emerge: **politik**, **realpolitik** and **raison d’état** (Mosse 1968, 1954; Orsini 1946). The constitutive power of signification was explicitly recognised from the beginning, the state making its very appearance, according paradigmatically to Hobbes, as **persona ficta** and **persona magna**. The very question of how states become constituted when they are not part of a divinely created order has remained a central question, one revisited by many contemporary philosophers, including those from which this chapter takes its inspiration: Hannah Arendt (1958 and 1963), Jacques Derrida (1986), Paul Ricoeur (1987) and Claude Lefort (1989). Arendt and Derrida explored the issues involved by returning to the founding of the United States of America. Derrida’s reflections came through a close reading of the US Declaration of Independence. Bonnie Honig (1991) has also supplied a comparative analysis of Arendt and Derrida. These readings have inspired this chapter, but the chapter itself concerns the operation of the political economy of the sign in significantly differently ways and in very much more mundane circumstances. Whereas Arendt, Derrida and Honig were concerned with the founding constitutional act that instituted a new state, this chapter is concerned instead with how the everyday political economy of the sign operates in the state- ing of a long tradition of derived state-hood, that of the Commonwealth State of Australia.

### State-ing states

The ambiguity of this punning heading serves to make several points. It conjures up the performative idea of states being constituted by, and comprised of, statements made under the sign of the state (‘stating states’). Second, it prompts the constative idea of states being certain antecedent determinate conditions, grounds and modalities (that is, certain sorts of states ‘stating states’), without reference to the enabling power of which statements of the state-sort cannot be made. Third, this ambiguity expresses what seems to be a defining paradox of politics: autonomous political action must entail a referential statement to something that antedates and so enables it (in speech act terms, a constative), but that enabling condition is present only by virtue of what is enacted by the statement (in speech act terms, a performative). Finally, a pun is the quickest way of subverting simplistic referential conceptions of language. It obviates the requirement to rehearse the history of the philosophy of language in order to advance and justify what it teaches about the constitutive, dialogical and differential character of language.
The account of the state bequeathed to us through much of international relations theory once nonetheless systematically elided all this, and for a wide variety of reasons. One was its long-standing investment in the idea of a rational subject pre-existing the historical conditions of formation that made it the rational subject it was said to be; which ‘rational subject’ was, of course, the product of battles that long preceded battles over ‘modernisation’ and the periodisation of politics as ‘modern politics’. Another was the fact that the subject of international relations first arose in the twentieth century as an Anglo-American discipline serving as a common political and analytical vocabulary for addressing relations between states. International relations theory crafted a widely used political vernacular based upon deep-rooted and widely shared philosophical assumptions about agents and agency divorced from the historically founded practices that constitute agents as the agents that they were. Thus the modern political subject was, and is, variously seen as embodying natural desires and interests (Hobbes, Locke and Bentham), as a bearer of natural rights (Hobbes and Locke) and as a party to a social contract (Warren 1988: 152). These accounts shared cognate conceptions of power as will and command (Geertz 1980; Foucault 1984). Statecraft was further conceived as the conduct of Staatspolitik, albeit that it was overwhelmingly concerned with the discovery of governmental mechanisms that would translate these shared political abstractions into effective and efficient means of rule.

This chapter does not treat the state as a reified object of political thought. Rather, it addresses what goes on under the sign of state and explores the operation of the political economy of the sign by which the state comes into play politically. As a changing field or ‘system of formation’ and signification, the state seeks to lay down what must be related, in a particular discursive practice, for such and such an enunciation to be made, for such and such a concept to be used, for such and such a strategy to be organised. To define a system of formation in its specific individuality is therefore to characterise a discourse or group of statements by the regularity of a practice.

(Foucault 1982: 74)

Hence, as Foucault suggested, ‘If there is a unity, it does not lie in the visible, horizontal coherence of the elements formed; it resides, well anterior to their formation, in the system that makes possible and governs that formation’ (Foucault 1982: 72). In this instance that system included the metaphysics of sovereign power, referential accounts of the sign, correspondence theories of truth and the understanding of power as a commodity.

The aim of this chapter is not only to experiment with a different way of addressing and understanding the phenomenon of the state but also to show how the ways in which the signifying powers of the state, while bringing the state to presence, nonetheless simultaneously also defer the presence of the state. It also argues that the ‘subjectivist’ character of a state, and of the political subject it claims to be, is
not merely contestable, a function of the struggle for discursive dominance; the state-ing of it is fundamental to the agonistic character of politics itself. It is always also radically elusive.

In offering a reflection on the signifying powers of the state, this chapter thus differs from the foundational and constitutional concerns of Arendt, Derrida and Honig. It focuses instead upon some quite mundane, everyday, modes of signification of the state of Australia. These range from the iconographic to the lexical. Through them, the Australian state is repeatedly re-performed and re-presented in its very deferral. The sign is how the state appears. The sign is also what stops the state from fully appearing. Paradoxically, it is also the very deferral of the fully present appearance of the state that continuously allows for its repeated appearance.

Here, in micro-signifying form, therefore, is an example of how the spectacle (Debord 2006) of the state is produced and reproduced through the everyday operation of the political economy of the sign. Here, also, the ‘reality’ of the state is explored through the ways that the political economy of the signifying powers of state summon the state by continually deferring it. Paradoxically, the state is present by being absent. It is never ‘there’, except in the traces left by ciphers empowered under the sign of the state to signify on its behalf. It is the ensemble of presence/absence that is responsible for the production of the overall effect of the ‘presence’ of the state, demonstrating, in addition, that disclosure and concealment are twinned in all utterance.

**Constative/performative state-ments**

To breed an animal who makes promises – is not this the paradoxical task that nature has set itself in the case of man? Is it not the real problem regarding man?

(Nietzsche 1956a: 189)

To put the modern problematic of the political succinctly: those who get together to constitute government have no authority to do what they set out to achieve. They, therefore, have to constitute their own foundations for doing what they do, for there is no law above the law they make. The construction of those foundations is often expressed in terms of extra-political antecedent rights, duties or commitments, or the restoration of some such foundational principles, laws or traditions. However powerful this appeal may be rhetorically, it remains, nonetheless, part of the self-founding of – not the extra-human guarantor it is regularly claimed to be for – the political community, and it continues to hold within itself its own originary violence. The paradoxes, dilemmas and dangers that then arise are not, of course, confined to the experiences of the United States (Kaviraj 1992), but the founding of the American republic does provide a well-documented exemplification of them (Honig 1991).

In her account of the American Revolution, for example, Hannah Arendt, while seeking to celebrate this achievement as a model for the establishment of model
political authority, nonetheless criticised the ‘founding fathers’ for losing their nerve and including appeals to absolute foundations (God and the self-evidence of the truths they espoused) to justify their revolt against rule from Great Britain. As they emancipated themselves in an exemplary act of violent self-determination, she argued, so the vertigo induced by their bold performance persuaded them to seek some absolute foundation for it. Constative appeals to truths that required no agreement because their self-evidence compelled without argument or political persuasion were, she maintained, politically illicit: ‘Since their self-evidence puts them beyond disclosure and argument they are in a sense no less compelling than “despotic” power and no less absolute than the revealed truths of religious or axiomatic centres of authority’ (Honig 1991: 99).

According to Arendt, the inclusion of a reference to foundation was without foundation and corrupted the essentially political nature of their act, for the peculiarly political character of conduct, in Arendt’s account, is not the constative reference to some truth of pre-given object in the world, but the performative utterance that brings something into being that did not exist before (Honig 1991: 99). According to Honig, therefore, Arendt lamented the way that the Declaration of Independence compromised the performative free coming together to constitute a new political order by its constative reference to foundations outside the political act itself.

If the political cannot be grounded in absolutes, then it is fair to ask for an elucidation of what acts do distinguish it. Arendt’s answer was the performatives of forgiving and promising. Ordinarily categorised as moral matters, these performatives are also uniquely political in that they are, like language itself, irredeemably social, directed not by any external command or motivation, nor determined exclusively by private will, but comprising the enabling backcloth of practices that distinguish us as human beings. Criticising Arendt for her desire to disambiguate the declaration by dismissing its constative utterances in order to celebrate the statement as an exclusively performative speech act, Honig argued that this move obscured something that both had to be assumed by as well as thereby created within the declaration. That is to say, Arendt’s performative politics must necessarily presuppose a community of promisers:

a pre-existing community composed of people who may hold different values and beliefs but who, nonetheless, have shared understandings of what a promise is, what it means to make a promise, and what one must do in order for one’s performance to be recognised as a promise.

(Honig 1991: 103)

From whence does this community of promisers originate? Arendt occludes the question but cannot escape it. Foregrounding it has the effect of radically reambiguating the declaration.

Having taken Arendt to task for not addressing what Nietzsche had recognised as the central problem of human being without God, namely how to ‘breed an
animal with the right to make promises’, Honig pursued the point by turning to Derrida’s reading of the Declaration of Independence. Derrida’s reading deals with precisely this question. It explores it through restoring the constative aspect of the text. The outcome is the exposure of a paradox that, this chapter argues, leaves not only the act of political foundation but also that of all mundane political conduct irresolvably ambiguous, and the character of political utterance inescapably dualistic, both constative and performative. This defining paradox of the political is not confined to constitutive declarations of independence, of which that issued in Philadelphia on 4 July 1776 is only one (another good example would be the *Poblacht nah Eireann* [Proclamation of the Irish Republic], which was issued by Patrick Pearse on the steps of the General Post Office in Dublin on Easter Monday 1916). Nor is it confined to heroic acts of self-foundation. The example studied here is taken from an already instituted state and deliberately concerns a lowly and obscure significatory act of state: namely, a treaty between Australia and South Korea.

Arendt claims that the source of authority for the declaration is the performative creation *ex nihilo* – the subjective ‘we’ of the paradoxical statement ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident’. But what of this ‘we’, a collective subject precisely like that which the state is claimed to be, brought to ‘presence’ by some sort of textual legerdemain? From whence, or what, does it arise? In a passage that has direct application to the text to which we are to move next, Derrida, in characteristically scrupulous fashion, pursued its trace relentlessly:

The ‘WE’ of the declaration speaks ‘in the name of the people’. But this people does not yet exist. They do not exist as an entity, it does not exist, before this declaration, not as such. If it gives birth to itself, as a free and independent subject, as possible signifier [of the declaration], this can hold only in the act of signature. The *signature invents the signer*. This signer can only authorise him – or herself – to sign once he or she has come to the end, if one can say this, of his or her own signature, *in a sort of fabulous retroactivity*.

(Derrida cited in Honig 1991: 103; emphasis added)

I want to return to this fabulous retroactivity in the conclusion, first, because it refers to what I want to call the masque of state and, second, because this curious illusion (fabulous retroactivity) also preoccupied those political theorists, Machiavelli and Hobbes, who have been so crudely misappropriated by modern ‘realists’.

Derrida’s point, however, is this: founding, promising or signing cannot occur *ex nihilo*. A performative utterance is never self-sufficient. It always seeks an anchoring in a last instance, a foundation, or an absolute of some description. The ‘we hold’ is, necessarily, both constative and performative, and it is, therefore, radically undecidable as to whether ‘independence is stated or produced by this utterance’. More than this, however, whatever name is used to specify the last instance that grounds the utterance, the last instance marks not an absolute, for there are none,
but an aporia – a gap, an unbridgeable chasm that, although constituted by a mode of reference or understanding, nonetheless abounds in paradox and poses irresolvable problems – thereby invoking a multiplicity of different formulas and devices for its resolution. It is from this perspective that Derrida contests Schmitt’s miracle of decision with the concept of un-decidability.

Sovereignty is a classic instance of an aporia in international relations. Said to resolve the ultimate question concerning the origin or source of power, it is the site where the nature and origin of power are in fact most deeply problematic (Agamben 2011). In sum:

For Derrida, the combined constative and performative structure of the document and its We hold illustrate beautifully a structural feature of all language; that no signature, promise, a performative – no act of foundation – possesses resources adequate to guarantee itself, that each and every one necessarily needs some external, systematically illegitimate guarantee to work. This need marks the Declaration of Independence just as it marks utterances which are more quotidian.

(Honig 1991: 106)

It is important, therefore, to emphasise that Derrida’s observation applies with equal force to the established Commonwealth State of Australia. The next section seeks to show this by focusing on a detailed reading of the frontispiece of a text that could hardly be a more arcane example of the signcraft of statecraft.

The quotidian example through which we explore the Derridaean aporia is also, of course, a classic example of composite constative/performative utterance. It is, therefore, emblematic in every way of the entire discussion here, for while the frontispiece stands for the treaty document it also stands for ‘Australia’, and in standing for Australia it stands for the enigma of the way in which the political economy of the sign makes and means, stages and lends sense to, in this instance, a political subject, a subject capable of making promises.

One important difference should, however, be emphasised. The Commonwealth State of Australia did not give birth to itself as a free and independent political subject. It derived its independent statehood from the imperial state of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. It originated, therefore, out of an attenuated chain of political formation and re-formation whose mysteries and enigma go under the title of ‘tradition’. One of the additional points made through the reading that follows is therefore also that a ‘tradition’ does not escape the peculiar operational effect of the political economy of the sign, which is, to restate it in Derridaean terms, that the signature invents the signer, whose presence is indicated only by the absence marked by the trace of the signature. Tradition therefore also illustrates the constative/performative point, in that tradition is something to which performatives appeal as that which guarantees them, in the last instance, although tradition has no existence outside the inevitably and inherently problematic repetition (an iterability that is in fact an alterability) of the traces of the
performative acts (customs) that are claimed to constitute the tradition. Tradition, then, is simply the attenuation of the aporia of political rule enacted in the guise of historical continuity and coherence; one comprised of a process of repetition of constative/performative statements in a process of representation that precedes and makes possible the very presence it is supposed to reproduce.

Tradition, too, poses the question: what times are these and what do they demand of us? It works, however, by enacting a recollection of the same in the form of a political masque. That is to say, it claims to look backwards to something stable and fixed which is to be retrieved, recovered and repeated as a guide to what the present is said to demand. It has to produce that which it claims to repeat, because repetition is never the same, but it does so through, and in the distinctive idiom of, the dynamics of nostalgia for a past presence. It is, then, a record of constant variation and alteration, even rupture, that contains its own distinctive modes of production, exclusion and violence, for it is a movement in which movement is something to be overcome. It consequently offers an effective device for quelling ‘the seductive aporia of how we can acquire something new’ (Caputo 1987: 13).

Within tradition, identity and meaning are formed and policed via the promise of the metaphysical consolations of immemorial usage, or the comforts of a recollected time. The objects of its violence are the marginal cases it makes possible and produces, identities and meanings in formation and struggling to express themselves: identities and meanings that do not fit its sanctioned recollections.

State-ing Australia

The text in question here, then, is taken from a treaty between Australia and the Republic of South Korea concerning the fishing practice of squid jigging by Korean fishing vessels within the Australian Fishing Zone. The text at issue is not even the treaty as a whole, however. It is merely a fragment, the frontispiece to the treaty. As with all fragments, this fragment is revelatory.

At first glance, the title page of the treaty document reveals a range of typographical features to do with the layout and boldness of text, as well as an example of a highly conventionalised symbol. Reading typographically, there are eleven elements arranged from the coat of arms at the top to the treaty series number at the bottom, and each of these is subject to detailed examination (see Figure 3.1).

Arms and control

All power has, first, its armorial bearings: its archaic significatory means of holding and announcing itself in a combination of language and imagery, which narrates it in a single dense historiographical signature. To begin, at the top centre of the page, surrounded by a margin of white, standing apart from the rest of the text, there is a coat of arms surmounting the word ‘Australia’. Such a device is a highly conventionalised and heavily valorised sign that stands for the highest authority of the state. In this instance, it is a sign of the reigning monarch
(Queen of Australia), which, under Australian law, is applied by the Queen's representative, the governor-general. (The monarch herself, still a crucial signifier of sovereignty, resides some 25,000 kilometres from Australia, thus further indicating that Australia's statehood is derived from a complex chain of signifiers rather than from an act of self-foundation.)

The armorial bearings therefore represent the source of Australia's power. But this is not an embodied power, at least in this text, because this micro document (the title page) bears no human signature, not even that of the governor-general. His authority is indicated merely by the presence of the coat of arms, the most abstract of signs. This stands for the power it symbolises, whose elusive quality it apparently captures as a part of the great seal of the state. This, the most primordial sign of power, nonetheless defers our access to the source of this state's power. And
that paradox acts as an invitation to us to unpack the device because, although it holds pride of place/space, it acts as a (partial) sealant against the dissolution, dispersion and contaminating infusion of meaning immanent in all texts.

Affixing the sign of the seal thus attempts a closure of meaning, which, nonetheless, provides an opening through its hybrid symbolisation (iconographic and lexical) not only to the title page and main body of the treaty but also to the artificing of the state itself. Even at this stage, the dense economy of all signs is manifest; not least that of the written word: ‘Australia’, alone, is offered here as the lexical indicator and guarantor of the power and identity of this state.

Interestingly, the award of the great seal (containing the coat of arms) to Australia by the royal warrant of King George V in 1912, an exercise of royal prerogative power by the British executive rather than an act of legislation, denoted a derivation of power from a superior body as opposed to the self-founding of the American republic. The chain of derivation, however, attenuates, albeit in important and different ways, rather than resolves, the aporia of power (sovereignty). It does so by interposing a genealogy of derivations, as it happens also comprised of constative/performative utterance, into the process of state formation. Interestingly, too, the award of the great seal was to the government of Australia, and specifically not to the people of Australia. It is the sign, then, of an authority authorising an authority, or of a signer-inventing-signature (author) inventing another signer-inventing-signature (author), of virtually equal authority, which signified signer is thereby empowered to make promises. Hence the significance of the signification of the royal seal’s coat of arms on the frontispiece of the treaty document.

Most immediately evident in this symbol are the representations of two of Australia’s most recognisable animal forms, the kangaroo and the emu. Equally noteworthy is that these two most clearly defined shapes (not only because of their black solidity, but also because they border and enframe) are those that stand outside the protective shield of arms. The eye enters the image, then, for there is a scopic as well as a textual regime at work here, via the circuit around the shield, ensuring that the greatest definition is given to the boundary of the coat of arms, rather than the centre; boundary production is the act of identification.

Within the shield, six divisions represent the six formerly self-governing British colonies, which federated as the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901. In this image the state is an aggregate of smaller units – ironically and recursively states – though of lesser significance because the signatures that invent these signers are of a reduced significatory register. The enclosure of these states within a protective shield (or blazon) suggests an aggregation for the purposes of what may be termed collective or, more popularly (although confusingly for a heterogeneous immigrant society), ‘national’ security or ‘national’ interest. What is being evoked – conjured up – through complex symbolisation of boundaries is a collective character. Moreover, it is one that, in the enclosure of the states by the signs of nature (kangaroo, emu and wattle branch), neatly displays the deep ambivalence in modernist accounts of man’s relationship with nature between those (such as Descartes and Hobbes) committed to a project of mastery, and their critics (such as Rousseau), committed instead
to harmony. Whether the symbolism here is being used to invoke an image of ordered state(s), marking out a pacified territory against the anarchy of the cultural other – the state of nature – or, conversely, of a mutually supportive harmony between the two, is ultimately undecidable. What is clear, however, is that the signification/representation of nature – consistent with modernist ways of deriving the grounds of man’s sociability and politicality by reference to a hypostatised nature (the state of nature, natural law, rights, passions, desires, needs or interests, and so on) – is being appropriated for the purposes of the domestication of both man and nature.

By identifying Australia with signs of its natural habitat, its state practices, therefore, signify their authority and identity through the domestication of nature and earlier human states by combining each into a plural oneness that effects a composite union simultaneously between peoples, and between these peoples and their physical habitat. The state, its power residing in the coat of arms, representative of an absent Queen’s power (whose power resides in another coat of arms, which coat of arms is a composite of previous signifiers, and so on). Yet such a composite and intertextual signifier as the coat of arms, the assembling of which ‘arms’ also signifies a long and bloody history, legitimates the instrument of an apparently single source of power, which is that of a sovereign state, and enables a discourse of state to take place.

This sign not only works its effect through its ensemble of signifieds, reconciling like and unlike (man and nature, state and state) but is also a system of deferral. Although power appears to reside, at least initially, in the coat of arms indicating the seal of state, that seal actually stands only in place of the governor-general’s signature, which in turn stands in place of the Queen’s signature, which in turn stands for the sovereign – although the sovereign at the end of the chain is unstably formulated in the formula of ‘the-Queen-in-Parliament’. At which point we enter the treacherous waters of ‘tradition’, which in this instance is the performance and imagining of the United Kingdom of whatever combination of kingdoms and territories happen to constitute it, together with whatever forms of political regime happen to govern it, at any one time. And so we are well advised to turn back, arbitrarily, as is the way of power, to our task in hand.

No single source of authority or closure of meaning exists here; ironically, not even in the sign of the seal. This instead offers an entry into the system of dispersion and displacement of signification that texturally constitutes the state. Whether we attempt to go up to the ‘source’, or follow it down through its débouchement, political power resides in no single unitary site but is everywhere disseminated through the proliferation of the signs of state. Moreover, although more abstract than any other signifier, the coat of arms apparently exerts the greatest formal authority, for without it the treaty would have no effect. Nonetheless, despite its being the authorisation of the instrument, this sign of the power of the crown is absent from the inside title page of the greater treaty document. Thus, as we enter the document, signs of the seal’s authority are progressively effaced and replaced, thereby also constantly displacing and dispersing the place in which power resides, the more
persuasively to invite the reader into complicity with the signifying system itself, thereby operationalising the text’s authority via its efficient interpolation into, and continuous constitution of, our forms of political life.

Such dispersal is neither incidental nor ornamental (cf. the long quotation from Maurice Joly that heads this chapter). It is absolutely vital to the realisation of political power and authority through the device of the text and its signatures. For the sign of the seal of state only successfully states the state if the sign of state is capable of precisely such dissolutive dissemination, through mutating inscription in all manner of other ways and in all manner of other places. The signature invents the signer. Yes. But its force, so to speak, is directly proportional to the signature’s capacity for reproduction: the iterability that spawns the vast complex regime of signification to which the promiscuous fecundity that arises out of its very constative/performative undecidability gives rise.

‘Department of Foreign Affairs’

The next typographical item in the document offers another equally dense deferring sign of power through which we can explore this empowering dispersal of signification that comprises the state. Hinting at an additional layer of aggregation, the line ‘Department of Foreign Affairs’ contracts within itself two major analytical axes. The first refers to the sectional dispersion of power within the domestic polity, by which departments are aggregated into collective ‘unities’ that comprise the ‘government’, while the second refers to the establishment of a ‘negative space’ by which the sovereign state is defined in relation to the ‘outside’, or ‘foreign’. By its rigorous definition of that which it is not, the state becomes aggregated (negatively) in terms of the spaces that are not ‘foreign’ – that is, through the formation of a boundary between inside and outside, domestic and foreign.

To explore this a little further, and with specific reference to the title page of the treaty document, ‘Department’ indicates that the speaker of this line is an institutional identity which is separate from other government departments insofar as it speaks to a specific category of transactions: foreign affairs rather than some other affairs, and their respective instrumentalities. However, it is intelligible only with the addition of extra textual and culturally determined references – in short, the overall style of presentation, coupled with the coat of arms – suggesting, of course, that the ‘preferred’ reading of ‘department’ is of one government instrumentality among many.

‘Foreign Affairs’ indicates that the central preoccupation of this voice is also, but much more explicitly, concerned with the definition of ‘otherness’, defining that which is ‘foreign’ (Campbell 1992). It is thus a voice that is deeply implicated in the definition of political and cultural identity. For there to be Foreign Affairs there are presumably one or more departments concerned with home or domestic affairs and ways of differentiating one from the other: in effect, practices of inclusion (one of us) and exclusion (one of them). The signature of this department, then, has to be one intimately concerned with the inscription and operation of regimes of
boundary construction by which the realms of self and other are demarcated and policed.

That this department of ‘Foreign Affairs’ operates the treaty instrument signifies that it has the power to ‘speak the state’ over any other department on this particular site of reference. As holder of this power, too, the Department of Foreign Affairs signifies the sovereign identity of the state as one department among the many bodies that comprise the apparatus of the state. Signifying itself by reference to sovereignty (Queen/Governor-General), nature (kangaroo, emu, wattle branch), constitution (federalising statement) and collective interest/identity (shield) – all of which represent axes of difference and conflict contained within a unifying symbol – the signature of the state now signifies itself through a process of internal – as opposed to external – disaggregation of signifiers. If, in the coat of arms, the state is signified metaphorically, here it is represented metonymically by one of many government departments within a larger aggregation of departments that form the apparatus of state rule, which (unstable) state is one of the many constatives (typically, Australia or government, although others, elsewhere, might also refer to nation, people or class) to which the performative will refer for its grounding.

In the context of this treaty, then, the term ‘Department of Foreign Affairs’ names the instrumentality of power whose responsibility is to name the exception, the other, the foreign, and transact business with it. After the reference to ‘Australia’ in the coat of arms, this line indicates the proper name or signatory body which, through a more extended and complex process of inscription, defines and legitimates the immediate context, or speech situation. It then becomes a further representation of the abstract symbol of power that adorns the top centre of the page, but it is one that seeks to localise and specify it more, indeed to embody it institutionally. It does this in the subsequent line.

The address that then follows in the line ‘Canberra, A.C.T.’ is, of course, an incomplete, non-functional, address. For example, it lacks building, street and postcode. It therefore serves a symbolic purpose by providing a locus for the presented world of the text indicative of a formulaic language use common to a range of bardic genres from fairy tales to newspapers. It represents, if you will, the ‘once-upon-a-time, in-a-place-far-away’ function. ‘Canberra’, here (as, in other similar contexts, Washington, London or Paris; and, at one time, because currently it evokes a quite different and uncertain register, Moscow), is the symbolic locus of Australian federal power. However, coincidentally or not, the initials ‘A.C.T.’ seem to serve an additional function. They not only allow a further way of specifying the territorial space occupied by the seat of power – the Australian Capital Territory – but A.C.T. simultaneously also, of course, invokes leadership, decision and authority.

‘Subsidiary Agreement’

The next segment – ‘Subsidiary Agreement’ – names the presented speech act. This is a promise. It implies a law of contract whose authorisation, because of the weight of illocutionary force contained by it (Austin 1962; Searle 1969), entails an
act of contract derived from a history of contract practices and authorisation by
that portion of the great seal that is the signature that invents the signer (the state),
now locuted through the instrument of the treaty. Its perlocutions nonetheless pro-
liferate through a range of indirect speech acts not merely to function as the stated
contract but also to fulfil a range of other communicative functions (e.g. phatic
communication and maintaining contact) (Searle 1980; Jakobson 1960).

That this speech act is denoted as 'subsidiary' refers intertextually to an umbrella
text – another treaty – external to the one at hand. This is specified in the main
body of the treaty and adds to the textual cohesion of the title page by referring it
to that larger ‘Agreement on Fisheries Between the Government of Australia and
the Government of the Republic of Korea’. This is noted in the first paragraph
of the main body of our subsidiary treaty and designated the ‘Head Agreement’.
‘Subsidiary Agreement’ is an appeal to a broader discursive base that adds weight
to the legitimation of the text as an agreement, but, of course, it also links this
text into the ongoing process of boundary construction for both Australia and
the Republic of Korea in the practices of discursive exchange, which, through all
sorts of practices of differentiation (inclusion and exclusion), mark out the division
between political self and other, not only between (as here) but also within what
are inevitably problematic and provisional communities of people.

In another displacing move, we can note the shifting nature of the reference,
from ‘Agreement on Fisheries ... Korea’ to ‘Head Agreement’, in which the pre-
sented ‘actors’ are again effaced from the relationship. Rendering them more secure
from challenge, they are concealed and replaced by the term ‘Head Agreement’,
which at the site of this sign permanently defers our access to the actors actu-
ally constituted through this process of signification. Present not only in the traces
of their inscriptions, their identities are constructed and secured at this site not
so much because they are made manifest but because they are subtly constituted
through interlocking differentiating and deferring signs. The state as well as other
political subjects has apparently passed this way, but we never encounter its or their
‘actual’ presence, only impressions (traces, appearances) that they have left on the
world, which they have thereby shaped. The signature invents the signer. Yes, again.
This does not make the state, or the other subjects, any less ‘real’. What it does is
radically problematise what is meant by real, and indicates that the ‘real’ is a mode
of appearance, a constative/performative production. Corporeal as well as institu-
tional bodies are continuously erased as well as invented by signatures. There is,
then, something much more ‘real’ (more worldly, more phenomenal) in this obser-
vation than in all the insistences of realists that are ordinarily at such pains to efface
the radically referential and ambiguous textuality of (inter)national politics. By these
liliputian processes of deferment, we are drawn into the thread of state-ing via the
intertextual processes that constitute the significatory fabric of the state.

At the same time, this slippage of reference seems to open textual spaces that
set in play a range of possible readings. Not the least of these revolves around the
use of the structural metaphor of ‘head’ to denote the higher authority of the
larger agreement within which the subsidiary aspect of the text-at-hand would be
meaningless, in the same way as the main body of our treaty carried a similarly privileged knowledge space for the title page. The space in which the constitutive passage of the state occurs, then, is an intertextual one, gaining the guarantees of its legitimacy and power from the range and breadth of the signatures/signers of the other texts that constitute it, but which state-ing, of course, in turn operates.

Agreements, with the implication of act, also imply some form of actant in order to perform the act in question. This is, in part, signalled by the words ‘between the’. It can be noted that these words are in fainter print and smaller characters than those of the key lexical items. They signify that the subsidiary agreement occurs at the interface between states rather than within them. This is indicated despite the fact that the state is only partially unpacked, and represents not the entirety of the state but the government of the state. This reads like a return to the ‘prince’ as black box because the government performs an equally unitary role, in which its constituent parts are only hinted at through the reference to ‘Department of Foreign Affairs’. Such a reading is further problematised by the deictic ‘the’, which attempts to signal the singular and unitary nature of that to which it refers. It remains unclear, however, whether the faint print and smaller character size serves to elide the interfacial nature of the agreement, or whether it is intended to marginalise the grammatical, or structural, elements in order to give relative importance to the semantic, or lexical, units. Whatever the intention, any unitary reading of these elements remains radically problematic in the face of the multiple functions performed by the text in the constitution of both meaning and identity. Given this, it remains the case that a semiotic reading of this title page and, indeed, of the treaty document in full would have to foreground the ‘between-ness’ of the text itself as central to the kind of identities and relationship being constituted and maintained by such a performative.

‘Government of Australia’

The next item locates, at least provisionally, the first of the presented actors, or chief characters, in the text. This is ‘Government of Australia’. It is an unquestioned category that is rendered problematic by framing the text within one department of the government of Australia, namely the Department of Foreign Affairs. Among other possibilities, one available reading of this is that the Department of Foreign Affairs offers just one of a range of subject-positions that can be filled by the term ‘Government of Australia’. This allows the government of Australia to be established as the constative that elides the rich store of competing interests, anxious to emerge as the legitimated voice in this as in all transactions, having effectively silenced all other interests. The specificity of the voice, together, however, with its self-betrayal as one of a range of available positions (by virtue of the fact that it is the voice of one department within a multifaceted government), renders the category – government – itself problematic.

In the first instance, noting that it is the Department of Foreign Affairs that holds the legitimated voice, let us also note that the presented world of the text, beyond it
and in the context of the constitution of actual forms of life, concerns a mode and a place of fishing. This raises questions that one might want to see raised in the main body of the treaty concerning the role of other departments/identities, both in government and outside. Most notable in this set of absences, which indicate intertextually the structuring forces of other, non-specific, government departments involved and implicated in the larger text of our treaty, is the Department of Primary Industries, headed by the minister – then, one John Kerin. Notable, because the absence of this department is signalled strongly by the presence of Kerin’s signature (his mark), as also is the absence of the minister for foreign affairs! One may note that in the publication of the document in the Australian treaty series that very signature is itself placed under erasure with a discrete ‘[signed]’. This, then, presents us with a double erasure, remarkable for its prodigious feat of metonymy, in which the signature of a single person (although erased, it must be present upon the ‘original’ document) may stand in place of the government of Australia as signalled by the ‘[signed] for the Government of Australia’. Thus the sign of the government of Australia stands replaced by the signature of a single person, which is ultimately replaced by a sign indicating the place of the signature. That this signature may be that of a person who is not the titular head of the Department of Foreign Affairs, but one who is designated acting minister of foreign affairs, reveals that the signature of the person is a ‘shifter’. It is an institutional signature, or subject-position, which can be filled by a range of actors for the purpose of state-ing. The presence of the signature also signals the ever-present gaze of the lawgiver, the scopic regime of power, whereas the absence signalled by the presence of the signature brooks no further negotiation. It is an act of narrative closure through which the law has become word and the word has become flesh, but the flesh is protected from contestation because of the fluidity entailed in the presentation of the signature for erasure.

‘And the’

As the text unfolds, the next element – ‘and the’ – draws itself in two opposing directions. Dealing with the second element first, the deictic ‘the’, although separated from the element that follows, it nevertheless forms part of the nominal group that names the other party (or constituted actant) in the agreement: ‘[the] Government of the Republic of Korea’. To separate the ‘pointer’ from the ‘name’ serves to disaggregate the name, leaving ambiguous the unitary status of ‘government of the Republic of Korea’, while exerting a forward pull that prefigures the second character in the narrative. Against this forward pull of the deictic, the conjunction ‘and’ represents a site of provisional stasis within the text. It is a term of relativity that signifies the existence of a paratactic relationship (relationship of equality) between the element before and the element after. It is therefore connected intimately with the element ‘government of Australia’ and the element following, whose approach is signalled by the ‘the’ to which it is bound and with which it shares the line, font and size. Again, there is an ambiguity caused by the reduced size and faint print of ‘and the’. It rests upon whether there is an attempt to play
down the structural linguistic elements (as a surface reading would suggest), or to play down the discursive equality accruing to sovereign states under international law. If the latter is the case, two questions emerge. Under what conditions can an agreement take place if Australia is not to recognise the discursive equality of states? If, on the contrary, we recognise the discursive equality of states, then is this not something to foreground? Under this rubric, the agreement would serve to strengthen the betweenness of the relations of states (how state-ing states is intimately involved in a state-ing through which states state each other); and thus the conjunction, insofar as it is inclusive and accommodating, becomes, along with the element ‘between’, one of the key elements of the treaty.

‘Government of the Republic of Korea’

From the conjunction we confront the final bold type: ‘Government of the Republic of Korea’. Without the ‘pointer’, it seems to oscillate between verb and noun, process and object, right through the three layers of its retreat. At one end of the journey lies a black box: Korea. Alone, unitary, it is an empty category, a princeless state – a state of stasis. Moving outward, we encounter ‘Republic of Korea’, re: public, res republica, in the manner of the people. Reactivated thus, the category now contains/pertains to a polity. Moving outward for the third step, we find ‘Government’. But this government ambiguously wanders between the institutional embodiment of the prince and the active processes of governing stating the state. Each elides the other, circling warily. The state, like Sartre’s ontology, ‘is where it is not and is not where it is’ (Sartre 1974). It is a question, or series of questions: whom or what is constituted by this state-ing? Whom or what states? What, and for whom? These questions return, as much for the government of Australia as for government of the Republic of Korea. And, as we trace the paths of deferment, we find the ‘state-er’, as with the signer, progressively postponed by the sign of signs and by the signs of the deferral and effacement of signs. We are presented, so to speak, with a small discursive micro-economy within a much larger system, a circle of production of signs, because signs are exchanged for signs, and power is transacted through the interstitial process of sign exchange rather than wielded as a substance by the predetermining will and logocentric presence of an executive subject.

If we are to operate this slippery and elusive text, even within the terms of its ‘preferred’ reading, we find according to its macrostructure that the term ‘government’ is used to instantiate a unitary subject-position (which serves as a constative). This seems in turn to support the traditional realist claims that international relations concern only the subjectivities of the states concerned, and that the nature and structure of the subjectivities remains unproblematic. The question of who speaks is quite manifest, but most tantalising because we have so many conflicting signs for something that is presented so insistently and unproblematically, yet deferred so continuously. Indeed, within the main body of the treaty there is little further reference to non-unitary actors, these being conflated within the term ‘government’.
And yet, as we said earlier, there is more than text here, for this is also a scopic regime. There is not only a discursive economy but what we might call, in addition, an ‘economy of regard’, a transactional network in which the constituted subjects are positioned in each other’s regard – that is to say, both visually and valuably. Just as the text surveys its subjects/objects and positions them in a regime of regard, we also are implicated in surveying the text. This frontispiece is emblematic again because it is deliberately arranged both to summon and to receive the glance. Its devices, such as the coat of arms of the seal, are manifestly visual as well as textual. None of this is accidental. Its layout is neither random nor arbitrarily chosen. Somewhere the protocols governing its presentation are specified, and somebody has loyally followed them in this instance. The orientation of the gaze is, therefore, also organised and directed in and by this text. It is a mode of appearing as well as of meaning, identifying and promising. These are all compacted here, for the text is an exercise in the presencing of meaning, identity and promise. But how, and to what effect? Specifically, how is the gaze summoned and determined? What is its directionality, and what does it bring about? (In what does it consist? In our focus and attention? In our trans-fixation by it in a self-simulating self-fascinating invocation of multiple selves?)

A way to focus a little more clearly on this puzzle, at least in respect of agency and political subjectivity, is not to ask who is the subject of the text? It is, of course, a matter of asking how is the subject of the text? And, similarly, to ask not just who is subjected to and thereby transfixed by this economy of regard, but to ask how, through it, does the subjectification take place and to what objectifying effects? This chapter will return briefly to these puzzling questions in the last section.

Moving on with the reading, however, it can be noted from the body of the treaty that the agreement is one ‘concerning Squid Jigging by Fishing Vessels of the Republic of Korea’. The ‘subject’ is, then, a concern, a worry, a going-on (a performance of something; including, no doubt, a host of signs and gestures involved both in the fishing and in the encounters between those fishing and others who have one way or another also become enmeshed in the activity), rather than an agent (the author of a going-on: here, as elsewhere in modern political vocabulary, constantly, insistently, invoked as a constative). Our initial response might be to ask: how is this concern a concern, and for which agents? But here it is evident that all sorts of deeply problematical agents are equally being summoned up by a concern. This simple document is no simple case of an agent, or a number of agents, expressing a concern and acting upon it. Here, again, we have, instead, the radically undecidable interplay between constative and performative utterance in the state-ing of states, which entails, in addition, the state-ing of all manner of other political subjectivities. Agents, ostensibly being the constatives to which performatives refer, are being constituted, summoned into presence, empowered, specified and embodied by the performatives themselves.

Let us also examine another new actant, that of the fishing vessels of the Republic of Korea. At this point we have to enter the presented world of the title page of
the treaty in order to pursue these questions of rule. We are thus no longer able to resist the intertextual pull of the page’s own intertextual embeddedness.

Squid jigging is a method of fishing – a mode of practice – performed, according to the text, by fishing vessels. Like Quintillan’s ‘thirty sails’, however, we are left with an ambiguous fleet; one sail per ship seems the least likely, and most unwieldy, possibility by which a vessel is substituted metonymically for the crew. These vessels are those of the Republic of Korea. Australian fishing vessels are not mentioned, but they are, however, concerned. To such an extent, indeed, it is deemed necessary, within the main body of the text, to ‘establish the detailed procedures for the conduct of Squid Jigging operations by fishing vessels of the Republic of Korea within the Australian fishing zone and for the issue of licences by the Government of Australia’.

Return, then, to the question of the subject, in the sense of who speaks and how? It becomes apparent that the power to speak comes from the least specified actor – namely, Australia – as this actor has the broadest discursive base and a non-specific site upon which to return the gaze. The individual fishing vessels of the Republic of Korea are highly specified, including the ‘masters of the licensed vessels’, which are specified further within the main body of the treaty. However, they are, in these terms, the least powerful, functioning not as subjects but as objects within the terms of the treaty. The speaker, then, disaggregated within the main body of the treaty into ‘Department of Primary Industry’ and ‘commercial interests of Australia’, is a plurality – the unfocused institutional voices that enact the agreement. Those subjected to this amorphous voice are, variously, the government of the Republic of Korea, masters of the licensed vessels and Korean fishermen. The power to enforce the licence as a mode of surveillance and instrument of legitimation rests entirely with the government of Australia, yet the government of the Republic of Korea is also to serve as agent acting on behalf of Australia to enforce the details of the licensing arrangements. Thus, finally, Australia is also displaced . . . from being the enforcing subject in the first instance.²

To give impetus to the speech act, there follows a revocation of the spatio-temporal locus of the document: ‘(Canberra, 16 October 1984)’. Following this, at some distance from the rest of the text yet still on the title page, lies an active, forward-looking, italicised phrase, or incantation: ‘Entry into force: 16 October 1984’. The reference to force clearly underlines the agonistic role of language (Lyotard 1984), seeming to reinforce the traditional realist concerns with the power of the sovereign state. In one sense the textualist (now also scopicist) regime of politics seems not so far removed, after all, from the realist’s preoccupation with power. But that is an illusion, for where these views differ profoundly is not so much in the respect they accord to power as in the way they approach the question of how power operates, especially in the way the textualist/scopicist insists on exploring how power is engendered only by the effects of inscription and representation – sometimes bloody and deadly, frequently not, but even when violent always sutured within the fabric of a complex system of reference, however strange and bizarre. Similarly, they differ not in respect of the significance they attach to
the practices of state, but in theorising how the state means, not what it means, and how its meaning constitutes the subjects (constructed identities, ‘personations’ according to Hobbes) and objects (issues, problems, categories and, finally, circularly and vitally, the very subjects whose agency, it is claimed, initiates all actions) of the world of politics.

Parenthetically, we can note that one of the functions of the state as a signifying system is to effect continuously this constant movement to and fro, between subject and object positions, such that subjects (such as ‘the people’, or masters of fishing vessels) are invoked as the source of agency only to be translated into objects (for example, as a population resource or as a policy problem). For the realist, the state is a more or less aggregated subject/object. For the textualist or scopicist, it is a painstakingly structured, but nonetheless mutable, locus of multiple and minutely orchestrated textual and visual enactments of subjectification and objectification via constative–performative utterance. The state is consequently not identical with its geographical boundaries or its territoriality, for example, for these, too, are practices of signification. The state is in its state-ments, those significations inscribed only in a trace. Once again the state is where it is not, and it is not where it is: not in any centrality or presence but constituted as a function of the meaning and boundary-making practices enacted under its sign. That is why the subsidiary agreement is state-ing Australia.

The agreement, however, is only one text within a series of texts (listed as number 19 in the 1984 Australian treaty series), composed at the interface between the states entailed in the construction of the boundaries that contribute to delineating the state. Thus ‘squid jigging’ is embedded within that vast textual/scopic economy of meaning and regard – subjectifying, objectifying and bounding – that comprises the state-ing of the state in, and the state of, the modern world.

**The masque of state**

Everything profound loves the mask.

(Nietzsche 1990)

Both of the early modern theorists of politics, Machiavelli and Hobbes, are celebrated most for their ‘political realism’. But both also put the meaning of that category in some doubt through a feature common to, although somewhat differently interpreted in, their work. That is, their fascination with the mode of appearance of the real through the productive powers of illusion, (dis)similitude, misrecognition and spectacle. Moreover, these factors are integral to their understanding of the production of political subjectivity and the maintenance of political order. Both, indeed, regarded the production of the state as a work of art in which the real origins of social control lie in the mysteries of representation, and in which power is an effect of signification.³

*The Prince* is a dissertation on the art of seeming, appearance and dissimulation. Hobbes’s concern is most explicit in the final chapter of *De Homine* (‘Of Artificial
Man’), in which he considers the constitution of the body politic by discussing personification in terms of the theatrical mask; in chapter 16 of *Leviathan* (‘Of Persons, Authors, and Things Personated’), in which he once again takes up the theatrical analogy; and in his engagement with optical science, where he seems most influenced by the work of the Mersenne Circle and its combination of catoptrics with anamorphic art (Caygill 1989: 18; Hobbes 1976). In their respective enterprises, however, neither was concerned with the word to the exclusion of the visual. Machiavelli, as playwright and acute observer of the political, was preoccupied with the production of ‘appearance’. Hobbes, with his pronounced interest in optics as well as political theory, was preoccupied with the functioning of what Caygill has called ‘productive judgment’ and the way in which it contrives the appearance of a unity out of diversity (Caygill 1989: 18). For both, dramaturgy was an integral part of their conception of the production of political order (Schulman 1989).

If the defining problematic of the political in the modern age is how to produce and sustain life-enhancing self-rule without the guarantee that some stable and unified ordering principle is immanent either within ourselves or the natural universe that will enable us to do it, the modern era is also alleged to have been dominated not just by increasingly dense systems of textual mediation and their associated interpretive practices, for which bureaucracy has become a paradigm, but also by sight. The invention of printing, according to the familiar arguments of Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong (McLuhan 1964; Ong 1967), served to reinforce what Martin Jay has called the ocularcentric focus of modernity (1992), itself derived from such inventions as the telescope and the microscope. This privileging of sight has continued to intensify throughout all of modernity’s defining industrial, scientific, commercial, cultural and military structures (Virilio 1989).

But, just as Jay concludes that it would be wrong to espouse a monolithic view of the visual culture of the modern age, and goes on to differentiate at least three variants within it (Cartesian perspectivalism, Baconian empiricism and the Baroque), so it would be wrong to concede to any simple visualist insistence that the visual has been the master sense of modernity. After all, and manifestly, what we have here is an extraordinarily complex manifold in which the visual and the textual are combined by being mutually implicated in the production and reproduction of modern forms of life; *a fortiori*, its political forms. Knotting the manifold, however, is a performative rather than a cognitive activity. Moreover, its ground is not the dialectical one of positivity/negativity, but the dialogical one of inassimilable alterity. The modern *mise en scène/mise en sens* of the political is consequently conjured as a performative interplay of presence and absence out of the infrastructuring, but necessarily open and problematic, ground of the signifying protocols of the text and the gaze.⁴

The signs of the state can therefore be traced from the iconographic to the lexigraphic. In the process it appears that all political practice, from the smallest to the greatest matter of state, is involved in the *mode of appearance* of political subjectivities, as well as of the matters – indeed through the matters – that concern
them. What is also quite evident is that no form of life, none of the identities that people it, however structured, is fixed or constant. That is because the ground itself, that which enables them in the first place, is neither stable nor unified. The play is an endless reinvention of form through practices and characters, which are also products of the systems of signification that they animate and employ to animate themselves. Mediation of changing political form is, thus, the name of the language game of ‘statecraft’.

The state then emerges not as a universal subject, nor even as a collection of subjects somehow contrived from a chorus of pluralistic voices into a single utterance, but as a set of signifying – indeed, enabling – practices, which represent one of the most important of the signifying conditions of possibility for political subjectivity (individual or collective) to appear, to speak and to write itself in modern times. Instead of an agent, disciplining within a domestic polity a host of metaphysically conceived egotistical subjectivities, and itself constituting a super-egotistical subject, we are confronted with practices that open rather than foreclose the issue of how self-constituting practices of subjectivity work, and especially of how they work politically to constitute a plurality of subjectivities in an objectifying political order.

A person, Hobbes teaches, ‘is he whose words and actions are considered, either as his own, or as representing the words or actions of another man, or of any other thing, to whom they are attributed, whether truly or by fiction’ (Oakeshott 1960: 105; emphasis added). It seems, then, that political subjectivity is a function of the marks of signification. A mark is also a mask and a masque is also a performative play of presence and absence:

Persona in Latin signifies the disguise, or outward appearance of a man, counterfeited on the stage; and sometimes more particularly that part of it, which disguiseth the face, as a mask, or vizard [visor]: and from the stage, hath been translated to any representer of speech and action, as well in tribunals, as theatres.

(Hobbes 1998: 106)

The mask is integral to political personification. For the mask announces both that it is representing something – whatever is signified on the mask – while contriving simultaneously to signify that it is also representing, via disguise, something else: that which the mask itself suggests is behind the mask, wearing or authorising it. The statements of state, its marks – enunciations of every imaginable description – are, then, a mask: a visaging that simultaneously serves to imply a willing (political) persona that is never there fully present as a stable and unified subject. It only ever comes into existence as a plural and unstable entity in continuous dissemination characterised by différance.

Yet, all utterance is also performance, and not just a mark. Just as the mask is integral to political personification, so also then is the masque integral to political performance. Moreover, something of the etymology of mask further moves us
from language to language in action, language in play. The French spelling ‘masque’ was originally the same word as mask and formerly used indifferently with it until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when masque was refined to distinguish the sense in which it is used today as ‘masked ball’, a form of amateur histrionic entertainment which became popular at court and among the European nobility during that period (Rebhorn 1988). Originally consisting of dancing and acting in dumb show, later it came to include dialogue as well as song.

Under the sign of the state there is therefore a ‘masque’ in play: a certain seeming in which political action and political community are made to appear, and are ‘habited in character’. Although the mask/masque contrives a topology of surface effects and a tropology of significations for which there is no stable foundation outside the performance itself, one of its principal functions is to signify that (somewhere) such a stable foundation may be found.

Hence, the manner in which we would account for (political) subjectivity, although it cannot break entirely with the paradigm of subjectivity, is no longer subjective either, for it exposes and emphasises the différance that inhabits all our modes of being. In recognition of this, we require a radical reconceptualisation of the political and a radicalisation of (inter)national politics.
If you gaze long enough into an abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you.  
Friedrich Nietzsche *Beyond Good and Evil*: 102

What I take to be one of the defining features of continental thought is a comprehensive reappraisal of metaphysics that provides both a re-posing of the question of being and a fundamental critique of epistemology. Its insistence upon the concurrent operation of a difference inhabiting existence offers a new point of departure for philosophical reflection and political analysis. That difference recoils upon both identity and meaning. It stops any identity or meaning from ever becoming fully stabilised. Here there is an instability constitutive to all thought and practice. It is not only the source of the fruitfulness of existence, it is the basis of an alternative, originary, account of freedom: freedom to give the law, amend the law and render justice. It is a factical freedom that opens us up to being political creatures in the first place.

Such a point of departure problematises the very foundations of traditional philosophical and political thought. The *Fragenstellung* of politics – the grounding question of politics, the question concerning the political as such – arises differently. It is less a question therefore of modifying traditional political thinking than of starting from somewhere else outwith it. This rupture in thinking is itself political, since the most political thing about politics is the question of what is political and how to think about the political. Positive, and not merely critical, possibilities are thereby opened up to political thought and to the thought of international politics when this move is made.

The term *post-structural* has gained widespread currency as a way of referring to the complexities of continental thought. It has, however, been used to obscure rather than clarify highly contested philosophical positions. It conflates continental thinkers and their thought and overlooks the very significant differences that exist
between them. For example, the different ways in which they figure difference accounts for the ways in which they think it arises and operates. They pursue its implications differently and they think it has different entailments for the ways in which we do exist.\(^1\) In short they do not form a school or a partisan band in the ways in which labels such as post-structuralism or post-modernism mistakenly claim that they do. Theirs is a complex and contested site of intellectual formation and intervention. It has a direct bearing upon what we even conceive politics, government and rule to be, but it offers no manifesto, programme or agenda. It is less that these thinkers agree than that they provoke. Theirs is a provocation to traditional political thought because it is a provocation to thought as such.

Here the political is seen to arise out of the *plethos* insinuated into the very existence of human being by the concurrent operational force of a difference that can never be rendered the same. Such a difference, it has to be added, is more than oppositional difference and so the thinking of it is not dialectical. Hence it does not offer the saving turn of an *Aufhebung* or synthesis promised by Hegelian negation and difference. This is an account of difference that is intra rather than merely inter, and which is a positive process of differentiation rather than simple negation. Human being, then, becomes that which is necessarily a stranger to itself, because it is always already both more and less than one. Bearing difference within itself, it is never fully at home with itself. It is *unheimlich*.

*Unheimlich* is an ontological condition. It does not mean that human beings are not thrown into some home or other historically, or that they are not capable of making homes historically. Neither does it refer to being thrown out of their homes as are the subject of this chapter, refugees. It simply means that human being has no destined home. *Unheimlich* therefore refers to the facticity of human being; to a finite mortality that does not resent the finitude of its factical freedom or seek an excuse for it in a promise of eternal salvation. Such a being is free not because it is comprised of the properties of a natural or God-given will, but because it enjoys the property-less-ness contingency of its finite facticity. Factual freedom issues from the opening of difference that, in the continental conception of it, characterises the event of existence as such. It is that to which Derrida refers as differing and deferral in the term *différance*. This freedom is factical freedom. Factual freedom is the ontological condition for politics in the continental tradition. It is a question, however, rather than an answer. It is a question that does not have a definitive answer. Politics, philosophy and religion are ways of answering to that freedom.

The so-called a-foundationalism or anti-foundationalism of such thinking is a denial of the transcendental only where the transcendental is conceived as a final *archê* or ground. That there is no such ground does not, however, mean that there are no processes of grounding, transcending or overcoming. These terms are therefore fundamentally reconstrued as well (Farrell Krell 1991; Stambaugh 1994). In Derrida they are figured, albeit in different terms, and in different ways, as ‘the messianic’. Out of that reconstrual arises the possibility of another political thought. The ‘Law of the law’ says Derrida (1992c), appears also to be an abyssal freedom.
in which, while necessarily having to decide how to take up this factual freedom
(of determining what is just and what is unjust, for example, and, therefore, what to
do), such freedom has to find ways of being hospitable not simply to others but to
the very Otherness or strangeness that inhabits itself. In that sense, estrangement is
the condition of human existence. Unheimlich, human being is nonetheless thrown
into a position of being able to create as well as destroy homes.

Created yet also creating and therefore neither merely made nor present as a
given, human being is something in between the two. Specifically, finite and factual,
in between birth and death and always already, therefore, on the way into a future
in which it becomes that which it has also never yet been, the human is always
in the condition in which something is called for in the way of interpretation,
decision and action. Not simply occurring in history, the event of human existence
within the event of existence is itself a radical hermeneutical and phenomenological
experience whose taking place is historical.

One of the challenges with which continental thought confronts students of
politics and international relations is that of finding some ‘concrete’ site upon which
this turn in thought can be shown to have direct purchase. This chapter suggests
that the refugee provides precisely that. As stranger in dire need, often caused as well
as exacerbated by government and rule, the refugee is presented and explored here
as a figure of the ‘inter’ – or the in between – of human being. The refugee offers
a figure also of the ‘inter’ of international relations, and of the political abjection
that is such a common feature of processes of international political subjectification.
But the refugee or stranger in need is also a reminder of the homelessness that all
human beings share-in.

The appearance of such a stranger is, thus, fundamentally deconstructive. It
always brings to presence the strangeness, heterogeneity and supplementarity of
the self to the self, the unheimlich at the very heart of the home. It thereby poses
the challenge to embrace that strangeness in hospitable ways. This emphasises that
human being is a how, a way of being. It is not a what. It is not an object whose
essence may be captured in a concept. Since it is differs within itself it is always more
than one and is therefore always in questionable relation with itself and with other
beings. This is not egoism. It is the logical consequence of always already being
characterised by différence. It is a relational matrix that exists in a wider relational
matrix that Heidegger calls a world. Consequently, it is challenged to acknowledge
a belonging together – a ‘we’ – in the very absence of any predetermined specifica-
tion of what it is to be human, of how to be a ‘proper’ human and what a ‘proper’
world should consist in: ‘The improper is the very mark of finitude’ (Raffoul and
Nelson 2008: 4). The advent of the stranger in the form of the refugee exposes
and in exposing amplifies and intensifies our appreciation of this condition. The
refugee arrives without those authorisations from religions, leaders, nations, parties
and states that usually tell us how we are to be domiciled and who we therefore are.
Indeed, the question of the ‘we’, the question of being-with (Mitsein) and belong-
ing together, most often arises here despite, or in violent opposition to, the warrants
of religions, leaders, nations, parties and states.
Outwith all warrant the refugee is a scandal. It is a scandal for philosophy, and specifically for epistemology, in that the refugee recalls the radical incalculability of the human in, but also beyond, its needs. The refugee is a scandal for politics also, however, in that the advent of the refugee is a reproach to the violent formations and de-formations of government and rule and of the very processes of political subjectification that give rise to the refugee. The scandal is intensified among politics of identity that presuppose the goal of politics to be the realisation of sovereign identity, and among epistemologically driven politics that presuppose the goal of politics to be secure self-knowing.

These challenges also extend the register of what it is to be democratic. Such an extension is integral to an international relations that takes the thought of the ‘inter’ seriously as its point of departure. For the question integral to democratic thought, of who belongs to the demos, does not simply arise within the demos. It arises at the limit of the demos. Neither does it arise there only at the interface between one demos and another. More profoundly and more disturbingly, it arises at the interface between the demos and what is not demos; between the people and what is not to be included among the people. Democratic politics therefore originally concerns how a people is a people, not what the people is. It is a question of how a people is a people in recognition, for example, of the others and of the Otherness that remains constitutive also of it; and not simply with who or what represents a people. Such issues therefore extend the register of democratic thought, specifically for us here through the ‘inter’ of being-with, which is a different way of saying international relations. It is the ‘inter’ that continental thought and international relations share. Through it, the one might usefully illuminate the other.

The return of the ontological

To be specific, perhaps the most characteristic feature of the last hundred years of philosophising has been the return to the ontological in continental thought. By this I mean that since Nietzsche and Heidegger, in particular, and the crisis of historicism, in general, ontology has not only become the principal focus of thought but the onto-theological underpinnings of Western thought as a whole – the ways in which, through Plato’s eidos to the theism of Christian theology and on to Hegel’s Absolute Spirit, the very question of being as such had previously been posed and addressed – have been subjected to a sustained reappraisal.

The question of ontology was not only re-posed. The charge was also laid that the onto-theological yearnings that characterised Western thought were the source of its own life-inimical violence. This thinking was also historical. In part it derived from, and where it did not it nonetheless also powerfully resonated with, the shattering experiences of the twentieth century. The return of the ontological was, therefore, no mere turn of thought. It was incited by and sought directly to engage features of twentieth-century life that threatened life with mounting intensity and global reach: bureaucratisation and rationalisation; global industrialisation and technologisation; the advent of mass society and total war, later nuclear war; genocide
and holocaust. These events challenged statesmen and women, as well as philosophers, to reconsider the character of the civilisation that they had inherited and the self-annihilating trajectory down which its dynamics were propelling it.

World War I was pivotal. Totalitarianism, together with the destruction of European Jewry and the use of genocide as a regular tool of policy, followed. The invention and dissemination of weapons of mass destruction at the end of World War II provided further reason for rethinking the foundations of Western politics and philosophy. Whereas the political and economic character of the age seemed to demand a fundamental reappraisal of the fundamentals to which it held, the philosophical reappraisal of the fundamentals called, in its turn, for a political reappraisal of the age. Modernity became a question, but the question was increasingly formulated in ways that were concerned less with its realisation and more with whether or not it was capable of being overcome. The challenge has only grown as its globalisation began to pose the question of whether or not its impact would allow the planet to remain habitable for human beings.

The ‘inter’ of international relations

The refugee is not ‘natural’ politically. No national or co-national, the refugee arises in the strange space of estrangement located between the two. Neither in nor out, the refugee also bears the name of some previous place. But it does so as a badge of estrangement. A non-political category, the refugee nonetheless does also exist in political ways. One has nevertheless to stretch the category of politics beyond that of governmental and police regulation to acknowledge that politics: a politics through which refugees challenge their depoliticisation and policing.

Homeless, the refugee is located in a carefully defined nowhere place within the boundaries of some nation or state. As the refugee is forcibly deprived of a home and in search of a new one, the very political question of what it means to have a home, and who belongs in that home, thus comes violently to presence. The refugee appears also as a suppliant. In search of hospitality and a welcome into a new home, the refugee arrives with indelibly painful memories of a home that once was; perhaps of a home that never really was. For the violent event of displacement, of dislocation and subsequent Diaspora, generates representations of home that inevitably call into question what home was really like. No one knows what home was really like, because the home recalled is not the home that it was. The home that it was could not have been so homely because it proved so susceptible to radical dissolution and dispersal. Even when the re-settled finally regains a home this question of the home remains ambiguous and is only ever provisionally settled (Warner 1991; Bernasconi 1993).

Denaturalised, one study of forced migration notes, means having ‘no means of identification’ (Collinson 1994). How, then, in all the senses of the term, is one to address the refugee? Under a previous name, the refugee did have an address. As refugee it has none (Derrida 1979). An administrative category specifying that which is no longer reliably locatable, or designatable, the refugee is someone kept
waiting for – holding out for – a new address. As such they circulate sometimes endlessly in lines, camps or holding tanks. They never arrive, and yet they are here. Here, they are processed but deliberately not domesticated. The refugee poses the very question of home address. These entail technical matters of processing, but they are simultaneously also political matters of human being. Without secure name, identity or home address, the refugee dramatises what is most evident about being in its existential neediness: the necessity of finding modes of address without a reliable address book. No category of identity, and no category of lost identity even, serves to tell us unambiguously who and what we are and how we dwell in the world (Goswami 2008).

The alienation of the constitutive outside

Exactly because s/he destroys the old trinity of state–nation–territory, the refugee, an apparently marginal figure, deserves on the contrary to be considered the central figure of our own political history.

(Agamben 1993: 8; author’s translation)

The constitution of any social group or political community is a matter of the exercise of inclusions and exclusions. The semantic field of the alien is, therefore, manifold and its political register is determinative of political community. All this is, by now, well established. Different politics of identity determine different things to be alien to them. How the alien appears, and the experience of the alien as alien, also waxes and wanes according to different times and places, and according to different political and philosophical systems. How the alien is alien similarly determines how the self-same, in both philosophy and politics, is itself not simply constituted, but continuously reinaugurated in the process of trying to exclude the alien from it. Beneath all identity politics and beneath all allied philosophical systems there brews a secret horror alieni that seeks to dispel alien-ness as such, to divest itself of everything enigmatic and strange, making that estrangement the bearer of all that such systems find loathsome and threatening, evil, sinful and barbarous. What are we to make, therefore, of what is going on when the political discourses of states, nations and religions bring to material presence not merely those subjects which they name but the very ‘outside’, by reference to which they legitimise themselves: souls and subjects posited as existing outside the practices that constitute them as the souls and subjects that they are, together simultaneously with aliens and alien-ness threatening what they are said to be?

Mass expulsion and forceful displacement of peoples are not modern phenomena. Exile and Diaspora are not exclusively modern experiences. But if all philosophical systems and all social and political groupings are constituted on the basis of complex practices of inclusion and exclusion, then the nature of modern inclusions and exclusions is peculiar to, and discloses something fundamental about, the character of political modernity. The sheer scale of the mass forced displacement of peoples globally in our times does seem to be distinctive, and it has given
rise to analytical crises in the areas of migration and refugee studies, as well as political crises in those areas of national and international policy-making concerned with immigration, emigration, refugee protection, humanitarian intervention, asylum seeking and regulation (Zolberg 1988; Mitchell 1989; UNHCR 1995). More than that, migration and immigration, the mass production of refugees, equally destabilises domestic politics as well.

The violent character of modern global estrangement also seems to be extraordinarily diverse. Consider, for example, the list of outcasts that distinguishes modern forced displacement of peoples: refugee, political refugee, development refugee, internal refugee, asylum seeker, ‘oustee’, deportee, ‘relocatee’, involuntary displaced person, involuntarily resettled person, forced migrant, involuntary migrant, and so on. Consider too, the politics and policies that have given rise to them: war, internal security actions, low-intensity operations, pacification, ethnocide, genocide, pogroms, political repression, racial and religious discrimination, conquest, colonisation, territorial appropriation, state building, nation building, self-determination, famine, urbanisation, industrialisation and development. The United Nations High Council for Refugees estimated in 1993 that, out of a world population of about five billion, around 1 in every 130 people had been forced into flight across state borders (UNHCR 1995). Given the complexity and confusion surrounding the production and movements of refugees, together with the shifting legal politics of classification that characterises the categorisation of people as refugees, the precision of these figures is questionable and is said to significantly underestimate the scale of the phenomenon. Later reports, which include people forced into flight within their own state territories, thus classifying refugees as part of an extraordinarily large and variegated global phenomenon of coerced displacement, record that approximately 1 in 115 people find themselves in this condition. While, globally, ‘there are as many reasons for moving as there are migrants’ (UNHCR 1995), it is now increasingly difficult for migration analysts and legislators to distinguish between voluntary migration, involuntary migration, forced migration and expulsion.

The production of the modern refugee appears therefore to be distinctive and differs from earlier, particularly nineteenth-century, refugees in the way in which it is characterised in terms of the politically deliberate wholesale devastation of the very ontological horizons of refugees’ worlds and their reduction to world-less beings. The combination of drivers involved is legion: war of one form or another; violent mass political repression; geopolitical instability; regional and global economic transformation; the redivision and redistribution of capital, labour and industry; man-made environmental disaster; religious and ethnic conflict; drought, famine and the struggle for resources. The most overwhelmingly important reason, now, is said to be violent internecine conflict. The vast majority of refugees appear to be produced by violence against civilian populations. ‘Virtually all of the refugee producing conflicts taking place in the world during the early part of 1993’, according to the UNHCR study, ‘were within states rather than between them’ (UNHCR 1995).
It is not my intention to add to the taxonomisation of modern outcasts, or to list the policies that have given rise to them. I am concerned with that which exceeds categorisation. For the refugee, like the human itself, is always both more and less than ‘human’, whatever human is taken to be. Thus, while the manifold ways in which expulsion and revulsion are experienced can be taxonimised, and taxonomic precision has its advantages in other forms of argument, expulsion and revulsion (the effect of being strange or estranged) always bring to presence the uncanniness of strangeness as such. That is to say, the uncanniness of being within a category categorised as being without a category—that of the refugee—discloses the very uncanniness of the category ‘human’ itself, its improbable condition of always already containing both more and less than it seems it ought naturally to contain.

Because the constitution of any social group or political community is a matter of the exercise of inclusions and exclusions does not mean that one set of inclusions and exclusions is the same as any other. Practices of differentiation help constitute the ethos of a people, a governmental regime or a political order. Nor is it true that because there have always been people who have been outcasts we can legitimately concentrate on the native and the home, and thus forget about the stranger and the outside. On the contrary, the ‘we’ is integrally related to, because formed by, this relationship with the alien. Given the horrors inflicted on the alien it is understandable, indeed almost orthodox, to deny difference and urgently champion an all-encompassing inclusion so as to mitigate or eradicate the terrors of exclusion. All order, in short, encounters the alien or the strange, which is defined not in relation to itself at all. Such alien-ness is beyond the trial of propriety to which strangeness is continuously submitted.

But the alien-ness I wish to emphasise concerns an alien-ness that is not the property of any person, place or thing. It does not belong to entities, albeit that it comes to presence in the appearance of persons or things. Propriety does not, however, attach to it. It is not a property of the world but an indelible, if fugitive, feature recurring in the world, always at work there. The political register and the very semantic field of the alien or refugee discloses this alien-ness. In doing so it betrays the workings of the horror alieni within the philosophical and the political. Buried in that horror alieni is something more fundamental about the fundaments of thinking and practice than is ordinarily addressed by traditional political theory and politics.

A different ontological condition thus arises with the refugee. But you do not have to be a refugee for it to arise. Acknowledging it may, however, affect how you relate to the refugee or stranger. That condition is the excess of Being over its appearance, the manifestation of what Heidegger called the ontico-ontological difference between beings and Being as such. Recognition of the ontological difference is recognition of the mutually disclosive belonging together of Being and beings, and thus of the excess that always already inhabits the being of human being. Being’s absent presence does not come to presence as such. Albeit Derrida has fundamental reservations about this Heideggerean terminology, and would perhaps reject its usage here, this is what sets deconstruction in motion. Better to say that the différance of deconstruction is Derrida’s way of challenging and transforming
Heidegger's terms while struggling with something like the same sort of insight. Hence, deconstruction is less a technique than something that happens to be. It occurs, rather than is done.

Alert to this ontological dimension of identity politics, we can be alerted also to that other register of scandal I referred to in my opening. It is that strangeness, coming to presence with the appearance of the refugee, alien or stranger, which takes this chapter through and beyond identity politics. For it is within identity politics that the refugee, alien or stranger commonly comes to be regarded as virulent to the degree that the idea of order operating there presupposes a unity, or at least a self-contracting unity of the many. This is not a question of the many ways in which we necessarily have to become identifiable to ourselves and to others. The refugee, alien or stranger is one of those occasions when the human condition itself manifests its strangeness.

Accepting that other times and other forms of life have treated strangers badly or manufactured strangers does not, then, deny that modern estrangement happens in its own modern way and for its own modern reasons. We note that our age is one in which political order is commonly premised on the realisation of a unitary identity. It is also one that presupposes and operates a certain kind of technologically driven uniformalisation of identity, often in the name of diversity and difference.

Although we know the history of the thought, and therefore in many ways why politics came to be understood as grounded in a secure triangulation of territory, the people or nation, and the sovereign state, it also seems incredible that such an account of politics should have done so when it did. For at the same time millions upon millions of people were engaged in transoceanic Euro-American and intra-European migration which was matched only by the forcible transport of African slaves and the 'cooler' migrations from Asia. Everyday reality (from the seventeenth through to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) witnessed the massive mobility of peoples, the artificiality of boundaries, the imagined character and mongrel reality of nations and races and the mass of media techniques that went into mounting the transparent spectacles of state sovereignty. And yet, the sovereign unity of state and subject alike became the vernacular of politics and of political thought. In many ways, of course, such factors were the reasons why it did so.

But we should not fool ourselves. If these were the fables of responsibility thought appropriate to those troubled times, they are precisely the ones that now cause trouble in our times. We are in need of different fables of responsibility. These require a different thought of politics, inter-national politics in particular. The scale of the politically instrumental manufacture of estrangement in world politics necessarily calls into question, therefore, the very moral and political foundations and accomplishments, nationally and internationally, of the modern age.

In such circumstances – and given the vaunted political and moral claims made on behalf of states and of the international state system, as well as of so-called international society – we seem increasingly left not knowing to what symbolic space, to what understanding of the human way of being, we can entrust what we call freedom and humanity (Nancy 1993b: 28). The refugee is the abjection
that characterises the worst excesses of political modernity’s failure to deliver on its promises.

**The development of subjection and abjection**

Abject means cast out. Abjection is the act of expelling. It marks the efforts of political subjectification to purify human being politically. Overflowing the limits of that which seeks to be the self-same, abjection is the waste matter that nonetheless contaminates the governmental institution and regulation of identity, system and order. Waste is therefore never epiphenomenal. There is no form of production without waste. Never a mere unintended consequence, waste is systemic. Waste is never waste without its wasting processes (Ricoeur 1969). Reason, too, has its waste. So also does development.

‘Refugeeism’ has therefore become a function also of twentieth- and twenty-first-century developmental processes committed to making life live more fruitfully and productively. In the process development employs its own **horror alieni** against those most resistant to being thus made more fruitful and productive. Development studies have documented how development itself has generated at least equal numbers of refugees to those caused by civil war and the political, ethnic and religious persecution to which I referred above.

Social scientific research on involuntary resettlement mushroomed between 1984 and 1994 in response to the discovery that World Bank-funded development projects – notably those concerned with the building of large-scale dams – manufactured massive impoverishment instead (Cernea 1988, 1995; Frischtak 1994). The principal difficulty with the overwhelming volume of this research is, however, the propensity to depoliticise the issue by translating it into precisely that technical policy-analytic enframing that contributed to the production of the problem in the first place. Technology thus translates the question of the political into certain kinds of problematisations requiring rigorous calculability, utility and governmentality. It then feeds itself on the history and further elaboration of the very problematisations it practices (Burchall et al. 1991); the development–security apparatuses of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries provide a classic illustration of these points (Duffield 2001, 2007).

The production of refugees is not an unintended consequence of international politics. Often a very deliberate act of policy, it is one of its most extensive and intensive industries. Mass forced relocation of peoples within their existing territorial boundaries and for the purposes of ‘resettlement’ and greater productivity is committed in the name of their development, which was then conflated also with their securitisation, and sometimes simply in the name of development as such. ‘Development-caused displacements that seemed to be piecemeal occurrences’, one study records,

were estimated as totalling far less than the number of refugees world-wide, [but] have turned out to be a much larger process than all the world’s new refugee
Refugee flows. Refugees and development displaces, of course, are not ‘numbers’ that compete with each other, but are global parallel dramas sometimes intertwined. (Cernea 1995; emphasis added)

Complexly complicit in the violent appropriative and exploitative politics of the political and economic elites of the recipient states, operating through politically mandated mass relocations of people, development has enriched some and pau-perised many. Increasingly committed in the name of globalising capital economic systems of production and exchange, these movements de-world those who are resettled. Resistance rather than critique changes such systems today as it did in previous imperial systems of good government, such as those through which the British sought to rule India after its original forcible acquisition (Mantena 2010). It is more through the crucible of violent resistance than the abstractions of critique that different politics and new forms of identity are fashioned.

Albeit that the theme of abjection arises here, this chapter is not motivated by the treatment of the refugee as a victim. Refugees always offer, and have always been more than mere objects of pity and suffering. That, in turn, raises the point, well made by Judith Butler in another discussion, of how ‘such socially saturated domains of exclusion’ can be recast from their status as constitutive-outsiders ‘to beings that matter’ (Butler 1993: 189). I take the refugee to be a being that matters in respect of the systemic world dis-order of political modernity, the requirements to overcome it, and the possibility of doing so.

This chapter thus also draws upon what political theorist William Connolly called ‘ontopolitical interpretation’. By the ‘ontopolitical’, Connolly means the way in which every political interpretation invokes a set of fundaments about the necessities and possibilities of human being; about, for instance, ‘the forms into which human beings may be composed and the possible relations which humans can establish with nature’ (Connolly 1995: 1) – for the *on*, or the *onta*, of ontology refers to the reality of really existing things. In making his point about the way in which all political interpretation is simultaneously also ontopolitical because it cannot but disclose the ontology sequestered within it, Connolly demurs at the logos of ontology because he finds the idea of the logic of reality apart from appearance too determinative and restrictive. It suggests a principle or design of being, when it can and has, of course, been argued that the fundamental thing about being is that it exhibits no such overriding logic or principle.

Surveying the various means by which modern political thought has elided the ontological, Connolly concludes that this elision also obscures a convergence of ontological views, asking rhetorically:

What if some common presumptions of our times … contain dangerous demands and expectations with them? What … if the points of ontopolitical convergence in the late-modern nation-state turn out to be exactly the domain in need of reassessment today?'

(Connolly 1995: 4)
Connolly notes that this is precisely what that strain of thinking from Nietzsche called the ontological turn contends: ‘that every detailed interpretation presupposes answers to fundamental questions of being, and that this is indeed one of the territories of modern discourse that requires critical reflection’ (Connolly 1995: 4).

My contention is that the appearance of the refugee brings that very space of modern discourse directly into question because the refugee is a function of the dangerous ontopolitical convergences that Connolly notes: specifically, the ontological narcissism, to which he refers in his essay on ‘Freedom and Contingency’, in which freedom has become associated with the security of being in command, the corollary of which appears to mean being subjected to intensifying surveillance and control (Connolly 1989). We should not be fooled, either, by the ways in which development and securitisation manufacture waste in the name of freedom as well as in the name of securing life to make life live (Foucault 2007).

Democratic asylum

What becomes of being-with when the with no longer appears as composition, but rather as dis-position.

(Nancy 1996: 5)

Human being is a mobile way of being on its way from birth to death that lives life without owning whatever gives life. It is in reception of a grant that offers no security of tenure over the freehold of its existence. That leaves it in the curious position of having to own up to itself without possessing original title to itself. Pace John Locke it simply does not, and cannot, possess a secure property right in itself by itself. In consequence, it tells stories to account for itself. It binds itself to and with such fables in pursuit of making such freedom not only bearable but also enjoyable and life enhancing. Technological mastery of ourselves and ‘nature’ through casting ourselves as sovereign reasoning subjects is the myth that currently characterises politically modern times. In the process it nonetheless finds itself compelled to grant some right to asylum for the mass human waste that it creates in the process of seeking to institute and re-institute itself.

The question of taking the refugee seriously in the way I propose here is not a simple problematisation of the modern subject as a solus ipse: ‘It is more than this and something else entirely’ (Nancy 1996: 6). It is a matter of the ipse itself, hence the ontopolitical valence of the refugee. Neither a neighbour nor a friend, not linked by a politically fraternal, communal or national bond, the appearance of the refugee poses the question of the ‘we’ of the human as such and discloses its co-ipseity beyond, or other than, our current understandings of the belonging together of human being. That co-ipseity is obscure, enigmatic and opaque. Readily deniable, it is nonetheless also impossible to escape. Inescapably ethical, a matter of ethos, it sets up aporetic perturbations in all settled systems of political order and understanding, including those of communitarian and liberal thought (Dumm 1994).
Michael Walzer, while unsympathetic to the position argued here, nonetheless also admits as much. At the extreme, he notes in *Spheres of Justice*, ‘the claim of asylum is virtually undeniable. I assume that there are in fact limits to our collective liability, but I don’t know how to specify them’. But if that is true, he goes on, why stop with asylum? Why be concerned with men and women on our territory who ask to remain and not with men and women oppressed in their own countries who ask to come in? Why mark-off the lucky or aggressive, who have somehow managed to make their own way across our borders, from all others? Once again I don’t have an adequate answer to these questions.

(Walzer 1983: 51)

His difficulties lie, of course, in the *plethos* and equality – a phenomenological symmetry and asymmetry (to use Derrida’s Levinasian gloss on Heidegger) – which radically disrupts Walzer’s project. It is precisely that phenomenological symmetry and asymmetry that the refugee brings so forcefully and corporeally to presence.

Raising the question, the capacity and our necessity to be able to say ‘we’, the refugee does so in circumstances that are not authorised, therefore, by God, the Leader, the State or the People. Rather, the refugee not only raises that need in the circumstances in which none of these ontopolitical figures says it for us, but does so also, and crucially, in precisely those circumstances when these figurations of the ontopolitical convergences of modern times – those very ontopolitical signifiers that operate as rallying points for mobilisation and politicisation fated nonetheless to dishonour their promise ‘both to unify the ideological field and to constitute the constituencies they claim to represent’, as Butler glosses Zizek (1993: 191) – tell us, instead, exclusively to say ‘I’. Not being able to say ‘we’ in the circumstances in which it is most called for – that is to say, when we are not authorised to do so, and when it is the strange and different that we are entertaining – is precisely, however, what institutes the demented ‘I’ that results in individuals not being able to say ‘I’ any longer either (Nancy 1991, 1993a, b). That is what makes the refugee a touchstone for the very democratic politicality of any community – its capacity, in making way for other beings, to make way for other ways of political being, to be in its very own way of being.

The ‘we’ is in question as a question, then, when faced with the refugee, because the refugee poses the very questionability of the ‘we’ at us directly and politically, but in a way in which the answers we have currently settled upon – and in – no longer answer. That ‘we’ obliges us to find other ways of saying ‘we’ again, and through that inescapable insistence binds us in a peculiarly ethical form of ‘commonality’. Asylum is how we currently own up to this even as it remains a selective instrument of state and inter-state politics.

I would call that politics democratic that did not merely claim to represent ‘the people’, did not begin with a subject individual or collective, but was committed instead to continuously forestalling the foreclosure of freedom entailed in having to give an answer to the question of the self and of the community – indeed, that had
no understanding of the self that was not also said and simultaneously always already a being within the Otherness of the ontological difference. I would also call that politics democratic if it was one that was thus committed to the project of keeping open the question of who ‘the people’ (the *demos*) is; that is, of continuously disclosing, rather than foreclosing, the ‘inter’ or ‘we’ in the human way of being. Democracy to come would thus be – always already is – the forestalling of the foreclosing of this questionability, even in its own foreclosing (Critchley 1992). Is it not this that constantly takes place in the ‘inter’ of international relations, despite what international relations once thought itself to address as knowledge and politics when constituting itself as an academic discipline?
The concept of sovereignty is integral to a political thought that is indebted to the philosophical tradition of the West, and the philosophical tradition of the West is a metaphysics of presence. Sovereignty is the apogee of secure self-presence to which this tradition aspired as the foundation of its understanding of truth. Once the Christian God lost its ascendancy in the Western thought of being, and the thought of politics began to escape from the onto-theological determinations of the Church, the sovereign political subject of the modern state began to make its appearance, moving quickly to the centre of political theory, especially that of modern international political thought. It remains firmly lodged there still, despite the revisionist arguments of internationalisers and globalisers. Although the simulation and construction of sovereignty has begun to be critically reappraised and its genealogy traced, my concern here is to consider how sovereignty appears from the standpoint of a philosophy that has challenged the very ontological underpinnings of the metaphysics within which the thought of sovereignty has always been located (Bartleson 1995; Biersteker and Weber 1996). Although this philosophy is variously indebted to the work of Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, it has been developed in a variety of contested ways by many other thinkers. In this chapter I seek to bring some of the different ontological arguments of that thinking to bear on the question of sovereign subjectivity by exploring the radically disturbing impact that the advent of the stranger has upon the sovereign.

Some of the key assumptions that lie behind the idea of sovereignty go back to classical times. When introducing the first theorisation of politics at the beginning of the Republic, for example, Plato has Socrates compare the task of the Guardians with differentiating natives from strangers: ‘For you must have noticed that it is a natural characteristic of a well-bred dog to behave with the utmost gentleness to those it is used to and knows, but to be savage strangers?’ (Plato 1987: 127). The dog’s disposition to be ‘annoyed when it sees a stranger, even though he has done
The sovereign and the stranger

it no harm’, is contrasted with the way in which ‘it welcomes anyone it knows, even though it has never had a kindness from him’ (Plato 1987: 127). This trait, says Socrates, with some irony perhaps, ‘is a trait that shows discrimination and a truly philosophic nature’.

The dog distinguishes the sight of friend and foe simply by knowing one and not knowing the other. And a creature that distinguishes between the familiar and the unfamiliar on the grounds of knowledge or ignorance most surely be gifted with a real love of knowledge.

(Plato 1987: 128)

Without claiming a direct line of ascent from Plato, the inaugural moment of the modern state draws on Plato as it does on others in the classical tradition. Here, it echoes Carl Schmitt’s political dictum that the essence of the political is to be found in the friend/enemy distinction, a distinction that threatens native and stranger alike because every native is ineradicably marked by strangeness as well (Schmitt 1976: 26).

It is, nonetheless, also evident from the guiding metaphor of the guard dog that individuation for Plato entailed differentiation – indeed, a certain act of differentiation for which dog and guardian alike had to be rigorously trained. Even here, then, differentiation somehow precedes individuation. Without differentiation, there can be no individuation. There is friend only because there is enemy, and vice versa. There is stranger only in relation to native, but in a way such that identity is privileged over difference.

But who is not a stranger? What human is not a mortal and temporal being bearing the mark of difference within itself, as that which makes itself possible? Difference that does not merely individuate each human being as the individual self that is it, but which each self actively bears constitutively within itself. In the spacing of time it is that difference which both opens up the self and opens it out as the responsive, receptive, projecting and communicating, plural and hybrid, temporal and singular way of being-with-others, on the way from birth to death, which comprises the self. Who, in short, is not a bearer of this very strangeness of human being itself?

For not only were all natives at birth once strangers, they are necessarily also strangers to themselves – however well they may think they know themselves – because of this active constitutive difference that they bear within themselves as the selves that they are (Kristeva 1991). Conversely, all strangers require to settle a while – that is to say, for the duration of their mortal existence. There is no human who is not simultaneously both native and stranger. This very strange hybridity is bound, however, to put even the most well-bred guard dogs off their scent and send them wild with murderous frustration. The mortal danger not only to strangers, but inescapably also to the constitutive strangeness of the native as well, lies, then, not in such hybridity but in the philosophical and political mentality of the guard dog.
As with the delimitation of any place of dwelling, the constitution of a people, a nation, a state or a democracy necessarily specifies who is a stranger to, or estranged from, that identity, place or regime. The very act of delimitation itself does not dispense with the stranger. For the limit or boundary – the very mark of the actively constitutive process of differentiation that becomes so evident with the advent of every concrete stranger and that is fundamental even to the actions of Plato’s guard dogs – is what brings native and stranger together as well.

No more so, in fact, than when, as in our time, the delineation of political spaces has reached a kind of global limit, where all global space is politically demarcated and so also therefore contested space, and there are no ‘unmapped’ territorial political spaces any longer. The world does not possess the boundaries that would ‘make it into a plane surface’: ‘When the plane becomes a globe, the boundary becomes immanent to the world, no longer marking the border between what is possessed and not possessed, but between what is possessed by some and not others’ (Caygill 1993: 52). Contemporary global politics is thus a space in which human beings are fated to encounter each other as strangers and, by virtue of that very encounter, encounter the strangeness of the human condition itself.

As we follow the trial of human estrangement we come to appreciate and address freedom, politics and justice differently because these issues come to be posed differently by the trial to which the condition of estrangement subjects the human. The ontological assumptions that underpin the sovereign idea of sovereign subjectivity – together with the politics, freedom, and justice associated with it – are profoundly challenged by that trial. In the process an entirely different set of ontological considerations concerning the way of being of human being is projected to the fore. An obligatory freedom becomes the ontological condition of human being: justice, the call that resounds tellingly throughout it; and politics, the taking place – khôra – of that encounter of human being with its freedom (Sallis 1999).

All this is made possible by the constitutive and ineradicable hybridity and Oth-erness to which human being bears testament in itself, as it is freely disclosed and individuated in the world through the difference to which the foreignness of the individual stranger alerts us.

More attuned to the inherent strangeness of human being than to that of the tradition of sovereign subjectivity is the political sensibility of the Greek poets. Because they conceived the truth, and so also the truth of human being and human knowing, differently, they appear to have been especially sensitive to the manifold trials of estrangement that individual human beings and communities undergo in their politics, and to the enigmatic ‘law’ of hospitality that estrangement continuously invokes. I pick up this trial of human estrangement and follow its trail a little way here by beginning with the Greek poets.

The suppliant

In a very short but penetrating essay on the figure of the suppliant in Greek poetry, Maurice Blanchot notes that the suppliant and the stranger are one. Both, he says,
‘are cut off from the whole, being deprived of the right that founds all others and alone establishes one’s belonging to the home’ (Blanchot 1993: 93). Outside the sovereign community, the supplicant is the stranger who represents an appeal for justice that goes beyond the justice that is ordained and dispensed by the sovereign law of the community.

Blanchot goes on to analyze the uncanny status of this supplicant stranger. The community is in possession of everything – ‘authority, force, the power of decision, freedom’ – and the inequality between supplicant and the one being supplicated is manifest. Yet it is precisely through this lack that the stranger radically disturbs the very foundation of the community itself. Through his or her humiliation the figure of the stranger may seek a ritual appeasement of the community’s rule but simultaneously must let it be known, indeed (in virtue of presence alone) cannot hide the fact, that being thus separated from all law and authority, he or she escapes the jurisdiction of the power and law of the community. In doing so, the stranger powerfully invokes another, if obscure, domain of law and belonging in which both community and supplicant are somehow antecedent, or at least more originally implicated. The reverberations of this paradox cannot be contained short of problematising the origin and authority – indeed the very idea – of any sovereign subject at all. For the reality and the truth of the strange supplicant cannot be denied, even though the appeal of the supplicant stranger may be refused, regarded as unrealistic, legislated away or rejected as untruthful in the ways that it frequently is, now, in the contracting asylum and refugee regimes of contemporary sovereignties.

Blanchot succinctly summarises the inevitable consequence: ‘the supplicant is thus the man [or woman] who is coming, always on the move because without a place and of whom one must ask the most mysterious of questions, that of the origin’ (Blanchot 1993: 94). Every new arrival, therefore, raises a profound and inescapable question, that of the provenance of the native as well as of the stranger. ‘Where did you come from?’ is a question that applies equally to both. Every new arrival, however, also poses a profound and inescapable truth. That truth is the truth of the common facticity of native and stranger in a provenance that they share but which nonetheless remains mysterious to them. Who knows from whence their being ultimately derived, or where it may finally be headed? Each, stranger and native alike, stands out and is thereby disclosed in the opening of existence itself. Thus encountering the stranger, the native undergoes a trial of estrangement herself that discloses the estrangement she, too, bears within herself. No one, it turns out, is at home in this encounter. Strangers to each other, each is also a stranger to itself in that neither one of them does, in fact, know their original provenance. The question ‘Where are you from?’ must always arise, but none know the final answer to it. It is this that binds them (Todorov 1984). Where that question may lead, or what the truth of it may require from us, and whether or not either will be welcomed, is the challenge faced by all.

This radically unsettling state of affairs is compounded, then, because the answer to the question and the status of the truth to which it points are not transparent and will never be fully clarified. The question cannot, however, be avoided. Here
is the stranger. What are we to make of her or of him? What are we to make of
the strangeness in ourselves? What might this teach us about generative principles
of political formation concerning that in virtue of which human beings are said to
belong together, when instituting politics, government and rule.

By his or her very nature, the stranger is outside the settled modes of question-
ing, the received understandings of truth and identity and the sovereign will and
law of which the sovereign subject is said to be comprised. And, yet, the stranger
is there, not only in all of the mystery that provokes the question but also in all of
the inescapable and shared facticity that demands a response. The mystery is com-
pounded further because the suppliant is not the weaker or even the weakest of the
parties concerned. The suppliant stranger is simply off the scale.

Being off the scale is precisely what calls into question not only the measures that
the sovereign subject takes in respect of the suppliant but also the measure itself. For
the Greek poet there was a fundamental dishonesty and impiety in judging by such
measures alone when one of the parties did not even register on the scales. Scales
may have to be used because they are the only things present to hand, but they
are not the final arbiters of what is just, since the advent of the stranger calls the
very status of the scales themselves into question. The scales of justice are thereby
always subjected to another test, one that exceeds their technical application within
and by the community. They are submitted to a politicised examination of their
responsiveness to the excess of justice to which the mere presence of the suppliant
attests and in which both parties – native and stranger alike – are always already
mutually implicated.

What more can be said about this obscure mutual implication in an excess of
justice that the encounter between strangers and native, wherein natives are also
disclosed as strangers, reveals as constituting some ‘original’ differentiating bond
between them? From whence does it arise? How is it manifested? What kind of
claim does it constitute? How does it relate to the establishment and to the insti-
tutions and practices of the sovereignty that the stranger’s arrival so profoundly
problematises? Is it capable of sustaining some other kind of political bond? Despite
the manifold and ultimately accidental ways in which each of them have been
shared out into different times and different places, what is this strange ‘being-
there’ that each shares in as strangers to themselves by virtue of the fact that each
is undeniably here, and here with the Other in a world whose very constitution
in difference is indebted to the one excluded? Such a call to justice cannot derive
from sovereign power because it is antecedent to, more ‘original’ than, sovereign
subjectivity, even if it only ever becomes apparent in the relations of power and
legality constitutive of the worlds that aspire to such sovereign self-possession.

More disturbing, in particular for modern discourses of emancipation, neither
can this call of justice arise from understanding human beings as individual rather
than collective sovereign subjects, as isolated and autonomous entities comprised of
rights. For only certain regimes of power and knowledge can endow them with,
or deprive them of, that particular status. However they are, and however they
discover themselves to be human beings in this encounter with one another, the call
to justice cannot derive from rights sovereignly acknowledged or denied. It issues out of something other than the claim of rights that sovereignties dis-empower, the very absence of any such thing as sovereignty at all.

This constitutive lack or absence in the self of the self is no deficiency. ‘It never enters the field of view of our calculating reason’, writes Heidegger. He adds, ‘a no and a not may arise out of a surplus or abundance, may be the highest gift, and as this not and no may infinitely, i.e. essentially, surpass every ordinary yes’ (Heidegger 2002: 132). This mutual implication in an excess of justice, this original differentiating bond, this being-in-common, comprises a radical and inexhaustible excess to which the presence of the stranger draws our attention, and in terms of which our hospitality is tested. An excess, it should be emphasised, not simply of needfulness, however immediately needful the refugee’s need initially appears. For refugees, migrants and asylum seekers are no mere victims, and it would miss the point being made here only to draw attention to their needfulness. Such strangers recall us instead to Jacques Derrida’s analysis of the ‘gift’, a trace of the reserve that is charged with possibilities (Derrida 1992a).

The suppliant stranger is, almost, without status in the community. Its sovereign authorities do not empower her or him. Neither, however, can she or he be certain that whatever paradoxically powerful position of reverse power she may appear to deploy against the sovereign as suppliant will guarantee her introduction, or reintroduction, into a world that will recognise her facticity and grant that existence its due: allowing her as other to be other as she is. And yet the law of hospitality, however it finds expression and even when it does not, bids us open the door to the stranger.

The language of estrangement

The advent of the stranger gives voice, then, to the question of being in which human being cannot avoid being judged in its judging, as it judges. Hence the call of justice, which has no other voice, no other occasion and no other articulation than that which takes place in the singular instances of human being, of which the advent of the stranger is one.3 Thus, ‘the suppliant is, paradigmatically, the one who speaks’ (Blanchot 1993: 95). Having a voice speaks of a curious connection between the stranger and the one to whom she or he comes and addresses themselves. The stranger, ‘lacking all common language, is paradoxically the one who is present solely through’ her speech (Blanchot 1993: 95). It is the existence of the word, the fact that the suppliant speaks at all, that matters.

Speech separates. The stranger lacks all common language. But speech also joins. It constitutes the in-between-the-two that connects the stranger to the native. In the case of the stranger/suppliant, the stakes at issue in that real, problematic and ambiguous communication are always stark, unproblematic and unambiguous. No speech, no food. No food, no speech. Life or death. Precisely because these stakes are so basic, none of the three analogies for a political community that Walzer, for example, used to discuss the question of membership – neighbourhoods, clubs and
families – come anywhere near doing justice to the issues that the advent of the stranger and the question of being in the form of belonging pose, or how he or she poses them. None of them, indeed, address the point Walzer concedes at the outset of his discussion, that ‘statelessness is a condition of infinite danger’ (Walzer 1983: 34).

Language as such is, then, the password that effects the opening toward, and the possibility of transfer between, native and stranger (Derrida 1993: 9). Language effects the transitivity – mobile moment of ‘communicability’, its flow and overflow – that allows the call of justice to take place from case to case, and from place to place. It grants time to them and gains time for them. Without breaking down the distance between the two of them, the brute facticity of language forces the sovereign to become an interlocutor and enter a space of discourse with the stranger. It is a space of discourse that these two parties have not rendered transparent. This is not a space that they occupy with equal force and advantage, but it is there. Moreover, it is precisely there, in virtue of ‘speech having arranged this space between the two’ where human beings who are separated by everything nonetheless also come to witness their being-in-common (Derrida 1993: 9).

‘Such, is the great lesson of the *Iliad*,’ observes Blanchot. There it is said, ‘When a mortal ... unexpectedly arrives at a rich man’s house from a foreign land, a wonder seizes those who approach him’. Even the great Achilles, despite being forewarned by his mother, loses his composure when Priam, an enfeebled and defeated old man who has succeeded in crossing the enemy lines, appears to confront the slayer of his sons: ‘Priam’s presence in and of itself troubles the order of things’ (Blanchot 1993: 95). But the lesson of the poem does not end there. It does not terminate in the perplexity and confusion into which the native is thrown by the appearance of the stranger. Neither does it end in setting the dogs on him.

Rather, after having listened to the old man, wept with him and spoken in his turn, Achilles will not rest until Priam has eaten. ‘Now then, divine old man’, the warrior-king concludes, ‘you too must think of a meal’ (Blanchot 1993: 95). When Priam resists taking his place at table, the furious Achilles comes close to killing him. ‘There is really no third term’, Blanchot notes, ‘you shall be either benevolent host or murdered... From which one might conclude that to supplicate is to speak when speaking is maintaining, in all its severity and its primary truth, the alternative: speech or death’ (Blanchot 1993: 95).

Eating with others thus bears the prospect of an apprenticeship in civility. A recognition of shared humanness and necessary preparation for living with others, it does not, of course, exhaust what such living entails, but it does broach the very question itself. Eating together does signify, for the moment at least, that you are not to be consumed. There is no guarantee that ‘we’ will or can live together, that ‘we’ will not consume one another. Commensality is, however, a sign that the other shares in the question-able ‘we’ of the human. Without that sign – however it is signified – the question of whether or not and how to live together simply does not arise. Paris, Jean-Jacques Rousseau observed in political distress with the early
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modern condition, is for those ‘who can no longer forgo eating humans’ (cited in Strong 1996: 153).

In sitting down to eat together – in the hospitality that each must extend not only to the other if there is to be any hospitality at all, for there would have been none if Priam had not accepted Achilles’ invitation, but also to the very idea of the other’s being there – the contestants consummate a kind of ‘communion’ with their own as well as each other’s being there, in a meeting that becomes a meeting of strangers in acknowledgement of their common estrangement as human beings. That communion is also a communion with the excess of the call to justice in which they are mutually implicated because they have been at war with each other over their judgements, and to whose appeal they remain subject in their judging. The enigma of the stranger/suppliant recalls, then, a belonging together and a domain of obligation that exceeds, and therefore recasts while not altogether dispensing with, the sovereign’s justice. That excess is exhibited in the law of hospitality that must be specified anew the instant the very presence of the stranger invokes it. This hospitality consists less, Blanchot says,

in nourishing the guest than in restoring in him a taste for food by recalling him to the level of need, to a life where one can say and stand hearing said: ‘And now let us not forget to eat’.

(Blanchot 1993: 97)

The gastronomic gesture of commensality renews as it recalls that being-in-common. Note, also, that Priam does not become the same as Achilles when he sits down to eat with him, and neither does Achilles become the same as Priam. Solicitude toward the other is extended that lets the other be as he is. This is a fragile act of mutual hospitality, full of risk and danger, extended to each other and the being they share in, a welcoming that intimates a complex and delicate political praxis all its own.

More always arrives with the stranger, then, than meets the eye; more even, that is, than the mere communicating presence of the stranger herself. Something hidden comes across in the presence of the stranger. But, in whatever way it is indicated it is exhausted neither by the stranger nor by the very existence of language, which somehow contrives the space that native and stranger inhabit. However much it depends upon each for making its presence felt it is not identical with either the stranger or language. It exceeds both and never makes its appearance as such. Once again this ‘something’ or ‘no-thing’ – disclosed in the very arrival of the stranger, and the fact of language – is the mystery that may not of course command respect. We may not accede to its call. Even when denied, however, it cannot be legislated away. It is the spectre that haunts all thought of sovereign subjectivity (Derrida 1994).

This ‘commonalty’, which might now be said also to be a commonalty in virtue of being addressed by a call to justice, is hidden, in other words, in language as well; in the sense that speech enjoins us as an enigmatic ‘we’ the human. There is
a commonness here, also, which is not only hidden but which, combining identity and difference, never defaults into either.

Exceeding sovereign systems of communal and inter-communal justice, yet nevertheless only ever arising as such in the specific historico-political settings of such systems, language brings to presence a demand that does not specify how it can be satisfied or whether it can in fact be satisfied at all. The demand thus issued necessarily exceeds sovereign justice. It also exceeds the language in which it finds specific expression: that of human rights as well as sovereign subjectivity. This claim, manifest in the advent of the stranger and manifest also in language – coming across most powerfully, therefore, in the stranger who speaks – puts sovereign justice into question and continuous measure against a seemingly immeasurable measure. In short, the very hospitality of sovereignty to the call of justice that arises with the advent of the stranger is the issue that is undeniably posed by the stranger, however much it is ritually and rigorously denied or subject to assimilation and extermination by philosophical and political systems which aspire to sovereign presence.

Here is a call for justice, then, which constitutes a tribunal that never convenes as such, of which ‘we’ are nonetheless the occasion. It is one that invokes radically indeterminate terms of reference that defy codification. It is, nonetheless, ‘real’. In specifying the substantive ‘we’ that is included within the sovereign rule of law, all communal codes necessarily bring this indeterminate and inexhaustible call of justice, in which human beings are wholly and mutually implicated, to presence. They do so even as they deny it when they are most inhospitable or cynically self-serving in relation to it.

Making enemies of strangers

Recall that even Plato’s understanding of the principle upon which the polity is founded betrays the operation of a relationship of difference. The well-bred guard dog is engaged in differentiating friend from stranger. Although it employs the idea of identity in order to be able to differentiate between the two, it is not simply responding to and deploying some innate principle of identity. It has, instead, to be very carefully trained to differentiate, precisely because there is no innate principle of identity to apply. In short, it has to be taught to differentiate on the basis of identity in order to be able to elevate identity to the privileged position it will enjoy.

Recognition that the inauguration of a political entity within the Western tradition is not to be found within the entity, in any kind of principle or essence of identity, but as a function, instead, of a differentiating action that establishes a relationship of difference and identity surfaces again with Hegel. It is formally theorised and made politically axiomatic, however, in the work of Carl Schmitt. According to Schmitt, a political entity comes into being when the distinction between friend and enemy is drawn – ‘the specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy’
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(Schmitt 1976: 26) – and the entity drawing this distinction is the political entity. For him, in the modern age, that entity is the sovereign state:

The state . . . [as] an entity and in fact the decisive entity rests upon its political character . . . To the state as a political entity belongs the *jus belli*, i.e., the real possibility of deciding in a concrete situation upon the enemy and the ability to fight him with the power emanating from the entity.

(Schmitt 1976: 44)

But, Schmitt is careful to note, any agency that operates in this way is a political agency. This fundamental understanding of the essence of the political, however, does not merely establish a principle for differentiating the political from all other acts of differentiation – such as the good from the evil, the beautiful from the ugly, the profitable from the unprofitable – it necessarily also does much more than this, as Schmitt’s own texts often reveal. It establishes, in effect, a certain economy of differentiation, designed, indeed obliged, to make war on alterity, difference and hybridity because that is the way the Western tradition has come to establish and privilege identity (especially in the inauguration of the sovereign political subject) as such. Hence, within this framework of understanding, there is a prevailing need to eliminate ‘unwanted perturbations or unwanted needs’ (Schmitt 1976: 48). Moreover, there is a fundamental requirement also to review all alien life, within and without, not only as a potential threat to the life of the sovereign subject that is established in this way but also as only being truly other in the form of a mortal threat to the political subject. ‘The political enemy need not be morally evil or aesthetically ugly’, Schmitt insists. He ‘need not appear as an economic competitor, and it may even be advantageous to engage with him in business transactions’. The crux of the matter is, however, precisely this: ‘He is nevertheless the other, the stranger; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible’ (Schmitt 1976: 27). Schmitt emphasises the extremity of the antagonism and of the threat that the stranger must take to sovereign political subjectivity understood in this way (Schmitt 1976: 49). But he does so at the level of an ever-present possibility, not actuality.

It is evident, therefore, that it is not so much the scale of the material threat but the possibility of radical difference, because of the way the identity of the community is itself conceived (ideally as a sovereign, ‘organised political entity, internally peaceful, territorially enclosed and impenetrable to aliens’ (Schmitt 1976: 47)), fundamentally threatened and offended by difference, which establishes the requirement to draw the friend/enemy distinction. The ‘truly other’ here is the other only, however, in terms of its relation to the subject. It is a mortal threat to identity because of the way identity is conceived and privileged. What that privileging demands is a war against the alien-ness of all life. Since life itself is comprised of alien-ness, it institutes a war against life itself. One has continuously to ask, and these fundamentally are the only questions worth putting to strangers according to
the Schmittean rule of sovereignty: is the stranger equivalent? If not, is the stranger assimilable? If neither, the alien is the enemy. It is a test that applies equally to the alien within as it does to the alien without:

The endeavour of a normal state consists above all in assuring total peace within the state and its territory. To create tranquillity, security, and order and thereby establish the normal situation is the prerequisite for legal norms to be valid. Every norm presupposes a normal situation, and no norm can be valid in an entirely abnormal situation.

As long as the state is a political entity this requirement for internal peace compels it in critical situations to decide also upon the domestic enemy. Every state provides, therefore, some kind of formula for the declaration of an internal enemy.

(Schmitt 1976: 46)

In this way, Schmitt inadvertently reveals how the sovereign political subject is prone to violate itself as well as others in the effort to control itself.

For his definition cuts both ways. If political community is to be established only upon the basis of being able to identify the enemy, it follows that we must establish enemies, or we cannot found a political community. Otherness has to be a mortal threat to the sovereign subject, even if it is constitutively installed within the subject itself. Moreover, the foundation of the political community must take place here outside the law because Schmitt concedes that there is no law that tells you who the friend or who the enemy is, or where and when conflicts over the very life and character of the political community will arise: ‘These can neither be decided by a previously determined general norm nor by the judgement of a disinterested and therefore neutral third party’ (Schmitt 1976: 27). This is a politicised way of denying any belonging together of human being in its apartness. If the question of friend or enemy appears to be an exceptional one because it arises outside the law, it is nonetheless also a mundane one because such a subject must continuously review the difference with itself, as well as between itself and other subjects, so as to constitute and preserve itself as a single sovereign unitary subject. In the process of pursuing and seeking to realise such an understanding of what it is to be a subject, it is condemned to making an enemy of itself. For Schmitt, as for Hobbes, this is the condition from which the law – and, hence, the inauguration of the sovereign political subject – is derived: that of the lawlessness of putatively sovereign subjects repelled by their own hybridity.

**Distributive justice after the event**

Ultimately, this is a point that a liberal such as Walzer must, and does, also make. ‘The distribution of membership is not pervasively subject to the constraints of justice’, he writes (Walzer 1983: 61). In fact, given that justice is the distributive justice of the sovereign political subject, it cannot be subject to the constraints
of its own justice at all because the foundation of sovereign subjectivity is always outside law.

Contra Walzer (and Hobbes and Schmitt), the community and its membership are not a matter of distribution, as if each somehow existed before the manifold of difference that brings each human being into being as the historical being that it is. Being-in-common is not a choice. It does not even approximate what Walzer calls membership, as if one had a say in the matter. It is not a distributive good, as if human beings were born into some abstraction rather than a world. Belonging is ontological, not contractual. There is always already a dissemination, a share-out, that invests each human being with its being in a world, which world is a world of questioning about that very distribution and its future. It is fanciful to assume that we suddenly appear as sovereign subjects with a contract to negotiate and matters of distribution to consider. We are thrown up by a distribution and have, questioningly, to decide its living out. This dissemination or share-out, a belonging together with others in the Otherness manifested in the strangeness of human existence itself, is the openness of an obligatory freedom. That freedom is always and everywhere also a specific historical condition that consists in the particular challenges and demands that make up a determinate form of government and rule.

For Walzer, then, there are subjects who are different. Relationality is inter-subjective. It is something that arises after the event of there somehow being subjects. Such difference is a relational concept of difference that projects the other in relation to the subject such that the other cannot truly be other at all. Here, relationality is the event of being that must always ask itself how to be, in that, bearing difference within itself, it is always already a belonging together with others in the Otherness of a historical existence into which it finds itself thrown, and from out of which it must project its future as it takes on its obligatory freedom to be. Here there is difference that brings to presence in its hiddenness the radical strangeness of all human being, an Otherness of which each human being bears its own trace. Although Walzer’s understanding of inter-subjectivity allows him to pose the question of the interrelation between subjects – ‘like us but not of us: when we decide on membership we have to consider them as well as ourselves’ (Walzer 1983: 32) – it does not allow him to consider what Derrida calls the ‘strange’ phenomenological symmetry between the self and the other, in that they are the same in the difference that sutures them. Nor does it allow him to consider the ethical asymmetry that arises between self and other, in which each is called to give the other its due in the Otherness they share – to which I have been referring as the excess of justice – and that the advent of stranger draws to our attention.

For Walzer, then, there is only a community of inter-subjectivity. Here, instead, there is the belonging together of being-in-common. For Walzer, morality enters as a prudential ordering of inter-subjective relations. Here, ethicality is integral to the call of justice to which all are subject because it resounds tellingly throughout the very operation of a difference that individuates (Hodge 1995). For Walzer, it is a matter of the political and moral question of the distribution of goods, where
the boundary between inside and outside is extant. Here, it is a matter of the politics and ethics of difference, where the boundary between inside and outside is immanent. In short, here, precisely because there is no sovereign point of departure that ordains a difference but an arrival, a continuous renewing reply to the excessive call of justice is possible.

Even the distribution of the common good of membership, as Walzer construes it, is never merely a distribution. No distribution of membership simply serves the exercise of the sovereign power or will of a community. Through what Peter Goodrich calls the ‘copious particularity’ (Goodrich 1990: 210) of the law – which simultaneously also establishes a theatre of attachment via the entire panoply of its discursive practices, rhetorical tropes and iconic forms – the distribution of membership always and everywhere repeats the whole complex of sovereign initiation through which the sovereign political subject is violently reinaugurated at the expense of the other. For we do not ‘come together to share, divide and exchange’ (Walzer 1983: 3). Sharing, dividing and exchanging – the manifold of the specific historical spatio-temporal occurrence of difference that individuates – is how we are brought together within the communities into which we find ourselves thrown. The ‘rights to choose an admissions policy’, Walzer accepts, ‘are … basic…, for it is not merely a matter of acting in the world, exercising sovereignty and pursuing national interest. At stake here is the shape of the community that acts in the world, exercises sovereignty, and so on’ (Walzer 1983: 61–2). At stake here, rather, to echo Hannah Arendt, is the world.

**Conclusion: re-inauguration**

The stranger is inscribed as stranger by the writ of the law, both national and international. An alien is thus an alien in virtue of the operation of the law itself. Being off the scales is a function of the scales. Interestingly, the discourse of universal human rights (as well as the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness) becomes complicit in this process through its insistence that ‘everyone has a right to a nationality’ (UN 1961: Article 15). The corollary, of course, is that no one has a right not to have a nationality or not belong to a state. Only this form of political subjectivity is licensed, an insistence that poses particular difficulties to, for example, nomadic and indigenous peoples, and not only to such peoples in the lands that the West usually thinks of as strange. The case of the Romany in Europe, particularly in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, provides a perfectly good illustration as well.

The refugee is exemplary in this respect. Precisely the between-the-two, propelled out of one world on the threshold of another, the refugee discloses the very trial of estrangement because he or she is explicitly exposed to the test of being determined as truly alien or not. In the process, the related issues of the availability of the word (the ability to speak and the opportunity to be heard) and of the habitability of the world become matters of life or death. Here, the violent re-inauguration of sovereignty is repeated as the refugee–stranger is put to the question
of whether or not she is truly ‘the other, the stranger ... in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien’ (Schmitt 1976: 27). How might the different ontology, the ontological rift of the ontology of difference, which discloses an understanding of the human way of being so radically contrary to that of sovereign subjectivity and which comes so powerfully to presence with the refugee–stranger, be summarised? And what might its political implications be?

We begin with a human being that is a finite temporal being whose intentional way of being is an issue for it. It is consequently always ready in the condition of having to interrogate the position in which it finds itself. A finite mortal natality on its way from birth to death – decided and yet deciding – it is a plural and mutable openness in the motility of the ecstasies of time. Time here is less a line or trajectory than that which spaces things out so preventing everything happening at once or, indeed, becoming a sovereign presence. You might say, then, that we begin with human being as both foundling and changeling, a way of being that is always open to the future because it is continuously challenged to assume how it is to be in a present that is constituted by a ‘not yet’ which is bequeathed by a ‘once was’. The present is consequently always the future because, as the ‘not yet’ indicates, it is always pointing beyond itself and coming toward its projection of itself (Heidegger 1988).

Such, among many other things, is the ontological thought that Heidegger’s early thought recalls to contemporary thought (Farrell Krell 1992). Moreover, such I also take to be one of the most important preoccupations of the thinking by Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Nancy which has taken up Heidegger’s thought in a radically questioning way. An ontological thought that also recalls the tragic understanding of the self of the Greek poetic tradition, this thought is one that has already been fundamental to politics (Euben 1986, 1990; Goux 1994; Nussbaum 1986).

We can only ever begin, it insists, while we are already underway. Inauguration is continuously recalled, repeated and reinstituted in every action. Inauguration’s imagined moment of self-initiated and complete presence is never, of course, realised. But inauguration as repetition is most evident – and Walzer, too, notes this – when decisions are being made about belonging (Walzer 1983: 52). That is why the advent of the stranger is so informative about the very character of the way the foundation of ‘community’ as such is not only conceived but also organised as a practice. What is at issue here, however, is not the closure necessary to the ‘distinctiveness of cultures and groups’, which Walzer endorses. It is instead the operation of difference that, as it individuates, simultaneously issues the demand that the other not simply be taken into account but respected in its Otherness. It asks how we are to think and act in acknowledgment of the issuing of this demand, rather than systematically elevating the foreclosing claims of the inside over the outside. This ‘outside’, in any event, as Howard Caygill observes (Campbell and Dillon 1993), no longer has the space to be outside, but is always at the door, that very threshold which ought to be the domain of thought of an international relations that lives up to the ‘inter’ of its name.
The founding of a people, nation or state, together with whatever international regime simultaneously orders their relations and serves to sustain them as the agents that they are within the terms and conditions of that regime, necessarily introduces us to the trial of human estrangement itself, here, in this historical time and in these specific places. As it does so it necessarily and immediately also invokes the law of hospitality. What Derrida calls ‘the very secret duty of hospitality’ (1993: 8) is, therefore, to be distinguished from the ‘material aid’ that Walzer regards as a calculable obligation and therefore prudential limitation on the right of closure by which a political community is constituted (Walzer 1983). For the obligation to grant material aid is itself a limited one governed by immediate policy considerations, whereas Derrida’s ‘duty’ is unlimited because it concerns the very reception we give to, as well as the very receptivity of, our being. The matter at issue is the poverty of the political welcome that sovereign subjectivity extends to that being.

Just as the creation of a place simultaneously obliges us to say not only how the stranger is to be received but also how the strangeness that haunts us as human beings is itself to be welcomed or not. Arising as the very difference that actively constitutes and individuates identity of any sort, inauguration is, however, not something that once took place or is definitively to take place as some future point, as if once it had happened it could be over and done with. It cannot be grasped once and for all. It is never pure but always adulterated, because it always already and, necessarily, comprises unoriginal inclusions. Inaugurations – the subject’s claim to sovereignty, the constitutional act of foundation, the stranger’s trial of asylum, the immigrant’s process of naturalisation – consistently give themselves away as acting into something that is always already under way. That is why they are to be judged, ultimately, by the hospitality they extend toward mortal life’s interrogatory motility. Sovereignty claims to have initiated itself. It cannot see, therefore, why it should welcome the other. It is driven instead to police, normalise or make war on the stranger. In doing so it violates the uncanny incompleteness and undecidability, or in-betweenness, of life by striving to secure life against the very openness that constitutes it.

This is why the problematic of human estrangement, the problematic of the political itself, is so evident in the domain of international politics. For it is there that being in the middle – living an existence that is always and everywhere in-between – is so manifest. What is at issue, therefore, for an international relations that takes the ‘inter’ of betweenness seriously, is not only the way in which political space itself is demarcated and how contemporary sovereign subjectivities work out, or ought to calculate, their political arithmetic. It is how being between operates and issues a call for the inherent Otherness of human being to be made welcome politically.

Two disturbing and radically disruptive political propositions consistently force themselves onto our attention, therefore, when differentiation is first presented to us politically, even when that is done only – as with sovereign subjectivity – to privilege identity. First, what obligation is owed to the ensemble identity/difference that in separating individuals from one another simultaneously joins them together?
And, second, what if the operation of that identity/difference is not simply something that separates one self from another but is actively born(e) within the self it-self, such that any self is always already divided within itself as a self and could not in fact be a self if this were not so? If that were so, and the philosophic position to which I subscribe says that it is, such difference would inevitably make each self a stranger to itself. How would the idea of politics – the political itself – stand in the light of this radically opposed understanding of the human way of being? What would it be like, then, for politics to be a work of non-allergic relating to whatever is not the self-same?

Our initial response might begin by noting that estrangement rather than sovereign subjectivity is the condition of possibility of the political. Estrangement makes the reinauguration of political space itself a possibility. In doing so, such estrangement is the taking place of an insatiable call for justice through which human beings are challenged to take up their being by taking on the political as a means of keeping open their very possibility of being. Estrangement accomplishes this because it poses the issue of human being’s belonging together in its very apartness; wherein which, also, the human itself has always to assume responsibility for that free way of being in ways that continuously do justice to it in the specific historical locations in which it is necessarily always already located.
This moment of suspense, this *épokhè*, this founding or revolutionary moment of law is, in law, an instance of non-law. But it is also the whole history of law...

Jacques Derrida, ‘Force of Law’

Introduction

...and of justice also.

Theories of politics express a historically specific account of what political life is all about. They do so by affirming a familiar, spatial understanding of where it can occur (Walker 1993). Politics, most insist, is something proper to the life of a ‘people’ living within the secure borders of a political community, which unit nowadays is normally taken to be the modern territorial State. The concept of democracy, too, ‘has always been tied to the city, to the State, to the *polis* as *topos*, and in modern times to the nation-state’ (Derrida 1994: 48). However, the plural economies of value through which politics is technologised globally now challenge the old concept of *politeia*, the *topos* of the polis. The possibility of civic experience is denied or dissimulated by the complex velocities and tempos of the economics of violence, image and resource through which military, media and capital effect this technologisation.¹

Many think it is possible to establish and dispense a form of justice within the political framework of secured territoriality. Some even think it is possible to aspire toward some higher moral ideal beyond the regime that would adjudicate disputes and furnish orderly governance. This would end the cycle of violence fuelled by codes of vengeance that are said to characterise disorganised clans, tribes and criminal groups (Girard 1977). The limit, border post or boundary here, then, is the point at which justice ends and anarchy begins. Within those limits the
normal model of distributive justice operates. Beyond those limits it is a war of all
against all governed, it is said, by the calculations of States and Leaders, the virtù
of Princes, or the logic of structured relations. Some say that anarchy may also be
mitigated by the rules of international society or the conscience of an international
community.

For this normal model of politics and primary justice, the border specifies where
the remit of justice ends. The thought of another justice arises conversely, however,
at the limit, and by virtue of it. It is precisely through the interstitial, which is
simultaneously also intra-spatial, that the call of another justice issues. If the limit,
as the Greek word horizon indicates, is that which forms the backdrop, against which
one can see what is coming and therefore posit knowledge, it is also a threshold. As
something therefore in between, the limit is also that point of dissolution where the
azimuth shades into the blur not simply of the unknown but of the unknowable, in
consequence of which we are continually surprised: ‘to take on this horizon that
precisely is not a horizon, this finite horos of an infinite apeiron, such are the stakes
in what is at issue’ (Nancy 2008: 114).

Importantly, ‘experience of the absence of horizon is not one that has no hori-
zon at all’ (Derrida 1994: 50–1). Where the horizon disjoints, something else not
knowable has already intruded into what delimited experience thinks it securely
knows. At issue, therefore, is the operational force of the coincidental recoil of the
limit on that which the limit circumscribes in the first place. However certain in
itself that thing appears to be, and however securely its boundaries are said to be
drawn, the recoil of limits effects a profound perturbation throughout anything that
is delimited (Blanchot 1993).

All experience is, however, a taking place. It is necessarily therefore delimited.
It invites critique when it so insists upon its delimitation that it dogmatically denies
the recoil of the limit upon which it depends and the excess of being over appear-
ance and experience that haunts it. Think the limit here, therefore, as liminal rather
than terminal; the self, correspondingly, as a hyphenated or articulated self. Precisely
because it is a threshold, and precisely because it comprises as well as circumscribes
existence, the limit is a portal through which another justice continuously enters;
and a way is kept open into a future justice yet to be formulated and yet to be
dispensed.

This interstitial condition of being-in-between, Derrida teaches, is exempli-
ified by the ‘inter’ of international relations (Derrida 1994) and in the case of the
refugee, for example, there is a direct expression ‘inter-nationally’ of the claim not
simply of justice but of another justice. The refugee subverts the traditional inter-
subjectivity of international relations by calling to mind the stranger in the self to
itself. Hence the sovereign subject so foundational to traditional international and
political thought falsely poses both the question of the self, or subject, and the
origin of the call for justice. For there is no law that makes the law. Law is always
born from a ruptured or broken law, justice from the absence of justice. There is
no sovereign point of departure, only a sovereign kind of intervention within and
against as well as on the part of what has been given beforehand.
There is, then, always a co-presence of the other in the same, such that every self is a hybrid. Should there even be such a thing, the ‘origin’, if it is to issue in anything new at all, must always already come open, divided and incomplete. The advent of justice and the corresponding possibility of politics and law arise only because that *plethos* in existence is ineradicable. Continental thought teaches us that it is only because human existence issues out of a rupture of this sort, that it is an entity that is not so much incomplete as one to which completeness does not apply, that a call for justice issues through it. If there were a plan, law would be the outworking of the plan. If there were such a law of the law, justice would simply be the working out of the plan. The call for justice arises continuously because there is no law that makes the law, there is no plan. Outwith law, human being gives itself law. But justice and the law are not the same thing. Hence, while the call for justice may arise within, and against, the law, it always also exceeds the law.

Thought of another justice therefore entails a continuous displacement of normal justice. But how does normal justice ordinarily understand its taking place?

**The normal model**

At its simplest the normal model of justice – sometimes known as the distributive model – notes that any society is governed by rules (Shklar 1990). Normal models differ, however, according to how they account for the derivation of those rules, what those rules define as just and unjust and who or what is empowered by them to make, execute and interpret the law. The most basic of these rules establish the status and entitlements of those who belong to the community. Correspondingly, these rules also specify who is a stranger, outsider or alien, and they sometimes make provision for how the alien is to be dealt with should it appear at, or cross, the threshold that circumscribes the community.

This, in its crudest terms, is distributive justice. The laws, which it specifies, establish a regime of justice that expresses the cultural values, ethical beliefs and political entailments of that community. More than that, they inaugurate them. Each juridical decision taken in the name of the law of the community is in some way, great or small, a communal reinstitution of these institutions, discourses and practices. The law, then, does not merely make a decision or enact a will. Neither does it merely express the power of a political community or sovereign. It reinaugurates a sense of what it is to have a will and make a decision as well as to what ends and purposes these may be devoted (Goodrich 1990).

An official narrative of one form or another will tell how law came to be and how it is as it is, together with the ways and means by which it is to be interpreted and exercised. Such a narrative will explain both the origins of the law and the way in which it has been handed down: God and covenants, social contracts or immemorial tradition are among the most favoured of these. Divine inspiration, nature, the dictates of reason or common sense thus secure the foundation of the law. It follows that injustice, for the normal model, becomes a function of sin, unnatural behaviour, the breakdown of reason or the failure to attend to the dictates
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of common sense. One way or another, such ruptures tends to be blamed upon the bestiality and irregular passions and desires which the law was inaugurated to limit and control as the means of regulating behaviour and dispensing justice in the first place. Thus, injustice for the normal model is the abnormal which effects a breach in the very paternity of the law itself. It is what the normal model claims to keep at bay as distributive justice orders the affairs of the community. Many of Derrida’s final reflections on sovereignty record in detail the constitutive paradox of how bestiality is nonetheless also the very mark of the sovereign (Derrida 2009, 2011).

All thought of justice and politics must pass through thought. How could it be otherwise? We think justice in the way that we do because of the various ways in which it is established and distributed. We also think justice in the way that we do because of the ways that we think. The thought of another justice is correlated, therefore, with another way of thinking, one that comprehensively ‘takes-on’ the onto-theological tradition of thought that underwrites the normal model of justice. Continental thought, that of Jacques Derrida in particular, challenges onto-theological thinking in a very wide variety of ways. This questioning does not result in a new orthodoxy. It refreshes thought because of the ways in which it raises issues that remain a matter of widespread dispute among what have come to be known as ‘continental’ thinkers.

The return of the ontological

Thou art a Scholler – speake to it, Horatio.

(Marcellus, Hamlet)²

Here, I take one of the defining features of contemporary continental thought to be a return to the ontological. This return to the ontological has also been developed in terms of a critical genealogy of political problematisations consequent upon a fundamental reappraisal of the basic categories of philosophical modernity. Specifically, the modern understanding of narrative, order and justice, value, identity and continuity, together with an aspiration to a rigorously methodological access to truth and totality, secured always from the perspective of the cogito (without asking about the sum), were all disrupted by the ontological turn. It was precisely because the ontological turn did devastatingly target the sum that the putatively secure ground of the cogito was radically unsecured.

Because you cannot say anything about anything, that is, without always already assuming something about the is as such, the return of the ontological has even wider ramifications than that of calling into account the historicity of traditional political discourse. For any thought, including, therefore, that of justice, always already carries some interpretation of what it means to be, and of how one is as a being in being. To call these fundaments into question is to gain profound critical purchase upon the thought that underpins the thought and practices of distributive justice itself. Here we are operating at the level of those fundamental desires and fears which confine the imagination and breed the cruelties upon which it relies.
in order to deflect whatever appears to threaten or disturb its various drives for metaphysical security (Dillon 1996).

Politics and philosophy have been wedded since their first inception in the *polis*. Little surprise, then, that this return to the ontological was prompted by the political and philosophical crises that assailed European civilisation at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. And thus the crisis of inter-national politics to which E. H. Carr famously referred (Carr 2001) was much more than Carr credited. It was a profound crisis of philosophy and politics concerning a civilisation that had entered a crisis concerning history and time as well as the failures of empiricism, scientism and positivism to satisfactorily resolve the political and philosophical challenges posed by the Copernican turn to modernity in both politics and philosophy (Blumenberg 1985, 1987). This deconstruction of its founding assumptions and self-contradictory dynamics was well under way before August 1914 and the destruction of The Great War.

For what was at issue was a thinking way of life – complexly diverse and radically plural in its composition – that hit the buffers in terms of the elevated and grossly self-regarding universal expectations of reason and justice which its thought and politics had promised since the beginning of the modern age. Historicism’s failure to meet the challenges of empiricism, positivism and scientism served to expose the crisis of political modernity itself: bureaucratisation, rationalisation, global industrialisation, technologisation, the advent of mass society, racism, imperialism, world war and genocide (Bambach 1995).

On the one hand, a return to ‘basics’ was prompted by the ways in which the slaughter of The Great War, the holocaust of the Second World War and the advent of the terminal dangers of the nuclear age undermined the confidence of a European civilisation gone global. Compounded by the traumas of post-colonialism, its racism and imperialism also recoiled throughout the very fabric of Europe’s metropolitan powers. It contaminated them and pervasively contradicted in practice their claimed virtues and values. On the other hand, the turn to the ontological was indebted philosophically, among other influences, to Nietzsche’s overturning of the metaphysical deceits of onto-theology, and to Heidegger’s early attempt to formulate a fundamental ontology (Nietzsche 1956a, b; Heidegger 1988, 1982, 1984a, 1987 and 1991). I am not claiming that the outcome of the ontological turn has resulted in some new orthodoxy or canon. Levinas, for one, and through moves too complicated to retrace in this exercise, championed the metaphysical over the ‘ontological’. Quite the contrary. The question of ontology was split wide open, and the formulations, desires, institutions and practices of our traditional philosophy and politics were shown to hang violently suspended in that very opening.

Irrespective of this return to basics, the preoccupation of both thought and politics nonetheless also became newly preoccupied with the future. Just as the self-annihilating drives of European civilisation gone global posed the question of a habitable global future for all mankind, so, in thought too, the crossover from the nineteenth to the twentieth century became preoccupied with ‘an affirmation of the future or of an opening onto the future’. ‘Think of the problem of
messianicity in Benjamin, the question of the future in Nietzsche, the privilege of the futural ecstasy in Heidegger. . . . These thinkers are all thinkers of the future’ (Derrida 1994: 23). This futural thinking was intimately associated also with the thought of destruction. The experiencing of an abyss resonates somehow with the thinking of the abyss and, there – ‘where the mouth gapes (Derrida 1994: 24) – many attempted to rethink, and in rethinking newly affirm, the future politically as well as philosophically. Preoccupation with the limit – the limits of human self-destructiveness, on the one hand, resonating with the limits of thought, on the other – prompted a burgeoning concern also with the eschatological and apocalyptic as well as messianic configurations of futurality. Our contemporary politics of security, for example, are nothing if not a political eschatology fearing the end of all finite political regimes and obsessed with deferring the immanent collapse as much as the violent external overthrow of such regimes.

The return of the ontological was, then, a plural development, radically disturbing the fundaments of all regional thought such as that of politics and justice as well as the more well-known and intimately related thought of the subject and of ‘reason’ itself. This movement of thought was positive in that, while providing a critical reappraisal of ontology, a certain new ‘ontological’ sensibility also emerged from it. This is based upon a profound, if variously interpreted, appreciation of the ontological difference – the difference between beings, as existing entities, and being as such. It offers for all other thought the alternative and radically dualistic starting point of the mutually disclosive belonging together of being and beings.  

The return of the ontological thus became the driving force behind what William Connolly called ontopolitical interpretation. Connolly reminds us that all political acts and every interpretation of political events, no matter how deeply they are sunk in specific historical contexts, ‘or how high the pile of data’ upon which they sit, contain an ‘ontopolitical dimension’ (Connolly 1995, 1991, 1993). There is not one ‘realism’. Every statement about politics and the political is a statement about ‘the real’. What that means is that all political acts, and all political utterances, express – enact or perform – a reality: a view of how things are as such. They establish fundamental presumptions, ‘fix possibilities, distribute explanatory elements, generate parameters’ (Connolly 1995: 2). In doing so they also institute a framework of necessity and desire. That is why the ontological turn has a direct bearing upon the question of another justice as well as upon the allied questions of freedom – what I call here factical freedom – and belonging. It therefore challenges the language of politics as much as it challenges politics of language, and thus re-poses the very question of the language of the political itself (Schürmann 1990; Flynn 1992).

Aristotle taught that politics is a certain way of life. It is not merely rule, governance or management, but an *ethos*, or way of being, associated with the *polis*. Hence the term *politeia*. The *polis* and its *politeia* have, of course, gone. We can therefore push Connolly’s observation a stage further. While justice is always intimately related to an allied regime of politics – the frame within which it is staged, legislated and executed – it follows that another justice must be intimately related to
another politics. By that I mean not only that the thinking of another justice entails the thinking of another politics but also that the thinking of another politics must be a response to the call of another justice. Challenged to articulate another ‘politeia’ – to articulate a ‘politeia’ which brings another ‘we’ to presence – another politics has to consist in an ἔθος continuously attuned to the advent of another justice. It is precisely that attunement which articulates the ‘we’ of what Jean-Luc Nancy calls being-in-common or being-in-relation (Nancy 1991, 1993a, b).

Ontopolitical interpretation whips the ground from under the feet of the normal model of justice because it targets that ground as one comprising deep-rooted insistences that are deeply inimical to human flourishing and dangerously at work now, especially in an age of radical globe interdependence. Thus Leviathan’s justice tends to imprison dissidents and expel recalcitrance for the same reasons that the rational controlling ego attempts to banish unwanted impulses from itself. Insistence by the subject of justice on the self-same induces the expulsion or denial of anxiety-inducing otherness. Hermeneutical denial leads to hermeneutical tyranny (Johnson 1993). Allied with the impulse of ontopolitical interpretation, the advent of another justice calls us instead to a political life which makes way for the being-in-common of human being to be redisclosed in circumstances like that in which we currently exist, which are continuously closing it off and closing it down.

From out of the ontological turn, therefore, existence does not have to be made ethical by justice; it makes its very appearance as an ethical problematic (Hodge 1995). Given no a priori justification, it is nonetheless continuously in the position of always having to offer one as it assumes its groundless freedom. Thus the ‘Law of the law’ (Derrida 1990) for human being is the circumstance of an ungrounded or factual freedom. There, while necessarily having to decide how to take up its freedom, how to determine what is just and what is unjust, what is a fair measure of existence, and therefore how to be and what to do, such factual freedom has to find ways not simply of welcoming others but of extending that welcome to the very uncanny otherness of which it is constitutively comprised. It must do so since its own existence is always already composed of that very strangeness.

This move to another politics and another justice is not simply a matter of being kind to strangers. Neither is it a simple matter of elevating others to some special status. That would be to fail to appreciate fully the profound disturbance which the ontological return wreaks throughout the metaphysical tradition of philosophy underwriting our traditions of political thought and practice. It is a matter, instead, of cultivating an ἔθος that welcomes rather than denies the human plurality that is integral to its being, a plurality that is not comprised of the many, ultimately self-same, subjects of interest governing the traditional contractual model of politics.

The resistance to hermeneutical tyranny begins with fundamental opposition to its source in hermeneutical denial. In ways too numerous and persistent to mention, hermeneutical denial insists on maintaining that the human is not an unanswerable question to itself. Denying this simultaneously and necessarily always entails denying, also, the very character and centrality of language to being human. Skilled opponents of the radical hermeneuticism of human being – including some early
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Hermeneuticists – know that language is the site to be captured and tamed and that failure to do so will be fatal to their disciplinary project. Hermeneutical denial strives somehow to suborn, subordinate or otherwise discipline language.

Conversely, another justice rearticulates the living question of human being. Its advent is integrally aligned with the irrepressible movement of language itself. Inciting the liminal force of language against the forces of hermeneutical denial, another justice invokes the resources of language in a tone more poetic than arithmetic. It finds its expression in the vernacular of hospitality and possibility, for example, rather than the current ones of liability and accountability.

Silence also contours language. Another justice therefore finds its expression as well in the attunement of hearing, listening and attending, without which there would not be that withdrawal necessary for other intimations, interpretations and ways of being to find expression. This receiving, greeting and hosting – participating in a giving composed of no permanent presents and no secure returns – entails, in its turn, another ‘constitution’ (Derrida 1992a, 1995a). Once enacted in terms of a welcoming composure toward that which appears most difficult to receive well, such a ‘constitution’ also addresses that which seems, at least in our tradition of thought, to be most fearful: our very own corporeal strangeness.

For within our post-Cartesian tradition, cognition is king. Habermas, for example, differentiates three spheres of value: the cognitive, the normative and the expressive. While it is trite to insist that the talking head sits upon a corporeal trunk, and that the whole represents a site of embodied practice, it is necessary regularly to do so. Cognition is itself an embodied composure, a powerful ensemble in which the normative and the expressive – or aesthetic, as some would have it – are integrally involved. As a way of being which not only peddles a distinctive normative agenda, cognition also manifests its own very peculiar modes of expression. What is most peculiar about that mode of expression, however, is the denial of its very own corporeality. Less a differentiated sphere of value, cognition is the sign of a certain architecture of valuing – an integral ensemble of the cognitive, normative and expressive, to use Habermas’s terms – in which some things are prized over others in correlated economies of force as well as of value. As it is already corporeal, challenging politics on these grounds is not to aestheticise or corporealise politics at all. The politics of cognition is already thoroughly corporealised and aestheticised in its own existing ways. The challenge is much more threatening, which is why such moves often elicit a violent response. To corporealise, ‘aestheticise’ or ‘poeticise’ against cognition’s politics challenges cognition’s very architecture of power because these invoke a constitution or composure quite different from that which cognition seeks exclusively to license.

An alternative composure need not entail that proactive decisiveness so prized by champions of distributive regimes. Rather, something like what Heidegger sought to recall from Eckerhardt’s ‘letting be’ (Gelassenheit) is called for. It appears passive only because it is attuned to the call of that other justice in response to which traditional juridical and decisional responses are often most violently at a loss. This is why the recall of their debt to that which they exclude, of the dangerous and
uncertain adventure of hospitality to which another justice calls us, is not only strange but also somehow deeply threatening to the defendants of distributive adjudication.⁵

Allowing a space for other ways to be is, then, a political art which raises questions not only about the Cartesianism of modern politics but also about that substitution whose insatiable ethic is Levinas’s contribution to this debate. Recall that the return of the ontological has been a plural and ambiguous move resulting in no new orthodoxy or canon. A difference that fissures it through and through is that which Levinas’s passionately self-conscious *Auseinandersetzung* against Heidegger (and Hegel) produced between himself and the German thinker (Levinas 1988, 1991a, b; Lewellyn 1996; Mulhall 1996). For Levinas, the self is conjured up as a response to the infinite ethical call of responsibility for the Other. He defines that response in terms, ultimately, of standing in for the Other. Politically and ethically, however, standing in for the other threatens to allow the Other no place for its Otherness to stand and flourish. Allowing it that place is what I take to be the political work which devolves upon a way of being that is continuously invoked into being by the advent of the call of another Justice which issues through its own mortal hybridity.

Since the Levinasian concept of proximity is supposed to allow both being with, and yet continuously also an unbridgeable separation from, the Other, the philosophical issue revolves around whether or not it serves well enough to allow the Other its Otherness when face to face with an ethically invoked subject: ‘returning the other to its own proper care: that is to the logic of its own being as a decision for existence, that decision being a decision for proper engagement of being’ (Nancy 2008: 118). Proximity seems to insist that the Other’s space can never be occupied. Levinasian desire is the subject wanting the Otherness of the other. An ethically charged subject, keen thus to substitute, may nonetheless mount a devastating intrusion into it, if not restrained also by their desire. How then are desire and substitution reconciled in the Levinasian subject?

Philosophy’s task, for Levinas, is to avoid conflating ethics and politics. The opposition of politics and ethics opens his first major work, *Unity and Infinity* (1991b), and underscores its entire reading. This raises the difficult question of whether or not the political can be rethought against Levinas with Levinas. Nor is this simply a matter of asking whether or not politics can be ethical. It embraces the question of whether or not there can be such a thing as an ethic of the political. Herein, then, lies an important challenge to political thought. It arises as much for ontopolitical interpretation as it does for understanding the source and character of political life that flows from the return of the ontological. For Levinas the ethical comes first and ethics is first philosophy. But that leaves the political unregenerated, as Levinas’s own deferral to a Hobbesian politics, as well as his very limited political interventions, indicates (Hand 1989: 211–66). In this chapter I understand the challenge instead to be the necessity of thinking the co-presence of the philosophical, the ethical and the political. Precisely not the subsumption of the ethical by the political as Levinas charges, then; not even the counter-claim that the political
is first philosophy, but an insistence on the co-belonging of the political, the ethical and the philosophical which, among other things, raises the question of the civil composure required of a political life that is itself informed by the ethic of another justice. Perhaps there can never be such a thing. Perhaps such a form of politics would very quickly spell the doom of those who sought to practise it. Who knows? But what we currently have just doesn’t seem to be a survivable politics at all. It practices self-destruction.

Otherness is born within the self just as it is borne as an integral part of itself and in such ways that the self remains an inherent stranger to itself (Kristeva 1991). No one has tenure in being. The point about the human, betrayed by this factical absence of tenure, is precisely that it is not sovereignly self-possessed and complete, enjoying undisputed property rights over itself. Modes of justice therefore reliant upon such a subject lack the very foundations in the self that they most violently insist upon seeing inscribed there.

The subject was never, then, a firm foundation for justice, much less a hospitable vehicle for the reception of the call of another justice. It was never a secure ground and the resistance human being shows towards all the massive projects of political securitisation to which it has been subject serve as alibis for those who continue to insist that the first law of government and rule, which they call politics, is securitisation. The subject was never in possession of that self-possession which was supposed to secure the certainty of itself, of a self-possession that would enable it ultimately to adjudicate everything concerning itself.

The very indexicality required of sovereign subjectivity gave rise rather to a commensurability much more amenable to the expendability required of the political economies of mass societies than it did to the singular, invaluable and uncanny uniqueness of the self. The value of the subject became the standard unit of currency for the political arithmetic of States and the political economies of capitalism (Hacking 1990; Burchall et al. 1991). They trade in it still, and increasingly to devastating global effect.

Economies require calculability (Hirschman 1997). Thus, there is no valuation without mensuration and no mensuration without indexation. Once rendered calculable, however, units of account are necessarily submissible not only to valuation but also, of course, to devaluation. Devaluation, logically, can extend to the point of counting as nothing. Hence, there can be no mensuration without demensuration either. There is nothing abstract about this. Their logic leads to the ground zero of holocaust. However liberating and emancipating systems of value – rights – may claim to be, they count out the invaluable. Counted out, the invaluable may then lose its purchase on life. Herewith, then, the necessity of championing the invaluable itself; that which exceeds measure. But how does that necessity present itself? Another justice responds: as the surplus of the duty to answer to the claim of justice over rights. That duty, as with the advent of another justice, is integral to the lack constitutive of human being.

This lack is not a negative. Rather, it is a reserve charged with possibility. As possibility, it is that which enables life to be lived in excess without an overdose
of actuality (Dillon 1995a: 229–39). What this also means is that the human is undecidable. Undecidability means being in a position of having to decide without having already been fully determined and without being capable of bringing an end to the requirement to decide, to legislate, to welcome and to give measure. Measurement counts, and we cannot proceed without counting. But immeasurability matters.

In the realm of undecidability, decision is precisely not the mechanical application of a rule or norm. Nor is it surrender to the necessity of contingency and circumstance. Neither is it something taken blindly, without reflection and the mobilisation of what can be known. On the contrary, knowing is necessary and, indeed, integral to ‘decision’. But it does not exhaust ‘decision’, and cannot do so if there is to be said to be such a thing as a ‘decision’. It is not only deconstruction that tells us this. Herbert Simon and Geoffrey Vickers reflected on something like it (Simon 1957, 1958; Vickers 1973). But only deconstruction gives us it to think, and only deconstructively sensitive philosophy thinks it through. To think decision through is to think it as heterogeneous to the field of knowing and possible knowing within which it is always located (Derrida 1994: 37). And only deconstruction thinks it through to the intimate relation between ‘decision’ and the assumption of responsibility, which effect egress into a future that has not yet been – could not as yet have been – known: ‘The instant of decision, if there is to be a decision, must be heterogeneous to this accumulation of knowledge. Otherwise there is no responsibility. In this sense only must the person taking the decision not know everything’ (Derrida 1994: 37). One cannot know everything because one is advancing into a future into which one cannot see. The ancients invented the blind seer Tēiresias to make this point.

This is no simple absence of knowing. Neither is it an economic account of the asymmetry of knowing. Nor, finally, is it a matter of calculating the logics that apply in situations of imperfect information. Here we have no mere lack of knowledge that may be remedied, calibrated or otherwise represented mathematically and of which an account can be taken. What I am referring to is, instead, a lack integral to the structure of any and every ‘decision’, where the issue precisely is not a matter of not yet knowing but of the unknowable inalienable from knowing itself.

Further even, and this is the crux of the issue, it is a matter of that peculiar infinite responsibility which releases the human pneuma in respect of unknowability as such. A peculiar and quite distinctive form of responsibility thereby arises. It corresponds to the very unknowability that invokes it. Since the unknowable is not the not yet known, but that which cannot be known in every act or exercise of knowing, it is attended by a responsibility which can similarly never be fully exhausted or discharged. Assumption of responsibility for this unknowability – taking it on – is what makes a ‘decision’ a ‘decision’, rather than the application of judgement according to a rule, or the submission to the necessity of a law, however that law is decreed or described. Short of divesting the human of that very lack of measure, the assumption of which distinguishes the being of human being, this responsibility will never be discharged. Here then, too, the thinking of deconstruction reveals its
Another justice: profoundly ethical and political character: through its commitment to think and not elide the aporetic character of the co-presence of the ethical and the political; through its insistence on the inescapability of assuming responsibility for that immeasurable task; and through its continuous indictment of the hubristic eclipsing of undecidability by decidedness. That is why Derrida insists that deconstruction is ultimately not an analytical technique. Rather, it is the event of undecidability, simply the case, as he puts it, taking place in every decidedness. ‘Decision’, then, becomes that which is prepared to own up to its responsibility for undecidability. It knows that neither ‘decision’ nor responsibility will ever discharge each other in relation to this Otherness. Since undecidable is therefore what ‘we’ are – or suffer – an éthos may arise governed by the desire continuously to make way for the immeasurable responsibility consequent upon it. Such an éthos, it may then be said – I would want to say – is what distinguishes a political life.

Call this self plural, divided and hybrid, excessive and incomplete. Call it an articulated not an atomic self, expressed and joined by its difference from itself. Whatever is determined by this condition is no secure foundation for justice or even, ultimately, of rights. It is something more awesome, something from which these arise; the very occasion – in fact, the only occasion that we know of – of the claim of another justice. The human self is therefore continuously summoned the more so it responds to that insatiable injunction of which it is the expression. Such a divided self is the taking-place, ‘origin’ if you like, of the call of another justice of which its own being is the very event. Contrast how profoundly different such an account of ‘origin’ is, for example, from that of John Rawls’ ‘original position’ (1973). Not a contract but the advent of the claim of another justice is what distinguishes that event, precipitating also the way of its unfolding.

This piéthos, born of an absence which is in turn borne as an ever renewable question, is the very uncanniness of which human being is haunted. The human is that which is forced to ask what is it to be. But it is not the is. Moreover, the is never does appear as such. It only ever occurs in the instance of some thing: being never presences without beings, beings never are without being. As if it could be any other way. As far as we know, the human is the only being which has as its very way of being asking the question what is it to be. This ‘question of the question’ is the interface of mutually disclosive belonging together of politics and philosophy. Inevitably it is a surface of friction that engenders what Foucault called ‘the politics of truth’ in which truth and politics contaminate each other and frequently struggle to overcome one another. This very relationship is itself nonetheless undecidable. It is the reason why we pursue truth as we practise politics, and practise truth in pursuit of politics. Deciding yet decided – given and made – the human is therefore neither merely natural nor social. It is, in a manifold of ways, in between. It bears this unnatural betweenness in itself as its way of being.

Specifically, in-between birth and death and always already, therefore, on the way into a future in which it becomes that which it has also never yet been, the human is always in the condition of calling for interpretation, judgement and action. It does not simply occur in history. The event of human existence within the
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event of existence as a radical hermeneutico-phenomenological experience – the continuous play of an interrogatory presence and absence within the (non)horizon of time – makes history possible, such that historicity is a fundamental category of human existence.

The advent of another justice is thus intimately related to the essentially active and futural character of this temporality of human freedom. It comes into its own, and we are continually challenged to plot and assume new bearings in consequence of it, precisely because the human’s radically hermeneutical adventure in the finely spun filigree of absence presencing discloses its ineradicably present absence in everything that we do. To assume this responsibility is not, then, to discharge but bear it. The gap is irreducible. Only because the human has continuously to assume responsibility which it can never discharge – not because it is guilty of an original sin, but because it is an open, radically hermeneutical and futural way of being – does it have the very possibility of a future. Generosity is, however, the composure, and openness the tone, for the welcome such a condition requires if, taken on, it is to be lived on into the future at all.

This does not mean we are bound to welcome the call of justice. On the contrary, we are free to deny it. We ordinarily do so. Moreover, the offering of the ethical adventure of freedom while denying security of tenure and identity within it also appears, in the modern version of our tradition, to induce narcissisms and phobias which have found and might again find political expression in violent nationalisms, racism and fascism. But the call of another justice comes across nonetheless, and there are particular occasions when its force seems peculiarly undeniable even as it confounds our habitual modes of justice and challenges us to rethink, and find ways of readdressing, the injustice of which all modes of distributive justice are necessarily and integrally composed.

One such of these occasions, I argue, is peculiar in both character and intensity to the radical injustices of contemporary political forms of distributive justice, as established and regulated by the twinned devices of the modern State and the inter-State system. It is the appearance of the refugee. Here we have a paradigm case of ‘post-politics’, at least as I would want ‘post’ to be understood in the midst of a surfeit of government and rule. The refugee precipitates a fundamental crisis in the juridical self-satisfaction of the political traditionalist as much as she or he does in the hubristic epistemological claims of the modern political cogito. Neither the epistemic realism of cognition nor the phronesis of an established tradition is capable of rendering him or her justice. For, while the refugee is the abjection consequent upon modern political subjection, she or he signifies, in addition, the radical dissolution of that shared world which is actually effected by, indeed required of, the political cogito.

Here, all rational hope seems expended. The refugee arises precisely as the remainder of the political cogito’s arithmetic sum. Here, the bearings of their world have suffered the disaster that is the original meaning of that term. The refugee lives through a wordlessness which is itself a direct outcome of modern political existence. Here, a claim of justice issues outwith our deliberate modes of
distributive justice, and as a direct function of them. A claim of justice then issues against Religion, King, Tradition, Party, Leader, State and Demos. It demands hospitality for that which appears most peculiarly alien to their regimes of distributive justice. How the refugee is received becomes a touchstone, therefore, of the reception we give to the very strangeness of our own being. We owe that strangeness to the very lapse of time itself (Derrida 1992a; Wood 1991).

The lapse of time

The non-ethical opening of ethics.

(Derrida 1976: 140)

In endless recall of the Cartesian moment of self-fathering, the modern is always positioned, primed and impatient to start history all over again. Cartesians have thus deflected certain so-called post-modern attacks by noting the deep complicity of post (meaning after) with the defining characteristic of the modern itself. Post-politics is a term that may be fatally afflicted, therefore, with the modern inflection of remembrance, time and history: ‘a succession of crises, each to be surmounted by the application of reason’ (Oakeshott 1962: 5; and 1983). Similarly, the post-structural or the post-modern have become code words that overwrite and obscure important philosophical issues, distinctions and disputes. But we might retrieve something from this confusion of labels by recalling that post is also a call and a boundary marker. Such a post is the threshold across which the call of another justice arrives. Whatever juridical regime to which they are subject, each human being ‘is’ in virtue of always already being in receipt of the nameless calling card of another justice. Past-the-post, as we used to say where I came from of those who tried our patience, this justice insistently irrupts into our midst in virtue of the rivenness of a time that is always already out of joint.

Many traditions insist that time comes fully loaded with a pre-determined commission that will ultimately be fulfilled. The tradition from which I am taking my lead in exploring another justice (and another politics) expresses a different conception of time. It is as if, through some cosmic lapse or omission, someone or something forgot to stack time this way. The time is out of joint, says Hamlet. Time is out of joint, says Derrida.

The human transits this lapse of time. It is the very source of its enabling an-archè. Such a lapse of time is a spacing that prevents everything having happened at once. That is why, and how, the integral and irrecoverable heteronymous past is bequeathed to a future that is different. The lapse of time is thus an occasion or taking place of an opening-up as such – one reason why the term ‘event’ has become such a term of art in this philosophising. Its possibilities nevertheless, also, always assume determinate historical forms: forms that we inherit through complex processes of reception that often pretend to do no more than pass on the message when in fact they cannot help but change it through the very ways in which they receive and repeat it in the process of passing it on. Ultimately, of course, and for
the same reasons, they can never know what in fact they have passed on because an inheritance is only ever the inheritance of those receiving it. It is they who have to make something of it in the making of themselves. This is how we become responsible. Only through the lapse of time, therefore, does human being have the space to stand-out, to stand-up and to count: count in standing—for its very own invaluability.

In consequence of the lapse of time, and only through the lapse of time, does human being therefore stand in receipt of the call of that other justice which it has always to make good. Since there is no power to make good the lapse of time, however, the human encounters another justice that will never have yet been remembered or satisfied; it is always to come. Hence, there always is, and will always have been, justice to be done. There will also always be those ‘law makers’ who think that they have made up the shortfall and closed the gap, shutting us off from that which most enlivens us. They have to be resisted. Life itself demands as much.

Being human is therefore challenged to compose itself throughout the lapse of time. Post, here, can therefore signify the thought of being in the midst of a lapse of temporality or historicity. It signifies a call as well as a threshold. The time of justice is consequently what is at issue in a ‘post-politics’ defined by its limit sensibility and the acuteness of its hearing to the call of another justice.

Behind this reading of another justice (more a tracing of its imprint) is therefore this other taking place of time. It haunts continental thought in diverse forms from Kierkegaard and Heidegger through to Derrida and Levinas. Time’s taking place is thus a topos of encounter whose occasion is human being. Taking place, not tied to a place, is therefore how politics and democracy begin to be rethought in this thought. Here, too, being human is to be addressed and claimed by the call of a justice that continuously exceeds those that are offered in normal distributive models (Derrida 1993; Connolly 1995).

**Being human**

Hence, such an understanding of time entails another understanding of being human. It is one far removed from that of a disembodied consciousness applying its will through the exercise of universal reason and the application of governmental and juridical arithmetic. That is why political cognitivists are alternately so outraged or confounded by it. For them, it sins against their most deeply embedded moral assumptions; or they think it sunk in an opacity which they like to contrast with their own supposed commonsensical transparency. I can barely understand them.

Sensibility to another justice, correspondingly, entails a certain suspicion of distributive justice, because oppression is easier, and more easily disguised, when personhood is granted only to those in possession of the membership badges issued through the distributive mechanisms of the normal juridical model. In particular, sensibility to another justice is especially suspicious of distributive mechanisms derived from the contractual myths of possessive individualism. For once the individual human being is rigorously specified as a fungible unit of account it is but
a short step to systems of calculability, commensurability and expendability which characterise the arithmetic politics and political arithmetics of much of the international relations and strategic studies – military and managerial – as well as the inter- and intra-genocidal politics of modern times.

When various thinkers from the seventeenth century onward – most notably John Locke and the American Founding Fathers – conferred upon the new individual certain inalienable rights, they did not only enact an extraordinary new political mythology. They were also always very careful to qualify inalienable rights with membership of the right group, thus inaugurating a new mode of differentiation between native and stranger. As we know. More to the point, as they knew, this meant devastating consequences for the excluded groups (Wald 1995).

Instead, one must understand human being as a radically hermeneutical, mortal and corporeal life. Having its being to be, it always already finds itself thrown into the midst of a world in which it must continuously ask the question what is it to be, and is thereby obliged to take up the freedom of its interrogatory being there. Here we have the radical phenomenology of a way of being which is a dense, composite and open site of what Wayne Booth has felicitously called a play of ‘philiations’ (Booth in Johnson 1993). Bequeathed in time, these philiations necessarily change over and through time. For, as an event, time’s taking place is necessarily also a complex (e)motion.

The self that is the place of the taking place of justice is not a what. For it does not possess an unchangeable essence. It has never done so. Nothing it can do, even by way of the narrating of itself which it necessarily undertakes, will ever secure it one, either (Ricoeur in Johnson 1993). An irredeemably tragic experience, it is a how or way of being whose very existence consists in an obligatory, yet historical, hermeneutical freedom (Dillon 1996). Exposed to the radically hermeneutical condition of being interpreted as it interprets, that freedom consists in responsiveness. Such responsiveness, incited by the challenge to give the being of beings (including its own hybrid and uncanny way of being) its due, is what the human is: simply, answerability.

In order to be at all, then, this way of being has to pose and respond to the question what it is to be. In doing so it takes its bearing – composure of transits, plots, courses and fixes – from the connectedness in the midst of which it always already finds itself. More often than not, it is only when those navigational aids are disrupted, and its automatic pilots break down, that it fully recognises its radically hermeneutical condition. It is at these points, especially, that the call of another justice resounds most loudly throughout its hermeneuticism. Here the bearing of a new bearing may be assumed. Each always has to be assumed questioningly, however, within a given world, and none ever exhausts the task of having to do so. For another justice always already arises within and alongside – is vented through – the legislation, execution and adjudication of existing distributive regimes.

This making way for other ways of being to be is a political art. Other justices emerge out of the injustices of regimes of distributive justice in response to the call of another justice. That is why there is an intimate link between another
justice and another politics. Such a politics is not an habitual tradition, a contractual negotiation or an epistemically realist computation of the correlates of rigorously self-interested behaviour. It is an irruptive and inventive practice called up by specific historical circumstances. Politics becomes that way of being whose composure is an art of intimation, articulation, intervention and judgement. It is a practice that responds to the call of another justice. There is no guarantee that it will be available when required, just as there is no guarantee that it will be successful should it be exercised, or that everybody is able to practise it on demand. Too often rule, management decision and violence occlude it. Recognisable when it makes its appearance, however, we nonetheless bear witness to it.
DECONSTRUCTING THE MILITARY BODY

For there to be ghosts there must be a return to the body, but to a body that is more abstract than ever. The spectrogenic process corresponds therefore to a paradoxical incorporation. Once ideas or thoughts are detached from their substratum, one engenders some ghost by giving them a body.

Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*

**Power: intelligence incarnate**

In references too numerous to cite, Foucault teaches us that power is a relational phenomenon. A field of power relations is instituted by a generative principle of differentiation and formation that introduces a relational order: a system of combinatorial possibilities, the bodies dis-empowered by those possibilities and their enactment of the very relations of power that animate them as the bodies that they are. Such a principle of differentiation and formation is generative, productive and creative, not merely negative and punitive. Differentiation establishes a terrain of power relations whose geometrics of difference are spatial and temporal, synchronic and diachronic, comprised of vectors in time and motion as well as states of existence. Indeed, because states of existence take place, in taking place they are necessarily always already in time and motion. Such states may even be possessed of their own particular operant temporalities as well as dynamics (Rheinberger 1997). What differentiates is also the locus, however, of attempts to command the very capacity to inaugurate and regulate relations of power as such. This chapter on the contemporary military body follows Foucault’s account of power, but the principle of differentiation and formation that concerns it is ‘intelligence’ itself. By intelligence I mean the capacity to ‘tell’ signs.¹

To tell signs is to exercise the power of signification, to encode and decode, the uncanny ability to make meaning out of inarticulate matter and to make inarticulate
matter out of meaning, to make silent material, indeed to make silence itself, speak; but also to silence whatever shares in the common capacity to signify. To tell signs is to discern and discriminate and, in thus differentiating, to engender both a system of power relations and the bodies that enact it. Such a power itself depends upon relationality, the relation between signs that allows the possibility of ‘telling’ them apart. There is no ‘telling’ them apart – discrimination – without an order of relation that allows of their telling as such. Telling signs does not simply bring things to light, it mobilises a world. Thus intelligence and the sign have been intimately linked since classical times: ‘It is nóos that enables one to recognize’ (Nagy 1983: 37).

A relation always determines its elements, parties or terms. It also institutes an associated art of combinatorial possibilities, their logics and protocols, and the creative acumen required to enact them. Contemporary military strategic discourses also now embrace this relational account of the order of things. They too pursue the capacity to tell signs and, in telling signs, to command systems of operational combination instituted and engendered by sign-systems that bring things to presence, order them in their presence and remove them from presence. In other words, contemporary military strategic discourse seeks strategically to command the violent comings and goings of power relations in their mobilisation of worlds under the sign of force.

The power to differentiate as such lies in language. Language appears to belong to us. We have language, but language, the relationality that allows of the telling of signs, has us. It precedes us, and it succeeds us. Its very capacity to signify anew – iterability – is one that escapes our command. Thus what cannot be captured in language is, so to speak, the proper name of language itself: the nameless anterior somehow to naming (Derrida 1995). Precisely because we have no prior possession of it or sovereign command over it, every utterance speaks of the language that enables, but simply cannot be secured by, it.

Derrida teaches us that this radical elusiveness of language is the very condition of possibility of enunciation and iteration (Derrida 1976). If language were not free of us in this way language would not possess the quite extraordinary generative power that it has. If language were not free of us in this way there would be no exercise of power frustrated in its effort to command power. If language were not thus radically free entirely somehow of us, albeit having its life and power solely though our exercise of it, there would quite literally be nothing more to say, and nothing more said. This radical elusiveness also gives rise to the dissemination these days not only of a military strategic discourse that pursues its goal (telos) via signification, but of a deconstructive strategising that subverts strategy even as it strategises. For:

[i]n the delineation of différance everything is strategic and adventurous. Strategic because no transcendent truth present outside the field of writing can govern theologically the totality of the field. Adventurous because this strategy is not a simple strategy in the sense that strategy orients tactics according to a final goal, a telos or theme of domination, a mastery and ultimate
re-appropriation of the development of the field. Finally it is a strategy without finality, what might be called blind tactics... The concept of play keeps [here] ... the unity of chance and necessity in calculations without end.

(Derrida 1982: 7)

Military strategists have not become deconstructionists. But there has been a move among them, recognising something approximating this power of signification, to bend those powers to traditional military design. In what follows I explore this development and seek to illuminate the twist that it gives to an ancient as well as modern story concerning martial desire and mastery. I do by casting it in the form of an allegory concerning the classical cosmological conflict between Zeus and the goddess of cunning and intelligence, Mētis.

The power of signification

There is, then, no assignable origin to this power that immemorially ‘we’ are: and how ‘we’ are is a function of diverse principles of formation that operate to invoke orders of being—with in ways that are equally diverse and frequently opaque to ‘us’. In consequence, language has always been the immemorial locus of conflict. Empowering always wages war first, in other words, over its very own conditions of possibility immanent in the power of signification itself. It does so precisely because ‘a given sēma will not, of and by itself, explicitly declare or command. To make sense of a message one must have recognition (noun nōos, verb noéō) of how sēma works within its code’ (Nagy 1983: 40).

The struggle over the power of signification is thus the struggle over power as such – or, recalling Foucault’s teaching that power is not an object that can be possessed, we should say over the exercise of power relations. Whoever commands the power of signification embodies power. But whoever does so, in ancient military strategic terms does so because the leader or commander is the one who gives the sign. In Greek the strategos is the leader or commander precisely because he is in charge of the telling of signs. But the telling of signs is simultaneously also what unites the strategic and the poetic as well, since both are forms of ‘telling’ – that is to say, of pointing, reckoning, signalling, narrativising, mobilising and mythologising: ‘Thus, implicit within the language of early Greek poetry is the connection between power, and sēma, logoi and power’ (Holmberg 1997: 29).

This fundamental association carries over into the Roman world as well, and was made quite explicit there too. The Latin for obey orders is signa sequi – literally ‘follow the signs’. The word signum refers in this context to the military standard carried by the signifier or ‘standard-bearer’. Signum, therefore, refers to ‘that which is followed’. Thus, when the signum or ‘standard’ is planted in the ground by the standard bearer, the soldiers encamp. Roman military order developed this schema to a high degree of precision. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latin Phrase</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>signa subsequi</td>
<td>‘keep in order of battle’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ab signis discedere</td>
<td>‘desert’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There is, then, no isolating the power of signification as telling – in the poetic and mythological narrativising sense as well as in that of reporting – from the military strategic reliance upon the power of signification as well.

The world of violence and war has therefore always been intimately associated with the world of signification as such. To reduce this, as Michael Howard and other modern and contemporary strategists have done and continue to do to so-called modern reason, is to merely to continue the mythologising of modernity as a political category whose force has been that of instituting certain kinds of inclusions and exclusions which, in turn, rationalised and legitimised mounting forms and degrees of governmentally organised violence.

Thus, when Foucault talks in terms of power relations as strategic arrangements, he is, in a sense, literally correct. In a relational order of things dependent upon telling signs, power as strategy strategises by instituting and commanding a differentiating system of signification. The power of the sign lies, however, in the very disturbing fact that that power is un-assignable. If the sign is to signify – repeatedly – its power to signify cannot finally be secured (Derrida 1988). In order to secure itself in possession of the power of the sign, power relations are driven to secure the sign. This is a power that is always already in force, notwithstanding the fact that it can never be fully possessed by those – ‘we’ – who operate through it. In the process the power of the sign thus operates both with and against the power of the sign, thereby frustrating all of ‘us’ who seek to secure ourselves through its employment. Here, in the strategic conflict through, over and for the power of signification, the war is ultimately waged less between the bodies constituted and deployed across a strategic terrain of power relations instituted by an order of signification than with the irredeemable duplicity of the sign itself, without which there would be no terrain of power relations and the strategic conflict waged to command it. It is the very polysemous power of the sign that thus incites the desire that results in the war to secure its possession. In that war the polysemous power of the sign continuously evades capture, thus re-engendering the desire that fuels the conflict over its possession.

A second argument follows from the first. The body, too, in our tradition, has its epiphany in language, in some mode of signification or other. Since conflict over signification typically becomes gendered and sexualised, particularly, for example, because of its intimate association with the power of reproduction, though how
always remains a critical political problematic, there will also be a sexual politics to the conflict accompanying the complex play of desire in any order of signification. The homology between reproduction and signification is of course a deep and intimate one. Any order of reproduction is a matter of the deployment of the power of the sign, a politics of signification itself. ‘Meat’, or ‘meet’, corporeality is always signified. ‘Meat’ or ‘meet’ is a modality of corporealising.

Gender and sexual politics are thus always about more than gender and sex, since these politics do not precede the relations of power that proceed from the power of signification and the desire incited by it. Instituted by that power, and corporealising its desires, they in turn also seek to command the power of signification and police its associated desires. Granted that sexual reproduction has hitherto appeared to be the power that men cannot appropriate, it is not power over sexual reproduction that is at issue here but conflict over the power of reproduction as such: the power to tell signs, signification. The power of reproduction, one might say, stands for the power of reproduction. As will become evident, what was true of classical myth remains as true for the martial as well as for the many other forms of contemporary politics. Albeit gendered and sexualised differentiation are primordial loci and tropes of the conflict over the power to command the empowering of signification, the difference that these differences make is inscribed by the institution of historically specific forms of power relations, and their cognate plays of desire. These themselves are dependent upon specific orders of signification. In sum, power relations are instituted by the un-secureable power of signification.

The institution of a system of power relations typically also founds itself in a play of desire and a system of gender differentiation that also establishes a sexual politics. Sexual politics do not, however, pre-exist the configuration of power relations and play of desire that constitute them as the sexual politics that they are. To appropriate the power of the sign through coveting prior possession of the power of the sign is the means through which command of that power is sought. Commanding the sign seeks command of the sign. Desire is desire for that command, albeit the command may be sought in different ways giving expression thereby to different configurations and expressions of desire. The very distinguishing character of the power of signification itself nonetheless always frustrates such enterprises. The sign has the power to signify repeatedly precisely because the meaning of it is ultimately un-secureable. If the power of the sign were stabilised and secured it would lose its power to signify, and thereby also to excite. Thus, in the age of information, network and code, the martial body does not so much seek to inscribe the surface or discipline the mechanics of the body any longer. It seeks instead to command the power of the power of reproduction or signification itself. Noting that any order of power relations, most especially one that founds itself explicitly in the command of the sign, as modern ones increasingly do, typically also instituting itself through an allied play of desire and excitation of gender and sexual politics, this chapter seeks to explore some of the discursive conditions of emergence, and characteristic features of, the contemporary military body-in-formation. What this contemporary military body-in-formation seeks to become is ‘intelligence incarnate’.

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Deconstructing the military body

Corporeal phenomenality

Look for nothing behind phenomena: they are themselves are what is to be learned.

(Goethe 1998, n 93)

In direct senses of the term, the will to becoming intelligence incarnate provokes what Jan Patocka calls a ‘phenomenology of finitude’ (Dastur 2000: 79). It is addressed, for example, to the domain in which finitude and the struggle to master and command finitude through the power of signification are violently at issue, subject in addition to what often aspires or claims to be a science of force that may often achieve its ends without having to use force: strategy, specifically strategy in the form, here, of martial corporealising.

François Dastur reminds us, however, that phenomena are not given. Recalling Heidegger, she says they are always already doctrines, significant systems of signification (Dastur 2000: 26). Retaining this Heideggerean twist to phenomenology, we can also say that what is most ‘essential’ to corporeal existence is that it is so originally structured by language that it cannot appear to itself in ‘nature’.

Be that as it may, one has to begin by contriving some way of allowing the body in question to give itself away. Since phenomenalising is prone to hiding as well as manifesting, it needs some encouragement to do so. Martial corporealising is, however, more revealing than others in this regard. Helpfully, it is prone to putting itself on parade. The trick is then to take seriously, and not to be taken in by, the phenomenon of martial display.

Since phenomena are always already doctrines, philology and etymology are among phenomenology’s natural allies, and so I propose to take a classical sign of contemporary martial embodiment seriously. With it, I play a form of phenomenological analysis in both a major and a minor key. I major in the key of the goddess Athena, invoked as their patron by two of the most prolific and influential military strategists of the information age, John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt of the RAND Corporation. I run a minor key alongside their revealing sign of the corporeal ambitions of the military body-in-formation. I do this by punctuating this text with fragments from the preface to a United States Air Force White Paper entitled SPACECAST 2020, which is an official endorsement and expression of these ambitions. Subtitled ‘Leveraging the Infosphere’ (SPACECAST 1995), the extract fantasises the opening of a future war in which command of information is paramount. By that means I allow this military parade of ‘intelligence incarnate’ to illustrate and punctuate my text.

It had been five minutes since the tingling sensation in her arm had summoned her from the office. Now she was standing alone in the darkened battle-assessment room wondering how she would do in her first actual conflict as commander in chief (CINC).
One final prefatory remark. Strictly speaking, the contemporary military body is no longer a mere ‘formation’. It frankly recognises itself to be ‘in-formation’. The word play is deliberate and revealing. A creature of the age of information and code, it espouses the view that the very power of engendering – engendering itself – is fundamentally a function of code, subject via digitalisation and geneticisation to electronic and molecular modulation and control. It embraces the allied view that, as a function of code, any (military) body must be endlessly mutable, and that the way to command this mutability is to develop a strategic virtuosity in the employment of information in order to refashion (military) bodies-in-formation according to any and every eventuality. Having cracked the code, military corporeality now embraces martial becoming (Dillon and Reid 2009). What is most fascinating about the developments taking place at the cutting edge of military in-formation at the beginning of the twenty-first century is therefore this: the very means by which phenomenality makes its presence – the intimate correlation between appearing and what appears, enacted through the power of signification – has become the prowess to which martial embodiment, paradigmatically in the US military, now aspires.

This so-called Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) is no simple transformation in high-tech weaponry (Blank 1996; Freedman 1998; Sullivan 1998). To regard it in that way is facile. We are witnessing a profound transformation of the very military phenomenality of our civilisation which is deeply influential in respect of the conditions of possibility and of the strategic imaginary decisive in the emergence also of the aspiration of allied bodies-in-formation such as commercial corporations and political institutions and universities. Seeking to make the correlation between appearing and what appears a matter of strategic command, martial corporeality as body-information identifies the confluence of the digital revolution in information and communication technology with the molecular revolution in biology as the source of the power that will grant it this ancient wish. Heroic Commander, here, aspires to become digitally empowered Magus.

**Camping Athena**

Information has been associated with power, war and the state since at least the time of the Greek gods. One normally thinks of Ares, or the Roman version Mars, as the god of war. Where warfare is about information, however, the superior deity is Athena – the Greek goddess of wisdom who sprang fully armed from Zeus’ head and went on to become the benevolent, ethical, patriotic protectress and occasionally wrathful huntress who exemplified reverence for the state (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 1997: 132). Invocation of the goddess Athena revealingly discloses the corporeal desire at work within the new strategic discourse of the twenty-first-century RMA. Athena is martial presence without history, a military expression of the metaphysics of presence. Athena is pre-sent.

Sprung fully armed from the head of Zeus, and exemplar of military might, Athena also bears the intelligence of her mother Mētis. Hers is military body
without the usual, and apparent, gestation. But even goddesses have histories, as Xenophanes’ fragments and Hesiod’s theogony attest. Embodiment of military embodiment, whose invocation threatens to elide the awkward genealogical question posed by the historical presence of military presence, Athena’s story nonetheless reveals as well as conceals.

Without a mother, also refusing marriage and maternity in order to act instead as divine protectress of the virility of the polis, Athena provides a complex figuration of the politics of desire at work in the conflicted history of engendering desire. Virgin patroness, her pivotal role in the founding myth of Athens commits Athenians to a perennially uncertain political and cultural game in which masculine worth has continually to be asserted over feminine difference in a system profoundly contradicted by its founding premise: the total exclusion of woman from the public realm. Through comic farce and tragic ambiguity, as well as philosophical reflection, the life of the Greek polis not only affords an enduring democratic ideal for Western civilisation but also records the tortuous difficulties that civic discourse encounters as it tries to conjugate the convoluted grammar bequeathed by the deep-seated contradictions of a founding myth enacted in civic practices (Loraux 1993). One is powerfully reminded here of Levi-Strauss’ observation that ‘Men do not think in myths, myths think in men without their knowing it’ (Levi-Strauss 1969: 12). Read more closely, the engendering of Athena’s body not only recalls the gender and sexual politics of our own political systems. It also problematises the very desire to command fully present presence via intelligence that excites Arquilla and Ronfeldt’s invocation of the goddess.

‘Computer on, terrestrial view,’ she snapped. Silently, a huge, three-dimensional globe floated in front of her. ‘Target: Western Pacific. Display friendly and enemy orders of battle, unit status, and activity level,’ was the next command. The globe turned into a flat battle map showing corps, division, and battalion dispositions. Lifelike images appeared before her, marking the aircraft bases with smaller figures showing airborne formations.

Whereas Athena’s expresses a pre-Socratic conception of corporeality, the modern conception of the body has, of course, evolved and prospered under the post-Socratic illusion of self-evidence. That self-evidence has been sustained by two manoeuvres. The first was the one that separated animation from corporeality by dividing body from soul. Thus body became mere repository for something else, something purer or at least purifiable. This manoeuvre was intimately related to a second, in which the body was reduced to matter. As matter it was dependent on, and open to, positivistic study. In short, it acquired the status of a medical and then more broadly a scientific object. The Greeks contributed to this process of objectification on both counts: first, in relation to the differentiation of body and soul and, second, in relation to the medicalisation of the body as an object of systematic enquiry and examination in respect of its health, disease and death. But this Socratic
precursor of the modern body nonetheless also marks a deep and troubling rupture in the very Greek culture of which it is also an expression. Athena, especially, recalls a corporeal sensibility in classical life that precedes the Socratic break. Jean-Pierre Vernant helps us to appreciate what that is when he notes how Hesiod’s theogony indicates some of the defining features of the pre-Socratic body (1989).

A scant five minutes had passed since the global surveillance, reconnaissance, and targeting (GSRT) system alerted the CINC of unusual activity on the other side of the border. Multiple sensors, some of which had been dormant for years and some that had recently been put in place by special precision guided munitions (PGM) delivery vehicles, had picked up increased signal activity and detected an unusual amount of motion, scent, heat, noise, and motor exhaust in and around enemy bases. Now GSRT activated two additional CINC satellite (CINCSAT) low earth orbit (LEO) multisensor platforms, launched four air-breathing sensor drones, and fired two ‘lightsats’, intersystem, omnisensorial communications satellites into orbit to bolster the surveillance grid that watched the globe and space beyond, 24 hours a day.

Although he lampoons the heterogeneous and restless troop of Homeric gods and goddesses in order to propose a more rigorous and refined conception of divinity, Xenophanes does not radically dissociate divine nature from corporeal reality. He merely claims that the body of a god or goddess is not like that of a mortal. To be precise, it is dissimilar. It is dissimilar, moreover, for the same reasons that a goddess’s thought is dissimilar to a mortal’s thought. Vernant summarises Xenophanes’ account of the difference between gods and mortals this way: ‘Dissimilarity of body and dissimilarity of thought are jointly proclaimed in the unity of a formula in which gods’ bodies and thoughts are fused by virtue of their common difference to human beings’ (Vernant 1989: 21; emphasis added).

Divinities are the divinities that they are, here, via the operation of a dividing practice that differentiates them from, while intimately also allying them with, mortals. Strictly, then, as Vernant says, divinities ‘have a body that is not a body’ (Vernant 1989: 39). They possess the power of becoming-corporeal. In the capacity to become corporeal they signify a correlated dis-similarity of gods and mortals. A body invisible in its radiance, a face that cannot and must not be seen directly, the apparition of the goddess rather than revealing her being, hides that being behind multiple guises. Athena possesses the distinguishing mark of all deities, then, a power of corporeal seeming finely calibrated to the feeble human capacity to withstand the sight of it.

A body without organs – since the life of organs is finite whereas the goddess is immortal – the being of Athena is not exhausted by becoming-corporeal. It is comprised instead of immortal faculties, undying energy and inexhaustible vitality. Faculties that may engender corporeality, these are capacities which cannot be exhausted through the process of becoming or being a body. In Athena’s case these
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powers and capacities are especially interesting because they are expressed not only in terms of martial prowess but also in terms of an intimately allied command of ingenious stratagems, skilful know-how, lies and deceptions: in short, the cunning intelligence of mētis, the signifying art of ‘seeming’ as such.

If the goddess’ capacity to become corporeal can take the form of many different bodies, the reason is that no corporeal manifestation may exhaust the power of corporealising that enables each and every one of them. The corporealising power of the goddess would be impoverished ‘if it were to be identified with any one of the figures that lends it its appearance’ (Vernant 1989: 38). Moreover, mortals must not see the goddess in her full presence if they are to withstand that presence. It works the other way around as well, of course. Just as mortality, in the correlation of gods and mortals, is defined against the infinite power of the gods, so the infinite power of the gods is imagined in contradistinction to the power of mortals. If this power of corporealising – the very power of martial corporeality to which Arquilla and Ronnfeldt aspire, the desire for which they express through invoking Athena – is to retain its supreme quality, then it must not be fully visible to the humans in whose world it is exercised.

The allusion to Athena powerfully recalls, then, the complex semiotic military–industrial forces that currently lay out terrains of power comprised of surveillance and seduction, differentiating between all manner of parties but utterly dependent upon the correlating of those parties in their very dis-similarity. These are quite opaque to the mechanisms of liberal transparency and accountability championed by liberal governance whose own global power play, ironically, they now so powerfully enable (Dillon and Reid 2000, 2001, 2009; Hardt and Negri 2000). No goddesses without humans, no humans without goddesses. No military body without information, no information without military body-in-formation either.

Beside each symbol were the unit’s designator, its manning level, and the plain-text interpretation of its current activity. The friendly forces were shown in blue, and the enemy in red. All the friendlies were in the midst of a recall. The map showed two squadrons of air domination drones, a wing of troop-support drones, and an airborne command module (ACM) heading toward the formations of enemy forces. Shaded kill zones encircled each formation. Enemy forces floated before her, also displaying textual information. The image displayed enemy units on the move from their garrisons.

The same goes not only for male and female in the sexual politics of the early myths and of Hesiod’s theogony, whose cosmology is an account of the immemorial struggle to master the reproductive power of signification played out as a violent sexual politics. It also goes for the way in which modern military power similarly also seeks to command the very power of differentiation of inside and outside, of secure and insecure, less of a mere geostrategic terrain of power than the capacity
through the power of signification to create and command multiple terrains of power relations as such. What we have here is less terrain to be held than incarnation to be commanded. Invoking Athena, contemporary military strategists seek her immortality via info-science rather than divinity, though they never in fact escape the draw of divination.

So, originally structured by language that it cannot appear to itself in nature, corporeality has thus become a function of the sign because the information age is an age whose ontology is that of code. In the electronic capacity to manipulate information and code digitally – not as message or meaning, not as product or commodity, but as the generative principle of formation of in-formation as such – information-age strategists discern the very synthetic power of ‘materialising’ itself. It is the power over the telling of signs upon which corporealising depends – becoming body, incarnation – to which they lay claim when invoking Athena as the patron of strategy and war in the information age.

To invoke is, however, also to evoke. Body without organs, invocation of the goddess thus also serves to disclose some typical manoeuvres and desires at work within the martial power play of the information age, including the desire to see without being seen; to strike with impunity; to confound with tricks and stratagems borne of supreme métistic virtuosity, commanding the play of signs and meaning; to come and go as one pleases. Above all it means to appear armed and capable without the protracted vulnerability of coming to presence as armed, and to disappear before armed presence becomes a target for retaliation. There is a preference here, then, for webs of signification as snare and trap, inspiring shock and awe through confusion, disorientation and dislocation spun by strategic command of the sign. Ideally, it means having mass only to suit. Above all, it expresses a desire to prevail without, apparently, the expenditure of much prevailing cost or effort and beyond the confines of geographic proximity; to have power over the sign as immanent power, corporealising at will in shapes and forms appropriate to the task, desire or necessity at hand, materialising forcefully wherever one chooses (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2000). Invested with the immanent power of the sign, martial corporeality in the information age seeks to enable itself, to engender and re-engender power as something to be possessed through mastery of the power of the sign.

Aboard the ACM, the aerospace operations director observed the same battle map the CINC had just switched off. By touching the flat screen in front of him, he sent target formations to his dozen controllers. Each controller wore a helmet and face screen that ‘virtually’ put him or her just above the drone flight being manoeuvred. The sight, feel, and touch of the terrain profile – including trees, buildings, clouds, and rain – were all there as each controller pressed to attack the approaching foe.

It is therefore simplistic merely to say, as Arquilla and Ronfeldt do, that Athena exemplifies patriotic reverence for the state: Paul Revere in deified drag. Athena is semiotic intelligence incarnate. Invoking Athena, the martial carnality that Arquilla
and Ronfeldt promote expresses protean desires long associated with the power to engender through commanding endlessly re-figurable embodiment. In the process, however, they elide all the ethical and political issues, as well as the attendant risks, associated with aspirations to such power.

‘Camping’ Athena in the way these strategists do consequently connotes much more than the compulsory cliché of paying strategic obeisance to classical – implied timeless and universal – strategic authorities. Doing what modern strategists never do – seriously engaging the deeply correlated semiotic, semantic and political registers conjured back to presence by such invocations – serves, here, to broach an interrogation into the martial corporeality and political economy of desire sequestered in this information-directed RMA.

One might have thought, then, that strategists so attuned to the generative power of the sign in the very engendering of every sort of modern power – ‘information is the prime mover’, they say elsewhere – would have been more careful about giving themselves away through the choice of such a revealing sign as ‘owl faced’ ‘flashing-eyed’ Athena. Invoking the goddess recalls the power plays of desire and engendering that formulate as they also try to resolve the troubling problematic of the radically (in)secure power of the sign. For the politics of those power plays, so deeply installed in the mystery of signification, are first explored in the different orders of signification represented cosmologically by Zeus and his wife Mētis, as well as their child Athena, to whom our information strategists have appealed.

Cocking the question

There was no mother who gave me birth; and in all things, except for marriage, wholeheartedly I am for the male and entirely on the father’s side. Therefore, I will not award a greater honour to the death of a woman who killed her husband, the master of the house.

(Athena to the Court: Aeschylus, Eumenides)

All bodies are subject to the play of filiation as well as to the engendering power of differentiation effected by signification. The subject of filiation, too, is deeply implicated in the laying-out of a field of power relations, relations instituted by dividing practices that effect correlations and affiliations as well as enmities: parties dependent upon their very dis-similarities locked in conflict over the vanity of insignificant differences that divide them as much as over the brute fear of that ineradicable alienness in which they nonetheless share.

A substantial part of Derrida’s most direct and sustained reflection on the question of the political – Politics of Friendship (1997) – is taken up precisely with the deconstruction of the phallo-logo-centrism of the filiation upon which Western conceptions of signification, power and politics have been based since classical times. From the perspective of that reflection the question of being, as such – a fortiori the question of being a body, most notably a political or military body –
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has come to us cocked: simultaneously armed, sexed and gendered. Our information strategists invoked much more than they knew, then, when invoking Athena as their patron. Cocked, the issue of intelligence incarnate, first posed and played out in the Greek myths and Hesiod’s theogony, is no less primed for us today. Intelligence incarnate, Athena’s history is one of bloody conflict sexualised and sexualising, gendered and gendering, in the struggle to command the power of engendering signification itself.

Women have long been made to bear the odium of this self-frustrating campaign to command that which cannot be commanded if it is to retain the very power that distinguishes it. In the same cause John Locke was as bad as the Greeks. With ponderous irony, he complained:

From what has been said in the foregoing Chapters, it is easy to perceive what imperfections there is in language, and how the very nature of Words, makes it almost unavoidable, for many of them to be doubtful and uncertain in their signification.

(Locke 1997: Book 3, Chapter IX, 475–6)

_Eloquence_, like the fair Sex has too prevailing Beauties in it, to suffer itself ever to be spoken against. And ’tis vein to find fault with those Arts of deceiving, wherein Men find pleasure to be deceived.

(Locke 1997: Book 3, Chapter IX, 508)

The story therefore goes that Athena’s mother was an Oceanid named M¯etis (may’-tis), from whom a special form of intelligence (m¯etis) receives its name. After allying with M¯etis in order to use her cunning to overthrow his father, Zeus had impregnated her. Gaea and Uranus had, however, prophesised that if M¯etis bore the child it was destined to be a son who would in turn overthrow his father, Zeus. Zeus promptly swallowed M¯etis. In time, and in order to relieve him of a terrible headache, Prometheus struck Zeus on the head. Out sprang Athena in all her pre-formed martial puissance.

My reading of the myth is that this is a means by which different powers of signification are first distinguished and symbolised in terms of distinctly male or female capabilities. A reunion of the two powers is then effectuated by first subordinating the unstable power of female signification (M¯etis) to that of the male (Zeus). The resolution is then legitimated and domesticated in a female figure, Athena, dedicated to championing the institution of a hierarchy of signifying power subordinated to that of a male-dominated political regime, namely Athens.

According to the detailed account given by Detienne and Vernant (1978), classical Greek thinking is distinguished by the way in which it consistently differentiates between speculative reasoning and ‘metistic’ intelligence. For them, as also for Lisa Raphals (1992), who compares and contrasts the semantic register of m¯etis with that of _zhì_ in Chinese literature: while m¯etis is clearly distinguished as a stochastic intelligence, rather than a formal epistemology, it is quite clearly also an explicit not a tacit capability. Metistic intelligence entailed recognition of the polyvalent nature
of the universe and the transformatory polysemic nature of signs, a world in which form was constantly changing and in which no rule was given but had always to be found.

Such intelligence is intimately bound up also with a sophisticated ability not only to read and interpret signs but, in the making of them, to escape predicaments, resolve difficulties and solve problems. Metistic intelligence was, in short, synthetic as well as hermeneutical and analytic. Like phronesis, métis applied to environments that were mobile and mutable, subject to radical contingency and uncertainty. Unlike phronesis, however, it was not confined to the social world, or to the affairs of the polis. Its remit extended to the human’s generic environmental embeddedness, applying also to their radical connectivity with other creatures and other things. For example, certain kinds of animals were also thought to have métis. Thus, while Odysseus was the exemplar of metistic intelligence among humans, the octopus and the fox were thought to exemplify it among animals. A kind of cunning, métis was at a premium in hunting, fishing, war and politics as well as in navigation and medicine (Detienne and Vernant 1978: 312).

Albeit conflict over and through métis in Greek myth is not one exclusively conducted between male and female, often also characterising conflict between male and male, engendering takes place here through the very process of formulating the problematic of signifying power and effecting a solution to it. The ambiguity is nonetheless important. The duplicity generally assigned to female intelligence in the form of métis in early Greek literature is in fact never exclusively the property of the female. Classically it is also an innate property of certain gods and heroes: notably Zeus among the gods and Odysseus (known for all his tricks and stratagems as polumetis) among the mortals. Indeed, Zeus is able to defeat Mètis herself only because he is in fact already in possession of a measure of metistic intelligence. For example, he tricks Mètis into reducing her size in order to swallow her.

More generally, it is perfectly clear also that one has to have metistic intelligence in order to be able to tell and make signs at all, and that the slippery unstable character of métis is a function of the radical polysemy of the sign, its capacity interchangeably both to deceive and to tell the truth.

In other words, the very condition of possibility of métis lies in the irreducibly polysemous character of the sign, not the essential properties of a sex. The fear of female semiotic monopoly is the gendered expression consequently of a lust
incited by the sign’s own opaque polysemous power. Projected onto the female as a means also of bringing it to significatory presence, so-called female strategies for employing this power are themselves re-assimilated by males appropriating typified female speech and female acts (notably weaving), and finally also, as with Zeus, simply appropriating the female as such. In the process, however, maleness is also differentially established: as the power of abstraction and of the capacity to institute symbols that are stable, fixed and enduring, as well as the power of brute force (biê).\(^5\) Ironically, however, males are depicted as persistently failing in their attempts to domesticate the polysemous power of the sign because ‘Male figures attempt to impose a sema[n]tic control on mêtis while not fully recognizing the mêtis of sêma themselves’ (Holmberg 1997: 30).

Abstraction, symbolic thought, metaphor thus are depicted as properties of the male; the female is completely excluded from meaningful symbolic communication. But the sêma itself, the product of mêtis, provides a false security which these texts also acknowledge. The creation of the first sêma, at least in the theogony, is explicitly linked to the female in the figure of Pandora, the perfect sêma, the ultimate example of representation and mêtis. The distance between a sêma and its referent in fact re-enacts in every incident an ambiguity essential to the female and a movement essential to the action of mêtis. Thus the attempt at gender differentiation is consistently undermined by the nature of sêma (Holmberg 1997: 30–1).

The undecidability of the sêma is disclosed by mêtis. Those who signify, whoever they are and however they may be sexed and gendered, are always already infected by this undecidability, always already participate in its power. The lust to repossess and domesticate mêtis is itself played out metistically and is therefore always already subverted by the very play of undecidability of which metistic power is essentially comprised. Undecidability rules, even among the gods.

On the ground, a platoon sergeant nervously watched his face-shield visual display. From his position, he could see in three-dimensional colour the hill in front of him and the enemy infantry approaching from the opposite side. If the agency had had enough time before the conflict, it could have loaded DNA data on the opposing commander into the data fusion control bank (DFCB) so he could positively identify him, but such was the fog of war. The driving rain kept him from seeing 10 feet in front of him, but his monitor clearly showed the enemy force splitting and coming around both sides of the hill.

Lying in the triangulation of reasoning by example, the deciphering of signs and endless word play, mêtis also links the visible to the invisible. One of its principal purposes was to secure victory in adversity through turning one’s opponents strengths to one’s own advantage and through setting traps, snares and other webs of (dis)simulation. The abilities to change colour or shape, to become undetectable and to surprise also distinguish it. Above all, metistic intelligence was said to be fluid and supple: it kicked in where the rule broke off and only ruse and invention would
The enemy's doctrinal patterns indicated that his most likely attack corridor would be on the eastern side of the hill. Now the enemy was splitting his force in hopes of surprising our forces. The platoon sergeant's troop commander saw the same screen as her troops did, with the added feature of having her opponent's 'predicted' movements overlaid with his actual movements.

Military digitality and emergence

The military body, its appetites, forms and desires, its entire sensorium, is thus not what it once was. But then no body is. The discursive conditions of emergence that have empowered this new strategic discourse of martial corporeality as intelligence incarnate, threatening to supplement if not supplant the disciplinary determinations of the military body explored by Foucault (1982), are those shared with the forces transforming corporeality as such these days. There is no space here to tell their story in detail, but some of the salient features may be noted.

In some respects the genealogy goes back beyond the Second World War of the twentieth century. The war itself, and its immediate aftermath, was critical for initiating the complex networks between cyberneticists, information and communication scientists and ultimately also the molecular biologists that became such an integral part of the biophilosophy of contemporary information and code. These were to be extensively developed throughout the Cold War years. Eventually, the force of global military and ideological conflict combined with militarily resourced, nationally organised and commercially driven science, in which the molecular and the digital have become powerfully allied politically, economically, technically and conceptually, to effect life science as strategy and strategy as a life science (Dillon and Reid 2000, 2009).

It also helps to continue keeping Hesiod's theogony in mind. Recall that the conflict between Zeus and Mētis is a conflict over the power of signification waged between different accounts of the power of signifying. The first, said to be that of the male (Zeus), is more abstract, speculative and formal. The second, said to be characteristic of the female (Mētis), is more supple, sinewy and unpredictable,
characteristic in fact of the undecidable and polysemic character of the sign itself. Recall, too, that the resolution of this apparent conflict requires one command of signification to appropriate and subordinate the other (Zeus swallows Mètis). A hierarchy of power is thus instituted, represented by a domesticated female figure (Athena) devoted to the maintenance of a certain gendered solution to this engendering problematic.

We no longer inhabit the rich cosmological and mythological world of the Greeks (or the Chinese, for that matter), so there is no modern figure of Athena. But, addressing the discursive conditions of emergence presupposed by contemporary martial corporeality, this concluding section of the chapter suggests that we understand the modern military body as a function of the turbulent and complex confluence of quite different understandings of knowledge and intelligence than those positivistic and telic understandings that have traditionally informed the analysis of martial embodiment. ‘In-formation’ is an ambition that revolves around widely shared, albeit nonetheless highly problematic, interpretations of key discursive terms – information, language and code – as well as the institution of a complex semantic field, shared between the information, communication and life sciences, that allows for combinatorial possibilities that did not exist prior to the powerful forces unleashed by their recent confluence.

Information, language and code are not, of course, synonymous. Not only do they differ, but there are radically different understandings of language and code, just as there are quite different accounts of information. Early cybernetic information theory, for example, specifically excluded semantic content from its mathematicised and digitalised conception of information. Such differences also obtain within as well as between the information, communication and molecular sciences. The story of how information and code came to constitute a semantic field shared by the information and communication and molecular sciences is, however, well told, in particular by Lily Kay (1993, 2000a).

In the 1950s the spread of information theory, electronic communication technologies and computers had an enormous impact also on the life sciences. A new and profoundly important space of scientific representation emerged:

We witness here the opening of a new discursive space in which the world, or the message, became configured together with concepts of the gene as the locus of scriptural-technological control, and with notions of control over bodies in ways which by-passed their physicality. Their three dimensionality was flattened into a one-dimensional magnetic tape; their material density symbolically represented as a digital code.

(Kay 2000b: 107)

The trope of information – with all of its allied relations with mathematics, cryptanalysis, linguistics, computers, operational research, surveillance and weapons systems – served to integrate mechanisms of molecular specificity, structural considerations, mathematical relations, linguistic attributes and coding within a single explanatory framework (Kay 2000b: 115).
The discursive vocabulary of information and code has also long since passed from the information and life sciences to the military sciences. Clearly, too, the reasons why it has done so are, in part, that these sciences originally emerged in connection with broad geostrategic exigencies as well as specific military projects, most especially in the USA (Aspray 1985; Kay 1989, 2000a, b; Beatty 1991; Lenoir and Hays 2000). The same is true in many respects of the Human Genome project, initially styled the Manhattan Project for Biomedicine (Lenoir and Hays 2000). Strategic discourse does not work because it has borrowed, borrowing widely divergent terms: it works precisely because of the open semantic field brought into play via the intersection of different, if cognate, terms.

From her virtual command post, she arrayed her forces to flank the foe. She had to be careful not to be fooled by the holographic deception images put in place by the enemy – an all too frequent and disastrous occurrence in the last conflict. If she was lucky, surprise would be on her side today.

The networked body-in-formation

During the course of one of the many internecine wars that gave birth to the modern age, Oliver Cromwell invented a new model army. In the centuries that followed the military body as a disciplined body co-evolved across Europe with other sites of institutional confinement that Foucault taught were characteristic of the disciplinary societies of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Gilles Deleuze remarked, in such societies individuals

are always going from one closed site to another, each with its own laws: first of all the family, then the school (‘you’re not at home you know’), then the barracks (‘you’re not at school you know’), then the factory, hospital from time to time, maybe prison the model site of confinement.

(Deleuze 1995: 177)

Deleuze noted, however, that Foucault was a genealogist, not an essentialist. Thus Foucault’s account of disciplinary societies understood them to be the result of certain historically contingent ‘disciplinary’ power relations: ones, Deleuze argued, that had been superseded, or at least supplemented, by cybernetically determined power relations. Now, Deleuze says, in response to Foucault, we are, ‘in the midst of a general breakdown of all sites of confinement . . . Control Societies are taking over’ (Deleuze 1995: 180). (Control is the cybernetic understanding of control by means of which open information systems are strategised into modes of self-regulation and self-reproduction.) Thus, while

sovereign societies worked with the simple machines, levers, pulleys, clock; . . . disciplinary societies were equipped with thermodynamic machines presenting
the passive danger of entropy and the active danger of sabotage; control societies function with a third generation of machines, with information technology and computers, where the passive danger is noise and the active piracy and viral contamination. This technological development is more deeply rooted in a mutation of capitalism.

(Deleuze 1995: 180)

Such capitalism, Deleuze says, is

a capitalism no longer directed towards production, but towards products, that is, towards sales or markets. Thus it’s essentially dispersive, with factories giving way to businesses. Family, school, army and factory are no longer so many analogous but different sites converging in an owner, whether the state or some private power, but transmutable or transformable coded configurations of a single business.

(Deleuze 1995: 181)

As the CINC, airborne controller, and ground-troop commander activated their situation assessment system (SAS), GSRT identified them, confirmed their locations, and passed information required to get them online. As each warrior requested target data, GSRT fused sensor data, tapped databases, activated resources, and passed templated, neurally collated information to each person in exactly the format he or she needed to get a clear picture of the enemy and the unfolding situation.

It is as well to be cautious about grand claims about the panoptic and post-panoptic character of Western societies. Nevertheless, Admiral Arthur Cebrowski, one of the key architects of the transformation of US military strategy in response to the information revolution (known as network centric warfare) designed comprehensively to reconfigure the US military body in ways that enthusiastically embrace the biopolitical capital dynamics of control societies, wholeheartedly concurs with Deleuze. Noting that while there is as yet no equivalent to Carl Von Clausewitz’s On War for this cyberneticist revolution in military affairs, Cebrowski and his co-author explain in detail how it is possible nonetheless to ‘gain some insight through the general observation that nations make war the same way they make wealth’ (Cebrowski and Gartska 1998: 2).

‘Network-centric warfare and all of its associated revolutions in military affairs’, Cebrowski writes, ‘grow out of and draw their power from the fundamental changes in American society. These changes have been dominated by the co-evolution of economics, information technology, and business processes and organisations’, linked by three themes. First is the shift in focus from the weapons platform to the concept of informational network. Second is the shift to radical relationality ‘from viewing actors as independent to viewing them as part of a
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continuously adapting ecosystem’. Third is the tendency towards bio-philosophical modes of discourse: ‘the importance of making strategic choices to adapt or even survive in such changing ecosystems’ (Cebrowski and Gartska 1998: 1–2). Speed, self-synchronisation and flexibility are at a premium and network-centric operations are claimed to deliver to the US military ‘the same powerful dynamics as they produced in American business’ (Cebrowski and Gartska 1998: 5). Disclosing the conceptual provenance and inspiration of this refashioning of the military body in the bio-philosophical discourse of the complexity sciences, Cebrowski concludes:

Military operations are enormously complex, and complexity theory tells us such enterprises organize best from the bottom-up. . . .This is not just a matter of introducing new technology; this is a matter of the co-evolution of that technology with operational concepts, doctrine, and organization. . . .This is not theory – it is happening now. For example, new classes of threats have acquired increased defensive combat power for joint forces. The combat power that has emerged – the co-operative engagement capability (CEC) – was enabled by a shift to network-centric operations.

(Cebrowski and Gartska 1998: 7–9)

This was the same GSRT that was also aiding San Francisco in responding to yesterday’s massive earthquake. From the president to the city mayor to the fireman trying to find the best route through the cluttered and congested streets, each got the requested real-time information in seconds, just as our troops in the Western Pacific did.

Successful organisation of war mimics successful organisation for profit to mimic the operation of complex adaptive systems determined by negotiating diverse and challenging fitness landscapes through mutating, morphing and other means of changing their constituent elements, forms and connectivities: bodies-in-formation (Cebrowski and Gartska 1998).

Omniscient, omniversal, omnisensorial, omnidirectional, the new strategic discourse embraces a corporeality designed to realise martial intelligence incarnate: morphing and swarming according to targets of opportunity and combat exigency. The technical radicality of this military vision contests, on the terrain they had claimed as their own, the political radicalism of those that embrace cyborgisation for alternative political, cultural and corporeal becomings. Military strategists, too, now know their Foucault, Deleuze and Harraway. They already had operational research and cybernetics; they are developing network warfare and complexity thinking.

Already extensively cyborg and virtual, the primacy of synthetic environments long accepted, martial desire lusts for a mutable corporeality-in-formation whose ‘top sight’ enjoys the overwhelming power of digital synoptic intelligence: matrix
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Information dominance of inner space is, however, critically dependent also upon outer space. The infosphere merges here with the biosphere. Thus do the bio- and geo-political imperatives of contemporary martial corporeality collude, as well as collide. In emulation of its divine patron, the military body-in-formation marries extraterrestrial power to the task of terrestrial dominance and *Star Wars* meets the *Matrix* in defence of the planetary information infrastructure without which intelligence incarnate becomes mortal fallibility.

**Conclusion**

Voice of Athena, dearest to me of the gods, how clearly, though you are unseen, do I hear your call and snatch its meaning in my mind.

*(Odysseus: Sophocles, Ajax)*

Incarnation is now a life science. Life science, for which information in the form of code is currently the prime mover, has gone digital. With the success of that move, two things happen: first, the digitalisation of intelligence that promises real-time omniscience through the terminals; and, second, a fundamental change in the corporeal imagination of martial presence.

It has long been recognised that the question of the bodies we are is indissociable from the complex cultural specification of the bodies we want and do not want. Or, rather, of the bodies we are enjoined to want, and not want, to possess and be possessed by, to dominate, dominate and punish. Throughout the modern period military bodies have been disciplinary bodies. Now they aspire to be digital ones. Domination remains the desire that animates them – shock and awe in the battlespace, hegemony in geo-space – but, since the desire is increasingly mediated through radically different digital practices, the corporeality it engenders is undergoing transformation as well.

A novel politico-cultural economy of martial desire is enabled here by technologies and bio-philosophical discourses in which materiality has become code. Code ‘cracked’, materiality becomes a function of the digital architectural strategies – desire in pursuit of algorithmic realisation – that effect its recombination. A matter thus of the astonishing powers of modern *technē* – corporatised choice
courtesy of boardroom praxis, capitalisation, military command and the epistemological acquisitiveness of research institutes – life science becomes strategy and strategy becomes a life science. Students of strategy, military strategisers are themselves thus now also compelled to become life scientists (Dillon and Reid 2001, 209). As military embodiment pursues the intelligence incarnate offered by the information and molecular revolutions, power over life becomes allied with power over death in a complex convergence of sovereign geopolitics with global biopolitics gone digital. Populated by martial bodies that have long been cyborgs, here we are witnessing the emergence of a libidinality in thrall to Athena the wise as digital dominatrix.

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*The CINC paused for several moments, wondering how battles were ever fought without the information systems she now used with practised ease, and she was glad they were fighting an enemy still mired in the visual/electromagnetic intelligence (ELINT)-oriented manoeuvre force of the last war.*
Force Transformation
Transformation should be thought of as a process, not an end state. Hence there is no foreseeable point in the future when the Secretary of Defense will be able to declare that the transformation of the Department has been completed. Instead, the transformation process will continue indefinitely. Those responsible for defense transformation must anticipate the future and wherever possible help create it.

(Elements of Defense Transformation 2004, October)

Force of Transformation
This vulnerable force, this force without power, opens up unconditionally to what or who comes and comes to affect it.

(Derrida 2005, xiv)

The messianic
Recalling Derrida’s celebrated essay ‘Force of Law’, in which he engages Benjamin’s ‘Critique of Violence’, this chapter seeks to champion the non-negotiability of Derrida’s legacy in terms of how it finds expression in a messianic ‘Force of Transformation’ (Benjamin 2004; Derrida 1992c). What is non-negotiable in Derrida is the aporia of justice. He expresses and explores how the aporia of justice transformatively impacts on us by using a powerful figure of political speech: that of the messianic. Derrida is not alone, however, in being powerfully committed to the force of transformation, or of sensing how that force of transformation is deeply implicated also in the desire for a democratic politics. Democracy-to-come in Derrida’s terms, democratic state practice in terms of the Pentagon, whose
preoccupation with force transformation is contrasted here with Derrida’s force of transformation.

The epigraphs that head this chapter therefore register from the outset equal if different commitments to transformation. One way or another, messianic talk is the talk of the age. Hence a passionate desire for force transformation is at work throughout the United States’ techno-scientific military and strategic community. It contrasts, however, with Derrida’s equally passionate commitment to the force of transformation. For both Derrida and the Pentagon, transformation is ‘to come’, on the way towards which we are continuously heading but at which we never arrive. That seems, however, to be the limit of their agreement. I want to explore the equal but opposite expression of transformation that is at work here.

So, note the difference. The one is concerned with the transformation of force. The other is concerned with the force of transformation. As always, Derrida does not try to effect some escape from our contemporary political and strategic discourse. He plays out the aporias of which they are an expression. He is able to do this because the terms themselves do it for him. He is not simply against force, for example. He turns the very relations of force that are said to obtain in our conventional accounts of politics inside out. Neither is he simply for transformation. He observes that transformation is also a force, one that exceeds the force that the Pentagon seeks to transform. He thereby probes what transformation entails and interrogates not only what kind of force transformation may exercise upon us but also how it might exercise that force. Derrida is no stranger to force or transformation, just as he is no stranger to decision or to reason. He is more familiar with these, much more familiar, than many of those who speak in traditional political and strategic terms. He knows those terms, he uses those terms. But he knows them and he uses them differently and to powerful effect against the many ways in which they make us comfortable with a democratic politics that is more martial than democratic, with the extreme violence exercised in its name and with the everyday injustice that its justice metes out.

The US Office of Force Transformation is committed to an indefinite realisation of the promise of techno-scientific revolution through the promotion of global capitalism in the cause, it is said, of maintaining the United States’ global liberal hegemony. Yet, it is perfectly evident that this commitment is an end or value in itself, one that is quite at odds with American republican ideals, the championing of democracy and the pursuit of representative and accountable government on both sides of the North Atlantic. The Pentagon’s messianism is grounded in an aspiration to a form of power whose force would be so great that its ‘shock and awe’ would prevail with the minimum application of force, or even without force ever having to be deployed. Ever since Machiavelli, modern politics has dreamed of a martial political force so powerful that it would not even have to be used to achieve its ends. That dream took possession of the Pentagon after the dissolution of the Soviet empire in Europe. But the dream was not born from out of the end of the Cold War. It is the logical corollary of a certain modern account of politics.
and power. It nonetheless also invokes a contrast with the messianic violence about which Benjamin and Derrida have also spoken.

I am not saying these understandings of violence are the same thing. For one, they arise within entirely different ontological frameworks and entirely different understandings of what it is to dwell in the world and even, to use Heidegger’s terms, to have a world. But they do seem to be obscurely related, at least in terms of complex surfaces of frictions and desires rather than an incomprehensible gulf of understanding – but, again, these are not the same desires. These are desires that arise within and against one another, that for the self-same, for example, versus that for the Other. Desires that have arisen in the same historical times, and however differently the promises, demands and dangers of those times are interpreted. Tempting as it is to contrast Derrida’s messianic force of transformation in an exclusively binary way with the messianism of the Pentagon’s transformation of force – the distinction between the messianic and messianism being one of those surfaces of friction – my concern is with the issue of violence as such, since the question of violence is as central to Derrida’s messianic as it is to the Pentagon’s messianism.

Derrida’s messianic talk contests the messianism that lies behind the desire for an efficient and effective strategic calculus of necessary killing that finds its expression in the Pentagon’s dream of power. It challenges the very reason, as well as the force and the promise, of that problematisation and practice of politics. The messianic in Derrida derives instead from what he calls the im-possibility of justice. It is impossible to become just. Justice is a responsibility that continuously devolves upon us because it is always ‘to come’. If justice had already arrived, we would have to attend to no more appeals for justice. That there will never be justice is the condition of possibility for us continuously to attend to the incessant call of justice. It is, therefore, always possible to be open to the appeal for justice.

Derrida describes this politics and justice to come as an aporia. It is a difficulty from which there is no escape. It is a problem for which there is no resolution. His work continuously interrogates what is then required of us – of our reasoning and of our use of force and violence – if our living is to be lived-out in recognition of this claim on us to be just. For that reason his philosophy is politically charged even when it is not politically expressed. It always has a bearing on politics, on what we understand politics to be, and how we respond to the decisions taken politically in our names. As a matter of fact, Derrida very often expresses himself in direct political terms. Indeed, the terms with which he has been most concerned are the same as those that comprise our traditional political lexicon: sovereignty, power, spirit, community, language, friendship, hospitality, force, witness, testimony, futures, archives, secrets.

There is, however, one crucial difference. Derrida’s political lexicon is governed by a different ‘grammar’: that of différence or deconstruction. His political lexicon, therefore, operates differently. It does not simply mean different things, or point to different things. It entails different things. Living according to it would change our individual and collective experience. Derrida devoted his work to interrogating how that entailment arises aporetically, and what it demands of us in the process.
An aporetic condition is not an abstract condition. Aporias are material conditions of existence that take place historically and politically. Aporias are always technical as well as ontological (Stiegler 1998; Beardsworth 1996; Bradley 2011). By that I mean that they always express a mechanics as well as metaphysics of power. They do not merely express, they fashion a form of life. This means that they therefore also differ, and that they take place in many different ways. Among other means of taking place, aporias materialise through powerful figures of political speech. They therefore do so idiomatically, reflecting their time and their place of taking place. Among the most powerful figures of political speech that Derrida deploys, in response to the aporia of democracy and justice to-come in our time, is that of the messianic. Indeed, I think it possible to reinterpret almost all of Derrida’s work as changing our political lexicon into terms – described throughout *Rogues*, for example, as forms of ‘weak force’ (Derrida 2005) – which champion the non-negotiability of the aporia of justice in our times. For Derrida, too, the question of the nature of the times and what the times demand of us is therefore also central to the ways in which he poses the questions of the political and the ethical.

If the political concerns what is said to be common to human beings, the generative principle of formation that binds and unites them as such, this unity always finds its operationalisation also in the practices and institutions of government and rule. Political modernity progressively sought to ground itself in expressions of factical rather than God-given freedom. In its efforts to problematise the politics, government and rule of factical rather than God-given freedom, political modernity has nonetheless offered many different interpretations of – and many different material referents for – nature, will, interest and biology. Factual, rather than God-given, freedom therefore grounds political modernity ontologically. If the political therefore always concerns the ontological, government and rule always concern the mechanics of forms of life. That is why politics is so often at odds with government and rule – for it is never easy to connect up metaphysics and mechanics. A rift joins them. That rift is a surface of friction. How they are to be related is one of the aporetic difficulties characterising a form of political life.

Political modernity therefore concerns the metaphysics and mechanics of factical freedom. It gave rise to and it remains a widely contested field of governmental formation and intervention, as well as political debate, concerning the unity of human being. But factical freedom is no mere natural thing that can simply be read off from a nature assumed to be transparent to reason. Neither is it the freedom of a pre-formed naturally born subject comprised of interest and will, which properties are assumed to exist prior to their historical formation. Factual freedom and its entailments are therefore what constitute the problematisation of and not merely the solution to politics in periodisations of the modern. What factical freedom consists in and how it renders human beings governable are what the very problematic of modern politics has been about. Here it helps to draw, in addition, upon Michel Foucault for further exploration of the ethos as well as the *technē* of factical freedom.
Transformation

For Foucault, having freedom as a formal property of the will (autonomy) and being factically free are not at all the same things. Consider the following exchange from an interview he gave in 1983 (cited in McNeil 2006: 67–8)

Q: You say that freedom must be practiced ethically?
MF: Yes, for what is ethics if not the practice of freedom, the deliberate practice of freedom.
Q: That means that you consider freedom as a reality already ethical in itself?
MF: Freedom is the ontological condition of ethics. But ethics is the deliberate form assumed by freedom. (emphasis added)

Politics, like ethics, is the deliberate form assumed by factical freedom concerning its government and rule, and that is also why it is always already an ethical activity, at least in the way in which Foucault understood an ethical activity: ‘ethics is a practice, ethos is a manner of being’ (Foucault 1983: 377). Factical freedom does not consist, therefore, in specifiable properties. It is property-less, thoroughly improper, a site where the calculable and the incalculable clash. It is redundant to say historically; when something takes place, that is history. That is also why Derrida’s messianic introduces a term and a challenge that has a direct bearing on politics as well.

Some discount this talk of the messianic as a turn to religion and a theologicalization of the political and of the ethical in Derrida. It is said that this vitiates his earlier work, or compounds the mystification for which it has long been criticized (Bradley 2006). I dismiss the charge that the messianic is further evidence of Derridaean mystification, but I do not contest the charge that there has been a turn to religion and a certain re-engagement with theology. Manifestly, Derrida became preoccupied not only with the question of religion in his later work but also with the question of God (Derrida and Anidjar 2001; de Vries 2002; Sherwood and Hart 2004; Caputo 1997). I do not think, however, that this disqualifies that work politically. On the contrary, I would propose that the turn to religion could be construed as a politically important manoeuvre, one of a number through which Derrida figures the aporia of justice in politically compelling ways.

For the moment one introduces God into the political mix one is speaking directly about the clash of the calculable and the incalculable. It is hardly necessary to observe that the question of God could not be more politically charged today, but then it never lacked political charge. And there was never a time when it was not a site of antagonism and, therefore, also a powerful political incitement. Removing God from politics does not eliminate the incitement of the incalculable and the invaluable. It channels ‘the God question’ into different courses, where it finds its expression in different forces, removed from the critique of theological interrogation and left to a political theory evacuated of its capacity to assign a place to incalculability. A theological interrogation of the messianism obtaining in the current Office of Force Transformation in the US Department of Defense, for example, would yield critical military–strategic as well as political
purchase on the prevailing significance of that incalculable investment in global force transformation, as would its demise.

Despite the price paid for the active inclusion of God and theology in politics – a price regularly paid in violence – something vital may also be violently excluded when policing politics from God and the theological (Hunter 2001). The reason is simple: the incalculable and the invaluable cannot be eliminated from the practices of political calculation and intelligibility because the calculable and the valuable are always contoured by the incalculable and the invaluable, however calculated or valued. The incalculable has always been integral to political calculation and political intelligibility – not least in a political modernity that has sometimes claimed to be governed exclusively by the purely immanent calculus of reason. In military strategic terms consider only Clausewitz’s philosophy of war, and in particular the undecidable incalculability of the moment of combat and the clash of forces which he describes there (von Clausewitz 1984; Gat 1989). Immanence, in short, never shakes off transcendence, often violently aligning itself against its ‘enslavement’ to that which nonetheless conditions it.

Talk of the messianic has, therefore, always been political talk. There is nothing about it that disqualifies it from being political. Indeed, messianic transformation is precisely what distinguishes modern political talk as ‘modern’: ‘new time’, renewing time, a time of continuous renewal, modernisation. One wonders if we have ever been secular (Asad 2003). Messianic talk may be dangerous talk. After all, it speaks of transformation-to-come, over whose legitimate expression modern economics as well as modern government – it is hard to distinguish the two – seek a monopoly. A certain kind of violence is a necessary entailment of the messianic as well. Derrida long recognised this (Derrida 1978, 1995a).

But all political talk is dangerous talk, and every politics entails its own violence. The violence that the messianic may threaten does not exclude it from political calculation, or from being political. Rather, it poses a greater incentive to interrogate – politically, philosophically and theologically as well as culturally and socially – the enormous political valences and political entailments of such talk, and plumb the depths of the political as well as the religious charge that it carries.

Derrida does precisely this in a novel political as well as philosophical register, that of the claim of an insatiable justice exterior to both law and politics. It is hardly the exteriority of justice to law and politics, however, which is novel in Derrida. It is the way in which he figures how that exteriority will never materialise as such, but is instead always already at work on the inside, so to speak, continuously contesting and unsettling the good conscience to which all law, rule and calculation is given, and the very promissory economies upon which they themselves rely. It is no surprise that Derrida should talk of the messianic. These days are also saturated with a very wide variety of appeals to transformation and to a politics or democracy to come. Political modernity has, for example, been grounded in the messianic promise of reason, science and the people.

It is the tone of Derrida’s messianic voice that is therefore different. It is a way of speaking about resources of ethical and political renewal opposed to the
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all-enveloping governmentality, ravaging technicity and violent moralising of contemporary modernisation and globalisation. It contests the promise of global liberal capitalism and its version of the ‘to-come’.

One has therefore to ask: what is being presumed about both religion and politics, in order for this turn to religion in Derrida to be questioned or discounted politically? For to discount the messianic move in Derrida courts making certain questionable assumptions about both religion and politics, as well as ‘the permanence of the theologico-political’ (Lefort 1989). Since reason too entails a certain faith, nothing foreign is being introduced in this turn to the theological. While it is therefore not foreign, it is, however, particular. We may therefore want to ask what other ‘faiths’ are excluded by the reintroduction of the reasoning affiliated specifically with revealed religion. What is being wasted by the excoriation of Derrida’s turn to religion?

Western politics was thoroughly theologised from its inception and not simply in the way that Carl Schmitt contended (1988b). It claims to have outgrown this birth in the theologico-political, but it may be more pertinent to ask what kind of monster has been subsequently nurtured. In the process it may also be more pertinent to assume that the theologico-political is not a passing but a permanent issue, precisely because it concerns the inescapable interface of the calculable and the incalculable that is definitional here of politics. Finally, it may also be more pertinent to ask if our capacity to respond to intersections of the calculable and the incalculable, by continuously interrogating, for example, the intersection of theology and political theory, has itself been vitiated by forms of secularisation that rely upon their own incalculable, but often unacknowledged, claims. I want to hazard the thought in this chapter that this line of questioning may offer a more fruitful way of responding to Derrida’s religious turn.

I therefore broach a different thought to those of his critics about Derrida’s so-called religious turn: the thought instead that it may be interpreted less as a turn to religion or, rather, a theologisation of the political, than as a materialisation of the aporia of justice. In the process Derrida revises the question of divinity as much as he does the question of politics. Talk of the messianic is one way in which the aporia of justice finds not only renewed political and ethical but also ‘religious’ voice in Derrida. Equally also, but differently, modern messianism draws its voice, on all three counts, from the very military centre of modern technicity. The messianism and religiosity of modern military power cannot be engaged effectively by seeking to exclude the questions of incalculability and faith from it via the substitution of reason alone. As if reason itself were not always already itself faithful, as if modern military power had never been faithful to the centre of modern reasoning from its very beginning, and as if the military strategic thinking of martial democracies does not also acknowledge incalculability throughout its own current technics.

My proposal, that the messianic turn may be of profound and positive political significance, is prompted in addition by the following allied thoughts. For convenience and brevity I will just list them: that religion and politics are indissolubly related; that our understanding of both religion and politics is obscured more than it
is clarified by what these terms have come to mean today, and by the governmental concordat currently obtaining between derelict institutional religions and derelict democratic politics; that when we talk of any politics we are always addressing a specific religio-political nexus; \textit{a fortiori}, that when we are talking about a secular politics we are, in fact, always addressing a certain religio-political nexus founded upon expressions of faith that do their work by denying their reliance upon belief; that modernising political discourse retied and reknotted religion and politics; that its very own conviction in the power of reason demands the reinterrogation of the religio-political nexus of modern politics; that Derrida was more remorselessly true to this conviction in the power of reason than many who profess it, while continuously reminding himself and us of the limits within which it operates, the necessity of continuously operating at those limits and the violent price to be paid for refusing them. I do not have the space to develop these bluntly stated arguments more fully here, but I do want to table them by way of preparing to engage the messianic tone in one of Derrida's recent texts, \textit{Rogues}.

\textit{Rogues} was prompted by the charge of 'rogue state' that the Anglo-American alliance issues against states that defy liberal geopolitics. Playing with 'voyous', a French word for rogue, Derrida returns to many of his well-established political, philosophical and ethical themes. He pushes these themes further in respect of both a trenchant attack on the rogue character of all states (not least the United States and the United Kingdom) and a progressively more aggressive interrogation not only of political 'sovereignty' but also of the sovereign 'unconditionality' of reason itself. In the process he pursues and plays these themes against a continuous reaffirmation of that 'act of messianic faith – irreligious and without messianism' (Derrida 1995: xiv) – which came to characterise his later work, and for which he has received much criticism. Here the messianic can be construed not only as inaugurating a host of problems in relation to Derrida's work, which it does, but also as offering a literature of hope and protest in direct opposition to the cultic messianism of modern imperial power.

\textbf{Political theology}

For Plato the issue of theology was intrinsically related to political theory.

(Taubes 2010: 222–23)

The ‘theologico-political’ has a history. That history is yet to be written. Carl Schmitt, for example, did not write it. He polemicised it as a form of advocacy on behalf of his own theologico-political assumptions and subscriptions (Meier 1998). Cryptically sketching some of its most important features, however, Jacob Taubes tells a different story. Recalling the deep-seated relation that has long obtained between thinking politically and thinking theologically, he teaches that neither category is fixed and that their historically changing relation to each other is not comprehended effectively by etiological stories about the rise of secularism.
In the process, he provokes us into thinking critically, and politically, about the theologico-political once more. Taubes notes that:

It is important to keep this original situation of theology in mind in order to see that its relation to political theory is not a derivative affair, but rather touches the very centers of both.

(Taubes 2010: 223)

He went on: ‘Just as there is no theology without political implications, so there is no political theory without theological preconditions either’. In a short but astonishingly acute and compact survey Taubes reviews the history of the relation between theology and political theory. He notes how the very problematic of theology is first posed by Plato in a dialogue between Adeimantus and Socrates in which Adeimantus questions: ‘But which are these forms of theology: typoi peri theologieas, that you mean?’ The question is asked and answered at that point when the narrative myth of the divine in Greek culture was being made accountable to reason (Vernant 1990). It is posed, along with many other fundamental questions, in relation to Plato’s political concern for the community: ‘A society that accepts sophist epistemological relativism is doomed, according to Plato, to anarchy and tyranny, because political authority cannot be founded on the basis of relativism’ (Taubes 1910: 233).

Even a theology that claims to be entirely apolitical, conceiving of the divine as entirely foreign, the absolute Other of man and world, Taubes explains, ‘can have political implications’. He then records the familiar story of how God is replaced by Man throughout the nineteenth century, and Providence is replaced by Progress. This process culminates in Nietzsche’s announcement of the death of God, although Taubes observes how, in the Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel had already quietly recorded God’s demise. Sovereignty passed to ‘the people’. With the passing of God also went the passing of a social and cosmic experience of hierarchy that was not only a political concept expressing the ‘ideology’ of a feudalistic society, not only a theological analogy translated into the political order. In the Middle Ages it was so basic to man, cosmos and God that even the epistemological notion of an ‘idea’ was determined by the image of hierarchy.

(Taubes 2010: 226)

Thus ‘An “idea”, in its Platonic sense, did not “reflect” things visible in the universe; rather, the things of the “lower” changing order partook of and reflected the changeless realm of ideas’ (Taubes 2010: 226) The death of God was also ‘a general breakdown of the hierarchical order in thought, belief and action’ (Taubes 2010: 226). If hierarchy was the organising idea of the medieval world, evolution has, arguably, become that of late modern times.
On the way to evolution, however, the hierarchy of unequal forces was first replaced by the balance and counter-balance of equal ones. Taubes observes that the idea of balance, as one of the key features of the grammar of political modernity, has not received the attention it deserves. Students of Hobbes, pluralism, international relations and strategic studies will, however, disagree. They do not need reminding of its significance. Taubes, nonetheless, does recall that the idea of balance always retained a transcendent other worldly point of reference. In deist vocabulary it was the hand of Providence. Recall also Adam Smith’s ‘hidden hand’ as well. ‘This development from heteronomous theism to the autonomous atheism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’, says Taubes (2010: 227), ‘contains the inner history of theological-political thinking in the modern period’. But matters did not stop there.

When the last traces of transcendence had been eliminated from the general consciousness and the principle of immanence took its place ‘then the principle of balance [lost] its transcendent point of reference: balance has [then] to result exclusively from the immanent relationship of the powers involved’. The autonomous reason on which the counter-balancing law of immanent forces relied for its authority – in pluralist liberal political thought as much as modern strategic studies – quickly lost that authority when once it, too, was reconstrued as rationalisation (ideology critique), as concealing irrational motivations (the unconscious) and as itself conditioned by the unconditional (deconstruction; cf. especially Derrida’s account of the ‘sovereignty’ of both reason and power in *Rogues*). By the nineteenth century the conjugation of the theologico-political had, therefore, arrived at the point where ‘if God exist[ed] then man must be his slave’. As the idea of progress supplanted the myth of providence, Bakunin therefore drew the opposite conclusion to Voltaire: ‘if God existed, man would have to kill him’. Dead or alive, however, God remained a pole of reference and messianism mutated into ‘modernisation’ (Taubes 2010).

Pursuing his review, and turning it into a powerful critical hermeneutic, Taubes observes how ideology, in particular, ‘is only a first step towards a new, mythical existence’. Provocatively proposing Sorel’s theory of violence as offering the key ‘to any present day political theory’, Taubes’ conclusion is directly to the point. It requires quoting at length:

Only myth offers a criterion for social action, and through myth alone a group, a class, or a nation may act as a motor in the historical process. It should be obvious that the rise of myth as a political force goes with the decline of religion as a civic platform... The mythical energies cannot be ignored without peril to the society, but they have to be formed into a *nomos*... The uncreated consciousness of our era that pulsates through the various mythologies should be forged into a new concept of reason. This is a task for philosophy, in the sense in which Plato and Hegel understood the term... The secret nexus between the two realms [Theology and Political Theory] is established by the concept of power. Only when the universal principle of power is overruled will the unity of theology and political theory be superseded. A critique of
the theological element in political theory rests ultimately on a critique of the principle of power itself.  

(Taubes 2010: 231–2)

Derrida’s work is preoccupied with the continuous deconstruction of that new nomos of reason. Indeed, he engages and breaks open the very idea of nomos, of the conception and force of law that lies behind all law talk. Similarly, also, he contests ‘the principle of power itself’, whether in speaking, writing, thinking, welcoming, giving or acting, as well as in the cult of contemporary global power. To the degree that the politically modern, not least but not only in its cardinal principle of sovereign power, might be represented as ‘the unity of theology and political theory’, whose effect obscures the thought of the divine as much as it does the thought of the political because of the ways in which it unites them in the thought of the modern state and the messianism of the politically modern, then Derrida does no more than offer grounds for repealing their conflation. His turn to religion might be nothing but a means of resourcing a renewed interrogation of ‘the secret interface’ between the thought of the divine and the thought of the political. In many respects nothing could be more politically urgent today.

An aporetic condition is one from which there is no escape. While it is a forceful provocation to the production of figures of political speech, the aporia is itself, however, no speech-act. It takes place, but not by our volition. ‘The coming of this event exceeds the condition of mastery and the conventionally accepted authority of what is called the “performative”. It thus also exceeds, without contesting its pertinence, the useful distinction between the “constative” and “performative”’ (Derrida 1995: xiv). Its ramifications, therefore, also exceed the political economy of speaking. That is why other forms of speaking are important, including, for example, those of gesture, myth and the poetic. While often speaking poetically, Plato’s hostility to the poetic of political talk and gesture only testified to its enduring force. Policing it politically in the cause of rule no doubt contributes to keeping it alive, indeed to its very liveliness.

The aporia is, however, that speaking cannot ultimately rule, and rule cannot ultimately command the force of speech. But speech does remain forceful, no more so than when it is messianic and, therefore, necessarily also dangerous. The civil enlightenment of seventeenth-century Europe and the Atlantic republicanism of the eighteenth century were not without their allied messianisms (Kahn 2004). From outwith that culture, the messianic promise in Derrida offers a resource for questioning not only what that modern messianism of political freedom consisted in but also the ways in which our fate is now so bound up with its cultic, military and political as well as capitalist expressions.

The aporia of justice

The play on terms between ‘Force of Law’ and ‘Force of Transformation’ in my title is, therefore, deliberate, but it does not claim that they are the same thing.
The ‘Force of Law’ is the force of that strategically ‘necessary killing’ required by modern law to institute modern law. The ‘Force of Transformation’ derives from what Derrida calls the aporia or im-possibility of justice. Its force is ‘a weak force’ or ‘vulnerable force . . . without power’ that ‘opens up unconditionally to what or who comes and comes to affect it’ (Derrida 1995: xiv). Yet these terms are also closely related. Juxtaposing them is meant to prompt reflection on the relation between the two. It suggests in particular that, since politics and law cannot elide the aporia of justice, politics and law can never be mere expressions of the technical command of force transformation; they are always already enmeshed in a force of transformation that exceeds their technical command and from which they themselves cannot escape. It suggests, indeed, that the promise of ‘force transformation’ to which modern politics and law aspire offers no security from a force of transformation that is not theirs to dispense and from whose force they cannot escape.

Between them, Benjamin and Derrida agree on the radical disjuncture between law and justice, the violence integral to law and the fundamental inadequation of law to justice. One can stretch the point and speak, in addition, of a triangulation of politics, law and justice. Justice is as exterior to politics as it is to law. In other words, an inescapable inadequation lies at the heart of the triangulation of politics, law and justice. This exteriority of justice to law and politics does not rupture the relation between politics and the other two. It ties politics, law and justice together in ways that exceed the teachings of our political and philosophical traditions. Specifically, it tells us that politics cannot simply be oriented toward the good since there is no metric to provide the mean that would serve such a secure navigational bearing. It also teaches us that politics does not derive solely from the brokering of interest, because without a meta metric the brokering of interest is also a play of the incalculable. Political justice cannot similarly also be confined to redistribution. However important they are – and they are – the distributive questions of who gets what, where, when and how do not exhaust what politics is about. The antagonisms issuing from the call of justice around which politics ultimately revolve, and which government seeks to domesticate, ultimately derive from conflicting expressions of the calculable and the incalculable, the valuable and the invaluable.

It tells us also that reason alone cannot resolve these clashes, since it is the very unconditional condition of the calculus of reason itself that is at issue within them. It teaches us, finally, that the politically strategic logic of necessary killing required for the foundation and preservation of political order, which claims to limit killing through its subjection to the rule of state monopolisation, is a myth.

Despite their measure of agreement, Derrida nonetheless deconstructs the distinction that Benjamin makes between law-constituting and law-preserving violence. The relation between law-founding and law-preserving is not dialectical, in which the one succeeds and critiques the other. There is founding in every act of preservation and every act of foundation presupposes the iterable preservation of law. Politics is not two separate moves. It is a single double move. The relation between its elements is not a sequential one. The very relationality of the political – incalculability – is a deconstructive not a dialectical one. A material effect of this
relationality is that every act of law and politics is always already a response to the non-negotiable claim of justice. Another material effect is that however much the claim of justice requires recalculation it nonetheless exceeds critique. It calls for transformation, not least a transformation of the imaginable, as well.

A third material effect is the urgency upon which Derrida insists in relation to justice. The an-economic relation we have with the call of justice – an-economic because it does not follow the logic of economy but that of the gift – is urgent because it arises in each instance, in every time (Derrida 1992a, 1995a). However promissory the call of justice may be – the promise of the very affirmation of existence announced in every act and with every enunciation – it is not to be deferred. The claim is always issued and at issue here and now.

While politics and law are transactions of the possible, the calculable and the valuable, Derrida’s justice is intractable, incalculable and invaluable. For us mortals, the claim of justice is thus an aporetic condition. The claim of justice is not brokered as a bargain or a deal. Its demand is non-negotiable. The im-possible aporia of justice to which politics and law perforce must speak is not, however, an impasse. Neither does it suppress valuation, calculation or the possible, so long as ‘possibility’ is understood within the wider sense of undecidability that Derrida derives from the Nietzschean ‘the dangerous perhaps’ (Thurschwell 2003). It is itself a locus of transformation.

Neither do aporias disarm. They empower. They do not negate. They provoke. They do not close down our capacity to respond. They open it up. The aporia of justice is the condition of the possibility of justice. But it is not only a condition of possibility. It is also a condition of operability inflecting how justice, issuing from the very affirmation of existence that attends each act and utterance, invokes an infinitely welcoming disposition towards its claim.

The aporia of justice is thus also a beginning not an end. It does not silence. It incites. An aporia is lived out and through figures of political speech. And figures of political speech may be – have been – transformative of the very metrics that empower rule and law. Derrida’s writing is thus a political lexicon that continuously explores how one can speak, performatically, to this challenging condition even if we are not performatively responsible for its advent and are incapable, therefore, of exercising sovereign power over it. Performativity is a species of the force of transformation required to contest the security (salvation) induced force transformation with which we are globally threatened.
9

VIOLENCE, THE MESSIANIC AND THE TRAGIC

No one bears witness for the witness.
Paul Celan, ‘Achshenglorie’ (2001)

Introduction: the modern and the messianic

The turn (le tour), the turret or tower (la tour), the wheel of turns and returns: here is the motivating theme and the Prime Mover, the causes and things around which I will incessantly turn.
(Derrida 2005: 6)

Politics is an idiomatic game. It takes place performatively, and it does so in specific ways, at specific times and in specific places. Arising within specific fields of problematisation, formation and intervention, political idioms are precisely what distinguish different historical modes of government and rule. Since idioms of politics always also include the violence that is committed to institute and preserve regimes of government and rule, an idiom of politics necessarily also limits the unlimited ethical obligation to which Derrida, among other thinkers, such as Levinas, says we are subject. The idea of an unlimited ethical obligation to the Other runs directly counter, however, to both the onto-theological assumptions and the strategic practices that characterise modern politics. It seems as if it may therefore also offer a powerful counter to the unlimited violence, from holocaust to mutual assured destruction, that has come to distinguish modern politics. That is how and why the unlimited ethical obligation to the Other – what Levinas prioritises as ethics rather than existence – is a good place to begin to take the measure of modern politics: not only the measure of its violence but of the unlimited violence to which its very own logic of strategic political reasoning is committed. I am especially interested therefore in the idiom of violence that distinguishes modern politics, and in the ways that violence is integral to the categories as well as to the very idea of political modernity.
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Few, if any, thinkers have been as intellectually honest about modern political violence as Jacques Derrida, and few struggled so consistently with the challenge to ethics, justice and politics posed by modern political violence. Derrida did not succeed in answering the question of modern political violence. No one has. In any event, that was not Derrida’s way. He re-posed the questions of modern politics and violence instead. In doing so, he subverted the claim of modern politics that violence can be tamed by submitting it to a politically strategic calculus of necessary killing – killing sufficient to deliver the security said to be foundational to modern freedom and justice, in the name of which modern politics claims to answer the operational question: how much killing is enough? That modern politics has failed in these, its foundational claims, is historical fact.

However, Derrida also teaches us a structural, rather than an historical, lesson in respect of the modern political requirement for a strategic calculus of necessary killing. For what Derrida remorselessly demonstrated, throughout his account of the messianic in particular, was that, since the incalculable is always already operative in every calculation, we can never accept in principle what modern pluralist democratic politics, for example, asserts as their premise; that there can only be a democratic politics of representative government, and that such democratic politics is possible only if human being is subject to interests whose universal fungibility makes strategic calculation possible. In challenging these claims, and the reduction of modern politics both national and international, democratic and non-democratic, to transactional relations of subjective will and interest, Derrida made the aporia of the lesser violence of the messianic that he advocated, and to which we must return in a moment, less a solution to, and more the aporetic core of, the democracy and justice to come that he championed instead. Attracted as I am to these moves, I have problems with them, and I wish to interrogate these a little more here.

Derrida’s claim thus shifts the question of modern politics away from the idiom of strategy, with which it has long been allied, to that of a certain counter idiom of the messianic. I do not mean to suggest that the strategic claims of modern politics have not themselves also been infused with their own messianic idiom. They certainly have. I am interested here, however, in Derrida’s version of the messianic. This he drew from a wide range of Jewish and non-Jewish thinkers alike. These included Heidegger on the one hand and Levinas on the other. But Rosenzweig, Scholem and Benjamin, among many others, were very powerfully evident in Derrida as well.

From the strategic to the messianic

Derrida’s invocation of the messianic is consistent with the entire enterprise of his thought. But it also arises for specific historical reasons. One of them concerns his recognition that the strategic idiom of modern politics always threatens the worse rather than the lesser violence; indeed, has committed the worse violence. It does so because there is no way in which its strategic calculus of necessary killing can
answer the way in which it formulates the questions of politics and violence. Those questions are ultimately reduced to one: ‘how much killing is enough to institute and preserve modern political order?’ Despite the best endeavours of strategic thinkers, the question does not yield to strategic calculus. In consequence, its operational answer has always been, will always be, ‘more’. By and large, where it desists from violence the limits are set by the strength of the resistance that it encounters or the exhaustion that it suffers rather than by the answers given by its strategic equations. These seem always to be adjusted to the political aftermath of the violence rationalised in their name.

However, does Derrida’s counter-strategic way of posing the question of violence through the idiom of the messianic fare any better? What of the violence of the messianic itself? These questions are not meant to denounce either Derrida or the messianic. They are intended instead to question some of what Derrida has to say about politics, violence and the messianic, and to do so by pursuing some openings that Derrida himself made.

The structure of the chapter that follows is therefore this. It opens with a brief account of the messianic as it arises in Derrida. It then moves on to a more substantial reflection on the messianic in terms of how it arises in complex triangulation, also, with the theos and the tragic; related ways in which the Western tradition addresses the singularity of what continental philosophy since Heidegger has diversely called ‘the event’ of being and of the violent singularity of human existence within it. This section does not even attempt to explore all of the salient issues thrown up by this complex triangulation. It merely offers it as part of the wider economy of violence and of overcoming within which Derrida’s account of the messianic has to be considered. Suffice to say that you cannot get a grip on one point of the triangulation without becoming trammelled somehow also in the legacy of the other two. They bear so intimately upon one another that their co-relating has to be addressed in terms of the violent milieu from out of which the messianic arises in Derrida as a kind of counter-force.

Specifically, this section seeks to differentiate, however sketchily, the messianic from the tragic. For, however much tragic and messianic sensibilities resonate in their accounts of the wound of existence, and while their accounts of the essential violence of existence often appear very similar, this section argues that, ultimately, they are different. It offers little more, however, than an intimation of how they differ, and of how they differ as much idiomatically as they do ontologically: that is to say, performatively rather than merely descriptively or conceptually. Thereafter, the chapter focuses on Derrida’s witness in Rogues, and the difficult – irresolvable – question of the aporia of the lesser violence that he addresses directly once more in that text.

**Derrida’s messianicity**

In his account of the politics to come, whose central motif is the messianic, Derrida looks forward to how the fugitive and fragile solidarity of singularity might
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displace the strategic solidarity of the sovereignly self-same upon which the entire strategic tradition of Western political thought has been based. That solidarity of the singular is a quite exceptional thought of how politics might allow itself to be structured ethically by the specter of the Other. The messianic is a device by which he continues his explorations of this possibility. All that I have space to do here is broach the question of the complex relation that obtains in Derrida’s work between violence and the promise that he says is borne by the messianic: that not only of democracy and justice to come but also of their lesser, messianic, violence.

The larger part of the messianic in Derrida’s texts serves more generally as yet another of those analytical devices that he uses to deconstruct the idioms and violence of law, of politics and of morality: of the necessary institution, in other words, of rule and decision. It is a vehicle through which he continues his interrogation of violence and decision as he remains in deep conversation with modern philosophy from Kant, Hegel and Kierkegaard through to Husserl, Heidegger and Levinas. It is a device, also, for bringing the allied ties of religion and the question of God within the ambit of these enquiries as well. He uses it to interrogate the violence and the sacrifice demanded, especially, by the violent non-violent doctrines of peace promoted by philosophy and religion as well as modern politics (Beardsworth 1996; de Vries 2002).

Not hopeless in despair, he nonetheless tells us in the Preface to Rogues, the promise of the messianic, the very idiomatic greeting of the messianic, is nonetheless ‘foreign to the teleology, the hopefulness, and the salut of salvation’ (Derrida 2005: xv). Not foreign ‘to the salut as the greeting of salutation of the other, not foreign to the adieu (“come” or “go” in peace), not foreign to justice’, the messianic is nonetheless ‘heterogeneous and rebellious, irreducible, to law, to power, and to the economy of redemption’ (Derrida 2005: xv). It cannot be reduced to religion or to politics. Equally, the messianic does not remain a literary trope, a mere deconstructively analytical device by which to question and, in questioning, disclose more about the complex aporetic difficulties posed by the irreducible mismatch that obtains between the incalculable ethical demands of the Other. The ethical demand issued by the Other is one to which he believes we remain subject along with the madness of the historically situated decisions that we are also obliged to make, even when we attempt to respond to, rather than refuse, the ethical demand of the Other. For, however useful it may be for disclosing the deep implication of all thought as well as all law, decision and rule in violence, the messianic for Derrida is far more than that.

It is more an ontological device. It mirrors the structure of the promise installed in existing as such, the irreducible affirmation within existence without which, for Derrida, existence would not be able to continue to come at all. Inasmuch, also, as the messianic is one of the names he gives for this promise, the originary affirmation that always already underwrites the world and whose promise of a continuous ethical and political ‘to come’ he also champions in the world, there is no promise of the Derridaean sort without the violent conditions that, calling it forth, continuously also threaten to overwhelm it. Equally, there is no such promise outwith the
force of the binding through which we are tied to it, struggle as we may against it. In other words, however affirmatory the promise to which the messianic bears witness, violence is as integral to the promise as the promise is integral to the structure of the messianic. That, then, is why the messianic itself, as a kind of ontology of the promise rather than a mere analytical device, cannot be dissociated from violence.

Indeed, Derrida never does try to dissociate it. His work is a rigorous refusal to do just that. Even the espousal of the injunction to practise the lesser violence resonates with aporetic ambivalence and difficulty in his work. A device for exploring the complex question of violence, the messianic, in all its associated forms, especially of hospitality and of the arrival of the *arrivant*, is both the occasion of violence as well as one of the idioms of violence. Derrida himself witnesses that violence on himself and in himself every time he is drawn to testify to it philosophically – every time, indeed, that he returns to what he calls ‘the question’. This he does most vividly in the early sections of *Rogues*, to which I return in the final section of this chapter.

Just as the messianic arises directly therefore from what Richard Beardsworth calls the tertiary economy of violence that structures the world of the Western tradition (Beardsworth 1996: 20–2), so also does it serve for Derrida not only as the counter-violence to that violence but also as the promise of a lesser violence. I am still not sure that I understand or am ultimately persuaded by this central claim. In any event, it cannot be addressed without understanding also that the lesser violence is part of an indissociable couplet for Derrida. The lesser violence is, in other words, always already associated with the ever-looming possibility of monstrosity and of the arrival instead of the worst (*le pire*). He explores that prospect in his account of the messianic via the claim of hospitality and of the ways in which hospitality itself is so closely coupled also with hostility and violence (Derrida 2000; de Vries 2002: xv). In *Politics of Friendship* (1995c), for example, Derrida explores the etymological links between hospitality and hostility and in doing so observes also how hospitality effects contiguity or proximity. The lesson he draws is that proximity, the proximity of the family and of the friend as well as of the threatening stranger, offers no secure safeguard against violence. It is, however, the prospect of the greatest force overwhelming the promise of the messianic which puts him back on the rack of the question at the beginning of *Rogues* (2005). Before returning to *Rogues*, however, I want to set the messianic in a more originary setting: that of its triangulation with the tragic and with the gods.

The *theos*, the tragic and the messianic

A mimesis opens the fiction of tone. It is the tragedy of ‘Come’ though it must be repeatable (*a priori* repeated in itself) in order to resonate.

(Derrida 1981a: 480)

I want to begin this section, as Derrida does in the epigraph that heads it, by first linking the messianic with the tragic. The messianic and the tragic resemble each
other most in their preoccupation with the violence that arises from our singularity. ‘Greek tragedy poses questions about the riddle that each of us is assigned’, Dennis Schmidt teaches. It does so ‘by beginning with the simple fact of the singularity of our experience of that riddle’ (Schmidt 2001: 281). In revolving around the singular, in their allied but differing accounts of human singularity, the messianic and the tragic revolve around the violence as well as the promise that necessarily also attends it. If proximity offers no escape from the aporia of violence, neither does singularity.

It is not, however, the resemblance between the messianic and the tragic that concerns me. The turn to the tragic is indeed a turn towards something much more foreign to us than is the turn to the messianic. For in the tragedies we turn towards the fact of our ineliminable strangeness, ‘independently of structures and assumptions – subjectivity, the good, metaphysics’ which so preoccupied Derrida, and which his work, among others, ‘has shown to be exhausted’ (Schmidt 2001: 281). The messianic and the tragic inhabit different economies of violence, not least, also, because of their different understandings of the divine. We are dealing with different worlds here.

Despite his acute sensibility also to the tragic, therefore, Derrida’s attraction to negative theology (de Vries 1999; Bradley 2004) signals how differentiated his Judeo-Christian indebtedness is from the theogony and cosmology of the Greeks (Bremner 2004; Vernant 1991). So, I differentiate the tragic from the messianic below in order to move to the specific economy of violence within which the messianic arises for Derrida. But, first, a word about the *theos* with which both the messianic and the tragic are, of course, intimately also connected. I need to say something as well about the relation of *theos* not only to violence and the horror religiosus (de Vries 2002) but also to reason and to politics, to the claims of reason over politics and, finally, to the modern promise of a rational political order which finds its limit in the transcendence to which all these three – *theos*, messianic and tragic – testify, albeit very differently.

Werner Jaeger teaches us that theology ‘is neither a medieval, nor a Christian but a classical Greek word’ (1980: 6). Whereas the Christian form of theology, of which we think first when we apply the term, is more specifically called ‘revealed theology’, the concept of theology originally meant every form of rational approach to the problematic of God. Hence, Augustine hailed Plato as the true father of theology. Meister Eckhart also called him ‘the great theologian’ (quoted in Jaeger 1980: 46). Christian philosophers also used to call this ‘first philosophy’, in the sense of Aristotle, or ‘natural theology’, as opposed to the supra-natural kind.

It was ultimately Aristotle, through Aquinas’ reception of him, who provided Christian theology with a theological architectonics. But such Aristotelian architectonics grounded in reason also remained contested throughout the Christian tradition, and not just by Luther and the Protestant Reformation (Jaeger 1980: 13). Still operating within the boundaries of the medieval church, two centuries after Aquinas, Thomas à Kempis, for example, furnished a powerful example of Christian piety less susceptible to the influence of the reason of Greek philosophy. Thus,
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while theology was always linked to reason (the *logos* of the *theos*), not least in terms of addressing the force of the godhead as well as the violences of religion, Christianity was also a mystical phenomenon. Its mysticism was never first inspired by reason and it never depended upon reason alone.

Something curiously analogous applies to politics as well. Where theology was the *logos* – or reason – of the *theos*, philosophy was the *logos* – or reason – of the *polis*. But just as the mystical phenomenon of Christianity exceeded the reasoning of theology and so remained in irresolvable tension with it, so also did the factically excessive demands of political life of the *polis* always exceed the *logos* of philosophy. However, Plato taught, most directly in *The Statesman*, that reason fails to comprehend the *technē* of the *politikos* as much as it proves unable also to comprehend the mystery of God (Rosen 1997; Castoriadis 2002). Thus politics remains in an equally inescapable but irresolvable relation with philosophy. Somehow the question of the God and the question of the political always exceed the *logoi* (theology and philosophy) through which they are addressed.

Having interrogated elsewhere (1995b) how Plato’s recounting of the myth of the *khôra* also says as much, Derrida observes that the factual experience to which I am referring arises in ‘the hollow space of finitude in which messianic eschatology comes to resonate’ (Derrida 1978: 103). In the instant of messianic as well as tragic insight, then, the limits of reason are brutally exposed as they are cast in high relief against the eschatological horizon that contours all experience: an azimuth whose reverberation throughout experience is the provocation that excites the tragic and the messianic sensibility alike. And while both the tragic and the messianic are preoccupied with the problematic of giving the singularity of things their due – that is to say, they are centrally concerned with the problematic of justice – the tragic is not a morality play. Schmidt again:

> Greece marks the last moment in what has come to be the Western world has a contact with forms of thinking that are not defined by metaphysics or by the polarities of good and evil, and it is this above all else that lends Greek tragedy a claim to distinction.  

*(Schmidt 2001: 279)*

Despite the great care and vast subtleties of expression that Derrida brings to the thought of it, I think his messianic might still remain just that: a morality play. The world is, however, in great need of new fables of responsibility.

It is therefore important to emphasise that the discourses of theology and politics not only have always been heterogeneous in relation to one another but also were heterodox in themselves. Neither tradition of thought offers a settled account of their justicial objects of thought – *theos* and *polis* – through reason alone. And while the *theos* and the *polis* have been trammelled together from their inception, not least in the way that each exploits to its own ends the violence integral to the other, it seems that there could be neither one without the other. Reason therefore has its
limits (as well as its waste) and violence arises at those limits. But in *Rogues* especially Derrida also shows how violence inhabits reason as well.

In *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony* (1994), Roberto Calasso notes a classic paradox directly obtaining here. It is one to which Derrida is sensitive also. ‘To invite the gods ruins our relationship with them’, says Calasso. But it also sets history in motion, he says, and thus, ‘A life in which the gods are not invited isn’t worth living’ (Calasso 1994: 387). Crossing gods and men is nonetheless a uniquely dangerous activity. ‘[I]n crossing variant species [the gods and man]’, John Sallis notes in his reflections on the tragic, ‘there is always the risk of producing monsters’ (Sallis 1991: 5).

The violent encounter of the heterogeneous and the heterodox in the fateful conjuncture of politics and theology therefore always engenders a space in which something disturbing is likely to come to presence. In a gesture that repeats but nonetheless also differs from that of the tragic, and in the ways in which it turns towards but also seeks to turn religion away from itself, the messianic in Derrida also has something of the monstrous about it: something that nature did not intend, a supplement placed beside it, as Nietzsche remarked of the tragic also (Sallis 1991: 83). Without this there would be no nature to call nature at all, however indeterminate and violently divided – created yet creative according to tragic insight, but undecidable according to Derrida’s messianic insight – that nature may be.

Equally, however khoratic their sense of space and place, and however similarly kairological their account of decision, however much they also share the sense of being suspended in the abyss of existence, the tragic and the messianic very much differ in the ways in which each plays out that supplementarity in existence and its corresponding sense of the divine. In the tragic, it is Dionysius who comes to presence. In Derrida’s messianic, it is the *arrivant*. Dionysius and the *arrivant* do not, however, compute. They sing a different song and their fates are correspondingly different.

The transformative power to which the messianic appeals is therefore always rooted in a significantly different account of the supplementarity that defines what it is to be human and, however much the tragic sensibility resounds throughout the messianic, we must be careful not to flatten out that difference, subtle though it is. Derrida, in *Rogues*, offers one example of that co-relation. Reflecting on the theogonic mythology of patricidal struggle for sovereignty between the Greek gods – for example, Cronos seeking to prevent being overthrown by his son Zeus – Derrida observes that this struggle ‘belongs to, if it does not actually inaugurate, a long cycle of political theology that is at once paternалистic and patriarchal, and thus masculine, in the filiation father–son–brother’ (Derrida 2005: 17). That cycle continues in different forms to the present day:

This political theogony or political theology gets revived or taken over (despite claims to the contrary by such experts as Bodin and Hobbes...) by so called modern political theology of monarchical sovereignty and even by the unavowed
But, if Derrida contests the founding of politics in the strategic calculations of the phalo-logocentrism of the formal equality of sovereign subjectivities (cf. *The Politics of Friendship*), he equally dissents from democratic theorists who seek to found politics in the equality of everyone with everyone, of the sort championed most eloquently and persuasively today by, for example, Jacques Rancière (2004, 2007). With Rancière, equality enables the social order, itself, he says, a division or partition of the sensible. The event of political subjectification occurs through polemical engagements, within an historical partition of the sensible, between superiors and inferiors, when inferiors challenge the material inequality established by a partition of the sensible in the name of this equality. Derrida differs fundamentally. Such events lie instead, Derrida maintains, in a ‘dissymmetrical, unequal correspondence, unequal as always to the equality of the one to the other: the origin of politics, the question of democracy’ (Derrida 2005: xii). Whereas the polemical relation obtaining in Rancière’s politics of dis-agreement confines violence by limiting politics to the litigation he thinks proper to it, no such limitation is allowed by Derrida. In the khoratic Derridaean space and kairological decisioning of his messianic politics of democracy-to-come there is always already the possibility of the worse as well as the lesser violence. The central problem, as we shall see, is how to distinguish between the two, and how to know that in seeking the lesser violence one is not facilitating the worst.

To return to the tragic and the messianic, however, and in the challenge that his messianic insight poses to reason, Derrida makes a demand that we can see as analogous to, albeit different from, the demand that Euripides makes on the tragic. ‘Euripides, the critic, the thinker’, Sallis tells us, ‘submitted tragedy as it had been attained to a demand for illumination, for intelligibility, the demand that what is to be beautiful must be intelligible’ (Sallis 1991: 115). Since Derrida the thinker characterises the messianically informed wound of experience differently from that afforded by tragic insight, he similarly also submits it to a different demand.

Whereas Euripides would have the tragic submit to the demands of intelligibility and reason, Derrida would have reason and intelligibility submit to the demands of the messianic. However much it must travel the path of reason, in the event Derrida teaches that the travail of reason, bringing itself to its limits, is to serve to disclose the continuous arrival of justice to come in the occulting of those limits. There it must expose itself, I think, even re-compose itself in exposing itself, to the claim of an insatiable justice towards which its face must always be turned in the effort to seek the lesser violence that would defer the worse. Derrida’s messianic insight parallels that of the tragic; everything that we do is opaquely as well as irresolvably implicated in violence. We are indelibly contaminated more or less by violence. That, more or less, is the point. On the one hand, Derrida teaches that we must distinguish between the two. On the other hand, everything he teaches seems to
say that we cannot. He is himself racked by the responsibility posed by this very undecidability.

Although the question of justice was, of course, at the heart of the tragic as well, the promise of overcoming around which the messianic and the tragic equally revolve is therefore also different. In a stunning passage, Nietzsche says, ‘Tragedy is seated in the midst of this excess of life, suffering and joy, in sublime ecstasy listening to a melancholy song that tells of the mothers of being whose names are delusion, will and woe’ (quoted in Sallis 1991: 96). The messianic is similarly situated but it is differently articulated. It too sings a song as Nietzsche taught it was the genius of the tragedies to do. Rather than simply echoing the tragic, however, especially out of the specific economy of violence to which it is a response, the messianic might perhaps be better understood as possessing a different attunement, a different ear for the oppressions of existence and the construal of the predicament of the oppressed. For that reason, equipped thereby also with a different voice, the messianic not only sings in a different key. In respect of violence especially, it also sings a different song; a song to be sung in the solidarity of the shaken, bearing witness to the solidarity of the shaken, less in the violent Dionysian idiom of sublime ecstasy, for example, than in the transforming counter-violent juridical appeal of another justice simultaneously operating within and against the law. Its song of singularity, therefore, also sings a revised version of Greek moira (μοῖρα), or destiny, substituting a version more in celebration of the irrepressibility and insatiability of the ethical demand to which existing, as such, we are all subject.

Thus, to draw a further important distinction, and notwithstanding its own powerful idiom, the discourse of the messiah, as distinct also from that of the messianic, ultimately depends upon the message, the violently sublating sacrificial good news, in particular, of the Gospel. As the Catholic liturgy has it, ‘Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again’. That of the messianic does not. What distinguishes the messianic is, instead, the transformative aesthetic, the very idiomatic tone of the messianic (Fenves 1993a, b), the how of its bearing witness to a singularity suspended precariously between the finite and the infinite, rather than the secure dispatch and reception of a message reporting the existence of a safe passage from life to Life. In bringing the theological and the political together again, allowing the one to refigure the other in the dangerous messianic monstrosity of that very encounter, Derrida not only raised new questions about the categorial status in the Western tradition of the tragic, the messianic and the theos, as well as the violences obtaining in all three, but thereby introduced a new dimension of thought into thinking about what Claude Lefort called the permanence, in Western thought and practice, of the theologico-political (Lefort 1989).

Whereas, then, and according to modern doctrines of secularisation, the political was long supposed to have supplanted the theological in the modern disciplining of the divine, it is perfectly clear that a deep and pervasive enchantment continues to characterise the modern world through the very political, techno-scientific, appropriation of the divine that most characterises it (Fletcher 2009).
of disenchantment is, therefore, not the issue. The issue is the modern’s gross enchantment with itself, the how of that strategising enchantment and the all-pervasive violence that drives it towards the greatest force and the worst violence. It is precisely here that the messianic arises, Derrida maintains, especially within the modern and against some of the most powerful philosophical contributions to the modern, as a powerful ethico-political counter-violence to the narcissistically violent self-enchantment of the modern.

A further gloss to the counter-force claimed for the messianic is required here. Recall Heidegger’s teaching that ‘all counter movements and counter forces are to a large degree co-determined by what they are against, even though in the form of reversing what they are against’ (Babich 2006: 251). In its search for that deus ex machina capable of correcting the world through the violence of its knowing, for example, the modern has pursued self-transformation equally as much as the messianic. Techno-science itself is an aesthetic, and all aesthetics seek transformation not just of the human condition but ultimately always also of the human soul. The very donation life that comes and goes as one’s life, one’s name assigned to it as an after-thought. If techno-science seeks, thus, to improve the world by the forceful overcoming of calculation, the messianic seeks, instead, to heal it through the equally but differently forceful overcoming of its own distinctive affects. These include, notably, hospitality, welcome, the gift and, finally also, a-dieu; what Babich calls its ‘concinnities’ (Babich 2006: 61).

Through deconstruction, therefore, Derrida sought to describe a messianism without a messiah in terms that transcend the reductively bitter and circular counter-force logic of the dialectic. This presupposes an originary homogeneity in the order of things that Derrida refused from the outset of his philosophising, in particular in his account of the messianic and of the ‘non-dialectizable tension ... of the concept of hospitality’ so integral to it, ‘even of the concept in hospitality’ (Derrida 2000: 362). For all that the circular counter-force logic of the dialectic does is return itself to the self-same, whereas that of deconstruction admits the surprising force, surprisingly violent force, of the wholly Other. In his insistence on going through reason not only to the undecidability of the decision, but also to its decisive responsibility – to pick up the commission of the omission of existence through the very heterogeneity of whose rupture existence issues – Derrida enacted his own version of Nietzsche’s Apollonian/Dionysian couplet. But he did so with a typical deconstructive twist, one designed to allow for the possibility of a ‘to come’ undetermined by the force and counter-force negation of the merely dialectical.

Shortly after this observation about hospitality, Derrida reminds us that:

After peace, after the peaceable and peaceful experience of welcoming, there follows (but this following is not a new stage only the becoming-explicit of the same logic) a more violent experience, the drama of the relation to the other that ruptures, bursts in or breaks in, or still, you may recall some of these citations, an experience of the Good that elects me before I welcome
it, in other words, of a goodness, a good violence of the Other that precedes welcoming.

(Derrida 2000: 364)

Here again we encounter evidence of so many diverse, heterogeneous and violent tones in the messianic – the ‘good violence of the Other’, the ‘lesser violence’, the ‘weak force’ of the messianic and so on – that, tempted as I am to try and enumerate them, I think that enumeration is beside the point. For the purposes of this sketch, at least, it is the complex violent tone of the idiomatic whole that they comprise which counts, and to which I can only gesture here. Critical to this idiomatic ensemble, nonetheless, is the promise Derrida promises us, of ‘a good violence of the Other’. I hesitate to say it of such a careful thinker, but one wonders if that promise is a quixotic one. Let me nonetheless emphasise again. One does not raise the issue of violence in order to discredit the messianic. One raises the messianic in order to interrogate, without reserve, and without deference either to the piety demanded by the Other, or the tutelage demanded by power, the inescapable violence of existence and the challenge it poses to all thinking concerning the possibility of justice, including that of the thought of the messianic itself.

To bring justice out of injustice, and thereby transcend oppression: that is the alchemical promise of the messianic in Derrida. The messianic must go through reason, for him, but it does not ultimately do its work through reason. For the work of reason, what reason in the modern period has wrought in its wasting, and the novel oppressions it threatens, is one of the single most important targets of the messianic. Working with and through reason, the messianic in Derrida seeks less to go beyond reason than to find the means at the limits of reason – limits only to be attained by the passage through reason – to continuously welcome the well-spring of life which is ultimately Other than reason. Such is his account of the messianic promise. But there is no gainsaying its violently disruptive force throughout both reason and life. He never desists from admitting this.

Ultimately, then, the messianic and the tragic inhabit different worlds. Different idioms, they are also engendered by different economies of violence. Derrida pays no more forceful witness to the violent an-economical force of the messianic itself, however, than in the tortured testimony he provides during the first lecture of *Rogues*.

On the rack of the question

The question of the question is not just another question.

(Sallis 1991: 126)

Derrida gave a lecture entitled ‘Shibboleth’ on 14 October 1984 at The University of Washington in Seattle. It was delivered to the first international conference on the work of the poet Paul Celan. He was careful to date it. Derek Attridge
reprints part of the lecture with a short but very helpful introduction in an edited collection of Derrida’s essays, *Acts of Literature* (1992b). Observing that one of the distinguishing features of Celan’s poems is that ‘they enact with peculiar intensity the paradox which lies at the heart of Derrida’s sense of literature’, which very much also informs his sense of the messianic, Attridge notes how each one of Celan’s poems

is imbued with a quality of uniqueness, of here-and-nowness, while at the same time owing that quality to the cultural and linguistic cross-roads that constitute it, and from which it speaks to us, in our equally singular and situated time and place.

(Derrida 1992b: 370)

It is that dual quality, characteristic also of the ethical challenge posed by messianic, in this time and this place nonetheless also to welcome the disruptive alterity of the Other, that Derrida explores again in his tribute to Celan.

Concentrating in particular on the significance of dates and dating in Celan’s poems, Attridge explains how the ‘date implies, for Celan and for Derrida, the possibility of encounter (including the encounter with the absolutely other) and of the anniversary, the gathering together of events across historical boundaries’ (Derrida 2002: 371). Whereas philosophy aspires to make writing timeless, and politics to submit dating to machination, all writing, and all the signatures that sign writing off, is a dating. Specifically in respect of Celan’s poems, Derrida remarks, quite beautifully, ‘a poem is en route from place toward “something open” (“an approachable you”), and it makes its way “across” time, it is never “timeless”. . .[it is] all cipher of singularity . . . the anniversary repetition of the unrepeatable’ (Derrida 2002: 371). ‘The motifs that characterize the lecture all concern circling, the singularity of “once”, one time, turns, turning, and returning “replacements and supplantings, voltes and revolutions” (Derrida 2002: 373).

In a lecture he gave several years later at Cerisy-la-Salle during the summer of 2002, which is included in *Rogues*, Derrida directly recalls the themes and motifs of turning and returning which characterised so much of the lecture that he gave on Paul Celan. This time, however, the motifs are dramatised through the metaphor of the wheel and the rack. These set the scene for the torturing to which Derrida himself feels subjected by the return of the question of the question and the complex violent milieu of the messianic. He begins his reflection by citing Fontaine’s poem ‘The Wolf and the Lamb’. His point of departure is the poem’s proposition that ‘the strong are always best at proving they are right. Witness the case we’re now going to cite’ (Derrida 2005: xi).

Full of emotion at returning to Cerisy, moved also by the wars and threat of war as well as by the mounting violence globally that he witnessed in the early years of the new century, Derrida was offended most by the infinite ‘war on terror’. He therefore began by recalling his earlier Celan lecture, insisting that it was ‘political through and through’ (Derrida 2005: 7). In quite explicitly messianic tones, he
noted the difference in time between the two lectures but also recalled the recurring necessity of bearing witness—*one more time*—to the messianically ‘dangerous law of supplementarity or iterability that forces the impossible by forcing the replacement of the irreplaceable’ (Derrida 2005: 7). In doing so he twists and turns on the rack of ‘the question’.

What question? It is not easy to supply a simple answer. In one sense, he says, it is the question of democracy-to-come (included in the title of the conference to which he first delivered the lecture). But the future of democracy-to-come is entangled with the historicity as well as the semantics of power—not least, at the time he was giving the lecture—and their renewal of fresh forms of global violence. It is similarly entangled with the very history and meaning of the democratic, to which he also returned. And, finally, of course, the question is entangled with the messianic promise itself: a promise in which the injunction to seek the lesser violence is always married to the ever-present possibility of worse violence; a possibility, in short, that cannot be divorced from seeking the lesser violence.

The ‘question’ therefore always comes doubled—‘at the same time semantic and historical, at turns semantic and historical’ (Derrida 2005: 6). It also comes re-doubled: re-doubled by the co-presence of the worse in the lesser violence. As he explores the implication of the one in the other so also is Derrida himself put on the rack of the question as it finds expression here in terms of the question of violence (Heidegger would say *polemos*). He was racked more than usually, it seems, by the violence he had long detected in the Levinasian thinking to which his own thought of the messianic remained indebted (cf. ‘Violence and Metaphysics’, Derrida 1978).

Little wonder, then, that one can almost smell the burning flesh as Derrida is put to the question: ‘This double question...a torturing question’ (Derrida 2005: 8), ‘the question in the senses of an inquisitional torture where one is not only put in question but is put to the question’ (Derrida 2005: 7). Indeed, he puts himself to the question in a curious and perverse parallel to the auto-immunity that he fears, and his testimony on behalf of the messianic is wrung from him once more, this time against the historical background of a century newborn, yet tooling up to match, if not exceed, the violences of the one that preceded it. ‘The Free Wheel’, as he titles his chapter, is a turn-up that turns him over time and again. He, in turn, struggles to turn the wheel to good effect, directing it towards what he calls ‘the precomprehension of democracy’. He says, ‘Did we not have some idea of democracy; we would never worry about its indetermination. We would never seek to elucidate its meaning or, indeed, call for its advent’ (Derrida 2005: 18). And so, typically, he seeks to move ‘towards the horizon that limits the meaning of the word, in order to come to know better what “democracy” will have been able to signify, what it ought, in truth, to have meant’ (Derrida 2005: 18). If I find this element of the argument compelling, and I do, then perhaps I ought to be equally persuaded by the injunction to a lesser violence. But I am not. I am happy to accept that this is a failure of my understanding. But—again—while I fail to understand, I have to bear counter-witness in my own questioning.
The messianic question that tortures him first comes in the form, then, of democracy-to-come as that which signifies the promise continually to revise democracy as the sovereign power of the people in its self-production and self-legislation. Moving to the limits of democratic thought, he observes that it still finds its expression in terms of a force (\textit{kratos}), a force in the form of a sovereign authority (sovereign, that is, \textit{kurios} or \textit{kuros}), having the power to decide, to be decisive, to prevail, to have reason over or win out over \textit{(avoir raison de)} and to give the force of law \textit{(kuroδ)} and thus the power and ipseity of the people \textit{(demos)}.

\textit{(Derrida 2005: 13)}

But it is ipseity itself that is the source of the problem: ‘ipseity names a certain principle of legitimate sovereignty \ldots the very self or autopositioning, \textit{of ipseity itself’}(Derrida 2005: 12). Everywhere ipseity reigns, he says, in Levinasian tones, ‘there is some oneself, the first, ultimate, and supreme source of every “reason of the strongest” as the right \textit{(droit)} granted to force or the force granted to law \textit{(droit)}’ (Derrida 2005: 12). In the event, then, the problem returns to the sovereign self-same, auto-legisating itself and now also, he claims, threatening self-destruction as well through its assault on its own auto-immune systems. Here, then, I must begin to conclude by departing from the point at which I would have preferred to start. As he addresses the suicidal drivers now impelling the geopolitical vandalism of globalisation, the stakes posed by the messianic – the correlation of the worse and the lesser violence – could not be higher. But neither, it seems, are the prospects of finding a resolution to the aporia of the lesser violence any clearer.

**Violence more or less**

If one hears a quixotic tone in the messianic promise that Derrida holds out for us, I admit to a gross uncertainty in my attempt to capture the idiom of his messianic with that word; this tone alone would, however, also serve to differentiate messianic from tragic insight. For the knowledge at which we arrive through tragic ordeal is a knowledge that makes us sad. It is a knowledge at which we would rather we did not have to arrive. Its tone is \textit{pathos}. Derrida’s messianic tone is quite different. The messianic insight that inflects all of his, otherwise remorseless, depiction of the solidarity of the shaken is characterised by a knowledge that serves to elevate our spirits. It is the tone of hope.

I would that I could be persuaded by that hope, or ally myself unreservedly to the belief that hope, like courage, can make true. Whereas I understand how he thinks this hope is sourced, I do not fully understand how he thinks it can be operationalised in relation to distinguishing violence, more or less. I might have forced too fine or too brutish a distinction, so once more the failure to understand no doubt belongs here rather than there. But let me conclude with pressing the point of what I am failing to understand.
Recall two of Derrida’s most important teachings on the issues at stake here. The first is not a simple injunction to a lesser violence, but the insistence that the lesser violence and worse violence arise together as one predicament. They are not serially, but co-related. Derrida does not allow us the possibility of dealing with them one after the other. The aporia is that of not having any secure means ultimately of being able to distinguish the prospect of one from the other. This introduces something vital. In electing for what we think may be the lesser violence, we may very well commit worse violence. Good conscience is no defence against being contaminated in holocaustal violence. The horrors of the twentieth century will have taught us that for sure.

But that is not Derrida’s most pertinent teaching on this point. The point is that the advent of the messianic, of the Other, is itself violent. Who can tell, how are we to tell, that the violence of the messianic may not itself evoke holocaustal violence from us? An impious thought? Then, I am impious. But this is not the only point either. The other point is that, however poor a student, I have learnt this lesson from Derrida.

The second teaching is this, and it brings me to my conclusion. At the beginning of ‘Violence and Metaphysics’ Derrida (1978) explains how ‘the question’ becomes the very question of the question as such:

within that fragile moment when the question is not yet determined enough for the hypocrisy of an answer to have already initiated itself beneath the mask of the question, and not yet determined enough for its voice to have been already fraudulently articulated with the very syntax of the question.

(Derrida 1978: 80)

The teaching here is in fact three-fold. The first teaching is that the ‘question must be maintained. And it must be maintained as a question. The liberty of the question (double negative) must be stated and protected’ (Derrida 1978: 80). Whatever happens, the question returns as a question and must remain a question. In fact, because it is what the questionable facticity of human being brings to attention, our constitutive obsession with it may of course bring about our downfall. That may simply be our fate. Why not? Not even the prior disclosure of one’s fate is a secure defense against its arrival.

The second teaching is that the question is never first given as a question. The question itself has to be won out of the answers that have already been given to it. ‘Thus the question is always enclosed; it never appears immediately as such, but only through the hermetism of a proposition in which the answer has already begun to determine the question’ (Derrida 1978: 80).

Third, and perhaps this is the point of the point, the question does not authorise itself. It has for Derrida an Other authorisation: ‘The question has already begun – we know it has – and this strange certainty about an other absolute origin, an other absolute decision that has secured the past of the question, liberates an incomparable instruction: the discipline of the question’ (Derrida 1978: 80). Hence the question
proceeds from the fact that ‘There is no stated law, no commandment, that is not addressed to freedom of speech’ (Derrida 1978: 80). And so he returns us to the factical freedom whence politics arises as a possibility and the rendering of justice arises as its ethic, ethic in the sense of the Greek ἔθος (McNeil 2006).

Contrary to much popular opinion, there is, then, a chart datum in Derrida. That chart datum does not lie in the logos, however much he teaches us that we still have to wade through the logos to get to it. Neither, here at least, does it lie in the Other, however much he inclines towards securing factical freedom ‘ethically’ against itself by binding it to the Other. Chart datum is the an-economical gift of factical freedom. The aporia of this factical freedom has no secure metric for computing the lesser violence. That is why it is an aporia. We could almost say that this, precisely, is the definition of factical freedom. Entering the twenty-first century, one wonders if we are up to it, up to what we will have to become in order to rise to its challenge. I hope we make it: ‘I’ve realized now’, says a character in Vasily Grossman’s epic novel of The Great Patriotic War, ‘that hope almost never goes with reason. It’s something quite irrational and instinctive’.

Factical freedom to pose the question, to be the very vehicle of the question, therefore assumes priority again, since without that freedom the question could never be posed. Its aporia of the lesser/worse violence has Derrida spinning on the wheel of ‘the liberty of the question’ (Derrida 1978: 80) because the freedom to pose the question cannot escape the aporia of the lesser/worse violence. Such is, however, also tragedy’s teaching. I would rather it were otherwise, but I wonder, therefore, if tragedy ultimately wins out over the messianic in Derrida himself.
Divine violence and the Machiavellian moment

For all their boasting, practical men do not know either men or the world; they do not even know the reality of their own works. [If they could return to life], the geniuses of pure politics, the fatalia monstra recorded in histories, would be astounded to learn what they have done without being aware of it, and they would read their own past deeds as in a hieroglyph to which they had been offered the keys.

Benedetto Croce

Introduction

The coming of this event exceeds the condition of mastery and the conventionally accepted authority of what is called the ‘performative’. It thus also exceeds, without contesting its pertinence, the useful distinction between the ‘constative’ and ‘performative’.

(Derrida 1995: xiv)

The structure of this chapter’s argument is simply put. It comes in the form of a number of related propositions concerning the nature of modern freedom, a freedom first expounded for ‘us’ by Machiavelli (Althusser 1990). The chapter opens with an account of this freedom as factual freedom, one whose condition of possibility is a radically contingent time without warrant. Factual freedom conditions the deciding that those such as Carl Schmitt, for example, problematise in terms of sovereignty. Without freedom there is no decision to make, no exception to determine and no friend/enemy distinction to draw.

Preoccupied with the problematic of order and its entailments, Schmitt elides the problematic and entailments of the freedom that is logically anterior to it.
Factically free, modern man does not discover the law, Schmitt agrees, but he makes the law, as Machiavelli maintains, by finding within himself the republican virtue (*virtù*), rather than mere decisional will, required to do so. Freedom’s *virtù* is ultimately underwritten also by the freedom of the sign – that radically contingent undecidability which ultimately defines evental time itself – which the Schmittean sovereign is supposed magisterially to transcend. Criticising traditional definitions of sovereignty as ‘the highest, legally independent, undowered power’, Schmitt argues that this ‘is not the adequate expression of a reality but a formula, a sign, a signal. It is infinitely pliable, and therefore in practice, depending on the situation, either extremely useful or completely useless’ (Schmitt 1998: 17). Schmittean reality is ultimately sign-less. That is why a ‘miracle’ is required to account for how Schmitt’s sovereign decides by appearing to cut through the radical undecidability of the sign; a seeming which Machiavelli would immediately see through. Machiavellian man enacts his freedom instead, however, through his capacity not simply to read but also, and above all, to constantly rewrite the signs of the times. Sign and sex are always also powerfully related in Machiavelli. *Virtù* is political semiotics as sexual potency. For that reason I maintain the vocabulary of ‘man’ throughout this chapter.

Subsequent sections analyse the nature of this Machiavellian moment of modern factical freedom. They do so, first, as a strategic moment. That strategic moment is acted out, second, in the form of a war for, and through, the radically undecidable power of the sign. As semiotic battlespace, factical freedom is continuously required to signify how much killing is enough. But it can never resolve this strategic predicament because the very contingency of evental time – upon which this freedom relies – denies it the possibility of ever securely computing the strategic calculus of necessary killing, which is what ultimately defines its Machiavellian moment. When asked to say how much killing is enough, factical freedom gives only one reply: more.

Locked in a strategic predicament which it can neither escape nor resolve, the Machiavellian moment of modern factical freedom is therefore analysed, third, as an aporia. This section nonetheless also explains that aporias are not passive conditions. Their very lack mobilises powerful political desires. Such desires are acted out in performative figures of political speech. Aporias are what help define a mode of politics, government and rule. They are the source of its most defining, and ultimately irresolvable, problematisations of existence.

Many tropes characterise the performative enactment of the aporia of politics as factical freedom. Before going on to analyse divine violence as the definitive trope of factical freedom, a fourth section analyses a further aspect of the Machiavellian moment. Strategic and aporetic, rather than chronological or dialectical, the Machiavellian moment of modern factical freedom is also promissory. It is kairoslogical, and the promise is the promise of the future itself. What is always already at stake in the promissory economy of the Machiavellian moment of modern factical freedom is not only the future of factical freedom, however, it is the future as factical freedom. No factical freedom, no future.
Delivery is not, however, the only requirement demanded of factical freedom. Its killing is necessary, not arbitrary. What establishes that necessity is a strategic calculus of necessary killing capable of computing how much killing is enough to realise, refresh and secure factical freedom against all the forces which threaten it: principally, in fact, those of the very time which enables it. If it cannot secure a strategic calculus of necessary killing, the Machiavellian moment becomes guilty of mere murder. It must therefore also deliver without the guilt of failing to establish the necessity of its killing. Its violence must therefore somehow expiate as it prevails. In want, however, of a strategic calculus of necessary killing which will determine how much killing is enough, the only violence capable of meeting its requirement of ‘cruelty well-used’ is one so great that it will prevail without application. Such violence recalls aspects of that messianic violence that Walter Benjamin called ‘divine violence’.

In conclusion, while this chapter proceeds by engaging Machiavelli through some of his most distinguished contemporary commentators, notably John Pocock and Miguel Vatter, it is nonetheless also written as a dark political allegory for our own times. This chapter therefore concludes by posting a profound suspicion about those thinkers – Althusser, Badiou, Rancière, Nancy, Agamben and Deleuze, among others – who seek a progressive politics from an evental account of time. An irony is therefore intended to surround the conclusion’s Deleuzean epigraph: ‘Philosophy’s sole aim is to become worthy of the event’.

**Factual freedom**

The alternative to action is delay and temporisation, and once time has become the domain of pure contingency, it is impossible to temporise because there can be no secure assumptions about what time will bring about; or, rather, the only assumption must be that, unless acted upon, it will bring change to one’s disadvantage.

(Pocock 2006: 166)

This chapter first assumes that Machiavelli inaugurates the modern understanding of politics in general and of freedom in particular. John Pocock would, however, disagree. But that is because he allows the modern to be identified with *raison d’état* and sovereignty (Pocock 2006: 563). I do not. I see it grounded in the modern periodising account of the factual freedom of evental time, and in the aporetic strategic predicament posed by the kairological demand that characterises such a temporality.

To analyse the predicament posed by Machiavellian freedom is therefore to analyse our own predicament as politically free in ways that are continuously said to be modern. Along with many commentators, this chapter also acknowledges that this modern understanding of freedom is critically dependent upon Machiavelli’s understanding of time. Time, here, is unaccountably given. It is governed by no law and it issues in no law. Here, ontologically speaking at least, Machiavellian
time takes place as an event. ‘Event’, ‘not [merely] as a temporal punctuality or an instance of presence but, instead, as a dynamic open-ended field of forces, whose historicity prevents experience from closing into representational constructs, psychic spaces, or lived instances’ (Ziarek 2002: 13). In that sense it is radically – that is to say ontologically – contingent. Machiavelli’s figure for this radical ontological contingency – a statement of the real about temporality itself expressed through a traditional divine personage – is Fortuna: capricious, indeterminate but, to a degree, seducible.¹ Machiavellian Man is free, then, not because he is a bearer of rights but because the time in which he exists takes place without any divine, natural or historical warrant.

Machiavellian time (modern political time) is itself, however, also comprised of evental encounters: correlations of historical forces and circumstances inviting intervention to change the course of time. The Machiavellian term of art for such encounters is riscontro. Intimately allied with a family of related terms including, in particular, occasione, or historical events, rinno vazione, or renewing, mutazione, which is usually translated as adaptation, and modi, which is usually translated as ‘manners’ or ‘modes’ that permit adaptation to the radical contingency of Fortuna, riscontro captures the kai rological character of the Machiavellian moment as well, about which more shortly (Ferroni 1993). Modi are performative figures of political speech. They bring a world into play. They might also be called political affects: capacities to move, as well as be moved by, the signs of the times. Modi are the how of factual freedom. Time might be radically contingent and evental but it also comes to presence for Machiavelli, a playwright as well as diplomat and political theoriser, in language, a language of political signification finding its expression in rhetorical and literary tropes (Ascoli and Kahn 1993; Kahn 1985). The ‘modes’ of factual freedom are therefore always modes of signification.

Machiavellian Man is thus freed by the indeterminate nature of time to act into time to change the course of time if he contains within himself the wherewithal to do so. Indeed, if he is to enjoy his factual freedom, he must do so. In a Heideggerian sense, Machiavellian Man is therefore thrown: thrown into what Heidegger calls facticity, the experience of life as factual. What is ‘factual life experience’? asks Heidegger. He answers:

‘Experience’ designates (1) the experiencing activity (2) that which is experienced through this activity … the experiencing self and what is experienced are not torn apart … ‘Experiencing’ does not mean ‘taking-cognisance-of’, but a confrontation-with, the self-assertion of the forms of what is experienced… Factual does not [therefore] mean naturally real or causally determined, nor does it mean real in the sense of a thing. The concept of ‘factual’ may not be interpreted from certain epistemological pre-suppositions, but can be made intelligible only from the concept of the historical.

(Heidegger 2004: 7)

Along with Miguel Vatter, whose extraordinary work on Machiavelli is one of the primary inspirations for this chapter, I therefore call the Machiavellian moment
of modern freedom, factual freedom (Vatter 2000). An iron-bound necessity also attaches to the evental contingency of Machiavellian time in a modern revision, also inaugurated by Machiavelli, of the ancient correlation of contingency and necessity (Vuillemin 1996). It is a predicament that cannot be escaped.

To elaborate, then, factual freedom is not a negative or a positive form of liberty. It is neither a ‘freedom from’ nor a ‘freedom to’. It is a ‘freedom for’: for the assumption of one’s throwness into time without law in order to bring law to time; a freedom to act into time to change the course of time, or not. Factual freedom is a difficult freedom. It is not easily practised and it is easily lost or, indeed, given up. It is not underwritten. For the moment we do not need to go into all the manifold reasons which Machiavelli gives for why it can be lost or surrendered. Suffice to say that, according to Machiavelli, the greatest threat to factual freedom is its own self-corruption: ‘for virtù brings forth tranquillity; tranquillity idleness; idleness disorder; disorder ruin; and similarly from ruin rises order; from order virtù; and from this, glory and good fortune’ (Machiavelli 1988: 811).

Men are therefore continuously in danger of losing, or conceding, the art of practising factual freedom. They become soft. They become corrupted. They may also become inexpert or lack the vigilance required to continuously maintain factual freedom through renewing it. They may simply become incapable of reading the signs of the times correctly or lack the courage and skill to act upon them. Fundamentally martial and imperial in its impulse, factual freedom commonly over-reaches itself and, thus weakened, it may also fall to the tyranny of authorities other than its own self-governing republican institutions.

A common Jeremiah of factual freedom is thus to bemoan its imperial overstretch, as if more judicious policy would somehow save it from its fate, that of imperialising self-corruption (Hörnqvist 2004: 17). Fear of the loss of political virtù consequent upon the detumesence of republican potency is another typical republican trope. Revolution is continuously therefore required to renew factual freedom, because every form of rule atrophies freedom through the indolence it progressively instils in men. Factual freedom must therefore maintain a constant watch on itself and its condition or else it will perish. An obsession with security is never far from the operationalisation of this freedom.

In this account of freedom, ‘the notions of “right” and “virtue” can also never be reduced to a common meaning’ (Pocock 2006: 560). Rights are ultimately a juridical phenomenon to which one lays claim; the virtue required to practise factual freedom is an affect which factically free men may or may not find within themselves, cultivate and practise. Roman virtus, ‘Tuscanised’ by Machiavelli as virtù, is the political affect for the Florentine. There is, however, a crucial difference between the two. The difference is this. ‘Romans’, Pocock explains, ‘knew of virtus as a characteristic of the citizen and thought of it not only as exercised within a public discipline but as consisting in a religious respect for that discipline as a good in itself’. In Machiavelli, however, ‘Virtù is capable of being used when the capacity is not disciplined by moral or political restraints. That is why Machiavelli can write of the Prince’s virtù when it is being exercised illegitimately.’ It denotes
the individual’s capacity for action’, Pocock goes on, ‘including the political and the military’ (Pocock 2006: 557). If there was, as Pocock says, ‘something primal about virtus’ (Pocock 2006: 558), virtù extends and intensifies that primal quality. No longer simply part of a wider cult of civic religion, however, virtù, the capacity to act into time to change the course of time, itself becomes civic religion to factical freedom. In short, whereas virtus was part of a wider social and political cult, virtù itself simply is the cult.

Despite the weight of scholarly exegesis, then, and despite the political anthropology of human cupidity which Machiavelli is also famed for proclaiming, Machiavelli’s understanding of being does not ultimately concern ‘Man’. It concerns the nature of existence as historical time.\(^8\) Substituting history for divinity – Horkheimer among others noting that Machiavelli’s new ‘political science’ ‘is furnished primarily by the past’ (Horkheimer 1995: 317) – the Florentine interrogates how the problematic of politics must be posed and resolved when time is understood as evental. Since no external law legislates the law of evental time, and no transcendental rule authorises rule, law and rule are the revolutionary historical accomplishments of political innovation that are not so much warranted by an order in nature, or history, as called for by its absence (Vatter 2000). Their very possibility is afforded in time by time as the historically contingent event of what Vatter calls ‘no-rule’.

For Machiavelli, the law does presuppose that individuals are bad or culpable by nature as a condition of positing that ‘the law makes them good’. The law is thus often figured in Machiavelli as a cure for the originary cupidity of Man. But acknowledging the facticity of freedom, taking place in time as event, one must gloss the priority which is ordinarily accorded to this reading of Machiavelli. The factical freedom of the people, recognising the originary violent contingency of rule, is ultimately founded in the desire for what Vatter calls ‘no-rule’: rule both materialises factical freedom as political form but also vitiates factical freedom as originary freedom from rule. The more rules rulers make, the more the people are therefore compelled to ‘cheat’ and ultimately to revolt. Freedom must therefore redeem itself against the ‘corrupting’ effects of political form by returning to its origins in the desire for no-rule. This impulse finds its figure in ‘the people’ and, as Machiavelli observes, ‘the people can thus be satisfied because their aims are more honorable than those of the nobles; for the latter want only to oppress and the former only to avoid being oppressed’ (1988: 35). An opening of time to be seized by a factical freedom continuously threatened by its own political accomplishments, but renewed by its political virtù, evental time conditions all that is politically possible for time conceived as history, and for Man thus conceived as the free agent of his own mis-fortune.

By means of this onto-political logic, Machiavelli therefore institutes a novel account of the circulatory character of time in terms of a continuous return to the origins of freedom in the event of no-rule: a continuous re-turning, ridurre ai principii, that posits all political authority in continuous polemical tension with the freedom that simultaneously both founds and subverts it (Vatter 2000).
This circulation of time is no longer, in other words, back to God but back to the radical contingency of evental time from which factical freedom takes its warrant.

**Strategic**

It is the use of an engagement for the purpose of the war.

(von Clausewitz 1984: Book One, ‘Strategy’)

It is precisely here that we first hear the modern assertion that the primary characteristic of political action is strategic behaviour; that the man of virtù is essentially a strategos. Politically grounded in the question posed most starkly by another political strategist, Lenin, in terms of ‘what is to be done?’ this strategic ‘what’ also demands a strategic ‘how’, a reliable political calculus of some description.

There is, however, a profound difference between the strategic situation of Leninist Man and Machiavellian Man. That difference further illuminates the character of factical freedom because it compounds the problem of furnishing factical freedom with a political calculus. Leninist Man labours under the illusion that he is underwritten by the dialectic of history. His archetypes, good and bad, are in a sense already pre-inscribed. If his strategic predicament is not already fully resolved there is an historical calculus which will resolve it for him because it guarantees that an answer lies, at least in principle, in the very movement of history as such.

Machiavellian time is not providential. That we know. But neither is Machiavellian time dialectical. This we do not necessarily know, because so many commentators, including his most astute, persist in labelling Machiavellian time dialectical when their very own most sophisticated interrogations establish that it is not. However much the wheel of fortune turns, it is perfectly evident from Machiavelli, and indeed his commentators, that time is not dialectical and that Fortuna is no dialectician. The time of the event has no unity and the factical freedom that it grants enjoys no underwriter of last resort. Factical freedom is instead condemned to rely upon its own continuously changing political artifice to figure out how to act into time to change the course of time in order to renew its freedom in circumstances which are challenging in continuously novel ways, because time, and the times themselves, are radically contingent.

To repeat, such contingency is both ontological and historical. There is no order to temporality here. Time, itself, issues in no order. Order is a human accomplishment. It is, as Hobbes was later to put it, artefactual. As Vatter also observes, there is no rule to rule. The contingency of any and every rule may, therefore, be revoked in favour of the necessity of another rule demanded by continuous change in the signs of the times (Vatter 2000). If the factical freedom of the Machiavellian moment is to have a political calculus it has therefore to be fashioned from historical archetypes which display virtù – ‘Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, Theseus and the like’ (Machiavelli 1988: 20) – rather than from archetypes attuned to some telos or dialectic of time said to be operating in history.
In addition, men's actions compound the ontological contingency of time historically. Men do what they do, but they cannot ultimately command the outcome of what they do. Human action itself creates contingency as well. Thus, by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the radical contingency of factual freedom was argued out in Atlantic societies, and especially through Anglo-American political discourse, in terms of the crisis of political obligation it posed, and the many novel devices, such as covenant and contract, by which the passions and the interests, in which contingency was by then said to lie, might be transformed into binding political significations.¹⁰

Factual freedom's condition is therefore strategical, not dialectical. In fact, the dialectic is not strategic at all. In its concern with the transcendent unity and historical order of time it is, of course, profoundly onto-theological. The difference is summarised brilliantly by Foucault. ‘Dialectical logic’, he says, ‘is a logic which plays with terms which are contradictory but within the element of homogeneity … which promises to dissolve them into one unity’. Strategic logic is concerned, instead, ‘to establish the possible connections between disparate terms which remain disparate’. ‘The logic of strategy’, he continues, ‘is the logic of the connection of the heterogeneous and it is not, repeat not, the logic of the homogenization of things which are contradictory’ (Foucault 2004: 44).¹¹ Strategy is thus an *ars combinatoria*, rather than an *ars differentia*. It reads the heterogeneous signs of the times in order to fashion timely interventions into the course of time, continuously seeking to secure itself against all the changing correlation of forces which distinguish the changing nature of the times, not least those at play within the play of factual freedom itself. It does so, quintessentially, renewing time by making time. It is ultimately creative rather than reactive. It must be. For time itself provides no order or law to be represented. Rule is made, and applied, not discovered. Factual freedom does not, therefore, simply encounter strategic predicaments. Factual freedom is a strategic predicament.

Posed by the radical contingency of evental time, the strategic predicament of factual freedom is therefore also a continuously emergent situation. Such a continuously emergent situation is simultaneously also, however, an emergency, hence the immediacy, urgency and brutal instrumentality of Lenin’s rendition of it. From Machiavelli and many others, of course, we also understand that the *ultima ratio* of strategic behaviour is force and violence. Strategy does not simply concern the application of force; it expresses the purely instrumentalised will to power of free agents in a universe construed as the *spielraum* of their factual freedom. As a strategic predicament, factual freedom is therefore intimately allied with violence. This is not a contradiction. It is not a paradox of freedom. Neither is violence one political instrument among others for the factically free. If factual freedom is essentially strategical, and the essence of strategy is violence, to be factically free is to be violent – strategically. Every strategist of the modern period, including also, iconically, von Clausewitz, of course, has proclaimed as much (Howard 1984a).

The very grid of intelligibility which governs the strategic problematic of being factically free is therefore that of war: ‘modern’ war, will to power as the
deployment of force for the realisation of the political objective of being factically free. Machiavelli is no more acute, no more remorseless, in his analytic of factical freedom than in his frank recognition of the violence required to be factically free. Famously, he calls it the art of ‘cruelty well-used’. Says Machiavelli, ‘Well used cruelties (if one may speak well of evil) are those that are done all at once, when it is necessary to secure oneself, and in which one does not persist, but are converted into the greatest possible advantage of the subjects’ (Machiavelli 1988: vii). Continuously reading the heterogeneous signs of the times, paying special attention, for example, to those historical exemplars who are claimed to have done so successfully in the past, particularly by excelling in the arts of war, strategy is a martial semiotics concerned not only with reacting to the times but with taking charge and reshaping them. This signals a new order for the sign of the times. Modern Machiavellians, in the second Bush White House for example, embraced this very idea:

> We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality – judiciously, as you will – we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out. We’re history’s actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.

(Suskind 2004)

Factical freedom is thus a semiotic battlespace (Ascoli and Kahn 1993). Contemporary military strategic discourse, and the ‘effects based operations’, of the so-called ‘information age’ in the US and the UK especially, but more widely also across the Atlantic world, now frankly describe it as such (Dillon and Read 2001; Dillon 2002a, b). Weaponising information as much as it informationalises weapons, factical freedom in the twenty-first century explicitly proclaims itself as war pursued for the power of the sign through the very undecidability of the sign (Dillon 2002a). Its significatory modes – modi – are demonstratively constitutive and experimental.\(^\text{12}\)

Thus the Machiavellian moment of modern factical freedom is not only a strategic moment rather than a dialectical moment: it is also a continuously emergent moment, one which enacts a permanent crisis. The emergency of the historically emergent freedom of republican virtù is, then, evental not juridical. It concerns that universalised, sexual and gendered potency expressed historically as politically strategic intelligence and ‘savvy’, or virtù, whose loss would eventuate in the loss of freedom as such. This political trope is no arcane theoretical issue. It is endlessly played out in the popular culture as well as the politics of Atlantic societies, that of the American Republic in particular.\(^\text{13}\)

**Significatory**

Must heaven speak? It has already manifested its will by striking signs. . . . It is up to us to do the rest.

(Machiavelli 1988: xxvi)
First entering on stage as a metaphor referring to an autonomous force outside the subject, by chapters 6–7 of *The Prince*, Machiavellian contingency – *Fortuna* – is redefined as that which is produced by a lack of *virtù*. Factual freedom’s very condition of possibility, contingency, also becomes an alibi for political failure: the loss of *virtù*. Contingency will only prevail over the freedom which it grants if factual freedom becomes deficient in *virtù*: ‘*Fortuna* exercises her power when no barriers are erected against her; she brings her efforts to bear upon ill-defended points’ (Machiavelli 1988: xxv). Thus, *virtù* is no slave of time, not least because time as event is an opening, not a determinant. *Fortuna* ultimately becomes a sign of the violent non–coincidence of actions and times, a symptom that *virtù* has given up the goal of changing the times (Vatter 2000). Freed from blind chance as much as from providence, and possessed of *virtù*, this critical Machiavellian revision of the classical problematic of the necessary and the contingent (Vuillemin 1996; Dillon 2007) allows factual freedom the polemical force to act into time to change the course of time by virtue of the potent freedom which evental time itself makes possible.

More than a historically linguistic event, however, the advent of a new form of political discourse here, the opening of time as significatory event in Machiavelli, is the very eventalness of the sign itself. As temporality becomes historicity so the historical becomes archival and the archive becomes subject to interpretation. Machiavelli himself is a master of this interpretive art. Everything in his world ‘signifies’, but nothing comes with stable meaning pre-installed. No sign is certain and no sign signifies unless it is circulated and read. Machiavelli might well have been familiar with Lorenzo Valla’s historically grounded linguistics and its attack on referential understanding of language: ‘Words uttered by Men are indeed natural, but their meaning is determined by conventions’ (Najemy 1995: 93). Ultimately there is no controlling the circumstances of its reading. Posing as mere historical observer, but understanding that in this cockpit of factual freedom the sign must be successfully instrumentalised if *Fortuna* is to be mastered by bending time to political intent, Machiavelli struggles to divine how signification itself can be tamed politically.

Signification is thus the discursive currency of all political intercourse. Machiavellian Man is thereby compelled to struggles with the currency of the sign – in Greek *sēma* means ‘coin’ as well as ‘sign’ or ‘word’ (Shell 1982: 2) – in ways which recall Renaissance, as well as our own, understandings of the equally uncanny power of money (Shell 1982; Poitras 2000). While disavowing rhetoric through a nonetheless rhetorically powerful discourse of the real – itself a classic rhetorical trope – even within *The Prince* Machiavelli cedes the radical polysemous instability of the sign and the absent presence of the real he continuously invokes (Najemy 1995). Since the timing of signing is everything, the exemplars of political reputation which he continually invokes are unmasked. They are not real historical examples at all, but counterfeited species of political exchange coined, circulated and deployed by Machiavelli himself to buttress an account of freedom – the Machiavellian moment – which characterises our own modern political times.
But he was perhaps too much the dramatist, and too much the ‘Renaissance Man’, to be entirely seduced by the idea that such a manoeuvre could master the sign. In any event, ontologising as he historicises, Machiavelli writes the real back into the source from whence he claims to have discovered it: namely history. Thus does he underwrite the political freedom he espouses as he simply claims to record it. Machiavelli’s ‘real’ is the virtuoso product of his own art of political signification. It is not simply the case, however, that the referent of ‘the real’ escapes the web with which signification seeks to ensnare it merely because the polysemous power of signification renders the sign undecidably contingent on the unpredictable circumstances of its circulation and its reading. The referent of ‘the real’ continuously escapes the web of signification because the very power of the sign as such lies in the fact that it cannot in fact be securely represented against any so-called ‘reality’ if it is to continue to signify (Derrida 1976, 1981a). Rhetoric besides, Machiavelli’s political reality is plainly an effect of the deconstructive power of signification itself. For that very reason it is, and it expresses, radical undecidability.

Notoriously proclaiming himself a realist, then, what Machiavelli actually does instead is describe how political virtù might be capable of conjuring the effect of ‘the real’ on command through the metistic arts of political invention. Whereas virtù is fundamentally an affect of character, all character nonetheless presupposes a related form of skill or intelligence (Pocock 2006: 157). Some form of expertise, however crude, correlates with character, however simple. Virtù is allied to what the Greeks called metistic intelligence: the cunning of ‘seeming’ (Detienne and Vernant 1978; Pucci 1995; Dunkle 1989; Dillon 2002). The very metistic intelligence of political virtù nonetheless always requires something in excess of itself to make it work. That supplement is the deconstructive donation of evental time in the form of Logos itself. It is unaccountably given to Man, and yet also contingently shaped by Man. Given time, Machiavellian Man is also obliged to make time for himself metistically (Detienne and Vernant 1978; Pucci 1995).

Whether or not deception, itself an art of Machiavellian politics, is intended, the sign is in fact fated to dissimulate if it is actually to fabricate. Machiavelli knows this. Politics thus unfolds in a continuous experimental play of appearance: ‘when it is a matter of judging the inner nature of Men, above all of princes, since we cannot have recourse to courts we must stick only to consequences’ (Machiavelli 1988: chapter xviii; Merleau Ponty 1984). Politically speaking, then, polysemic signs are a force to be conjured with. Machiavellian Man is more Magus than rational analyst, strategist or political scientist.

Free to act into time to change the course of time by a radical contingency that can never be mastered yet must be artfully played, because time’s arbitrary giveness continuously subverts its translation into history via political fabrication, Machiavelli’s political exemplars are archetypes. Abstracted from their age, their own conjunctures of time and place, these exemplars are entirely unreal. It is only in the form of maxim and cliché that they can ever be made to appear politically effective at all. Machiavelli’s Moses, for example – a standard Renaissance trope,
implausible from start to finish as a ‘real’ historical character – can be taken to stand for them all.

Moses first appears in Chapter 6 of *The Prince*, which is concerned with those who acquire new princedoms by dint of their own virtù and military self-sufficiency. Thereafter, he last appears in the *Discourses*, where Machiavelli gives a slightly more extended account of the political lessons to be drawn from a comparative analysis of the fate of Moses, Savonarola and Piero Soderini, a contemporary Florentine political operator.

Moses was, however, neither a prophet nor a prince. He did not, as Machiavelli maintains, found a religion, a people or a state. The Jews had followed a law – having observed a covenant with Yahweh from the time of Abraham – before Moses became the reluctant conduit for transmitting another to them. What sort of leader was this biblical Moses, asks one humanist scholar? She replies, ‘Accidental, reluctant, obstinate, despairing, – and in the worst Machiavellian fate hated, thus ruined by the people’ (O’Rourke Boyle 2004: 227). A killer, reluctant also to deliver his people from Egyptian bondage, contesting his election by Yahweh, Moses ‘died alone in a foreign wilderness, divinely obstructed from entering the Promised Land’ (O’Rourke Boyle 2004: 227). By Machiavellian standards of effective leadership, ‘biblical Moses was incompetent’ (O’Rourke Boyle 2004: 230) and ‘fatuous [especially] for the Exodus’ incident on which Machiavelli drew (O’Rourke Boyle 2004: 245). More to the point, Machiavelli’s Moses, claimed to be derived from ‘continuous study of the ancient world … diligently analysed and long pondered’ (Machiavelli 1988: 227), was a hackneyed cliché of Renaissance rhetoric.

A parade of authors had conscripted Moses’ name for ideological political ends with flattering but false comparisons to Plato’s philosopher-king, the Bishop of Basil Caesarea, the emperor Constantine, the king Mathias, and a procession of popes. Machiavelli the opportunist inserts his artifice into this convenience. Yet, however, preposterous their extrapolations from Scripture, the allegorists did not boast of historical purpose or erudition, as he did, but specified their contemplative intentions. Machiavelli’s abuse of scripture is fabulation.

(O’Rourke Boyle 2004: 245)

In thus positing a ‘significatory realism’ shot through with undecidability, Machiavelli’s eventual time reproblematises knowing as much as doing. For all he proclaims it realist, Machiavelli’s politics is strategic experimentation inflected with more than a touch of magical realism. Outputs are always fated to become outcomes; the often unintended consequences not simply of what men do but of the unpredictable impact of their actions on the wider eventual political economy of reputation and seeming into which their factual freedom throws them: ‘For a prince then it is not necessary to have in fact all the above-described [virtues] but it is very necessary to appear to have them’ (Machiavelli 1988: 57–8).
The Florentine’s vocation was ultimately, therefore, itself more political than philosophical (Pocock 2006: 4). Within the compass of such an evental understanding of time Machiavelli was primarily concerned with telling us how men act out their factual freedom. In particular, he was concerned to tell us what men are required to do if they are to retain their freedom by resolving their strategic predicament; this determines how and when to act into time to change the course of time by specifying how much killing was enough to do so. For time as event does not simply free Machiavelli’s Man, or time, from cosmological determination. Reposing both the nature of Man and Time, Machiavelli ties them back together in a novel, historically politicising, relationship. Time becomes the radically contingent history that free Men make in necessarily violent pursuit of their mis-fortune.

It is important to be absolutely clear about the character of the necessity that attaches to killing here. Killing may be said to be necessary for all sorts of reasons. Factual freedom is not distinguished by the fact that it is necessary to kill. If it was then factual freedom could not be distinguished from any other political regime claiming that it is necessary to kill. Factual freedom is distinguished by the fact that what is necessary about its killing is calibrating how much killing is enough to enact and preserve its freedom. This it simply cannot do, but more of that in a moment.

As it frees politics from cosmological determination, the radical contingency of evental time thus immanently conditions the very operationality of the Machiavellian moment. Machiavelli offers us both praxiology and an ontopolitical account of this condition. Central to its praxis is command of signification: ‘Must heaven speak? It has already manifested its will by striking signs... It is up to us to do the rest’ (Machiavelli 1988: 89). Through command of the signs of the times Machiavellian Man seeks the command of time: ‘I also believe that he is happy who can match his way of proceeding with the qualities of the times’. Just as no praxis is ontologically innocent, however, no ontology is praxiologically insignificant.

Machiavelli’s teaching here says something fundamental about the co-production of ontology and practice in the reading of the signs of the times. Existence takes place as history in the form of signification (Hörnqvist 2004). It is therefore pointless to try to decide which comes first: time or sign. What appears to be two things is in fact one, albeit double. In Machiavellian terms, historical events (ocasione) are encounters (riscontro) through which the institution and reconstitution of political form continuously emerge in the significatory modi of political action.

Probing the entailments of a political facticity which owes its account of freedom to a radically contingent temporal ontology, itself finding historical expression in the polysemous undecidability of the sign, since factual existence takes place as signification and strategy derives from command of the sign, Machiavelli struggles to immanentise the rule of meaning in the polyphenous play of political signs in order to secure the success of doing. In the process, he cannot but be ontological as he claims to be historical and practical. He cannot but be practical and historical as he expresses an ontology: an account of the real which demands certain practices. The Machiavellian moment thus acts out the significatory undecidability through which the materiality of its strategic condition is constructed. It does so through a
wide variety of political tropes, including those concerning, for example, sexuality as well as strategy, since virtù is nothing if not political savvy as sexual potency. Definitive of it is, however, strategic understanding of cruelty well-used, and the 'balls' to use it.\(^\text{19}\)

It is the very political acting into evental time, seeking to manipulate, exploit and command the meaning of the contingent events of time, which constitutes the republican world order. The play on 'world order' is intended. Republican virtue seeks to instantiate a republican sociality, or world. But that world is a jealous one. Like capital, republican virtue finds that there can be only one world, if the world of the republic is to prevail. In the process, republican forms and republican virtue must affirm and enact the temporal ontology which enables them historically. Ontology and historicity thus irrevocably contaminate one another in the Machiavellian moment. (When do they not?) That contamination reverberates throughout the modern politics of the factual freedom of the event which Machiavelli inaugurates. In the event, whatever historical Man makes of the Machiavellian moment, his political action is irreducibly indebted to the unaccountable donation of time even as it seeks to make its own time as history. If the very supplementarity of time makes factual freedom it also breaks it. ‘Given time’ remorselessly deconstructs historical time, all the time (Derrida 1992a).\(^\text{20}\) And that’s a fact.

Machiavelli is notorious only because he insisted on what other champions of this account of freedom elide. If the Machiavellian moment is, as John Pocock expressed it, a matter of ‘the republican ideal [posing] the problem of the universal’s existence in secular particularity’ (Pocock 2006: 9), its political economy of emancipation requires a corresponding political economy of violence. Unless it can specify, historically, who for freedom’s sake must die, the killing it does will merely perpetuate a vicious cycle of violence rather than a virtuous circle of emancipation. If we go on to ask from whence derives the strategic purchase of cruelty well-used, Machiavelli answers clearly and consistently. It is on the minds of men, specifically their capacity to use and read signs. If this theatre of cruelty and politically inspired death is to have its effect, it can do so only as the lethally calibrated signification of a power that none will mistake in its effect and in its expiation of the killing that it must do. But we, along with Machiavelli also, know all about the power of the sign (Machiavelli 1961).\(^\text{21}\) Its power cannot be escaped but neither can it be secured. Neither effect nor expiation is, or can be, guaranteed by it. This is the strategic predicament of factual freedom.

Other regimes may therefore be murderous or genocidal. Their mythic violence may be an expression of some tribal, racial, sexual, gendered, tyrannical, religious, totalitarian, oligarchic or charismatic essence: what Benjamin calls, ‘bloody power over mere life for its own sake’ (Benjamin 2004: 250). But factual freedom is not like that. It is not power over mere life for its own sake. It is power over life in the event of life to express and enact the evental freedom of life, the very capacity for vivere civile which distinguishes it from other forms of existence. Its essence lies in its being free to read the signs of the times to act into time to change the very course of time via a strategic command of signification, a generic weaponisation...
of the *Logos* that renders violence politically instrumental in the cause of freedom. Machiavellian Man is therefore not free in this way because he is bad. Though bad he undoubtedly is, ‘All those who have written upon civil institutions demonstrate (and history is full of examples to support them) that whoever desires to found a state and give it laws must start with assuming that all Men are bad’ (Machiavelli 1970: 81–2, 117). Men are ultimately bad, however, because factically they are free.

Enacting a realm of radically contingent time, political timing for the factically free is a matter of being contingently effective throughout time via the art of cruelty well-used. Factical freedom must therefore always be well-played at the limit of its condition, and its condition is always and everywhere at the limit. In the event, those free men who cannot kill well, politically, will ultimately live and die less well because they will lose their freedom. ‘I conclude that, since circumstances vary and men when acting lack flexibility, they are successful if their methods match the circumstances and unsuccessful if they do not’ (Machiavelli 1988: 87). Required to kill well politically, the Machiavellian moment of modern factical freedom revolves around the permanent crisis – or emergency – posed by the radical elusiveness of a satisfactory formulation for this, its definitive requirement. If it cannot resolve its strategic predicament it will not be able to deliver its promise.

**Aporetic**

Aporia rather than antinomy.

(Derrida 1993)

Here we approach the nub of the argument. Factically free, Machiavellian Man – modern man – is continuously confronted with the eternal return of a moment, the Machiavellian moment, which poses the same politico-strategic question. The Leninist formulation of it was: what is to be done? But having reviewed Machiavelli’s insistence on the *ultima ratio* of factical freedom being the art of cruelty well-used, we are in a position to restate the strategic question which confronts it. Put simply, the question is this: how much killing is enough?

What factical freedom ultimately requires to enact being factically free is thus a strategic calculus of necessary killing. But none such is available. Indeed, within the orbit of contingent time which enframes factical freedom none such is possible; there is no law to time, time issues no law, and the signs of the times are radically undecidable. It would be a profound mistake to think that therefore nothing can be done. Anything may be done. Anything is often done. Indeed, as it turns out, anything and everything must be done, if necessary. For sufficient killing is necessary to being free. Such killing becomes unlimited because factical freedom is, in fact, incapable of answering the question how much killing is sufficient? The point, then, is that Machiavellian Man, for all the emphasis on his strategic savvy, cannot know for sure what he does when he kills; hence the sobering reminder provided by the epigraph which heads this chapter.
We are now also in a position to understand an allied matter: why \textit{salus populi} becomes the supreme law of republican freedom. The Machiavellian moment of modern factual freedom is practically defined by the requirement to have a strategic calculus of necessary killing which will answer the question: how much killing is enough? A politics thus modelled on war, this \textit{logos} of war is remorselessly also inscribed on the \textit{logos} of peace through discourses of security: ‘to act in politics is to expose oneself to the insecurities of human power systems, to enter a world of mutability and \textit{peripeteia} whose dimension is the history of political insecurity’ (Pocock 2006: 36). Hence the full tag \textit{salus populi suprema lex esto} (‘security of the people is the supreme law’: Machiavelli 1970: 40–2).

In the Machiavellian moment of modern factual freedom peace therefore becomes the extension of war through securitisation of the everyday \textit{vivere civile} of republican virtue. This fuels the watch which the republic must permanently exercise on and against itself and its citizens: ‘That a Strict Watch should be kept on the Doings of Citizens’, titles Machiavelli in one of his discourses, ‘since under cover of Good Works there often arises the Beginning of Tyranny’ (Machiavelli 1970: 28). Directed towards all actual and virtual enemies of the republic – any one and anything can be such – this impetus to instantiate and continuously resecure the republic through approximating a form of power so great that it would work without use, and in thus prevailing without bloodshed simultaneously also expiate, bears down most, therefore, on the civic republican \textit{persona} itself: both individual and collective. For it is there that Machiavelli teaches us that republican \textit{virtù} is continuously won, lost and re-won.

External threat may therefore aggravate and excite, or otherwise provide an outlet for, but it does not essentially constitute the fear that constitutively stalks the Machiavellian moment of modern factual freedom and its martial civic ethos. That fear is sourced, instead, from the very ontopolitical conditions of evental temporality which provide that freedom with its original warrant (Connolly 1995). Nothing is more corruptive of this freedom in its continuous cycle of exhaustion and renewal, however, than the relentless surveillance and limitless violence required to reproduce and secure it. Herein, then, lies the intense aporia which also defines it.

If the radical contingency of time frees Machiavellian Man for the task of continuously reinventing and renewing his freedom in the incalculably contingent correlation of forces which comprises time – ontologically and historically – it simultaneously also therefore deprives him of the very possibility of the strategic calculus required to secure his freedom politically. Factical freedom thus poses an irresolvable problem to itself. Its strategic predicament is therefore also an aporia. To be factically free is to be in want of a strategic calculus of necessary killing, one which would resolve the problem of cruelty well-used – which is to say, answer the question: how much killing is enough?

There is no escape from this predicament, for the factically free, and there is no resolution to it. That is precisely what an aporia is: an inescapable and irresolvable predicament. This does not mean to say that nothing happens in an aporia. As
Richard Beardsworth brilliantly explains in his still unrivalled account *Derrida and The Political*:

> An aporia demands decision, one cannot remain within it; at the same time its essential irreducibility to the cut of the decision makes the decision which one makes contingent, to be made again. The promise of the future (*that there is a future*) is located in this contingency.\(^{23}\)

*(Beardsworth 1996: 5; emphasis added)*

In this specific instance, factical freedom lacks the strategic calculus of necessary killing that would secure its freedom and differentiate its killing from mere murder. This lack is, however, the well-spring of its complex and most powerful political desire, the desire not only to capitalise instrumentally on the event of its very own eventalness but to relive it also of the guilt which its necessary killing necessarily imposes. The Machiavellian moment is not only strategic, significatory and aporetic. To realise one’s power, while expiating oneself of the guilt associated with the violence necessary to it, effects a conjuncture that is as much auspicious as it is decisional. This moment is therefore also kairological. We have then to consider how this additional, kairological, quality also distinguishes the Machiavellian moment of modern factical freedom.

Without a strategic calculus of necessary killing equal to the task of teaching it how much killing is enough to continuously renew the promise of freedom, modern freedom founders in its own murderous adventure. What it requires as a condition of its very operationality is precisely what it can neither fashion nor discover without invoking the divine; a power which not only prevails but, 'Praise be to God', expiates as it does so. *Pace* Carl Schmitt, and others, the theological absolutism of Christian divinity is not only sovereignly all powerful; critically, also, it has the power to forgive sin and expiate guilt. In this instance the guilt associated with necessary killing in want of that strategic calculus which would teach it how much killing was enough; the guilt, in short, of the strategic aporia of the Machiavellian moment of factical freedom. For all it proclaims itself religiously sceptical and politically secular, modern freedom continuously invokes the all-powerful expiating force of the sacred in the process of enacting its necessary killing. Thus exposing itself to be religiously structured, the Machiavellian moment of modern factical freedom without benefit of godhead poses a challenge which Nietzsche, Heidegger, Bataille, Derrida and Foucault have been among the very few to take seriously. In the main they have been excoriated for doing so.

**Kairological**

...what we take hold of when we seize *kairos* is not another time, but a contracted and abridged *chronos*.

*(Agamben 2005)*
In an ‘Afterword’ written for a new edition of the *Machiavellian Moment* almost thirty years after the book’s initial publication, John Pocock gave more attention to the idea of a ‘moment’ than he had in his original text. In fact, he identified several different ways in which the concept of ‘moment’ was deployed and might be further deployed. Elucidating the concept of moment, however, raises more questions about the strategic and aporetic character of the Machiavellian inheritance of the Atlantic tradition than Pocock addresses. We have to go through and beyond Pocock to get to them, and, by this means, to the last two points of my argument concerning the kairotological nature of that moment and its characteristic appeal to a form of ‘divine violence’.

The first understanding of moment, Pocock tells us, is the original or what he calls ‘the historic “moment” at which Machiavelli appeared and impinged upon thinking about politics’ (Pocock 2006: 554). A second is the methodological concept of moment characteristic of the Cambridge School of political thought, which advocates ‘the return of texts to the contexts in which they were first written’ (Pocock 2006: 554). A third moment extends this methodological application of moment to the mobility of texts in time: ‘the fortunes of texts, and the discourses they may be said to have conveyed as they travel from one context to another’, specifically the fate of Machiavellian texts as they moved ‘from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century and from Florence to England, Scotland and Revolutionary America’ (Pocock 2006: 554). None of these moments especially concern my argument here; although, by allegory, the implied criticism of the American republic must by now be quite evident.

A fourth account of moment, however, and the point at which Pocock’s analysis begins fruitfully to exceed the historical confines he nonetheless tries to set for it, derives from what he calls the two ‘ideal’ moments indicated by Machiavelli’s writings: ‘the moment at which the formation or foundation of a “republic” appears possible’ and ‘the moment at which its formation is seen to be precarious’, entailing a ‘crisis in the history to which it belongs’ (Pocock 2006: 554). But these turn out to be a single moment, ‘The “Machiavellian moment” as that in which the republic is involved in historical tensions or contradictions which it either generates or encounters’ (Pocock 2006: 554).24 Pocock then provides a succinct account of the aporetic character of this moment: ‘Here we might say, was the original “Machiavellian moment”; the free republic set itself problems it might not be able to solve’ (Pocock 2006: 559).25 But there is an additional quality to this Machiavellian moment. Pocock touches upon it when recognising something primal about the character of virtus and, a fortiori, also of virtù (Pocock 2006: 558).

In this elaboration of ‘moment’ Pocock himself thus takes us beyond the idea that the Machiavellian moment is a simply an historical moment. Every thing Machiavelli says, and everything incidentally that Pocock also says, establishes that there is no telos to history, no dialectic at work within it, access to whose logic would guarantee the success of strategic interventions into the course of time. The Machiavellian moment is therefore not simply an historical moment, chronologi-
moment. It is less ideal, however, than existential. It happens. It refers to an account of what it is to exist, and what is entailed by existing, in which there is always already an excess of existence as such over particular historical forms of existence, the unaccountable giveness of time and its taking place historically. Strategic and aporetic, in which the aporia contains the very promise that, in Beardsworth’s terms, there is a future to come, the Machiavellian moment of modern factical freedom is ultimately not only a strategic and an aporetic but also a kairological moment (Martinez in Ascoli and Kahn 1993: 135).

The French historian Monique Trédé lays out in great detail the various senses of the term *kairos* that emerge from the time of Homer to end of the fourth century BC, and their employment in both rhetoric and politics (Trédé 1992). She carefully analyses, in particular, the political sense of the *kairos* as that moment of opportunity, decision and promise which must be seized by timely strategic interventions characteristic of the practices of rhetoric, medicine and politics alike. As Pierre Aubenque also put it, *kairos* is ‘the moment when the course of time, insufficiently directed, seems as if to hesitate and vacillate, for the good as well as for the bad of man’ (Aubenque, cited in Alliez 1996: 244n).

It was no coincidence that *kairos* was especially associated with rhetoric and with medicine in the ancient world, for it was concerned with reading signs in order to fashion timely interventions. It called for a symptomology of audiences in rhetoric as much as for a symptomology of the body in medicine. The same also obtained in its application to politics and war. In Greek the *strategos* was the one who held the sign which men followed in battle (Dillon 2002). Thucydides similarly described *kairos* as a situation that elicits political and military leaders to act at a strategic or appropriate time in order to achieve the optimum result. The *kairos*, then, understood as that right time to act or to make political decisions, consists in both the perceiving and the seizing of the moment (Calcagno 2007; White 1987). *Kairos* nonetheless also assumed a powerful Judeo-Christian inflection. That inflection emphasised the promise that also lies within the kairological moment (Heidegger 2004; Hemming 2003). This promissory inflection is powerfully at work within the Machiavellian moment of modern factical freedom.

A spatio-temporal event of time without warrant, *kairos* is not (simply) chronological and it is not dialectical, but neither is it an expression of time as duration (Heidegger 2004). In its persistent recurrent eventalness, kairological time is a kind of ‘now’ time, a suspension of time in expectation of a future always to come. In as much as it requires that the ways in which we live are fashioned by the requirement to live in anticipation appropriately of it, *kairos* too demands a form of governance.26 The time of the instant, indeed of time itself as the ‘time that remains’, kairological time is the eternal return of the same recurrent moment in which human being must assume its factical freedom and engage the mis-fortune offered by its indeterminate existence. One is thus always in the position of deciding and of being decided in the kairological time of factical freedom.

Something else is, therefore, going on here. The Machiavellian moment of modern factical freedom not only necessitates strategic decision. It not only poses
an inescapable condition and an irresolvable problem as well. And it is not simply the fact of its lack – the impossibility of a strategic calculus of necessary killing – which propels its political desire. If it were only a strategically aporetic moment, its problem would be epistemological: lack of the strategic competence to resolve its predicament. However, its lack is not the impossibility of secure knowing. To be sure, there is a ‘not knowing’, or, to be precise, an impossibility of secure knowing. But structure of the lack which propels the Machiavellian moment of modern factical freedom is ultimately not epistemological. It is not, simply, the absence of secure knowing.

Factual freedom is, in addition, an auspicious moment, because factical freedom is not only always yet to come, it is a yet to come in which the power that will prevail prevails not only over other powers but does so in expiation also of the guilt associated with the exercise of the violence of that power to come itself. Strategic and aporetic, the Machiavellian moment of modern factical freedom is therefore also, and ultimately most definitively, a kairological moment. Thus the lack which drives the strategic and aporetic character of the Machiavellian moment of modern freedom is ‘promissory’. It is precisely this promissory auspiciousness which lends the event of factical freedom – its very temporality – its messianic character (Derrida 1994, 1995b, 1992c). More to the point, however, such a moment requires its appropriate mode (modi) of governance. The object of vivere civile, the very cult of the civic virtù of the Machiavellian moment of modern factical freedom, is ultimately to secure Machiavellian Man for the coming of factical freedom. However contrived the modern cult of factical freedom may be – and of course everything said hitherto about the significatory as well as the strategic and aporetic character of the Machiavellian moment emphasises, of course, that it is – the point of it ultimately is its religiosity, not its ideology.

The promise is not simply that it is possible to be free in this factical way. Much more than mere factical freedom is at stake in the promissory economy of factical freedom. What is ultimately at stake is not simply freedom, but the advent of the future itself; futurality. For the promise of factical freedom is that only factical freedom can deliver the future: that the future itself will come through factical freedom. What is always already at stake in the promissory economy of the Machiavellian moment of modern factical freedom is not only the future of factical freedom, it is the future as factical freedom. It is precisely this kairological messianic promise which inflects and compounds its obsessive concern both with security, ensuring that people remain constantly worthy of the event, and the ‘divine violence’ which, alone, could solve its strategic predicament while also realising its expiatory messianic promise. The essence of its aporia is thus kairological, not epistemological. The problem is the promise, and the promise is that continuous expiation to come which grounds and drives its cultic character.

Let us be clear. This messianic moment is not the arrival of the Messiah. No one comes. No one has come. No one will come. In the Machiavellian moment of modern factical freedom there is only political becoming; the crisis condition of the emergency of guiltless emergence in which the politics of freedom must
continuously revolutionise its own re-formation by returning to its radically contingent foundation in the rule of no-rule, the definition of evental time, or founder. Once institutional religion became subordinate to the state, an understanding of grace lost and conscience fatally attenuated in its privatisation, factical freedom was free to rampage globally as an imperialising cult of ‘civic’ power. Only this explains the fated condition of the American Republic at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Subverting its very own moral and political precepts of a civic life enacting itself through republican virtù, in the American Republic especially, the Machiavellian moment of the Atlantic world is characterised by the endlessly strategising rule of techno-scientific, capitalistic, media and military oligarchies whose very excess acts out a Bataillean political economy of violent expenditure rather than a classical political economy of republican prudence and virtue (Bataille 1989, 1993). When asked to say how much killing is enough to secure the emergency of freedom in its continuous historical emergence, factical freedom answers ‘more’, since there is no end to the emergency of its emergence and no limit to the cultic expression and extolling of its politics. This ‘more’ discharges the very excess of sexualised and gendered virtù in which its civic ideal consists. In the process it legitimates and rationalises itself by proclaiming a force so great that while none are capable of withstanding it, all may be expiated by it. It is not reason or freedom that suspends the excess of killing to which this dynamic commits it, but the resistance and exhaustion excited by it.

Divine violence (perpetual peace)

Necessary wars are just wars, and when there is no other hope except in arms, they too become holy.

(Livy, quoted in Machiavelli 1988: 88n)

Machiavelli’s realism notoriously expels God from the affairs of the state. His interest in religion is evidently conditioned by his preoccupation with what empowers political action and strengthens civic virtù (Machiavelli 1970). Commentators miss the point of the divine in Machiavelli’s political thought, as much as they do in our own, however, when they pose the issue in terms of the sociological relation of politics to religion. Religion, as sociological phenomenon, is precisely not the point. Divinisation, as ontopolitical necessity, is.

Factual freedom ingests the Godhead. It does so because it must divinise the immanent laws of political signification if these are guiltlessly to redeem the emancipatory promise of republican freedom. Divinisation which expiates as it dominates is the absent presence around which the significatory powers definitive of factical freedom must ultimately revolve if they are to transcend the deep aporia of the existence which it poses. Only in such divinisation can there be a strategic calculus of necessary killing capable of realising the promise of self-redeeming freedom as emergent historical becoming in evental time; it is redeemed of the violent debt it
incurs in its very self-enactment. In want of a reliable earthly metric, only a kind of divine violence will satisfy freedom's exorbitant political demand for that cruelty well-used whose sublime realisation would comprise excusing itself via the most omnipotent, omnipresent and omnisensorial enactment of itself. Murder transposed into politically necessary killing. Politically necessary killing transposed into sacrifice. The sacrificed as those whose immolation, and self-immolation (‘Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori’), consumes the guilt factical freedom projects upon them so that the factically free can walk free of the burden of death which they have incurred in the very enactment of their Machiavellian moment. Sacrifice as that which expiates the killing done by and in the name of the factically free.

Lived out in figures of political speech, aporias not only circumscribe the politics which they enact. They constitute its very ethos and temper: how it is lived and what it is capable of perpetrating in pursuit of redeeming its political promise. Only a form of divine violence articulates that plenitude of power and messianic promise of expiation required for the aporia of factical freedom to enact its supremely violent promissory message: ‘pure power over all life for the sake of the living’ (Benjamin 2002: 250). As ever, it is the status of ‘the living’, and our relation to living as such, which is at issue here politically in the civic construction of life to which Atlantic civilisation remains martially committed globally as the apogee of ‘world politics’. Not only the power to which such living aspires but the expiation of power which, simultaneously and obsessively, its very living also demands.

Citing Livy, in his appeal to the Borgia to unite Italy, Machiavelli appears ultimately to intuit that factical freedom must somehow therefore also become holy in the aporia of its strategic necessity if it is not to be lampooned as murderous farce. Indeed, it becomes messianic in its call for a transformation – here, in The Prince, Italian unification – which would simultaneously expiate the violence required to achieve it; the double move always defines and distinguishes the saved. Committed to a messianic understanding of the political by virtue of the very eventalness that conditions it, the violence of the Machiavellian moment is therefore compelled also to sacralise itself. For divinity alone is said to possess the overwhelming force, which expiates as it prevails, required to save factical freedom from itself.

Lived in want of a strategic calculus of necessary killing, the Machiavellian moment of modern factical freedom thus expresses itself through desire for a force to transcend its strategic aporia and realise its kairological promise without the sin of killing. Such violent, transformatory and expiational power is something like what Walter Benjamin called ‘divine violence’ (2002). It finds sustained expression today in the peace machine of global liberal governance, most explicitly in the military strategic and security discourses which now saturate its Atlantic tradition. Such a divine violence becomes the master trope of the Machiavellian moment as it enacts the travails of its strategic aporia and struggles to live up to the promise of its kairological challenge, while excusing itself for the killing that it must do; killing which it is unable strategically to compute. Indeed, except for the cultic roll call of its own dead, such killing now regularly refuses even to compute the deaths it inflicts on others.
Conclusion

Philosophy’s sole aim is to become worthy of the event.

(Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 160)

Aporias, like that of the Machiavellian moment, take place. They are not abstract. They are acted out: acted out through performative figures of political speech, because that is the way they come to presence and constitute a world. Political aporias thus circumscribe a grid of political intelligibility and comprise a tropology as well as a topology of political life. Such a terrain of political self-enactment is as mobile as it is material, and it ramifies. It does so through the continuous reiteration and transformation of the very performative tropes of which it is comprised. Throughout the ramification of the violent aporia of modern political freedom, its lethality has mounted. Massification, industrialisation, novel forms of imperialisation, techno-scientific nuclearisation, informationisation and biologisation of war, to which successive historical iterations of the Machiavellian moment have made their contributions, all now characterise its contemporary condition. The Machiavellian moment has not been entirely responsible for these developments, of course, but it has been, and remains, deeply implicated in and committed to their further development in the name of freedom. Such novel historical circumstances now newly condition the Machiavellian moment, introducing challenges which are no longer merely lethal but potentially also terminal.

Variously depicted as scientific manual or revolutionary manifesto, we can thus interpret The Prince, in particular, for example, as first interrogating the irresolvable state of emergency of freedom as continuous emergence which characterises the politically modern (Wolin 2004; Althusser 1990). In as much as Machiavelli offers the first account of the modern project of founding political freedom, of constituting the republic as political form in the aporetic facticity of its historical condition, he is not instituting grounds for a state of emergency in the ways that Schmitt and Agamben have done, however, as a function of sovereign power and its necessary suspension of the law (Schmitt 1976; Agamben 1998). The return to origins which renews political freedom in Machiavelli is a return to the aporetic condition of the radical contingency of the evental time first said to inaugurate it. The factual freedom of continuous emergence is thus an existential condition rather than a juridical contrivance.

For all its reliance upon a strategic calculus of necessary killing, however, it is not possible for factual freedom to determine how much killing is enough, politically, to resolve the emergency of its emergence. Its lethality thus mounts as its return to the promissory facticity of its freedom raises the political stakes by demanding new capacities to kill beyond even the industrial proportions acquired during the course of the twentieth century. The bloody aporia of evental freedom inaugurated by Machiavelli is our Machiavellian moment as well. It therefore serves as a direct political allegory for our times.

As Althusser’s brilliant reflections in Machiavelli and Us first indicated, the freedom of the event which Althusser first detects in the Florentine remains a
continuing source of inspiration for many contemporary political thinkers who seek to revivify the Machiavellian moment of republican freedom as a means also of challenging the global violence of the techno-scientific military–industrial and commercial systems which now dominate its contemporary Atlantic expression (Althusser 1990; Vatter 2004). At issue in such critical responses to the deeply derelicted state of the Machiavellian moment today is, however, the aporetic violence of evental freedom itself. For critical thinkers run the danger of eliding the problematic of violence, with which the ‘event’ of factical freedom is irredeemably contaminated, when seeking to renew the emancipatory promise which it offers. This suspicion prompts caution in drawing on Althusser, Badiou, Rancière, Nancy, Agamben and Deleuze, among others, when appealing to the emancipatory promise of time as event in pursuit of an emancipatory politics.

For what Machiavelli makes plain, not only in The Prince but throughout The Discourses, The History of Florence and The Art of War as well, is that cruelty well-used is the sine qua non of factical freedom. Moreover, it is not only the other whose death is a political necessity. Republican killing also extols the death of self-sacrifice as the highest republican virtue (Pocock 2006: 90). But what calculus could possibly compute how much killing and self-sacrifice is enough? What calculus could match the emancipatory promise of freedom – be directly consonant with its universal message of emancipation for all ‘mankind’ in the particular historical circumstances in which it finds itself – such that the very violent force of freedom itself would be sufficient to secure its actualisation without having to spill blood? Indeed, since war makes ‘states’ as much as ‘states’ make war, what killing could be so purely instrumental that it would deprive violence of its own independently formative dynamics and effects? Outside of the prevailing religiosity of its characteristic performative figures of political speech, in which the promise of factical freedom invokes the sacralisation of violence as a necessary corollary to realising its messianic promise, evental time cannot furnish such a calculus. When it thus resorts to the invocation of divine violence, in the way that its military strategic discourse as well as its decisional, electoral and political rhetoric especially now do, factical freedom betrays the very emancipatory promise for which it kills. So enthralled do ‘we’ seem to have become by the martial character of the civic promise of the Machiavellian moment, however, that we have hardly begun to address, let alone develop effective analytical mechanisms for interrogating, that religiosity and cultic violence which now seems to characterise it most.
NOTES

3. Signifying power

1 This essay arose out of collaboration begun in 1989 when Michael Dillon was a visiting fellow in the Department of International Relations and the Peace Research Centre at the Australian National University. He would like to thank the department for its hospitality and the Leverhulme Trust for its additional financial assistance and, subsequently, Jerry Everard, for permission to republish it here.

2 For an account of how the ellipsis works as ‘infinity’ see Brian Rotman’s beautiful book *Ad Infinitum* (1993).

3 On Machiavelli, see, for example, Rebhorn 1988; and Waswo 1987. On Hobbes, see Caygill 1989.

4 Combined they comprise the regime that Derrida means by ‘text’:

   as I understand it (and I have explained why), the text is not the book, it is not confined in a volume itself confined to the library. It does not suspend reference – to history to the world, to reality, to being, and especially not to the other, since to say of history, of the world, of reality, that they always appear in an experience, hence in a movement of interpretation which contextualizes them according to a network of differences and hence of referral to the other, is surely to recall that alterity (difference) is irreducible. Difference is a reference and vice versa.

   (Derrida 1988: 137)

4. The scandal of the refugee

1 For example, Heidegger figures it as the ontological difference between Being and beings, Levinas figures it as the advent of Alterity, Derrida figures it as *différance*, and Lacan figures it as the barrier that distinguishes the symbolic from the Real. For Heidegger *angst* at the nothingness of being serves to promote the project of authenticity. For Levinas Alterity ramifies into an account of our encounter with it as the advent of an ethical obligation that promotes the project of the ethical subject’s substitution for the Other. Derrida’s *différance* plays the motility of temporality much more extensively into the operation of difference and promotes the project of deconstruction, which is its principal operational effect. Misfires of the symbolic bring the intractability of the Real into play for Lacan,
thus promoting the project of Desire. The implications of the return of the ontological were developed by Foucault in terms of a critical genealogy of political Problematisations consequent from a fundamental reappraisal of the basic categories of philosophical modernity.

2 The Scots phrase ‘outwith’ is used to capture both ‘outside of’ and yet also ‘related to’. Hence the scandal. The contradiction of the expressions captures the contradiction of the status of the refugee caused by, yet expelled by, the warrants and actions of states and political regimes.

3 Provisionality is no bad thing.

4 One of the major contributions that Heidegger made to philosophy in the twentieth century was via his insistence upon what he called ‘the ontico-ontological difference’. That difference is the difference between Being as such (capitalised by Heidegger) and existing beings.

5. The sovereign and the stranger

1 Michael Walzer notes that in ancient times the word of stranger and enemy was often the same and that we have only slowly come to differentiate them in a way that allows us to treat the stranger with hospitality (Walzer 1983: 32). Whereas most Schmitt commentators emphasise (correctly) the way in which his understanding of the political is indebted to Hobbes, I would like to draw attention to how his definition of the political is also powerfully reminiscent of Plato’s guard dog metaphor. It is not simply therefore a matter of Hobbes or Schmitt introducing something like the friend–enemy distinction into political thought. Metaphysics tends to demand such a thing of political thought.

2 Hence the traditional response in Greek poetry to the provenance of the stranger was ‘he who comes from elsewhere comes from Zeus’. Priam was, of course, protected by Zeus in his adventure across the lines to Achilles’s tent, and Zeus was, among other things, the god of suppliants. The point, then, is not that Achilles would have been in trouble with the top god had he maltreated Priam. Rather, Greek theogony and the Greek poets understood the significance of the stranger/suppliant so well that they placed it under the protection of their highest deity.


4 Peter Goodrich recounts a wonderful example of this, which, in addition, illustrates the point about the stranger within as well as without. He does so when discussing a dispute in 1985 between the Hiada Indians of Lyell Island in the Queen Charlotte archipelago off the coast of mainland British Columbia and the US logging company that had been granted permission by the government of British Columbia to log the island. The testimony presented to the court by the Haida was extremely novel in legal terms. It took the form of symbolic dress, mythologies, masks and totem poles as well as the legends, stories poems, songs, and other forms of interpretation that such art and mythology implied. The argument was both lyrical and visual, narrative and aesthetic, and it extend far beyond the contours of contemporary Western languages of law.

The Indians, of course, lost the case:

That language was annulled in the simple, direct and brutal sense that it was not even referred to save as curiosity, a relic, a more primitive remnant of a more savage past.
The court would not compare mythologies, it refused even to countenance the question of the 'other.'

(Goodrich 1990, 183)

5 This analysis is, of course, heavily influenced by Heidegger's existential analytic of Dasein, to which the question of difference and the belonging together (Mitsein) of human being (Dasein) is essential, such that Mitsein neither qualifies nor modifies the Sein but belongs to it essentially and constitutively. Given the importance of these points and the disputes surrounding them, Peg Birmingham clarifies them in an exemplary way and forcefully demonstrates through a close reading of Being and Time that, for Heidegger: 'Dasein's embodiment is the place of difference, disallowing the possibility of understanding identity as solus ipse. Inauthentic or authentic Dasein's embodiment means that it is originally and inescapably with others, immersed in its world and permeated by that world' (Birmingham 1992: 36). Jean-Luc Nancy extensively develops this aspect of Heidegger's thought in ways that contest other aspects of it (1991, 1996).

6. Another justice

1 Technologising politics concerns an alliance between the way the State is conceived largely as what Oakeshott called an enterprise association and the way the supremacy of representative–calculative thought dominates onto-theology. In respect of enterprise association, see Oakeshott 1975.


3 Blumenberg’s work was a response to this crisis, to expression it found in Carl Schmitt and Ernst Jünger as well as the debate it stimulated with others such as Karl Löwith. To this powerful mixture has to be added a trio of Jewish thinkers whose work has been at least as important: Rosenzweig, Scholem and Benjamin. For an excellent introduction to the issues that engaged these thinkers, see Mosès 2009.

4 The implications have, of course, been interpreted in radically different fashions, notably by Heidegger, Levinas and Derrida.

5 There are both philosophical and political difficulties with Gelassenheit. Derrida explores them in Of Spirit (1989). Nonetheless, recalling Derrida's account of the double yes in affirmation, I am inclined to champion what might be called an affirmative Gelassenheit; a standing up for, which is a promise to stand by, the other. Peg Birmingham is one of very few to explore, politically, this notion of solicitude in Heidegger’s thought (1992). See also Dallery and Scott 1992.

6 Disaster originally meant loss of the stars by which one takes one’s bearings.

7 A recent study that connects this theme to contemporary cultural anxieties in the United States is Wald 1995.

8 I take issue, in other words, with Ricoeur's account of how the self is sutured together, while nonetheless accepting much of what he says about the difference between the self as idem and ipse. See, for example, Paul Ricoeur, 'Self as Ipse’, in Narrative and Interpretation.

7. Deconstructing the military body

1 I allow for Heidegger’s account of the sign here as Wink (in the sense of gesture) that makes something immediately evident, makes something to be thought appear directly and is the fundamental trait of language, rather than mere Zeichen (sign in the sense of mark or index) that indirectly designates a thing not actually present: Heidegger 1971.

2 There are, of course, many ways to be in language, many experiences to have with language, so this argument is not one that claims that all that there is to language is the power struggle over the power of language to engender things; although Heidegger, for example, first seems to side with the view that says there is only the polemos of the being that comes
to being in language and then, via *gelassenheit*, poetry, language and thought, to explore ways in which letting be rather than struggle may characterise the being that comes to being in language. The advent of language is nonetheless also, if not exclusively, a power struggle over the power of language to engender things. It is that struggle, the cyberneticism and molecularism that are beginning to fashion a military body-in-formation, that concerns this article.

3 The capacity of strategy, understood in these terms, to achieve its ends without necessarily having to use force is detailed in a number of classical texts, most notably in that of Sunzi's, *Art of War*. See Raphals 1992: Chapter 5.

4 The social and political contradictions, tensions and paradoxes which this induced in the Greek *polis* are brilliantly explored in Loraux 1993.

5 For a careful account of how *mêtis* thus differs from the so-called masculine attribute of *bîê*, see Dunkle 1989.

6 This account of strategy differs as much from the modern military tradition as much as it does from that offered in, for example, De Certeau 1974.

8. Transformation

1 Stiegler and Beardsworth make the most carefully laid, and therefore serious, of these charges. In an equally careful and challenging way, Arthur Bradley reviews them in detail (2006 and 2011). He develops them further in Bradley 2006.

2 My thanks to Alexander Hope for this observation.

9. Violence, the messianic and the tragic

1 Vasily Grossman’s, *Life and Fate* (2011: 72) a Tolstoyan chronicle of the Great Patriotic War, the fascism that the Soviet Union shared with Nazi Germany and the horror of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe.

10. Lethal freedom

1 The Machiavellian moment of modern freedom is nothing if not preoccupied with politics as potency. For that reason I continue to speak in terms of ‘man’. The choice is deliberate. It draws constant attention to the intensely gendered and sexual mode or ‘manners’ of modern freedom.

2 It will become evident, however, that the inspiration of Miguel Vatter’s Machiavelli (2000) is inspiration to the *auseinandersetzung* which follows. See also Heidegger 1999. Jean–Luc Marion refers to ‘the event’ as ‘the always already of facticity’ and ‘the right now of its occurrence’ (Marion 2002: 36). As with ‘event’, however, so also with ‘facticity’ as well, these are less commonly agreed terms of art in continental thought than problematics around which it revolves in dispute. Consider Derrida’s more enigmatic observation: ‘an event, if I understand it right . . . would have the form of a seal, as if, witness without witness, it were committed to keeping a secret . . .’ (Derrida 1995b: 60). Miguel Vatter (2000) is thus indebted philosophically to these debates while employing them in his own unique way.

3 History of Florence, p. 811.

4 ‘[R]epublican humanism . . . was fundamentally concerned with the animation of moral personality in civic action’ (Pocock 2006: 518). As Pocock also observes: in his later years Machiavelli weaves, ‘his theories of military organisation more and more closely into his theories of citizenship and civic virtue’ (Pocock 2006: 124).

5 ‘faced the dilemma, born of its finitude, that it could escape neither expansion nor the corruption that followed expansion’ (Pocock 2006: 524).
6 As, of course, is the contrary celebration of republican virility: which is precisely the way to read neo-conservative ‘ass-kicking’ imperial homilies contrasting American virtù with European effeminacy, such as that provided by Robert Kagan in his aptly titled Of Paradise and Power. America and Europe in the New World Order (2003). Ignoring its title, for a more sober contemporary analysis of American imperialism see Cox 2003.

7 Pocock says, ‘I see “virtue” and “right” not as incompatible but as irreducible’ (‘Afterword’: 561).

8 Echoes here also of Heidegger’s Being and Time, but Machiavelli’s account of evental time is not that of Heidegger’s destinal sending of Being. Pocock puts it this way:

   a vital component of republican theory – and once this had come upon the scene, if no earlier, of all political theory – consisted of ideas about time, about the occurrence of contingent events of which time was the dimension, and about the intelligibility of the sequences (it is as yet too soon to say processes) of particular happenings that made up what we should call history.

   (Pocock 2006: 3; emphasis added)

9 Surprisingly, this applies both to Vatter’s Between Form and Event (2000) and to John Pocock’s magisterial work The Machiavellian Moment (2006).

10 See especially Victoria Khan’s wonderful account of the way in which the political discourse of the seventeenth and eighteenth century continued to be indebted both to the facticity of freedom and the poiesis of its articulation (Kahn 2004).

11 Foucault 2004: 44.

12 See, for example, Smith 2003; Davis 2001; and Jobbagy 2003.

13 And no more cogently, I would suggest, than in the works of authors such as Lauren Berlant, Michael Shapiro and Cindy Weber. See, for example, Berlant 2001 and 1997. Shapiro 1999; 2001; and 2006. Weber 2005.

14 Vatter 2000: 183. This non-coincidence of actions and times is bound to be violent in as much as actions will violate time if they are not in accordance with the times. For the way in which Machiavelli’s new account of chance engenders it as Fortuna, see Pitkin 1984.

15 Vatter is no more scholarly or cogent than in his reading here of how Machiavelli radically revises the classical posing of chance and necessity especially in response to the Master Argument of Diodorus Cronus. See Vatter 2000: Chapter 3, ‘History as Effect of Free Action: Fortuna and Virtù in The Prince’.

16 Hence the supplement which secures the very possibility of the sign’s continuing signification (Derrida 1976 and 1981a).

17 By which I mean a history that is intelligible as well as a history comprised of human signification. The two do not necessarily go together. Humans may signify but what that amounts to in terms of history could simply be absurd. Hörnqvist provides a detailed summary of the different rhetorical, ideological and, he also says, deconstructive accounts that have been given of Machiavelli’s use of language: Hörnqvist 2004: Chapter 1. He himself focuses on rhetoric. The account here draws extensively upon the work of Jacques Derrida.

18 This argument is detailed in Chapter 7, above.

19 ‘Virtus could therefore carry many of the connotations of virility, with which it is etymologically linked; vir means man’ (Pocock 2006: 37).


21 His play Mandragola revolves around the very ambivalent and polysemous play of the sign. See Machiavelli 1961.
23 Beardsworth 1996: 5.
24 Pocock, ‘Afterword,’ p. 554. I deliberately avoid entering the debate about the Machiavellian moment as an encounter between republican and liberal accounts of freedom. This has petered out into a truce which accepts that there is a liberal republicanism and republican liberalism. The point is that this debate does not get to the essentials of the Machiavellian moment as an ontological predicament which poses a recurrent historical condition. For an exhaustive summary of the debate, however, see, for example, Gibson 2000: 261–307.
26 No wonder that, beginning with Heidegger, continental philosophers subscribing to a philosophy of the event ultimately turn to St Paul when seeking to interrogate what kairological time may demand of us. See, for example, Heidegger 2004: ‘Phenomenological Explication of the First Letter to the Thessalonians”; Agamben 2005; and Badiou 2003.
27 In observations too numerous to cite Derrida continuously reminds us, of course, that this impossibility is the locus also of possibility.
28 On the structure of the promise, and in particular its messianic character, see Derrida 1995b;1994; and 1992c. Derrida’s entire approach to the aporia of evental time and its messianic promise is, of course, precisely not strategic.
29 Towards the end of Notebook 1, Gramsci observed that the ‘[Church] is no longer an ideological world power but only a subaltern force’. Quoted in Green 2002: 2.
31 See Pocock 2006: ‘Fortune, Venice and Apocalypse’. Discussing Bruni’s De Militia, Pocock observes, ‘he thinks of arms as the ultima ratio whereby the citizen exposes his life in defense of the state and at the same time ensures the decision to expose it cannot be taken without him’ (Pocock 2006: 90).
32 Benjamin 2004; and Derrida 1992c. This critical reflection on modern freedom requires a more extensive exploration of modern freedom’s relation to philosophies of the event than can be encompassed here. There are many philosophies of the event. Most notable today are those derived from Lucretius and Spinoza, including that of Marx, and those derived from Heidegger. There are, however, philosophies of the event which also excite conservative rather than radical politics. This would go for the English political philosopher Michael Oakeshott (for example, 2004), and perhaps also for the American Alfred North Whitehead (2004). Among its most distinguished contemporary and radical exponents must be included not only Deleuze and Badiou but also Derrida.
33 There are significant exceptions to this complaint. They are to be found especially among those revisiting the problematic of political theology. See, in particular, de Vries 2005; 2002; and de Vries and Sullivan 2006. See also Lippitt and Urpeth 2000; Bulhof and ten Kate 2000; Asad 2003; and O’Donovan 1996.
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