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THE GHOST OF POLITICS IN THE SOFT MACHINE

A Plea for Politics

Should one be worried about the disappearance of politics but be assured by the efforts to bring it back? Or should one be delighted by the disappearance of modern politics and inspired by the possibility of post-modern politics? Quite across disciplinary lines this anxiety or anxiousness seems to be inscribed in titles of numerous recently published books, *Politics in an antipolitical age* (Mulgan 1994), *The Reinvention of Politics* (Beck 1997), *In Search of Politics* (Bauman 1999), *The Return of the Political* (Mouffe 1993), *The Conquest of Politics* (Barber 1988), and so on.

To read the present situation as if politics were misplaced or replaced and should be somehow rediscovered is seductive but deceitful. Such a diagnosis may converge with efforts to see genuine politics as the true challenger of undemocratic regimentality, governmentality or managementality. This kind of anxiety may as well stem from a powerless 'will to power' and the possible motivation to seek for a more decisionist mentality of rule. The critical point in yearning for the return of politics is not its ambivalence. Ambivalence can quite well be taken as the alter ego of political language. It may even be claimed that "the struggle against ambivalence is both self-destructive and self-propelling" (Bauman 1991, 1-3).

To call political situations ambivalent or politics ambivalent is quite possible, and in fact, it reminds of the by now classical Pocockian idea that politics "deals with the contingent event" (Pocock 1975). In the present situation characterized by the "privatization of ambivalence" (Bauman 1991, 197-230) this very idea may turn out to be somewhat paradoxical. What might be then a crucial illusion or delusion in pursuing a new politics of ambivalence or in conceptualizing politics as a way of living with ambivalence? I

think that it would be the dubious sentiment or an omnipotent conviction to assume that one can represent this ambivalence. Rather than being seen as causes, plurality and ambivalence might be seen as effects of multiple struggles between divergent and conflictual standpoints. This kind of argument may be thought to be a pluralist obsession. An alternative strategy might be to follow the Burroughsian lines of escape, 1) Disrupt, 2) Attack, 3) Disappear. Look away. Ignore. Forget (Burroughs 1984, 101).

Displacement of Politics

Displacement is a term easily encountered in different literary genres and texts. Reading them gives an immediate impression that this term has polyvalent meanings. We may talk about displaced persons but as well we could claim that every individual is a “displaced person” by definition (Luhmann 1986, 15). Freud uses the notion of displacement (*Verschiebung*) as a specific transcribing or substituting technique of the dream-work. However, he also talks about the displacement of a subject relating to the dream-work in general as a ‘distortion’ (*Entstellung*) (Spivak 1983, 172). Roland Barthes urges us to read texts whose authors have been displaced, “What we hear, therefore, is the *displaced* voice which the reader lends, by proxy, to the discourse, the discourse is speaking according to the reader’s interests.” (Barthes 1974, 151) When Bonnie Honig titled her book *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, she applied this term to imply a linguistic procedure practiced by a group of political theorists (Kant, Rawls, Sandel) for underrating conceptions of politics which celebrate an agonistic conflict, dissonance and disruption (Honig 1993, 2-3). While her own conception of politics is influenced by Nietzschean and Arendtian perspectives, she may avoid the full Nietzschean strategic sense of a joy in destruction as an eternal recurrence or eternal novelty. When Nietzsche talks about his fundamental innovations, he formulates them as displacement effects, in place of ‘moral values’, in place of ‘sociology’, in place of ‘society’, in place of ‘epistemology’, in place of ‘metaphysics’ (Nietzsche 1968, 255).

The term ‘displacement’ can be seen as a strategy. This is how Derrida uses the term displacement (*déplacement*) gaming with both Freud’s ‘distortion’ (*Entstellung*) and Nietzsche’s ‘destruction’ (*Destruktion*). This strategy seeks to shake up the dominant textual structure, to make it tremble (*ébranler*). (Pheby 1988, 3) Strategic terms are tools of intervention into events. Comprehension and action must be seen to go hand-in-hand. It is up to us to figure out how to intervene, how to be ready-at-hand and how to read situations. If strategic terms are seen as tools of intervention, one can select the

tools to be used in an action. Which tools are selected depends on the task at hand, on our sense of situatedness and eventuality. In cases where conditions and conducts are presumed to remain serialized, reproduced or structured, we can hope to come to terms with traditional tools. But in cases where circumstances fluctuate, we easily find ourselves displaced. We can find it hard to get a hold of what is going on and become one of the many who judge by the eye rather than by the hand, out of touch with the events. Political situations are situations of paradoxical self-transformation. It is difficult to perceive this any better than Machiavelli did, the disturbing suggestion, made by Machiavelli, was that since *virtù* was action, it must sooner or later alter the conditions on which it rested and so render itself impossible (Pocock 1975).

Political action renders itself impossible! This is how displacement of politics makes sense. Political situations are often experienced as in a dream (Patton 1997, 10). This reminds us that dream-work (displacements in the Freudian sense) can be seen at play here. These experiences point out a crucial characteristic of political events, they seem to be already *passé* before we are able to comment on them (Lindroos 1998, 69). This is a good reason to distinguish historical time from political time. *Kairos*, the youngest son of Zeus, personifies opportunity, the right time for something to take place, the right time for action (Lindroos 1998, 12). Such a temporalization of politics gaming with contingency and chance undoubtedly characterizes the politicality of action. However, one should not forget that political action, at every moment, renders itself impossible because it is a displaced practice. Therefore, it is an illusionary presumption to link the right moment to act with a kind of metaphysics of political presence so typical of *vita activa* figures of politics. There is another possibility of distinguishing historical time and political time so that it retains the idea of politics seizing situational opportunities or chances without presuming presentist metaphysics. This is the sense in which Gilles Deleuze speaks about the 'time of the event' (*Aion*) (Deleuze 1990a, 8). The distinctive features of event time find an expression in the difficulties surrounding the determination of the precise moments at which events occur, the precise temporal boundaries, beginnings and ends, of historical or empirical events (Patton 1997, 7). Event-time is especially sensitive to the complexity of events, the infiltrated modes in which past and future play a role in the present. That event-time 'escapes History' can be seen as another way of saying that politics takes place by displacing itself.

As a pure event – in the Deleuzian sense – displacement of politics can be characterized by certain specific features or problematizations. Being selective such a description is ambivalent but not arbitrary. I want to mention five such characteristic features,

1. Displacements of politics shake up spatial configurations which are conceptually constitutive of politics. Novelty in the spatial imagination can be read as displacement effects. These may open up new possibilities and perspectives for political action or for a politics that has many geometries (Haraway 1997, 73).

2. Displacement of politics does not only address political action, but the political, the substance of political events. Even though any conflictual situation or event can be political, politics does not take place in every conflictual situation. The political cannot be a priori classified. Any event or situation, whose outcome is not yet determined (Patton 1997, 12) or any problematic which has more than one solution, can become political and be predisposed to displacements.

3. Displacement of politics implies that politics always takes place by taking the place of itself, i.e. by self-transformation. The Machiavellian insight that political action (*virtù*) renders itself impossible, cannot be identified with the making-itself-unnecessary-thesis. Displacement effects are not witherings away or overcomings but alterations and modifications.

4. Displacements of politics open up political opportunities. On the other hand, contingency, opportunity and chance help to render politics possible. However, rather than in the future (*Occasione/Fortuna* for Machiavelli) or in the present (*Chance* for Weber) (Palonen 1998), a political opportunity should be seen to appear from a 'non-place', to reside in an 'aternal' line of escape between a past-present and a future-present. A pure political event is "eternally that which has just happened or that which is about to happen" (Deleuze 1990a, 8).

5. In the domain of politics of politics or politics of knowledge, displacements of politics can refer to conceptual, narrative or epistemic transformations in how politics is being conceived in a political action. Since conceptions of politics condition the conduct of politics, conceptual, narrative and epistemic shifts are situationally effective. These effects can be diagnosed historically, either by the history of concepts or by the genealogical studies.

Rhetorical Figures of Displacement

Talking about displacement of politics in terms of pure events addresses the possibility of politics. We may wonder how to characterize something that constantly transforms and can be undecidable, unnameable and undefinable. A simple answer might be that it can be done by characterizing the transformation itself. Without proceeding into situational diagnoses of empirical events, it is possible to read the ongoing transformation of politics by looking at the present displacement strategies. These strategies can be conceived in rhetorical terms,

1. Metaphoric Displacement

The most typical rhetorical mode of displacement is the use of novel metaphors (Schon 1963). Metaphoric displacements also remould the spatial figurations of situations and events in which politics is seen to take place. We can hardly any longer imagine politics taking place in a definite territorial, public, bounded space, or in a kind of space of public places. The new spatial imagination rather perceives political situations as differentially distributed in a global space of flows (Castells 1989) or points-circuits of all kinds (Deleuze and Guattari, 195-199) which cannot be captured by container-metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 29-31). However, to claim that the political world is no more geometrical – the archetype of the modern mind – may be inaccurate. It might tell more about the issue at hand to claim that since “it cannot be squeezed into geometrically inspired grids” (Bauman 1993, 15) we need a topological imagination capable of picturing singular events and virtual spaces.

2. Metonymic Displacement

Metonymic displacements work on a chain of political signifiers by letting particulars stand for more generic concepts. Metonymic displacements let us pass from one key (concept, issue) to another that is more particular or detailed. Metonymic displacements modulate political issues and themes so that details become decisive. That is why political ideas and disagreements may now reside in details and differentials. From the point of view of details and singularities, any situation can be read as political. Now that the detail is glorified, a number of molar practices linked with programs, agendas and platforms become obsolete and are supplemented by modulations of details.

3. Oxymoronic Displacement

Oxymoronic displacements both cope with and reproduce ambivalences and ambiguities of our present political predicament by using paradoxical utterances and styles of reasoning. This is not just a prerogative of our business consultants who offer their “cruel help” to the public sector. This style-blending departs radically from the established political practices (strikes, demonstrations, campaigns, public meetings, petition marches, party-work) (Tilly 1986, 390-398) which have so far urged us to struggle for a better future for ourselves and for others. Oxymoronic figures make a vital contribution in giving up the idea of politics as a collective action or a mass action and in recognizing that coalition politics, which is also the real challenge

of the radical democracy, is the saying of the day. In efforts to keep fragile coalitions (and subjects as assemblages) together, oxymoronic strategies are handy.

4. *Maximatic Displacement*

Maximatic displacements can challenge convictions that politics always takes place in specific interpretative communities or that politicality is a specific modus of interpretation, reflection and judgement rather than e.g. an intense trust in desires, sentiments and feelings. Maxims, either as succinct principles, conditionings of conduct, proverbial phrases or just as symbolic codes, can be espoused and embraced via identification. Maxims are utterances and dictums which can address any audience and this auditorial anonymity and undefinability can be performatively effective. Maximatic displacements challenge principles of political representation and treat an audience as tribunal, the virtual site of sovereignty.

5. *Parabolic Displacement*

Parabolic displacements can shake up narrative structures and dominant narratives which tell foundational tales about molar institutions such as the state, and about their institutional thinking and practices. Parabolic displacements produce new points of intersection and new juxtapositions in and between texts. Parabolic displacements provide material for experimental efforts, but they can ultimately leave open the issue as how to reorder and rearrange narrative events into new series and sequences.

6. *Paradiastolic Displacement*

Paradiastole is a kind of rhetorical master figure of displacement, and the one which both Machiavelli and Nietzsche most skilfully applied. A splendid example of the use of paradiastole in the displacement of previous conceptions is in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* where he makes us look down on how "ideals are fabricated" (Skinner 1999, 69-70). Nietzsche discloses how the Christians succeeded in reversing the moral/pagan world of the Antiquity by rhetorically redescribing a number of vices as their neighbouring virtues. Paradiastole provides a rhetorical technique which can produce a maximum displacement effect with a minimum effort.

Governmentalization of Politics in a 'Society of Control'

Displacement of politics can be seen to refer to the contingent play of "specified modifications" and "different transformations effectuated" (Foucault 1991, 58) in the field of relations of forces. Such modifications and transformations address 'chance' rather than 'change'. However, instead of just claiming that politics deals with a contingent event, one might say that politics is a contingent event or a moment of chance in itself, that which is unpredictable, unexpected, unsuspectable, incalculable, startling, contestable, ambiguous, unfounded, coincidental, occasional, mutable, revisable, alterable, undefinable, displaceable (Palonen 1999). This conclusion emphasizes the ambiguity, even the idiosyncratic or idiomatic nature of politics. It is no wonder then that politics, as a moment of chance, becomes a target of specific ordering activities or control practices by various institutional arrangements, be they networks, hierarchies or markets.

One way of expressing this dimension of control is to speak of governmentalization of politics. Governmentalization of politics operates via different practices of power, be they pastoral, disciplinary, actuarial, contractual, virtual. These different practices often operate simultaneously but with different intensities in different situations and events. In our situation of the present characterized by dynamic transformation of politics and intensification of the chance-moment, governmentalization of politics seems to have taken a turn towards what has been called a 'society of control' (Deleuze 1990b). This turn basically follows the insight that the intensification of the chance-moment simultaneously intensifies the demand for more efficient and sophisticated means of control. The diversification and multiplication of displacement effects can no more be managed by closures (prison, hospital, school, factory etc.) but have to be coped with by modular means (ciphers, scramblers, passwords) (Burroughs 1984, 181). Rather than just demand interpretation they seek to intensify feelings and sentiments and make the audience become tuned along with the send-offs, make it not just responsive but resonant. This kind of modular management of politics does not work on its 'object' as on something that is distinctive and resistant, but as on something that is just out-of-tune, off-key or discordant.

Gilles Deleuze has acknowledged (Deleuze 1990b) that William S. Burroughs started the analysis of societies of control. It is also obvious that the writings of Burroughs have profoundly impressed and influenced Deleuze. But why Burroughs? The Swedish novelist Henning Mankell has made a relevant remark, when the social transformation is fierce, the only way to see what is going on is to look at it from the perspective of crime. This, in his

opinion, explains the popularity of using detective novels in diagnoses of the present (Teittinen 1999). The limit experiences of Burroughs' in situations (con)testing the force of law certainly made him a sensitive eyewitness to, and subject of, conditioning and control. Burroughs lived in an interzone between pleasure and pain, freedom and control, opposition and power, perhaps politics and government too. Walking on a rope he acutely recognized that it was only the shadow of this rope, conditioned by his own movements, that separated these binary oppositions. He did not fool himself into believing that it was just in the vocabulary of dichotomies and binary oppositions that power talks and control communicates. Rather he became convinced that our conduct is more and more conducted or governed through paradoxical, puzzling, ambiguous and ambivalent terms in an immanent fashion. Accordingly, the exercise of power is animated by an opposition, the quest for freedom is accompanied by an obligation. Burroughs not only was sensitive to the arbitrariness of borderlines but recognized that this sophisticated sensitivity also characterized a society of control whose flexibility, as a soft machine, he never underestimated. He was quite aware of the possibility that his own creations – the Terminator, Eraser and Blade-Runner – might be soon obstructing his own lines of exit and escape. This was also the challenge which urged him to reach beyond the word and image. A society of control is for Burroughs a condition of permanent displacement and devolution, a state of flux. From another perspective, a society of control could be called a society of freedom emphasizing that the conduct of autonomous individuals are governed through their freedom. However, it must be noticed that in an “advanced liberal” condition “individuals are not merely ‘free to choose’, but *obliged to be free*” (Rose 1999, 87). This *obligation to be free* is being a characteristically oxymoronic figure justifying government in which freedom must be produced and controlled. In a society of control every individual, in spite of her/his standing and condition, is faced with this counterfactual obligation, and, therefore, the conduct of every individual is evaluated as if she/he were free. (Obliging people to be free could be juxtaposed with an critical effort to show people “that they are much freer than they feel” (Foucault 1988, 10).) This request has also another face which Burroughs sharply observed, in a society of control every individual is treated as a potential addict who can fail to meet the request of freedom. If addiction is a lack of freedom (free choice), it constitutes a reason for control. The mode or mould of this control is situationally dictated. This displays an effort to legitimate or hegemonize games of truth in which our freedom, choices, and, in fact, ways of life are discursively conditioned. Burroughs naturally challenges these games of truth by displacing the rules of the game.

Control and Spectacle

In a society of control the obligation to be free finds expression in the responsabilization-talk. The freedom of individuals is there equated with responsibility which has been articulated in different ways, as rationality, self-control, consumer-sovereignty, self-mastery, social or symbolic capital, self-improvement, activity, competitiveness, even respectability. The responsabilization of individuals, along with the privatization of ambivalence and risk-management, may be seen as a way of mainstreaming governmental configurations. In governing the conduct of individuals by the responsabilization mode, and in controlling the freedom of individuals through the figure of autonomy, the society of control has become a site of spectacles of self-aggrandizement, self-improvement and self-help. When President Bill Clinton in 1994 invited self-help stars Stephen Covey and Anthony Robbins to Camp David to speed up his career, this kind of performative pumping up was already symptomatic of the times. Even though the spectacular performances of these self-help celebrities in the 'mega-events' charged the audiences in a quasi religious fashion (McGinn 2000, 45-48), they should be seen as actual spectacles of morality and truth. The message of these self-help celebrities about a responsible freedom is naturally articulated in numerous ways. Each plastic surgeon of the soul offers her/his special human technology for self-improvement, which are being marketed as distinct brands. The language of this self-improvement industry asks people to think and make up their mind as to who they want to be or become. These discourses promise to help people to help themselves and to see even the most miserable circumstances in a positive light (McGinn 2000, 45-48).

It is easy to mock the spectacular ways and means and the slick language games of the self-improvement gurus, and to consider them as something totally adverse to those efforts to responsabilize individuals in the name of their freedom founded on science and research. The main aim of the booming self-improvement industry is surely to make money. It has also succeeded in this outstandingly well. However, from the point of view of government of freedom, even the most preposterous self-tutors or life counselors and the most critical aestheticians of existence may be taking part in the same spectacle of morality and truth. Perhaps this is just the spectacle of truth that Nietzsche was talking about.

When Nietzsche discussed 'spectacles of truth' he focussed his eyes on a time span of two millenia. At the other end of the pole, he commented Tertullian's *Spectacles* and explained how the early Christians paradiastolically displaced pagan/Roman spectacles, the true 'orgies of feeling' by their own priestly spectacles of the divine and moral truth based on the 'ascetic ideal'

which sustained feelings and sentiments of guilt, pity, sin, resentment, and, at the same time inspired terror and awe (Hooke 1998, 20-24). On the other hand, Nietzsche diagnosed his own times in terms of spectacles of self-conscious truth which he called "the great spectacle in a hundred acts reserved for the next two centuries in Europe – the most terrible, most questionable, and perhaps the most hopeful of all spectacles." (Nietzsche 1967, III/27) This may be the great spectacle of self-aggrandizement taking place in the society of control. It is being terrible, questionable and hopeful promising that one can become something other than what she/he is if one meets the obligation of freedom in the form of responsibility. Nietzsche very well recognized that the value of this great spectacle is ambiguous (Hooke 1998, 20-21). However, since the power of the spectacle is most conspicuous in the society of control, it is not misleading to call this condition a society of spectacle.

Even though Burroughs does not specifically argue in terms of spectacles, his untimely diagnosis connects spectacle and control. He does this by pointing out how the word and image are at present the principal means of control. Burroughs not only reminds of the spectacular nature of control; he not only reminds that no control machine so far devised can operate without words and images (Burroughs 1999a, 339). He not only reminds that even behind the violence there is the word. He also provides us with an outline for an analysis of control by the word and image. His starting point is an unorthodox view of language claiming that the spoken word came after 'writing' (see Harris 1986, 25-28). He makes a revealing point, "A syllabic language forces you to verbalize in auditory patterns. A hieroglyphic language does not. I think that anyone who is interested to find out the precise relationship between word and image should study a simplified hieroglyphic script. Such a study would tend to break the automatic verbal reaction to a word. It is precisely these automatic reactions to words themselves that enable those who manipulate words to control thought on a mass scale." He continues, "An essential feature of the western control machine is to make language as non-pictorial as possible, to separate words as far as possible from objects or observable processes." (Burroughs 1984, 103)

Compulsive verbalizations, automatic verbal reactions, non-pictorial enunciations, linguistic artefacts manifest control for Burroughs. This kind of spectacular control by the word and image uses the strategy of the repetition of phrases and commonplaces so that we immediately voice only that which is already taken for granted (Vähämäki 1997, 146-172). This control is a function of velocity and acceleration so that one can only respond and react without deliberation and judgement. It proceeds by producing pure response-events rather than sense-events, it programs all thought so that

periods of silence (undirected thought) and dreaming as spontaneous happenings become impossible. A society of control is not so much a nightmare as a non-dream. (Burroughs 1984, 103)

In a society of control it is Being rather than Action that is the prime object(ive) of control (Burroughs 1997, 142) In a society of control political action can be treated as an externality. Since it is our being that is being controlled, we must be immediately prepared to confess who we are, ready to identify ourselves or to prove that we are not one of those suspected as being addicts (Burroughs 1997, 79). When this kind of control of Being succeeds, the control of Action becomes a secondary task delegated to specific authorities. In order to control Being, one has to work on beings. For control to succeed one has to identify the immediacy of being as a presence or as a self-presence. One need not necessarily have to specify the character(istic)s under control. Sometimes it is more efficient to leave this unspecified, like Burroughs reminds us, "The state legislators drew up a law making it a crime to be a drug addict... Since no place or time is specified and the term 'addict' is not clearly defined, no proof is necessary or even relevant under a law so formulated... This is police-state legislation penalizing a state of being." (Burroughs 1997, 79, 142)

An immediacy of being, adjacent to the immediacy and immanence of control, is a stationary effect of the reduction of action. The immediacy of being can be found in situations where action stands still, is in suspense. The control of being by the word and image is not so much persuasive or argumentative as it is formative and constitutive. That is why the obligation to be free demands us to mould and make up ourselves by ourselves and bracket all (collective) action. This kind of freedom refers to the abundance of mutually contradictory alternatives. Such a situation of freedom can be also read as a situation of an immediate control of being characterized by an anxiety and even apathy (Burroughs 1984, 41). Burroughs emphasizes that a free being by habit can be effectively controlled by contradictory commands. They are an integral part of a society of control, "Stop. Go. Wait here. Go there. Come in. Stay out. Be a man. Be a woman. Be white. Be black. Live. Die. Be your real self. Be somebody else. Be a human animal. Be a superman. Yes. No. Rebel. Submit. RIGHT. WRONG. Make a splendid impression. Make an awful impression. Sit down. Stand up. Take your hat off. Put your hat on. Create. Destroy. Live now. Live in the future. Live in the past. Obey the law. Break the law. Be ambitious. Be modest. Accept. Reject. Plan ahead. Be spontaneous. Decide for yourself. Listen to others. Talk. SILENCE. Save money. Spend money. Speed up. Slow down. This way. That way. Right. Left. Present. Absent. Open. Closed. Entrance. Exit. IN. OUT, etc., round the clock." (Burroughs 1984, 45)

In a society of control freedom is an ambivalent and ambiguous state of being which is double-binded by paradoxical demands and oxymoronic maxims. The control of being by the word and image aiming at a conditioned conduct and an automatic obedience (Burroughs 1993, 34-36) leans on the naming calling which presupposes the IS of identity (Burroughs 1984, 200). "The IS of identity always carries the implication of that and nothing else, and it also carries the assignment of permanent condition (or a rigid status). To stay that way." The definite article "THE contains the implication of one and only." (Burroughs 1984, 200) From the lingual point of view this control of being can be seen in the crippling force of three little words, "to be" "THE" (Burroughs 1984, 201).

To be me. To be myself. To be you. To be another. To be a body. To be an animal. In a society of control these verbal viruses infect any situation since they carve verbal moulds or labels 'me', 'you', 'animal' to fit in. In this sense, "my" being is shaped like a wax in this mould "I" by the word and image (Burroughs 1999b, 251). In this way, I am identified with the verbal label "myself" and locked by words and images (Burroughs 1984, 49) into lines of association and control (Burroughs 1984, 176; 1999c, 199).

An Order with a Slack

Burroughs experiments with the writing so that he would not be identified with the verbal label 'Burroughs'. He always wants to keep as many alternatives open as possible (Burroughs 1999b, 254). His creations of multilevel events and characters by a cut up-method, a fold in-technique, a mix and a montage are one way of cutting the lines of association and control (Burroughs 1984, 34-35). One of his multiple personalities can interrupt him rudely at any point of inflection, juncture or intersection in his texts (Burroughs 1993, 78), "I have a thousand faces and a thousand names. I am nobody. I am everybody. I am me I am you. I am here there forward back in out. I stay everywhere I stay nowhere. I stay present I stay absent." (Burroughs 1999d, 373.)

To believe that Burroughs is here just taking part in the game of demasking/remasking is altogether premature. He knows that the verbal war games (Burroughs 1984, 202) in a society of control, in which the human voice is just a weapon (Burroughs 1984, 199), are started at the molecular level by the word-viruses or the virus power of words (Burroughs 1984, 12-13; 1999e, 275). (This claim echoes his basic theory that the written word was actually a virus that made the spoken word possible.) At this level, where habits, conditionings of conduct, short-circuits of reaction and automatic responses

of obedience are formed and manifest in cellular decisions, cellular equations and cellular alterations (Burroughs 1997, 151), there the molar distinctions between the mind and the matter or the concept and the reality lose their sense. This is the level where biocontrol operates by way of codes, information molecules as send-offs (Burroughs 1993, 132). Burroughs claims that this "sending" can never be a means to anything but more sending, just like the aim of control can only be more control. In fact, this is how machines operate, programmed to react to send-offs, be they cell machines, body machines, adding machines, thinking machines, police machines, alien mucus machines, money machines or control machines of any other kind. (Burroughs 1984, 73, 83; 1993, 33; 1999a, 320, 336; 1999e, 278)

A society of control operates in a machine-like fashion. It is sophisticated and efficient because the lines of control are already drawn at the molecular level, they are connected to the biocontrol machines. It is sophisticated and efficient because it is a code society in which speech need not be consciously understood to have an effect (Burroughs 1984, 181). Habits can be formed and reinforced, conduct can be conditioned and desires can be temporarily satisfied in spectacular ways by codes, ciphers and scramblers which have a strong appeal to people (Burroughs 1984, 181). In this way, it is considered possible that "a complex pattern of tensions...keeps the unhappy pleasure-seekers in a condition of unconsummated alertness...The transient population is completely miscellaneous and unrelated, so that you never know what sort of behaviour to expect from anybody." (Burroughs 1997, 69) This contingency of conduct, this impulsiveness on the part of the population at large can challenge control. But it can do so only locally since on a mass scale these arbitrary forces typically oppose each other. Besides, this kind of reactionism is just another side to habits. Habitual conduct is launched by first impulses, just like drug users remind us. But there is more to this inequality. If we think of junk, we may see that it "is the ideal product... the ultimate merchandise. No sales talk necessary... The junk merchant does not sell his product to the consumer, he sells the consumer to his product. He does not improve and simplify his merchandise. He degrades and simplifies the client." (Burroughs 1993, 8) That goes just like the burroughsian character Lupita says, "Selling is more of a habit than using." (Burroughs 1993, 26) This is how the money machine operates, "It eats youth, spontaneity, life, beauty and above all it eats creativity. It eats quality and shits out quantity." (Burroughs 1984, 73-74) It also keeps the poor busy (Burroughs 1984, 77). If this is so, we are already in the Valley, "In the Valley economic laws work out like a formula in high school algebra, since there is no human element to interfere. The very rich are getting richer and all the others are going broke. The big holders are not shrewd or ruthless or enterprising. They don't have

to say or think anything. All they have to do is sit and the money comes pouring in...The Valley is like an honest dice table where the players do not have the vitality to influence the dice and they win or lose by pure chance.” (Burroughs 1997, 108-109)

A society of control has its limits, its monopoly to mould can be contested, its recourse to force is counterproductive, its paradoxical measures feed internal contradictions, its concessions loosen the lines of control (Burroughs 1984, 188; 1999a, 339-342). These limits can be though always displaced, since control demands opposition, “When there is no more opposition, control becomes a meaningless proposition. It is highly questionable whether a human organism could survive complete control. There would be nothing there. No persons there.” (Burroughs 1999a, 339) A society of control is a zone, a soft machine whose “rooms are made of a plastic cement that bulges to accommodate people, but when too many crowd into one room there is a soft plop and someone squeezes through the wall right into the next house.” (Burroughs 1993, 143) If a society of control is seen as an order with slack – to use William E. Connolly’s expression (Connolly 1987, 113) – one may ask “(w)hat *political* difference could be made by this appreciation of limits, ambiguity, and mystery?” (Connolly 1987, 110) Connolly himself claims that “(i)n an order with slack the imperatives are loosened. Because the imperatives are relaxed there is more room for us, first, to define our lives outside the medium of politics, second, for politics to serve as the medium through which we confront ambiguities within those limits...This idea of slack, serving as a counterpoint to the logic of disciplinary control, itself stands in an ambiguous relation to radical and liberal doctrines...that are most in need of redefinition at those obscure junctures where their differences merge into commonalities.” (Connolly 1987, 99, 113-114)

The Possibility of Politics

Connolly seems to be quite optimistic about the (postliberal and postradical) possibility of politics, “to squeeze more slack out of the order” (Connolly 1987, 113). Burroughs is also determined to slacken the lines of control but he is much more sceptical about the powers of ‘our’ politics to squeeze more slack out of control machines. He reminds us that “(o)nce a problem has reached the political-military stage, it is already insoluble” (Burroughs 1984, 79); that “(w)hen you are talking about democracy...you are not talking about anything” (Burroughs 1984, 49); and “(p)eople who are completely verbal like judges and politicians just won’t change their premises ...(until) being displaced by some violence or disaster” (Burroughs 1984, 50). These and

similar statements are not just demonstrations of a repugnance about politics, but rather an invitation not to submit to the established discourse on politics, not to satisfy with the received views of politics even in their postliberal and postradical forms! His exclamation that “(w)hy should we let some old broken down ham tell us what wisdom is” (Burroughs 1993, 98, 100) very well makes the point. If we claim that politics can squeeze more slack in a society of control, we not only have to displace our political language, we have to consider the possibility that politics takes place beyond language, beyond the word and image.

If we claim that politics can squeeze more slack in a society of control, we should talk about politics as a Becoming, as an undefinable, unnameable and undecidable displacement effect. Earlier on I made an effort to picture this transformation in rhetorical terms of displacement strategies which might be also seen to add momentum to this Becoming. From the Burroughsian perspective, even this effort is backward, dictated by the word. If we claim that politics can squeeze more slack in a society of control, we not only have to displace our lingual conventions. We have to consider the possibility that politics as a Becoming takes place beyond language. For Burroughs, politics in the new sense means innovation, discovery and experimentation rather than justification and judgement. If politics as a Becoming is seen or sensed as an innovation and experimentation, it is also possible to read Burroughs as an artist of politics. As far as politics is concerned, he is an innovator who should be understood in the context of discovery. To accentuate this point, a testimony of Albert Einstein is instructive. He answered in a letter to Jacques Hadamard about an inquiry on the working methods behind his research. Einstein pointed out that,

“A. The words or the language, as they are written or spoken, do not seem to play any role in my mechanism of thought...The physical entities which seem to serve as elements in thought are certain signs and more or less clear images which can be ‘voluntarily’ reproduced and combined.

B. The above mentioned elements are , in my case, of visual and some of muscular type. Conventional words or other signs have to be sought for labouriously only in a secondary stage when the mentioned associative play is sufficiently established and can be reproduced at will.

C. According to what has been said, the play with the mentioned elements is aimed to be analogous to certain logical connections one is searching for.

D. Visual and motor. In a stage when words intervene at all, they are , in my case, purely auditive, but they interfere only in a secondary stage as already mentioned.

E. It seems to me that what you call full consciousness is a limit case which can never be fully accomplished. This seems to me connected with the fact called

the narrowness of consciousness (Enge des Bewusstseins)." (Einstein 1945, 142-143)

We should forget "Einstein" – a marvellously impossible idea! What matters is his point that words or language only follows, in a secondary stage, discovery and innovation. Burroughs could be understood to make a similar point as far as the art of politics is concerned – just like Deleuze does in emphasizing that a political event is eternally that which has just happened or that which is about to happen. Politics as a discovery, an innovation and an experimentation appears from a 'non-place', which has no name and which can be locked into words only afterwards. The chase to pin conceptually down 'politics' is a backward effort. The obsession of the political theory to reflect the meaning of politics may also explain its sterility in terms of political discovery and innovation. In fact, reflexivity, aiming at a full consciousness, is a trap – just as Connolly has pointed out echoing Foucault, "(i)t obligates us to bring the self more completely under the control of historically constructed standards of reason and morality" (Connolly 1987, 108). Naturally these standards, this memory, these words and images, can thwart innovation. Discovery and discernment demands that we appreciate the mystery and ambiguity of politics, a kind of poetic ability to confront events as if they were revelations. This is why, politics cannot be expressed directly. "It can perhaps be indicated by mosaic of juxtaposition like articles abandoned in a hotel drawer, defined by negatives and absence." (Burroughs 1993, 98)

In the beginning of this article the claim was made that it is illusionary to believe that one can conceptually capture the ambiguity of politics as if one could have a full consciousness of what is going on in politics. Sophisticated efforts may surely be made to assemble politics out of multiple and manifold, heterogeneous and hybrid elements or attributes, which both consolidate and contradict, confirm and challenge each other. These efforts would parallel those cartographies which map subjects as assemblages of enunciation. However, in a society of control even these efforts tend to be incorporated within the nexus of the governmentalization of politics up to the effect that the distinction between government and politics vanishes. This is a dilemma which reveals the thresholds of language, the limits of the social sciences genre which typically seeks to present itself as something more universal than a dialect. What then are the perspectives open as to deal with this dilemma? I propose the following four perspectives.

Firstly, one can simply challenge the claim about the ambiguity of politics and subjectivity and then proceed to give a rigorous analytical account of the unequivocal(ized) topic. *Secondly*, one may acknowledge the outstanding difficulties in conceptually assembling politics but still sustain a scholarly

conviction of being able to produce an ever more intricate articulation of politics. *Thirdly*, in coping with the dilemma of deciphering politics as an innovation and a discovery, one may emphasize the thresholds of language. For this reason, one can juxtapose words and images and conceive that politics as an innovation can only be imagined, i.e. discerned in more or less clear images. *Fourthly*, one may appreciate the ingenuity of politics as something beyond representation, something beyond the word and image. This is the perspective of Burroughs on politics which he situates at the origin of untouchability (Burroughs 1993, 100), and which for him has, like a ghost, lost its body in a society of control (Burroughs 1993, 21-22,33). Thus it is being driven by a need or a desire without a body (Burroughs 1993, 33). Such a politics always finds a space in between (Burroughs 1993, 111- 112), an interzone for someone who can escape her/his labels, her/his IS of identity.

Burroughs lets Mr Martin, one of his multiple personalities, make the point on politics,

“*Question*, Mr. Martin, you say ‘give me a wall and a garbage can and I can sit there forever.’ Almost in the next sentence you say ‘All I want is out of here.’ Aren’t you contradicting yourself?

You are confused about the word ‘self’. I could by God sit there forever if I had a self to sit in that would sit still for it. I don’t. As soon as I move in on any self all that self wants is to be somewhere else. Anywhere else. Now there you sit in your so-called “self”. Suppose you could walk out of that self. Some people can incidentally. ...You have taken great trouble and pain...and you have gotten precisely back where you started. To really leave human form you would have to leave human form that is leave the whole concept of word and image. You cannot leave the human image in the human image. You cannot leave human form in the human form. And you cannot think or conceive in non-image terms by mathematical definition of a being in my biologic film which is a series of images. Does that answer your question? I thought not.” (Burroughs 1999b, 254)

For Burroughs genuine politics as an innovation, a discovery and an experimentation should leave the present human form and take place beyond the word and image. The reason is obvious enough, “In the beginning there was the word...I think that the next step will have to be taken beyond the word. The word is now an outmoded artifact. Any life form that gets stuck with an outmoded built-in-artifact is doomed to destruction. The present form of a human being quite possibly results from words, and unless they get rid of this outmoded artifact it will lead to their extinction.” (Burroughs 1984, 98) Needless to say, Burroughs has not said the last word on this topic.

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