

Making Things Public

Atmospheres of Democracy

Assembling or Disassembling?

Which Cosmos for Which Cosmopolitics?

The Problem of Composition

From Objects to Things

From Laboratory to Public Proofs

The Great Pan Is Dead!

Reshuffling Religious Assemblies

The Parliaments of Nature

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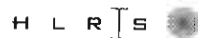
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From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik or How to Make Things Public

Bruno Latour*

The aide said that guys like me were "in what we call the reality-based community," which he defined as people who "believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality." I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. "That's not the way the world really works anymore," he continued. "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." Ron Suskind¹

Some conjunctions of planets are so ominous, astrologers used to say, that it seems safer to stay at home in bed and wait until Heaven sends a more auspicious message. It's probably the same with political conjunctions. They are presently so hopeless that it seems prudent to stay as far away as possible from anything political and to wait for the passing away of all the present leaders, terrorists, commentators and buffoons who strut about the public stage.

Astrology, however, is as precarious an art as political science; behind the nefarious conjunctions of hapless stars, other much dimmer alignments might be worth pondering. With the political period triggering such desperation, the time seems right to shift our attention to other ways of considering public matters. And "matters" are precisely what might be put center stage. Yes, public matters, but how?

While the German Reich has given us two world wars, the German language has provided us with the word *Realpolitik* to describe a positive, materialist, no-nonsense, interest only, matter-of-fact way of dealing with naked power relations. Although this "reality," at the time of Bismarck, might have appeared as a welcome change after the cruel idealisms it aimed to replace, it strikes us now as deeply *unrealistic*. In general, to invoke "realism" when talking about politics is something one should not do without trembling and shaking. The beautiful word "reality" has been damned by the too many crimes committed in its name.

What Is the Res of Res publica?

By the German neologism *Dingpolitik*, we wish to designate a risky and tentative set of experiments in probing just what it could mean for political thought to turn "things" around and to become slightly more *realistic* than has been attempted up to now. A few years ago, computer scientists invented the marvelous expression of "object-oriented" software to describe a new way to program their computers. We wish to use this metaphor to ask the question: "What would an *object-oriented* democracy look like?"

The general hypothesis is so simple that it might sound trivial – but being trivial might be part of what it is to become a "realist" in politics. We might be more connected to each other by our worries, our matters of concern, the issues we care for, than by any other set of values, opinions, attitudes or principles. The experiment is certainly easy to make. Just go in your head over any set of contemporary issues: the entry of Turkey into the European Union, the Islamic veil in France, the spread of genetically modified organisms in Brazil, the pollution of the river near your home, the breaking down of Greenland's glaciers, the diminishing return of your pension funds, the closing of your daughter's factory, the repairs to be made in your apartment, the rise and fall of stock options,

* Although I cannot thank all the people whose thoughts have contributed to this paper without listing this entire catalog, I owe a very special thanks to Noortje Marres, whose work on Lippmann and Dewey has been central during the three years of preparation for this show.

¹ Ron Suskind, "Without a Doubt", in: *New York Times*, October 17, 2004.



Clinton's cat "Socks" or the degree zero of politics, Little Rock Arkansas, November 17, 1992, © AP Photo / Greg Gibson
□ Chelsea Clinton's cat "Socks" gets the attention of photographers on the sidewalk outside the fenced Arkansas Governor's Mansion in Little Rock. "Socks" strolled about a two block area with photographers in tow. President-elect Bill Clinton was working on his transition and preparing for a trip to Washington and a meeting with President George H. W. Bush.



Presidential hopefuls US Vice President Al Gore and former US Senator Bill Bradley listen to a question December 17, 1999 during an ABC TV Nightline town hall meeting moderated by Ted Koppel at Daniel Webster College in Nashua, New Hampshire. ■ Photo © AFP/E-Lance Media, photo: Luke Frazza

the latest beheading by fanatics in Falluja, the last American election. For every one of these objects, you see spewing out of them a different set of passions, indignations, opinions, as well as a different set of interested parties and different ways of carrying out their partial resolution.

It's clear that each object – each issue – generates a different pattern of emotions and disruptions, of disagreements and agreements. There might be no continuity, no coherence in our opinions, but there is a hidden continuity and a hidden coherence in what we are attached to. Each object gathers around itself a different assembly of relevant parties. Each object triggers new occasions to passionately differ and dispute. Each object may also offer new ways of achieving closure without having to agree on much else. In other words, objects – taken as so many issues – bind all of us in ways that map out a public space profoundly different from what is usually recognized under the label of "the political". It is this space, this hidden geography that we wish to explore through this catalog and exhibition.

It's not unfair to say that political philosophy has often been the victim of a strong object-avoidance tendency. From Hobbes to Rawls, from Rousseau to Habermas, many procedures have

been devised to assemble the relevant parties, to authorize them to contract, to check their degree of representativity, to discover the ideal speech conditions, to detect the legitimate closure, to write the good constitution. But when it comes down to *what* is at issue, namely the object of concern that brings them together, not a word is uttered. In a strange way, political science is mute just at the moment when the objects of concern should be brought in and made to speak up loudly. Contrary to what the powerful etymology of their most cherished word should imply, their *res publica* does not seem to be loaded with too many things. Procedures to authorize and legitimize are important, but it's only half of what is needed to assemble. The other half lies in the issues themselves, in the *matters* that matter, in the *res* that creates a *public* around it. They need to be represented, authorized, legitimated and brought to bear inside the relevant assembly.

What we call an "object-oriented democracy" tries to redress this bias in much of political philosophy, that is, to bring together two different meanings of the word *representation* that have been kept separate in theory although they have remained always mixed in practice. The first one, so well known in schools of law and political science, designates the ways to gather the legitimate people around some issue. In this case, a representation is said to be faithful if the right procedures have been followed. The second one, well known in science and in technology, presents or rather *represents* what is the object of concern to the eyes and ears of those who have been assembled around it. In this case, a representation is said to be good if the matters at hand have been accurately portrayed. Realism implies that the same degree of attention be given to the two aspects of what it is to represent an issue. The first question draws a sort of place, sometimes a circle, which might be called an assembly, a gathering, a meeting, a council; the second question brings *into* this newly created locus a topic, a concern, an issue, a *topos*. But the two have to be taken together: *Who* is to be concerned; *What* is to be considered?

When Thomas Hobbes instructed his engraver on how to sketch the famous frontispiece for *Leviathan*, he had his mind full of optical metaphors and illusion machines he had seen in

his travels through Europe.² A third meaning of this ambiguous and ubiquitous word "representation," the one with which artists are most familiar, had to be called for to solve, this time visually, the problem of the composition of the "Body Politik". Up to now it has remained a puzzle: How to represent, and through which medium, the sites where people meet to discuss their matters of concern? It's precisely what we are tackling here.³ Shapin and Schaffer might have renewed Hobbes's problem even more tellingly when they redrew his monster for *their* frontispiece and equipped his left arm not with the Bishop's crosier but with Boyle's air-pump.⁴ From now on, the powers of science are just as important to consider: How do they assemble, and around which matters of concern?

But in addition to the visual puzzle of assembling composite bodies, another puzzle should strike us in those engravings. A simple look at them clearly proves that the "Body Politik" is not only made of people! They are thick with things: clothes, a huge sword, immense castles, large cultivated fields, crowns, ships, cities and an immensely complex technology of gathering, meeting, cohabiting, enlarging, reducing and focusing. In addition to the throng of little people summed up in the crowned head of the Leviathan, there are objects everywhere.

To be crowded with objects that nonetheless are not really integrated into our definition of politics is even more tellingly visible in the famous fresco painted by Lorenzetti in Siena's city hall.⁵ Many scholars have deciphered for us the complex meaning of the emblems representing the

² Horst Bredekamp, *Thomas Hobbes Visuelle Strategien. Der Leviathan: Urbild des modernen Staates. Werkillustrationen und Portraits*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin, 1999; Simon Schaffer, this volume, chapter 3; about Nicéron's machine: Jean-François Nicéron, *La perspective curieuse à Paris chez Pierre Billaine Chez Jean Du Puis rue Saint Jacques à la Couronne d'Or avec l'Optique et la Catoptrique du RP Mersenne du mesme ordre Oeuvre très utile aux Peintres, Architectes, Sculpteurs, Graveurs et à tous autres qui se meslent du Dessain*, 1663.

³ Dario Gamboni, this volume, chapter 3.

⁴ Steven Shapin, Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump. Hobbes, Boyle and the Experimental Life*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1985.

⁵ Quentin Skinner, *Ambrogio Lorenzetti: the Artist as Political Philosopher*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986; Anne-Marie Brenot, *Sienne au XIV siècle dans les fresques de Lorenzetti: la Cité parfaite, L'Harmattan*, Paris, 1999; Giovanni Pavanetto, *Il Buono et il Cattivo Governo. Rappresentazioni nelle Arti dal Medioevo al Novecento*, exhib. cat., Fondazione Cini, Marsilio, Venice, 2004, and his paper in this volume, chapter 2.



Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *The Effects of the Good Government*, 1338-1339, fresco (detail), Palazzo Pubblico, Siena, Sala dei Nove, © Comune di Siena, photo: Foto Lensini Siena

Good and the Bad Government, and have traced their complex genealogy. But what is most striking for a contemporary eye is the massive presence of cities, landscapes, animals, merchants, dancers, and the ubiquitous rendering of light and space. The Bad Government is not simply illustrated by the devilish figure of Discordia but also through the dark light, the destroyed city, the ravaged landscape and the suffocating people. The Good Government is not simply personified by the various emblems of Virtue and Concordia but also through the transparency of light, its well-kept architecture, its well-tended landscape, its diversity of animals, the ease of its commercial relations, its thriving arts. Far from being simply a *décor* for the emblems, the fresco requests us to become attentive to a subtle ecology of Good and Bad Government. And modern visitors, attuned to the new issues of bad air, hazy lights, destroyed ecosystems, ruined architecture, abandoned industry and delocalized trades are certainly ready

to include in their definition of politics a whole new ecology loaded with things.⁶ Where has political philosophy turned its distracted gaze while so many objects were drawn under its very nose?

A New Eloquence

In this show, we simply want to pack loads of stuff into the empty arenas where naked people were supposed to assemble simply to talk. Two vignettes will help us focus on those newly crowded sites.

The first one is a fable proposed by Peter Sloterdijk.⁷ He imagined that the US Air Force should have added to its military paraphernalia a "pneumatic parliament" that could be parachuted at the rear of the front, just after the liberating forces of the Good had defeated the forces of Evil. On hitting the ground, this parliament would unfold and be inflated just like your rescue dingy is supposed to do when you fall in the water. Ready to enter

⁶ Peter Sloterdijk, *Sphären III – Schäume. Plurale Sphärologie*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/M., 2004.

⁷ Peter Sloterdijk, this volume, chapter 15.



The United Nations Security Council meets at the UN headquarters to hear evidence of Iraq's weapons program presented by US Secretary of State Colin Powell Wednesday, February 5, 2003. © AP Photo / Richard Drew

and take your seat, your finger still red from the indelible ink that proves you have exercised your voting duty, instant democracy would thus be delivered! The lesson of this simile is easy to draw. To imagine a parliament without its material set of complex instruments, "air-conditioning" pumps, local ecological requirements, material infrastructure, and long-held habits is as ludicrous as to try to parachute such an inflatable parliament into the middle of Iraq. By contrast, probing an object-oriented democracy is to research what are the material conditions that may render the air breathable again.

The second vignette is the terrifying one offered by the now infamous talk former Secretary of State Colin Powell gave to the United Nations on February 5, 2003, about the unambiguous and undisputable fact of the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.⁹ No doubt, the first half of the representation – namely the assembly of legitimate speakers and listeners – was well taken care of. All of those sitting around the UN Security Council horseshoe table had a right to be

there. But the same can't be said of the second half, namely the representation of the facts of the matter presented by the Secretary of State. Every one of the slides was a blatant lie – and the more that time has passed, the more blatant it has become. And yet their showing was prefaced by these words: "My colleagues, every statement I make today is backed up by sources, solid sources. *These are not assertions.* What we are giving you are *facts* and conclusions based on solid intelligence" (my emphasis). Never has the difference between facts and assertions been more abused than on this day.

To assemble is one thing; to represent to the eyes and ears of those assembled what is at stake is another. An object-oriented democracy should be concerned as much by the procedure to detect the relevant parties as to the methods to bring into the center of the debate the proof of what it is to be debated. This second set of procedures to bring in the object of worry has several old names: *eloquence*, or more pejorative, *rhetoric*, or, even more derogatory, *sophistry*. And yet these are just the

⁸ Full text is available at: <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2003/17300.htm>

labels that we might need to rescue from the dustbin of history.⁹ Mr. Powell tried to distinguish the rhetoric of assertions from the undisputable power of facts. He failed miserably. Having no truth, he had no eloquence either. Can we do better? Can we trace again the frail conduits through which truths and proofs are allowed to enter the sphere of politics?

Unwittingly, the secretary of state put us on a track where the abyss between assertions and facts might be a nice "rhetorical" ploy, but it has lost its relevance. It would imply, on the one hand, that there would be matters-of-fact which some enlightened people would have unmediated access to. On the other hand, disputable assertions would be practically worthless, useful only insofar as they could feed the subjective passions of interested crowds. On one side would be the truth and no mediation, no room for discussion; on the other side would be opinions, many obscure intermediaries, perhaps some hecklings. Through the use of this indefatigable cliché, the *Pneumatic Parliament* is now equipped with a huge screen on which thoroughly transparent facts are displayed. Those who remain unconvinced prove by their resistance how irrational they are; they have unfortunately fallen prey to subjective passions. And sure enough, having aligned so many "undisputable" facts behind his position, since the "dispute" was *still* going on, Powell had to close it arbitrarily by a show of unilateral force. Facts and forces, in spite of so many vibrant declarations, always walk in tandem.

The problem is that transparent, unmediated, undisputable facts have recently become rarer and rarer. To provide complete undisputable proof has become a rather messy, pesky, risky business. And to offer a *public* proof, big enough and certain enough to convince the whole world of the presence of a phenomenon or of a looming danger, seems now almost beyond reach – and always was.¹⁰ The same American administration that was content with a few blurry slides "proving" the presence of non-existing weapons in Iraq is happy to put scare quotes around the proof of much vaster, better validated, more imminent threats, such as global climate change, diminishing oil reserves, increasing inequality. Is it not time to say: "Mr. Powell, given what you have done with facts,



Althing in Thingvellir (fingvellir), Iceland, photo: Sabine Himmelsbach ■ In 930 A.D. chieftains in Iceland gathered in a natural amphitheater and formed the world's first parliament, the Althing. The meeting place was called Thingvellir ("parliament plains"), and over the next 300 years representatives journeyed here once a year to elect leaders, argue cases, and settle disputes.

we would much prefer you to leave them aside and let us instead compare mere *assertions* with one another. Don't worry, even with such an inferior type of proof we might nonetheless come to a conclusion, and this one will not be arbitrarily cut short?¹¹ Either we should despair of politics and abandon the hope of providing public proofs altogether, or we should abandon the worn-out cliché of incontrovertible matters of fact. Could we do better and manage to really conclude a dispute with "disputable" assertions? After all, when Aristotle – surely not a cultural relativist! – introduced the word "rhetoric" it was precisely to mean *proofs*, incomplete to be sure but proofs nonetheless.¹²

This is what we wish to attempt: Where matters-of-fact have failed, let's try what I have called matters-of-concern. What we are trying to register here in this catalog is a huge sea change in our conceptions of science, our grasps of facts, our understanding of objectivity. For too long, objects have been wrongly portrayed as matters-of-fact. This is unfair to them, unfair to science, unfair to objectivity, unfair to experience. They are much

⁹ Barbara Cassin, *L'effet sophistique*, Gallimard, Paris, 1995, and her contribution to this volume, chapter 14.

¹⁰ Simon Schaffer, this volume, chapter 5.

¹¹ See the complex set of assertions offered by Hans Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, Pantheon Books, New York, 2004.

¹² "Enthymen" is the name given to this type of incomplete proof: Aristotle, *Treatise on Rhetoric*, Prometheus Books, New York, 1995.



Hangar at Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida, March 7, 2003, photo © NASA/Getty Images ■ NASA crash investigators place debris from the Space Shuttle Columbia onto a grid on the floor of a hangar. NASA is attempting to reassemble debris from the shuttle to learn what caused Columbia to break-up during reentry. NASA Mission Control lost contact with the Space Shuttle Columbia during the reentry phase of mission STS-107 on February 1, 2003 and later learned that the shuttle had broken up over Texas. Debris from the wreckage drifted hundreds of miles from central Texas to Louisiana. All seven astronauts onboard the shuttle died in the crash.

more interesting, variegated, uncertain, complicated, far reaching, heterogeneous, risky, historical, local, material and networky than the pathetic version offered for too long by philosophers. Rocks are not simply there to be kicked at, desks to be thumped at. "Facts are facts are facts"? Yes, but they are also a lot of other things *in addition*.¹³

For those like Mr. Powell, who have long been accustomed to getting rid of all opposition by claiming the superior power of facts, such a sea change might be met with cries of derision: "relativism," "subjectivism," "irrationalism," "mere rhetoric," "sophistry"! They might see the new life of facts as so much subtraction. Quite right! It subtracts a lot of their power because it renders their lives more difficult. Think of that: They might have to enter into the new arenas for good and finally make their point to the bitter end. They might actually have to publicly prove their assertions *against other assertions* and come to a closure without thumping and kicking, without alternating wildly between indisputable facts and indisputable shows of terror. We wish to explore in this catalog many realist gestures other than just thumping and kicking. We want to imagine a *new eloquence*. Is it asking too much of our public conversation? It's great to be convinced, but it would be even better to be convinced *by some evidence*.¹⁴

Our notions of politics have been thwarted for too long by an absurdly unrealistic epistemology. Accurate facts are hard to come by, and the harder they are, the more they entail some costly equipment, a longer set of mediations, more delicate proofs. Transparency and immediacy are bad for science as well as for politics; they would make both suffocate.¹⁵ What we need is to be able to bring inside the assemblies *divisive* issues with their long retinue of complicated *proof-giving*

¹³ Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *Toward a History of Epistemic Thing. Synthesizing Proteins in the Test Tube*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1997; Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, Henning Schmidgen, this volume, chapter 5.

¹⁴ It's a striking feature of the 2004 American election to have witnessed the drift of the meaning of the word "convinced" from an objective to a subjective status: one now designates by it the inner wholesomeness of an interior soul and no longer the effect on one's mind of some indirect and risky evidence: the "convinced" Bush won over the "flip-flopper" to-be-convinced Kerry.

¹⁵ Hanna Rose Shell about Marey's instrumentarium, this volume, chapter 5. Peter Galison about the Wall of Science, this volume, chapter 5.



NASA Crash Investigator, Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida, March 11, 2003. © photo: AP Photo/NASA, Kim Shiflett ■ A member of the space shuttle reconstruction project team holds a piece of wreckage and tries to locate it on pictures of Columbia taken while the orbiter was in the vehicle assembly building.

equipment. No unmediated access to agreement; no unmediated access to the facts of the matter. After all, we are used to rather arcane procedures for voting and electing. Why should we suddenly imagine an eloquence so devoid of means, tools, tropes, tricks and knacks that it would bring the facts into the arenas through some uniquely magical transparent idiom? If politics is earthly, so is science.

From Objects to Things

It's to underline this shift from a cheapened notion of objectivity to costly proofs that we want to resurrect the word "Ding" and use the neologism *Dingpolitik* as a substitute for *Realpolitik*. The

latter lacks realism when it talks about power relations as well as when it talks about mere facts. It does not know how to deal with "indisputability". To discover one's own real naked interest requires probably the most convoluted and farfetched inquiry there is. To be brutal is not enough to turn you into a hard-headed realist.

As every reader of Heidegger knows, or as every glance at an English dictionary under the heading "Thing" will certify, the old word "Thing" or "Ding" designated originally a certain type of archaic assembly.¹⁶ Many parliaments in

¹⁶ See the Oxford Dictionary: "ORIGIN: Old English, of Germanic origin; related to German *Ding*. Early senses included 'meeting' and 'matter', 'concern' as well as 'inanimate objects'." Martin Heidegger, *What is a thing?*, trans. W. B. Barton, Jr., Vera Deutsch, Regnery, Chicago, 1968; Graham Harman, this volume, chapter 4.

Nordic and Saxon nations still activate the old root of this etymology: Norwegian congressmen assemble in the *Storting*; Icelandic deputies called the equivalent of "thingmen" gather in the *Althing*;¹⁷ Isle of Man seniors used to gather around the *Ting*;¹⁸ the German landscape is dotted with *Thingstätten* and you can see in many places the circles of stones where the Thing used to stand.¹⁹ Thus, long before designating an object thrown out of the political sphere and standing there objectively and independently, the *Ding* or Thing has for many centuries meant the issue that brings people together *because* it divides them. The same etymology lies dormant in the Latin *res*, the Greek *aitia* and the French or Italian *cause*. Even the Russian *soviet* still dreams of bridges and churches.²⁰

Of all the eroded meanings left by the slow crawling of political geology, none is stranger to consider than the Icelandic *Althing*, since the ancient "thingmen" – what we would call "congressmen" or MPs – had the amazing idea of meeting in a desolate and sublime site that happens to sit smack in the middle of the fault line that marks the meeting place of the Atlantic and European tectonic plates. Not only do Icelanders manage to remind us of the old sense of *Ding*, but they also dramatize to the utmost how much these political questions have also become questions of nature. Are not all parliaments now divided by the nature of things as well as by the din of the crowded *Ding*? Has the time not come to bring the *res* back to the *res publica*?²¹ This is why we have tried to build the provisional and fragile assembly of our show on as many fault lines from as many tectonic plates as possible.

The point of reviving this old etymology is that we don't assemble because we agree, look alike, feel good, are socially compatible or wish to fuse together but because we are brought by divisive matters of concern into some neutral, isolated place in order to come to some sort of provisional makeshift (dis)agreement. If the *Ding* designates both those who assemble because they are concerned as well as what causes their concerns and divisions, it should become the center of our attention: *Back to Things!* Is this not a more engaging political slogan?

But how strange is the shape of the things we

should go back to. They no longer have the clarity, transparency, obviousness of matters-of-fact; they are not made of clearly delineated, discrete objects that would be bathing in some translucent space like the beautiful anatomical drawings of Leonardo, or the marvelous wash drawings of Gaspard Monge, or the clear-cut "isotypes" devised by Otto Neurath.²² Matters-of-fact now appear to our eyes as depending on a delicate aesthetic of painting, drawing, lighting, gazing, convening, something that has been elaborated over four centuries and that might be changing now before our very eyes.²³ There has been an aesthetic of matters-of-fact, of objects, of *Gegenstände*. Can we devise an aesthetic of matters-of-concern, of Things? This is one of the (too many!) topics we wish to explore.²⁴

Gatherings is the translation that Heidegger used, to talk about those Things, those sites able to assemble mortals and gods, humans and non-humans. There is more than a little irony in extending this meaning to what Heidegger and his followers loved to hate, namely science, technology, commerce, industry and popular culture.²⁵ And yet this is just what we intend to do in this book: the objects of science and technology, the aisles of supermarkets, financial institutions, medical establishments, computer networks – even the catwalks of fashion shows!²⁶ – offer paramount examples of hybrid forums and agoras, of the gatherings that have been eating away at the older realm of pure objects bathing in the clear light of

¹⁷ Gisli Pálsson, this volume, chapter 4.

¹⁸ Elizabeth Edwards and Peter James on Benjamin Stone's photographs, this volume, chapter 2.

¹⁹ Barbara Dölemeyer, this volume, chapter 4.

²⁰ Oleg Kharkhordin, this volume, chapter 4.

²¹ "When [the *res*] appears in this function, it is not as a seat where the unilateral mastery of a subject is exercised [...] If the *res* is an object, it has this function above all in a debate or an argument, a common object that *opposes* and *unites* two protagonists within a single relation." And, further on: "Its objectivity is ensured by the common agreement whose place of origin is controversy and judicial debate." Yan Thomas, "Res, chose et patrimoine (note sur le rapport sujet-objet en droit romain)", in: *Archives de philosophie du droit*, 25, 1980, pp. 413-426, here pp. 417f.

²² Frank Hartmann, this volume, chapter 12.

²³ Lorraine Daston, Peter Galison, "The Image of Objectivity", in: *Representation*, 40, 1992, pp. 81-128; Lorraine Daston, this volume, chapter 12. Jessica Riskin, this volume, chapter 12.

²⁴ Peter Weibel, this volume, conclusion.

²⁵ Richard Rorty, this volume, chapter 4. Graham Harman, this volume, chapter 4.

²⁶ Pauline Terreehorst, Gerard de Vries, this volume, chapter 11.



Saint George, San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice, photo: Fondazione Cini

Right page: "Moyens expéditifs du peuple français pour démeubler un aristocrate" [The French people's quick measure of removing an aristocracy], *Révolutions de France et de Brabant*, engraving, illustration 52, the Houghton Library, Harvard University ■ While sacking a noble's house, the mob is taking a careful look at what they throw out of the windows, creating, involuntarily, a *Thing* around which they assemble.

the modernist gaze. Who could dream of a better example of hybrid forums than the scale models used by architects all over the world to assemble those able to build them at scale 1:27? Or the thin felt pen used by draughtsmen to imagine new landscapes?²⁸ When we say "Public matters!" or "Back to Things!" we are not trying to go back to the old materialism of *Realpolitik*, because *matter itself* is up for grabs as well. To be materialist now implies that one enters a labyrinth more intricate than that built by Daedalus.

In the same fatal month of February 2003, another stunning example of this shift from object to things was demonstrated by the explosion of the shuttle Columbia. "Assembly drawing" is how engineers call the invention of the blueprint.²⁹ But the word assembly sounds odd once the shuttle has exploded and its debris has been gathered in a huge hall where inquirers from a specially

designed commission are trying to discover what happened to the shuttle. They are now provided with an "exploded view" of a highly complex technical object. But what has exploded is our capacity to understand what objects are when they have become *Ding*. How sad that we need catastrophes to remind us that when Columbia was shown on its launching pad in its complete, autonomous, objective form that such a view was even more of a lie than Mr. Powell's presentation of the "facts" of WMD. It's only *after* the explosion that everyone realized the shuttle's complex technology should have been drawn with the NASA bureaucracy *inside* of it in which they, too, would have to fly.³⁰

The object, the *Gegenstand*, may remain outside of all assemblies but not the *Ding*. Hence the question we wish to raise: What are the various shapes of the *assemblies* that can make sense of all those *assemblages*? Questions we address are to the three types of representation brought together in this show: political, scientific and artistic.

Through some amazing quirk of etymology, it just happens that the same root has given birth to those twin brothers: the *Demon* and the *Demos* – and those two are more at war with each other than Eteocles and Polynices ever were.³¹ The word "demos" that makes half of the much vaunted word "demo-crazy" is haunted by the demon, yes, the devil, because they share the same Indo-European root *da-* to divide.³² If the demon is such a terrible threat, it's because it divides in two. If the *demos* is such a welcome solution, it's because it also divides in two. A paradox? No, it's because we ourselves are so divided by so many contradictory attachments that we have to assemble.

We might be familiar with Jesus' admonition against Satan's power,³³ but the same power of division is also what provides the division/divide, namely the *sharing* of the same territory. Hence

²⁷ Albená Yaneva, this volume, chapter 9.

²⁸ Emilié Gomart, this volume, chapter 12.

²⁹ Wolfgang Lefèvre, *Picturing Machines 1400-1700*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2004.

³⁰ Wiebe E. Bijker, this volume, chapter 9.

³¹ Marcel Detienne (ed.), *Qui veut prendre la parole?*, Le Seuil, Paris, 2003.

³² Pierre Lévêque, "Repartition et démocratie à propos de la racine da-", in: *Esprit*, 12, 1993, pp. 34-39.

³³ "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand; and if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand?" (Matthew 12: 25-26).



the *people*, the *demos*, are made up of those who share the same space and are divided by the same contradictory worries. How could an object-oriented democracy ignore such a vertiginous uncertainty? When the knife hovers around the cake of common wealth to be divided in shares, it may divide and let loose the *demon* of civil strife, or it may cut equal shares and let the *demos* be happily apportioned. Strangely enough, we are divided and yet might have to divide, that is to share, even more. The “*demos*” is haunted by the demon of division! No wonder that this show offers, I am afraid, such a *pandemonium*. Politics is a branch of teratology: from Leviathan to devils, from Discordia to Behemoth, and soon a whole array of ghosts and phantoms. Tricks *and* treats all the way down.

No Representation without Re-presentations

Michael Frayn’s play *Democracy* begins with the grating noise of a worm, a little annelid that at the onset is supposed to make the whole decadent West crumble like a wooden house eaten up by termites while the sturdy and united DDR emerges from chaos.³⁴ The same noisy worm is heard again at the end of the play, but this time it’s the whole Soviet Bloc that, unexpectedly, lies in dust while democracy – “the worst form of government, *except* for all the others,” as Churchill famously said – keeps on munching and worming along.

A demon haunts politics but it might not be so much the demon of division – this is what is so devilish about it – but the demon of unity, totality, transparency and immediacy. “Down with intermediaries! Enough spin! We are lied to! We have been betrayed.” Those cries resonate everywhere, and everyone seems to sigh: “Why are we being so badly represented?” Columnists, educators, militants never tire of complaining of a “crisis of representation”. They claim that the masses seem no longer to feel at ease with what its elites are telling them. Politicians, they say, have become aloof, unreal, surrealistic, virtual and alien. An abysmal gap has opened between the “political sphere” and the “reality that people have to put up with”. If this gap is yawning under our feet much like the Icelandic fault line, surely no *Dingpolitik* can ignore it.

But it might also be the case that half of such a crisis is due to what has been sold to the general public under the name of a faithful, transparent and accurate representation.³⁵ We are asking from representation something it cannot possibly give, namely representation *without* any re-presentation, without any provisional assertions, without any imperfect proof, without any opaque layers of translations, transmissions, betrayals, without any complicated machinery of assembly, delegation, proof, argumentation, negotiation and conclusion.

In 2002 in the course of another exhibition called *Iconoclash*, many of the same authors tried to explore the roots of a specific form of Western fanaticism. If only there was no image – that is, no mediation – the better our grasp of Beauty, Truth and Piety would be. We visited the famous iconoclastic periods from the Byzantine to the Reformation, from Lenin’s Red Square to Malevich’s *Black Square* to which we added the less well-known struggles among iconoclasts in mathematics, physics and the other sciences.³⁶ We wanted to compare with one another the various interference patterns created by all those forms of contradictory attitudes toward images. Scientists, artists and clerks have been multiplying imageries, intermediaries, mediations, representations while tearing them down and resurrecting them with even more forceful, beautiful, inspired, objective forms. We reckoned that it was not absurd to explore the whole Western tradition by following up such a ubiquitous double bind. Hence the neologism *Iconoclash* to point at this ambivalence, this other demonic division: “Alas, we cannot do anything without image!” “Fortunately, we cannot do anything without image!”³⁷

Iconoclash was not an iconoclastic show but a show *about* iconoclasm; not a critical show but a show *about* critique. The urge to debunk was no longer a *resource* to feed from, we hoped, but a *topic* to be carefully examined. Like the slave who was asked to remind emperors during their triumphs that they were mere mortals, we had asked

³⁴ Michael Frayn, *Democracy*, Methuen Drama, London, 2003.

³⁵ Noortje Marres, this volume, chapter 3.

³⁶ Bruno Latour, Peter Weibel (eds), *Iconoclash. Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2002.

³⁷ The illustration on page 25 has been kindly provided by Erica Naginski, “The Object of Contempt”, in: *Yale French Studies*, No. 101, *Fragments of Revolution*, 2001, pp. 32–53.



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