The Market Place Ton is a Parliament

The Good and Bad

The World Government

View from above into the exhibition *Making Things Public* at the ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe 2005, photo: Franz Wamhof

From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik
or How to Make Things Public

Bruno Latour*

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.

> 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 Suskind[1]

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,

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

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, Graveures et à tous autres qui se meslent du Dessein*, 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 Pavanello, *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, 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 breatheable 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 destructions in Iraq.[8] 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 "indisputable" 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 (Þingvellir), 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 "Enthymem" is the name given to this type of incomplete proof: Aristotle, *Treatise on Rhetorics*, 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 t he 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?
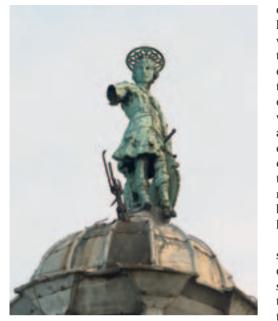
But how strange is the shape of the things we

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 Gísli 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 4.
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 Hougton 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-cracy" 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 Albena Yaneva, this volume, chapter 9.
28 Emilie Gomart, this volume, chapter 12.
29 Wolfang 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 Icono*clash* 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
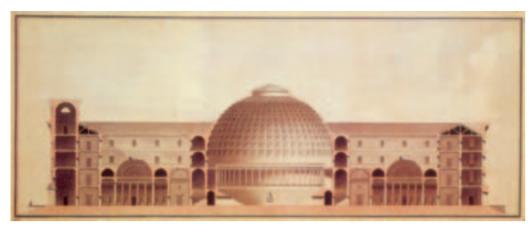
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34 Michael Frayn, *Democracy*, Methuen Drama, London, 2003.
35 Noortje Marres, this volume, chapter 3.
36 Bruno Latour, Peter Weibel (eds), *Iconoclash. Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2002.
37 The 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.

The Mercator Atlas, 1609, 2nd edition – republication by Jodocus Hondius, frontispiece, engraving by Gerard Mercator hand-colored, 45 x 75 cm, private collection, photo © Bruno Latour

Etienne-Louis Boullée, Palais National, plenary hall in section, c. 1792, water-colored pen drawing, 54 x 138 cm, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, Cabinet des estampes, Ha. 56, pl. 12, © BNF

Members of the International Medical Congress, London, 1881, photoprint, February, 25, 1882, 47.6 x 72 cm, Wellcome Library, London, photo © Wellcome Library, London

an angel to come down and suspend in mid-air the arm that held the hammer, an angel that could mutter in the ear of the triumphant idol-breakers: "Beware! Consider what you strike at with so much glee. Look first at what you might risk destroying *instead*!" Once the destructive gesture was suspended, we discovered that no iconoclast had ever struck at the right target. Their blows always drifted sideways. For this reason, even St. George, we thought, looked more interesting without his spear.[38]

Our aim was to move the collective attention, as the subtitle of the show, "*beyond* the image wars in science, religion, and art," clearly indicated. This "beyond" was drawn, very simply, by taking into consideration the other half of what they were all doing: Those we were following were never simply tearing down idols, burning fetishes, debunking ideologies, exposing scandals, breaking down old forms but *also* were putting ideas onto pedestals, invoking deities, proving facts, establishing theories, building institutions, creating new forms and *also* destroying unexpectedly and unwittingly other things they had not known that they cherished so much. By bringing destruction, blunder, plunder and construction together we hoped to foster a new respect for mediators.

Obviously, there is something in the way flows of images create access to Beauty, Truth and Piety that has been missed by idol-breakers over the ages. To summarize our attempt in one simile, I proposed to say that Moses, in addition to being tongue-twisted, might have also been a little hard of hearing and that's why he had understood "Thou shall not make unto thee any graven image" when he had been told: "Thou shall not *freeze frame*." If you stick to them, images are dangerous, blasphemous, idolatrous, but they are safe, innocent, indispensable if you learn how to jump from one image to the next. "Truth is image, but there is no image of Truth."[39] This solution might offer, we thought, a possible cure against fundamentalism, that is, the belief that without any representation you would be represented even better.

Iconoclash, however, carefully excluded politics. This was done on purpose. There is no activity where it is more difficult to pay due respect to mediators; no calling more despised than that of politicians; no sphere more inviting for irony, satire, debunking, derision than the political sphere; no idols more inviting for destruction than the Idols of the Forum; no discourse easier to deconstruct. On political rhetoric, critique has a field day. By kindergarten, toddlers have already grown cynical on all political matters. In a show that was *about* critique, adding politics would have skewed the whole project, and visitors would have left even more iconoclasts than when they had entered.

But once we have moved *beyond* the image wars, once we have regained a good grasp of the masses of intermediaries necessary to represent anything, once we have moved back to things, could we extend the same attention for mediators to the most despised activity, namely political *spin*? Is it possible now to tackle the question of political representation with care and respect? Even more extravagant: Is it possible to tackle it uncritically? Just try to imagine a show about politics that would not be about debunking, exposing, revealing or smashing the idols down. Do you really want to take politics *positively*? Indeed.

"Disabled Persons of All Countries, Unite!"

What makes it so difficult to stare straight at the Gorgonian face of politics is that we seem to delight in adding to it some even more distorting traits. Not happy with Frankenstein, we want to hybridize it with Quasimodo. Monstrous it is, yet this is not a reason to transform it into a painting by Hieronymus Bosch. Or rather, Bosch is painting our own internal Hell, which might not bear that much of a relation with the *specific* monsters of politics.[40] What frightens us so much in collective action, the reason why we delight so much in despising it, is that we might see reflected in its distorted mirror our own grimacing faces. Are we not asking from the assembly something it cannot possibly deliver, so that talking positively of politics horrifies us because it's our limitations that we are not prepared to accept? If it's true that representations are so indispensable and yet so opaque, how well prepared are we to handle them? When

38 Jerry Brotton, "Saints Alive. The Iconography of Saint George", in: Latour, Weibel (eds), op. cit., p. 155.

39 Marie José Mondzain, "The Holy Shroud. How Invisible Hands Weave the Undecidable", ibid., pp. 324-335.

40 Joseph Leo Koerner, "Impossible Objects: Bosch Realism", in: *Res*, 46, 2004, pp. 73-98.

hearing the call for assembling at the Thing, are we able to accept that we are radically and basically unfit to take a seat in it? Do we have the cognitive equipment required for this? Are we not, on the whole, totally *disabled*?

Instead of the radiant citizen standing up and speaking his mind by using his solid common sense, as in Rockwell's famous painting *Freedom of Speech*, should we not look for an eloquence much more indirect, distorted, inconclusive? In this show, we want to tackle the question of politics from the point of view of our own *weaknesses* instead of projecting them first onto the politicians themselves. We could say that the blind lead the blind, the deaf speak eloquently to the deaf, the crippled are leading marches of dwarfs, or, rather, to avoid those biased words, let's say that we are all *politically-challenged*. How would it look if we were chanting this more radical and surely more realistic slogan: "Disabled persons of all countries, unite!"?[41] After all, was not Demosthenes, as much as Moses and many other legislators, speech-impaired?[42] Are we not all, when our time comes to speak up?

The cognitive deficiency of participants has been hidden for a long time because of the mental architecture of the dome in which the Body Politik was supposed to assemble. We were told that all of us – on entering this dome, this public sphere – had to leave aside in the cloakroom our own attachments, passions and weaknesses. Taking our seat under the transparent crystal of the common good, through the action of some mysterious machinery, we would then be *collectively* endowed with more acute vision and higher virtue. At least that was the idea, no matter if the machinery was the social contract or some other metamorphosis: The selfish narrow-minded worm will re-emerge as a brightly colored collective butterfly.[43]

During the Enlightenment, architects took this virtual reality so literally that they actually drew and sometimes built those domes, globes and palaces.[44] Later, during the time of revolutions, other builders gave a shape to this public sphere that was no longer limited to deputies and congressmen but included the whole people or the proletariat or the *Volk*.[45] They distributed speech differently, they imagined another way to com-

pose the body, the procedures were modified, they arrayed much vaster masses, but it was still under a dome that they marched and chanted. From Boullée to Speer, from Pierre-Charles L'Enfant to the new Scottish Parliament, from John Soane to Norman Foster, it seemed possible for architects to provide a literal rendition of what it means to assemble in order to produce the common will.[46] Individuals might be corrupted, feeble or deficient, but above their weak heads there was a heaven, a sphere, a globe under which they all sat. Just before the French Revolution, Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès imagined a parliament so big – and so virtual – that it extended to the whole of France, tiers after tiers, all the way to the farthest provinces.[47]

Unfortunately, much like the Tower of Babel, those "palaces of reason" – to use the name of many city halls in northern Italy – are no longer able to house the issues they were supposed to gather. Commentators on the "events" of May **1968** in France were amused to see that the turbulent demonstrating crowds passed by the National Assembly without even looking at it, as if its irrelevance was so great that it could not even invite abuses. How irrelevant they might seem now that the global has become the new name of the Body Politik. *Where* would you assemble the global? Certainly not under golden domes and kitsch frescoes where heroic senators and half-naked Republics are crowned by laurels descending from clouds. Why are politics always about imitation? There is Robespierre imitating Cicero, Lenin mimicking Robespierre. In the name of the common good, forests of Greek columns have been erected across the Western world – while the "mother of parliaments" in Westminster remained faithful to the dark, cramped, uncomfortable cave of stalls, spires and gargoyles. Neo-gothic, neo-classic, neo-modern or neo-postmodern, those spaces were all "neo," that is, trying to imitate some ven-

erated past.[48] But you might need more than imitation to build the new political assemblies. Covering the Reichstag with a transparent dome – in effect, fully opaque – as Foster did, doesn't seem nearly enough to absorb the new masses that are entering political arenas. If it's true that a parliament is a complex machinery of speech, of hearing, of voting, of dealing, what should be the shapes adjusted to a *Dingpolitik*? What would a political space be that would not be "neo"? What would a truly contemporary style of assembly look like?

It's impossible to answer this question without gathering techniques of representation in different types of assemblies. The effect we wish to obtain is to show that parliaments are only a few of the machineries of representations among many others and not necessarily the most relevant or the best equipped.

It's likely that fundamentalists will not like our show: They think they are safer without representation. They really believe that outside of any assembly, freed from all those cumbersome, tortuous and opaque techniques, they will see better, farther, faster and act more decisively. Inspired directly by the Good, often by their God, they despise the indirectness of representations. But realists might appreciate it because if we are all politically-challenged, if there is no direct access to the general will, if no transparent dome gives any global visibility, if, at best, the blind lead the blind, then any small, even infinitesimal innovation in the practical ways of representing an issue will make a small – that is, huge – difference. Not for the fundamentalist but for the realists.

Ask the blind what difference it makes to have a white cane or not. Ask the deaf what difference it makes to be instrumented with a hearing-aid or not. Ask the crippled, the advantage they see in having a slightly better-adjusted wheelchair. If we are all handicapped, or rather politically-challenged, we need many different prostheses. Each object exhibited in the show and commented on in the catalog is such a crutch. We promise nothing more grandiose than a store of aids for the invalids who have been repatriated from the political frontlines – and haven't we all been badly mauled in recent years? Politics might be better taken as a branch of disability studies.

From an Assembly of Assemblies ...

An exhibition cannot do much, but it can explore new possibilities with a much greater degree of freedom because it is so good at thought-experiments, or rather *Gedankenaustellung*. One of those attempts is to design not one assembly but rather an assembly of assemblies, so that, much like at a fair, visitors or readers can *compare* the different types of representation. This is what we have attempted here.

Scientific laboratories, technical institutions, marketplaces, churches and temples, financial trading rooms, Internet forums, ecological disputes – without forgetting the very shape of the museum inside which we gather all those *membra disjecta* – are just some of the forums and agoras in which we speak, vote, decide, are decided upon, prove, are being convinced. Each has its own architecture, its own technology of speech, its complex set of procedures, its definition of freedom and domination, its ways of bringing together those who are concerned – and even more important, those who are not concerned – and what concerns them, its expedient way to obtain closure and come to a decision. Why not render them comparable to one another?

After all, they have never stopped exchanging their properties: churches became temples before becoming city halls;[49] heads of state learned from artists how to create through publicity a public space;[50] it is deep inside monasteries that the complex voting procedures have been prepared and constitutions been written;[51] while laboratories are migrating to forums, the tasting of products borrows heavily from the laboratory;[52] supermarkets are taking more and more features that make them look like contested voting booths;[53] but even the most abstruse models of physics have to borrow heavily from social theories.[54] On the other hand, financial institutions seem to gather more information technologies

41 Michel Callon, this volume, chapter 5.
42 "How then should Pharaoh heed me, a man of impeded speech." (Exodus 6: 12) According to Marc Shell (personal communication) all great statesmen had some speech defect.
43 Chantal Mouffe, this volume, chapter 13.
44 Jean-Philippe Heurtin, *L'espace public parlementaire. Essais sur les raisons du législateur*, PUF, Paris, 1999, and this volume, chapter 13. Ludger Schwarte, this volume, chapter 13.
45 Ana Miljacki, this volume, chapter 3.
46 Deyan Sudjic, *Architecture and Democracy*, Lawrence King Publishing, Glasgow, 2001.
47 See excerpt, this volume, chapter 13.

48 Christine Riding, Jacqueline Riding, *The Houses of Parliament. History, Art, Architecture*, Merrell, London, 2000; James A. Leith, *Space and Revolution: Projects for Monuments, Squares, and Public Buildings in France, 1789-1799*, McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal, 1991.
49 Joseph Leo Koerner, this volume, chapter 7.
50 Lisa Pon, this volume, chapter 12.
51 Christophe Boureux, this volume, chapter 7.
52 A. Hennion, G. Teil, F. Vergnaud, this volume, chapter 11.
53 Franck Cochoy, Catherine Grandclément Chaffy, this volume, chapter 11.
54 Pablo Jensen, this volume, chapter 5.

Katherine Blouin and Vincent Demers, Arbre à palabre (Palaver Tree), Kabé, Mali, 1998, © Katherine Blouin and Vincent Demers

than parliaments.[55] The quietest sites of nature have become some of the most contested and disputed battlegrounds.[56] As for the World Wide Web, it begins by being a mess and slowly imports all sorts of virtual architectures, but only very few reproduce the even more virtual space of the original parliaments;[57] artistic installations borrow more and more from scientific demonstrations;[58] technical know-how absorbs more and more elements from law.[59] There is no river that flows anymore from mountain to sea without being as equipped in speech-making instruments as humans are through opinion polls.[60] Such is the constant commerce, the ceaseless swapping, the endless crisscrossing of apparatuses, procedures, instruments and customs that we have attempted to weave through this show and this catalog.

To collect such an assembly of assemblies, we have not tried to build around them an even bigger, a more all-encompassing dome. We have not tried to imagine that they would all be reducible to the European tradition of parliaments. On the contrary, we have offered to show how much they differ from one another by linking them through the humble and mundane back door of their representation machineries. We would like visitors and readers to move from one to the other by asking every time the three following questions: How do they manage to bring in the relevant parties? How do they manage to bring in the relevant issues? What change does it make in the way people make up their mind to be attached to things?

We hope that once this assembly of assemblies is deployed, that which passes for the political sphere – namely the parliaments and the offices of the executive branches – will appear as one type *among* many others, perhaps even a rather ill-equipped type. This approach to presenting the representation technology of parliamentary life will not seek to ridicule its antiquated ways or to criticize the European way of imagining public space. On the contrary, in the object-oriented conception, "parliament" is a technical term for "making things public" among many other forms of producing voices and connections among people. By this comparative visit, we seek to learn how parliaments – with a small "p" – could be enlarged or connected or modified or redrawn.[61] Instead of saying that "everything is political" by

detecting dark forces hidden beneath all the other assemblages, we wish on the contrary to locate the tiny procedures of parliamentary assent and dissent, in order to see on what practical terms and through which *added* labor they could, one day, *become* pertinent. In this show, we hope visitors will shop for the materials that might be needed later for them to build this new Noah's Ark: *the Parliament of Things*. Don't you hear the rain pouring relentlessly already? And Noah for sure was a realist.

... to an Assembly of Dissembling
There might just be another reason than the weak imagination of architects for not having a well-designed dome under which to assemble: Getting together might not be such a universal desire after all! No matter how wide you stretch it, the political horizon might be too small to encompass the whole Earth. Not only because parliaments are too tiny, not only because a parliament of parliaments would require the use of many different machineries now dispersed among different gatherings, but because the very idea of a political assembly might not be shareable in the end. The urge for political representation might be so much of a Western obsession that other people might *object* to being thus mobilized or called for. And this objection too has to be registered in our show.

If you read the UNESCO literature, it seems that the whole world aspires to become one under the aegis of democracy, transparent representation and the rule of law. But what if every time this inflatable parliament was being dropped in, many other voices were raised: "No politics, please!" "No representation!" "Not with you," "No democracy, thanks," "Would you please stay as far away as possible?" "Leave us alone," "I'd rather not," "I prefer my king".[62] What if the disagree-

ments were not the sort of issues that divide people in the normal state of things but were bearing instead on the very way to assemble at all? What if we had to imagine not an assembly of assemblies, not even an assembly of ways of assembling but an assembly of ways of *dissembling*? Would not that be a call for *disassembling* instead?

And yet this is just what happens when you begin to listen to other voices. Not because they are exotic, far fetched, archaic, irrational, but because they too claim that making things public might be a much more protracted affair than entering into the realm of politics – even widely enlarged. Under the thin veneer of "democracy for all" will soon appear another crisis of representation, one much wider and deeper, because it will strike at the heart of what it is to represent at all.

Listen to the Japanese tradition: The very word "representation" strikes their ears as quaint and superficial.[63] Listen to the Jivaros: Their highly complex rhetoric of agonistic encounters aim at *not* meeting in the same assembly.[64] Listen to the Jihadists calling for the extension of the Oumma. The word "demokrata" remains an imported vocabulary that resonates more like a term of abuse than any deeply cherished value.[65] There are many other ways to assemble than under the aegis of a political intent.[66] And when highlanders of Papua New Guinea assemble to vote using a complex procedure imported by helicopter from Australian-trained scrutinizers, can we measure how much they have transformed it?[67] Even in our own lands obsessed by the transparent republic, much effort is put into doing just the opposite, that is, into making things *secret*.[68] What if one of the causes of fundamentalism were that all those other ways of gathering find themselves, in the end, badly represented? As if the usual garment of politics were too narrow for them? As if they never had room to assemble with the other things they are attached to, such as their gods, their divinities, their scruples of conscience. It's as if the whole definition of politics inherited from the conflicts between church and state had to be discussed again.[69]

To see politics as a problem of collecting, where if you don't manage it properly you disappear into chaos, seems to be the problem of only a fraction of humanity, for instance, those obsessed

by the link between their cosmic and social orders.[70] And even among those, the idea of politics as speaking one's mind in the middle of an assembly seems to be a rather provincial notion. According to François Jullien, the Chinese tradition seems to ignore it entirely.[71] The Chinese, at least in their ancient learned tradition, don't want simply to add their differences to other differences. They are more than happy to take their seats in the global amphitheater of multiculturalism – similarly seated but with a tiny difference of *angle* to witness the same spectacle – but wish to remain *indifferent* to our own, meaning Western, ways of being all-encompassing. Differences we could absorb – we thought we could absorb under the decaying but still solid dome of the Holy Roman Empire – but *indifferences*?

To the possible dismay of political scientists, the very idea of a political assembly does not gather much interest. This is where things become really complicated and thus interesting: How to devise an assembly of *ways of dissembling* instead of sending a convocation to gather under the common dome of "One Politics Size Fits All"? Can we enlarge our definition of politics to the point where it accepts its own suspension? But who can really be *that* open-minded?[72]

And yet, do we have another course of action? It would be too easy simply to recognize the many contradictions as if we could be content with the absence or the demise of all political assemblies, as if we could abandon for good the task of composition. There must be some alternative to cheap universalism ("but surely every human is a political animal") and to cheap relativism ("let everyone gather under their own flag, and if they have no flag then let them hang themselves!").

55 Daniel Beunza, Fabian Muniesa, this volume, chapter 11; Alex Preda, this volume, chapter 11.
56 Vinciane Despret, this volume, chapter 6; Isabelle Mauz, Julien Gravelle, this volume, chapter 6.
57 Richard Rogers, Noortje Marres, this volume, chapter 14.
58 XPERIMENT!, this volume, chapter 14.
59 Susan S. Silbey, Ayn Cavicchi, this volume, chapter 10.
60 Christelle Gramaglia, this volume, chapter 8; Cordula Kropp, this volume, chapter 8; Jean-Pierre Le Bourhis, this volume, chapter 8; Matthias Gommel, this volume, chapter 8.
61 Delphine Gardey, this volume, chapter 13; Michael Lynch, Stephen, Hilgartner, Carin Berkowitz, this volume, chapter 13.
62 Isabelle Stengers, this volume, chapter 15.

63 Masato Fukushima, this volume, chapter 1.
64 Philippe Descola, this volume, chapter 1.
65 Gilles Kepel, *Fitna. Guerre au coeur de l'Islam*, Gallimard, Paris, 2004.
66 Anita Herle, this volume, chapter 2; Amiria Henare, this volume, chapter 1.
67 Pierre Lemonnier, Pascale Bonnemère, this volume, chapter 1.
68 Peter Galison, this volume, chapter 10.
69 Olivier Christin, this volume, chapter 7.
70 Philippe Descola, *Par delà la nature et la culture*, Gallimard, Paris, 2005.
71 François Jullien, *The Propensity of Things. Toward a History of Efficacy in China*, Zone Books, Cambridge, MA, 1995.
72 Compare Isabelle Stengers' definition of politics (this volume, chapter 15) with Ulrich Beck, *Der kosmopolitische Blick*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 2004.

The rats council, fables from La Fontaine, illustrations by Gustave Doré, 1868, Bibliotheque Nationale de France, photo © BNF, Département des estampes et photo

That we have to find a way out is forced upon us by what is called "globalization": even though the Jivaros, the Chinese, the Japanese, the faithful members of the Oumma, the born-again Christians don't want to enter under the same dome, they are still, willingly or unwillingly, connected by the very expansion of those makeshift assemblies we call markets, technologies, science, ecological crises, wars and terrorist networks. In other words, the many differing assemblages we have gathered under the roof of ZKM are *already* connecting people no matter how much they *don't* feel assembled by any common politics. The shape of the dome might be contested, because it does not allow enough room for differences and indifferences, but that there is something at work that is called "global" is not in question. It's simply that our usual definitions of politics have not caught up yet with the masses of linkages already established.

In this catalog we want to probe further into this historical paradox. In earlier times, say during the Enlightenment, there existed a metaphysical globe, to use Sloterdijk's expression,[73] even though globalization was barely beginning. But now that we are indeed globalized, there is no globe anymore! To take an example, when the cartographer Mercator transformed Atlas from a distorted giant supporting the Earth on his shoulder into a quiet and seated scientist holding the planet in his *hand*, this was probably the time when globalization was at its zenith. And yet the world in **1608** was barely known, and people remained far apart. Still, every new land, every new civilization, every new difference could be located, situated, housed without much surprise in the transparent house of Nature. But now that the world is known, people are brought together by violent deeds, even if they wish to differ and not be connected. There is no global anymore to assemble them. The best proof is that there are people setting up demonstrations against globalization. The global is up for grabs. Globalization is simultaneously at its maximum and the globe at its nadir. There are lots of *blogs* but no globe.

And yet, we are all in the same boat, or at least the same flotilla. To use Neurath's metaphor, the question is how to rebuild it while we are cruising on it. Or rather, how can we make it navigate when it's made of a fleet of diverging but already intertwined barges? In other words, can we overcome the multiplicity of ways of assembling and dissembling and yet raise the question of the one common world? Can we make an *assembly* out of all the various *assemblages* in which we are already enmeshed?

The Phantom Public

The cry is well known: "The Great Pan is dead!" Nature, this huge and silent parliament where all the creatures would be arrayed tier after tier from the biggest to the smallest, this magnificent amphitheater offering to the clumsy politicians a perfect and successful original of what is rational and what is irrational, this great parliament of nature has crumbled down much as did the Tower of Babel.[74] Political philosophy has always tried to prop up its frail intuitions onto the solid and powerful pattern of some other science: It seems that everything from the metaphor of the organism to that of the brain has been tried. It has been a continuous undertaking: How to replace the dangerous trade of politics by the serious and safe knowledge of some better established science? And it has continuously failed.

A crisscrossing of metaphors from Menenius's "Fable of the Members and the Stomach"[75] to contemporary socio-biology and cybernetics[76] has tried to fasten the poor assemblies of humans to the solid reality of nature. All the organs of the body have been tried out to probe the making up of the monstrous Body Politik.[77] All the animals have been invoked in turn – ants, bees, sheep, wolves, bugs, worms, pigs, chimps, baboons – to establish a firmer ground for the whimsical assemblies of humans. And yet to no avail, since there are many ways to be a body, since sheep don't flock,[78] wolves are not as cruel as humans, baboons have an intense social life,[79] brains have no central direction. It seems that nature is no

73 Peter Sloterdijk, *Sphären II – Globen*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1999.
74 John Tresch, this volume, chapter 6.
75 William Shakespeare, excerpt this volume, chapter 3.
76 Eden Medina, this volume, chapter 12.
77 Francisco Varela et al., "The Brainweb: Phase Synchronisation and Large-Scale Integration", in: *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 2, 2001, pp. 229-239; Michael Hagner, this volume, chapter 2.
78 Vinciane Despret, this volume, chapter 6.
79 Shirley Strum, *Almost Human. A Journey Into the World of Baboons*, Random House, New York, 1987.

longer unified enough to provide a stabilizing pattern for the traumatic experience of humans living in society. No doubt, the Body Politik is a monster – so much so that it's not even a body.

But which *type* of monster is it? This is what we wish to find out. We might have transformed politics into a monstrous activity because we have tried to make it exist in a form, borrowed from nature, that it could not possibly take. "The answer was not acceptable in the nineteenth century, when men, in spite of all their iconoclasm, were still haunted by the phantom of identity," wrote Walter Lippmann in a stunning book called the *Phantom Public*.[80] In many ways our exhibition is an effort in teratology, an experiment in trying to pry apart two ghostly figures: the Leviathan and the Phantom of the Public. (Sorry, there is no way to talk about politics and to speak of beautiful shapes, elegant silhouettes, heroic statues, glorious ideals, radiant futures, transparent information – except if you want to go through, once again, the long list of grandiose ceremonies held by various totalitarianisms which, as we are all painfully aware, lead to the worst abominations. The choice is either to speak of monsters early on with care and caution, or too late and end up as a criminal. O Machiavelli, how right you were; let us pray that we heed your cautious lessons in realism.)

According to Lippmann and to the philosopher John Dewey in response to his book,[81] most of European political philosophy has been obsessed by the body and the state. The Europeans have tried to assemble an impossible parliament that represented really the contradictory wills of the multitude into *one* General Will. But this enterprise suffered from a cruel lack of realism. Representation, conceived in that total, complete and transparent fashion, cannot possibly be faithful. By asking from politics something it could not deliver, Europeans kept generating aborted monsters and ended up discouraging people from thinking politically. For politics to be able to absorb more diversity ("the Great Society" in Dewey's time and what we now call "Globalization"), it has to devise a very specific and new type of representation. Lippmann calls it a Phantom because it's disappointing for those who dream of unity and totality. Yet strangely enough, it is a

good ghost, the only spirit that could protect us against the dangers of fundamentalism. Long before the United States degenerated into its present conservative revolution, it had a much more sturdy and contemporary tradition. Those American philosophers call their tradition *pragmatism*, meaning by this word not the cheap realism often associated with being "pragmatic" but the costly realism requested by making politics turn toward *pragmata* – the Greek name for Things. Now that's realism!

In this exhibition, we try the impossible feat of *giving flesh* to the Phantom of the Public. We want to make the visitors feel the difference there is between expecting from the Body Politik something it cannot give – and that surely creates a monster – and being moved by the Phantom Public. The idea is to take the word Phantom and to grant this fragile and provisional concept more reality – at least more realism – than the phantasmagorical spheres, globes, common good and general will that the Leviathan was supposed to incarnate. In other words, we want to tackle again the problem of composing one body from the multitude of bodies – a problem that is reviewed here by many exhibits – but this time with contemporary means and media.

The Phantom designed by Michel Jaffrennou and Thierry Coduys is an invisible work of art. It's activated by the movements of the visitors throughout the show so that each spectator is simultaneously an actor in the show and the only screen on which the whole spectacle is projected. By moving through the various exhibits, the visitors will trigger various captors that will be used as so many inputs to trigger outputs which will give a vague and uneasy feeling that "something happens" of which the bystanders are responsible but in a way that is not directly traceable. Politics will pass through you as a rather mysterious flow, just like a phantom. Moreover, the input/output relation will vary according to the time of day, the number of people in the show, the answers given to the various queries, the cumulative effect of past visitors, the somewhat invisible presence of the web visitors. At times the relation will be traceable in a sort of one-to-one connection ("I did this, and here is what happened"), but at other instances the whole effect

will be entirely lost ("I did nothing, and here is what happened"), while at some other times the effect will be direct but on some other visitors. Through this complex, invisible (and expensive!) work of art rendered possible by the complex technology infrastructure of ZKM, we hope to substitute in the mind of the visitor the light spirit of the Phantom for the crushing weight of the total Body Politik. Unfortunately, the catalog has to render through the layout the experience of what it is to be caught by the passage of this Phantom Public. It's to the flow of words and images that we have to confide the task of imitating the ghostly but spirited figure of politics.

Why do we attach so much importance to the difference between Body Politik and Phantom? It is due to the fact that for the new eloquence to become a habit of thought, we must be able to distinguish two ways of speaking. To raise a political question often means to reveal a state of affairs whose presence was hitherto hidden. But then you risk falling into the same trap of providing social explanations and do exactly the opposite of what is meant here by political flow. You use the same old repertoire of already-gathered social ties to "explain" the new associations. Although you seem to speak *about* politics you don't speak *politically*. What you are doing is simply the extension one step further of the same small repertoire of already standardized forces. You might feel the pleasure of providing a "powerful explanation," but that's just the problem: You yourself partake in the *expansion* of power not the re-composition of its content. Even though it resembles political talk, it has not even begun to address the political endeavor since it has not tried to assemble the candidates into a new assembly adjusted to their specific requirements. "Drunk with power" is an expression not only fit for generals, presidents, CEOs, mad scientists and bosses – it can also be used for those commentators who are confusing the expansion of powerful explanations with the composition of the collective. This is why we might need still another slogan: "Be sober with power." In other words, abstain as much as possible from using the notion of power in case it backfires and hits your explanations instead of the target you are aiming to destroy. No powerful explanations without checks and balances.

Politics of Time, Politics of Space

Going back to things and speaking positively of the "phantom of the public," is this not, in the end, terribly reactionary? It depends on what we mean by progressive. Imagine that you have the responsibility of assembling together a set of disorderly voices, contradictory interests and virulent claims. Then imagine you are miraculously offered a chance, just at the time when you despair of accommodating so many dissenting parties, to get rid of most of them. Would you not embrace such a solution as a gift from heaven?

This is exactly what happened when the contradictory interests of people could be differentiated by using the following shibboleths: "Are they progressive or reactionary? Enlightened or archaic? In the vanguard or in the rear guard?" Dissenting voices were still there, but most of them represented backward, obscurantist or regressive trends. The cleansing march of progress was going to render them passé. You could safely forget two-thirds of them, and so your task of assembling them was simplified by the same amount.

In the remaining third, not everything had to be taken into account either, since most of the positions were soon made obsolete by the passage of time. Among the contemporary parties to the dispute, progressive minds had to take into consideration only those few seen as the harbingers of the future. So, through the magical ordering power of progress, politics was a cinch, since 90 percent of the contradictory passions had been spirited away, left to linger in the limbo of irrationality. By ignoring most of the dissenters, you could reach a solution that would satisfy everyone, namely those who made up the liberal or revolutionary avant-garde. In this way, the arrow of time could safely thrust forward.

Philosophers define time as a "series of successions" and space as a "series of simultaneities". Undoubtedly, while we filed away everything under the power of progress, we lived in the time of succession. Chronos would eat away all that was archaic and irrational in his own progeny, sparing only those predestined for a radiant future.

But through a twist of history that neither reformists nor revolutionaries ever anticipated, Chronos has suddenly lost his voracious appe-

80 Noortje Marres, this volume, chapter 3.
81 John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, Swallow Press, Ohio University Press, Athens, OH, 1991 [1927].

tite.[82] Strangely enough, we have changed time so completely that we have shifted from the time of Time to the *time of Simultaneity*. Nothing, it seems, accepts to simply reside in the past, and no one feels intimidated any more by the adjectives "irrational," "backward" or "archaic". Time, the bygone time of cataclysmic substitution, has suddenly become something that neither the Left nor the Right seems to have been fully prepared to encounter: a monstrous time, the time of cohabitation. *Everything has become contemporary.*

The questions are no longer: "Are you going to disappear soon?" "Are you the telltale sign of something new coming to replace everything else?" "Is this the seventh seal of the Book of Apocalypse that you are now breaking?" An entirely new set of questions has now emerged: "Can we cohabitate with you?" "Is there a way for all of us to survive together while none of our contradictory claims, interests and passions can be eliminated?" Revolutionary time, the great Simplificator, has been replaced by cohabitation time, the great Complicator. In other words, space has replaced time as the main ordering principle.

It's fair to say that the reflexes of politicians, the passions of militants, the customs of citizens, their ways to be indignant, the rhetoric of their claims, the ecology of their interests are not the same in the time of Time and in the time of Space. No one seems prepared to ask: What should now be simultaneously present?

How different, for instance, to deal with religion if you wait for its slow disappearance into the faraway land of fairies, or if it explodes before your very eyes as what makes people live and die now – now and also tomorrow. What a difference it makes if nature, instead of being a huge reservoir of forces and a bottomless repository of waste, turns suddenly into something that interrupts any progression: something to which you cannot appeal and can't get rid of. "*Comment s'en débarrasser?*" Ionesco asked during the "Glorious '30s".[83] It has now become the worry, the *Sorge*, the *souci* of almost everyone in all languages. We can get rid of nothing and no one. Ecology has probably ruined forever the time of Succession and has ushered us into the time of Space. Yes, everything is contemporary. Progress and succession, revolution and substitution, neither

are part of our operating system any longer.

And yet where is the alternative OS? Who is busy writing its lines of code? We sort of knew how to order things in time, but we have no idea of the space in which to collect ourselves.[84] We have yet to channel new political passions into new habits of thought, new rhetoric, new ways of being interested, indignant, mobilized and pacified. Whenever we are faced with an issue, the old habits still linger and the voice of progress still shouts: "Don't worry, all of that will soon disappear; they're too archaic and irrational." And the new voice can only whisper: "You have to cohabit even with those monsters, because don't indulge yourself in the naive belief that they will soon fade away; space is the series of simultaneities, all of that has to be taken into account *at once*."

This does not mean that there is no progress in the end, or that no arrow of time can be thrust forward. It means that we slowly proceed from a very simple-minded form of cohabitation – such as the evolutionary or revolutionary ones – to a much fuller one, where more and more elements are taken into account. There is progress, but it goes from a mere juxtaposition to an intertwined form of cohabitation: How many contemporary elements can you build side by side, generating the series of simultaneities? Communism might have been wrong not in the quest for the community but in the hasty way it imagined what is the Common World to be shared.

What is Dingpolitik?

Back to things. Back to this fragile and provisional pandemonium: a show, a catalog. *Demon* and *demos*, as I said earlier, have the same etymology. If you follow the first division, you multiply the occasions to differ and to dissemble; if you follow the second division, you multiply the occasions to agree, to compose, to assemble, to share. The difference between the two is as thin as a knife. In

both cases the *Ding* will disband – and so will this exhibit. If the "demon of politics" has taken you over, a certain pattern will emerge: too much unity, too much disunity. But if you manage to feel the passage of the Phantom Public through your actions, another pattern will emerge: fewer claims to unity, less belief in disunity. The quest for composition has begun again just as in the times of Father Nicéron. This is at least the effect we wish to produce on visitors and readers.

So what is *Dingpolitik* in the end? It is the degree of realism that is injected when:

a) Politics is no longer limited to humans and incorporates the many issues to which they are attached;

b) Objects become things, that is, when matters of fact give way to their complicated entanglements and become matters of concern;

c) Assembling is no longer done under the already existing globe or dome of some earlier tradition of building virtual parliaments;

d) The inherent limits imposed by speech impairment, cognitive weaknesses and all sorts of handicaps are no longer denied but prostheses are accepted instead;

e) It's no longer limited to properly speaking parliaments but extended to the many other assemblages in search of a rightful assembly;

f) The assembling is done under the provisional and fragile Phantom Public, which no longer claims to be equivalent to a Body, a Leviathan or a State;

g) And, finally, *Dingpolitik* may become possible when politics is freed from its obsession with the time of Succession.

Such is the experiment that we have undertaken with this show and catalog. Needless to say, the authors assembled here don't have to agree with one another or with this introduction! But accepting a fragile and provisional roof to probe one another's attachment to things? Perhaps.

If fundamentalism is the conviction that mediations may be bypassed without cost, then it's the ultimate "ding-less" mode of doing politics. In the end, one question really has interested us: Can fundamentalism be undone? When will the horsemen of the apocalypse stop meddling in politics?

82 Francis Fukuyama (*The End of History and the Last Man*, Free Press, New York, 1992) was right in diagnosing the end of history but wrong to believe it would simplify the political tasks ahead: Exactly the opposite happened. Simultaneity is much harder to crack than succession because you can't get rid of any contradictions.

83 Eugène Ionesco, *Amédée ou Comment s'en débarrasser*, Gallimard, Paris, 1954.

84 Witness how clumsy is the effort of Samuel Huntington (*The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1998) to project into geography the history that Fukuyama had declared moot.

Athens (Greece), Opening Ceremony of the 2004 Olympic Games, photo © AP Photo, photo: David J. Phillip ∎ Athletes from countries all over the world assemble inside the stadium during the Opening Ceremony of the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, Friday, August 13, 2004.