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Aesthetic Politics and Political Aesthetics: a Crucial Distinction

Introduction: the three models for modernity

Modernity can be characterized by three dominant models, each of which has controlled the technological, the economic, and the governmental system respectively: industrialism, capitalism, and nationalism. For its energy supply, the industrial model digs down into the entrails of the earth to pump out oil. Capitalism gets its energy from an oversupply of unskilled labor force keeping salaries as low as possible to barely cover basic survival and reproduction needs of the proletariat. Nation–States extract their energy from tax collection which is coagulated labour-time (in Marx's terms) within its arbitrary borders.

Although the capitalist model was temporarily and partially substituted by socialist and communist regimes in some areas, it has certainly prevailed as the most resilient and lucrative economic pattern in human history. In turn, the industrial model has proven a spectacular success in controlling millions of people's lives by the manufacture, distribution, consumption and imposition of commodities, imaginaries and lifestyles.

No less successful has been the nationalist model deployed in both East and West, rich and poor, theocratic and secular societies and vehemently defended by the left and right parties as an incontrovertible value. The most diverse oligarchic, fundamentalist, dictatorial, democratic, or monarchic political regimes all adjust to the nationalistic model at least at an ideological level to demand loyalty. Since the nineteenth century, nationalism proliferated epidemically across all continents silhouetting States as didactic colored puzzles in a geography class. This model has also been utilized to nullify other minority identities and invent new ones ad hoc for political and economic purposes.

Impossible to know how long this model will prevail, but it definitely is alive and kicking and spilling blood all over the world. What is there in this model that makes it so universal? What impels so many people to recognize themselves as members of a nation–State, brothers and sisters in nationhood? Casting a vote every four or six years, participating in national surveys, holding a national passport or official identity card, and taking the streets to protest may all be ways of expressing political, class or national identities, but these practices hardly seem to be enough to create something as omnipresent as a "national identity".

There are many reasons why national identity can not be taken for granted: First we must consider violent schismogenic tendencies (in Bateson's 1936 term) that rip a society apart through different centrifugal forces such as class struggle inherent to capitalism, cultural distinction and exclusion, generational, ideological, religious and educational divergence etc. Second, "the nation" based on a single dominant culture as a symbol, necessarily subordinates other cultures generating conflict. Here the role of the aesthetic becomes pivotal as a vehicle to pump emotional energy toward the ideal of national unity and conceal dissent. It appeals to, or in Louis Althusser's (1977) stronger term "interpelates", participants' sensibilities and provides emotional bonding to this imagined community by the aesthetic creation and recreation of nationalistic narratives, images and rituals. Elias Canetti (1983:15) describes "in the familiar and exact repetition of precise rites, the mass is guaranteed something like a domesticated experience of itself" and, I would add, an experience of the magnified self merged into an omnipotent collective mass.

Anderson (2000:6) defined a nation as an "imagined political community – and imagined as inherently limited and sovereign." He stated that "communities must be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (note here the term "style" to which we will return later). This emphasis on the imaginary comes from the fact that members of national communities can not really know or meet each other, but still imagine themselves as part of a community defined as "nation". The components of such imaginaries are, as I have argued elsewhere, aesthetic. (Mandoki 2007b)

No political system can be maintained indefinitely by brute force. It requires a degree of acquiescence by the masses. Antonio Gramsci's concept of "hegemony" proposes

that organic intellectuals work as ideological persuaders for the dominant classes to obtain such acquiescence. (Luciano 1972) How hegemony is attained to legitimize a nation–State is a question of constructing and propagating some imaginaries rather than others to be introjected and reproduced by the population. Althusser (1977: 75–138) contributed to this discussion by defining the role of ideological State apparati and their mechanism of "interpelation" by which each person recognizes her/himself as a *subject of* and *subject by* the dominant ideology. However, he never elucidated further how such interpelation is produced or how each person responds to it and manages to identify with such ideology nor did Gramsci sufficiently explain how these organic intellectuals succeed to persuade the masses. Here the relevance of aesthetics to politics becomes salient.

Politics and aesthetic visibilization

As Hannah Arendt (1958:198) points out: "The polis, properly speaking, is not the city–state in its physical location; it is the organization of people, since it arises from acting and speaking together, and its true space is found among people who live together for this purpose, no matter where they are." Politics is what happens *between* people through various activities, real and imaginary, besides being a result of communicative action or rational argument that are too abstract for generating a sense of national cohesion and collective identification. Moreover, political systems are not self- sufficient, as they affect and are affected by all other cultural and social dimensions: ethical, economic, biological, historical, geographical, semiotic, technological and aesthetic.

The majorities of the indigents living under and bearing the economic weight of privileged minorities in systems of notorious social imbalance could overturn their oppression simply by their sheer number. To counteract this possibility, strategies are deployed to impose stability on the system and maintain the illusion that a contingent situation is natural, necessary and inevitable. Among the procedures and tactics to achieve this effect of inevitability of the status quo –let's call it a fatalistic fallacy that would presuppose that if a situation exists is because it should exist– we can count the disciplinary technologies widely analyzed by Michel Foucault (1979, 1983). This keen observer of power mechanisms describes a particularly effective and imposing

power strategy (as in Bentham's panopticon prison design) where the subject by power is subjected to and by processes of visibilization. Foucault's analyses on regimes of visibility, however, are not sufficiently explicit about the unavoidable role of aesthetics in the manifestation of power and how it operates to demand it, enforce it, or resist it. I believe such omission is due to the traditional obtrusive restriction of the concept of aesthetics to art and beauty which in this case does not allow observing other linked relevant phenomena. (Mandoki 1991, 2007)

Yet only through aesthetics power messages manage to break through and penetrate the subjects' sensibility and resolutely impact their decision–making (where resistance, docility or admiration, disgust, attraction, compliance are at stake). Thus a prominent mechanism by which political systems address their subjects is and has been aesthetic in the struggle for political hegemony, not only by means of art (as claimed by Eagleton (1990) in the case of the bourgeoisie) but by all aesthetic processes involving sensibility in heightening and intensifying experience or numbing it.

This link between power and aesthetic visibilization has been so intimate and compelling that all material traces we inherited from the most stratified societies since antiquity to the present attest to this deliberate ostentation of power by aesthetic means through pyramids, temples, palaces, ceremonial sites, reliefs, mausoleums and cathedrals to contemporary stadiums, shopping malls, financial centers, casinos, mega-hotels, airports, museums, and skyscrapers.

With the development of media and digital technology, as well as with contemporary diffusion and massification of communication, the opportunity to affect and stamp the minds of the population with elaborate imagery for political control has increased exponentially. The invention of photography with its effect of reality and its potential for image alteration, and cinematography with its tremendous emotional impact through editing, amplification and propagation, as well as its integration of multiple perceptual and aesthetic registers all easily manipulate the real and the imaginary by the ability to create credible fictions and conceal undesirable realities.

Political visibilization is displayed not only via the visual but by the exact same four registers (acoustic, somatic, lexic or verbal in addition to the visual or scopic) by which artistic aesthetics are displayed (music, opera, dance and theater, as well as

literature, poetry and plastic arts). Hence, my claim that aesthetics are to political systems what oil companies to industry: both are means of extracting and providing energy to their respective systems. Both also can create new objects, enrich or deplete our lives or pollute our environments. These four registers are at play in the aesthetic construction of national or collective identities contributing with narratives in the lexic; settings, props and costumes in the scopic; intonation, pauses volume, music and rhythm in acoustic and the theatralization of the leaders acting in ceremonies for the visibilization of their power while affecting the somatic register through biopolitics that impact life and death, hunger and satiety, work and leisure of the population.

The aesthetics–politics tension

Political aesthetics as an area of inquiry is in no way new to philosophical inquiry. Since Plato's expulsion of poets and story-tellers from the Republic and his preoccupation with the effect poetry and fine arts upon the citizens, to 19th century German idealist philosophers pursuing an artistic State and the more recent 20th century Frankfurt school philosophers Theodor Adorno, Ernst Bloch, Leo Löwenthal, Walter Benjamin and Herbert Marcuse, as well as Lukacs, denouncing or proposing aesthetics for emancipation and conscientization of the masses, the pertinence of the relation between aesthetics and the political is only growing.

The aesthetic and the political are two distinct dimensions of human reality (as the economic, technological, semiotic, cognitive, ethical, semiotic, environmental etc.) that cross through the social fabric and partially interlock, collide or overlap affecting each other. Since the asymmetries and variations in the link between aesthetics and politics have been overlooked by several recent authors who are dealing with this particular connection, the basic distinction between aesthetics as a tool for a political agenda (i.e. propaganda) and politics as a tool for an aesthetic agenda can not be sufficiently emphasized.

Among frequently quoted authors who nonetheless neglect this distinction is Jacques Rancière (2004: 12–13) claiming that politics are essentially aesthetic. In what he names as the "distribution of the sensible" he holds that:

> There is thus an 'aesthetics' at the core of politics that has nothing to do with Benjamin's discussion of the 'aestheticization of politics' specific to the 'age of the masses'… It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time.

To hold that politics are a "form of experience" is *petitio principii* in addition to its vagueness, since it loosely can apply to a vast number of phenomena as forms of experience besides the political. Only aesthetics are, by definition and by etymology, strictly forms of experience that can certainly impact and be impacted by other dimensions, the political included, whereas politics are forms of negotiation thaother areas such as the economy, health, education etc. This does not make aesthetics and politics equivalent. Politics are not an abstraction but a very concrete aspect of reality, an array of activities occurring specifically in the public sphere, not a matter of talent for speech nor through particular conceptions of space and time but basically by means of the arendtian "acting and speaking together, and its true space is found among people who live together for this purpose..." In other words, it is us people who create the political space among ourselves and negotiate or impose its conditions. Moreover, politics are expressed not only in speaking (as implied by Rancière and Habermas) but in a variety of verbal and non verbal acts mentioned above (marches, rituals, gestures of domination or subordination, distances or proximities, passivity or activism etc.).

Another recent approach to this problematic and relevant relation of the political and aesthetics is taken by Crispin Sartwell (2010: 1–2, 238) who claims that all politics are aesthetic: "Not all art is political, but all politics is aesthetic; at their heart political ideologies, systems, and constitutions are aesthetic systems, multimedia artistic environments." He adds "… it's that an ideology is an aesthetic system, and this is what moves or fails to move people, attracts their loyalty or repugnance, moves them to act or to apathy." Although he is correct in emphasizing the emotional usefulness of the aesthetic for a political regime, what precisely does he mean by an "aesthetic system" is not sufficiently clarified. "[P]olitical ideologies and constitutions are aesthetic systems of which texts form a portion, in the precise sense that political

systems appear in different media, none of which is fundamental and all of which are related; the ideology or system in part simply is the design style." In reality, all social institutions or matrixes, not only the State, participate in or are crossed by the aesthetic dimension as well as by the other dimensions of cultural life: economic, ethical or semiotic, educational, technological etc.(cf. Mandoki 2007ch. 28-32) Every institution produces its own particular conventions of style and design, but this does not turn the political into equivalent of the aesthetic; it is an illusion resulting from observing them from an aesthetic lens, but there are other lenses. The question remains whether for Sartwell "aesthetic systems" are the same as "artistic systems" or "aesthetic environments" or are ideologies the same as systems?

> A politics is an aesthetic environment, whatever else it may be. Political systems are no more centrally textual than they are centrally systems of imagery, architecture, music, styles of embodiment and movement, clothing and fibers, furnishings, graphic arts. It's not that systems use these things as tools to gain loyalty, for propaganda; it's that a military junta, sharia law, and anarchism, for example, constitute artpolitical environments in all media. (Sartwell 2010:2)

This statement is problematic on many instances apart from introducing the new term of the "artpolitical". First the claim that politics are an aesthetic environment is to conflate the political with its aesthetic outcomes or the State with all political and aesthetic activity. Politics as a social activity is performed throughout all social institutions by what Foucault defined as "micro-physics of power", not only by the State. There are politics in the educational system, in the artworld, in the health system etc. Each also has it own aesthetic conventions (as I have discussed above and in other texts Mandoki 1991, 1994, 2007, 2015).

Second, such "imagery, architecture, music..." do not turn politics into aesthetic but constitute part of the perceptible, sensorial fabric of all social reality, and consequently can be found, again, in all institutions, not only the State and not only by political activity. Politics, like aesthetics, ethics, semiotics, allow me to insist, is a social dimension that can be traced throughout the diversity of cultural matrixes such as the religious, the medical, the family, the legal, sports or the school systems.

Third , the notion of "artpolitical environments" is not sufficiently defined either, I guess partly because Sartwell does not consider the distinction between art and

aesthetics relevant. However, aesthetics, as the theory of sensibility (originally founded as such by Baumgarten's *scientia cognitionis sensitivae*) examines one distinct dimension of social and biological life among the various regions, aspects and patterns that constitute reality: the sensitive dimension. Art, on the other hand, is a specific institutional convention upon particular sets of objects and events, as Dickie (1974) accurately argued, that are placed as candidates for explicit aesthetic (I would say "artistic") appreciation.

Sartwell takes the conventional objectualistic and formalistic approach to aesthetics as the study of external shapes or forms. "It seems to me that a rough idea of aesthetic properties as properties of a thing's design or configuration (conceived as an arrangement of materials) under an interpretation will suffice." (Sartwell 2010:5) Yet things only "have" designs or configurations in terms of perceptual subjects' sensorial impressions and signification processes within particular conditions (semiotic, biological, social, cultural) of interpretation. It is a matter of sensibilities involved, and not of an inherent quality of the objects themselves or an autonomous thingness.

Fourth, why does Sartwell consider military juntas or sharia law as "artpolitical environments"? What is artistic about them? It is true that imposing the burqa unto women seriously constricts their sensorial universe, and so it has definite aesthetic effects, but the question also is whether these two cases are still political or rather its nullification given that they do not allow any social negotiation "among people living together" but inflict despotic impositions upon their population. People who fight for political principles fight for very concrete present and future conditions of life and well-being for their children and neighbors, not for artpolitical environments or questions of style.

Political aesthetics and its strategies: four cases

Anderson brings up the classic example of nationalism expressed through the *Unknown Soldier* memorial.[7] The cenotaph is an aesthetic construction designed to produce the emotional effect of admiration towards individuals who sacrificed for the homeland. To achieve this effect, a cenotaph should be monumental, imposing, classicist and perfectly symmetrical, made of durable and expensive materials like marble or granite. The huge Tomb of the *Milite Ignoto* in the *Altare della Patria* in

Rome is undoubtedly the paradigm of cenotaphs. This construction was built to produce an intense corporeal experience daunting us by its massive scale and perfect, static symmetry.

The brutality of war forces the State to transmute such horror into honor by displaying aesthetic strategies that glorify so many violent and premature deaths. Thus, at the end of the First World War, King George V established in 1918 the Memorial Day ceremony in honor of the fallen soldiers to be commemorated every 11 of 11 at 11 in Commonwealth countries (presently United Kingdom, Australia and Canada). This ceremony shifts from the dominant scopic of the *Milite Ignoto Altare* to the dominant somatic of political figures' presence at that time and place designed to awaken patriotic emotions performed at the cenotaph monument (cenotaph means in Greek empty tomb). Formations of soldiers, religious choirs, ecclesiastical figures, and military bands march, pray and sing while offerings of crowns of red poppies are placed at the monument.

During the 2005 London ceremony, 20 veterans used lights to send a message from the roof of the Royal Observatory on the Thames River to the parade of the mounted guard that would be decoded at Whitehall. The message said "War turns us into stone. In memory we shine and rise to new days. " Two Douglas Dakota DC3 aircraft scattered three million poppy petals over London and the bridges of the Thames. The London Eye 2 lit up red during the commemoration. To the right of the bishop, Queen Elizabeth displayed in tone and form the gestures indicated for the ceremony wearing a black suit and hat. Days before, the members of the Royal British Legion carried a paper poppy on the lapel, symbolizing the blood shed by soldiers on the battle front since 1918, a symbol inspired by John McCrae's 1915 poem *In Flanders fields*.

Established regimes use onerous resources to aesthetically exhibit their power and create the sense of their indispensability. People's Republic of China celebrated its 70th Anniversary with a colossal, precise and massive human machine–like military parade with a discipline never seen before, particularly impressive by Chinese female soldiers. This seems to have been the biggest most meticulous aesthetic demonstration of power since the Zeppelin Field formation designed by Albert Speer. By its sheer heftiness and effacement of individuality and of the human within the vast incalculable quasi robotic deployment in synchronicity and sacrifice of the personal

for the collective, such aesthetics of order and control provoke fear of being crushed by the homogenization of this social machine or relief of being dispensed from individuality and merge into its giga–mass.

Candidates that aspire to captivate voters during electoral campaigns deploy primarily aesthetic strategies that present the candidate according to carefully designed identity models calculated by marketing engineers and image consultants to seduce or fascinate their potential voters, exactly as identities are designed to commodities for commercial marketing campaigns to fascinate their potential consumers. Not by coincidence the same professionals are hired in both cases. Candidates are displayed as detergents, cars, sports shoes, beverages or star system celebrities since they are also a kind of commodity. They obey to the same aesthetics and logic of mass culture consumption developed by Madison Avenue's advertising agencies using same persuasive mechanisms such as repetition, hyperbolization, panoptic effects of simulated personalised interpelation, product panegyrics targeting each social niche by aiming at their particular sentimental kitsch, etc.

During the American 2008 presidential elections, Black Eyed Peas group singer Will.I.am created a hip hop video clip that turned out to be a very improved version of the 1985 kitsch celebrities' *We are the world*. He made a collage of the Democratic candidate's speech to evoke Martin Luther King's speech "I have a dream", with the acoustic seduction of rhythm and hip hop, recruiting the symbolic weight of the racial struggle to capitalize over a mulatto candidate as an Afro–American (who in fact is exactly as much white as he is black).

The video made use of 37 attractive celebrities (musicians, actors and athletes) that during 4' 30" repeat as a choir the campaign slogan *Yes we can*. They were carefully selected as tokens to represent particular fractions of the North American society, namely African–Americans, Asians, Latinos, Jews, gays, single mothers, disabled and Puerto-ricans, a variety in reality fictitious because all these 37 celebrities are of the same type: mostly 30 to 40 in age, sexy, hot, super–cool, good-looking and successful. The repetitive slogan "yes we can" is enunciated as a prayer with religious reverberations, adding the visuals of beautiful faces in very well elaborated black and white format to create an effect of sobriety and naturalness. This video to support a presidential candidate proved to be a masterpiece of contemporary political

propaganda, the American equivalent to Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*. Using hip hop aesthetics to recruit Afro–American voters and transfer the fans' esteem for their stars to the candidate through the bandwagon effect by the well–known advertising tactic that exploits status bias, all proved very effective in achieving viral contagion, since in American society such models are mainly entertainment and sports celebrities. The now ex–president owes his electoral success in a large extent to the aesthetics of this video clip that reached more than 25 million viewers (not much compared to Eminem – Love The Way You Lie ft. Rihanna 1,863,946,063 but significant for a political clip), which was followed by another Will.I.am's creation with messianic and personality cult tints whose motto is "Obama" (among other artists who promoted him).

Aesthetic strategies for political use can also be quite grotesque. By sharp contrast to professional advertisement image construction of a candidate and of the British and Chinese precise order and control, an improvised fake aesthetic show was concocted for the inauguration ceremony of the new president of Mexico, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who in December 1, 2018 used and abused autochthonous Indian tokens to make himself appear as anointed with a supposedly symbolic cane and a crucified Jesus cross as a leader of Mexico's native ethnic and Catholic populations (blatantly violating the Leyes de Reforma separation of Church and State since the 19th century). This fake Mexican–curious new-age kitsch performance ominously foretold the improvised political style, anti–scientific rhetoric, Catholicist prudishness and lack of credibility and of organization that characterize López's regime since. The token indigenous performers were later reprimanded by their own community leaders for playing this shameful role and violating their own traditions. Despite all the public kneeling, Mr. López's real hostility towards diverse ethnic groups is explicit by pushing environmentally harmful projects into their communities (resulting already in various murdered indigenous activists).

In short, political aesthetics are deployed through an immense variety of aesthetic strategies and throughout various scales, from the most sophisticated to the coarse, all indexical and iconic (in Peirce's terms) of the regime they advertise.

Aesthetic politics and its sinister side

While *political aesthetics* as analyzed previously is a deliberate display of emotional and sensibility-arousing mechanisms for political purposes, the politicization of aesthetics or *aesthetic politics* attempts to impose a particular idea of beauty or its own version of the aesthetic by a deployment of all political resources. The aestheticization of politics is manipulative whereas the politicization of aesthetics is utopian and ultimately ensues into different forms of fascism, totalitarianism and despotism.

A version of the historical trend that ultimately gave rise to the politicization of aesthetics is delineated in Josef Chytry's (1989) erudite *The Aesthetic State*. The first German to dream an imaginary aesthetic State taken from the Greeks according to Chytry was Winckelmann, followed by von Herder, Goethe, Hegel and Schiller. In the *Letters on the Education of Man*, Friedrich Schiller proposed this dangerous idea of the "political artist" who rather than designing artworks is given the power to design humans as his working material. "The political and educating artist follows a very different course, while making man at once his material and his end. In this case the aim or end meets in the material, and it is only because the whole serves the parts that the parts adapt themselves to the end." (Schiller 1795: IV) He sees the State through the metaphor of the work of art when claiming "But the state is an organisation which fashions itself through itself and for itself, and for this reason it can only be realised when the parts have been accorded to the idea of the whole. " (cf. Schiller's political artist outcomes Mandoki 2019) Consistently, Mussolini (1922) shared this ideal of the political artist for whom "the task of Fascism is to make the mass an organic whole with the Nation, ... just as the artist takes his raw material in order to create his masterpiece." (Taken from Mussolini's speech in http://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/speech-at-udine-september-20-1922.html)

Nazism's relation to aesthetics deployed not only the aestheticization of politics through propaganda by Riefenstahl, Speer, and Goebbels but mainly by the politicization of aesthetics. On one hand Joseph Goebbels, Minister of the Reich of Public Instruction and Propaganda who completely controlled the theater, literature, press, radio, film and art, is the paradigmatic example of aesthetics used by

totalitarian States to manipulate the masses. Aesthetics here are a means for a political end. On the other hand, politics as a means for an aesthetic end can be read all through *Mein Kampf* splattered with assertions on aesthetics, partly on political aesthetics (such as the design of the swastika) and mainly on aesthetic politics based on race: "For in a world which would be composed of mongrels and negroids all ideals of human beauty and nobility and all hopes of an idealized future for our humanity would be lost forever."

Walter Benjamin ([1935] 1968: 241) alerted that the *Ästhetisierung der Politik* characterizes all forms of fascism: "All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war". Rather than an aestheticization of politics, this politicization of aesthetics not only leads to war, as we have seen, but to eugenics and ultimately to genocide legitimizing the effacement of what it decrees goes against its particular idea of beauty. This direction was taken by Hitler's racist genocidal regime enhancing what he believed was Aryan race's aesthetics.

Susan Sontag (1975) notes on Nazi aesthetic politics the following: "It was in the SS that this assertion seemed most complete, because they acted it out in a singularly brutal and efficient manner; and because they dramatized it by linking themselves to certain aesthetic standards. The SS was designed as an elite military community that would be not only supremely violent but also supremely beautiful."

Sartwell credits Hitler "in *Mein Kampf* for making full identification of the political and the aesthetic" and posits that "Nazism as an aesthetic is described as a synthesis of romanticism and classicism, a sublimization of the classical."

> "[...]but in its moments of sublimity—and I choose the word advisedly—it constituted a remarkably powerful synthesis. I see this synthesis above all in the films of Leni Riefenstahl, where it is perfectly conscious and perfectly crafted. One way to formulate the effect of a Nazi romantic classicism is that it articulates German national culture—its language, its arts, and its "Aryan" bodies—as the particular repository of universal values, an aesthetics of German world conquest." (Sartwell 2010:16)

The author considers that "... Hitler dealt with the bureaucratic structure, or with military planning, or with genocide, from the point of view of an aesthetic sensibility and for the sake of an aesthetic effect." He further adds: "As a set of doctrines or texts,

Nazism was a mess: a grab bag of extreme nationalism, race theory, militarism, State capitalism, socialism, autocratic bureaucracy, and quasi–paganism...” requisite to add to all these isms, its obsessive antisemitism.

The “Holocaust Aesthetics” section of Sartwell's book is particularly unfortunate on several accounts: first it does not distinguish between artworks that deal with experiences of the Holocaust, (i.e. Adorno's corrected reference to poetry *about* Auschwitz) and the Holocaust itself as aesthetic phenomenon if this can even be conceivable, namely the aestheticization of the enormity of death camps. Second, in its neglect of the impact upon the Holocaust victims' sensibility affecting generations. (On this problem cf. Ruth Klüger http://cora.se/2015/01/27/ruth-kluger-holocaust-aesthetics/). Third, given the common use of the term “aesthetics” as synonym of beauty it could be easily and dangerously be taken to mean “the beauty of the Shoah”. The term “holocaust aesthetics” is at least as perverse as a “rape aesthetics”, “torture aesthetics” or “pedophilia aesthetics”.

In fact, we are not dealing here with a mere matter of style but with a genocidal supremacist racist military organization which not only deployed aesthetic strategies such as mass soldier formation (i.e. Zeppelinfeld), light effects (the “cathedral of light”) choreography in the grotesque goose step and gesture (*zieg heil* grotesque signal), in addition to swastika graphics, Wagner's music and the *Uber Alles*, *Horst Wessel Lied*, *Vorwärts! Vorwärts*! songs and hymns. All these are mere political aesthetic tools whether of good or bad artistic quality from Riefenstahl's mastery to Hitler's kitschery. What was uniquely sinister of this administration was its aesthetic politics derived from Schiller's aesthetic *Bildung* and later Schelling's which, as Frederic Spotts keenly observed, consisted on the fact that Hitler “regarded politics not art as a means to an end, the end of which was art” (Spotts 2009: 10). Art as an ideal by political means, amputated from sensibility, and regardless of the suffering it can provoke, necessarily derives into genocide.

The genocide perpetrated by Nazism begins to forge its legitimization on the basis of a supposed aesthetic supremacy of a race, adorning it with romantic tendencies and deification of the artist. The House of German Art in Munich became the Mecca of this new pseudo–religion that had the Aryan race as its chosen people, the military

officials as its clergy and the SA (*Sturmabteilung*), the SS (*Schutzstaffel*) and the Gestapo (*Geheime Staatspolizei*) as its bishops, cardinals and archbishops and ultimately the *führer* as its god. This "temple" exhibited works of art with formats and motifs copied from classical Greece and Rome adapted to Nazism. It also copied from Christian art: triptychs associated with salvation and redemption were used to represent the trinity of German workers, soldiers and peasants. With the pretentious title *In the beginning was the Word* Hermann Otto Hoyer transmutes a plump brewery bully on the verge of a nervous breakdown ... into a god. Such aesthetic deployments made great use of Wagner's music as the best original musical score category for Nazi stagings, Speer's light and sound effects, choreographic marches and massive gymnastic maneuvers, the *führer's* delirious rhetoric, his copy of Indian swastika clockwised as rotating axes to decorate arm bands, letterheads and monumental banners in addition to Nazi officers' uniforms designed by Hugo Boss.

As I argued in another paper (1999), it was through a systematic process of substitutions that aesthetics became not only an implement for mass organization during the Third Reich but, most importantly, its goal:

1) the substitution of religion for the instrumentalization of art consecrating the "Temple of Art" in Munich.

2) the substitution of art for propaganda where all painting, music and sculpture had to laud the *führer* and the Reich.

3) the substitution of propaganda for aesthetic ritualization of Nazi ideology (once propaganda was no longer necessary for an already imposed despotic regime).

4) the substitution of culture for oppressive monumentalism such as the design of the mega–assembly in Zeppelinfeld by Speer and the redesign of the Reich Chancellery as well as of its capital in Berlin. The monumental design of Nazi architecture such as the *Große Halle* and other buildings was calculated precisely to compete aesthetically and surmount by scale the most well–known architectural landmarks of European culture.

5) the substitution of politics for aesthetics where the *führer* intends to impose his racial aesthetics as a dog breeder over the human species.

6) the substitution of the aestheticization of politics by the politicization of aesthetics (twenty years ago, when I wrote that paper, I did not realize this crucial asymmetry).

No other dictatorial, totalitarian or despotic regime in the history of humanity achieved this particular constellation of aesthetic and political strategies with the consequence of exterminating millions of lives.

Conclusion

The link between politics and aesthetics requires to be examined carefully as it has various sides, colors and shades with radically diverse consequences. To claim that all politics are aesthetic or that all aesthetics are political without regard to the asymmetries here examined blurs their serious social repercussions. While the aestheticization of politics attempts to achieve a political agenda utilizing aesthetic means, the politicization of aesthetics is deployed to impose an aesthetic version of the State as a work of art by political means. This approach was already prefigured in Schiller's notion of the political artist and of the formula "it is through beauty that we arrive at freedom." (Schiller's *Letter II*)

Tommaso Marinetti in *Manifesto del Futurismo* (1909) proclaimed an aesthetics of war : "We want to glorify war - the only hygiene in the world -, militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of anarchists, the ideas for which one dies and contempt for women."

> It goes without saying that the Fascist apotheosis of war does not employ such arguments. Still, Marinetti says in his manifesto on the Ethiopian colonial war: "For twenty-seven years we Futurists have rebelled against the branding of war as antiaesthetic.... Accordingly we state: ... War is beautiful because it establishes man's dominion over the subjugated machinery by means of gas masks, terrifying megaphones, flame throwers, and small tanks. War is beautiful because it initiates the dreamt-of metalization of the human body...."(Benjamin [1936] 1968: 241)

As Benjamin ([1930] 1979: 121–122) most vehemently denounces: "The most rabidly decadent origins of this new theory of war are emblazoned on their foreheads: it is nothing other than an uninhibited translation of the principles of *l'art pour l'art* to

war itself." He refers to von Schramm and Günther et al in Jünger's *Collection of Essays War and Warrior*. In his sharp criticism of the authors, Benjamin expresses his grim foreboding of the imminent catastrophe that would also devour him:

> The one, fearful, last chance to correct the incapacity of peoples to order their relationships to one another in accord with the relationship they posses to nature through their technology. If this corrective effort fails, millions of human bodies will indeed inevitably be chopped to pieces and chewed up by iron and gas.([1930] 1979: 128)

Politics become here a means to promote the aesthetics of war and violence. "This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art." (Benjamin [1936] 1968: 242) While communism deployed political aesthetics through propaganda for the dictatorship of the proletariat, fascism deployed aesthetic politics for the idolization of war and of the supremacy of the Aryan race. Communism is an economic model; Nazism and fascism are an aesthetic one.

The aesthetic State not only transgresses the role of the State as a necessarily administrative system and as guarantor of the security of its citizens but turns it into a tool for an individual's fantasy of beauty and art that inevitably derives into eugenics. The State is not, and should never be an end in itself nor an aesthetic agent, and should be political only in relation to other States, not in relation to the people it serves. That is why whenever a State invests disproportionately in aesthetic deployments of itself, this must be taken as a clear index that it is concealing vital issues from the public eye, in particular a degree of violence against the people. The State requires technological, military and economic expertise for such complex social task, and the only legitimate inversion of terms in the State is not a political aesthetics nor an aesthetic politics but ethical politics, namely, a political deployment for a universal ethical State.

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