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Post-Agonistics
Pluralism, Realism and the Image

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I declare that the work presented here is my own and that the information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged and listed in the bibliography.

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Abstract

This thesis is situated at the crossroads between philosophy, political theory, and art. It proceeds from an enquiry into various philosophical discourses on 'the real' – in particular the Lacanian conceptualization of the real as impossible and the Guattari-Deleuze formulation of the real as artificial. It examines what these discourses engender in political theory and in the fields of art and activism. It looks at their investment in constructing 'a people' and seeks to understand this as an enterprise that involves images and their configuration. From this angle, the project is interested in exploring the discussion on 'democracy and art' and engages in advocating a shift in current positions on their relation. After critiquing Chantal Mouffe's agonistic pluralism, it is suggested that provoking such a shift might be achieved by outlining a model similar to the way that Mouffe develops a model or 'democratic design'.

Mouffe's model is structured on Lacan's 'impossible real'. Accordingly, this dissertation points towards a design for pluralism based on 'a real' grounded in Wilfrid Sellars' conceptualization of a stereoscopic fusion between what he termed the manifest and scientific images of man-in-the-world. The project suggests that images can be sites in which such models or 'designs' are put into conceptual shape. Sellars' characterization of science as being rational, not because it has foundation, but rather because it is a self-correcting venture that can put any claim into jeopardy, is drawn on as the basis for the 'construction of a people' established on the Sellarsian real. Furthermore, the project engages with the work of a number of post-Sellarsian thinkers to lay the grounds for an argument for 'reasoning' as a distinct position that can be taken up in the context of the structural reality of democracy and its relation to art. The term post-agonistics (or postagonistics) indicates this shift to reasoning and how it might contribute to the expanded field of art.

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Introduction

From Participation, Implication, and Occupation to Reasoning

In order to impede the *closure of the democratic space*, it is vital to abandon any reference to the possibility of a *consensus* that, because it would be grounded on *justice or on rationality*, could not be *destabilized*. To believe in the possibility of such a consensus, even when it is conceived as an 'infinite task', is to postulate that *harmony and reconciliation* should be the goal of a *democratic society*. In other words, it is to transform the *pluralist democratic ideal* into a 'self-refuting ideal', since the very moment of its realization would coincide with its destruction. As *conditions of possibility for the existence of a pluralist democracy*, conflicts and *antagonisms* constitute at the same time the *condition of impossibility* of its final achievement. (Mouffe, 1996: 11, all emphases added)

In considering the emphasized words in the above paragraph, the reader may already be able to decode the main tenets behind Mouffe's design for a pluralist and politically realist democratic model. But what does it mean to tailor a blueprint for a pluralist outlook proceeding from trepidations about the closure of democracy, strong restrictions on consensus, and the curtailing of rationality while giving primacy to the democratic ideal? How does this affect our understanding of pluralism and what are its possible consequences? Part of this thesis's trajectory concerns providing adequate answers to these questions. This trajectory also involves sharpening the contrasts between the project of agonism and contesting political theories and philosophies by putting them into conversation with each other on the questions of abstraction and the real.

Taking this into consideration, it is clear that Mouffian agonism successfully mobilizes a specific image or conception of community. She achieves this by proposing a formula or a list of protocols – contrasted against competing theorizations – which clearly demarcate a 'democratic design' that highlights

what should and should not be taken up in order to induce changes to already existing liberal democracy. Principally, I find Mouffe's approach useful in its straightforwardness and its endeavour to lay out a kind of master plan for a pluralist politics that would rejuvenate democratic systems. But my appreciation of this approach has more to do with its formal and methodical qualities than with its major premise (the incommensurability of identities) or its major goal (the radicalization of democracy), aspects which I call into question and explore in different segments of the study at hand.

The concept of agonism has a long history in philosophy and political theory but no doubt Mouffe's articulation (as differentiated from Nietzsche's, Arendt's, and more recently Bonnie Honig's and William Connolly's) has had by far the most impact on the field of art and its intersection with political activism. This is why I mostly focus my attention on Mouffe's agonistic pluralism – and what is distinctive about it – rather than traverse the entire literature on agonism. I explore possible reasons for this predominance in *Chapter 1* and suggest that it may be accounted for by understanding the theoretical genealogy of Mouffian agonistics. The process of tracing the roots of Mouffe's particular articulation leads to exposing the intersections between her concept and that of the postmodern sublime (as established by Lyotard), and to the suggestion that Mouffian agonism is a kind of political enactment and rearticulation of this iteration of the sublime within the framework and institutional contextualization of liberal democracy.

This brings us to the broader area of research that this project contributes to: the confluence of democracy, pluralism, and art. Rather than approaching

this field from the particular perspectives of art history or curatorial studies, my entry point, and the frame of reference I exploit, is the image[1]. More generally, I have been preoccupied with how philosophy informs and interprets the construction of the image to social and political ends (and vice versa), in addition to how philosophy and political theory might contribute to the configuration and carving out of new paradigms for image making. The dissertation at hand attempts to synthesize this preoccupation with the general conversation on 'art and democracy' and in the process suggests ways of reordering and altering the terms and tenets of this debate. But why does this debate require such an overhaul and shifting of terms? An appropriate answer to this question requires some contextualization.

From an art historical perspective, Anthony Gardner's engagement with the art and democracy question brings to the fore contrasting positions on the issue. Gardner emphasizes and critiques the deep and profound ties between contemporary art and democracy. In exploring the evolution of Thomas Hirschhorn's politically charged installations, Gardner (2012) identifies two major positions that art practices have adopted in their dance with the liberal democratic project. The first is *participation*, which is best represented by the turn to relational aesthetics theorized by Nicolas Bourriaud. Gardner suggests that this position – with its talk of participatory

[1] With Beech (2014), part of my interest lies in the way that "philosophy often, despite (and because of) itself, produces a figure – and how, at that precise point, art, or the image" is invited into the picture. Philosophy and political theory – as well as its subfield of democratic theory – are densely populated with such images. To make some of these images explicit and foreground them is part of this thesis' methodology. More specifically, it is when such philosophically embedded images evoke 'a people' or a community that is of interest. Images in this abstract sense are the points at which the social aspects of a theory or a philosophy reach a sort of apex of abstraction and become circulatable in ways often detached from or untraceable back to it.

art projects as micro-utopias and its inclination to democratize art – contributes to the idealization of democracy. This is considered problematic because in the name of democracy, wars have been forged, nations have been unsettled, and lives have been lost. Thus Gardner seems to favour the second trope, which he arrives at by way of Hirschhorn's reflections on his own work in the early 2000s developed in response to the changing global picture as it became permeated with wars and conflicts as a permanent condition. This is the position of *implication* in which the work is set-up to implicate the audience so as to engage them in a process of *de-idealizing* democracy. Hence, the transformation in Hirschhorn's work from constructing monuments to his favourite philosophers to setting up spaces as immersive environments of implication, laden with images of war, conflict, and carnage brought about by the trigger-happy dimension of democracy. Implication, in this sense, depends on confrontation, whereby an audience is confronted with an overabundance of stimuli aimed at making them sensitive to the price of democracy as an excuse for interventionist politics.

But the trope of implication can also amplify its confrontational dimension through what Gardner (2012) calls 'retro politics'. This particular implicative mode of responding to the art and democracy question is epitomized in the work of the Slovenian collective Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) and its offshoots, the art group IRWIN and the music group Laibach. As Gardner suggests, for this strand and its representatives the main tactic tends to involve a kind of blurring between utopianism and totalitarianism and taking up historical imagery, icons, and symbols ambivalently situated between aspirations for social transformation and state/nationalist propaganda.

Overall, this strand practices a form of conflation of symbols and replication of past totalitarian motifs and is hinged on the idea that the appropriation and manipulation of this material and language can intervene into the fabric of the present in positive ways. Thus it illustrates a kind of belief that only “by speaking that same language could the totalitarian potential within that language be embodied, exceeded, and potentially revealed” (Gardner, 2012).

It is clear that democracy is not simply an issue or a theme for contemporary art practices, but that – along with capitalism – it constitutes part of the structural reality that both constrains and enables their production and distribution. We can consider the general positions of both participation and implication as disparate ways of dealing with this structural relationship to democracy, tethered to the venture of integrating Central and Eastern European art practices into the bigger picture of contemporary art, the emergence of neoliberalism as we understand it today, and economic globalization. So what we can take from Gardner’s explorative study of contemporary art’s positions on democracy is that while *participation* has attempted to enact the democratic gesture, it risks falling into a naivety about the full structural implications of democracy, and that its antithesis, *implication*, avoids this risk through confrontation, sensitizing, critique, and blurring the boundaries between democracy and totalitarianism.

Building on this general categorization, we can identify ‘agonistic pluralism’ as indicative of a variation on these positions. Although agonism calls for participation, I argue in Chapter 1 that it is perhaps better understood as a form of institutional *occupation* that works by what I term *franchising*

democracy, the idea that pluralist democracy – in its specific function of sustaining the stream of conflictual viewpoints – is an adequate institutional intervention in and of itself. This is only possible because agonistics adopts the Laclauian stance that not any "position in society, not any struggle is equally capable of transforming its own contents in a nodal point that becomes an empty signifier[2]" (Laclau, 1995). For Mouffe, the democratic struggle is obviously the best placed form of contestation and the struggle most adept at enabling the transformation of antagonists into agonists by becoming such a point revolving around an empty signifier.

The pivoting of the democratic project on this particular concept of signifier harks back to the Lacanian psychoanalytic tradition, and as Laclau (1995) informs us, what is at stake is the attempt "to signify the limits of signification – the real, if you want, in the Lacanian sense – and there is no direct way of doing so except through the subversion of the process of signification itself". For Mouffe, the name of this subversion process is agonistic pluralism. The move from *participation* and *implication* to the approach of *occupation* – which in this case is founded on a particular understanding of the real – brings into light the influence and impact of philosophical thought on the social movements of today and their convergence with art practices and image construction.

It is readily accepted that images "can politicize and depoliticize" (Burnett, 1995: 237). The question most relevant here, to my mind, is how do we want to politicize the image? Which version of the real is best suited to develop

[2] Laclau (1995) reiterates Lacan's concept of the empty signifier as "strictly speaking, a signifier without a signified".

images that politicize in ways that are not idealizing democracy and participation, nor suggesting that audience implication or occupational strategies are adequate forms of addressing and transforming structural power relations? For as we shall see, 'the real' taken up by Mouffe and used as the primary structuration device for her agonal democracy is the Lacanian *impossible real* touched upon above.

Hence, an underlying and basic argument – that lays out the spine of this project – is that the specific understanding of 'the real' we begin from, when thinking and developing models for politicization, ends up directly delimiting and conditioning our political objectives and how we think intervention. This is clear in Mouffe's agonism where 'the real' she draws on conditions her project towards the radicalization of democracy by leaving it open and preventing its possible closure by the depoliticization that is inherent to neoliberal forms of governance. An important corollary to this argument is that the phenomenon of post-crash social movements, such as Occupy, has often been linked to the notion of "constructing a people" or the construction of "a people to come", at least within the interconnected milieus of political theory, philosophy and art.

This not only evokes images of a politicized people, but implies that the story of 'the real' and the understanding of difference or pluralism used to envision such images are coded into them. This perhaps indicates why Mouffe speaks of "democratic designs"; her agonistic pluralism is a design *for* democracy which attempts to construct a people. In Chapters 3 and 4, I take up a similar modality, but instead of democracy, I propose as objectives 1) a pluralism

unhinged from the parliamentary imaginary and 2) a (Sellarsian) scientific realism. The aim is to provide a 'design', a proposal tailored to a wider more inclusive pluralism, one which is based on a more exhaustive anti-foundationalism, while at the same time taking science seriously in the context of a political landscape geared towards maximizing an environment of untruth. It is important to note that while the Sellarsian account of scientific realism (or, as it is often referred to, scientific naturalism) has recently enjoyed a resurgence in interest and debate across a certain niche of art practices and their related theorizations, it has been mostly adopted and reworked into political and aesthetic enquiries on noise[3]. To my knowledge, it does not appear that the current blossoming of Post-Sellarsian theory – with its strong residues in research fields such as inferentialism, philosophy of neuroscience, and collective intentionality – has had the same impact on the theorization of the image.

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[3] This has been largely due to the contribution of Ray Brassier and his interest in this field. Brassier's (2009) proposition that noise plays the role of exacerbating "the rift between knowing and feeling by splitting experience, forcing conception against sensation" is clearly connected to the Sellarsian "myth of the given" which works against direct intuition as a source of knowledge. Sellars' scientific naturalism can generally be thought of as having the benefit of counteracting the complacency of experience over methods of acquiring knowledge that proceed through inference, or better said, games of reasoning. In the context of the Sellarsian deprioritizing of intuitive experience, the artist Mattin (sometimes in collaboration with Brassier) and the GegenSichKollektiv have worked to develop a practice and theory of noise that would escape noise's capture in the genre of music or 'noise concerts'. This attempt has contributed to the further bridging of Sellars' philosophy and Thomas Metzinger's (2003) *Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity* in which there is no self as we understand it in popular culture, but instead a model that produces the unified image of the self for us. Metzinger's related concept of *Nemocentrism* – the idea of a subjectivity centred on no one – is related to Sellars' concept of pattern-governed behaviour. Hence, the work of the mentioned artists emphasizes the need to displace individual experiences as a strategy. As GegenSichKollektiv (2012) note, in a rearticulation of Brassier's ideas: "[T]he commodification of experience now takes place not only at the ideological level but at the neurophysiological level. If we take the term literally, noise should not work 'smoothly' at the level of either aesthetics or experience".

Broadly speaking, the second half of this project traverses some of Sellars' main arguments while making implicit and explicit connections between those arguments and the distinct projects of contemporary thinkers, most notably Brassier, but also McDowell, Seibt, Brandom, and Trafford. While this traversal does not go so far as to propose a Sellarsian theory of the image or the visual, it does attempt to draw out a preliminary framework for what adopting post-Sellarsian games of reasoning might entail for the image. This line of inquiry also leads us to a 'working through' of difference and antagonism in which a major premise of the agonistic argument is questioned: the idea that there exists an intrinsic antagonism that through democratic processes can be tamed and modified into agonism. Rather, antagonism should not be thought of as an 'outside' external to what Sellars calls "the space of reasons". The aim of this portion of the project is to suggest what might be required for a possible repositioning on the 'art and democracy' question.

To arrive at this repositioning, we must return to the central line of this dissertation – the idea that the particular understanding of 'the real' that we use as our starting point when developing models for politicization circumscribes and confines our political objectives. The 'impossible real' at the core of Mouffian agonism only permits a specific function for 'the people' Mouffe works towards constructing. For Mouffe (2014; 2016), the construction of a people is envisaged through the role of social movements in proposing demands and questions that in turn are taken as the basis for strategies by political parties within the setting of parliament. I argue that this restricts art practices to forms of demanding and questioning bound to the

limitations of already existing parliamentarianism or “critical republicanism”, as Khan (2013) calls it – an emphasis on the supposed constructive role of conflict in a democracy that Mouffe ends up sharing with Habermas.

From this particular conceptualization of ‘constructing a people’ developed by Laclau and Mouffe we shift our attention to the instigation of a ‘people to come’. The interpretation of Occupy through different and contesting filters of ‘the real’ underlines how each version of the real pursues a different strategy of politicization[4]. While the Lacanian impossible real hooks up with the project of radical democracy and hegemony, another real – ubiquitous to the theorization of art and activism – seeks a radicalization of nature in its labouring to resist parochial forms of representation and power.

As Chandler (2014) describes it, this real posits itself as an alternative power or “anti-power” which forms “a permanent ontological challenge to hegemonic power’s attempts to control or constrain the creative vitality of life”. What we are discussing here is the *artificial real* first articulated by Guattari and later fleshed out in collaboration with Deleuze as a politics of desiring-production, machinic filiation, and de- and re-territorialisation. The artificial real – to be more specific, its rearticulation into contemporary political theory – repeatedly

[4] See for example Conio’s (2015b) edited book making the argument that Occupy present the idea of a people to come. In one passage Conio (2015b: 25) states that “‘Occupy’ is a synecdoche for belief in the revolutionary transformation of the capitalist system: a new heterogenic world of protest and activism that cannot be thought in terms of the state, liberal democracy, parliamentary systems, or the hugely compromised nongovernmental organization (NGO) sector. Nor can Occupy be conceived in terms of class war or vanguard politics. These conceptualizations do not articulate fully where power is held, nor from where revolution may issue. A philosophical vocabulary that would materially inhabit the conditions of our present global world order is needed because the different registers of ontology (the movements of the earth), the social (the people yet to come), epistemology (concept formation), and aesthetics are nevertheless activated on the one single plane that is at considerable remove from the conventional terms of state or royal politics as they are understood today”.

assumes that it is “human hubris to assert frameworks of collective representation in terms of meaning or organization: these human constructs (the politics of the actual) are doomed to be constraining and exclusionary, a pale imitation of the virtual and the immanent” (Chandler, 2014). In Chapter 2, I bridge Sohn-Rethel’s conception of ‘real abstraction’ – in which social acts of exchange through the universal equivalent of money are articulated as prior to abstract concepts and intellectual labour, and thus condition them at the level of the unconscious – with the strong mutation in the Freudo-Lacanian unconscious that is the ‘machinic unconscious’ developed by Guattari and Deleuze. This mutation to the unconscious, due to its reformulation according to the perceived demands of real abstraction, forms the basis for the artificial real and runs counter to Lacan’s impossible real. Thus it becomes rooted in a political unconscious that faces the future not antiquity, a future “whose screen would be none other than the possible itself, the possible as hypersensitive to language, but also the possible hypersensitive to touch, hypersensitive to the socius, hypersensitive to the cosmos” (Guattari, 2011: 10).

This latter emphasis on ‘sense’ leads to a parallel inquiry into Deleuze’s concepts of Other-cide[5] and ‘transcendental empiricism’ where the attempt is to understand how this transformational journey of the concept of ‘the unconscious’ – undertaken by both Guattari and Deleuze separately and in collaboration – crosses with the question of how to understand casual

[5] Brito (2009) suggests that Other-cide can be understood as: a march in the contrary direction from that of the constitution of the subject, the march towards the world of universal variation where the distinction of consciousness and its object no longer exists or already doesn’t.

efficacy in relation to the reality of abstraction. In his ‘superior empirical encounters’ and what he calls ‘strange reason’, Deleuze finds ways of escaping “the norm-bound world of judgment and representation” (Jelača, 2014). He compresses art and science into a single expressive project which does away with the grounds for their epistemological differences. This prompts a comparative analysis between Deleuze and Sellars pivoted around how each thinker understands the empirical, abstraction, and knowledge. Deleuze’s (1994: 56–57) view amounts to an aestheticization of empiricism to achieve the transcendental. He writes that empiricism can become transcendental and aesthetics an indisputable field of knowledge when they are established in such way as to allow for apprehending “directly in the sensible that which can only be sensed, the very being of the sensible: difference, potential difference and difference in intensity as the reason behind qualitative diversity.” This is a somewhat traditional mantra that continues to play a role in the conceptualization of images and art practices. A foray into Sellars’ magnum opus *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* puts this view into question and leads to ways of thinking about the image based on a Sellarsian understanding of empiricism.

As Macbeth (2002) notes, “the fundamental and most profound lesson” of this book is Sellars’ assertion that “empirical knowledge, like its sophisticated extension, science, is rational, not because it has a foundation but because it is a self-correcting enterprise which can put any claim in jeopardy, though not all at once”. And as Macbeth writes this is not to deny that science has a foundation “in the evidence of the senses”. Rather, that “it is not in virtue of that feature of it” that science is a rational venture. This lesson is key to

understanding Brassier's (2015) position that "reason is inconsolable and non-conciliatory". And in Chapter 3, this is taken as an opportunity to construct 'a people' established through this view. This is the image of people whose pluralism is neither subsidiary to the structures of parliamentarianism and political parties nor based on the invention of a 'people to come' in the Deleuzoguattarian sense (explored in Chapter 2). Whilst the political implications of this concept have not been fully articulated in this project, the aim is to open up to new methods for such people construction and demonstrate the methodology and concepts behind them as clearly as possible.

This brings us to the final version of 'the real' featured in this project, the notion of a *synoptic real* articulated through Sellars' distinction between the manifest and scientific images (of man-in-the-world). This distinction and Brassier's call to avoid the "lure of reconciliation" between these two conceptions or images provide the premise for models and 'designs' for pluralism that are rooted in both the manifest and the scientific. And thus we can reconnect with our earlier enquiry around the positions art can take in relation to the question of democracy. As noted, the three main positions can be categorized as participation, implication, and occupation. But the groundwork provided in this thesis for an art-oriented understanding of Sellarasian anti-foundationalism and inferentialism brings to light contemporary philosophies and theories of reasoning, providing the basis for the suggested shift in positions on the 'democracy and art' question.

A theory of reasoning which also critiques Mouffian agonism and its incapacity to transform norms has been developed by James Trafford. Central to this is what Trafford (2016) dubs “transformative understanding”, whereby in understanding the constraints of structural power, those engaged in a conversation can work to surpass those constraints through dialogue and reasoning. Hence, along with such investigations into transformative reasoning, this dissertation works towards the reorientation of the established positions in the art and democracy debate, suggesting *reasoning* as a distinct project and position in contrast to those already discussed. I indicate that this repositioning can point towards possible models for making images or artworks that do not comply with the dominant aesthetic paradigm in contemporary art, a paradigm Malik (2015) captures in the term ‘indeterminacy’.

This while also allowing the image to be deployed as a site for pluralism that does not reduce the latter to the limitations of current parliamentary forms of democracy. In relation to this, I articulate a working concept for such a model for image construction based on a reading of Wilfrid Sellars’ concept of ‘stereoscopic vision’ and Ray Brassier’s take on it. This concept, which I term an *inaesthetics of jeopardy*, can be considered a preliminary attempt at delineating an original theory for the politicization of the image from a synthesis of philosophy and political theory.

What this model provides is essentially a way to think, construct the image around, and represent political antagonism and pluralism which is tied to a)

neither consensus (Habermas) b) nor the institutionalization of incommensurability and the franchising of democracy (Mouffe), but the cognitive orientation[6] (Seibt) that a non-sceptical position on dialogue and reasoning makes possible.

[6] Seibt (2015) develops a helpful description of what underlies dialogue in cognitive terms (i.e. the Sellarsian scientific image). Underlying dialogue is a process of cognitive orientation, a mental operation distinct from other forms of conversation in that it is not based on the extraction of information, the development of a plan for action, or the overcoming of an opponent, but the shared cultivation of the 'space of reasons' as such.

1. The Limits of the Differend: Rethinking Agonism

1.1 Mouffian Agonism: Vehicle for Differends

Politics demands coming to terms with the plurality of opinions, world views, and grievances that constitute the social spectrum, that is to say, the acceptance of antagonism as a formidable characteristic of thinking and doing politics. Chantal Mouffe emphasises this dimension and prescribes it as constitutive of politics proper. “It is only when division and antagonism are recognized as being ineradicable that it is possible to think in a properly political way” (2013: 26). The ineradicability of antagonism is also at work in Jean-François Lyotard’s concept of the *différend*, a concept that can be said to not only have strong residues in Mouffe’s formulation of ‘agonism’, but actually differentiates and sets apart her version of agonism from previous agonisms in the history of theory. Mouffe finds similarities between Hannah Arendt’s agonism and Jürgen Habermas’ “discourse ethics”, the latter used throughout her argument as the antithesis to her theory of agonism. According to Mouffe, what both Arendt and Habermas fail to recognize is none other than the differend:

> ‘…a[A]lthough Arendt puts great emphasis on human plurality and insists that politics deals with the community and the reciprocity among human beings who are different from each other, she never acknowledges that this plurality is at the origin of antagonistic conflicts. According to her, to think politically is to develop the ability to see things from a multiplicity of perspectives. As her reference to Kant and his idea of ‘enlarged thought’ testifies, her pluralism is not fundamentally different from that of Habermas, since it is also inscribed in the horizon of inter-subjective agreement. Indeed, what she looks for in Kant’s doctrine of aesthetic judgment is a procedure for ascertaining inter-subjective agreement in the public space. […] neither Arendt nor Habermas is able to acknowledge the hegemonic nature of every form of consensus and the ineradicability of antagonism, the moment of what Lyotard refers to as ‘the differend’. (2013: 23)

The differend can be most simply described as a mark of incommensurability between two parties who operate under different 'phrase regimes'. Originating in mathematics, the term 'incommensurable' initially indicated the lack of a common measure between magnitudes. It was then taken up by various philosophers of science in the 1960s, subsequently finding its way into political theory.[7] If the differend is "incommensurability politicized" (Spencer, 2001), then Mouffian agonism is an attempt to institutionalize the differend. In other words, it is an attempt to write the differend into the institution and bestow it with institutional normativity. With Mouffian agonism now an established and often cited concept, which is frequently relied upon within the expanded field of art, it seems relevant to map out its philosophical underpinnings as the most advanced formulation of what can be called *the institutionalization of incommensurability*.

Lyotard's differends "are conflicts of interest between parties that cannot be resolved, but must be acknowledged and kept in view at all times" (Grant, 2001). Mouffe's agonism attempts to tame antagonism while maintaining that "we will never arrive at the point where it has definitely been overcome" (Mouffe, 2010: 111). Mouffe shifts the differend from Lyotard's favourite register of the sublime to that of politics in practice. Lyotard's account of the sublime can be granted the title of his "master-concept of postmodern intervention". It is from this concept that his other interventionist concepts, such as the differend, are derived. Lyotard's sublime was formulated as a kind of update in logic to the Kantian sublime which he saw as the guiding

[7] For a detailed discussion of incommensurability as employed by Mouffe in relation to the term as used by Thomas Kuhn (whose theory Mouffe directly references) to explain scientific revolutions and competing conceptual schemes see Section 2.2

principle of modernism and the avant-garde. Lyotard saw Kant's reflections on the sublime as representing "a rupture, occurring like the crash of a meteorite onto the surface of the book". He declared that this rupturing was what "'the ontological earthquake" called modernity was all about (1988, cited in Bukdahl, 2007). Re-writing what such a rupture could be for the new context of postmodernism, which, in Lyotard's view, was dominated by techno-science and binary codes, formed the initial impetus and twist behind Lyotard's postmodern sublime. The sublime, Lyotard (1993: 89–107) explains, is tied to the question 'is it happening?' Instants which are not demonstrable (susceptible of logical proof) are those which originate in ideas that elude representation, even in the form of examples or symbols. He explains that the universe, humanity, and "the moment" are all cases in point of non-demonstrable absolutes which, according to Lyotard's interpretation of Kant, are so because to represent is "to make relative, to place in context within conditions of representation" (Lyotard, 1982).

Thus, according to Lyotard's account, we cannot represent the absolute, but we can demonstrate that the absolute exists through forms of negative representation. This is the task of presenting "the unpresentable in presentation itself" (1984: 81). This is the sublime as outlined and developed by Lyotard: it is all to do with the "temporality specific to contemporary capitalism". This is the temporality of innovation or "the new" which subjugates the will to its "technology of time" to affirm the will's hegemony over time, and in doing so tailors it to the metaphysics of capital. Innovation "works", but the question mark affected through the *is it happening?* "stops" (Lyotard, 1993: 89–107). This capacity to 'stop' or halt can only be presented

as the unrepresentable in presentation itself. And with this momentary 'stopping' the unrepresentable is represented only to be negated again and so on and so forth. Bertens (1995) puts it as follows:

> Lyotard's art of the sublime is thus an art of negation, a perpetual negation […] (his) postmodern aesthetic is based on a never-ending critique of representation that should contribute to the preservation of heterogeneity, of optimal dissensus. The sublime does not lead towards a resolution; the confrontation with the unrepresentable leads to radical openness.

The differend is the result of Lyotard's extensive reworking of the sublime in order to repurpose it for an abstract sphere of litigation. Mouffe's agonistics carry forward the transformation process, taking the differend into a realist sphere of politics. Hence, the conceptual genealogy that might not at first be apparent, becomes clear: agonistics is a sophisticated form of postmodern sublime whereby the radical openness of the latter, as we shall see, is transformed into radical democracy. This perhaps makes clear why Mouffe's agonism is such a prominent theory within art's extended field, it is a political theory that is at least partially indebted to an aesthetic theory which it has managed to convert and sublimate into its principles.

But in its transference to the immediate sphere of the political, agonism sheds any remaining metaphysical skin that may still have been attached to the differend. As such, agonism can be considered as part of what has been identified as a post-metaphysical move from the *readerly* to the *writerly* in political theory (Daly, 1994). This suggests – as some have pointed out and will be elaborated on later – that agonism perhaps shares more with the thinking of pragmatists like Richard Rorty and rationalists like Habermas than Mouffe would have us believe. A major question that these discourses

attempt to answer and, in so doing, allows us to compare and differentiate between them, is ‘what should we do with antagonism?’ which is to say ‘what place and function should antagonism occupy and serve within the design of democratic political systems?’ and ‘what kind of power should it have within such systems?’ The term ‘design’, which is used here in reference to Mouffe, comes up when she discusses what she believes to be the major task of democratic politics. This task consists of preventing the omission of passions or their banishment to the private sphere. Mouffe believes that this task has a dangerous enemy in the form of “rational consensus”, or what we can broadly call the culture of rational consensus within the public sphere. In opposition to such consensus, Mouffe stipulates that safeguarding these passions requires their sublimation by “mobilizing them towards *democratic designs*, by creating collective forms of identification around democratic objectives” (2013: 21, italics mine). Mouffe’s democratic designs are a) not compatible with rational consensus b) both an outlet for passions and a mechanism for forming counter-collectives based on these passions with the aim of contributing to furthering democracy by, as Lyotard would put it, not silencing the differend c) platforms for voicing in the public sphere those socio-political passions that are often kept private and off record.

For Mouffe, agonism is the tool with which such democratic designs can be drawn for society. Agonism is based on the idea that conflict is the chief ingredient and guarantor of pluralist democracy as well as what constitutes its specificity. Instead of arguing for a rational consensus, agonism argues for a conflictual consensus that avoids falling into pure antagonism by reinventing conflict as a struggle between adversaries rather than a struggle

between enemies (2013: 19). This is *the adversary principle* at the heart of Mouffian agonism. This principle allows her to establish incommensurability, the absence of any common ground, as a criterion for the political and for democracy. What concerns us here is how this particular formulation of the political, which is based on incommensurability, has helped to configure what is arguably one of the most prominent strains of political imaginary, in the sense of a predisposition, in art and curatorial practice. As I hope will become clear, there are obvious reasons for the popularity of agonism in the field, one of which is its functioning as a contemporary extension of the notion of incommensurability. Tracing its history back to both the Lyotardian differend and Laclau's Freudo-Marxist Lacanian conception of politics, and considering its conjunction with recent practices, we will look at the limits of the agonistic model and its consequences for the field. Later, we will begin to draft a possible alternative that will look to give antagonisms and their associated passions a different place and function in a speculative design for art practice that is not anti-rationalistic but rather strives to recognize and imagine processes of reasoning concurrently with antagonism.

A closer reading of the differend reveals the complex dynamic it establishes in relation to exchange as the defining characteristic of life under capitalism. Brassier (2014) notes how many post-1968 continental thinkers, among them Lyotard, understood the process of capitalist valorisation as one that "subordinates worker's activity to the activity of capital." For them, this meant that the "despotism of real subsumption renders ideology critique redundant." Real subsumption and formal subsumption are transitional stages that Marx

often used when postulating the development of capitalism. Brown (2012) describes them this way:

> Under conditions of formal subsumption, an industry or production process is drawn into a capitalist economy, but "there is no change as yet in the mode of production itself". Under conditions of "real subsumption," on the other hand, the production process itself is altered, such that the producers are no longer selling their surplus product to the capitalist, but are instead selling their labor to the capitalist, who will eventually be compelled to reorganize the production process altogether. […] we are already in the world of Marxian separation, where the whole production process is oriented towards exchange.

Working outside or around the edges of direct ideology critique, because of the latter's supposed redundancy, it is clear then that Lyotard's differend is, in part, an attempt to formulate a critical concept that can reveal injustices under real subsumption by functioning as an intervener. Bill Readings (1991) makes this point when he states that:

> In The Differend, Lyotard understands capitalism as the giving of hegemony over all other phrase-regimes to the economic genre of exchange. Capitalism as the rule of commodification and exchange becomes capitalism as the determinant rule of the economic genre over the linking of phrases. That is to say, in capitalism, all phrases are treated as if their linkage were economic, a matter of the exchange of values.

In other words, differends occur when the infiltration of real subsumption into language becomes dominant and those whose phrase-regimes have been left outside this subsumptionary process or cannot adapt to it are exposed. Lyotard (1988: 9) tells us that differends occur in situations "where the plaintiff is divested of the means to argue and becomes for that reason a victim." This is because a case of differend emerges between two parties "when the regulation of the conflict that opposes them is done in the idiom of one of the parties while the wrong suffered by the other is not signified in that idiom." One of the most telling examples Lyotard uses to explain his concept

- and one in which we can identify its relation with real subsumption - is that of a generic wronged worker who is unable to prove that she is a victim of injustice. Lyotard (1988: 9-10) explains that the legal language in contracts and agreements between workers and employers can only perform its role of litigation if workers identify with their labour as a commodity or a service. As a result, when they accept the terms of such contractual arrangements, their labour's use-value is completely subsumed into exchange-value, which then allows them to exist within a legal framework as plaintiffs i.e. claimants. Without recourse to the abstraction of their labour as a commodity or service they would not be able to claim anything, it is their acceptance of and inclusion in this idiom through a process of real subsumption that allows them to escape slavery, but does it allow them to avoid becoming victims?

Lyotard does not think so, on the grounds that the differend remains outside the contractual field of reference and outside the sphere of litigation. This is because "economic and social law can regulate the litigation between economic and social partners but not the differend between labor-power and capital" (1988: 10). In other words, the differend in this particular example is the wrong that is impossible to prove because of capitalism's real subsumption of labour and the resulting hegemony of exchange over the social. Litigation is centred on an exchange of commodities and services and presupposes the plaintiff as a figure with something to exchange and so grounds communication in exchange. "Communication is the exchange of messages, exchange the communication of goods" (1988: 12). Lyotard's differend, then, is an attempt to identify what legal frameworks are incapable of recognizing, because differends are born at the moment when human

labour-power is subsumed, reemerging as commodities and services, exchangeables and communicatory tools. This moment, for Lyotard, is the very condition that makes legal frameworks (in this case labour laws) possible. As a result, the differend can be seen as a form of tarrying with the injustices, passions, and feelings which linger as residuum after real subsumption has done its work.

This is the basic scheme of incommensurability on which Lyotard establishes the differend. In it "everything is staked on the plight of a phrase whose regimen excludes cognitive verification" (Ronell, 2004). It excludes "cognitive verification" because in order to be cognitively verified the phrasing needs to accept that it must do commerce with words in the idiom of testimonial law established as a result of subsuming labour-power into commodity. This scheme lends the differend its conceptual force. Rather than submitting to the regime of exchange or setting out to engage with abstraction, the differend hinges its supposed efficacy on identifying these casualties of subsumption, then proceeds to locate its possibilities for intervention in language itself, because "it can be conceived that language is something other than the communication of a bit of information" (Lyotard, 1988: 12). "To give the differend its due", Lyotard (1988: 13) writes, "is to institute new addressees, new addressers, new significations, and new referents in order that the injustice find an expression and that the plaintiff cease to be a victim. This requires new rules for the formation and linking of phrases." All this seems rather confusing because the vocabulary by which such phrases will be formed and linked cannot be so alien as to be incomprehensible, and once we admit that it is not, then it cannot follow that the novel phrase

regimens are purged of any links to exchange. Additionally, how and where will such new rules be formed? Are not such rules a matter of societal deliberation and negotiation subject to the power of institutional endorsement? Also, can they emerge - as they seem to do - out of the blue at the command of the thinker's will? To lessen the sense of confusion surrounding the possibilities and efficacy of Lyotard's differend one only has to make the link that Alan Dunn (1993) establishes in the following:

> The invention that is inspired by the differend demands what might be called artistic recognition; like the work of art, it refuses to be measured by a single system of value. This invention expresses the transcendent heterogeneity of need, its refusal to be bound by the standards of exchange.

Given the above, the differend seems to demand "that suffering be acknowledged as that which is not and cannot be recognized within a system governed by cognitive equivalence" (Dunn, 1993). The result is that its only recourse to intervention is the kind of expressivity found in a model of artistic freedom in which the autonomy of the artist's expression from exchange is taken to be de facto 'good' and a necessary trait for anything to be considered an intervention. To be sure, Mouffe is able to considerably improve on Lyotard's effort at envisioning agency outside a model of 'cognitive equivalence' or 'cognitive verification', i.e. an agency based on adherence to a model of incommensurability. This is mainly accomplished by changing the imagined setting for her argument. When we read Lyotard, we imagine the site to be a courtroom, while the site conjured up in our imagination when we read Mouffe is that of a parliament. This change in imagined site and its mental relocation from courtroom to parliament indicates a shift from articulating the differend as a concept that normal litigation cannot grasp to the differend's normalization as the everyday of

politics, thus establishing it as a condition for advocacy. This change in mental site has also been instrumental in enabling the differend to shed its traditional model of the autonomous artist. As Hagoort (2007) points out, “current liberal democracy is already reminiscent of” Mouffe’s agonistic model. “In parliamentary debates, politicians engage one another as ‘friendly enemies’”. Parliamentary adversarial relationships aligned with an agonistic model already seem to be a foundational element of contemporary pluralist democracy and are both the basis of this democracy and the means by which it puts a limit on attempts to reconsider how democracy might be improved. For Mouffe, an adversary is “somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question” (Mouffe, 2000: 101). The mechanics of this parliamentary template are well suited for art practices that are contingent upon the differend and its institutionalization.

This is embodied in what Mouffe refers to as the ‘artivist’, the artistic subjectivity through which political activism is established as a current in contemporary practice. It is through this subjectivity that we become aware of the displacement of adversarial parliamentary mechanics into a public sphere that is extramural and friendlier to aesthetic experimentation. Nevertheless, the undercurrent of incommensurability epitomized by the differend - with its deep-seated scepticism of exchange as a hegemonic idiom - is still the prime motif being put to work in such practices. What these practices, which Mouffe endorses, all have in common is their capacity to exploit the epistemological gap between particulars and universals, which, as Dunn (1993) has noted, is precisely where the differend resides. It is important here to propose a general definition of incommensurability as implied here. It is perhaps best

described as the idea that the epistemological gap between particulars (understood as ontological attributes or individual beings) and universals (understood as epistemological consequences of real subsumption) is constitutive of an irreparable rupture in society which leads to the exacerbation of injustices. It is then presumed that the role of thought is to formulate ideas that at least operate within the space of this rupture, and at best attempt to alleviate its effects by further exploiting this gap and emphasising its existence as actual, taking them to be the most pragmatic, unidealistic, and responsible courses of action. The exploitation of this epistemological gap is usually understood and described as "interventionist" because "it disrupts or interrupts normal flows of information, capital, and the smooth functioning of other totalizing systems" (Perini, 2010).

Mouffe frequently cites the work of the Yes Men[8] as a manifestation of what she means by an agonistic approach in art. Mouffe regards the Yes Men's World Trade Organisation project (1999) as a counter-hegemonic intervention "whose objective is to disrupt the smooth image that corporate capitalism tries to spread, thereby bringing to the fore its repressive character" (2013: 104-105). The World Trade Organisation project began when the Yes Men decided to appropriate the source HTML code comprising the WTO's website. Lifting this code from the original website, the Yes Men pasted it into a new domain and set up a copycat WTO website that at first glance seemed identical. However, the Yes Men's website included textual

[8] The Yes Men are a network of activists originating in the alter-globalization movement. The main members, Mike Bonanno and Andy Bichlbaum, are based in the United States.

information that mimicked the institutional tone of the WTO but was resoundingly different, as we read in the excerpt cited by Mouffe (2013: 104):

> The World Trade Organization is a giant international bureaucracy whose goal is to help businesses by enforcing 'free trade', the freedom of transnationals to do business however they see fit. The WTO places this freedom above all other freedoms, including the freedom to eat, drink water, not eat certain things, treat the sick, protect the environment, grow your own crops, organize a trade union, maintain social services, govern, have a foreign policy. All those freedoms are under attack by huge corporations working under the veil of 'free trade', that mysterious right that we are told must trump all others.

The mock website included email contacts. This led to the Yes Men receiving invitations to conferences and other events as representatives of the WTO, where, according to Perini (2010), they delivered presentations that pushed the neo-liberal logic of the WTO to the extreme, making claims such as "slavery is an economically sound business model".

We can evoke here Lyotard's wronged worker who escapes slavery by acknowledging that the condition for the legibility of her contract is the real subsumption of her labour because it identifies her labour as a commodity or a service. In such a project, the wronged worker is generalized as a model citizen and positioned against the faceless bureaucratic transnational machine of the WTO as an exemplar of the force of real subsumption. Likewise, Mouffe endorses such 'artivist' practices because she regards them as "counter-hegemonic moves against the capitalist appropriation of aesthetics and its goal of securing and expanding the valorization process" (2013: 105). This clearly follows from a position very similar to Lyotard's differend that sets itself up as a critical concept that can expose injustices under real subsumption by acting as an intervener.

The Yes Men play the role of satirical interveners flashing glaring spotlights on the epistemological gaps between the particular and the universal, which in this case are also depicted as gaps between the local and the global. General differends and wrongs become evident and incommensurability is reiterated. The figure of the satirical intervener or the intervener in general as formulated in such projects bases itself on an opposition between the lone individual or small community and transnational impersonal bureaucracy or markets and as a result seems incapable of understanding the compound nature of many subjectivities born of intensified participation in an exchange that such impersonal and bureaucratic infrastructures have enabled. Under such circumstances, the concept of intervention itself - here understood as interruption, disruption and the engendering of friction between the particular and the universal - is found requiring reconceptualization.

1.2 Franchising Democracy: the Impetus of Agonistic Pluralism

But before we get ahead of ourselves, we must return to the question of why agonism has become one of the most frequently employed concepts in art's expanded field, establishing itself as a mainstay in the theorization of art's role and function in the public sphere. More precisely, it has come to be regarded as the natural counter-argument to Habermas' formulation of the public sphere that has predominately been viewed as a problematic throwback to modernist and enlightenment ideals. A précis of this view can be found in Simon Sheikh's (2004) statement that:

> We no longer conceive of the public sphere as an entity, as one location and/or formation as suggested in Jürgen Habermas' famous description of the bourgeois public sphere. Jürgen Habermas' sociological and philosophical investigation of the emergence of the so-called 'public sphere', most often categorized and criticized for being normative and idealist, is basically a reconstruction of the ideals and self-understanding of the emergent bourgeois class - positing a rational subject capable of public speaking outside of itself, in society and of society. Thus the separation between the private (the family and the house: property), the state (institutions, laws) and the public (the political and the cultural).

Sheikh suggests that the Habermasian stance towards the public sphere now seems "purely historical". The question is whether the "bourgeois public sphere" ever existed in the first place "as anything other than a projection, an ideal". It is precisely this projection of a public sphere which, for Sheikh, seems unsuitable "in our multi-cultural and hyper-capitalistic, modular society". In such a society it would make more sense to think of a "contradictory and non-unitary notion of a public sphere, and of the art institution as the embodiment of this sphere" (Sheikh, 2004). It is hard to imagine anyone today insisting on adopting an exact Habermasian outlook on the public sphere within an art or art-institutional context: the diversity and

shear amount of forms, media, political positions, beliefs, and opinions that proffer themselves for consideration simply make it impractical. But Sheikh's articulation is reflective of Mouffe's strong anti-Habermasian engagement with the notion of 'public sphere', the results of which have proved popular within the expanded field of art. Generally speaking, this position represents the disqualification of any notion of 'the universal', replacing it with the notion of incommensurability (read contradictory and non-unitary). Incommensurability literally means the incapacity to be measured together (Connolly, 2015: 67), and in the agonist framework it is this notion that functions as the operational ground for democracy and/or a politics sympathetic to pluralism. Agonism is the political routine of living with subjectivities that are pre-assumed to be incapable of being measured together; it is the full acceptance of this as a fact and its utilization as the dynamo for a more radical democratization of the institutional and public spheres.

It is perhaps much easier to find indicators for political and cultural incommensurability in daily life than it is to substantiate any claims of universality. But this is simply to misunderstand the function of 'the universal'. Taking our cue from philosopher and sinologist François Jullien's (2012) distinctions between the uniform, the common, and the universal, we can envision a model for art and its institutions in which pluralism is not put up against 'the universal', yet retains the latter's political importance. Which is to say that the universal cannot be put into contestation or replaced with the incommensurable because, following Jullien (2012), the universal cannot accurately be described as something immediately given to us. Rather, we

ought to understand its function as “a horizon — a ‘regulative idea’ in the Kantian sense that it is never completely reached or known — that creates demand for the work of understanding”. Importantly, in addition to assigning this specific function to ‘the universal’, there are two categories that, for Jullien, need to be taken into consideration while operating within the universal as a regulative horizon. These are the categories of ‘the common’ and ‘the uniform’.

We can understand the common as “what is intelligible, despite the observable distances between” various political and cultural subjectivities, in other words what enables any dialogue in the first place. And the uniform can be understood as an inversion or perversion of the universal. The uniform does not stand on any “rational necessity”; rather, it is founded on “the convenience of production, as with standards and stereotypes”. What we have in agonism is a model which collapses the distinctions between the universal (as horizon) and the uniform, (mis)understanding the uniform as the universal. Since agonism equates universality with this awkward version of itself based on the convenience of production, it seeks to dismiss any role for it in structuring or thinking models of pluralism, replacing it with democracy as an empty universal signifier

For such reasons, a vision of the public sphere based on incommensurability, which agonism seems to offer, is not the only possibility for sustaining pluralism. Strangely, or perhaps not so strangely, we can retrace Mouffe’s intellectual enmity towards Habermasian discourse back to Lyotard. Lyotard (1988: 65-66) summarizes Habermas’ discourse as one concerned with the

process by which socio-political norms and values gain legitimacy in the public sphere. Habermas, according to Lyotard, emphasizes that legitimacy ought to be established on the idea of a universal consensus that is the fruit of ‘a dialogue of argumentation.’ Lyotard sees this as a mistake, first because it supposes that all the participants partaking in the argument will be able to reach an agreement on the general rules required to dictate which moves are acceptable in this ‘language game’ and which are not, and second, because it assumes that the endgame of dialogue is consensus. In Lyotard’s opinion this is proof of Habermas’ belief that “humanity as a collective (universal) subject seeks its common emancipation through the regularization of the “moves” permitted in language games and that the legitimacy of any statement resides in its contributing to that emancipation.”

Lyotard admits that Habermas’ motivation is “an idea and practice of justice”, but he thinks linking justice to consensus is an unacceptable idea because consensus has “become an outmoded and suspect value.” Instead, he suggests, a better direction would be to shape an idea and practice of justice that recognizes the “heteromorphous nature of language games”. This idea is, of course, the differend. There is an uncanny combination of subtlety and violence in Lyotard’s choice of the term heteromorphous to describe the nature of language games. It is commonly used to describe the nature of insects that go through total transformations at different stages in their life cycle: larvae become worm-like organisms, and those organisms become moths or flies. Although, in principle, the moth is the larva and the larva is the caterpillar or worm, there is no common measure between them at these

different stages because although the caterpillar retains the genes that would enable it to develop wings, these genes are not yet switched on.

The use of this peculiar term to describe language games is perhaps no coincidence. It anchors them in ontology, links struggle to a strong image of difference in action, and establishes a sense of time based on jarringly dissimilar stages. Such heteromorphous language games are what Mouffe has in mind when she draws up her agonistic approach to the general public sphere, underscoring the latter's status as "where conflicting points of view are confronted without any possibility of a final reconciliation" (2013: 98). These points of view are also hegemonic projects or latent hegemonies, since for Mouffe public space can only be conceived as a perpetual battleground. As we have seen, adopting the agonistic model as an institutional template for art leads to the affirmation of a contradictory and non-unitary understanding of the public sphere, in other words, to a conception of the art institution as a permanent battleground. The upshot of this is that, as Thomson (2009) points out, agonism "replaces the idea of a public good with 'politics' itself as an abstract value deprived of any content, except for the pragmatic virtues of pluralism and tolerance". As a complex manoeuvre of substitution or swapping it opens up the possibility of immanent critique for all groups in society that are able to identify with this political opportunity and make use of it.

However, this opportunity comes at the cost of a kind of ontological entrapment. This is because, as Thomson (2009) again explains, agonism denies "the possibility or desirability of citizens being able to free themselves

from their attachment to social groups subsidiary to the larger political community, or whose borders overflow those of the polis". It is because of this that the agonist trap only allows us to "articulate a distinctive political virtue in terms of the value of political conflict itself". It is in this sense that agonism allows for a form of participation that resembles something like "a universality'", albeit a negative one which can only be accessed through the value of a politics of conflict based on an absolutist-adversarial ontology.

There are of course, legitimate grounds for adopting the agonistic view institutionally. Mouffe (2013: 106) outlines some of these grounds. Enacting agonistics can be regarded a bulwark against those who, for her, consider that "political action should only aim at withdrawing from existing institutions and relinquishing all forms of belonging". This, of course, is Mouffe's persistent critique of Hardt and Negri, who, according to Mouffe (2013: 137) "refuse the idea that it is necessary to establish any form of political unity among the different movements". For Mouffe, Hardt and Negri fail to explain how the multitude is going to become a political subject in actuality. She states that although Hardt and Negri acknowledge the differences in objectives between various movements, they are not concerned with how to articulate these differences towards a shared end. In Mouffe's view, the problem of the concept of the Multitude is that it implies that it is "precisely because those struggles don't converge that they are more radical, each struggle being directed straight to the virtual centre of Empire" What runs across both Mouffe and Hardt & Negri, though, is perhaps the following: 1) The idea that 'difference' constitutes the key to unravelling Empire in the case of Hardt & Negri or forming a counter-hegemonic politics against the

hegemony of neoliberalism in the case of Mouffe: they agree that 'difference' constitutes a political force, but disagree on how to effectuate it. 2) The need to sever 'difference' from the social space of reasoning, the space in which knowledge of what a 'we' or a collective could be "is inseparable from a social practice—the practice of justifying one's assertions to one's fellow-humans", and is "not presupposed by this practice, but comes into being along with it" (Rorty, 1997). The severing of pluralism from reasoning, in Mouffe's case, is accomplished by tying the ambition of the pluralist project with the ambitions and scope of parliamentary politics, since the appeal to conflictual incommensurable differences is perceived as the basis for disrupting the encroachment of a single ideology – neoliberalism – upon pluralist democracy. In Hardt and Negri's argument pluralism is thought of the Deleuzian way, which, as I will argue in sections 2.2 and 2.3, contributes to the redirecting of 'difference' away from the dead-end of the incommensurability of cultures and identities as the basis for politics, although it still depends too much on difference as a political force in itself. In fact, as we shall see in section 2.2, Hardt and Negri's Multitude is analogous to the Deleuzian idea of 'Multiplicities' which, as Deleuze states, are entities composed of "becomings without history, of individuation without subject (the way in which a river, a climate, an event, a day, an hour of the day, is individualized)" (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002: viii). This indicates that the concept of Multitudes dovetails with what Deleuze called his "strange reason" or "transcendental empiricism", of which section 2.2 gives a full account. If we think of Mouffe as a political realist[9], this Deleuzian strain of thinking

[9] In the sense of being concerned with how to theorize politics while always taking into

difference is the antithesis of her resoluteness to disengage from a politics of the transcendental.

But as it turns out (in sections 2.1 and 2.2), the opposing concepts of 'agonism' and 'the multitude' can be put in comparison and better understood as contemporary *concepts of intervention* each based on a different tradition of understanding 'the real'. Agonism adheres to the Lacanian *impossible real*, while the Multitude is in line with Deleuze and Guattari's *artificial real*. In *Chapter 3* I suggest that the ambitions of pluralism and interventionism within the extended field of art might be better served by picturing, mediating, and putting into practice what Wilfrid Sellars called the *stereoscopic view* or *synoptic view*, which I describe under the umbrella term *synoptic real*. Accordingly, the question of 'what to do with antagonism' - or what place and function antagonism can be made to serve within the design of a pluralistic framework which art can imagine, picture, and contribute to - will turn out to be tied to the question of 'what to do with science', or how to place and give function to 'the scientific' within such a design.

Returning to Mouffe's critique of Hardt and Negri, her argument is that their distinct Deleuzian-Marxist[10] approach has "led activists to avoid addressing

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account the 'facts' imposed on political projects by the natural and/or social worlds. Political realism in this sense is better defined through what it rejects, which is "any understanding of politics in which the distinctiveness of politics is overlooked". This has been often articulated "in terms of avoiding forms of political moralism that give 'priority of the moral over the political'". See Sleat (2014).

[10] In (Casarino & Negri, 2008: 110 – 120) Negri compares his work (with Hardt) to Deleuze & Guattari's and Marx's. For Negri, *Anti-Oedipus* was "an attempt to recover the deepest or highest level of ontological causality, namely, an attempt to reintroduce desire within postmodern philosophy, to rediscover desire as foundation of the postmodern, so as to counter that last great Marxist heresy which was structuralism". The fact that for Negri, Lacan (and Lévi-Strauss) represents this structuralism makes clear why Mouffe and Laclau's Lacanian conception of politics runs counter to his. The main issue he takes with Deleuze and Guattari is that "the very idea of the production of the common is nowhere to be found

the fundamental political issue: how to organize across differences so as to create a chain of equivalences among the different struggles" (Mouffe, 2013: 138). For Mouffe, the problem is that Hardt and Negri think that institutional participation restricts the possibility of ever reaching a form of 'absolute democracy' that is compatible with the idealisms of total self-organization and a view on collectivity that is in line with the notion of the multitude. The multitude is a portrayal of social movement in which the collective or common is depicted as an extensive non-contractual body responding to injustice through resonance or indifference. According to Mouffe (2013: 106), individuals or groups aligned with such notions understand institutions as "monolithic representatives of the forces to be destroyed" and thus discredit any attempt at institutional transformation, denouncing those who take on such attempts and labelling every attempt at transformation a reformist illusion. Their idea is to transform by attempting to exist outside the institution, creating so-called alternative frameworks for social collaboration. But as a result they miss out on the possibility afforded by the institutional framework to contest the hegemonic order from a position of immanence.

Mouffe suggests that such positions are unable to imagine art institutions and museums as sites for "critical political intervention" because doing so would mean turning a blind eye to the economic and political powers that make the institutions possible in the first place. Thus, for Mouffe, such visions of collectivist action tend to "ignore institutions and to occupy other spaces outside the institutional field". Her view is that "museums and art institutions

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in" their work. Hardt and Negri's work can be seen as an attempt to forge such a conception of the common in relation to Deleuzoguattarian 'ontological causality' which is discussed as 'the artificial real' in section 2.2.

can contribute to subverting the ideological framework of consumer society". She sees them as potential "agonistic public spaces where this hegemony is openly contested", pointing out that "the history of the museum has been linked to the construction of bourgeois hegemony, but this function can be altered." (2013: 107)

Consequently, the agonistic approach in art is quite clear on its stance against anti-institutionalism, a stance that seems pragmatic, helpful, and appealing to politically concerned artists and curators all over the world who are looking to launch and establish their careers in the expanded field of art. It can be agreed that anti-institutionalism, if it still exists, is futile and unrealistic. But what Mouffe's stance indicates, to put it bluntly and rather generally, is a predilection towards replacing anti-institutionalism and the idea of an alternative outside of institutional frameworks with the notion of occupying the institutional field itself. One does not mean to reduce agonism to occupation. However, occupation - in the sense of inhabiting – is clearly an effect that the agonistic model generates, one which is related to the place of the institution, whether this is the actual institutional space or by proxy through an event, text, or context.

There is a further, far more important point which concerns how such occupation is thought and comes into force. Institutional occupation as envisioned by agonism functions through what may be called *franchising democracy*[11] as an adequate institutional intervention in and of itself. The

[11] The term franchising here is by no means meant to trivialize agonism as a concept with a long history in political thinking, nor is it in any way meant to refute democratic thought and its importance. Rather, the intention is to define how agonism operates at a formal level by

basic narrative is that democracy has been curtailed and encroached upon by the neoliberal bureaucratization forced upon states, institutions, economies, and citizens alike. In light of this, there is a need for establishing a “democratic ethos” that we can associate with “the mobilization of passions and sentiments, the multiplication of practices, institutions and languages games that provide the conditions of possibility for democratic subjects and democratic forms of willing” (Mouffe, 1996). Art and its institutions become sites for this distributed democratic ethos. If we consider the concept of agonism to be the franchisor, what it licenses to the franchisees, in this case artists, practitioners, and art institutions, is a particular operating method for democracy. This operating method upholds what agonism considers most particular about liberal democracy and what is at risk due to neoliberalist politics:

> [T]he specificity of liberal democracy as a new political form of society consists in the legitimation of conflict and the refusal to eliminate it through the imposition of an authoritarian order. A liberal democracy is above all a *pluralist* democracy. Its novelty resides in its envisaging the diversity of conceptions of the good, not as something negative that should be suppressed, but as something to be valued and celebrated. This requires the presence of institutions that establish a specific dynamic between consensus and dissent. Consensus, of course, is necessary, but it should be limited to the institutions that are constitutive of the democratic order. A pluralist democracy needs also to make room for the expression of dissent and for conflicting interests and values. (Mouffe, 1996)

In other words, consensus is only on the table in parliament and similar governmental institutions whose role is to sanction democracy. Elsewhere, the operating method of agonism is licensed to operate as an end-point in

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evoking the etymology and history of the word in relation to the currency *Franc* and originating in old French. The term originally meant freedom or to grant the status of being free. It transformed over the centuries to mean, at consecutive stages: a ‘special right or freedom’ a ‘specific legal privilege’, ‘the freedom or right to buy and sell’, to finally acquire its current meaning: ‘the authorization by a company to sell its commodities and/or services’.

and of itself because, as we may recall, it can only express particular political virtues in terms of the value of political conflict itself (Thomson, 2009). It is in this sense that agonism functions as a *franchising of democracy*. The value of political conflict as an abstract force upholding pluralist democracy is the only content in the license obtained by art, everything else is considered as form and technicality.

1.3 How to Occupy an Abstraction: Agonism and Institutional Critique

A telling example of this franchising rationale at work can be recognized in the Occupy Museums[12] movement that was formed during the 2011 Occupy Wall Street protests in New York. Although this movement's interventions might not be practiced as 'art', they circulate within the same economy, are advertised through the same platforms, depend on the same infrastructure for visibility, and have appeared in major international events such as the 7th Berlin Biennial (2012), where they were invited, among other occupy groups, to take over the ground floor of the Kunst-Werke institute for contemporary art. Occupy Museums (OM) reformulates the "we are the 99%" slogan of Occupy Wall Street to engender a conflict with institutions they count as part of the cultural elite or the 1%. OM's statements paint a picture of the institutional landscape as a corrupt and hierarchical system where 'high finance' is synonymous with 'high culture' and the value of art is fully dependent on speculation.

Various OM statements point fingers at museum board members, and remark on the worker inequality and the unfair wage gaps apparent in many if not most art institutions. In one statement OM proclaims "(we) held open assemblies on museum steps to free up a space of dialogue and fearlessness for the 99%. More and more people joined us. Museums must be held accountable to the public. […] We occupy museums because museums have failed us. Like our government, which no longer

[12] Occupy Museums was launched by members of the Occupy Wall Street Arts and Culture working Group in Liberty Park, artist Noah Fischer wrote the initial Manifesto.

represents the people, museums have sold out to the highest bidder".[13] In other words, the aim of occupying the museum is to democratize it so that it represents 'the people', unlike the said government. The move OM make can be crystallized in the following: by not attempting to answer questions that arise from this occupation, like, for example, what a democratic museum representing 'the people' would actually contribute to society, they assert that the gesture is supposed to leave such questions unanswered and open. This is because the act of occupying the museum or making it into a democratic franchise hinges on the idea of democracy as an empty signifier that needs to be contested in order to be identified.

The contestation is enacted through what Mouffe calls a "constitutive outside" whereby the performing subject, in this case OM, forges an us/them relationship with an identity perceived as other. OM identifies itself with the so called 99%, while the elitist corrupt other, the 1%, are posited as those standing at the helm of the museums. As we have already seen in the case of the Yes Men, the end of institutional critique here and for agonism in general is franchising the empty signifier of democracy in the hope that this in itself will disrupt normal flows of information and exchange and destabilize the totalitarian streak in liberal capitalism.

OM's interventions clearly reflect what Gilbert (2013, Kindle Locations 1426-1427) has identified as "Mouffe's formulation of democracy as the institutionalisation of the emptiness and contestedness of the place of sovereignty". Gilbert (2013) treads a fine line between critiquing and

[13] Stated in the about section of the Occupy Museums website.

elaborating on the theoretical sophistication of Mouffe's signature concept. In the process, he crystallizes how this institutionalisation of the emptiness of the site of the sovereign evolves from the history of Freudo-Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. Gilbert (2013: Kindle Location 1184) highlights the importance of the Lacanian empty signifier for Laclau's project. In its vacuity, and now grafted onto the stage of politics, this signifier designates "nothing but the general coherence of the collective or project as such". Modelling on this and deriving from it as well as Carl Schmitt's critique of liberalism, Mouffe's agonistic democracy, in Gilbert's (2013: Kindle Locations 1186-1189) words, is roughly summed up in the following argument in two interconnected parts:

> Every social formation, or at least every political order, depends upon the relationship of each constituent individual to a central figure, term, or idea that defines the coherence of the group (as well as on the designation of 'constitutive outsides').

However:

> What differentiates democracy from other types of social formation or political order is the fact that it institutionalises the idea of this central locus of sovereignty as being inherently empty, open or contested.

If we follow this logic, democracy supposedly functions by making the sovereign empty and leaving it 'up for grabs'. And the coherence of the collective is made possible by this empty nucleus of the sovereign. What seems obvious is the emphasis on thinking democracy as a kind of *formal minimalist device* that would make possible the radicalisation of the 'idea' of the collective. In order for this device or organising principle to work, it must be emptied of any ideals of a universal horizon and replaced with pluralist democracy. This in itself is not a concern, but what does matter in the end is

how this streamlined organising principle is developed by erasing any concept of discourse in favour of conflict as a base register to which we must submit as ‘the real’ of politics. In its somewhat commendable attempt to get rid of the necessity of agreement on the general rules of political dialogue (Lyotard’s point about Habermas’ project presupposing agreement on such rules), it disengages itself from the discussion on the place of discourse in politics, in other words, it hypostatizes a conflict-based ontology as vital for pluralism.

Mouffe still wants to put in place a minimal structure that would indicate very general constraints under which different political positions could be enacted and negotiated. But within this structure, what actually ends up acting as the starting points and constitutive rules for political deliberation and argumentation? Very little, except ‘us’ and ‘them’, and ‘constitutive outsides’. This step appears to be anti-foundationlist, realist, and an attractive option, because it avoids the meta-critical and normative narratives of reason, human nature, and modernity that thinkers like Habermas set as standards for critical engagement in politics. The problem, however, is that this ‘democratic design’ for a pluralist politics ends up making the functions of the ‘constitutive outside’ and the ‘us-them’ relationship extreme, and this extremity is held up as foundational for a politics of challenging and forming the sovereign. To make the relation between Mouffe’s agonistic pluralism and the idea of the empty place of sovereignty clearer, Gilbert (2013: Kindle Locations 1190 - 1197) introduces the notion of ‘the Master’. Structurally speaking, ‘the Master’ – originally the central figure or idea that identifies the coherency of the group or collective – cannot be avoided. From the

perspective of agonal democracy the problem with fascism and various authoritarian collectivisms is not their investment in somewhat equally subjective visions of a central idea or leader, but their decision to make the type, values, and characteristics of the central idea or figure permanent and not open to change. In a pluralist democracy, the idea is to explicitly acknowledge the necessity of a 'Master' figure or idea and through this acknowledgement "institutionalise his very contingency and arbitrariness". Gilbert recognizes that current forms of representative democracy already accomplish this when they are able to live up to their 'pluralist promise.' Representative democracy achieves this by:

> […] putting a contested space (parliament, for example) at the heart of our public life, by institutionalising forms of public debate and contestation (elections) as key mechanisms of decision making, pluralist democracy acknowledges and makes visible the contingent and changeable nature of that content which fulfils the role of the master/ leader /ideal.

Gilbert takes this to be a strong argument for democracy as a pluralist form of politics and more or less sides with Mouffe against Negri in suggesting that democracy is effective as a critique of neoliberalism since neoliberalism continually invests in the realization of "a singular ideology and system of government as 'sovereign'" and in the process attempts to phase out competing political positions. This brings us to the question of what exactly distinguishes Mouffe's agonistic democracy from current liberal representative democracy. Is agonistic democracy an altogether different democracy than the versions we already have? Or is it, simply put, an already existing 'pocket' within current trends which has been pushed theoretically to become the dominant type of democratic practice? Mouffe's

deployment of agonistic pluralism stands against neoliberalism (the figure of bureaucratic or managerial totalitarianism) on the one hand, and deliberative democracy (the figure of old western-centric enlightenment ideals struggling to come to terms with the pluralism of worldviews) on the other.

As such, agonism seems to refuse the inclination to managerial expertise: a presumed 'technocracy' encroaching on the space of politics. But it also refuses to think of the space of politics as one in which reasoning can take place: a dialogical space of social interaction. As Hauser (2014) points out, agonism folds into the larger narrative of the depoliticization of liberal democracy. For him, the questions and concerns regarding the fate of liberal democracy are hinged on the gap between "the ideals" of this order of democracy and "its phenomena", which seem to be moving in the opposite direction. These phenomena range from "restrictions on the sovereignty of the people and the rule of law, beginning with the often described symbiosis of a representational government and economic special interest groups" to the nondemocratic nature of global institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF etc. This threat of depoliticization produces the idea that within liberal democracy the space of political struggle – the space in which decisions are made – is rapidly decreasing.

Interestingly, although Gilbert seems supportive of the Laclauian-Mouffian conception of politics, he nonetheless is able to expose what in his view is a major weak point, its understanding of subjectivity. For Gilbert (2013: Kindle Locations1375–1389) the subjectivity underpinning and being put into play in Laclau and Mouffe's politics' is closely related to the subjectivity of Hobbes'

Leviathan, and perhaps this form of subjectivity's two most important characteristics are what he calls *ontological individualism*, by which he means the "insistence on the irreducible reality of the individual as the basic unit of human experience", and its *purely negative understanding of the social* which, as he explains, becomes apparent when "the social, the collective or the group are not understood as having any substantial mode of existence, but instead are thought to exist purely by means of a negation and delimitation – a kind of prevention – of the free activity of individuals". These two characteristics shape what Gilbert defines as the political subjectivity of *meta-individualism*, which is the explicit or implicit belief that if there is a *collective subject* then its agency, rationale, and political intentionality can only count as such if they pass the test of being formally indistinguishable from those of the individual subject. This, of course, is the exact opposite of the concept of Multitude, which does think collective subjectivity outside the post-Hobbesian paradigm of meta-individualism. And it is perhaps this meta-individualistic backbone of agonism which most strongly contributes to its particular understanding of sovereignty.

At any rate, the agonistic approach to art championed by Mouffe can be put this way: it is when art adopts her formulation of institutionalizing the said emptiness and contestedness of sovereignty as its operational logic for institutional critique. This produces forms of critique that occupy - in the literal sense - the institution as a place of sovereignty, or use the institution as a stand-in for the sovereign. Alternatively, the institution is imagined as a battleground and thus becomes an opportunity for representing or producing dissensus. It is thus perceived as an incubator harbouring places for dispute

and dissent (a courtroom for example), disputed places (such as Christoph Büchel's Mosque at the 56th Venice Biennale, 2015), and various forms of staging conflicts and populating the institutional space with what we may call – taking up our earlier definition – *incommensurable subjectivities*. Mouffe's accomplishment of normalizing antagonism as the basis for politics is frustrated when looped back into art's legacy of institutional critique. The supposedly strong anti-foundationalism[14] that manifests itself in the idea of democracy's dependence on a constitutional lack, hence granting contingent antagonisms the power to shape the political, is counteracted or nullified by the need to single out institutions or the institutional realm as objects of critique. The latter characteristic is, as Amanda Beech points out, the basic perquisite of institutional critique:

> … a critical theory that seeks to rehabilitate or even do some institutional critique first of all has to identify the institution. The consequence of this is that institutional critique institutionalizes itself because it fantasizes about what the institution looks like, as it also fantasizes about its opposite, about what critique looks like. It is when critique is understood as an institution in itself that institutional critique really gets going. (Beech, 2007)

"Critique understood as an institution in itself" is a concept that requires a complex process of elucidation and working through that I hope will gradually unfold in this thesis. Paramount to understanding the need or desire for such

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[14] In epistemology, foundationalism can be described in short as the theoretical position claiming that beliefs ought to be justified according to prior foundational beliefs, so that these prior beliefs can give justificatory support that other beliefs can be built on. The point is that these so called 'basic beliefs' are argued to be self-evident and automatically justified and not in need of further justification by other beliefs, that is, they are thought to be of a special kind. So, if a belief stands in need of justification, a foundationalist thinks it can be justified by such a basic belief or a string of connected beliefs founded on an initial basic belief. An anti-foundationalist holds that no such basic beliefs stand as the basis for justification of other beliefs. Mouffian agonism appears to be an unusual case because it claims an anti-foundationalist position regarding democracy, but in effect can only be anti-foundationalist on account of it acquiescing to the foundationalist beliefs of all participating members in a democracy or some such community.

a concept, we need to recollect how the agonistic occupational tendencies of movements such as Occupy Wall Street were theorized in relation to 'the establishment' as an abstract power. Blogging and posting on social media, theorist McKenzie Wark formulated what back then sounded like a surprisingly new question, how can you occupy an abstraction?:

> The occupation isn't actually on Wall Street, of course. And while there is actually a street called Wall Street in downtown Manhattan, "Wall Street" is more of a concept, an abstraction. So what the occupation is doing is taking over a little (quasi) public square in the general vicinity of Wall Street in the financial district and turning it into something like an allegory. […] The abstraction that is Wall Street also stands for something else, for an inhuman kind of power, which one can imagine running beneath one's feet throughout the financial district. Let's call this power the vectoral. It's the combination of fiber optic cables and massive amounts of computer power. Some vast proportion of the money in circulation around the planet is being automatically traded even as you read this. Engineers are now seriously thinking about trading at the speed of light. Wall Street in this abstract sense means our new robot overlords, only they didn't come from outer space. How can you occupy an abstraction? Perhaps only with another abstraction. (Wark, 2011)

To occupy the abstraction that is Wall Street (the latter itself of course a marker for neoliberal capital), according to Wark, another abstraction must be formed against it. This makes Occupy Wall Street (OWS) a *counter-abstraction abstraction* that functions allegorically by proposing an incomplete open-ended narrative against the abstraction of Wall Street/Neo-Liberalism. OWS is an occupation that "does not have demands"[15]: central to

[15] This is important because the apparent reason for an absence of demands is OWS's adoption of the agonistic model within the movement. Individuals participating in OWS considered working towards a list of demands a problem. This is because such a list would need a consensus, possibly leading to the unravelling of the idea of a 'conflictual consensus' already embodied in the occupation's pluralism and diversity. This became evident when a list of OWS demands circulated in the media. The group quickly refuted the claim that there was an official list of demands, stating that it was 'submitted by a single user'. See Occupy Forum (2011) and Picket (2011).

its political performativity is the question “what if people came together and found a way to structure a conversation which might come up with a better way to run the world?” (Wark, 2011). With no pressure on formulating demands based on consensus and an understanding that Wall Street, the physical place, represents but a fraction of the power they seek to challenge, OWS attempted to perform a double occupation. This is because, in Wark’s (2011) words, it is “an occupation of a place, somewhere near the actual Wall Street; and the occupation of the social media vector, with slogans, images, videos, stories. ‘Keep on forwarding!’ might not be a bad slogan for it. Not to mention keep on creating the actual language for a politics in the space of social media.”

What is striking in this passage is, first, the acknowledgement of abstraction, not only as a predominant feature of the power of the establishment but also as a property of a counter-establishment, here represented by OWS. Second, it is the division of the space of power into a physical on-the-ground place and a transient and disembodied online media space. The agonistic battleground, so to speak, is both online and offline, each feeding the other with ammunition in the form of translocal social media language games and local physical presence. Although one sympathizes with Wark’s account, it seems to bring to our attention a number of concerns about agonism revolving around those instances when through such accounts the institution is expanded into a ubiquitous offline-online presence, while at the same time OWS’s agonistic tactics remain unquestioned. These tactics are structured around the belief that the us/them model of politics is permanent and that any

attempt at challenging this dichotomy, at the core of democracy, places plural democracy itself in peril (Mouffe, 1996).

Thus we can take Wark's account as an entry point into a territory of thought in which we can begin to carve out the complex relationship between agonism, antagonism, the (art) institution, and abstraction, furnishing and laying the foundations for our argument for "critique understood as an institution in itself". By adopting Bonefeld's (2015: 13-16) Marxist reading of critique, we can say that OWS and/or OM's physical occupation is representative of a critique of 'the capitalist' rather than of the category of capital. Identifying and occupying Wall Street or the Museum as a foothold is based on the approximate personalisation of the capitalist in the form of a legal person instead of a natural person.

According to Bonefeld (2015:14), "the critique of the capitalist manifests itself as a demand for a better capitalism, one that works in the interests of the 'workers' […] (it) does not touch the category of capital by thought. Instead, it identifies the guilty party, condemns it, and demands state action to sort things out and set things right". Linking back to the notion of *franchising democracy* as the mode of intervention sought by agonism, we can see that such an occupational mode necessitates a clearly identified capitalist, or rather a concrete capitalist who can demarcate the institutional domain for the agonist. Once demarcated, this domain becomes the agonist's platform for intensifying their political passions and sentiments. However, this comes at increasing cost and is starkly contrasted by the desire to occupy (according to Wark) the abstraction that is the establishment as well as the

media space. The cost is best highlighted in the following passage by Bonefeld (2015: 15):

> The personalised critique of capital identifies the 'wrongdoer' of the wronged society and calls him a merchant of greed. For the sake of employment and industry, something needs to be done. Something can be done! The personalised critique of capitalist social relations is open to abuse from the outset. It thinks akin to a register of blame, and condemns the identified party as a power that hides behind the economic phenomena, sucking the living life out of the national community of hard-working people. This identification of the subject of misery leads to the condemnation of the world market society of capital as a network of money and power that imposes itself with destructive force on a national people who appear thus as victims of the cosmopolitan peddlers.

Following on from this, we can see that the emphasis on the us/them model, its need to occupy at the register of the institutional and thus its inability to operate outside of a personified critique of 'the capitalist' produces a kind of surplus incommensurability between an 'us' against 'the capitalist' and a 'them' that classifies institutions as 'the capitalist'. This entrenches liberal democratic thought in the space of the reactionary because it makes a caricature of the interactions between capital and people that can be easily exploited through demagoguery. This not only leaves the category of capital itself untouched, but also elevates 'capital' to a thing beyond critique. Capital thus appears to be no more than an economic mechanism that can be made to work for this class interest or that class interest rather than a general category to be transformed. (Bonefeld, 2015: 14) Here, a linkage emerges between Bonefeld's elaboration on the critique of the capitalist and Beech's (2007) insistence on a critique that not only avoids but surpasses the urge to define the institution, an urge she regards as "the very locus of instrumentalism".

The notion that an abstraction can be occupied, acknowledges the reality of abstraction and this, as we shall see later, is important as a first step in rethinking the role of antagonism in the development of art making. However, Wark's account of OWS's (and by extension OM's) bi-occupation of a physical institutional space with agonistic pluralist democracy on the one hand, and the attempt to occupy an abstraction on the other, forestalls the second occupation from having an operative model that is different to that of agonism's end of distributing a democratic ethos based on adversarial parliamentary mechanics. What is significant about the agonistic model is its refraining from the formulation of any hypotheses that do not prioritize the value of political conflict itself. Any hypothesis agonism produces loops back into itself, returning to conflict as an end and guarantee for democracy. This is why agonism requires – as Thomson (2009) points out – "something like a theoretical attack on theory. […] a problematically theoretical move designed to reverse the priority of theory over practice". The result is that agonism demobilizes theoretical impetus and thus becomes incapable of producing a hypothesis that does not refer back to itself or its requirement of a stasis of conflict, incommensurability and pluralism. Here, it might be helpful to remind ourselves of some questions put up for discussion earlier, namely, 'what place and function should antagonism occupy and serve within the design of democratic political systems?' and 'what kind of power should it have within such systems?'

Relative to such questions is Mouffe's contention that "the very condition for the constitution of an 'us' is the demarcation of a 'them'". This leads her to think that the key and decisive question to consider for democracy is "how to

establish this us/them distinction, which is constitutive of politics, in a way that is compatible with the recognition of pluralism" (2013: 19). If we look into the history of pluralism and how it came to gain its current function and place within democratic systems, we can say with Balibar (2015: 89) that an "insistence on pluralism was linked to an insistence by advocates of liberalism on the necessity of putting an end to such antithetical forms as despotism (even when 'enlightened'), absolutism, and totalitarianism, doing so in reality or in the imagination – perhaps even in myth". However, we can also track how the concept has accrued non-emancipatory justifications and purposes over political history.

Feldman (2012), for example, describes what he calls "conservative pluralism", a way of thinking pluralism politically and ascribing it a function that he associates with the development of British colonial politics and their residuum in a contemporary multicultural democratic society. He outlines how the colonial policy of "indirect rule" sanctioned a type of pluralism that "became the vehicle for British rule". The aim was to conserve and shape "the power of traditional rulers and established rulers – or those who the British (sometimes mistakenly) imagined these figures to be". Accordingly, the "Empire endorsed and helped to perpetuate the rulers and institutions it sanctioned". This had various implications for the diverse peoples of the colonies, the pluralism in place was one that was planned around reinforcing the powers of traditional and religious figures while at the same time delimiting these powers without much consideration for the pluralism and the possibilities of political and cultural diversification within their communities. Feldman construes this as a kind of template that would evolve back home

over the course of two hundred years, as Britain became a multicultural state needing to find a blueprint for cultural and religious pluralism within its democracy. He comes to the conclusion that the path of “conservative pluralism” can be understood as a “strategy of containment”, the objective of which is the preservation of the dominance of the traditional hierarchy.

This depiction of pluralism might seem to run against the grain of Mouffe’s counter-hegemonic intentions. Still, what we can take from it is that overemphasising the role of passions - in a plural democracy - over any identification with a dialogue based on rationality leaves pluralism open to forms of appropriation that can contribute to an impasse in social relations between different socio-cultural groups. Mouffe seems unaware of conservative pluralism when she recurrently accuses “liberal discourse” – perhaps Habermas or, more obviously, Rawls and Rorty – of wanting to eliminate antagonism. Her suggestion is that it should be sublimated:

> When the agonistic dynamics of pluralism are hindered because of a lack of democratic forms of identifications, then passions cannot be given a democratic outlet. The ground is therefore laid for various forms of politics articulated around essentialist identities of a nationalist, religious or ethnic type, and for the multiplication of confrontations over non-negotiable moral values, with all the manifestations of violence that such confrontations entail. In order to avoid any misunderstanding, let me stress once again that this notion of ‘the adversary’ needs to be distinguished sharply from the understanding of that term found in liberal discourse. According to the understanding of ‘adversary’ proposed here, and contrary to the liberal view, the presence of antagonism is not eliminated, but ‘sublimated’. (2013: 20)

A number of points can be put into question here. The idea that a simple adjustment to the adversarial scheme of politics, from the elimination of antagonisms to their sublimation, can somehow produce a democracy that challenges the hegemonic order seems a stretch of the theoretical

imagination. This is because absolute dependence on passions for the sublimation of antagonism, i.e. its rerouting into the domain of the adversarial, plays into and solidifies historic processes of *containment* and places a ban on the means by which such rooted strategies can be thought through and reassessed. A politics that accepts antagonism as a manifest characteristic of politics, while refusing to step away from discourse, dialogue, and reasoning, simply has more tools to address the modes of politics voiced through "essentialist identities of a nationalist, religious or ethnic type" that Mouffe claims are the result of placing restrictions on passions in democratic systems. Moreover, Mouffe's adversary principle, in its adoption of the notion of sublimation, offers no constructive premise for the rethinking of containment strategies. Oddly, it can be seen as part of the problem rather than a solution since, in taking the route of sublimation, it affirms cultural incommensurability as a foundational characteristic of pluralism qua democracy in multicultural democratic states. This is one angle of the institutionalization of incommensurability for which agonism has provided a solid and accessible theoretical structure.

From this angle, it becomes apparent that such a mechanism is capable of not only contributing to containment, but also of entrenching the said essentialist identities further into their essentialisms, whatever they may be, granting them normative powers. Reflecting on an argument put forward by sociologist Chetan Bhatt, Pathak (2008: 139) observes that by endorsing incommensurability in its cultural form such essentialisms are placed "beyond the analytic reach of reason" and thus become the playing ground of reactionary movements. Bhatt's (1997: 35) original argument is perhaps

harder to swallow, but he articulates a sharper argument against the institutionalization of (cultural) incommensurability by asserting that:

> [T]he claim to dissimilarity, difference, closure and uniqueness is a foundational declaration of religious and racialist movements and it is this authority that they now use to disavow critical assessment or political challenge. Versions of Spivak's argument that reason is Eurocentric […] or Bhabha's arguments on foundational incommensurability are rehearsed by those same movements as legislative norms.

It is not difficult to make comparisons between such claims to "dissimilarity, difference, closure and uniqueness" and the claims and opinions held by ultra-nationalist and nativist movements agonising the political landscape in Europe in the second decade of the twenty-first century. This lends the agonistic model the credibility of a self-fulfilling prophecy and stamps it with the seal of a pragmatic truth, which, in turn, makes it harder to imagine or construct alternative models – and here I am thinking about models that use images, sounds, performativity, and language - in which democracy and/or pluralism could be thought differently within the scope of art making.

Now we can return to Wark's question and begin to unpack his formulation in relation to agonism by placing the spotlight on abstraction. How can an abstraction be occupied? The answer Wark suggests is: perhaps only by another abstraction. But after identifying the *abstraction of occupation* or of OWS and OM with the agonistic model and inspecting the *abstraction of Wall Street* or the economy more closely, it can be claimed that we need a clearer sense of what we are actually discussing: are these two abstractions related or dissimilar? From where do these two abstractions – the one that wills and enacts occupation and the one that is to be its receptor– come? In the following chapter I will argue that the abstraction of Occupy-related

movements and the agonistic model is a Laclau inspired *real abstraction*. Adopting Laclau's version of real abstraction has consequences that limit art making – understood as a political practice that deals with representation and images – to a scope of thinking related to the agonistic as well as to notions of cultural and political incommensurability. If premised on Laclau's formulation of real abstraction, art's agency is instantly equated with intervention in the sense already explained, founded on the epistemological gap between universals and particulars and the disruption or interruption of capitalism's flows. The terminology of *real abstraction* is a contested one. There is no monopoly on its meaning, although the various versions contesting on the theoretical field all share Marxist roots. To examine the idea of an abstraction occupying another abstraction I will first put this Laclau inspired *agonistic real abstraction* in contrast with Alfred Sohn-Rethel's formulation of *real abstraction* developed in his seminal book *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology* (1978). There are advantages to the latter, but it also suffers from a number of problems and drawbacks when we begin thinking 'intervention'. These will be gradually clarified over the course of the discussion.

2. Outlooks on Abstraction, Models of the Real, and the Question of Intervention

2.1 Real Abstraction: Laclau and Mouffe Contra Sohn-Rethel

What is left to be noted, before exploring the notion of real abstraction, is that Mouffe's agonistic model is analogous to Laclau's formulation of real abstraction. Mouffe breaks down Laclau's real abstraction, turning it into a clear set of principles. This sharpens what is perhaps one of Laclau's lesser apparent theoretical undertakings - but one through which we can summate his general position on the political -, making it application-ready for work in art, politics, and theory alike. Moving on, there is an illuminating passage in Laclau's essay *Identity and Hegemony* (2000) where he discusses and compares the "hegemonic logics" of Trotsky and Gramsci. Laclau explains that Trotsky's popular notion of a "permanent revolution" is basically an instant of "hegemonic transference" that Trotsky devised when he realized that "the relation between global emancipation and its possible agents is unstable: the Russian bourgeoisie is too weak to carry out its democratic revolution, and the democratic tasks have to be carried out under the leadership of the proletariat …" Trotsky's and Gramsci's judgements about this transference of what Laclau sees as the "task of hegemony" were very different. Trotsky held that "it was simply the strategic occasion for the working class to carry out its own class revolution". According to Laclau, this leads to a problematic presumption on Trotsky's part: if that is the case, Laclau writes, then the "hegemonic task does not affect the identity of the hegemonic agent". What it boils down to then is something akin to Lenin's conception of "class alliances".

Gramsci, however, theorized that this transfer of hegemony “led to the construction of a complex collective will” (Laclau, 2000). He understood that “the transference of the democratic tasks from one class to another changes not only the nature of the tasks but also the identity of the agents (who cease to be merely 'class ' agents)”. As a result, the political dimension “becomes constitutive of all social identity, and this leads to a further blurring of the line of demarcation state/civil society.” For Laclau (2000), a contemporary logic of hegemony involves taking this Gramscian observation seriously and updating it. This is because, as Laclau points out, Gramsci was operating when “both subjects and institutions were relatively stable - which means that most of his categories have to be redefined and radicalized if they are to be adapted to the present circumstances”. But, today we find a more intense blurring as a result of globalization, a decline in the power and function of the nation-state, and international organizations with ‘quasi-state’ statuses. All this, for Laclau, means that fleshing out a relevant hegemonic task ought to no longer involve the articulation of complex collective wills in the descriptive sense of sociology, nor should it dodge, as Trotsky had, the evidence that hegemonic transferences engender shifts in the identities of hegemonic agents. Laclau then offers us what he regards as an updated corrective to both the Trotskyist and Gramscian formulations of counter-hegemonic thought, which he formulates as an explicit corrective task:

> [T]o move from a purely sociologistic and descriptive account of the *concrete* agents involved in hegemonic operations to a *formal* analysis of the logics involved in the latter. We gain very little, once identities are conceived as complexly articulated collective wills, by referring to them through simple designations such as classes, ethnic groups, and so on, which are at best names for transient points of stabilization. The really important task is to understand the logics of their constitution and dissolution, as well as the

formal determinations of the spaces in which they interrelate. (Laclau, 2000: 53, emphasis in original)

This formal analysis of the logics involved in hegemonic operations, is not simply an analysis but also an axiom that can generate its own realities, since it is premised on the general yet pivotal Marxian observation that "social reality itself generates abstractions which organize its own principles of functioning" (Laclau, 2000: notes p. 86). However, in contradistinction to Sohn-Rethel, Laclau firmly establishes this social reality on the grounds of a political ontology of difference:

… Marx, for instance, showed how the *formal* and *abstract* laws of commodity production are at the core of the actual concrete workings of capitalist societies. In the same way, when we try to explain the structuration of political fields through categories such as 'logic of equivalence', 'logic of difference' and 'production of empty signifiers', we are attempting to construct a theoretical horizon whose abstractions are not merely analytical but *real* abstractions on which the constitution of identities and political articulations depends. This, of course, is not understood by a certain empiricism, very widespread in some approaches within the social sciences, which confuses analysis of the concrete with purely factual and journalistic accounts. (Laclau, 2000: notes pp. 86 – 87, emphasis in original)

What this passage in its entirety demonstrates is how Laclau wants to account for a historical reading of his theory of hegemony/counter-hegemony, identifying specific sources and explaining the problems we run into if we overlook the change in context and circumstances produced by the forward march of capital. Although it sometimes seems that his general political ontology of antagonism and hegemony is ahistorical, he wants us to know that this is not the case and that he has drawn it from political history. While these historical sources remain sociologically descriptive and thus are not systematized into a basic general political-ontological framework, he still wants to retain a connection with them when structuring his axiomatic articulation of a political-ontological model of the zeitgeist - which also forms

the basis for Mouffe's more minimalist agonistic model. Rekret & Choat (2016) have developed the idea that Laclau's usage of the notion of *real abstraction* is a kind of stopgap deployed in an "attempt to develop abstract concepts that are connected to a particular historical context yet that nonetheless transcend that context and attain wider application". For Rekret & Choat (2016), this reveals the true identity of Laclau's abstractions: in this case they cannot be *real* abstractions but should be understood as *intellectual* abstractions, since they do not spring from a social reality. But, what does this mean? They note that "Laclau ultimately fails to connect the ontological and the historical because his notion of real abstraction maintains the divide between them: his ontological concepts are (at most) intellectually abstracted from historical tendencies (or, at worst, basically unrelated to them)".

The writers make a strong case for disqualifying Laclau's "real abstractions" as actual real abstractions connected to a materialist understanding of the terminology. A materialist account would always start from social relations emphasising their mediation by "abstract logics". The commodity form and abstract labour, for example, imply that "the process of abstraction is operative in the world, anterior or a priori to abstractions in thought". To back this up, they cite Jameson's (2013: 51) articulation of a kind of implicit rule for abstract thinking: "[W]e can think abstractly about the world only to the degree to which the world itself has already become abstract". But if capital produces an ever-growing range of cumulative 'bad' abstractions which precede our interventions how are we to engage with them? The questions asked by (Williams, 2014) highlight the challenge: "Is it enough to oppose

dangerous abstractions with ideology critique, or is the plane of the abstract itself a battlefield upon which we ought to set in play new abstractions of our own? If our age is one of increasing abstraction from our lived experience, is this something to be overcome – or alternatively to be embraced?" Jameson's articulation, very generally, grasps some dimensions of Sohn-Rethel's rigorous account of real abstraction, while it should be noted that Laclau and Mouffe's project of hegemony remains a serious attempt at addressing the questions more recently put forth by Williams. To a certain degree, they understand abstraction as a battlefield. Unlike Jameson their concepts are developed to tackle the problematic abstractive effects of neo-liberal capital rather than to critique it. However, it is the question of how abstraction relates to contesting interpretations of 'the real' that is of most concern to us, and Mouffe and Laclau's heavy theoretical dependency on the Lacanian real nominates their model to be theoretically utilized as a gateway through which we can tackle the various dimensions of the abstract/real relationship in the formulation of a politics in art making. According to Rekret & Choat, Laclau's attempt at theorizing 'real abstraction' runs contra to the materialist inceptions developed by thinkers like Sohn-Rethel, leading them to identify Laclau's (and Mouffe's agonistic real abstractions by extension) as "intellectual abstractions".

A way to illustrate this latter form of abstraction would be to think about how the concept of human rights works upon society. They argue that in the case of human rights "there is an abstraction from *real* inequalities or differences to produce a generic concept of personhood: the formal subject of rights is an *a posteriori* intellectual or even ideological abstraction from a real person".

Such abstractions are developed with hindsight and as afterthoughts to a generic political subject that has already been abstracted from real instances of injustice and inequality. They draw a comparison between Laclau's logics of hegemony and between the abstractive operations of human rights. They see the process of their formulation as being similar to an imposition "upon social reality by the intellectual act of the theorist". What these impositions consequently do is "produce insights that are then taken as evidence for the nature of social being as such. The abstraction from the content of particular social struggles or demands does not occur in practice but in an *a posteriori* imposition of mental logic upon the world" This is basically the logic of occupation, by which an intellectually abstracted past attempts to occupy the present as a generic real abstraction. In theory, this has worked to instigate political movements across the board. Nevertheless, it has also been marred by a real sense of incapacitation made apparent in the years following the 2007 - 2008 financial crash and the proliferation of political demonstrations across different contexts. Although it is difficult to pinpoint the exact reasons for such incapacitation, this reading suggests that one possibility might be a misconstruction of 'real abstraction' in the process of developing hegemonic and agonistic logics. Breaking that down further, it could be that the historicity and contexts from which the tendencies have been abstracted lag behind or cannot match up with the generic universalization of the abstract logic being imposed. Rekret & Choat put it as follows:

> Laclau's reference to the concept (real abstraction) does not rescue him from the problem of the historicity of his categories. In fact, in drawing upon an intellectual conception of abstraction his dilemma is not unlike that of the idealist defence of human rights, inevitably caught oscillating between defending the universality of rights while affirming the historical and cultural specificity of their origins.

Based on Rekret and Choat's reading, Laclau's real abstractions can be described as a process - like Mouffe often points out in her work - of making new subjectivities. Laclau's explicit exercise is to move from social and descriptive accounts of concrete historical agents to a formal analysis whereby the logic implied in hegemonic operations can be drawn out to produce new subjectivities which retain abstract ethical dimensions from historical-political tendencies. This exercise may be called the design of *abstract hegemonic agents*. Theoretically, this exercise is deeply susceptible to producing problematic voluntaristic[16] incarnations of agenthood. Along similar lines, Boucher (2008) has developed the reasons for this susceptibility and problematized the Laclau & Mouffe post-Marxist paradigm of agent-formulation. Boucher (2008: 113) reminds us that Laclau and Mouffe construct society as a plurality of particularistic groups and demands. This is not a problem in itself, but complications emerge when this construction is tethered to a conception of 'the universal' as a void or empty space that can never be reached or occupied.

For Boucher, this instantly produces a performative contradiction that is inescapable for the would-be hegemonic agent, because it instantiates the agent as an impostor whose "universality" cannot be of herself since universality is voided and restricted to impossibility. Rather, within such a formulation, universality is downgraded to a "masked particular": this is a result of the transformation process that any public speech-act or act of

[16] Voluntarism is, broadly speaking, the theory that considers (the) 'will' to be the most fundamental agency ascribing to it a freedom to act not constrained by precedent causes, such as natural or materialistic ones. See section 5.1 for a detailed discussion on the question of voluntarism in relation to agonism and postagonistics.

representation undergoes in light of this particularity-universality relationship. When the hegemonic agent speaks, "their position of enunciation is transformed from 'I speak' to 'the people speaks'". The implication is that behind their "abstract universal" announcement is a sectarian particular. The result is that the hegemonic agent's agency is bound to a kind of 'Liar Paradox'[17]. Ultimately, the reason for this conundrum is that the constraint or rule which allows or enables them to speak or represent their 'particularities' is: the recognition and adherence to the 'impossibility of universality' which is itself seen as the empty or floating signifier that makes a pluralist democracy possible.

Although, Laclau's project tackles the transformations that social movements and political actors have gone through in their relation to shifts in capitalism, his imposition of intellectual abstractions as ontological forces disables the proper explanation of such transformations. Perhaps this is because Laclau and Mouffe, as Rustin (1988) remarks, made a decision to choose radical democracy "above other political projects". But, as Boucher (2008: 111) points out, the idea of founding a leftist politics based on the generalized myth of the radical democratic imaginary ought to be taken with a pinch of salt because its rallying call is not unlike asking us to "accede to self-mystification". For Boucher (2008: 111) this is the problem of a simple theoretical presumption that the thinkers refuse to validate "ethically": left

[17] The Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy illustrates the Liar Paradox through the following exemplar argument: Let L be the Classical Liar Sentence. If L is true, then L is false. But we can also establish the converse, as follows. Assume L is false. Because the Liar Sentence is just the sentence that 'says' L is false, the Liar Sentence is therefore true, so L is true. We have now shown that L is true if, and only if, it is false. Since L must be one or the other, it is both.

underdeveloped as such, it sets in motion the performative contradictions in their hegemonic logics:

> Postmarxism cannot justify its intervention ethically or defend its politics as something more than another particularism. It cannot substantiate its claims that the political *agon* of radical democracy is anything more than a redescription of parliamentary politics through a rose-tinted ideological lens. The performative contradictions begin from Laclau's efforts to justify a preference for democratic politics. Modernity is not only constituted by the democratic revolution, but also by post-democratic totalitarianism. Laclau and Mouffe simultaneously claim that totalitarianism is impossible (total equivalence meaning the elimination of all differential identity) and prohibited, something that is an ethical abomination.

The decisive value of radical democracy for Laclau and Mouffe, in Rustin's words is "that it leaves everything open". This openness though is of a specific nature, it is an openness premised on *the real as the impossible*[18] , and instituted specifically to prevent the closure of the pluralist democratic project against the forces of neo-liberal hegemony. Subsequently, in this section and afterwards, this idea will be developed by confronting it with attempts at a non-Lacanian understanding of the real, teasing out the advantages of disengagement with the Lacanian framework of the real when thinking the art work, representation, pluralism, and politics.

What models for 'the real' would enable antagonism to perform a different role than the sanctioning of an undefined and ambiguous radical democratic imaginary as an end in itself? For the moment, the claim in connection to our previous section is that this formulation of *real* abstraction (which in principle

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[18] Žižek [in the Lacanian Real: *Television*] defines a real object as "a cause which in itself doesn't exist, i.e., which is present only in a series of its effects, but always in a distorted, displaced way". Further explaining Lacan's 'impossible real', he writes, "if the real is impossible, it is precisely this impossibility to be grasped through its effects. Laclau and Mouffe were the first to develop this logic of the real in its relevance for the social-ideological field in their concept of antagonism: antagonism is precisely such an impossible kernel, a certain limit which is in itself nothing, and which is only to be constructed retroactively, from a series of its effects, as the traumatic point which escapes them and prevents a closure of the social field".

is an *intellectual* abstraction) as an insertion of hegemonic logic based on an ontological axiom underpinned by ‘empty signifiers’, difference, and abstracted from historical tendencies, appears close to what Wark (2011) identified as the abstraction that was Occupy Wall Street. There is an alternative route that formulates real abstraction as emergent from exchange and thus social reality; this is Sohn-Rethel’s conception. This opens up a number of questions regarding thinking as a form of mental labour in an economy that is no longer based on material coins as was the case when Sohn-Rethel developed his theory, and what we might suggest as models for artistic intervention that do not ‘occupy’ in the sense of agonistics but ‘embody’ in the sense of “critique understood as an institution in itself” as posited by Amanda Beech.

Staying with Rekret & Choat (2016), their comparative account of the two real abstractions favours Sohn-Rethel’s because his is a version “of real abstraction which neither reduces politics to ontology nor reduces ontological abstractions to some unexamined historical base”. Sohn-Rethel traces abstraction back to its historical origins, but it is rather the materialistic deduction that the journey makes possible than the historical account in itself, which is important. His research led him to trace abstraction back to the early circulation and usage of gold and silver coins in ancient Greece. His argument was that when money became the form that society adopted and began using to exchange things of unequal material value through the guaranteed universal equivalent of the coin, the first pure thought abstractions (The One, the Many, Being, Becoming etc.) in pre-Socratic philosophies began emerging as a result of the cognitive process adapting

itself to this new form of social exchange. This basically means that thought is always grounded in the activity of material social exchange and that such a real activity of exchange produces thought abstractions – for example, the concept of value - that then have import for the social. These are real abstractions because although they only exist in our minds, they don't originate in them but in the social acts of exchange, or, in other words, abstractions emerge from material practices. To use Sohn-Rethel's (1978: 20) own words, "the economic concept of value is a real one. It exists nowhere other than in the human mind but it does not spring from it. Rather it is purely social in character, arising in the spatio-temporal sphere of human interrelations. It is not people who originate these abstractions but their actions".

Toscano (2008) assesses that while this may seem to be "a very truncated vision of the Marxist debate on abstraction", it nonetheless serves to make evident the shortcomings of other critiques dealing with this notion in that they "can ignore the resilience of abstractions that are really, practically 'out there', operating in a manner that a merely conceptual therapy leaves unaffected". Sohn-Rethel's epistemological inquiry into consciousness is based on the division between manual and mental labour, and the direction of his formulation of abstraction runs counter to Laclau and Mouffe's. "Instead of abstracting from historical conditions, Sohn-Rethel begins with our thought abstractions and traces them back to real abstractions". He starts by pondering that "given these concepts and truths, what must have been the conditions that gave rise to them?" (Rekret & Choat, 2016).

Thinking the reality of abstraction this way is both “more dialectical and more materialist”, because it means that “a real abstraction is also a relation, or even a thing, which *then* becomes a thought” (Toscano, 2008). The upshot of taking up this position on abstraction is that it sets up a basic delineation for the relationship between capital, the social, and cognitive abstraction. This particular delineation makes us sensitive to both a) the limits of voluntaristic and idealistic endeavours that aim to modify our abstractionist practices without comprehending the degree to which they are already incorporated into the mechanisms of social reproduction, and b) the political and epistemological questions to which destabilizing such abstractions might give rise.

Brassier (2009) disagrees with the tendency to formulate and think of capital as if it were autonomous and floating freely of the “little human subjects who compose it”. Although global capitalism produces an austere impersonal complexity which is hard to unpack, it achieves this through supervening “on the banal personal and psychological traits of the dealers, brokers, traders, executives, managers, workers, and shoppers, who are not just its dispensable machine parts but its indispensable support system, without which it would simply not be able to function”. Instead, he suggests, what can dismantle this mystifying tendency is an understanding of “the mechanical banality of the processes through which capital reproduces itself”. While capital appears as a complex force beyond the boundaries of persons and is attributed to what seem to be self-moving causes, this force is in fact nothing other than “an effect generated by the myriads of micro-processes that compose it: it is neither more nor less mysterious in its operations than any

other complex, multi-layered emergent phenomenon. This kind of emergence and complexity are banal and ubiquitous". One merit of Sohn-Rethel's account of real abstraction is precisely its demystifying treatment of abstraction's relation to society and capital in that it reduces this relation to a mechanical banality while maintaining - in fact highlighting - the place of social exchange in its mechanics:

'[I]n speaking of the abstractness of exchange we must be careful not to apply the term to the consciousness of the exchanging agents. They are supposed to be occupied with the use of the commodities they see, but occupied in their imagination only. It is the action of exchange, and the action alone, that is abstract. The consciousness and the action of the people part company in exchange and go different ways. We have to trace their ways separately, and also their interconnection [...] [T]he abstractness of that action cannot be noted when it happens, since it only happens because the consciousness of its agents is taken up with their business and with the empirical appearance of things which pertain to their use. One could say that the abstractness of their action is beyond realisation by the actors because their very consciousness stands in the way.' (Sohn-Rethel, 1978: 26–27)

This is a pivotal passage from which we can carve out some important observations. The consciousness of agents who are practicing exchange is made distinct from the actual practice of exchange. The act itself – whether practiced by a human or a machine - is what perpetuates the force of abstraction; it is not to be confused with the consciousnesses of the subject or agent who partakes in it. Seen this way, the act of exchange in itself or the "exchange abstraction", as Sohn-Rethel calls it, is attributed a non-experiential quality, it cannot be empiricized - i.e. confirmed or verified as something which occurs concretely - even when we are partaking in the process of exchange. Money, as a universal medium of exchange, represents this exchange abstraction in its most obvious manifestation. "Money is abstraction in material form, which, strictly speaking, is a contradiction in terms" (Abel, 2014: 207). If we are to believe Sohn-Rethel,

the introduction of coins - authorized by a state or state-like entity - to social life radically changed our intellectual history. These “abstractions in material form” ushered in an age in which the division of “head and hand” or “mental and manual” labour begins to dominate society, creating a divide between an intellectual class and a working class.

For Sohn-Rethel, the exchange abstraction’s unempirical nature sparks off a process of deempiricizing knowledge and allowing theoretical and analytical explanation to emerge as a practice that splinters off from social reality. For Sohn-Rethel, this is most evident in how mathematics emerges out of the more experiential and manual exercise of measuring. While the ancient Egyptians had a sophisticated tradition of measurement linked to their architecture and materialistically bound to ropes as measuring tools, the first abstract mathematical and geometrical practices delinked from any social reality were conceived in ancient Greece after the spread of coinage as universal equivalent. Thus, as Sohn-Rethel (1978: 102) explains, the abstraction of coins enabled theoretical enquiry to become “independent not only from this or that particular purpose but from any practical task”. This, in the words of Toscano’s (2008) reflection, is the effect of “the ‘thought previous to and external to the thought’. It lies in the prosaic activity, the doing of commodity-exchange, and not (in both the logical and historical sense) in the individual mind of the doer”.

For Sohn-Rethel, this “thought previous to and external to the thought” fully manifested itself in the Kantian *a priori* which he sees as a “second nature”. This second nature is basically a nature mirroring the non-empirical quality of

the exchange abstraction, leading to a kind of parallel thought that has abstracted itself from social reality and nature while at same time, oddly enough, retaining the capacity to represent nature, but only nature's most prosaic and fundamental qualities, those which are present and happen during the social act of exchange. This is what Sohn-Rethel identifies as the "mechanistic thinking" of science, mathematics, and (non-historical-materialist) philosophy since the inception of coinage. He explains that the concepts of mechanistic thinking are to be regarded as the "original categories of intellectual labour" and asserts that:

> It is a labour serviceable to the rule of private property and in particular to capital. It is the science of intellectual labour springing from the second nature which is founded upon non-empirical abstraction and on concepts of *a priori* nature. The form elements of the exchange abstraction are of such fundamental calibre – abstract time and space, abstract matter, quantity as mathematical abstraction, abstract motion etc. – that there cannot be a natural event in the world which would elude these basic features of nature. (1978: 73)

It seems important not to miss Sohn-Rethel's own conclusions. It is striking that these conclusions are almost never mentioned in the recent theoretical resurrection of this thinker's nonetheless important work on abstraction. The problem that is made glaringly apparent is that what is behind his analysis is his desire for socialism to establish "an alliance of society with nature" (1978: 181). Nature here is not simply the woods, forest, or desert, a presumably unspoilt place, so to speak; rather it is *an order of thought* cleansed of the bad abstractions of an 'intellectual labour' resulting from the exchange abstraction. If science, technology, mathematics, etc. are second-order nature made possible via the real abstraction of money, what then is first-order nature, society before the corruption of the coin? Yet, Sohn-Rethel -

unlike some socialist thinkers of his era – does not take to the vulgar bashing of techno-science or to farfetched exit strategies. Rather, he thinks that this social alliance with nature “demands the aid of science backed by the unity of mental and manual work”.

Mental, according to Sohn-Rethel’s analysis, stands for abstract, non-empirical, analytical, mathematical, theoretical, platonic timeless concepts etc., in other words, thought in general bound to and emergent from capitalist class relations. And manual means experienced, felt, embodied, and sweated out hard labour bound to a concept of the proletariat. There can be no denying that a difference between intellectual and manual labour exists with a visible gap between them, one that varies in magnitude and detail depending on where one is located in the world. What is questionable, however, is the implicit penchant for purging the first nature (as if we could ever recall it in a pristine and untouched state) of its second one. But let us look at how Sohn-Rethel himself suggests overcoming this gap that has been exposed by his very own distinction between a first-order *natural socially real* manual labour and a second-order *abstractly socially real* mental labour:

> [S]ocialism has the means to counteract the properties which, in capitalism, constitute the bourgeois character of this science. These properties are: that the basic categories of science are of the second nature and totally alienated from the qualitative realities of the first nature; that science is compelled to single out its objects as isolates; and that it must be carried out as an intellectual exploit. All these properties are capable of remedy by the feature, the essential one of socialism, that the people as direct producers must be the controlling masters of both the material and the intellectual means of production, and that they act in concert to establish prosperity within nature and its global unity. For this feature signifies that the material practice of the people in their social exploits commands the need for scientific findings to be integrated into the relationship of society to nature. (1978: 183 – 184)

From this passage, we can read that Sohn-Rethel pins his hopes on an abstraction he calls 'the people', a vague and romantic idea of direct production (ill-suited to many contexts where natural resources are too scarce for a notion of production which is not vastly transformed through techno-scientific labour), and a utopian vision of 'prosperity within nature' hinged on the promise of scientific findings that would somehow evade being of his second-order nature. In other words, Sohn-Rethel's *science-to-come* implies that if we were ever able to abolish the capitalist relation of economic exchange[19] or bypass it in one way or another, we would be able to reach this state of alliance between society and nature.

So the view is one of re-socializing a de-socialized labour, and according to Sohn-Rethel, the capitalist logic of appropriation through the exchange abstraction cannot be replaced by a socialist one of production until people are capable of creating a society that is re-socialized through their efforts at becoming direct producers. As Black (2013) points out, the problem is that Sohn-Rethel thinks "the only thing preventing social labour from becoming *directly* socialized is the exchange relation". He thinks that a society is capable of being classless if its form of social synthesis is operated directly through the process of production rather than through the mediation of exchange which inflicts capitalist appropriation. Sohn-Rethel's 'real abstraction' is then premised on an opposition between what can be called 'essence' on the one hand, i.e. concrete 'useful' labour which is considered to

[19] Interestingly, Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 192) make a strong point concerning the abolition of the capitalist relation and the embrace of socialism through the attachment to their ideal of radical democracy: "Every project for radical democracy necessarily includes […] the socialist dimension — that is to say, the abolition of capitalist relations of production; but it rejects the idea that from this abolition there necessarily follows the elimination of the other inequalities".

be the source of all value, and what can be called ‘form’ on the other, i.e. “the phenomenal form and phantasmagoria of exchange-values” (Black, 2013). But as is clear and crystallized in arguments by Black (2013 b: 27) and Postone (1993: 178), Sohn-Rethel favourably evaluates the mode of societalization put into action by industrial labour in paradigms such as Maoist China or the Soviet Union (even though he strongly objects to many facets of Stalinism) and considers it non-capitalist, while any mode of societalization effected by the exchange abstraction is considered by him to be problematic because he construes the exchange relation as the essence of capitalism.

Black and Postone regard this as an error because it restricts abstraction to a market phenomenon not essentially part of labour in capitalism. As Black argues, in the paradigms Sohn-Rethel approves of as socialist (and thus not due to the exchange abstraction), abstract labour still exists and forms the very premise for the alienated social structures which, in such paradigms, are intrinsic to social transformation. Hence, alienation, it seems, cannot be erased so easily by jumping to the conclusion that manual labour somehow is the essence and intellectual labour is the form promulgated by the exchange abstraction.

Following on from this, it is apparent that although Sohn-Rethel offers us a clear template on how socio-political abstraction might work, he ends up falling short of embracing the consequences of his own conceptualization and falls back on what now appears to be the classical ‘mend the alienation from nature’ narrative. This is because according to Sohn-Rethel’s

perspective alienation is solely linked to money; money is what drives it, while Black and Postone's simple arguments prove that alienation is not necessarily connected to the exchange abstraction. Furthermore, it has been argued by Williams (2014) that the implications for taking actions of a socio-political or representational nature based on Sohn-Rethel's theory of real abstraction ought to be made explicit:

> [W]ithin a capitalist reality system, there exists no 'real productive' element to return to. Attempts to reform the system from within radically misread the intrinsic nature of the abstractions of capital. Moreover, because these abstractions are not so much in the head as in everyday life, in capitalist practices, mere ideology critique alone will never be sufficient to undo or challenge them.

Moreover, we can detect a link between Sohn-Rethel's *Realabstraktion* and Lyotard's differend. Having already described Mouffe's agonism as an attempt to institutionalize the differend, which is to say to bestow it with institutional normativity, one can suggest that agonism also shares some links with Sohn-Rethel's formula. The differend sees capital's abstractive force, its absolute subordination of language to the regime of exchange, and its real subsumption of labour as a call for intervention through inventions that attempt to exclude 'cognitive verification', practices that, like 'art', refuse to be measured by a single standard of value. Agonism boosts the chances of such inventions by its insistence that they should occupy the establishment to amplify the project of 'radical democracy' as a final and ultimate guarantee against the total mechanization of democracy through the techno-scientific agency put into action by neo-liberal modes of bureaucratization. Agonism's mode of operation when thinking through institutionalism is *infiltration by intellectual abstractions*. But these abstractions are themselves steeped in a cryptic and generic abstract historicity. They have been designed to relieve

Trotskian and Gramscian notions of hegemony of any kind of stable concept of the social, because the gamble is on the empty signifier that is radical democracy, which Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 193) tell us is:

> a form of politics which is founded not upon dogmatic postulation of any 'essence of the social', but, on the contrary, on affirmation of the contingency and ambiguity of every 'essence', and on the constitutive character of social division and antagonism. Affirmation of a 'ground' which lives only by negating its fundamental character; of an 'order' which exists only as a partial limiting of disorder; of a 'meaning' which is constructed only as excess and paradox in the face of meaninglessness — in other words, the field of the political as the space for a game which is never 'zero-sum', because the rules and the players are never fully explicit. This game, which eludes the concept, does at least have a name: hegemony.

Given the obvious centrality of the Lacanian conceptualization of *the real as impossible* in this passage, it is worth enquiring into what it would mean to re-evaluate and rearticulate Laclau and Mouffe's use of the concept of 'agent' in their term 'hegemonic agent'. How can this much used term be refashioned for a specific political undertaking to which art - with its capacity to develop representations, identify with pluralism, and engage with political material – can contribute? This thinking towards a reformed concept of the 'agent' will lead us to call for reasoning to be put back into the larger picture of politics. This implies deviating from the centrality of the Lacanian heritage of real. To reach this alternate grounding of the real we will come into contact with a critique put forth by Dylan Evans and an alternative formulation of the real proposed by Félix Guattari. Ultimately we will find that Guattari's (or to be more precise, Deleuze and Guattari's) version of the real is not our final destination. But before we arrive at that point we need to first round off our discussion of Sohn-Rethel and finally grasp what it is that is important to take from his concept of 'real abstraction'.

2.2 Real as Impossible vs. Real as Artificial (Mouffe and Laclau Contra Deleuze and Guattari)

Simplifying, the classical philosophical investigation into the origin of thought took two major directions. Empiricists like Hume, for example, argued that symbolic forms of thought come about through direct physical experiences and sensations, while on the other hand, rationalists like Kant insisted that the faculty of reasoning must have been instituted *a priori*, since without such an *a priori* apparatus there can be no understanding of sensations. Sohn-Rethel in turn has come up with a third, materialist and economic hypothesis (Pasquinelli, 2015).

This speculative hypothesis, based on an anthropological imagination of how an intellectual class must have thought after the advent of coinage, states that the symbolic and abstract forms of thought of any epoch are abstract carriers and expressions of the acts of social exchange that establish its social synthesis. And nowadays our acts of social exchange continue to be largely conducted through the abstraction of money; this historical genealogy which starts with the Greeks still persists, albeit in altered and more advanced abstract forms. Whether Sohn-Rethel's account is correct or incorrect is highly debatable, because there is no litmus test to prove its accuracy. We have not yet invented a quantum device which would be able to penetrate the brain and conduct a neural analysis predicting and sifting out thoughts while they are being generated, then computing them back to us as first-order nature or second-order nature. It seems to provide a convincing speculative hypothesis for what appears mysterious in the capitalist relation, yet through this very accomplishment, it produces another problem with

enigmatic characteristics, which is that in its tying any form of abstract rationality to money, it posits the untested presumption that if the money-form in all of its variations were to be ever successfully overthrown, then science and/or rational thought (what Sohn-Rethel calls symbolic thought) would dramatically and substantively change in character and for the better. Nevertheless, we can maintain that after Sohn-Rethel's truncated version of materialism, what can be built on is that in attempting to "occupy abstractions" one must acknowledge that one is always already "occupied by abstractions", or, as Pasquinelli (2015, emphasis in original) puts it:

> Sohn-Rethel should be remembered if only for one basic resonance of his argumentation: the genealogical relation or *molecular contamination* that he registers between the money form and the thought form (or the labour form, we could add). Yet if such a connection is ventilated here, it is not to indulge in an archaeology of the modes of production but, on the contrary, to investigate the *cognitive effects* of the money form also in the current age (considering that, since McLuhan, we investigate the cognitive effects of all media in general).[20]

Here we can introduce our second model of 'the real' in relation to the abstractive forces of capital. This model identifies with the above-mentioned so-called 'contamination' constituted through the exchange abstraction. The machinic nature of this abstraction mutates and expands into a machinic filiation[21] through which intellectual labour is host to the 'real abstraction' of

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[20] Another way of putting this would be Noys's (2010: 10) assertion that: "There is not a simple separation between theoretical intervention and capitalist 'reality', but rather the fraught struggle between the capitalist production of real abstraction and the attempt to work on and against these abstractions without returning to some simple underlying reality supposedly obscured by abstraction. To put it in a lapidary fashion we might say reality itself has become abstract: this is its 'ontological fabric'".

[21] I take the term filiation here from Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (1983, English transl.), where it is mentioned numerous times. It is a particularly precise choice of wording which is fascinating when contrasted with the notion of Sohn-Rethel's second and first natures. Its etymology harks back to the Latin *filiatio,* meaning to be descendant or genetically derived from a father. A father has a *paternas* relationship and a son one of *filiatio*. The relationship of human to machine expressed in such terms can therefore be interpreted as an expanded familial one through which the father/son (or originary oedipal)

the money form and thus, to a certain degree, accepts its own captivity as the condition of its own 'desire' to produce and think politically. This model, and its divergence from the Lacanian impossible real, is best summed up in a short articulation by Félix Guattari from his *Anti-Oedipus Papers*: "[T]he real is the artificial – and not (as Lacan says) the impossible"[22] (cited in Alliez, 2011: 262). To grasp the basic conjecture behind 'the real as artificial', it is important to touch on its resistance to the Lacanian real. Evans (1996; 2005), a disillusioned former Lacanian psychoanalyst, has been at the forefront in unpacking the Lacanian framework.

The eschewal of this framework, for Evans, is triggered by a number of issues and concerns. He goes to pains to point out that Lacan was not a literary critic but a practicing psychoanalyst. "Every time that Lacan discusses a work of literature, or a piece of art, he does it for one reason, and one reason only; to illustrate a psychoanalytic concept so that other psychoanalysts can understand that concept better and use it in their clinical practice" (2005). Practicing Lacanian psychoanalysts, Evans remarks, and even Lacan himself, have voiced their concerns about how a methodology developed for treating patients and the adjunct theorization of how that method works could be so extensively mischannelled into literary criticism,

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relationship is grafted onto the relation between man and machine to be affirmed, decoded, obscured, and rewritten through an intellectual labour that is no longer held hostage by the father-in-flesh, i.e. a natural *paternas*.

[22] In his notes, Alliez (2011: 272, no.15) points out that this signals something like a machinic Nietzschean "will to power" whereby 'becoming' is restructured as a revisionary projection into the structural field of thought of a "constructivist pragmatics". This is a pragmatics that individuates itself by "the machinic affirmation of desire". According to Alliez, this sentence or claim that "the real is the artificial and not the impossible" is what prompted the discussion that led to Deleuze and Guattari's collaboration on *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (first published in French in 1972).

cultural theory, and academic contexts without so much as a wink to its clinical foundations. But for Evans (2005), the clinical practice of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis itself did very little to justify the Lacanian worldview: every time he put his Lacanian theory to one side during his years of experience, he discovered that he was more capable of helping the patient. When he opted to take the Lacanian route, it seemed to backfire. Evans (2005) describes how the Lacan of the 1930s was actually at the forefront of experimentation with the new biological and computational theories of the mind that we recognize today as the neuro- and cognitive sciences.

By the 1950s, however, it seemed that traces of such early experimentation had almost vanished, to be replaced with a deepened 'culturalist reading' of Freud. In terms of a timeline this makes sense: the horrors of the war years and the tragic instrumentalisation of science might have weighed heavily on Lacan's development, but it remains unclear why Lacan backtracked into Freudian territory. In Evans's (2005) narrative, we come to recognize a Lacan who rewrote Freud to save the latter from being dismantled by the modern sciences. Lacan's project, on this account, is not simply revisionary but moved by fears such as the trivialization of the human subject by the natural sciences. To this end, Freud's vocabulary was repurposed and refashioned to serve as a counter-hegemonic agent against the grey and banal facticity of science. Freudian 'instinct' was transformed into 'drive' which was a move, as Evans (2005) mentions, Lacan considered necessary to emphasise "the contrast between the flexible, culturally-determined behaviour of humans and the rigid, biologically-determined behaviour of animals". On Evans's account,

Freud's biology was incorrect, as was his model of a brain built on modern hydraulics[23], but he provided clear testable claims. The Freud that Lacan reinvented, however, was a pure cultural linguist, and one could add an 'intellectual abstraction' that was not just sealed off from scientific enquiry but totally removed from that world's registers. This Lacanian reinvention of Freud leads Evans to believe that Lacan was a closeted neo-Romantic whose seemingly unromantic view of the subject foraying into the formalisation and mathematisation of psychoanalytic theory was fuelled by his penchant for the poetic and the surrealistic.

Against this background, the real as impossible emerges as a theoretical frontier against what can be described as *the demystification of the human subject through science*. It is an intellectual operation in which an entire humanist tradition of subjectivity is replaced with the Midas touch of emptiness and lack, not to establish it against foundationalism and our predisposition for unchecked givens, but to maintain the mystery or the poetry of the human. The radical democratic imaginary as envisaged by and through agonism, with the Lacanian real at its core, is a political extension of this project. Its positing of the notion of incommensurability, borrowed from

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[23] Freud, in collaboration with Joseph Breuer (Erwin et al., 2002: 364), devised a new theory of psychopathology on the basis of this model. The "hydraulic" model is one "in which the mind is conceived as if it were a pressure cooker: A person comes upon an upsetting event in her current life. She is unable to react to it emotionally, and the memory of the event (with its concomitant feelings) is split off from consciousness. The unreleased energy, unable to be expressed, is bottled up in the system and exerts itself as a physical symptom". Erwin et al. suggest that such a theory (besides of course being scientifically incorrect) is predisposed to the role or agency of the psychoanalyst as a kind of cosmopolitan curer because it provides a "traumatogenic theory for neurosis", whereby neurosis is a reaction to an upsetting external event. Freud later realised that external traumatic experiences where not always the causes of neurosis and this led him to redevelop the hydraulic mind model, making it more intra-physical with a pre-conscious (containing things we are not immediately aware of), a conscious, and a dynamic unconscious (as the part of the mind cut off from consciousness).

Thomas Kuhn's theory on the incommensurability of different scientific paradigms, is perhaps more rhetorical device - finding in it alternatively articulated echoes of the Lacanian impossible real - than philosophical commitment to the idea of conceptual change as an enabling factor in the revision of previously acquired knowledge and the development of novel concepts – which is arguably how Kuhn's thesis ought to be understood.

This apparent conceptual displacement of Kuhn's account is pronounced in Mouffe's (2000: 102, emphasis in original) formulation of her adversary principle when Kuhn's thesis is evoked. This evocation provides a quasi-scientific propping up for what is essentially based on the Lacanian impossible real. It is Mouffe's argument that to "accept the view of the adversary is to undergo a radical change in political identity. It is more a sort of *conversion* man a process of rational persuasion (in the same way as Thomas Kuhn has argued that adherence to a new scientific paradigm is a conversion)".

For further clarification, and to put Mouffe's usage of Kuhn's incommensurability into context, Connelly's (2015, kindle locations 1539-1584) analysis of Kuhn's argument can help articulate the distinction between how Mouffe and Kuhn use the notion of incommensurability. The incommensurability developed by Kuhn in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) emerges from his study of the history of scientific concepts and how they shift into new paradigms. Kuhn calls a paradigm anything that like a judicial decision is accepted as part of the common laws of a scientific field providing guidance for future decisions rather than taken

itself to be an object of enquiry. When phenomena appear that cannot be explained by use of this paradigm and after numerous attempts to accommodate them under it, a break with the old paradigm emerges with a "new set of commitments" that form the basis for a new scientific practice. A "scientific revolution" is Kuhn's name for the process whereby a new paradigm overtakes a previous one. His incommensurability is then a description of the ways that pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary paradigms cannot be measured up against each other, as in the case of Pre-Copernican scientists and Copernicus's heliocentric paradigm.

There are three ways in which such paradigms are incommensurable. Roughly, that they are a) developed around different norms regarding what questions and problems science ought to be investigating, and it is in these areas where the radical shift occurs to make sense of new phenomena b) the reappropriation of some of the vocabularies in the old paradigm by the new paradigm radically alters their meaning to a degree that they might not have much in common c) out of this, different paradigms can still subsist as competing paradigms, but their followers, in a sense, inhabit different worlds.

The point about 'conversion' enters Kuhn's theory when he discusses what it takes for a scientist to leave an old paradigm and adopt a new one, since these paradigms are incommensurable; Kuhn thinks it would need something like a leap of faith or a conversion. He argues that new revolutionary scientific paradigms can hardly be adopted through rational persuasion, but that ultimately they come through as dominant when advocates of the pre-revolutionary paradigms are finally outnumbered. It is clear here that Kuhn's

theory is one of evolutionary conceptual change and how it emerges historically, while the point where Mouffe finds an intersection is the 'faith' required by a practitioner in adopting the revolutionary paradigm. But taken out of context, this deviates from Kuhn's theory of knowledge, since for Kuhn it is clear which paradigm ought to be taken up: his theory is a pragmatic description of how such paradigms end up being dominant rather than a prescription of how different (incommensurable) paradigms ought to contest for hegemony. The latter prescriptionary take on the incommensurable is what Mouffe understands as the power of agonism to shape a radical democracy, yet it has minimal connections to Kuhn's reading of the history of science and conceptual change. It is clearly grounded in the 'impossible real' rather than a concept explaining the evolution of scientific paradigms.

With regard to the 'impossible real', Evans (1996: 162 – 164) demonstrates that unexplainable inconsistency was part of Lacan's idea of the real until the early to mid-fifties, when it began to stabilize as the impossible. It is in this period that it begins to emerge as "that which is outside language and inassimilable to symbolisation", as an object incapable of being expressed symbolically, resisting symbolization in any way, and forming itself as a domain for whatever lives outside the possibility of symbolization. Evans continues:

> This theme remains a constant throughout the rest of Lacan's work, and leads Lacan to link the real with the concept of impossibility. The real is 'the impossible' because it is impossible to imagine, impossible to integrate into the symbolic order, and impossible to attain in anyway. It is this character of impossibility and of resistance to symbolisation which lends the real it's essentially traumatic quality.

Accordingly, and under the shadow of this traumatic quality imposed by the Lacanian real, the individual projects of Guattari and Deleuze develop separately and in collaboration to transform Lacan's unconscious into a "machinic unconscious" that would transcend the former's impossibility. The extent to which Guattari and Deleuze's work breaks from Lacan's has been contested by Pierre Boutang who has suggested that the origins of Deleuzoguattarian desiring-machines can be traced back to Lacan's lectures on the machine[24].

However, the parallels that emerge between the Deleuzoguattarian project and 'real abstraction' may help in identifying the scope of transformation inflicted on the unconscious and its legacy by both thinkers separately and together. Their model of doing philosophy and thinking its efficacy is premised on *the real as the artificial*[25]. Generally speaking, the real is artificial because in this political ontology we come to understand the real as a process of perpetual reconstruction and creation. Arguably, the most concise route to grasping this framework is through the concept of *fabulation*. The real is not something we have simply been given to recognize, but something which is fabulated, absorbed, and refabulated continuously within a plane of immanence. To clarify, an explanation of fabulation and its embedment in Deleuze's ontology is required.

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[24] This point is brought up by Schmidgen (1997: 17 - 18)

[25] The aim here is to broadly paint what each philosophical conception of the real is able to afford the practitioner or art maker who seeks to embody critique in her practice. Additionally, it is to understand in which ways such embodiment might be possible. The engagement should be understood as one of simple nomenclature aimed at identifying three versions of 'the real' (Impossible, Artificial, and Synoptic) in relation to the question of abstraction and causal efficacy.

Fabulation is present throughout Deleuze's work in particular – although not always clearly labelled as such - and is also mentioned on a number of occasions in his joint work with Guattari.[26] A vivid instance of Deleuze's (1990) evocation of the fabulatory - perhaps illustrating some dimensions of its relationship to nature, difference, and Deleuzian sense based ontology - is his reading of Michel Tournier's 1967 novel *Friday, or, The Other Island*, a book that reinvents Daniel Defoe's classic *Robinson Crusoe*. Petit (1991: 19-21) provides us with a clear account of how Tournier returns to the classic to pick up aspects that have been left out and could have been exploited to reach other conclusions or potential endings. Notably, she emphasises the same main axis Deleuze had developed earlier, the strange and total absence of sexuality in the original, "surely a man marooned alone on an island would suffer, at least at first, from sexual frustrations". This absence in the classic is the empty margin which Tournier exploits to develop a fabulatory forward-looking rewriting of Defoe's classic. The reimagination of Robinson's sexuality gradually strips the protagonist of "the trappings of his civilization" and in doing so he

> symbolically returns to the womb and reexperiences the entire process of sexual maturation. But instead of re-creating his previous sexual orientation, he creates first a new adolescent genital sexuality, then a nongenital sexuality of "solar coitus" which involves his entire body in mystic union with the sun. This sexuality is either infantile or beyond adult sexuality. (Petit, 1991: 20)

Evidently, this is an anti-oedipal sexuality in which the phallic impossible real plays no part. However, as we shall see later, the development of this new form of sexuality in the absence of others can also be thought of as advancing a dialectical inhuman twist on the Lacanian model of the other as

[26] See in particular Deleuze and Guattari (1994), pp 167–171.

a structural field. This twist in Lacanian thought - developed by Deleuze through his reading of Tournier's novel - is crucial in understanding the 'real as artificial' and how this 'artificial' becomes a link between political philosophies with a psychoanalytic grounding and contemporary realist theory. This twist in the Other as a structural field does to Lacan what Lacan did to Freud, it helps his Other survive the current wave of scientific expansion into the mind and cognition. It keeps his Other not only alive but functional, and imbues it with creative potential by dephallusizing constitutive lack, or the constitutive outside, which is to say dehumanizing it and displacing it to the realms of the cosmic and the molecular.

Fabulation's artificial real originates in its craving to liberate the real from the historic burden of the phallus in its ever-present absence in the Freudo-Lacanian trajectory. This is in stark contrast to Laclau and Mouffe's formulation of democracy, in which that same ever-present absence is postulated as the mechanism which makes democracy possible. Agonism is the phallic version of democracy par excellence. Democracy, it tells us, is the process hinged on an empty signifier through which we, the adversarial children, can temporarily adopt a paternal signifier in a quick turnaround of desires, identities, and frustrations.

Returning to Deleuze (1990: 303), a personal friend of Tournier, we see that he captures what is most important in the latter's reformed Robinson when he identifies the three interrelated areas in which the new Robinson differs from the old. The Robinson written in the twentieth century is

> related to ends and goals rather than to origins; he is sexual; and these ends represent a fantastic deviation from our world, under the influence of a

transformed sexuality, rather than an economic reproduction of our world, under the impact of a continuous effort.

The reworked cosmic sexuality of the protagonist is a form of becoming that Deleuze holds as a subversive power of disruption to the capitalist economic model, it is a deviation. The basic principle is that through their exchange and circulation, such fictional deviations produce “creative becomings” that can have effects on the very fabric of politics. The concept of perversion in relation to the notion of ‘the Other’ is the major axis that Deleuze’s reading of Tournier’s novel runs through. Although difficult to unpack at times, it is clear that Deleuze attributes a positive form of perversion to Tournier’s Robinson. Perversion, for Deleuze, is at the heart of developing a creative relationship to what he calls “the structure-Other”, which is his contribution to the revamping of the Lacanian constitutive outside. Deleuze (1990: 310) tells us that “Other = an expression of a possible world”. But in fact, this is the structure-Other which has the fundamental effect of distinguishing between a subject’s consciousness and its object. The result is a world filled with

possibilities, backgrounds, fringes, and transitions; inscribing the possibility of a frightening world when I am not yet afraid, or, on the contrary, the possibility of a reassuring world when I am really frightened by the world; encompassing in different respects the world which presents itself before me developed otherwise; constituting inside the world so many blisters which contain so many possible worlds - this is the Other. Henceforth, the Other causes my consciousness to tip necessarily into an “I was,” into a past which no longer coincides with the object. […] If the Other is a possible world, I am a past world.

Deleuze understands the notion of Other as “not reducible to either an alternative subject or particular object”. , it is “that which announces the structure that makes possible a coherent account of the world” (Hamilton, 2013). In Defoe’s classic, Robinson’s seclusion on the island does absolutely nothing to destabilize the coherency of his account of the world. Although the

protagonist suffers on a number of levels, what allows him to keep his sanity is the somewhat frightening intactness of his structure-Other. He finds a stash of coins and laughs at how money has no value, obviously an allusion to the coins not being exchangeable for anything under his current circumstances. But he proceeds to take the coins nonetheless, for future possibilities that may arise and in which the money may regain its value. Although the Defoe Robinson's existence is always in tandem with the Other, he remains blind to what the Other instigates as a structure that makes his version of the world coherent, i.e. consistently and logically possible. Here the structure-Other is at work, it doesn't need people or objects to account for the coherency of Robinson's scope of thought. Hamilton (2013) draws on this when he remarks:

> The fact that Crusoe takes the money, even though he knows it can have no value on the island, is truly noteworthy because it shows that […] Crusoe's experience of isolation has not compromised his vision of a world of others that is at work beyond his visual horizon. Importantly, his notion of such a functioning world is maintained by those things which 'prove' the idea of the other – the shield and the weapon he manufactures, the coins he cannot leave behind, the work ethic that he cannot abandon, and the God who has not abandoned him.

This structure-Other untouched by the traumatic experience of being stranded in a secluded world without others is exactly what enables the protagonist (Defoe's Robinson) to resume from where he started, on leaving the island and returning to civilization, along with his new island acquaintance Friday. Deleuze's interpretation of Tournier's novel is telling because in the new Robinson's attempts to deviate from the structure-Other we are given a prime example of how Deleuze's idea of political efficacy is basically *intervention as the disruption of the structure-Other*. In working through Tournier's protagonist Deleuze also develops a coarse image of his own

transcendental empiricism. Deleuze emphasises the new Robinson's creative sexualisation and complex – as well as at times mystically-dependent – "coming to terms" with his existence in a "world without others". Tournier, he proposes, is able to meld together a protagonist who becomes aware of the structure-Other and in doing so develops a kind of weird positive freedom by living creatively in the absence of the Other and taking that existence to its full conclusion. This conclusion is forcefully articulated by Bourassa (2015) when he points out that:

> A 'world without others' is not a world without other people, other encounters, other relationships, but a world in which others do not function within the constraints of the Structure-Other. So there is an Other that is not the Structure-Other, but the Double […] If the Structure-Other "appears as that which organizes Elements into Earth, and earth into bodies, bodies into objects, and which regulates and measures objects, perception and desire all at once" (Deleuze 1990: 318), then the Double is "the new upright image in which the elements are released and renewed, having become celestial and forming a thousand capricious elemental figures" (Deleuze 1990: 312). To encounter the Double is already to have the walls of the Structure-Other crumble. The Double offers not a new 'structure' or 'organization' but a reassembling of a field of being. The Double must, then, function tactically. The Double must be about the work of freeing, of redrawing, distraction, displacement, intensification: an infinity of strategies that will belong to the Double insofar as they all serve the future, the opening up and recasting of the Structure-Other.

The Double is fabulated and inserted into the flow of desires, its end - as we shall soon see – is a superior empiricism which is to say a form of knowledge which can decode, recode, and recast the structure-Other through sensual and intuitive experiences. The Robinson written in the twentieth century has arrived at a positive – although unusually fantastical – understanding of positive freedom. Paraphrasing Isaiah Berlin's (1977: 124) well-known definition of 'positive freedom' we can say that the protagonist has arrived at an awareness of the constraints and conditions that afford him 'the wish' or, in this case, the desire to be the instrument of his own acts of will, not those

of others. But this knowledge of the constraints and conditions (the structure-Other) enables another life, another encounter with the world which is constituted through another type of knowing that is non-dependent on other humans and their actions. It is also empirical – in that it can be intuitively accessed (the moment of intense solar coitus, the point at which Robinson imagines himself as composed of and living as ‘”free elements”). Through this superior empiricism the protagonist becomes a deciding subject, not one who is decided for, which is to say, a subject capable of conceiving ends of his own and realizing them. The Robinson of the twentieth century feels “free to the degree that (he) believe(s) this to be true, and enslaved to the degree that (he is) made to realize that it is not”.

In Tournier’s novel, Robinson and Friday do not end up leaving the island together and returning to Europe as they did in Defoe’s narrative. Rather, Robinson remains on the Island while Friday decides to leave. Deleuze argues that this is because in this version Robinson is no longer shaped by the structure-Other, he has created his own determinate fictional world that is not tethered to the possibilities of the structure-Other like the Defoe Robinson’s whole existence was. Deleuze (1990: 303) expresses this when he remarks that by

> raising the problem in terms of end, and not in terms of origin, Tournier makes it impossible for him to allow Robinson to leave the island. The end, that is, Robinson's final goal, is "dehumanization," the coming together of the libido and of the free elements, the discovery of a cosmic energy or of a great elemental Health which can surge only on the isle-and only to the extent that the isle has become aerial or solar.

The contours of fabulation are already outlined here. Fabulations are dehumanizing in the sense of proposing a being, a practice of life that

attempts to release itself from the structure-Other. And this, in a passage that bears similarity to Bourassa's interpretation of Deleuze's depiction of the new Robinson, is what Kaufman (2012: 113–114) picks up on her discursion into Deleuze's "world without others". For Kaufman, it is "not simply that the Other is missing from the desert island", but more importantly, what is at stake "is the opening that this absence provides, an opening onto an impersonal and inhuman perceptual space that is entirely beyond the realm of other people". If this inhuman perceptual space beyond the realm of other people sounds like an evocation of the Kantian thing-in-itself, it is because Kaufman thinks this is what it actually is. In fact, she thinks that this "world without others" is Deleuze's formulation of a space for thought that would not be determined by what Quentin Meillassoux markedly coined as "correlationism" which Kaufman describes in short as "the idea that everything must be described as *relative* to the perceiving consciousness and not in and of itself".

Building on this observation, intellectual labour for Deleuze is founded upon his particular understanding of the Other as structure. It is a form of labour that works towards supplanting the structure-Other with what Deleuze calls a "superior empiricism" based on fiction. This is accomplished through forms of perversion, which according to Deleuze is

> not defined by the force of a certain desire in the system of drives; the pervert is not someone who desires, but someone who introduces desire into an entirely different system and makes it play, within this system, the role of an internal limit, a virtual center or zero point […] The perverse world is a world in which the category of the necessary has completely replaced that of the possible. (1990: 304, 320)

This is what Tournier's Robinson manages to accomplish according to Deleuze. And we can see in the figure of this Robinson, Deleuze's mirror

image of himself, an avatar of Deleuze, or at least something of his philosophical blueprint bent on introducing desire into different systems and labouring towards replacing the possibilities circumscribed by the structure-Other with the category of the necessary, which amounts to an elemental nature.

Coming at this constellation of ideas from another angle, Fabulation is defined by Bogue (2010) as “the artistic practice of fostering the invention of a people to come”. Here, it is notable how fabulation’s desire to be forward-looking rather than entrenched in a return to a first-order nature is picked up by cinema. Tournier’s island and his Robinson’s ability to transcend the limits imposed by the structure-Other on his mental, physical, sexual and spiritual existence bears a strong similarity to the storyline and thematic at play in James Cameron’s *Avatar* (2009). In fact, at the height of the film’s popularity and cultural influence Latour (2010) detects the connection and elaborates on what he regards important about it. For Latour, *Avatar* is the first Hollywood script about

the modernist clash with nature that doesn’t take ultimate catastrophe and destruction for granted—as so many have before—but opts for a much more interesting outcome: a new search for hope on condition that what it means to have a body, a mind, and a world is completely redefined. The lesson of the film, in my reading of it, is that modernized and modernizing humans are not physically, psychologically, scientifically, and emotionally equipped to survive on their planet. As in Michel Tournier’s inverted story of Robinson Crusoe, *Friday, or, The Other Island*, they have to relearn from beginning to end what it is to live on their island—and just like Tournier’s fable, Crusoe ultimately decides to stay in the now civilized and civilizing jungle instead of going back home to what for him has become just another wilderness. But what fifty years ago in Tournier’s romance was a fully individual experience has become today in Cameron’s film a collective adventure: there is no sustainable life for Earth-bound species on their planet island

A noticeable problem with Latour's reading of the film, a problem which extends to the concept of fabulation, and ultimately to the regime of 'the artificial real' itself, is how prone it is to conflictual positions on modernity's second-order nature. Notice how we are given a coin with two sides. On one side we have a picture of hope which pays tribute to the power of scientific understanding: modernism's (here understood as Western civilization's philosophical and scientific trajectory) clash with a primordial nature can only be resolved through a total overhaul of how we understand our bodies, our minds and the world in general. On the other side of this coin we have a negative picture of modernity that claims that "modernized and modernizing humans are not physically, psychologically, scientifically, and emotionally equipped to survive on their planet". Further modernization, it seems, is not the answer for Latour, but rather the espousal of a position which takes modernism itself to be the structure-Other. How are we to accomplish the total overhaul of understanding the body, mind, and the world?

Arriving at an image of science in which Modernism is dehumanized seems to be Latour's answer, echoing Deleuze's take on the meaning of Tournier's Robinson. When the main character in *Avatar*, the paraplegic veteran marine Jake Sully, decides to stay, it is after he (in his avatar form) helps put an end to the occupation of Pandora and undergoes a strange cosmic process through which his consciousness is transferred from his human body to his avatar, enabling him to remain on his adopted alien planet with the Na'vi race. What better example for Deleuze's metaphor of the 'Double' than this avatar becoming the artificial reality of a new existence that annuls the sometimes invisible walls of the structure-Other. But in this film set in a

fictional future world, the eventual ‘dehumanized’ outcome depends on a series of events, technologies, and research programmes that would not have existed without modernism, and one might add, the darker side of modernism’s techno-scientific breakthroughs fuelled by the interests of military occupation and exploitation. This is a point Latour clearly misses: this futuristic Hollywood parody of the modern Crusoe cruises over such complex questions to arrive at an image of alien sublime beauty where the military machine can finally be laid to rest. In a sense, the reconciliation with nature – albeit in a future estranged from a typical image of nature – is achieved by destroying the military might of colonial power. This is the whole point of the film; what it wants to mediate and its main service is the easing of colonial guilt, or more generally, of contemporary imperial discomfort. Consequently, it proves incapable of transcending the structure-Other after all.

Fabulation or intellectual labour as the invention of a people to come is prone to such unresolved and conflictory struggles with the concept of nature and the notion of modernity because it does not see the point in positing processes of *reasoning* as a positive force capable of redefining the human understanding of and interaction with nature. It is true that Latour points towards the “collective adventure” through which this alternative understanding of nature and the human is perceived. But this collective adventure was of an absolutely techno-spiritual or techno-theological nature. As portrayed towards the end of the movie, in the process of consciousness transfer between Jake’s physical body and his avatar, *Avatar’s* collective adventure did not involve individuals analysing, negating, and discussing with

each other but rather direct experiential and intuitive access to precepts, concepts, and empirically vivid worlds of abundant emotion and beauty.

Revisiting Sohn-Rethel's 'real abstraction', it was noted how it lead him to conclude that another science ought to be developed, one in which society comes into alliance with nature. This is a version of nature in which the alienation of the unempirical second-order nature can be counteracted with what he describes as the central characteristic of socialism, namely the idea that 'the people' must be direct producers and masters of both the material and intellectual means of production: only then can unity with nature emerge. We called this Sohn-Rethel's science-to-come, and it can be claimed that - in a much more sophisticated and refined way - Deleuze's fabulations are swayed by similar convictions, which is to say that Deleuze's intellectual labour works against alienation despite insisting that the real is artificial. Instead of a science-to-come, Deleuze opts for the creation of a people-to-come, inserting this fictional collectively into the here and now. Instead of prescribing the questionable economic model of direct production as a remedy, Deleuze and Guattari embrace a model of 'desiring-production' in which desire is not primarily constituted by a negative lack à la Lacan or a return to a first-order nature but is a force that produces the real. This is the real as artificial, but the artificial here should be understood as a process of "naturing Nature"[27]. Jason Read (2008) conveys the exact point of convergence between Deleuze & Guattari and Sohn-Rethel when he writes:

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[27] Khandker (2014) maps out Deleuze's conception of nature as a fusion between Bergson's understanding of time and Spinoza's understanding of nature. As she points out, the result is that *duration* "insofar as it is continuous, unfolding, and able to encompass 'other durations,' is a *naturing nature*" while *matter* "insofar as it is capable of (artificial) division and tends

[T]he point where Sohn-Rethel and Deleuze and Guattari overlap […] is that they locate in Marx's analysis of the commodity form the schema of what could be called the political unconscious: the unconscious is not a bundle of drives in need of socialisation, but desires which are already organised by the practices and relations (what Deleuze and Guattari call flows) of capitalism.

Thus, for Deleuze, the so-called molecular contamination of the intellect by the abstractions of money and labour is perhaps better thought of as a source of multiplicity, as a web of criss-crossing lines and paths and flows which pose a challenge for the philosopher: abstractions do not explain anything but must themselves be explained through creative forms of analysis. The questions Deleuze seems to ask, as Ansell-Pearson (2015) puts it, are "how can the human become a creator equal to the whole movement of creation and invent a society of creators? How are we to think such a possibility? That is, by what means or methods of philosophy and of action can such a superior human nature become accessible to us?" If techno-science is dictated by real abstractions that cannot be empiricized because they are generated in social acts of exchange and not in the minds of people, then exchangeable fabulations that are at one and the same time empirically-enabled and oriented towards the 'creative evolution'[28] of the human, propose a form of intervention that takes nature in general as its grounding for a political subjectivity rather than the specific quarters of parliament or the courtroom. However, fabulations share some similarities with Laclau and Mouffe's *agonistic intellectual abstractions*. Obviously,

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toward repetition, is a *natured nature*". Matter is a natured nature, i.e. the product of an active naturing of nature brought into existence through a single duration in which everything takes part, encompassing human consciousness, beings, and the entire material world. (All emphasises mine)

[28] The influence of Bergson's book of the same title (1907) on Deleuze is well documented and the subject of various essays, see for example Ansell-Pearson (2015) and Khandker (2014).

Laclau and Mouffe are as far as possible from the 'pure metaphysics' of Deleuze, and are not interested in thinking through forms of transcendentalism[29], so the connection is limited to how these largely dissimilar thinkers perceive change qua intervention. Clearly, fabulations – or fabulatory abstractions (fabstractions) – are evolutionary and not based on lack: they also emphasise the experiential and sensible domains, their end is not a radical democracy but rather a radical nature, and contra Laclau's abstraction of historical political tendencies into a formal logic or pattern for antagonistic politics, *fabstractions* are imbued with a touch of the baroque[30] and are clearly not as rigid nor predetermined by a historical-materialist ideal of political hegemony.

Yet, they both share the will-to-power of interventionism while appealing to two different but interconnected notions of community – one by upholding democracy as an empty signifier and political difference as absolutely incommensurable (pluralist democratic community), the other by upholding

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[29] Although, as noted earlier, Laclau's recourse to the notion of 'real abstraction' can be understood as an attempt to keep the historical tendencies connected to a socialist understanding of hegemony alive while *transcending* them by abstracting them into a formalist axiom.

[30] Langlois (2014) builds a conception of Deleuze's philosophy as an updating of Leibniz's baroque metaphysics pivoted on the monad, from which Deleuze develops a modern baroque aesthetics or an image of modernism as a new baroque that can be connected to similar elaborations by the likes of Walter Benjamin. Leibniz's thought ought to be considered the "first serious attempt to supplement for the shadow of nihilism that began to sweep across the cultural landscape of Europe" after the collapse of theological reason. Deleuze's reworking of the monad in modern times, as a type of abstract machine, should be seen as a continuation of Leibniz's work in the wake of this crisis. Langlois's reading of Deleuze (based on the latter's book *The Fold*: *Leibniz and the Baroque* - 1993) is that he regards the baroque as "fundamentally an aesthetic borne out of a crisis at the heart of modernity, and what it exposes is not the opportunity, for instance, of either philosophy, literature, painting, or science to pick up the reins of a metaphysics where they are dropped, say, by the theological hegemony of divine transcendence or the commodity form of capitalist ideology". Rather, the Baroque is an exposing and an expression of what Deleuze labels the *dark background* of immanence that is manifested through Leibniz's monadic ontology, this dark background appears at the point where "the theological and enlightenment fictions of transcendence begin historically to dissolve".

the force of desiring-production, creative difference, and affirming *the being of thought* on the same ontological plane as the being of every other object (creative community). Here we can arrive at a point that was articulated differently earlier. The ‘real as impossible’ has a strong presence within the expanded field of art practice and relies on intellectual abstractions as developed by Laclau and Mouffe. The interventionism empowered by this real seeks to disrupt and undermine neoliberal bureaucracy – seen as an effect of the increasing transformative power of real abstractions – by radicalizing democracy as an end. The ‘real as artificial’ also has a strong foothold in the expanded field and relies on what we have termed fabstractions as developed by Deleuze and Guattari.

Instead of abstracting historical tendencies into a formal paradigm to transcend them through the process of democracy, fabstractions are abstractions that cultivate historical readings of nature, politics, and the human by returning to such material and ‘fixing’ it. This fixing takes a creative ontological course of action by reconstructing the materials so as to bring thought, i.e. intellectual labour (second-order nature) and nature onto the same plane of being through desire as a force. Both these interventions then seek an ontological manifestation although on different grounds, one through the insertion of a historically abstracted formal mechanism of hegemony in the style of human rights, the other through the reordering of the place and status of intellectual labour on the plane of being itself.

Fabstractions can be traced back to Deleuze’s conception of empiricism, which we can claim is specifically fashioned to warrant empirical awareness

in contexts where social exchange is dictated by the real abstraction of money, that is to say abstractions that emerge through social acts prior to thought and that cannot be empiricized. Such a conclusion can be arrived at from Deleuze's various attempts at defining his empirical inclinations. The most straightforward appears in (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002: vii) when Deleuze states:

> I have always felt that I am an empiricist, that is, a pluralist. But what does this equivalence between empiricism and pluralism mean? […] [T]he abstract does not explain, but must itself be explained; and the aim is not to rediscover the eternal or the universal, but to find the conditions under which something new is produced (creativeness).

Tellingly, Deleuze – indirectly echoing Sohn-Rethel – goes on to explain that in the rationalist tradition in philosophy the abstract has the task of explaining. In this tradition the abstract is realized in the concrete. Such intellectual labour starts with abstractions (he mentions the One, the Whole, the Subject) and searches for "the process by which they are embodied in a world which they make conform to their requirements (this process can be knowledge, virtue, history . . .)". Empiricism, says Deleuze, makes a different assessment: abstractions are not to be confirmed into the world, so to speak, but rather, we should start by "analysing the states of things, in such a way that non-preexistent concepts can be extracted from them". What Deleuze means by the 'states of things' is the pluralism – in fact the multiplicity – of states in which things exist. The new 'extracted' concept must dovetail with the multiplicities that constitute the states of a thing; this means neither simply resisting totalization nor unification. Essentially for Deleuzian empiricism, multiplicity serves to identify a "set of lines or dimensions which are irreducible to one another".

Everything is constituted through and by such sets of lines and dimensions. The extraction of empirically enabled concepts which correspond to a multiplicity is the labour by which we

> trace the lines of which it is made up, to determine the nature of these lines, to see how they become entangled, connect, bifurcate, avoid or fail to avoid the foci .These lines are true becomings, which are distinct not only from unities, but from the history in which they are developed. Multiplicities are made up of becomings without history, of individuation without subject (the way in which a river, a climate, an event, a day, an hour of the day, is individualized). That is, the concept exists just as much in empiricism as in rationalism, but it has a completely different use and a completely different nature: it is a being-multiple, instead of a being-one, a being-whole or being as subject. Empiricism is fundamentally linked to a logic - a logic of multiplicities (of which relations are only one aspect). (2002: viii)

It is important to note how such 'extracted concepts' are connected to a process of tracing and tracking the multiplicity of dimensions and lines from which some 'thing' emerges but also reject a binding to the historical events through which the multiple lines forming the 'thing' might have been triggered. The journey of the multiplicities which constitute a thing – and the transformations, becomings, subjectivizations, and intersections which they go through – makes it illogical to abstract (here rechristened as extraction by Deleuze) the new concepts from the historical situations or struggles which initiated them. Here we can clearly see how Deleuze's labour with abstraction is in opposition to Laclau's understanding of 'real abstraction' which, as explained earlier, amounts to a form of intellectual abstraction.

This is the manoeuvre through which Deleuze makes his empirical abstractions/extractions distinct, and is precisely why they can be identified as conforming to the model of 'real as artificial'. Deleuze's bet on the empirical is connected to his understanding of the multiple transformations things undergo, transformations that social acts of exchange play an active

role in producing. Deleuze's formulation of empiricism is also fleshed out in *Difference and Repetition* (1994: preface, xx–xxi) where he expresses that philosophical writing ought to be conceived as "a very particular species of detective novel, in part a kind of science fiction". What Deleuze is alluding to by citing detective novels is the formulation of concepts as a kind of intervention in order to "resolve local situations". The practice of philosophy as a science-fictional detective novel means that interventionary concepts "must have a coherence among themselves, but that coherence must not come from themselves. They must receive their coherence from elsewhere". And, according to Deleuze, this coherence from elsewhere is the secret of a new type of empiricism. Accordingly, we can speculate that Deleuzian empiricism receives its coherence from the real abstractions constituted by the acts of people and not their consciousness, this viewpoint can find support in the following passage:

> Empiricism is by no means a reaction against concepts, nor a simple appeal to lived experience. On the contrary, it undertakes the most insane creation of concepts ever seen or heard. Empiricism is a mysticism and a mathematicism of concepts, but precisely one which treats the concept as object of an encounter, as a here-and-now, or rather as an *Erewhon*[31] from which emerge inexhaustibly ever new, differently distributed 'heres' and 'nows'. Only an empiricist could say: concepts are indeed things, but things in their free and wild state, beyond 'anthropological predicates'. I make, remake and unmake my concepts along a moving horizon, from an always decentred centre, from an always displaced periphery which repeats and differentiates them. The task of modern philosophy is to overcome the alternatives temporal/non-temporal, historical/eternal and particular/universal. […] Neither empirical particularities nor abstract universals: a Cogito for a dissolved self. We believe in a world in which individuations are impersonal, and singularities are pre-individual: the splendour of the pronoun 'one' - whence the science-fiction aspect, which necessarily derives from this *Erewhon*.

[31] Deleuze is referring to Samuel Butler's 1872 classic. The title Erewhon is derived from Nowhere spelt backwards but according to Deleuze is also meant to represent 'here' and 'now'. A Victorian satire, the novel depicts a utopian society opposite to that of England at the time and paints a different picture of evolution similar to that of Deleuze's in which singular units such as living cells have the will and capacity to shape their environment.

> What this book should therefore have made apparent is the advent of a coherence which is no more our own, that of mankind, than that of God or the world.

What kind of world can be described as individuating through the impersonal and singularizing through the pre-individual? Is this the world of 'real abstractions' in which social acts of exchange acquire the power of 'thought previous to and external to thought'? Or is it rather a world in which nature is philosophically constructed to counteract the seemingly deterministic implications of 'real abstractions'? An argument could be made for the latter, but how is this philosophical construction of nature accomplished?

Sohn-Rethel's formulation of real abstraction was tethered to a historical materialist understanding of time; it depended on imagining an initial blank slate nature which evolves and accelerates into abstraction through the emergence of the money form as a vehicle for exchange that, metaphorically speaking, "invisibly rides the mind" even before the mind can think it. What Deleuze introduces is a particular conception of time that hosts both first-order and second-order nature in a continuum. As Bryant (2009) articulates it, this re-conception of time is what allows Deleuze to reinvent Kant's transcendentalism, morphing it into his own *transcendental empiricism*. The main move is to discredit Kant's understanding of time as something imposed by the mind on intuitions and introduce a conception of time which is "not in the subject or mind", but one within which both subjects and objects exist. This move shifts "time from the epistemic register where time is a condition for *appearances* to the *ontological* register where time is the condition of subjects, organisms, and things. Time consequently becomes a material reality, the material essence of beings, rather than a form imposed on

things". This repositioning allows for a transmutation in the notion of agency in which the agent is both an intervener and part of this material reality, since the universe is nothing else but modifications, disturbances, and changes in tension and in energy. Bryant elaborates that Deleuze's being *within* time does not imply that time is a kind of container, but rather that subjects, entities, and beings are "to be understood as *being* rhythms of duration".

This is time as the very material of being, which is apparent in Deleuze's definitions of duration as naturing nature and matter as natured nature. Thus, there seems to be a correspondence between Sohn-Rethel's 'real abstraction' in which incogitable social acts of exchange preceding thought end up conditioning intellectual labour, and Deleuze's understanding of time in which subjects and entities are rhythms, which is to say flows of duration, in other words, a force of naturing nature. Exchange in the economic register has mutated into rhythm in the register of time, and what is more, it can be made sensible and affective[32].

It is in Deleuze and Guattari's 'artificial real' that Sohn-Rethel's 'real abstraction' finds a naturalistic mirror image almost constructed to sync with it, much like digital devices made by the same manufacturer sync with each other. This syncing seems necessary for any disruption, interruption, break, or change to occur. If we take the speculative licence to connect these thinkers, we can make the deduction that real abstraction – within the

[32] It is important to mention here how the Marxian notions of real abstraction and real subsumption posed the general problem which Deleuze and Guattari attempted to solve and were the girding of their philosophies, yet were radically transformed by the duo's rootedness in other traditions. Negri (2008, in Casarino and Negri: 117) states that "Deleuze and Guattari thought within a Marxist domain, deployed their concepts in the context of a Marxist problematic—and yet such a domain and such a problematic were neither primary in nor internal to their intellectual formation. The sources of their thought were never Marxist […]".

paradigm of the ‘artificial real’ - can only be disrupted within its own flow, within its own rhythm, through what Deleuze calls a superior empiricism, which he clearly associates with an aesthetics capable of sharpening direct intuition through an experience of the sensible:

> Empiricism truly becomes transcendental, and aesthetics an apodictic discipline, only when we apprehend directly in the sensible that which can only be sensed, the very being of the sensible: difference, potential difference and difference in intensity as the reason behind qualitative diversity. It is in difference that movement is produced as an 'effect', that phenomena flash their meaning like signs. The intense world of differences, in which we find the reason behind qualities and the being of the sensible, is precisely the object of a superior empiricism. This empiricism teaches us a strange 'reason', that of the multiple, chaos and difference (nomadic distributions, crowned anarchies). It is always differences which resemble one another, which are analogous, opposed or identical: difference is behind everything, but behind difference there is nothing. (Deleuze, 1994: 56 – 57)

The claim here, read in-between the lines so to speak, is that the unempirical acts of exchange that inhabit our intellect through real abstractions can be countered and intervened upon by making sharper and more intense experiences of intuition through which “difference, potential difference and difference in intensity” are cognitively accessed. On accessing them through this superior empiricism, we transcend to the weird reason of multiple rhythms of chaos and difference in the universe, a kind of frontier which – now that we have zoomed in on it – reveals to us that difference is the instigator for everything, while nothing can account as an instigator for difference in the sense of its occurrence in nature. We can put forth some observations and linkages taking the latter passage as a starting point. Difference, multiplicity, and pluralism in Deleuzoguattarian interventionism are not played out as components in a world of political and cultural incommensurability, but rather as the rhythmic being of subjects, entities, and

beings in a univocal[33] existence. Unlike agonistic interventionism or the interventionism of the differend, fabulatory interventionism is not premised on the epistemological gap between universals and particulars. This stands for two reasons, first and foremost because the Deleuzian ontology of the univocal is developed precisely to allow for thinking difference without the essentialism of identity, which is to say without difference slipping into the quagmire of those – echoing Mouffe's previously mentioned articulation – "essentialist identities of a nationalist, religious or ethnic type".

This lurking essentialism haunted Lyotard's differend and was transformed into a decisive component through 'sublimination' in Mouffian agonism and its adversary principle. We have none other than Michel Foucault (2001) to thank for this observation. Foucault points out that Deleuze's "univocity of being, its singleness of expression, is paradoxically the principal condition which permits difference to escape the domination of identity, which frees it from the law of the Same […]". Second, the gap between universals and particulars is also not exploited because the end of the Deleuzoguattarian intervention is not the radicalization of democracy but of nature itself, as Hallward (2006: 62) makes clear:

Deleuze and Guattari will never stop inventing new mechanisms to undo or dis-organise the organism, to evacuate worlds, environments, territories,

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[33] Hallward (2006: 8-9) presents a clear articulation of Deleuze's univocity, the basic characteristic of Deleuzian ontology. In this ontological framework being is univocal "rather than equivocal or polyvocal. A univocal ontology declares that all beings 'express' their being with a single voice […] Thoughts and things, organisms and ideas, machines and sensations - they all are in one and the same sense of the word. All individuated beings contribute to one and the same activity and articulation of being". Hallward (2006: 10) also makes an interesting point regarding the somewhat inadvertent theological undertones of this ontology: Deleuze annuls "the difference between God and world but he does this in favour of God, not world. More precisely, what he annuls is rather the world's own capacity to negate God, to say no to God, to hold God at a critical or interpretative distance from itself".

species, and individuals of their actual or molar identity. The general goal is always a variation of the same effort – to make Nature operate in the only way it should: 'against itself'.

Here we have the overarching aim of the 'artificial real', an encapsulation of what fabulatory abstractions labour for, the pitting of nature against itself. This implies that despite escaping the Oedipal trap of the impossible real Deleuze and Guattari's superior empirical intuited abstractions remain interventionist in the sense of disruption and interruption. However, this is a disruption which differs greatly from that of agonistics, whereas agonistics proposes an occupation through the (Lacanian) empty signifier of democracy, that disruptive emptiness is traded in for a disruption which fully embraces the creative potential of Nietzschean 'powers of the false'. Flaxman (2011: xvi-xviii) develops a solid account of how Deleuze adopts Nietzsche's 'orphan concept' raising it as his own and developing it into a properly philosophical problem, because "this concept designates the power of invention that conditions all concepts and all conceptualization". Deleuze believes that falsification is already implied in the notion that truth is created. Thus the false – which is to say the artificial – overtakes signifiers, empty or otherwise, and requires an endless creation of concepts that have the dual characteristic of being rigorously formulated, yet essentially inexact.

If agonism, building on the differend, depends on a refusal to be measured by a single measure of value, and seeks inventions that challenge the norms of 'cognitive verification'. Then, Deleuzoguattarian fabulation seeks invention, or perhaps more specifically, creation, in the ceaseless permeation of the abstract concept of value with empirical assemblages of superior intensity. This intensity is due to the powers of the false, and fabulations depend on

this strange empiricism for their existence, in other words, they are released into the fabric of value to become. They have a particular mode of becoming which, as Bogue (2010) has noted, “is that of fashioning larger-than life images that transform and metamorphose conventional representations and conceptions of collectivities, thereby enabling the invention of a people to come”.

The invention of a people to come is not on the radar for agonism. Its intellectual abstractions already contain the formal abstracted characteristics of its historical hegemonic agents, which are deposited as a trace into a simplified operational logic for present day democratic politics. This leaves it susceptible to an umbilical relationship with the parliament – understood as the space or final image of the real – which cannot be easily shrugged off. Rather, this relationship seems to be uncritically transferred to embryonic formulations of collectivism influenced by the agonistic discourse, OWS and affiliated movements being a case in point. This unshruggable image of parliament as real – via democracy as an empty signifier – seeps into the structurational logic of art. It reproduces itself across geographies and institutional forms and channels as an anticipatory “indeterminacy”[34], to be made determinate in the mind of the subject encountering the art object or art experience. The unshruggable image of parliament is the relational

[34] Indeterminacy is Suhail Malik’s term for this typical feature of ‘contemporary art’. Malik (2015) writes “contemporary art depends upon its receiving subject, the addressee of the work who is taken to constitute it rather than arrive as late-comer after its production. Put colloquially, the art ’leaves space’ for the viewer, the viewer ‘completes’ the work”. Accordingly, it can be claimed that this indeterminacy to be completed by the subject experiencing the ‘art’, has its origins within – or is partially constituted through – the image of parliament as the real tied to art’s quest for a radical democracy as an end in itself.

conditioner that pre-formulates the addressee of a work of art as *an individual in the space of democratic decision* thus facilitating the smooth passing of the agonist ideal of 'radical democracy' into the system. Thus, agonist interventionism retains the concrete space of liberal democratic parliament as a kind of imprint wherever it goes and whatever it does: if it were to attempt inventing a people to come, this invention would contain both deposits of abstracted historical hegemonic struggles and imprints of lived parliamentary democracy. Contra this interventionist end, fabulations act upon the real with the aim of perpetual metamorphosis, since the (artificial) real is understood as a dynamic durational continuity between physical space, natural processes, and the flows of capital.

The parliamentary image that agonism cannot seem to get rid of is nowhere to be felt in Deleuzoguattarian interventionism – that is, intervention pivoted on the artificial real – and the work of artists who have taken up this model of intervention through their work. What this suggests is that fabulatory practices - in aiming to function as forms of determinate 'Other-cide'[35] - share some common ground with Beech's notion of "critique as an institution in itself". Roughly speaking, Other-cide is accomplished when actors or subjects produce according to desiring-production while overturning the structure-Other. Other-cide follows desire as a kind of duty or necessity, as opposed to the structure-Other which only allows us to function within a realm of possibilities that are preconditioned by the system within which we circulate. Our examples were: a) the classical Robinson of Defoe who,

[35] Other-cide is putting an end to the structure-Other, the ending – cide originates in the Latin *cida*, to kill or slay. As in suicide, *sui* being Latin for oneself.

despite the tumultuous experience of living in the absence of others on an island, was unable to break away from the structure-Other inhabiting his thought structure through language and the real abstraction of money, and b) Tournier's Robinson who was able to commit this Other-cide through the perversion of introducing desire into the experience of living on the island without others.

Thus, Other-cide is practiced through the introduction of desire (not necessarily sexual) into new realms of experience and the result, according to Deleuze (1990: 320), is a perverse world which he defines as "a world in which the category of the necessary has completely replaced that of the possible". Other-cide is a form of determinate agency for Deleuze and in a sense it intersects with the basic premise of "critique as an institution in itself" since it jettisons what Beech (2007) noted was institutional critique's tendency to perform a "fantasizing about what the institution looks like" and its opposite, a fantasizing about "what critique looks like". Despite this intersection, Other-cide's determinism depends on Nietzschean 'powers of the false' and forms of direct Avatar-like intuitive realisation which make it read as a mystical reformulation of Kant's transcendentalism. This is due to Deleuze's suspicion of reason and his dependence on the kind of rebellious "strange reason" he identifies as superior empiricism.

2.3 From Desiring-Production to Reason: The Question of Representing Abstractions

Now that we have examined both the impossible and artificial real, this short section can be considered a juncture into the key notion of the *synoptic real* which will provide the basic premise for reimagining the function of pluralism and antagonism i.e. difference within the politics of the image. Beginning with a step backward, what is left to note about the artificial real and its Other-cide is that although they seem on first glance closer to the model we are trying to establish, they are disqualified for the main reason that Other-cide should not mean Community-cide, which is to say that as I hope to make clear, reasoning and intersubjective recognition remain the most convincing methods of establishing individuality in the world. Furthermore, in the escape of reasoning and intersubjectivity there is also an escape of antagonism which as I hope to show is interconnected to processes of social reasoning and not external to them. It is important to note a number of points here. Earlier, we came into contact with the idea of a 'conservative pluralism' which rested on the notion of cultural and political incommensurability. This incommensurability was essential for the functionality of the agonist argument since without it one could not arrive at a 'conflictual consensus' springing from adversarial politics.

This is how difference is a necessity activating and structuring politics for Mouffe and Laclau. Although Deleuze's univocal ontology allows for thinking difference without this essentialism of identity and his Other-cide calls for a quashing of the structure-Other through the introduction of desire into the productive space of experiences, difference in Deleuze's interventionism

plays the role of the absolute necessity that cannot be reduced to a scientifically materialist explanation. As previously mentioned, for Deleuze, the state of things is always multiple and plural, difference is behind everything but nothing is behind difference and this is what for him ultimately supplies difference with the agency to abstract new concepts from an analysis of the state of things. The intellectual-fabulatory space is one where this intense world of differences can be mined, reformed, and recreated as a superior empirical encounter that can teach us the 'strange reason' of multiplicity, pluralism, difference, and chaos. This Deleuzian reason alludes to both the supposed necessity of molecular chaos and difference, and the supposed limit on knowing beyond the chaos of the molecular, the atom, and the difference behind every 'thing'.

The space of chaotic difference from which agency emerges is the Deleuzoguattarian ontological bulwark against the absolutism of 'real subsumption'. But, the point here is that Deleuze's 'strange reason' wants to avoid reasoning or more specifically classical rationalisms in the sense he describes when he elaborates on his empiricism, that is, rationalism as the realisation of the abstract in the concrete, and the search for the processes through which abstractions are embodied in the world. Because he wants to start the other way round, creating new concepts which function 'within time' as opposed to the timeless abstract concepts of rationalism, Deleuze reinvents the old metaphysical idea of substance[36], rearticulating it as multiplicity, plurality, and difference. Difference is the substance of nature, the substance behind which we can find nothing. This basic Deleuzian

[36] This observation is Daniel W. Smith's (2013) and due to Williams (2011).

articulation of difference, for Noys (2010: 53 – 65), amounts to what he calls the "positivisation of difference". Noys points to how the reworking of Marxist thought in Deleuze has its power in the latter's "articulation of the 'economic' as virtual 'positivity'". For Noys, this is what allows Deleuze to "give full ontological weight to the problem of real abstraction". Noys argues that real abstraction is exactly what Deleuze and Guattari formalize in 'their description of capitalism as an 'axiomatic' machine of de- and re-territorialisation.' The complication which occurs due to this is that "this positivisation of the economy gives capitalism a 'full' reality". And, he goes on to argue that:

> Although the couplet de- / re-territorialisation provides perhaps one of the most powerful means for grasping the new articulation of capitalism, the conception of such a 'structure' as positive neglects the 'creative destruction' of capital, which operates by a 'negation of negation' that captures and integrates elements into new positivities of accumulation. […] [T]he couplet de- / re- territorialisation also fails to provide the interventional space of negativity to disrupt the capitalist re-composition of such positivities. Instead we are called, already, to an accelerationism that would exceed capitalist deterritorialisation in an 'absolute deterritorialisation'.

For the present purpose, I will not enter into a full discussion on accelerationism[37] in both its recent and older post-1968 iterations. However,

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[37] Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy* (1974) and Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) have been recognized as early accelerationist works. In the 1990s, the work of Nick Land, Sadie Plant and a list of thinkers associated with the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit at Warwick University left a strong mark on philosophy by developing a distinctly nihilistic Deleuzian-Bataillean strain of thinking. More recently, new manifestations of accelerationism have divided opinion and have been contested by Noys, Shaviro, Wark, and others. In a critical account, Noys (2014) has portrayed accelerationism as a form of political thinking hooked on speed and supporting processes that push and aggravate capitalism to reach its extreme excesses. In the introduction to *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, Mackay and Avanessian (2014) summarize it as a heresy based on "the insistence that the only radical political response to capitalism is not to protest, disrupt, or critique, nor to await its demise at the hands of its own contradictions, but to accelerate its uprooting, alienating, decoding, abstractive tendencies". For Mackay and Avanessian, there is an assertion that lies behind all accelerationist thought, namely that "the crimes, contradictions and absurdities of capitalism have to be countered with a politically and theoretically progressive attitude towards its constituent elements. Accelerationism seeks to side with the emancipatory dynamic that broke the chains of feudalism and ushered in the constantly ramifying range of practical possibilities characteristic of modernity. The focus of much accelerationist thinking

as we shall see, the notion features prominently in the discussion on the reality of abstraction, and the question of how to best represent abstractions and their possible interventionary role in capitalism and its financialization.

Noys is dedicated to the project of conceptualising an "interventional space of negativity", which, as he proposes, can disrupt the lopsided inclination to positivisation, production, and acceleration that the capitalist relation produces. But a further step is to think the interventional not as a space for and of negativity itself, but as a space for and of reasoning, a reasoning that is bound to the negative as in the famous Hegelian dictum of 'the understanding' which only proceeds by looking the negative in the face. The interest lies specifically in thinking how such an interventional enterprise can be represented and traversed utilizing the realm of images, sounds, objects, words, and performativity normally associated with art practice. This interest intersects with questions surrounding the emergence of a twenty-first century Prometheanism in theoretical discourse, particularly in its Marxist (post-2007-2008 financial crash) frame of reference espoused by Alberto Toscano, and

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is the examination of the supposedly intrinsic link between these transformative forces and the axiomatics of exchange value and capital accumulation that format contemporary planetary society". Mohammad Salemy (2015) provides a short and clear depiction of divergent accelerationist thinking. Salemy states that the neo-rationalist line taken up by Reza Negarestani and Ray Brassier "represents the abandonment of the phenomenological binary of time and space, focusing instead on how insides and outsides are constituted through the movement and navigation of thought or cognitive resources of the collective general intellect". Brassier's work blends a particular continental metaphysics with the analytic tradition, especially the 'naturalism with a normative turn' of Wilfrid Sellars and the work of Robert Brandom. Salemy points to "another shade" of accelerationism that emerges from the work of Suhail Malik via his interest in the work of Jonathan Nitzan and Shimshon Bichler. Salemy summarizes Malik's work on this front as arguing that "acceleration should abandon Marxist notions of labour and production and utilize finance as a constructive technology towards a post capitalist future". It could be argued that the term or label 'accelerationism' reached its peak in 2014-2015, it is notable that the authors of the manifesto for accelerationist politics Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams in their book *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* (2015) make a conscious shift in their formulation putting more emphasis on a Laclau-based idea of hegemony, full automation, and a universal basic income and less emphasis on the term 'accelerationism' itself.

its transcendental realist formulation developed by Ray Brassier. My aim is not to embark on an analysis of these and other strains of contemporary Prometheanism but to traverse their philosophical underpinnings and theoretically roam through their territory, so to speak, all the while extracting ideas that will gradually accumulate to shape a concept of *Postagonistics*. What would this concept propose in terms of an interventional stance that is decidedly different from the intellectual abstractions of agonistics and the fabulatory abstractions of Deleuze and Guattari?

Weighing in on the *Manifesto for Accelerationist Politics* developed by Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams in 2013, Brassier (2014) expands on what he regards as Srincek's and Williams's distinction between 'epistemic acceleration' and 'political acceleration'. For Brassier, epistemic acceleration indicates conceptual abstraction i.e. knowledge, while political acceleration indicates social abstraction i.e. politics. The premise of the manifesto, according to Brassier, is that the feedback between social abstraction and conceptual abstraction can play "a positive emancipatory role". We have seen how Deleuze and Guattari's work enabled thinking a similar feedback through their adoption of the artificial real which in its bare scaffolding as a concept is their articulation of something like *the political unconscious of real abstraction.* Real abstraction through social acts of exchange or flows of capital already organizes the desiring force of the political unconscious. This 'desiring-production' is made to contour with a conception of nature axised on *duration* as the impetus of a *naturing nature,* and *material* as the product of a *natured nature*. This contouring effectively collapses the thinking of knowledge and concepts as something other than forms of de- and re-

territorialisation and grants the latter couplet unchallengeable political agency. According to both Brassier (2014) and Noys (2010), we are in the historic territory of a classical accelerationism[38] that has vitalist[39] tendencies and in which political agency was connected to "Aeolian[40] processes of deterritorialisation and emancipation" that were "propelled by the metaphysics of desiring-production" (Brassier, 2014). But while for Noys, intervention lies in rehabilitating negativity and its role in politics against the forces of accelerationism, Brassier points to the rationalization of accelerationism as a process which would allow a more progressive version of accelerationism to develop. This version would employ negativity in the rationalizing process, rather than rely on the kind of affirmationism[41] that is distinctive of classical accelerationism. He sees Srnicek's and Williams's manifesto as having already set off this process and thinks its significance

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[38] Both Brassier (2014) and Noys (2010) mention a passage from Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* as holding the quintessential logos behind classical accelerationism: "But which is the revolutionary path? Is there one? – To withdraw from the world market, as Samir Amin advises Third World Countries to do, in a curious revival of the fascist 'economic solution'? Or might it be to go in the opposite direction? To go further still, that is, in the movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialisation? For perhaps the flows are not yet deterritorialised enough, not decoded enough, from the viewpoint of a theory and practice of a highly schizophrenic character. Not to withdraw from the process, but to go further, to 'accelerate the process', as Nietzsche put it: in this matter, the truth is that we haven't seen anything yet."

[39] The evocation of forces distinct from purely chemical or physical ones when explaining the processes of life and functions of living organisms; the charge of vitalism is often levelled against Deleuze's work in particular and is due to his usage of Bergsonian conceptions of time and evolution.

[40] Brassier's use of the term 'Aeolian' seems to be strongly connected to the 'naturing nature' and 'natured nature' of Deleuze's philosophy in that it both evokes the 'Aeolian harp', more commonly known as the wind harp, an instrument built to create music by harnessing the energy of the wind. This evokes the difference in rhythm and types of winds that provide patterns of difference and repetition in sound for the instrument. It also evokes a vital god-like force guiding the winds in Aeolus, ruler of winds in Greek mythology.

[41] Affirmationism is perhaps best described and mapped out by Noys (2010: preface). Noys describes post-1968 (French) philosophy's relentless commitment to the assertion of creativity, desire, and productive potential to the disadvantage of the negative, he states that "the politics and metaphysics of affirmationism are indicative of a response and resistance to the dynamics of contemporary neoliberal capitalism […] The wider tendency in affirmationism to ontologise resistance as a perpetually occluded actuality left that resistance all too vulnerable to the cunning of capitalist reason".

lies in the idea of “an intervention into the politics of abstraction”, since they argue that “the representation of abstraction is not only unavoidable but necessary in order to mount an epistemic and political challenge to capitalism” (Brassier, 2014). Brassier comments that the necessity of representing abstraction does not guarantee the possibility that such representation will align itself with emancipatory action. What Brassier finds wanting in the manifesto is a “theory of totality” capable of clarifying the conditions “under which epistemic practices might be realised” with the view to an emancipatory politics. This resonates with Toscano’s (2011) definition of Prometheanism as the problem of “articulating action and knowledge in the perspective of totality”. But, what could this totality be? Brassier identifies this totality, for him simply put, it is *reason*. Prometheanism for Brassier (2015) lies in

> the attempt to eradicate the discrepancy between what is humanly made and what is nonhumanly given – not by rendering the world amenable to human whim or by merely satisfying our pathological needs, but by remaking ourselves and our world in conformity with the demands of reason.

It could be argued that *reason* in Brassier’s schema replaces and plays the role of *desiring-production* in Deleuzoguattarian philosophy, but this would be an oversimplification that would give us a distorted picture of Brassier’s thinking. However, it is worth noting the connection to the ‘artificial real’ in the first part of Brassier’s formulation: eradicating the difference between the human-made and the non-human given (i.e. nature) rings a Deleuzian metaphysical bell. It is in the second part – the conformity to reason – that Brassier completely parts ways with Deleuze. In general, Brassier’s work could be read as centred on the possibilities of a synthesis between epistemic and socio-political forms of acceleration. In other words, Brassier

attempts to develop a *totality schema* answering to how an alignment between abstract theoretical representation and social action ought to be accomplished. The aim, or end, is to achieve a spontaneity whereby *thinking* registers as a kind of *doing* rather than as a form of *contemplation*[42]. This, of course, presents us with the perfect philosophical background or the master-idea behind what was earlier identified as Beech's "critique understood as an institution in itself". It could be said that Beech's work as an artist uses text, image, and sound to depict a world-model in which subjects have either achieved this spontaneity or are embroiled in a process that stimulates and provokes it as an end. But returning to Brassier (2015), the question for him seems to be how to achieve this without what he calls the *lure of reconciliation*. The lure of reconciliation is what seduces Deleuze to develop his ontological framework in which he makes multiplicity and difference the substance of being, and places thinking on the same level as being itself. It is what leads him to claim that *concepts* are *things* in their free and wild state transcending their 'anthropological predicates'.

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[42] Brassier (2014) proposes adopting a (Wilfrid Sellars-inspired) reading of Kant's 'transcendental spontaneity' in which the faculty of apperception (or of recognition) exercises its freedom as a kind of spontaneity resulting from the human will's acceptance of intersubjectively initiated rules. This understanding is opposed to understanding Kantian spontaneity as an eruption indifferent to external determination. Freedom in this sense, Brassier notes, "is not simply the absence of external determination but the agent's rational self-determination in and through its espousal of a universally applicable rule". It is notable that the use of the word 'contemplation' here does not mean 'reflective thought' as such, but more specifically thought as an engagement that seeks to pass beyond mental images, discourse, and concepts to a direct experience of 'the real'. Brassier (2014) claims that contemplation is the "source of the human activities and practices that constitute the abstractions of capital". Interpreting this rather ambiguous statement through Sohn-Rethel, it could be said that the abstractions of capital are accelerated through forms of 'contemplation' that wish to access the real of the market, or simply the exchange abstraction, without doing cognitive commerce with the persons who enable it and are its support system.

This is in contradistinction to a discourse where concepts and things are divided, the trajectory that Brassier adopts. Deleuze's transcendental empiricism, as we have seen, depends on abstracting non-preexisting concepts from the multiplicities and differences in the state of things, infusing being with thinking in a continuous de- and re-territorialisation. Roughly put, this, and Deleuze's dependence on intuitional experience to access the real produce the theoretical consequence of reality turning into an expression of thinking. This reduction of reality to an expression of thinking might have been what Deleuze's empiricism needed to establish in order to gain traction on the real abstractions which skip consciousness and disseminate through acts of exchange. The 'will to power' of creativity was ultimately Deleuze's solution. But the 'lure of reconciliation' also has other dimensions in Deleuzoguattarian thought; one could say that the ontological model Deleuze uses is constructed from the onset to reconcile all being. This is the univocal ontology mentioned earlier, and in which "[a]ll that *is* can be said to be in exactly the same sense, all that can be said of being must be said in one and the same voice" (Hallward, 2003, italics in original).

Expounding on the ideas Deleuze and Guattari develop in *What is Philosophy?* Hallward adds that

> if all that falls under the concept of being must be treated in the same way and said in the same voice, then the essential compatibility of art and science follows as a matter of course. (Artistic) interpretation and (scientific) explanation become aspects of one and the same 'expressive' project.

And according to Hallward (2003), all of Deleuze's work assumes this reduction of art and science to an expressive project. The reason for this is that it eliminates the epistemological grounding for their distinction, that is to

say “the difference between deduction and insight, between what can be demonstrated ‘objectively’ and what resonates ‘subjectively’, between the natural sciences and the human sciences, and so on”.

What we have here is a *counter-ontology* that drops the distinctions between art and science, and by doing so manufactures a ‘strange reason’ that does the job of reconciling (and here let us recall Sohn-Rethel’s terminologies) the ‘second nature’ of science with nature. Its job well done is to pre-emptively reconcile *reason* and *nature*. And we are given access to this reconciled expression through fabulations – intuitive experiences fashioned out of larger than life images. This is an example of the lure of reconciliation that Brassier warns of, and to rebut it he adopts Wilfrid Sellars’ synoptic model. In this model, reason labours to fuse two distinct and ideal conceptions of the human – each conception a kind of framework through which persons picture the world, their relationship with it, and place in it. Sellars calls these two distinct conceptions the *manifest image* and the *scientific image* of man-in-the-world. And the horizon where reason is heading, so to speak, is what Sellars calls the *stereoscopic vision* or the *synoptic vision* in which these separate conceptions are to be fused in an ongoing process. This is the bare skeletal structure for the ‘synoptic real’ that Brassier adopts – influenced by Sellars’ special brand of scientific realism, a structure that, as we shall see, avoids the charge of ‘scientism’ through a complex elaboration of the function of reasoning in social life. This framework for ‘the real’ and what it affords art is what we will explore in the following chapter.

3. The Synoptic Real: Reasoning through Stereoscopy

3.1 Homo Synopticus: The Manifest and Scientific Images of Human in the World

Once the authority of science is established, it must be taken into consideration. We can go beyond science because of the pressures of necessity; however, it must be our starting point. We can affirm nothing it denies, deny nothing it affirms, and establish nothing which directly or indirectly contradicts the principles on which it depends.

(Émile Durkheim, 1975: 160)

To help establish a passage into the Sellarsian model, we can start by recalling Brassier's suggestion that what rationalizing accelerationism required was a 'theory of totality', one that could shed light on the circumstances that shape the possibilities of epistemic intervention in relation to the social and political spheres. Brassier (2014) locates this totality in "the social realisation of cognition", in other words, he seeks this totality in a form of realism that is capable of understanding the social dimension in the cognitive.

According to McDowell (1998), Sellars' central thesis is that "epistemic states" – i.e. any instance involving concepts and related to knowing or knowledge – cannot be understood as the realization or actualization of "merely natural capacities – capacities that their subjects have at birth, or acquire in the course of merely animal maturation". Here, McDowell is presenting us with the gist of what Sellars is probably most well-known for, his attack on what he labelled the *myth of the given*. As O'Shea (2015: Kindle Locations 220-226) concisely puts it, the *myth* can be understood through Sellars' assertion that the following argument is a crucial mistake:

[S]ince not all of our knowledge can be derived by inference from prior knowledge ad infinitum, there must be some basic items of knowledge which

are simply ‘given’ in roughly the sense that they are (allegedly) known directly or immediately without presupposing our possession of any other knowledge. Such presuppositionless knowledge would constitute the given element in our knowledge, the rest of our knowledge being built upon that foundation.

Toumela (1988) elaborates that the myth Sellars is concerned with entails that the world enables the production of knowledge (what Sellars calls epistemic states) without “active conceptual contribution by the knowing subject”. Toumela further remarks that following Sellars these supposed states of knowledge can be called “self-verifying” or “self-authenticating” states, since in complying with the myth we can “speak metaphorically of a mind's eye which has direct, concept-free access to universals”’ Toumela (1988) sums up the Sellarsian *myth of the given* in one sentence: it is the idea that we “can be engaged in non-conceptual but yet cognitive epistemic commerce with the world”. Sellars positions his philosophy strongly against such a framework of givenness, a framework he argues is common to what he regards as foundationalist approaches to the structure of knowledge. His aim was to contest foundationalism with his accounts of holism[43] and fallibilism[44].

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[43] According to Mandik’s (2010) general definition, holism asserts that mental states such as thoughts and beliefs have their content in virtue of their relation to other mental states. The contents of one’s mental state concerning *dogs* may be constituted in their relationship to other mental states such as those concerning ‘mammals’, ‘domestication’, and ‘barking’. Thus a mental state with the content ‘dog’ is inferentially drawn from the premise ‘domesticated barking mammals’.

[44] The doctrine - due to the enquiry into epistemology by thinkers such as Hume, C.S. Peirce, J. Dewey, W. Sellars and others – that beliefs and views etc. can never be fully supported through rational justification in an absolutely conclusive way without a remainder of a doubt. Fallibilism must not be mistaken for scepticism however, while both might believe that there is no way to establish the absolute certainty of a truth proposition, sceptics would usually attempt to disqualify most truth propositions, while fallibilism, roughly speaking, would accept beliefs or truth propositions based on a process of reasoning not unlike rounding numbers in mathematics, taking the nearest possible explanation to be true until proven otherwise.

According to O'Shea, Sellars' overall proposal is that "the whole structure of a conceptual scheme" eventually "meets the test of experience, and any belief or presupposition, whether it is an intellectual 'first principle' or a 'direct empirical observation', is open to rejection and replacement if an alternative conception and better explanation presents itself" (O'Shea, 2015: Kindle Locations 232-236). This framework for knowledge, in which things can be rejected and accepted based on better explanation, is what is referred to as Sellars' *explanationist* epistemology, which, as O'Shea points out (2015, Kindle Locations 236-243), epitomizes Sellars' "emphasis on the role of 'inference to the best explanation' as the primary source of epistemic justification, whether such explanatory inferences are explicitly proposed in scientific theories or only implicitly available in our reason-giving practices in everyday life". This is clearly pronounced in Sellars' (1997: 76) often cited definition of knowledge:

> The essential point is that in characterizing an episode or a state as that of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says.

Rorty's (1997) formulation of this is that "knowledge is inseparable from a social practice—the practice of justifying one's assertions to one's fellow-humans. It is not presupposed by this practice, but comes into being along with it". We might recall an earlier question here, the question of 'what to do with science', or how to place and give function to 'the scientific' within the design of a pluralistic system which art can imagine, mediate, picture, and contribute to. How does science come into this picture or model of 'the synoptic real' that insists on placing knowledge in the social space of reasons?

Sellars' *manifest image* is often construed as representing the common sense understanding of the human relationship to the world. While it seems to operate as such in the overall structure of his philosophy and sometimes clearly indicates common sense thinking in his writing, it cannot be equated with a "pre-scientific, uncritical, naive conception". Sellars (1963: 5-8) clearly states that the conceptual framework he identifies as the manifest conception of man-in-the-world is "itself a scientific image. It is not only disciplined and critical; it also makes use of those aspects of scientific method which might be joined together under the heading 'correlational induction'. What this means is that the scientific methods used within manifest thinking largely (but not solely) depend on the particular assumption that "what we know of anything is true only for us".[45](Bryant, 2014 emphasis in original) Or to put it otherwise, the methods used in such discourse assume that it is impossible to think a world in which human thought is not correlated to the anthropocentric narrative of humans in the world.

Distinctively, and unlike Quentin Meillassoux's attempt to dismantle correlationist thought, Sellars links the manifest image to what he calls "the perennial philosophy of man-in-the-world". Following Sellars, this enduring or continually present conception, labelled 'perennial philosophy' has its roots in the Platonic tradition but has evolved and branched out to include much philosophical thought, greatly influencing how we encounter ourselves as agents in the world. It is a distorted image that continually 'mislocates' and

[45] Bryant (2014) further asserts that due to this, correlationism can be seen as kind of scepticism since 'it asserts that whether or not things-in-themselves are this way is something we can never know because we can only ever know things as they appear to us, not as they are in themselves.'

displaces the scientific image – which broadly speaking is the image of the world populated and constituted by “swarms of colorless, imperceptible microphysical particles” (O'Shea, Kindle Location 641). But despite this Sellars contends that “man is *essentially* that being which conceives of itself *in terms of the image which the perennial philosophy refines and endorses*” (1963: 8, emphasis in original). The manifest image is a useful fiction and thus is “no *mere* fiction”. And unlike Spinoza, Sellars tells us that his aim is not to establish that the scientific image is true and that the manifest one is false. Sellars sees Spinoza as a thinker who also attempted to picture a stereoscopic view, but the concern for Sellars is that in this Spinozan view the manifest image appears to be dominated by the scientific one and ends up being depicted as a pattern of errors. Sellars’ usage of the analogy of ‘stereoscopic vision’, whereby the manifest and scientific images are fused, does not imply the same fate for the manifest, but rather that, in his own words, “the manifest image is not overwhelmed in the synthesis” (Sellars, 1963: 9). For Sellars, the manifest image is important because it is an achievement. His basic idea is to acknowledge and give form to a bi-dimensional system or world view that is, like Deleuze’s, univocal, but unlike the latter does not fulfil this univocity through a restructured ontology but a rigorous account of the place and function of the manifest and scientific discourses within an overall epistemological framework. That is to say that within this epistemological structure there exist two philosophical models that are the manifest and scientific conceptions of man-in-the-world. Brassier (2007: 8) explains that what Sellars introduces is a comprehensive model which insists that philosophy should

resist attempts to subsume the scientific image within the manifest image. At the same time, Sellars enjoined philosophers to abstain from the opposite temptation, which would consist in trying to supplant the manifest image with the scientific one. For Sellars, this cannot be an option, since it would entail depriving ourselves of what makes us human.

What this bi-dimensional system offers us is the bare minimum grounding for a totality schema premised on social interaction, reasoning, and cognition. It does this by reactivating 'science' as an image or conception that plays a particular role within a social *theatre of reasoning*. Wilson (2015) reminds us that "science is not the 'real' of philosophy", and we can add that it is also not the 'real' of art. If this is the case then, why does Brassier (after Sellars) see it necessary to maintain an image of the world in which 'the scientific' is not placed into a conceptual playing field in which all conceptions of the world are absolutely equalized? Wilson (2015) explains the mechanism at work in this reactivation of science in Brassier's thought when she notes that

whilst science attempts to conceptualise the real qua real, it remains cognisant of the fact that these conceptualisations are never what the real itself is. It is precisely this acknowledgment (of the metaphysical discrepancy between concepts and objects, and thus, of the *insufficiency* of any conceptual schema) which forces the perpetual construction and revision of the latter, on behalf of the real itself.

Science labours on behalf of the real, its conceptual labour depends on the awareness that its concepts are not things in the sense of being equal to 'the real', in clear contrast to Deleuze's formulation. As a model of thinking, science conceptualizes the real by coming into being along with it. Its domain is the realm of causes or 'the casual' because it's "coming into being along with the real" affords it the possibility to continuously refine its conception and depiction of the causes behind things. As Chodat (2008: 70) tells us, researchers in a laboratory obviously do not "simply stare harder and longer"

than the rest of us at whatever they are observing. Rather, what they excel at doing is developing theories designed to explain the past behavioural patterns of whatever they are observing (diseases, stars, or termites etc.) as well as predicting the future of such patterns. Herein lies the main difference between how the scientific image furnishes the world with concepts and its counterpart, the manifest image. It makes sense of the world through what Sellars (1963: 7) describes as "the postulation of imperceptible entities, and principles pertaining to them, to explain the behavior of perceptible things". As Chodat (2008: 70) puts it, when scientists fashion their theories they are often led to

> postulate entities that are not evident to the senses endowed to us by evolution. We can't lay eyes on a half-inch of gravity, and before astronomers had ever perceived Pluto, the planet was posited theoretically in order to account for perturbations in the orbit of Neptune. Moreover, such a postulational strategy can be used to tackle any and all 'perceptible things'.

For Sellars, the scientific image (which he often calls "theoretical discourse" because it postulates theoretical "imperceptible" entities) is not an auxiliary of the manifest image (which he often calls 'non-theoretical discourse' because it does not posit such entities). It also should not simply be considered a 'heuristic device' for calculating the world and its human story. If we perceive science in such ways it is because we fall into the mistake of interpreting the scientific image based on the false perception that the difference between the scientific and the manifest is a *substantive* distinction between theoretical and non-theoretical *existence*. While in actuality we ought to understand it as a *methodological* distinction between theoretical and non-theoretical *discourse*. Both conceptions are discourses and Sellars' rebuttal of the *myth* means that there can be no non-cognitive, non-linguistic conception of

conscious experience, all awareness for Sellars' is laden with discourse (Crane, 2008). This serves as a reality-check presenting us with the conditions under which we can understand Sellars' declaration that "in the dimension of describing and explaining the world, science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not".

Science's function in the Sellarsian synoptic schema lies in the important distinction between causes and reasons. Here we can quote Thomas Bible, a fictional character (roughly based on philosopher of neuroscience Thomas Metzinger) in R. Scott Bakker's novel *Neuropath* (2009). Bible's lifelong acquaintance, neuroscientist Neil Cassidy, has discovered the neural correlates of consciousness; hence he has tapped into the ultimate casual domain of human subjective phenomena. But this discovery has turned Cassidy into a pathological villain-type. Human subjects under his hands seem to be merely puppets[46] controlled by the neurological activity of their brains which we cannot account for in terms of *reasons*. Cassidy kidnaps people and alters their consciousness by tweaking the neural correlates and in the process the subjects often die. In the midst of this neurologically-informed Frankenstein type thriller set in the near future, Thomas Bible (Kindle Locations 843-845) – commenting on the horrific crimes Cassidy is carrying out – says the following to a friend:

Remember how I said science had scrubbed the world of purpose? For some reason, wherever science encounters intention or purpose in the world, it

[46] Gross (2011: 56) reminds us that "the ancient Greek word for marionette is *neurospaston*, 'pulled by strings,' formed from neuron—used for sinew, tendon, nerve, the string of a bow or lyre—and spasma—a pulling, drawing, or convulsing, the root of 'spasm'". This intersection in the very etymology of neuroscience between freedom and control puts the novel's character in a larger philosophical perspective and lends talk of cause and reason a dimension related to the question of freedom.

snuffs it out. The world as described by science is arbitrary and random. There's innumerable causes for everything, but no reasons for anything.

Here the *dramatis persona* is not merely ventilating his existential frustrations; rather, he is articulating what Sellars called the 'clash of the manifest and scientific images' of man-in-the-world. The world as described by science is purposeless, without reason and dependent on a fragmented overview of particular entities – such as neurons, quarks, and microorganisms – that seem not only disconnected from but threatening to the manifest world of human intentionality, rationality, meaning, free will, agency etc.

Presumably, the neuroscientist in this novel has turned to criminality because he has let the scientific image rule over his actions, and his actions are bound to what is referred to as the domain of *normativity*. Normativity pertains to the way things ought to be as distinguished from the way things are (Mandik, 2010: 83), in other words, it is the question of *what ought to be* recognized in distinction to the question of *what is*. Science tells us what *is* through the said postulational strategies; the manifest is constructed by and through the normative. For Thomas Bible (perhaps the surname is not coincidental, since it might serve to represent a sense of ethics associated with religiosity) and his pitiless colleague Cassidy, this clash is referred to in other terms, namely as *the semantic apocalypse*. The claim seems to be that since science can describe the real, it debunks the fiction of the manifest image resulting in a reification of alienation between oneself (as a normatively constituted manifest image) and the world (as a scientifically real entity constituted through postulationary strategies). This alienation is

externalized in the extreme form of the destructive nihilism Cassidy inflicts on the world. Here, science is real and the manifest in its normative domain is false. In a strange way, this semantic apocalypse is a rupture or eruption much like Lyotard described his sublime pivoted on the negative axis of depicting “the unpresentable in presentation itself”: it asks us to ‘stop’ constructing and/or surrender to the fact that we do not have free will as commonly understood, because science has discovered who we really are. There is no shortage of works in the field of art that indulge us in ever complex forms of the sublime based on the growing database of scientific imagery and theories. Alternatively, we can ‘will to power’ and embrace the powers of the false, the intellectual trip Deleuze embarked on.

But how might one acknowledge the authority of the scientific while going beyond it because of necessity, as Durkheim advised, or in Sellars’ more robust formulation: do justice to the perplexities that “spring from the attempt to take both man and science seriously” (Sellars, 1968: 1)? How can one still think in terms of intentionality, will, meaning, etc. and the real as described by science at one and the same time? How can one develop a constructive articulation of the relationship between natural science and the normative without succumbing to versions of the sublime or evocations of unjustifiable agency? An additional question, which will be explored later, is: how can we achieve this while thinking the reality of politics i.e. pluralism and the inevitability of antagonism? Sellars’ solution to the relationship between the natural and the normative is complex and multi-layered, but its gist is summed up succinctly by Jelača (2014):

Sellars's response to this predicament is ingenious to say the least. The normative space of reasons is to be understood as causally reducible, but logically (conceptually) irreducible to the natural space of causes. Insofar as conceptual thought or the logical space of reasons has a material substrate from which it arises, there is nothing, in principle, preventing the natural sciences from exploring it. This is why, for Sellars, the normative is causally reducible to the natural. On the other hand, insofar as the space of reasons is essentially normative in character there is nothing, in principle, that the natural sciences can teach us about it.

It is to be pointed out that Sellars' deviation from Kant lies in supporting the idea that the natural sciences are capable of grasping knowledge of the real or the in-itself and are not merely sentenced to produce knowledge of appearances as in the Kantian paradigm: Sellars clearly refuses the Kantian stance which sides against the possibility of a knowledge exceeding appearances. And to reiterate, the stereoscopic view or what we can call the *Synoptic Real* is the bi-dimensional order capable of producing a holistic image of agents in the world by acknowledging on the one hand the rule of the scientific image over the "natural space of causes", which can be understood as "the real order", while on the other hand maintaining the rule of the manifest image over the "normative space of reasons", which we can understand as "the order of knowing or the conceptual" (Jelača, 2014). In McDowell's (1998) articulation, Sellars' framework is based on drawing a line where "above the line are placings in the logical space of reasons' and below the line are 'characterizations that do not do that". As McDowell explains, there is a temptation (this is the *Myth*) to presuppose that certain below-the-line characterizations can fulfil tasks that in actuality can only be fulfilled by above-the-line characterizations in the space of reasons. The space of reasons is the socially constituted space in which the manifest image retains methodological primacy and practical reality. The scientific image, on the

other hand, can be identified as the realm of causation which has full ontological authority[47].

[47] This is based on a reformulation of Kant that is different to Deleuze's. While Deleuze seemingly chose to reorder ontology so that *concepts* like *things* would be within time – as in a single duration, Sellars reworks Kant to naturalize consciousness without abolishing the distinction between the conceptual domain and natural causation. This philosophical conversation with Kant initiates Sellars' system, this is apparent in a comment Sellars makes in his autobiography: "[H]ow could one appropriate Kant's insights without sliding all the way into Kant's own 'transcendental idealism'? It wasn't until much later that I came to see the solution of the puzzle lay in correctly locating the conceptual order in the causal order and correctly interpreting the causality involved" (cited in O'Shea, 2015: Kindle Locations 364-365).

3.2 The 'Space of Reasons' and Some Characteristics of the Postagonistic Image

On McDowell's (1998) account, there is a strong correspondence between the Sellarsian image of a 'logical space of reasons' and the Kantian image of 'the realm of freedom.' McDowell's insight is that the way in which we can comprehend this correspondence is through the Kantian idea that 'the conceptual capacities' are most evidently employed in the exercise of judging. Judging is of course not the only mental operation in which conceptual capacities are actualized. But for McDowell, this does not prevent singling out judging as the "paradigmatic mode of actualization of conceptual capacities, the one in terms of which we should understand the very idea of conceptual capacities in the relevant sense".

Through its insistence on resisting any easy reconciliation between the manifest and the scientific, and an insistence on the: a) bi-dimensionality of 'the real', b) the activation of the scientific image as a measure of what exists ontologically speaking, c) the refinement and enhancement of the manifest image along similar lines to the postulational strategies of scientific thought, Sellars' model opens the door to a basic space – the logical and social space of reasons – in which the practice of judging can be engaged with socially and politically without the domination of the aesthetic. From this perspective, art ought to exploit the idea of this space and play an instrumental role in its institutionalisation, politicization, progression, and revision by materializing representations based on the synoptic system's articulation of the world, embedding them into the representational economy of art. The efficacy of adopting this model of the real can at least be put to the test if art fosters it as

an alternative to the agonistics and transcendental empiricisms that seem to shape the prevalent political positions pertaining to intervention in contemporary art production. McDowell (1998) shows us why embracing the particularity of judging implies important socio-political consequences, when he informs us that judging or

> making up our minds what to think, is something for which we are, in principle, responsible something we freely do, as opposed to something that merely happens in our lives. Of course, a belief is not always, or even typically, a result of our exercising this freedom to decide what to think. But even when a belief is not freely adopted, it is an actualization of capacities of a kind, the conceptual, whose paradigmatic mode of actualization is in the exercise of freedom that judging is. This freedom, exemplified in responsible acts of judging, is essentially a matter of being answerable to criticism in the light of rationally relevant considerations. So the realm of freedom, at least the realm of the freedom of judging, can be identified with the space of reasons.

This emphasis on judging in the synoptic model of the real is important on a number of accounts, not least of which is how it fares in comparison to Deleuze's model. Jelača (2014) characterizes Deleuze's philosophical adventure as one in which the philosopher tries "to escape the norm-bound world of judgment and representation". For Jelača, the Deleuzian search for a transcendental empiricism or 'an other knowledge' is exactly this attempt to escape judging and representation. Nevertheless, Deleuze and Sellars share some similarities, most importantly their refusal of Platonism. But it is in how these two exceptional philosophers respond to the challenge that Deleuze poses, in the question "what is meant by the overthrow of Platonism?" (Deleuze, 1983), that we can also differentiate between them and evaluate our position regarding models of 'the real'. In Platonist realist-idealist ontology there are universal abstract entities that constitute the only reality there is. These abstract entities are instantiated by particulars, ephemeral

perceptible things. For the Platonist, spatiotemporal objects – in a world of appearances and empirically present phenomena – participate in instantiating the universal abstractions in any particular perceptible instance. In other words, the particular, in one way or another, carries the universal. Deleuze writes that abolishing Platonism seems to mean scrapping "the world of essences and the world of appearances" (Deleuze, 1983). Platonism, Deleuze informs us, labours "for the triumph of icons over simulacra".

For Deleuze, the Platonic model of the real is Sameness, which he identifies as the sense in which Plato "speaks of Justice as nothing other than justness": justice then is an iconic copy defined by its relation to a ground or model called justness. But for Deleuze, Plato's system is unbearably hierarchical and confined to representation and the distinctions between essences and appearances, models and copies. These distinctions only operate in the world of representation; Deleuze's ambition is "the subversion of this world". And for this subversion of representation, he enlists the concept of 'simulacrum'. He seems to be hinting that the Platonic tradition cannot account for the simulacra that populate contemporary life. The simulacrum is perhaps an alternate naming for the 'real abstraction' unleashed through social exchange in advanced capitalism. The simulacrum, Deleuze informs us, is not a "degraded copy", on the contrary, it contains "a positive power which negates both original and copy" as well as "model and reproduction". What is distinctive about simulacra is the loss of these distinctions. So Deleuze's stated mission of overturning Platonism can only be achieved by elevating the simulacra, "to assert their rights over icons or

copies". Although the simulacrum might not be identical to real abstraction, it does have the same classic accelerationist ring to it, since due to the operation of the simulacrum

> [s]election is no longer possible. The nonhierarchical work is a condensation of coexistences, a simultaneity of events. It is the triumph of the false claimant […] (who) cannot be said to be false in relation to a supposedly true model, any more than simulation can be termed an appearance, an illusion. Simulation is the phantasm itself, that is, the effect of the operations of the simulacrum as machinery, Dionysiac machine. It is a matter of the false as power, Pseudos, in Nietzsche's sense when he speaks of the highest power of the false. […] The simulacrum, in rising to the surface, causes the Same and the Like, the model and the copy, to fall under the power of the false (phantasm). It renders the notion of hierarchy impossible in relation to the idea of the order of participation, the fixity of distribution, and the determination of value.[…] Far from being a new foundation, it swallows up all foundations, it assures a universal collapse, but as a positive and joyous event … (Deleuze, 1983)

Here again is the positive joyous event of desiring-production, the desiring machine which this time takes the name simulacrum and retains its complex love-hate relationship with Lacan in the form of *jouissance* revitalized, but without the parochial constitutive lack. Most importantly, however, although Deleuze negates Platonic dualities and establishes an anti-foundationalist structure, he retains the platonic distinction between the *sensible* (that which can only be sensed by the senses) and the *intelligible* (that which can only be understood by the intellect). There is one univocal world, and these apparently markedly different realms of the sensible and the intelligible are within it and within one duration but are to be understood as two aspects of this same world: below sit the intelligible, universal, virtual, transcendental ideas and above surface the sensible, singular, actual, and empirical individuals . And since overthrowing Platonism for Deleuze means subverting the world of representation, he calls for the necessity of "an other knowledge", which, as Jelača (2014) informs us, is a type of knowledge

> supposedly capable of apprehending directly the intelligible Ideas, but also of creating the concepts identical to the sensible individuals. These two dimensions of knowledge, the intuitive and the creative, are not to be conceived as distinct, but as […] two aspects of a single principle governing thought. Once again, Deleuze's account of thought follows from his account of being. In line with his affirmation of the univocity of being, Deleuze believes that if we are to affirm the being of thought, being has to be said of thought in the same sense in which it is said of everything else

Because of this stance on direct apprehension of the sensible coupled with the privileging of the creation of concepts equal to the sensible empirical realm of experience. And since in Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical framework in which science and artistic expression are both part of an 'expressive project' in one ontological plane. The Deleuzoguattarian ideal of intervention falls into the Sellarsian myth of the given: it does this in its attempt to avoid Platonism. Deleuze and Guattari focused on developing concepts (through images, performative gestures, speech, sound etc.) which would act as simulacra to be sensed by the viewer. As Deleuze states, this is to "apprehend directly in the sensible that which can only be sensed", this is because according to (Deleuze, 1994: 56–57) works of art leave "the domain of representation in order to become 'experience', transcendental empiricism or science of the sensible". If we follow the Sellarsian definition of what it is to know, such art as 'a science of the sensible' or a becoming-experience does not correspond with a definition of knowledge, unless one is prepared to defend the problematic claim that direct 'apprehension of the sensible' is knowledge. It is perhaps awareness, and one could definitely argue that awareness is a type of knowing. But if it is, it still misses what is distinctive about knowledge from Sellars' point of view, which is that everything is necessarily open to explanation and epistemic enquiry through postulation

and that this is what propels knowledge forward. We will return to how Sellars' deals with the question of abstract entities and Platonism later.

For now, the question we are concerned with is how an art – that in one way or another generates images, assumes spatial relationships in institutional/public spheres, runs through time (time-based media), produces sounds, develops texts, and articulates itself through forms of performativity – might contribute to the problem of "articulating action and knowledge in the perspective of totality" through these very same resources. And from what we have come to unravel, 'the impossible real' and 'the artificial real' refuse thinking in relation to totality, and articulate action with the ends of radicalizing democracy or realizing an Other-cide dependent on the senses and tied to a creative desiring-production.

For the sake of our argument regarding models of the real and concepts of intervention, a major point of contestation concerning the Deleuzian model is that it suggests that knowledge can be achieved through direct apprehension in the sensible. The result of fully embracing or adopting the entire premise of Deleuzian science or 'strange reason' is that it automatically cancels out the possibility of a whole range of processes pertaining to the practice of judging – making our minds up as the realm of freedom. The implications of this are that the art project produced in full compliance with this model cannot carry the motto of a realist politics, which is to say it cannot accept antagonism as a strong characteristic of thinking and doing politics. This is because it favours direct apprehension over discourse, and attempts to bypass what we might call the image of discourse – any image representing forms of

interaction that take reasoning to be central to knowledge acquisition – in its transcendental empiricism which is supposed to give the viewer direct access to knowledge. From what has been put forth so far, an outline for a hypothetical scientifically-realist political image can be drawn. That is to say we are in a position to begin articulating what can be called the *postagonistic image*.

What kind of general profile or specifications should such an image have? It can be claimed that this image or artwork should be realist in two converging ways. This twofold realism means that it should be capable of representing a realist understanding of politics in the sense of holding that antagonism is part and parcel of political narratives in the world, i.e. part of the manifest image and common sense discourse. Second, it should be realist in the sense of being able to account for a mind-independent world, i.e. the scientific image of humans in the world. Importantly, the suggestion is that antagonism in such a twofold image should not be sublimated with the aim of its modification towards the goal of radical democracy. This is because such modification implies – in Mouffe's own vocabulary – antagonism's 'taming' in accordance with her vision of an agonistic pluralism, thus making such domesticated antagonisms the pre-constituted rule for a pluralist politics. As an alternative to this, antagonisms can be put to work in an image of intersubjectivity heading toward a horizon of knowledge.

Thinking in terms of *postagonistics* implies that antagonism springing from the pluralism of political world views can be capitalized on as a component of discursive engagement in a theatrics of reasoning. Such theatrics of

reasoning would present an alternative to, on the one hand, the intuitive sensing of what is presumed beyond discourse and reason in the Deleuzoguattarian model for tapping into difference and the plural, and on the other, the overemphasis on identities tethered to a meta-individualist understanding of the socio-political collective subject. Such an image would highlight that antagonism is not outside the space of reasons but takes its course within it, as the idea that pluralism and the antagonism it ensues are intertwined with the practice of judging. This postagonistic realist image would propose a picture of interactive rationalizations as reason-giving descriptions which have to do with providing justification rather than identifying causation (Chodat, 2008: 42). As Chodat observes, the latter sense of reason-giving as identifying causes is a problem we often encounter in Freudian accounts of the subject, resulting in the blurring of reasons and causes. Adhering to the Sellarsian synoptic model enables the image to pursue reasoning as the practice of justification and judging while accounting for the causal realm through the scientific.

With this, the postagonistic image joins the contemporary conversation on agency indicating that its inclination is to define an “agent” as the “sort of entity whose behaviour is efficiently and effectively captured in such reason-giving terms” (Chodat 2008: 42). This amounts to drawing the McDowellian line between reason-giving placings and causal characteristics, situating the former above the line and the latter below it, which is to say with Chodat (2008: 42) that unlike “hydrogen molecules, tectonic plates, and planetary bodies” an agent cannot effectively and efficiently be described by

nomological[48] theories, since such entities *move* while the agent *acts*. Essentially, however, the agent's acts or actions are not voluntaristic: this is a major if not the major distinction between the postagonistic image of the political agent subscribing to the synoptic real and its counterpart, the agonistic hegemonic agent.

This distinction calls for some clarification. Voluntarism is a particular understanding of freedom. Its perspective is that freedom is the hallmark of an act of will practised by 'a self'. Consequently, for the voluntarist, freedom cannot be associated with a self nor an act "determined by antecedent causes" (Brassier, 2013). According to voluntarism, the act arises out of nothing or 'ex nihilo', meaning that it cannot be determined in any sort of way by its material substrates, i.e. its natural physical processes. Freedom in the form of voluntarism is the product of the will turned into a supernatural force powered by a sovereign self. As a result, freedom is conceptualized as the quality of determinacy forged by a self. In this way, freedom is problematically metaphysical because it conjures up, even if it refuses to mention them, entities or forces that either invoke vitalism or refute the materialistic causes of being in the world (Brassier, 2013).

Mouffe and Laclau's version of action based on the concept of hegemony, as exemplified in the more compact Mouffian theory of agonism adopts an "absolute voluntarism" (Rustin, 1988). Following Rustin, hegemony which can be said to be the 'mother theory' for agonism contributed a paradigmatic shift in theory. This is because it altered the grounds for analysis moving from

[48] Relating to or expressing basic physical laws

complex structures in which ideology is but a moment, to discourses that paint ideology as everything and in which the idea of an external reality to ideology constraining social consciousness is completely denounced. Mouffe and Laclau's abomination of the idea of scientific knowledge as a grounding to political practice, even if this grounding is partial, leads them to refute "the theory that mental phenomena are constrained within limits set by the material world" (Rustin, 1988).

The distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices is also rejected in their vast attempt to overhaul theory and position it within the anti-foundationalist camp. But this overhaul leads them to assert that, since any external reality is only accessible through its construction in discourse, this means that their work is to attend to forms of thought that articulate social practice and step away from attempts to ground politics in analyses of objective conditions. Another way of looking at the Mouffe-Laclau argument for a radical democracy based on hegemony and agonism is that the manifest image,and therefore, the image and representation of the political, is the only thing in politics that counts. But the consequence is that what is supposed to be the space of reasons, with its emphasis on judgement and justification, is understood and represented as a wholly voluntaristic space of freedom. This voluntaristic image of freedom seems more in sync with the neoliberalism that Mouffe claims agonistics plays a part in curbing than it is with any notion of collective subjectivity. As Rustin (1988) argues, a political theory concerned with the latter is "essentially neither a determinism nor voluntarism". Rather, it is premised on the dual search for knowledge of the

“structures which constrain action and a commitment to modes of action which can bring freedom”’

In Rustin’s view, Laclau and Mouffe are in effect claiming that political action – generated through a voluntaristic understanding of freedom – eclipses political theory: they are rejecting the very idea of testable explanatory theory in its entirety. The claim is that since theories cannot account for the abundance of potential meaning and viewpoints in the world, then such theories can only be misrepresentations and ideologically driven bids to force the closure of what is actually the ever indeterminate situation of politics. And since there is no independent external reality by which such theories can be evaluated on a rational basis, then ‘reasoning’ ought to be taken out of the picture, thus demanding that democracy be structured on incessant contestation alone. Indeed, politics may largely be driven by irrational commitments and ideals, but to insist that since this is the case the entire political edifice ought to be built on institutionalizing such commitments and ideals alone, and furthermore, that such institutionalization is the only way to better democracy, is to already envision and predict that members of the species will never be capable of understanding their ‘selves’ as anything other than voluntarist agents.

The discussion about acts and how to properly classify them while taking science seriously, in addition to questions regarding how to rationalize the notion of agency, can broadly be thought of as a response to two connected problems. First, modern advances in neuroscience have made it clear that the manifest understanding of agency as emerging from a ‘will’ bound to a

‘self’ is erroneous. If ‘selves’ as testable entities are not necessary for scientific research, then how can an act be a voluntaristic eruption due to a ‘will’ connected to a sovereign self? This point is clarified by Metzinger (2011) in the following:

> [T]he process of generating and testing new hypotheses in empirical research programs investigating self-consciousness, agency, social cognition, etc. simply does not require the assumption of a theoretical entity by the name of 'the self'. Science can achieve its predictive success, describe and explain the available data, and integrate them into a larger evolutionary or neuroscientific framework without assuming that there is a mysterious thing called 'the self ' which is represented in self-consciousness, initiates actions, or engages in social cognition related to other mysterious individuals called 'selves'.

The second problem we face regarding agents and their acts concerns the capacity to intervene into the capitalist relation. Broadly speaking, within the Marxist trajectory, it is a fairly established idea that exchange value has hierarchy over use value (Kauffman, 2007). This, in combination with the transpiring real subsumption of labour, has resulted in philosophical concepts of intervention which – in order to subvert, rupture, or gain traction on these processes – require positing a force or will-like entity that in one way or another breaks through the conditions construed by the capitalist relation. This occurs despite acknowledging as the discussion group Endnotes have notably done that what “we are is, at the deepest level, constituted by this relation, and it is a rupture with the reproduction of what we are that will necessarily form the horizon of our struggles” (Endnotes, cited in Brassier, 2014). But as Brassier points out in the same essay, despite the accuracy of this position, the problem then becomes how to establish this “rupture with the reproduction of what we are’”or more accurately from where will this rupture emerge if we are at our deepest levels shaped by the capitalist

relation? Either there is some ‘inner part’ of the collective subject in this depiction which is untouched by the relation, or the theoretically strong argument about breaking with the reproduction of what we are as a necessity for ending the relation has the unwanted side-effect of the subject’s suicide, which Brassier appropriately labelled “the paradox of self-abolition”. The problem thus posed leads to two possible solutions, either self-abolition in the name of capital or the lesser of two evils, voluntarism, which scientifically speaking has no basis. Brassier’s analysis of Endnotes’ position is that after recognizing that they were heading toward the paradox of self-abolition, the writers posit a voluntarist-like force to escape it.

Confronted with the question of how to develop a materialist-realist articulation of agents and their acts in light of continuing neuroscientific progress on the one hand, and the problem of thinking intervention while recognizing the deep entanglement of the contemporary subject and the capitalist relation on the other, Brassier looks to Sellars for insight on what an act is. He investigates the conditions of the possibility for an act to propel itself forward without the requirement of voluntarism. And this leads him to adopt the Sellarsian distinction between two different orders of behaviour which come together in the ability to act. According to Brassier (2013), the ability to act is composed of:

a) *pattern-governed behaviour* which is prevalent in the “biological and physical realms”. There is no intentionality involved at this level since it is recognized that physical systems “realize complex patterns without intending them”. Patterns are propelled by bit-parts, that is to say by the components that constitute such a physical system, but the constitution process itself is

activated by something with no mind to speak of, evident for example when we look at the inner structure of mitochondria;

b) *rule-conforming behaviour* which is associated with the acquirement of language and thus the capacity to form rules for and infer rules from language(s), hence the faculty of reason or rationality.

As Brassier (2013) explains, what we understand to be an 'act' is the result of the superimposition of rule-conforming behaviour onto pattern-governed behaviour. The act thus defined is then the product of the complex layering of these two levels of behaviour, but cannot be reduced to either the layer governed by patterns or the one related to rules. But besides the rejection of voluntarism, what is Brassier's motivation for bringing into the sphere of art, politics, and the economical this Sellarsian perspective on what constitutes an agential act? We are informed in another text that it is because he wants to

> maintain the exceptional status of reason and insist on the "unnatural" nature of our rational capacity without lapsing into a metaphysical dualism of the mental and the physical […] but also without attributing to it (rational capacity) a supernatural origin. This distinction between rule-obeying activity and pattern-governed behaviour disqualifies the claim that markets *think* or dynamic systems *reason*. Rule-following is pattern-governed but not every pattern incarnates a rule. (Brassier, 2015, emphasis in original)

So if we follow Sellars' synoptic view along a similar vein to Brassier, we reach a position in which the 'unnatural' nature of the rational capacity is espoused because science is rational on account of its capacity to postulate imperceptible entities in order to explain perceptible things. And while pattern-governed behaviour (physical/biologically constituted behaviour) enables this unnatural capacity, it is the social dimension of rule-following behaviour that propels reason and enables it to supervene on the pattern-

governed behaviour. There is a hazy resemblance between Sohn-Rethel's vision of intellectual labour – having evolved through the route of socially constituted exchange abstraction, his 'second nature' – and 'the unnatural' nature of rational capacity that Brassier posits through Sellars. Although a full-fledged comparative analysis is likely to be unrewarding because of the gulf separating the philosophical trajectories of Sellars and Sohn-Rethel, we can at least point out an important distinction. There is a complete absence of an economic or an economic exchange factor in the Sellarsian route, and as we might recall, the weight that Sohn-Rethel puts on the exchange abstraction's hierarchy over forms of labour leads to the idea that the content of thought, philosophical and/or scientific, is shaped by this exchange. This articulation mirrors what the unconscious is in various post-1968 continental philosophies, the exchange abstraction is the thought previous to and external to the thought, the already existent set of desires which are constituted through flows of exchange. The important misstep in Sohn-Rethel's formulation is to think that manual labour is somehow the natural form of labour, while imagining that cutting out the exchange abstraction leads to a science and an intellectual labour that are in sync with nature and thus do not stimulate alienation.

If this were the case, as has been already pointed out, socialist projects that suppressed the exchange abstraction and were dependent on mass industrialised forms of manual labour would meet the requirement of a non-alienated mode of community led by a brand of scientific thought which is not related to the exchange abstraction or the commodity form. Instead, alienation registers as an unavoidable dimension of such projects. With

Sellars, and even more so with Brassier, we get the idea that science/intellectual labour and alienation are not only necessary bedfellows, but that intellectual labour is driven by alienation. And this runs in the opposite direction of *Realabstraktion*-based philosophies, because in the paradigm of the synoptic real it is conscious agents who, in the quest for knowledge and perhaps their desire to solve the problem of alienation, necessarily posit alienating assertions to be corrected in a reason-giving community. Thus to sift and separate abstraction and alienation seems a task that philosophy – and art in the broadest sense of manufacturing and mediating images – ought to rethink along the lines of Sellars' (1975) famous suggestion that the ideal aim of intellectual labour, which is to say philosophizing, is to

> become reflectively at home in the full complexity of the multi-dimensional conceptual system in terms of which we suffer, think, and act. […] '[R]eflectively', because there is a sense in which, by the sheer fact of leading an unexamined, but conventionally satisfying life, we are at home in this complexity. It is not until we have eaten the apple with which the serpent philosopher tempts us, that we begin to stumble on the familiar and to feel that haunting sense of alienation which is treasured by each new generation as its unique possession. This alienation, this gap between oneself and one's world, can only be resolved by eating the apple to the core; for after the first bite there is no return to innocence. There are many anodynes, but only one cure. We may philosophize well or ill, but we must philosophize.

In connection with this, we can understand why for Brassier (2014b) intervention must not be understood in relation to circular definitions of real abstraction, in which the reality of abstraction is explained in terms of its tendency to be casually effective while at the same time interpreting causal efficacy as anything capable of making a difference in reality. For Brassier – because of how alienation is intertwined with knowledge – this is clearly a deficient 'all too easy' way of making sense of intervention in relation to the

reality of abstraction. Once we become of aware of this intertwinement, there is nothing we can bring up as decisive proof of the separability of the concrete and the abstract. And for Brassier, this was the main point behind the myth of the given that Sellars argued against. Once one is able to recognize that there is no (epistemological) given, one can begin to understand that ‘nothing is either abstract or concrete in itself’.

Nothing in immediate experience helps us to make a distinction between the abstract and the concrete, since what appears immediately concrete is constituted through forms of abstraction. What this amounts to is an understanding of alienation as the gap between oneself and one's world, a “constitutive fissure of self-estrangement” whereby sensations (below the line characteristics) are conditioned by conception (above the line placings in the space of reasons). If we take this to be true, then alienation is an elemental dimension of rational agency and thus a necessary condition of freedom. To be rational, says Brassier (2014b), is to “have always already been expelled from the state of nature”. And for Brassier, this is the point at which the Sellarsian perspective intersects with the Promethean facet of the Marxian legacy in that this sense of alienation can be “understood as an enabling condition for the achievement of collective self-mastery and refashioning”.

This is especially relevant since the likelihood of rewinding the story of a humanly forged pact between the concrete and the abstract and returning to some kind of “originary state of organic immediacy” is non-existent. So what we can mainly take from this is that the interventionist outlook espoused by Brassier and, before him, by Sellars, is distinguishable from the

interventionist ideals we previously discussed because it recognizes that alienation is enabling of knowledge, and thus the idea that intervention is some kind of insertion which would interrupt or disrupt a political or social context is far from its conception. While the Mouffe-Laclau ideal is to intervene in the gap between universals and particulars, the gap in this model is between oneself and the world, between the rule-conforming behaviours and the pattern-governed behaviours that together constitute an act. This outlook is also at odds with the fabulatory abstractions or transcendental empiricisms of Deleuze and Guattari because of their emphasis on real abstraction as a circular trajectory and the significance of the sensible as some sort of knowledge in their paradigm.

The concern for Brassier is double-sided: how to avoid the various shades of voluntarism which seep into much contemporary theory when thinking intervention while at the same time thinking how to squelch the tendency to construct capitalism as an autonomous self-moving machine that has a mind of its own, independent of “the little human subjects who compose it”. What is specific about various notions concerned with the reality of abstraction across history is that they treat the money-form – whatever shape, material, or digital manifestation it may have – as a ‘nominal’ element, an outward expression or ‘name’ for a latent abstract labour (Bellofiore, 2004: 193). What Sohn-Rethel in effect does, is make the state or quality of being nominal the precedent and prime characteristic of the capitalist relation. This characteristic of nominality is the main overlap between Sellars and Sohn-Rethel. Sellars’ nominalism – which will be touched upon below – has the advantage of

having rational agents behind its abstractions, as it were, rather than Sohn-Rethels ‘social acts of exchange’ without a consciousness.

Furthermore, Brassier (2014) argues for a Sellarsian reading of Kantian spontaneity, whereby an act is constituted through the embrace of “an intersubjectively instituted rule” as opposed to erupting undetermined and out of nothing. Freedom accordingly is not simply read as the absence of external factors determining the subject; on the contrary, it is understood as the subject’s rational self-determination by taking up a universally applicable rule. Such rule-related behaviour is the hallmark of Sellarsian nominalism, which Brassier likes to deploy as “a weapon of materialist analysis that demystifies the idealist hypostatisation of abstraction”. Brassier’s close reading of Sellars’ particular articulation of the faculty of reason, with its rich and complex naturalist, normative, nominalist, functionalist and scientifically realist dimensionality, is accentuated and augmented by his continental nihilism. The nihilistic aura of Brassier’s writing brings out what is already there in Sellars’ perspective – more understated than latent – about rationality as a concoction of alienation and knowledge. And in the process the Sellarsian perspective is transformed into a new kind of post-Freudian death drive, a conscious rationalistic one.

This connection can be made by returning to Brassier’s (2003) statement that philosophical thought, which is to say, intellectual labour “is a psychic disturbance brought about by the traumatic trace of the inorganic, a symptomatic manifestation of the death-drive”. This statement perhaps represents a different period in Brassier’s thought, but it captures its nihilistic

dimension, helping us pinpoint the type of 'voice' he adds to the Sellarsian outlook. The metaphorical image here is of thought as a disturbance, some sort of menacing intellectual hunger to figure out how things hang together[49] impelled by what may be inorganic components inseparable to the human agent. These seemingly inorganic elements are returned to, time and time again, by rational capacity, like a recurring dream unremittingly returning to the traumatic experience that had triggered it until the dreamer's death.

This image of thought driving its agent to death reminds us of the curious case of the *Camponotini ants* that are transformed into slave-ants by the fungus *Ophiocordyceps unilateralis*, turning them into unilateral agents and driving them to act in a precise and organized fashion, eventually making them take their own lives. But although the human agent might be subject to such deep bleakness of nature, the said community of ants cannot reason, which is to say, they cannot develop concepts to explain the hijacking of their community members' very being and decide whether or not something ought to be done about it. To be able to do so, an agent would need to be able to step back from "the fact that it is inclined in a certain direction by the circumstance" (McDowell, 2004). The resulting act, with its inorganic reasoning aligned with the scientific below the line image, embodies an element of freedom. For the human agent, reasoning as a rationalistic death drive is the insistence on further conscious disturbance of the casual realm – which is not in the space of reasons – through conceptual postulations that

[49] According to Sellars, the "aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term" (1963: 1).

stand in need for justification and judging in a community. This sketches out the somewhat darker side of intellectual labour that we can detect in Brassier, a side he picks up on in Sellars and emphasises as part of the mechanics of rationality. Hence, to be a rational agent is to understand the anomaly of reason, its inorganicness, the ineliminability of its negative drive, and to abstain from branding things such as capital, markets, and dynamic systems with the seals of thought and reason, because

> not everything thinks: rationality is a metaphysical exception. But it's the exception *constituted by* the rule that discriminates the exception from the rule. So the 'farther horizon' toward which rationality propels itself is one that reason must construct: it is not pre-given and it is fundamentally incompatible with the brand of metaphysical eschatology for which the ultimate horizon is the reconciliation of mind and matter or reason and nature. Reason is inconsolable and non-conciliatory. Rational inquiry is propelled by cognitive interests that are generated anew by breaking with past modes of understanding. In this regard, reason is the 'restlessness of the negative.' It progresses by refusing the lure of being reconciled to the irreconcilable. The farther horizon toward which it progresses is the universal understood as the determinate negation of parochial, context-specific modes of understanding. (Brassier, 2015, emphasis in original)

Let us pit an image of politics based on this restless negative drive of reasoning against the image of a voluntaristic politics that agonism claims is the only feasible politically oriented realism. The postagonistic image is an attempt to reimagine this picture of politics by articulating a possible framework, a network of attitudes and ideas through which an anti-foundationalist approach to politics and its representation in art practice does not collapse into such voluntarism. Postagonistics navigates the field of politics, its uncertainties and its conflicts by following the synoptic model of the real. It simultaneously activates the discursive scientific image as the natural space of causes, and places politics and its discourse in the manifest normative space of reasons.

Postagonistics is anti-foundationalist despite holding that science can have access to the real because, according to Sellars (1997:75), science "is rational, not because it has a foundation but because it is a self-correcting enterprise which can put any claim in jeopardy, though not all at once". This is the strenuous task of science, through its postulational strategy in which it postulates imperceptible entities in order to explain perceptible things, it challenges common sense perceptions forcing them to reposition and correct. The power of the postagonistic image derives from its asking the question: what if pluralism is recast as a 'democratic design' (to use Mouffe's phrasing) that is anti-foundationalist, yet is rational in the very same sense Sellars' claims that science is? This question implies a pluralism which is rational because it is a self-correcting enterprise which can put any claim in jeopardy, though not all at once.

Jeopardy is not a word which we come across often in contemporary theory. Its root is the old French *jeu parti*, meaning a divided game and used when, in games such as chess, opponents arrive at a crossroads situation in which the game could go either way and both opponents have potentially equal chances of winning or losing. More accurately, it is a state of absolute uncertainty that the opponents ride out to reach the conclusion of the game. Hence, what Sellars seems to be saying, is that a rational endeavour, as science is, is rational on account of its capacity to follow through its reasoning (postulation of imperceptibles to explain the perceptible) to the end, irrelevant of whether the outcome sits positively or negatively with the common-sense understanding we have of ourselves in the world. This is how

a science evolves, i.e. corrects itself and its knowledge of the world. The last part of the sentence, “though not all at once”, alludes to the fact that such an enterprise is indebted to the manifest realm through its dependency on language, constituting the building blocks of its methodology, but as Brassier (2007: 7, emphasis in original) explains:

> [T]he fact that the manifest image enjoys a *methodological* primacy as the originary framework from which the scientific image developed in no way legitimates attempts to ascribe a substantive primacy to it. In other words, even if the scientific image remains methodologically dependent upon the manifest image, this in no way undermines its substantive autonomy vis-à-vis the latter.

I want to use the close reading of this sentence by Sellars as the basis for proposing a *working concept*. I follow Mieke Bal (2002: 99) in understanding a working concept as both a concept to work with and a concept that works to identify emergent or possible patterns: it is neither fixed and thoroughly theorized nor as slippery in definition as singular words may be.

The working concept I want to deploy is that of an *inaesthetics of jeopardy*. To bring this concept across, let us describe it in relation to a hypothetical artwork which can be sketched out as some sort of epic narrative. First, the term inaesthetics is due to Badiou who coins the term to describe an art which denies “oneself the temptation to rely on the reflection/object relation” (Badiou, 2005: xxxiii). This particular idea of inaesthetics bears some resemblance to Brassier’s insistence on bringing together theoretical representation and social action to the point of spontaneity, whereby thinking (philosophical thought) matches up with acting epistemologically, ontologically, and politically, rather than matching up with contemplation as a form philosophical reflection. We can borrow Badiou’s term ‘inaesthetics’ to

express this idea under one word, because to achieve this spontaneity one has to imagine an art that is not dictated by the age-old relation between objects and their supposed capacity to instigate reflective thinking. But this does not mean that making art objects, or as I would prefer to call them - images, should be abandoned for other forms of 'art'.

Such an inaesthetical approach may mean that, for example, in a video (installed in an exhibition space), the dependency of art on the reflection/object relation is replaced by the idea of constructing a model world[50] with functioning model agents. Furthermore, this model world with its model agents, its semiotics, and its intersubjective reasoning would follow the Sellarsian stereoscopic framework; the result would be one of representing or working toward a spontaneity in which the manifest aligns with the scientific. This entails that the work would be analogous to the concept of "critique understood as an institution in itself". Therefore, even if it is an art object, it barely lends itself to contemplation, since it cannot be accessed in the way Deleuze and Guattari describe accessing an artwork through intuitions or "apprehensions in the sensible" in order to extract precepts. Rather, it becomes a dynamic *site for reasoning* in its own right, a site in which intersubjective reasoning between model agents in a model world takes place and evolves. Taking this a step further, what is distinctive about the agents' reasoning process is the application of the idea that rationality entails some form of jeopardy, that reasoning is rational because it is able to

[50] To clarify, the sense in which I am using the word model is neither 'replica' nor 'utopian' but 'reality simulation', as for example the manner in which video games and the characters within them are simulated. I am certainly not implying, however, that such a model is necessarily conceptually, aesthetically, or visually related to video games, but only formally in terms of capturing the general character of what it means to be a simulated model reality.

jeopardize our common sense understanding of the world and not because it has any pre-linguistic, pre-discursive, or pre-cognitive foundations.

With this, we are able to think past the unshruggable image of parliament and construct an image that is determinate. The type of discourse associated with the sublimation of passions and antagonisms is replaced with an intense depiction of a space of reasoning in which a plethora of different model subjects are determinate and are asking for and giving reasons, justifying their positions and judging. These theatrics of reasoning are unfolding and the models are putting into jeopardy the topic of discourse, whatever it may be. Because of this, as viewers we are not given the moment of indeterminacy that Malik (2015) has articulated as the dominant idea that art should “leave space” for the viewer to complete the work, which as he points out makes contemporary practice a “correlation”. That is to say, not only does contemporary art, according to Malik, not resist the temptation of the reflection/object relation, but it structures its whole economy and rationale around it. Importantly, such a model of inaesthetics also does not shut the viewer out in its attempt to adhere to a scientific realism, because the inaesthetics of jeopardy follow the Sellarsian schema through which we are able to reach an active image of politics in practice that is politically (manifestly) real and scientifically real at the same time.

So by combining the inaesthetical approach of developing representations of model worlds as sites of reasoning and the Sellarsian principle of linking reason to jeopardy, with its specific nuance coming to us from the functional characteristics of games, we reach the working concept or framework of an

inaesthetics of jeopardy. Through such an inaesthetical framework, the postagonistic image is capable of representing the regional or local which plays a constitutive role in the antagonistic passionate narratives humans use on a daily basis to develop their politics – in other words, it ticks the box of a political realism based on pluralism. This is because the postagonist realizes – to put it in Brassier's words – that science "does not need to deny the significance of our evident psychological *need* for narrative". However, what science does do is demote this manifest narrative dimension of the human "from its previously foundational metaphysical status to that of an epistemically derivative 'useful fiction'"[51] (Brassier, cited in Wales, 2012).

As strange as it may first appear, this demotion leads to the reinforcement of the dialectic. Because the agents in the postagonist image are bi-dimensional models who are cognizant of their bi-dimensional status (as manifest and scientific images) in a bi-dimensional model world, the agents gain the affordance of 'epistemic responsibility', the capacity to give reasons, ask for reasons, to judge, to justify, and revise their beliefs in light of new evidence. They are freed from the search for meaning in a world science tells us is meaningless and has no reason to be thus and so. It is because of this that

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[51] Here, it might be useful to bring up Macherey's articulation of what fiction is and is not: "Fiction, not to be confused with illusion, is the substitute for, if not the equivalent of, knowledge. […] Fiction is determinate illusion, and the essence of the literary text is to establish these determinations. […] Fiction is not *truer* than illusion; indeed, it cannot usurp the place of knowledge. But it can set illusion in motion by penetrating its insufficiency, by transforming our relationship to ideology. (By its nature, ideology is always *elsewhere,* it can never be located; consequently, it cannot be totally subdued, diminished or dispelled.) Fiction deceives us in so far as it is feigned; but this is not a primary act of deception, because it is aimed at one even more profound, exposing it, helping to release us from it" (Macherey, 1978: 64). Our hypothetical example for a postagonistic image is a video which features model agents reasoning with each other: this means that the image is also text-based and that the text is pivotal in working towards an eventual horizon of synthesis between the fictional-manifest and real-scientific images.

this simulated model community can embark on an interactive search for truth. It is because the scientific realm of the casual has been reactivated and is not always already reconciled or muted. And because this communal space of reasons is not autonomous from the scientific realm of causes, the agents are challenged to give conceptual form to what arrives into their field of existence without reason. Instead of counting on intuitions or ‘apprehensions in the sensible’ to give them access to what supposedly can only be sensed, this model community follows McDowell’s advice on intuitions when he writes:

> Intuitions ought to be points at which what Sellars has called "the logical space of reasons" is impinged on by what lies outside it. What is preconceptually given has to be outside the space of reasons, since it is not in conceptual shape and therefore not capable of standing in rational relations to anything. (McDowell, 1998 b: 280)

The model community uses this *methodology of impingement* from the outside relentlessly as the ultimate resolution against the sublime, which is always around the corner. It is the *inaesthetics of jeopardy* against the *aesthetics of the sublime*: the more the community’s reasoning space is impinged upon, the more they know, and the more they know, the more they put their common sense image into jeopardy, and the more this manifest image is in a state of jeopardy, the more it can be made to fuse with the scientific image to reach the condition of spontaneity combining thinking and acting called the stereoscopic view, which is to say the synoptic real. Although the aesthetics of the sublime and the inaesthetics of jeopardy are both hinged on persistent negation, the sublime is in pursuit of radical openness as an end in itself, while the jeopardying approach is in pursuit of a distant horizon that it has committed itself to construct. Openness for

jeopardying is a trait, a characteristic due to it being structured on reasoning and the negation that emanates from that practice, it is not an end. The sublime wants to present the unrepresentable in a presentation, to stop it for a moment, to ask *is it happening?* It is as if images (in the wide and varying formations they come in, such as: installations, art objects, videos, performances, fictional companies etc.) in art's representational economy gravitate to the sublime when thinking all things capital.

It is no news that the power of capital is sat on the perch that nature used to inhabit when it comes to sublime aesthetics: capitalism as the self-moving and ungovernable Acéphale etc. Hard-won research into complex fields such as derivatives markets, financialization, algorithms and other financial technologies turns into mere filler in the practice of image-making if the sublime tendency is not resisted and counter-models are not developed. Sublime images, especially those produced after the 2007-2008 financial crash, seem steadfast in suggesting that our "greatest endeavours (to conquer space[52]) are minuscule compared to the tempest caused by out of control financial products" (Conio, 2015). The unrepresentable in such presentations is what we are unable to fully cognize about contemporary capital, its transformational capacities and its sheer scale. It shows up as a bittersweet and general differend, one made softer by the technological progress that capitalism has made possible.

Rather than accede to this tendency, the inaesthetics of jeopardy approach steers clear from such unrepresentable territories by adopting the

[52] As in outer space, planets, galaxies etc.

methodology of impingement, the model agents labour to put everything into conceptual shape in their attempt to construct a shared horizon. What is important to foreground about the inaesthetics of jeopardy is that 'the real' is always in an *eventual science* that can only be reached when the current discrepancy between manifest and scientific images is collapsed through reasoning. The work of jeopardying is that of establishing the image of a kind of *constructive writing with others* or a constructive 'reasoning-out-loud' with others. It is in establishing this image and putting it into circulation within art's representational economy that we can begin to imagine a world without a gap between our manifest and scientific images, a gap that is the root of the sublime and its aesthetics. We can draw a line of comparison between Sohn-Rethel's science-to-come, which longed for a science without the exchange abstraction based on direct production to reach a state of nature without alienation, and the image of Sellars' eventual science, which can only be reached through collectively putting things into jeopardy and thus accepting that alienation is intrinsic to knowledge. If this gap between manifest and scientific images is to be closed and a state of spontaneity between thinking and acting reached, alienation ought to be understood as a factor already integrated into the processes of knowledge and not simply a side effect of capitalist expansion.

This is why in composing the image of postagonistics we are not *reconciling* the manifest image – the image which includes politics and its constitutive antagonisms – with the scientific, but *joining it up* with the scientific in order to develop a lucid rendering of the possible process and the structure for "striving towards an intersubjectively accepted ideal of knowledge" (de Vries,

2005: 280). The total image, the overall view, is that of a model community which enriches the scientific with its differences and is enriched by its joining to the scientific. Sellars (1964: 40) himself seems to sum up the importance of imagination or the making of such images in the following paragraph:

> [T]he conceptual framework of persons is not something that needs to be reconciled with the scientific image, but rather something to be joined to it. Thus, to complete the scientific image we need to enrich it not with more ways of saying what is the case, but with the language of community and individual intentions, so that by construing the actions we intend to do and the circumstances in which we intend to do them in scientific terms, we directly relate the world as conceived by scientific theory to our purposes, and make it our world and no longer an alien appendage to the world in which we do our living. We can, of course, as matters now stand, realize this direct incorporation of the scientific image into our way of life only in imagination. But to do so is, if only in imagination, to transcend the dualism of the manifest and scientific images of man-in-the-world.

In postagonistics, the 'lure of reconciliation' is resisted to make room for the reimagining of an intersubjectively constituted ideal of knowledge. Working with the information and language that constitutes present everyday politics means working with material in which intentions are not always clear: misinformation is always being injected into the media stream, violence is never far away, and the balance of power is necessarily being played out. But because we can deploy the previously described methods of impingement and jeopardying, we can set such 'politically realist' material in motion when developing our postagonist image: the self-correcting enterprise that Sellars describes is the whole model world portrayed in the image. Thus, antagonism, which Mouffe rightly suggests as constitutive of politics, is not only maintained but also put to work by joining it to the scientific realm. This is an image in which reasoning is "the practice of collective freedom" (Trafford, 2016).

By virtue of this, the postagonistic image is indebted to the practice of judging discussed earlier. Granting the practice of judging this kind of rational agency is strongly connected to Sellars' nominalism, the way he addresses the question of abstract entities (his answer to Deleuze's question: what is meant by the overthrow of Platonism?) and his views on the reference relation between *words* and *things*, the idea that words reference things. The very notion of reference relations is problematized by Sellars. Of course, one can make a distinction between words and what they stand for, but "there can be no science in which such a relation figures, and so the relation is utterly mysterious from a naturalistic point of view" (Crane, 2008). Like all realists, Sellars accepts "a world independent of thought", and it is this world, in which entities exist in a register that has nothing to do with our language – which is to say the register of colourless matter, neurons, wavelengths, and quarks etc. –, that pushes him to look for a relational bond other than reference to explain how we achieve our complex semantics. Sellars' replaces *reference* with *inference* as the central notion on which semantics are based. Reference here also calls our attention to what is referred to as the representationalist account of meaning, which, as Peregrin (2012) explains, is the idea that "we are confronted with things (or other entities) and somehow make our words stand for them". The representationalist paradigm assumes that there are essential words in a language "in so far as they represent" something and other words that play a supporting role in the composition of complex representations (Peregrin, 2012).

An inferentialist non-representationalist account such as Sellars' proposes an alternative to this paradigm. Its central idea can be identified in an important precursor to Sellars' work, the later writings of Wittgenstein, in which the latter argued that we are not only limited to two alternatives namely that "*either an expression represents something or it is meaningless*" (Peregrin, 2012, emphasis in original). There is a third overlooked possibility which is that "the signs can be used as in a game" (Wittgenstein, 1958: 4). Although Wittgenstein did go further with this possibility of language as a game, Sellars and thinkers influenced by his work such as Robert Brandom greatly advanced and cemented the idea. This was accomplished through their varying discourses on inferentialism which, all things considered, is an attempt to think meaning through language rules where language is understood as a game. In this case, thinking language as a game is not a form of scepticism, as might be implied at first glance.

With Suits (1967) we can give a formalist definition to the concept of 'game' and claim that games are "goal-directed activities in which inefficient means are intentionally (or rationally) chosen". Consciously choosing to run the entire circle of a track to reach the finish line in a race while the shorter route of cutting across the field is available is inefficient, yet conditions the game. Inefficiency takes on a different meaning when considered against the backdrop of Sellars' model. The manifest realm of practical reality articulated through its language games is inefficient in relation to the scientific image, yet this very inefficiency is in part responsible for its efficacy, it is an inefficiency that is rule-based and thus becomes a form of efficiency. It should not be understood as a limiting factor, but as an enabling one. In a game of poker,

for example, Suits (1967) explains, certain rules must be followed, rules that tell us what we can and what we cannot do with cards and money, which happen to be the main elements used in this game. Winning a game of poker is a matter of contestants increasing their financial gains by using the means they are entitled to under the rules of the game, although “mere obedience to the rules does not by itself insure victory”. Hence, trying to win a game of poker can be described as “attempting to gain money by using the most efficient means available, where only those means permitted by the rules are available”.

More important is the fact that some games have additional properties that have made them a staple in inferentialist accounts of language. Chess is the prime example. In chess there is no clear-cut way to describe the goal of the game without mentioning the rules, whether implicitly or explicitly. As Ridge (2015) explains, this is due to it being a game in which “the pieces and the moves can be understood functionally”’ This is to say that the bishop, for example, is understood as that piece which is able to move only diagonally on a sixty-four squared board: it is defined by that function within the game, in other words by its use-value. What we experience of the bishop while playing, the fact that it is made of ivory, wood, or digital pixels or that we might make it move on a giant garden sized board in public or on a digital tablet screen while lying in bed, makes no difference. Furthermore, it is even questionable whether a physical or virtual bishop is required to constitute a bishop – as in the case of blindfold chess. Simply put, one primarily understands the bishop not as an abstract concept as such, but by and through its conceptual role, its use is tethered to the rules of chess. I can

infer its meaning through its conceptual role in the game, and in relation to other elements/signs (the queen, knight, pawns, and the board), which is to say its meaning can be defined by the inferential rules that direct its use.

So, if we supplant chess pieces with words, we can think of the inferentialist model as one which "identifies meanings neither with regularities of usage, nor with underlying dispositions, but rather with 'rules' of usage" (Peregrin, 2009). Generally speaking, the rules make the meaning. This is the basic backdrop for the rule-conforming behaviour we mentioned earlier. The inferentialist approach to the meaning of language expressions argues that "rather than take reference, or denotations of expressions, to establish meaning, it is certain rules of inference (and inferences themselves) that do this job" (Trafford, 2017: 21). Unlike many philosophers adhering to scientific naturalism, Sellars does not attempt to comprehend reference in relation to "naturalistically acceptable relations, like causation" (Crane, 2008). In other words, on account of the Sellarsian model, the world does not *cause* our minds to form certain representations; this is highlighted in Sellars' observation that the rejection of the myth of the given amounts to a rejection of the notion that "the categorial structure of the world – if it has a categorial structure – imposes itself on the mind as a seal imposes an image on melted wax" (Sellars, 1981: 11).

This might leave us with the impression that talk about 'reference' or indeed 'truth' is impermissible if this model were taken to be the blueprint for how language works. But in fact this misses what is most important about the idea, which is that when we talk of 'truth' or 'reference', they 'should not be

considered to be *epistemically* or *explanatorily* prior" (Trafford, 2017: 22, emphasis in original). We are now in a position to fleetingly touch upon Sellars' nominalism, which he uses to correct the Platonist ideal of abstract entities as realities that are external to inferential relations in a community. The example Deleuze used was that justice in Platonism is the iconic copy in time and space of an abstract eternal non spatio-temporal justness. Thus, in Platonism, reaching a 'sameness' or a 'being identical' of the abstract timeless entity is the set horizon or end one is labouring towards. As we saw, Deleuze thought past this by positing the proliferation of simulacra, which are not copies of an original abstraction but powerful entities themselves, 'real abstractions' which negate the very idea of original and copy that Platonism stands on.

Following O'Shea (2015, Kindle Locations: 1995 – 2255), Sellars takes a different turn which is not an outright dismantling of Platonism. The principle is based on what we understood of the functionalism of a chess piece, the idea that we could infer what it stood for from the rules of the game to which it belonged. In natural languages, there are always abstract singular terms such as 'triangularity'. Platonism insists that the function of such terms is to give a name to eternal abstract entities that do not exist in time and space; such an abstract ideal of triangularity is expressed through the abstract singular term triangularity and instantiated in perceptible triangular objects. Sellars' move is to suggest that the function of abstract singular terms such as 'triangularity' is metalinguistic, meaning that they refer to other examples of the same type or role in different language forms. So such abstract singular terms serve "to pick out linguistic *types* or *roles* that may be played

by or ‘realized in’ many linguistic materials or ‘pieces’” (O’Shea, 2015: Kindle Locations: 2109, emphasis mine). The behaviour of *dreieckigs* in German roughly parallels the behaviour of *triangulars* in the rule-governed linguistic economy of the English language. Thus – using Sellars’ articulate adoption of symbols to make this point clear – the •triangular• is realized in German by *dreieckig*. This means that the singular term ‘triangularity’ relates to the role played by •triangular•s in a similar way to how ‘the bishop’ relates to the role played by bishops. So what this means is that abstract entities are functionalist-nominalist entities that are inferentially articulated through the rule-governed behaviour of languages[53]. This functionalist-nominalist inferentialism, according to Sellars, is what enables conceptual function and thus conceptual change. And according to Brassier (2014b), conceptual function should be distinguished from representational function, which for most part is a ‘mapping function’ that is at some level directly conditioned by our biology. Our representational system has the task of mapping and thus navigating the world. Therefore, as O’Shea (2015, Kindle Locations: 2220) states, what the Sellarsian account of nominalism points to is that the “function of abstract entities is to carve at the joints of representational systems, and the primary (empirical) function of the latter systems is to picture or map the structure of reality”. What Sellars’ nominalism provides is a noncircular framework where conceptual function (the conceptual order) is to an extent disassociated from representational function and thus capable of

[53] Brassier (2014) explains that what makes Sellars’ analysis valuable from a materialist point of view is “that it treats abstract entities as hypostatised linguistic functions. It shows how conceptual form is anchored in linguistic function and grounds linguistic function in social practice”. Although Sellars has no clear theory for social practice, “his work has the signal merit of telling us what abstract entities really are”. And for Brassier, this presents “an important step towards explaining how capital’s apparently self-moving abstractions are in fact motored by the activities and practices of human beings”.

self-revision, adaptability, and carving at the joints of the representational function (the real order – scientific image). Of course, this structure has already been articulated in the more 'poetic' term of an 'inaesthetics of jeopardy' and depicted as the 'unnatural nature' of rational capacity. As Brassier (2014b) points out, one way to understand the prospect of achieving a "stereoscopic synthesis" of the manifest and scientific images is to think about it in terms of achieving the integration of "conceptual function with representational mapping". This would signal a promethean accomplishment whereby cognitive mapping is not merely a critique of capitalist reality and its institutions, but an undertaking in which there is no disjunction between theory and political practice, a spontaneity that may actually enable intervention on the real abstractions that dominate capitalism's landscape.

We have described how Sellars' 'synoptic real' – with its particular articulation for the functioning of the scientific image – can contribute to the development of a non-sceptical, anti-foundationalist, pluralist and non-sublime image. Finally, we should put this articulation of how science works to the advantage of politics in the construction of the image up against more dominant models of 'science usage' in the development of images. Sohn-Rethel claimed, as we saw earlier, that capitalism's principle of economic exchange was responsible for the properties in science that he regarded as bourgeois and identified those properties as being 1) the "second nature" of science's basic categories and this second nature's alienation from the qualities of first nature, 2) the non-holistic character of science, since it is "compelled to single out objects as isolates", and 3) science's need for intellectual exploitation. We saw how the dominance of similar ideas about the

hegemony of exchange led Lyotard to conceptualize his sublime based on the question of '*is it happening?*' and his concept of the differend – an early prototype of sorts for Mouffian agonism. And we also explained how Deleuzoguattarian philosophy was formulated as *the political unconscious of real abstraction* and how second-order nature and first-order nature were philosophically structured into a continuum in which empirically transcendental abstractions could be launched as interventions through desiring-production.

These *philosophical concepts of intervention* all share the characteristic of structuring their ontological frameworks with the view to circumventing the properties of science and Platonism, i.e. "the perennial philosophy", specifically those properties identified by Sohn-Rethel as due to the real abstraction of economic exchange. Whether the practice of these forms of political being is located in a politics of radical democracy inseparable from identity-dispute or in the difference inherent to the chaos of nature and distinguishable from such emphasis on identity – these philosophies share the common factor of invoking or articulating forms of agency in which processes of reasoning are skipped by making passions and sentiments the overriding force in politics. Alternatively, agency could be located in a 'strange reason' supposedly exempt from social-conceptual commerce, which is to say, discursive reason-giving practices. With this, difference is always elevated as a force in itself.

In such case, difference acts as a guarantor against the hegemony of real abstractions that side-step consciousness. It is supposed to be the disruptor

of capitalism's smooth homogenization of life. But perhaps a major motive for such intricate difference-based philosophies is that science – for all its alienating bourgeois properties – must either be altogether brushed aside or conquered philosophically by making philosophy and philosophical intervention its equal. Sellars, on the other hand, shows us how to work with science and how to join our manifest image to the scientific. Regardless of the motives behind these philosophies, in following these onto-political schemas in which the reduction or excision of 'the scientific' is taken as a measure against the abstractive forces of capital, we make our practices susceptible to producing or reiterating the sublime and/or what Beech (2014) calls "weak science". This in addition to depriving our practices from the functional role 'the scientific' can play in a socially oriented 'perspective of totality'.

The expanded field of art can be considered a space where such 'weak science' dwells and amalgamates into what Beech (2014) has identified as a kind of "spontaneous philosophy of artists". It is important to note that the question posed here is: how should we place 'the scientific' and define its functional role within a politics that uses the resources of art? It is not how can we make a more scientific art? This differentiation is important. The Sellarsian line of thinking answers the first question. As for the second question, it is largely responsible for forms of practice that depend on the fetishization of the archetypal space of scientific experimentation: the laboratory where experiments in physics, biology and related fields are carried out. Such practices function by analogy with 'real scientific laboratories', transforming the public site into an aestheticized laboratory on

display for this or that experiment. An example of this type of practice is the so called ‘victimless jacket’[54] project. In it, the public is made to encounter a miniature but growing ‘alive’ jacket in an aesthetically pleasing lab-environment. This jacket is made of the living stem-cells of mice that have been produced without actually harming the animals. Although such practices carry the potential of bringing questions regarding scientific experiments into public debate, they tend to fall into the category of spectacle and fail to convince us why putting such obviously crude yet beautified experiments on public display amounts to much more than inciting sublime angst for the sake of its consumption. Stories of the jacket’s growth gone wild, bursting out of its ‘installation’ and being ‘euthanized’ by a curator, end up producing caricatures of scientific experimentation. This perhaps is the consequence of not asking the correct question when it comes to ‘the scientific’ and its relationship to art practice.

It is with this in mind, that we can look to Beech (2014) for a portrayal of *how* and *why* art has been using science. According to Beech, in its endeavour to escape the ‘dead end’ of institutional critique, art has increasingly attempted to claim “some sort of science through and with the image”. We come across numerous variations of this claim to science which most frequently includes “an appeal to the aesthetics of science in the name of materialism, often with an ultimate attempt to think past the humanist-inspired role of the author”, while also attempting to solve or surpass representation.

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[54] See Doctorow (2008) and Sandhana (2004).

For Beech, this artistic claim towards scientificity has “problematically reproduced a self-annihilating culture of art […] based in resentment of the mediating faculty of the image”. This specific resort to the scientific or, as Beech describes it, the look and feel of the scientific, is basically an attempt to bypass resolving questions surrounding the relationship between mediation – which art is always part of, or implicated in – and ‘the real’. Beech calls our attention to practices which affirm an embrace of ‘materialism’ by prioritizing ‘method over form’ (perhaps implicitly, ‘form’ here is closer in meaning to image and representation). In what follows we get a glimpse of what these practices which Beech identifies with ‘weak science’ might be, namely

> the empirical research project, the phenomenal experience, the ‘you just had to be there’ moment where artworks turn towards (supposedly) ‘unmediated’ and pure experience as the measure of art’s newfound delivery of the real. Much performance art is testament to this correlation between the real, the unmediated image, and the claim for a politicized practice, as is the employment of the aesthetics of immediacy in documentary-inspired art. (Beech, 2014)

The ‘weak science’ to which art makes recourse is brought into the picture to escape the burden of the problem of mediation that, metaphorically speaking, art puts on its shoulders. The task art sets itself in such instances is “progress towards the achievement of what it thinks of as a more pure form”. Beech equates the pursuit of this presumably ‘purer form’ with taking to “the empirical”, which is seen as “the real path to a more true and more real reality, as if to leave behind the confines of art as category-form”.

Beech’s somewhat brief but useful rendition of the predominant forms of ‘science usage’ in contemporary practice demonstrates how, at the

unconscious level at least, science is either constructed as a longed for science-to-come in which the exchange abstraction is surpassed, or as a science of ‘strange reason’ in which we are supposed to access a realm of knowledge or the real order, through our intuitions and direct sensory experiences of the artwork or image. Mouffe’s post-metaphysical agonistics have also played a role in construing what ‘science’ is to art. This is manifested in a certain wholesale elimination of metaphysical and even epistemological dimensions from the image and art practices. In such works, as in the theory of agonism itself, there is a certain reduction of politics to ontology and an overdependence on the ideal of radical democracy. Together, these two characteristics condemn the image to serve as a depiction of the constitutive axiom of agonistics: that antagonism is ineradicable and that realism should start and end at that point. Attempting to produce a scientific image through the agonistic route simply means to produce images and projects that convey this axiom as a form of realism. Sellars’ synoptic real, with its particular function for the scientific, allows us to overcome the limits of the Mouffian axiom and reintroduce the metaphysical and epistemological aspects needed for the construction of images that take both science and politics seriously, thus enabling a realism which is realist on account of both politics and science.

When working with a medium such as video we understand that the ‘realism’ we can attain is an effect or a set of effects constructed by this medium. As

M. Sohn-Rethel[55] (2015: 6) argues in the case of film, realism “is not a given reflection of the world but rather a construction that must, often laboriously, be worked at”. Sohn-Rethel (2015: 7, italics in original) writes that film texts “can be constructed to convince us that they are vehicles of *truth* – or better *particular truths* – whether philosophical ones about the world or truths subsumed within the narrative or character interplay”. This constructability of realism (in video) pertaining to the medium’s imagery and textual content, and the medium’s plasticity as a vehicle for the production of realism, can be used to bring our jeopardying model-community into shape,and make its outlook, methods of knowledge acquisition and politics part of the wider representational economy. This is a first step towards using the scientific image in the reimagination of pluralist politics, a reimagination which seems increasingly pertinent. As demonstrated, art certainly can contribute to this reimagination.

[55] Martin Sohn-Rethel (1947–2016) was a film scholar who, among other books, also translated Alfred Sohn-Rethel’s (his father) *Intellectual and Manual Labour*. ‘M.Sohn-Rethel’ is used to make the distinction

4. Agonism or Postagonistics?

4.1 Transformational Shortcomings: Antagonism, Agonism, and Intervention

One of the mysteries of Mouffian agonism is exactly how the shift in understanding this or that person or group as an adversarial opponent after taking them to be an absolute enemy comes to happen. As previously mentioned, to supply some basis for this transformation Mouffe brings in the help of Thomas Kuhn's theory on the incommensurability of conceptual schemes in the evolution of science. For Kuhn, contesting conceptual schemes result in different scientific paradigms. But as we have seen, a revolutionary scientific 'reality' can only be reached by an all or nothing 'leap of faith' into a completely new conceptual scheme. For Kuhn, accepting a new conceptual scheme is reflected in accepting some group or person as an adversary rather than a full-blown enemy, as Mouffe implies. In both cases, it is a matter of conversion, in much the same way as some people convert from one religion to another. We can relate, on some level, to how this notion of faith emerges in Kuhn's attempt to explain why, for example, a paradigm such as that of the Copernican heliocentric model took so long to be instituted as the predominant norm, while speculation and evidence of its validity had been mounting for centuries and across continents. But when it is grafted onto politics, it seems to make considerably less sense. Moreover, the incommensurability of conceptual schemes has been seriously called into question by thinkers influenced by Sellars such as Donald Davidson. Taking the basic Sellarsian (Sellars, 1997: 117) idea that attempts "to break out of

discourse to an arche[56] beyond discourse" are misguided, Davidson (1973–1974) suggests that what Kuhn cements with his theory of incommensurable conceptual schemes is the concept of an "un-interpreted reality" or a "theory-neutral reality".

This un-interpreted reality is what conceptual schemes fight to achieve through elimination and conversion in Kuhn's worldview of science. According to Sellars, the postulation of entities that science depends on means that reality is not theory-neutral. But as we have explained, the jeopardying of science means that it is able to reach a degree of objective truth until proven otherwise. So doing away with the concept of an un-interpreted reality does not mean doing away with truth. For Davidson, Kuhn needs recourse to some sense of theory-neutral reality to put his contest of conceptual schemes into action, and this would create what he calls "the dogma of a dualism of scheme and reality". The result of this dualism is that we are left with a world consisting of different worlds that are marked by their "conceptual relativity". Hence, truth under such a general conception is always understood as "relative to a scheme". Davidson suggests that we ought to drop our dependence on any idea of a reality unburdened by discourse and theory, as well as dropping the duality of conceptual scheme and reality. Importantly, if we follow Sellars, when we give up our "dependence on the concept of an un-interpreted reality" and its resultant "dualism of scheme and reality", we are not aborting objective truth, but insisting that any such quest be carried out in what Sellars identified as the space of reasons. Davidson's formulation, however, stands out on its own

[56] A primordial reality, a beginning or origin.

because it directly addresses the question of interpretation and translation between conceptual schemes. This is expressed in the following paragraph:

> Neither a fixed stock of meanings, nor a theory-neutral reality, can provide, then, a ground for comparison of conceptual schemes. It would be a mistake to look further for such a ground if by that we mean something conceived as common to incommensurable schemes. In abandoning this search, we abandon the attempt to make sense of the metaphor of a single space within which each scheme has a position and provides a point of view. I turn now to the more modest approach: the idea of partial rather than total failure of translation. This introduces the possibility of making changes and contrasts in conceptual schemes intelligible by reference to the common part. What we need is a theory of translation or interpretation that makes no assumptions about shared meanings, concepts or beliefs.

On Davidson's account, the "space of reasons" cannot be compared to a single space where schemes contest, battling out their particular viewpoints until one particular scheme wins. This "single space" image is what Kuhn's theory conjures up and what Mouffe projects into politics – with parliament somehow always inhabiting our imagination of what that space looks like. Rather, the space of reasons is premised on the "common part" with which we can enter into any process of reasoning (translation or interpretation of concepts) without making assumptions "about shared meanings, concepts or beliefs". And this common part is exactly what the protagonists in Mouffe's understanding of antagonism are deprived of. A rigorous account of the many issues related to this theoretical removal of the common part, which is to say the rubbing out of the space of reasons in Mouffe's agonistics has been developed by Erman (2009). To better understand we must go all the way down to Mouffe's (2000, 13) initial distinction between two antagonisms. What she calls "antagonism proper" is supposedly a real or originary antagonism (although Mouffe does not label it as such). This is the sort of arche-antagonism on which the theory is structured. It is an antagonism

“which takes place between enemies, that is, persons who have no common symbolic space”. The second antagonism is the one transformed into agonism through the sharing of a common symbolic space, and the will of the antagonists turned agonists to become adversaries. Erman makes the point that, because Mouffe’s goal is the elaboration of a radical democratic theory and because she begins from the position of the enemyhood of disputing subjects, her theory requires the rejection of antagonism between subjects as it is. This leads to a positing of “some ethico-political principles” that the disputants have to accept if their antagonism is to be transformed into a democratic agonism, but these principles are, in Mouffe’s rendering, vague if not obscure. Such principles are alluded to when Mouffe (2000, 102) states that an adversary is a “legitimate enemy” with whom we share a dedication to a minimal common ground based on the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy.

Liberty and equality are flagged as common principles that all disputants should adhere to. According to Mouffe, however, the disagreement with our “friendly enemies” on what these principles mean and on the nature and extent of their implementation is what keeps liberal democracy in full swing. And it is such disagreement, due to the arche-antagonism, that, for Mouffe, cannot be resolved by deliberation or rational consensus. Of course, the principles of liberty and equality function as empty signifiers, but the issue is that an adherence to such principles requires some kind of consensus in the first place, and this is what Mouffe tries to bypass. Agonism is only possible through this bypass and Erman articulates what the implications of this are.

What Erman is able to unpack is the complex enmeshment[57] of difference, antagonism, particularity and individuality into the single concept of agonism that serves Mouffe's purpose of instituting a radical democratic project; agonism is an enmeshed concept. The postagonistic approach, as has been already hinted in the previous section, attempts to address such enmeshment when structuring the image and as a result opens up to a rethinking of pluralism. As Erman (2009) reminds us, antagonism for Mouffe is not simply difference but concrete difference between us and them. It is the Other instantiated as a concrete enemy. Additionally, however, this difference is also abstract in the sense that it is not purely descriptive. If it were to be purely descriptive, then such a difference would be relativized and its absolutism as an axiom for politics would not hold. Finally, Mouffe's antagonism is ontological and not normative, an antagonism before 'the ought', as Erman puts it. That is to say that for Mouffe, antagonism is ontologically given, even though it is only manifested socially or appears in the meeting between disputants. In Erman's view, if such a strong claim to ontological givenness – what I have called an arche-antagonism – is to be taken seriously, then

Mouffe would have to draw on empirical evidence to make plausible that human beings start out by viewing each other as enemies to be destroyed, e.g., similar to how philosophers use psychological data to make the case that humans strive for recognition. However, as Mouffe is well aware, if she

[57] I define an *enmeshed concept* as a concept based on the diffusion of boundaries and lack of differentiation between the distinct concepts that are combined to bring it into shape. The term here is a retooling of Salvador Minuchin's concept of enmeshment developed in his book *Families and Family Therapy* (1974, Harvard). By this I am referring only to the structural properties of concepts such as agonism, since Minuchin's enmeshment refers to family relations and occurs when boundaries between family members' 'egos' are blurred, thus contributing to a certain over-closure that is disenabling for its members. By analogy, the individual concepts making up the enmeshed concept, in this case agonism, have been subjected to such extensive diffusion and blurring. I do not mean to use the term in any psychological sense.

were to do so, she would soon discover that this is not how human beings predominantly perceive of each other.

For Erman (2009, all emphasises in original), the way Mouffe folds antagonism into difference and vice versa obscures "the fact that, while difference is *descriptive*, antagonism is *normative*. […] [D]ifference is primarily a descriptive concept standing 'by itself', similar to 'water' and 'blue'. Antagonism, by contrast, is an evaluative concept, similar to 'happy' and 'courage'". Mouffe moves freely in and out of difference and antagonism, collapsing the descriptive into the normative and vice versa. And this for Erman causes a further complication. This is the confusion of *particularity*, i.e. something implied by difference in general and *individuality*, i.e. a 'normative' difference such as antagonism is. This entanglement between the particular and the individual according Erman (2009) means that Mouffe does not acknowledge the Hegelian wisdom that individuality "requires specific attitudes among the subjects involved". Here, Erman is of course referring to Hegel's concept of right.

This is the idea that the "modern individualist concept of subjectivity must be completed in an intersubjectively constituted general will. That is, the general will constituted in mutual recognition is a condition and presupposition of subjective freedom" (Williams, 1997: 117). The subjects of Mouffe's agonistics are, as we have described previously, subjects of a voluntarism that erupts 'out of nothing' due to the fact that their antagonism is ontologically prior to any discourse. But the freedom based on intersubjective recognition in the Hegelian tradition would mean that a right contributing to a certain subjectivity can be asserted only if it may be asserted by all. This

implies a correlation between rights and duties constituted through a non-heteronomous concrete universal subject or general will that is open to further normative considerations, revision, and fine-tuning (Williams, 1997: 117). Accordingly, Erman (2009) asks a simple but important question: "[H]ow is it possible for antagonism proper to be a conflict between us and them (or me and the Other) without any 'common symbolic space', to use Mouffe's words?" Does not the fact that a conflict is underway imply that there is some common understanding on what is at stake and that there is an intersubjective linguistic context that the antagonists share?

The protagonists in such a scenario are able to identify the antagonistic conflict because they share a 'common part' which at the very least is constituted through some common presumptions about each other's subjectivity. But because Mouffe starts from a specific mode of enemyhood, antagonism is deprived of its significance as a dimension of normative discourse present in common understanding. If the distinction between friend and enemy is not understood as contingent and dependent on the state of affairs in a political context or certain historical circumstances, it is then the intentional enforcement of the idea that there is absolutely no common understanding whatsoever between antagonists. The suggestion that postagonistics adopts, in Erman's words, is that counter Mouffe there can be "no conflict without deliberation, i.e. without speech-acts oriented performatively towards validity-claims".

To acknowledge political realism in this case does not mean at all, as Mouffe (2005, 16) claims, that "the political belongs to our ontological condition",

rather that it is contingent and that antagonism is “an ever present possibility” (Mouffe, 2005: 16 – 17), not on account of its ontological makeup but because it is a component of reasoning. This reading of antagonism is what the postagonistic image takes to be the correct one, antagonism is not ontologically prior to conflictual situations – it comes into being in discourse of which it is a part. Persons disagree on the importance of different values and matters pertaining to who is right and who is wrong. But as Erman (2009) seems to point out, this is the juncture between antagonism and reason. In the case of such conflictual scenarios, it is clear that in their shared comprehension of such scenarios as conflictual the antagonists

> have already entered into the Sellarsian ‘space of reasons’. This is a normative space which cannot be reduced to an empirical description of causal relations. Agents are not solely caused to act by their strongest desire in a Humean sense. Rather, they ‘take up’ a desire (or some other pro-attitude) as a reason for action. And this endorsement of motivation requires a capacity for (self-)reflection through which their desires are coupled together with some conception they have of themselves. Moreover, the space of reasons is a social space, since this capacity for reflectivity takes place in a social setting – reasons are essentially public.

The problem we stumble upon on endorsing Mouffe’s interpretation of antagonism as ontological is that the transformation process becomes hinged on some sort of moral choice that is undertaken without explanation or grounding. This is why it is referred to as a matter of conversion or faith. If political realism is a question of avoiding the “priority of the moral over the political” (Sleat, 2014) then there is a sense in which, because of the ontological nature of Mouffe’s antagonism, her project falls short of the political realism she demands. Since the antagonists in the Mouffian picture do not share an intersubjective space, the only way they can come to accept the common ethico-political principles they need to embrace for their

transformation from antagonists to agonists is by subscribing to them in a personal subjective world which is *intrapersonal* (taking place within a person's mind). Additionally, while the Mouffian picture structures the moment of antagonist to agonist transformation as an intrapersonal conversion rooted in an unexplained ontological habitual orientation, it goes in the opposite direction in understanding conflicts as always *interpersonal* (taking place due to the relationships or communication between persons or different groups of persons) (Erman, 2009).

As has already been articulated, Mouffe's picture of antagonism is one based on a relationship of conflict between an ego and a concrete Other, or a we/they distinction or in another variation an us/them relationship. Because of the arche-antagonism in Mouffe's picture, as soon as the (collective-) ego meets the Other, the antagonistic conflict is manifested. And the only possibility for utilizing such antagonism to the advantage of the wider community depends on intrapersonal thinking in the individual's mind (or a private collective decision by a specific group) which paves the way for the conversion to agonism. This means that the "identity of the subjects involved is a premise of their agency" (Erman, 2009). But identity and such intrapersonal structures assigned with the task of conversion cannot be a premise of agency. Rather, as Erman points out, identity and the intrapersonal can only be a product of agency. This is to reassert and reiterate the 'unnatural nature' of reasoning and to point out that antagonism is not a given ontological fact, but a factor in the process by which individuality is constituted socially. It is only in this sense that antagonism is ineradicable, not, as Mouffe would have it, because it has ontological

foundation, but because it plays a crucial role in the constitution of collective and individual freedom.

Moreover, agency is not simply an interpersonal exercise of self-determination but importantly it is also a cognitive exercise of self-interpretation (Erman, 2009). These two dimensions cannot exist without each other since they are co-dependent. Here, once again, we can recall Gilbert's (2013) well defined articulation of the subjectivity at play in Mouffe's political outlook as that of a post-Hobbesian ontological individualism in which the individual is the irreducible unit of human experience. And the social or the community is but a demarcation existing as some sort of preventative boundary in relation to the free actions of individuals. Gilbert called this meta-individualism and it is clear how such an understanding of subjectivity leads to a construal of antagonisms as external to society, and as constituting society's limits. This is how Mouffe and Laclau understand antagonism leading to the thesis that antagonism marks the impossibility of society ever fully constituting itself (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 125). The idea of experiencing antagonism as a limit is exactly what the postagonistic image attempts to reconstruct, because, unlike Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 125), the postagonistic image does not regard the presence of the Other as one which prevents 'me from being totally myself.'

Rather, with Erman, postagonistics sees such a presence as the way to become totally oneself – if such a possibility even exists; it is more convincing that it would emerge "through the recognition by others, not through their absence". Antagonism is not the experience of the limit of the

social, as Mouffe and Laclau claim: rather, it is, much more straightforwardly, a social experience entwined in and around 'the space of reasons'. To further our argument, and pinpoint what a postagonistics concerned with thinking and making images ought to reconsider on the basis of an analysis of the deficiencies of the agonistic approach to pluralism, it is perhaps interesting to examine agonism in the context of international power relations. Specifically, we turn our attention to Chandler's (2010) engagement with the concept of 'civil society' as the *policy paradigm* of international peacebuilding interventions in societies recovering from conflicts or still undergoing post-colonial restructuring. Building on Foucault's work on the concept of civil society, Chandler argues that this concept is central to international peacebuilding, because not only does it produce new policies and frame intervention by one state (or an alliance of states) into the policies of another, but it also functions as a discursive framework that enables the production of meaning. In other words, it is a "policy paradigm through which the problems (and solutions) of peacebuilding intervention are interpreted" (Chandler, 2010). In light of this, Chandler argues that civil society ought to be understood as the third chapter in a series of policy paradigms that have intersected and overlapped to shape the conceptual apparatus through which "Western engagement and intervention in the colonial and post-colonial state has been negotiated and reflected".

The first paradigm was *race*, in "which the hierarchical division of the world was given a natural basis". As this paradigm came under increasing scientific and political scrutiny, a second framework overtook it, namely *culture*, which as a paradigm provided a basis for interpreting the divide between the West

and the post-colonial world on a moral and psychological basis; this culturalist paradigm was also extended to other parts of the world perceived as essentially different than 'the West' in their way of practicing politics and social relationships. What the cultural paradigm provided was a 'moral divide' between states/societies in the West which were considered to be at least formally alike post-colonial states/societies. The suggestion was that the political subject of the latter was "less capable of acting in a rational or autonomous manner". According to Chandler, what the civil society paradigm fails to do is surpass this dynamic inherited from the culturalist framework. On Chandler's account, it seems that the civil society paradigm wants to have its cake and eat it too. This is because it wants to act as a justification for essentialized differences, while at the same time understanding the irrational or poor social, economic, and political outcomes it is sometimes linked with as a result of "rational choices made by autonomous subjects". The difference, then, is that the civil society outlook views post-colonial or post-conflict societies from the vantage point of "self-governing individuals". This is the opposite of the viewpoint of individuals subjugated by "collectivities of race, nation or religion" that the older paradigms of race and culture identified with. For Chandler, this is perhaps why the paradigm of civil society appears more progressive on first estimation.

But the issue is of course that the shift to 'individualism' in this paradigm (mirroring the meta-individualism discussed earlier) allows for a reshaping of the problem of policy intervention in hitherto unrecognizable ways. By emphasising the individual's autonomy and the rationality of the subject the peacebuilding intervention is able to present its interventionism as an "act of

empowerment or of capacity-building" while at the same time disassociating itself from the superiority complexes and racial as well as cultural distinctions of colonial rhetoric. Still, exactly where and how does the idea of agonistic pluralism fit into this picture of civil society and international policy intervention? Chandler (2010) notes that the civil society paradigm is concerned with "influencing individual behaviour choices" as a form of intervention and that this is preconditioned by an inbuilt assumption, namely the moral and cultural divide between the post-colonial subject and the liberal democratic subject of Western democracies.

The distinction entails that the rationalist premises used in relation to the liberal democratic subject should be disregarded when considering peacebuilding interventions. A traditional liberal democratic subject would argue that rational deliberation can help resolve social conflicts. In contrast, the very idea of peacebuilding is hinged on the supposed *realpolitik* of not assuming that conflicts can be mended by political processes that are autonomous in nature. Thus, it looks to the domain of policy intervention through civil society so that it may influence institutional structures and frameworks with view to containing conflicts. Such a proactive interventionist approach to civil society believes that "external intervention" is imperative to "challenge or disrupt irrational or counterproductive forms of political identification through the process of multiplying frames of political identification".

The civil society policy paradigm is important to the notion of peacebuilding because it is an interpretive framework where different political and social

collectivities can be considered “as products of irrational mind-sets shaped by the past” while maintaining that such mind-sets can be transformed through non-deliberative intervention (Chandler, 2010). And central to the theoretical grounding of civil society as the domain of international policy intervention is the critique of liberal rationalist approaches. These critiques emerge out of concerns rooted in an analysis of the workings of Western democratic systems and their struggles with overcoming “particularist and conflicting identities” while adhering to a framework based on rationalist assumptions. Here, the leading and most significant critique is that of agonism with its variations (Honig, Connolly, and Mouffe are mentioned) that take differences and conflict to be irresolvable through liberal democracy. For Chandler (2010), the most important point to consider about how agonistic critiques of rationalist/deliberative democracy figure into the concept of civil society is that

> civil society becomes problematized as a sphere of irreconcilable difference at the same time as it becomes transformed into a sphere of policy intervention. Transferred to the sphere of international intervention, in the peacebuilding policy framework, a whole set of policy practices open up, based upon the thesis that through engaging with and transforming uncivil post-colonial or post-conflict societies, irrational antagonistic conflict can be transformed into rational agonistic contestation. Through institutionalist practices, external intervention is held to be able to build or constitute civil societies as a basis upon which the problems of societal development, inclusion and security can be resolved.

It is necessary to highlight that, from one’s own perspective, pondering on such criticism of the civil society paradigm is definitely not a rebuke of the mostly socially conscious hard work of civil society. The efforts of civil society in post-colonial and post-conflict contexts are often marked by institutional fragility and work against the grain of authoritarian regimes using various nationalisms and identity-driven politics to tarnish these endeavours with the

label of corrupt ‘foreign intervention’. Rather, it is to suggest that the ‘democratic design’ of the civil society paradigm of policy intervention is formulated on complex and often hidden (because they are philosophically dense) contradictions that are rooted in an ontological understanding of difference. Agonistic political thought, according to Chandler, has contributed to the theoretical outlook of this paradigm. Art – understood as a wide and diverse field for thinking and constructing images and a field in which the methodologies of image making can be analysed and developed – is in a position to advance theories and methodologies for image making that can think pluralism and political realism differently by simultaneously digging into the often contradictory premises of the ‘democratic designs’ we use and proposing alternatives through their ‘picturing’.

The postagonistic image, the basic characteristics of which we articulated in the previous chapter, is admittedly a first attempt at such a picturing. The contradictions of modern agonism are the topic of Ince’s (2016) analysis of the concept. For Ince, like Erman, agonism’s problems seem to arise from the transformative process: antagonism > agonism. However, Ince formulates this from a different perspective, claiming that the idea of a “violence-free agon is the most questionable and fragile aspect of agonistic politics”. This is because, for Ince, there is a philosophical contradiction between fundamentally defending the agonal while at the same time striving to eliminate violence. In Ince’s own words:

> Agonists, on the one hand, attribute a core founding meaning to power and conflict relations, but on the other hand, in order to eliminate the violent forms/contents that these relations may involve they refer to a reasoning which is essentially in conflict with their original onto-politic assumptions.

Furthermore, the insistence on ascribing such high political stakes (radicalizing democracy, counter-hegemonizing neo-liberalism etc.) to an anti-consensus form of politics means that the norms of a 'minimal common reason' are constantly undermined. As Ince (2016) informs us, it is in fact impossible to establish a democracy without such norms, and to suggest otherwise is to express a sceptical outlook on the democratic project, which is the complete opposite of what agonists like Mouffe entertain, since, as Ince puts it, for agonists "liberal democracy is the main heritage to care for". So, according to Ince, there is a kind of strange disavowal of the dimension of rationalist consensus in agonal pluralism since it is itself "heavily indebted to the rationalization process". This indebtedness is a factor that Khan (2013) is able to address by mapping out the similarities between Mouffian agonism and Habermasian discourse, claiming that Mouffe exaggerates the divide between her "political prescriptions" and the Habermasian outlook. Contra Mouffe, Khan proves that Habermas' stance on no occasion suggests the elimination of conflict but merely draws the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate expressions of conflict, quite similar to what Mouffe performs in her transformation of antagonism into agonism. Instead of diffusing antagonism and sublimating it into agonism, Habermas stresses its metamorphosis into "normatively regulated strategic action" (Khan, 2013). Habermas' deliberative democracy in its discursive dimension shares some common ground with our postagonistic image – indeed, Habermas occasionally brings Sellars' manifest and scientific images as well as other Sellarsian accounts into his writings. However, if we are to follow Brassier's (2011) analysis, the Habermasian image of an "argumentation community"

still misses the point of the Sellarsian encounter with the manifest and scientific images and the possibility of the stereoscopic synthesis. As previously noted in our discussion of the *jeopardying community* – the Sellarsian inspired image of a postagonistic pluralistic community – what working collectively toward this synthesis implies is the possibility of achieving an eventual integration of conceptual function with representational mapping as well as the possibility of putting any claim into jeopardy (although not all at once).

Constructing the image of such a community in action – implanting the image of this model community's intersubjective process of reasoning in the economy of art – is a way of claiming a stake in the possibility of such a stereoscopic synthesis for diverse members of the human species. Sellars' functional-nominalism with its focus on inferentialism allows him to root "the intentionality of the mental in socially instantiated practice". While maintaining that intentionality is irreducibly normative, the fact that such intentionality is always embodied linguistically affords us the possibility of investigating "when or how this normative dimension might have arisen in the course of our evolutionary and social history" (Brassier, 2011). On Brassier's account, Habermas acknowledges the distinction between normative and natural – which is also the distinction between reasons and causes – along the same lines as Sellars. According to Brassier, however, Habermas is unable to follow through the Sellarsian model and propose a positive and intricate relationship between the conceptual domain and the causal domain. For Brassier, Habermas conflates naturalism with empiricism and takes the Sellarsian clash of images as an excuse for escaping a fully scientifically

realist account of ‘mind’. This is to say that mind and hence normative conceptual order possesses “neurobiological as well as socio-historical conditions of emergence”. In Brassier’s view, Habermas’ position leads to his disacknowledgment – on conceptual grounds – of scientific attempts that strive to explain the transition from the sub-personal neurobiological scientific image to the personal linguistic and cultured manifest image. Brassier suggests that Habermas’ disdain for such attempts is due to what might be called ‘the threat of depersonalization’, an imagined limit that, when crossed, would leave persons unable to recognize themselves as persons any longer. Perhaps this can be linked to a general concern about how neuroscientific research may change our views about freedom, agency, and moral responsibility for the worse through its tendency to explain how our brains cause behaviour. Roskies (2006) has described this as the underlying anxiety that

> those things that once seemed to be forever beyond the reach of science might soon succumb to it: neuroscience will lead us to see the ‘universe within’ as just part and parcel of the law-bound machine that is the universe without.

But as Roskies argues, viewing and researching ourselves as biological mechanisms should not weaken the notion of ourselves as free and responsible agents, since some causal notion is required for any attributions of responsibility to makes sense in the first place. In ordinary life, our judgments about responsibility are mostly “contextualized, emotionally-charged, concrete scenarios”. Concerns about how a neural correlate view of the human brain might lead to damaging effects regarding responsibility are probably misplaced.

Roskies' position is that it is perhaps "the perception of the existence of a problem that is itself the problem". This is because 'free will' is important on account of what comes along with it, namely moral responsibility. The underlying worry or even horror (expressed in Bakker's novel *Neuropath* as the semantic apocalypse) is that societal frameworks will begin to collapse if, through such research, people are encouraged to believe that freedom is an illusion, and with it, moral responsibility. The issue, as Roskies puts it, is "not whether or not neuroscience actually challenges human freedom, but whether or not we think it does". Accordingly, for Brassier (2011), Habermas seems determined to "ward off the naturalistic dissolution of the normative". He accomplishes this by recoding the Sellarsian distinction between the manifest and scientific images into a dualism of theory and practice. Brassier suggests that the Habermasian dualism of theory and practice is misguided because in this picture scientific theory is entirely delimited by discursive practice. The idea is that science is rooted in language as a "pre-scientific practice" and, because of this chronological precedence, scientific theorizing is reducible to such pre-scientific language. Habermas' dualism of theory and practice leads to scientific theory playing the role of the objectifying tool in a dualism of epistemic perspectives where participatory practice (in a community) takes on the discursive role. Brassier claims that, put this way, Habermasian epistemic dualism amounts to inadvertently suggesting "that nothing we learn about ourselves from the perspective of scientific theory could force us to revise the content of our subjective or 'participatory' self-understanding". If this is the case then it is at odds with the *inaesthetics of jeopardy* and the *impingement* on the space of reasons deployed as a

discursive process by the model agents in the model world of the postagonistic image.

4.2 Transformation through Reasoning and Dialogue

It is perhaps necessary to briefly touch upon why postagonistics might be important in developing an alternative frame of reference to the predominantly Mouffian understanding of agonistics taken up by artistic practices looking to diversify and open up public spaces to pluralism. Here the work of James Trafford on 'reasoning through difference' and Johanna Seibt's work on the much-maligned notion of 'dialogue' are of particular value in helping us think through the image of a so-called new 'we', that is to say a notion of community committed to both pluralism and reasoning. Trafford (2016) models out the preliminary framework for a socially embedded process of reasoning with roots in both the Sellarsian fallabilist-inferentialist method for understanding 'abstract entities' and the Foucauldian discourse analysis view on structural power relations, the result is *a kind of pluralism which can put norms into jeopardy collectively* (although not all at once). Trafford's contribution is in addressing the question of what we have been calling, after Mouffe, 'democratic design', by bringing reasoning back into the picture through the forging of an alliance between these two traditions. Trafford states that the question of pluralism/difference is highlighted when we think power as networked – expanded across and happening – in our social interactions on a daily basis. This is the general Foucauldian understanding of power as a thing which circulates and is embodied primarily in actions. Referring to the work of Iris Young, the implication to be taken from the Foucauldian perspective is that power is productive and ought to be understood as a "function of dynamic processes of interaction" (Young cited in Trafford, 2016).

Furthermore, such power is acted out within a complex grid of social processes that often reinforce systematic structural oppression and deep social asymmetry. Constraints in such structural processes are material and economical but are also due to “background norms of cultural assumptions, decisions, and institutions”. This leads to a cycle of reinforcement of the said structural processes through legal systems and ‘habit’ which has the consequent effect of making them appear to be objective and fixed as givens. Interactions occur under the always present constraints of prior relations of interaction between people/groups/constituencies which are often reinforced through occurrent interactions. This is to underline a certain invisibility of structural processes, thus it is imperative that the interactions between individuals are not the only dimension to be considered but additionally “the complex ways in which these interactions are sculpted from the outset” (Trafford, 2016). According to this view, power permeates all social relations and interactions and not only ‘the sovereign state’. The true picture of power in Foucault’s depiction is one of “immanent, rather than externally imposed, power”. Earlier, we came into contact with the transformative dimension of the concept of ‘civil society’ and how it has become the normative scaffolding for policy interventions across nation-state borders and ‘peacebuilding’ frameworks. The structural approach indicates that we cannot think power in a properly *transformative* way (when for example considering the impact of embedded structural processes such as ‘civil society’) through an either/or position concerning universal claims, that is to say, universal subjectivity (associated with Habermas), or inversely, the denial of any recourse to the universal or even normative claims (associated with Mouffe).

If the structural understanding of power is correct, then Habermas' account of the requirements for constructing ideal situations in which political speech acts fold into a deliberative democracy offers no apparent way of gaining traction on the cyclical imbalances of power. The result is a kind of homogeneity which is rooted in a specific context, yet manages to conceal its entanglement with the specifics of that context. Conversely, while Mouffian agonism comprehends that a total freeing of ourselves from power is an idealist illusion better left out of politics and thus appears to be in sync with the structural understanding of politics, it stakes transformation on an enmeshed concept of agonism. From the onset it emphasises difference, individuality, and particularities as *the given partisan* condition of our being. As Erman has pointed out, this leads to an understanding of agency as a function of identity rather than the social recognition of identity as the cumulative effect of agency. Trafford (2016) makes the point that this might lead to impasses in which the structural power relations end up being sustained through agonistic pluralism because ultimately Mouffe "reduces the political to power". Because of her absolute privileging of a 'radical democratic' project discussed earlier, politics is seen as the successful attainment of power and the critical aspect emphasised is how to establish forms of power that do not undermine democratic values.

Such reduction of politics into power bans recourse to universal claims altogether and ends up institutionalizing incommensurability and thus it is not clear how such a project might be transformative since we are prohibited from 'adopting and building transformative ways of modifying' the structural

processes which contribute to the imbalances in the first place. For Trafford (2016), what is required then is an account of "reasoning together" which might – and here I use Mouffe's language – mobilize common affect, but not through the kind of strategic blanket discarding of rationalism Mouffian political logic is associated with. Mouffe identifies what is at stake as the "construction of a people" capable of presenting itself as a progressive answer to certain forms of reactionary politics that are on the rise as a result of neoliberal hegemony[58]. Deleuze's concept of fabulation, as mentioned earlier, attempted to construct 'a people to come' by bypassing conversation all together (Other-cide) and composing images that could achieve this imaginary, directly through the senses.

Agonistics also thinks the construction of a people can be achieved through a kind of short-cut to reasoning (conflictual-consensus) which attempts to motivate through the institutionalization of the incommensurable. Postagonistics resists both these inclinations, although they seem to lend themselves more readily to art practices – one by virtue of its aesthetical potential, the other because of its political realism. For the postagonistic image, there is nothing that can provide a way out of reasoning if the construction of a people is a goal. As Trafford's work suggests, such a construction would require a vision of reasoning-together "which is capable of making claims that are irreducible to current structures of power, yet also not immune from them". Reducing politics to power *only* is a form of entrapment.

[58] See Mouffe, 2016.

Robert Brandom has been at the forefront of the idea that “thought and talk give us a perspectival grip on a nonperspectival world” (Brandom, 1994: 594). The nonperspectival world is, of course, the Sellarsian domain of the causal or the scientific image. Our different perspectives and even disagreements, according to Brandom, are the basis for traction on this domain. Brandom argues that if we look at conversation as a model, it is clear that discursive practice and the “very possibility of common conceptual norms, the norms by which we bind ourselves, in using a word”, words as different and as far apart as ‘copper’ and ‘freedom’, depends on differences in perspective. Such perspectivality is due to the unavoidable contingency that shapes the differences in commitments of various interlocutors in a conversation, the varying trajectories through social and physical worlds the agents follow. Thus the possibility of instituting common norms is related to the capacity “to navigate across those differences in perspective, corresponding to differences in commitment” (Brandom in Pritzlaff/Brandom, 2008). This idea of perspectivality is imperative for thinking past the limitations of agonistic pluralism or the Habermasian deliberative model because, as Trafford (2016) states, interlocutors first need to understand their relationships “through the lens of perspective” before they can even begin to think of a relationship of “shared understanding” which does not fall into the trap of attempting to absorb the specificities and particularities of their perspectives into a single subject. The Mouffian outlook privileges differences as always concrete and immediate before our interactions, which means that differences are exercised *upstream* of our interactions. But accounting for perspectivality while forging room for thinking the structural

processes that configure the social landscape points towards the much more difficult task of designing models for interaction that allow difference to operate *downstream* of our interactions. On Trafford's account, thinking our interactions and the prospect of a shared understanding should not end with one of the variations on the theme of 'mutual comprehension' which is a staple of many theoretical frameworks attempting to work towards a shared understanding[59]. Rather, Trafford suggests, we should be more interested in the ways in which the construction of a shared understanding registers as a *process* that ultimately never leaves our perspectives unchanged and how such a process might help provide an account of shared understanding capable of "surpassing the current perspectives" of the involved interlocutors.

This emphasis on the processual dimension of conversation finds strong support in Seibt's (2015) reading of how the concept of dialogue ought to be understood. Taking *intercultural dialogue* as an example, Seibt looks at its "epistemic status" in relation to studies from the fields of cognitive science and communication. Seibt suggests that the understanding that intercultural dialogue generates is of a specific category, it entails a type of knowledge which is neither a theoretical "knowing-that" nor a practical "knowing-how". Thus, for Seibt (2015), such dialogue obviously reflects the Sellarsian intersubjective space of reasons in a particular way since the understanding it produces can be classified more accurately as *orientation*. Orientation, as Seibt (2015) informs us, is most recognizable to us in its spatial form. An example would be leaving a familiar building through an exit we have never

[59] 'Asymmetric reciprocity' (Iris Young) and Seyla Benhabib's more symmetrical idea of dialogue. which requires interlocutors to imagine themselves in each other's shoes, are discussed in a mostly positive tone but eventually decided against by Trafford (2016).

used before: our practical routine is suddenly subjected to the interference of the mental operation of orientation in which we become more alert and exposed until we figure out our position in relation to the surroundings and move on. Because this process is short-lived and does not require "conscious self-positioning on a memorized spatial map", it is not recognized as a unique mental operation. But it can become much more pronounced in unfamiliar terrains, turning into a complex cognitive interaction with the surrounding environment (Seibt/Nørskov, 2012).

As such, orientation "is neither propositional knowledge nor inference nor the formation of an intention for action": it is a mental operation in its own right (Seibt, 2015). Grafting this conception of orientation – as a particular type of mental operation – onto the idea of dialogue, Seibt is able to mark out what is distinctive about dialogue. This is that dialogue is not undertaken with the point of accomplishing certain results or producing this or that immediate effect, but with the aim of cultivating the space of reasons, or, as she puts it, "creating a joined horizon of understanding, in order to enable continued meaningful communication". As she points out, dialogue is distinct on account of it being a kind of conversational engagement "without extraneous purpose or product". It is not based on the extraction of information, the development of a plan for action, or overcoming an opponent.

In this sense, dialogue is a type of communicative action performed without an independent product; *it has an aim but no purpose*. In other words, it does not attempt "to achieve anything beyond the facilitation of communication". The suggestion then, is that dialogue presents us with a state of

intersubjective cognition evident as a process, as well as the outline for how social and political significances are experienced as *processes of cognitive orientation* during conversational encounters. So, what is specific about intercultural dialogue as opposed to everyday dialogue between interlocutors who do not interact under the pretext of (cultural) pluralism? Seibt (2015) suggests that dialogue, and specifically intercultural dialogue, is

> an opportunity to experience the process of cognition in 'slow-motion' - cognition is always social meaning-making, the contextual working up of meanings, rather than the processing of ready-made symbolic representations. In everyday conversations, where meanings are communicational tools to achieve certain goals, the generation of contextualized meanings happens too fast to enter our awareness. In intercultural dialogue, however, our routinized valuations are challenged; we are forced to re-experience the dynamic origins of valuations in the searching activity of orientation and to recalibrate our field of significances.

The image here is akin to an MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) brain scan in which instances of cognitive orientation register as brain activity on experiencing the social stimulation of (intercultural) dialogue and are indicated by different colours and colour intensities. Although Seibt mentions no such image, the fact that her account manages to indirectly evoke it is testament to the depth of her Sellarsian background. The bottom line is that, understood this way, the intersubjectivity of dialogue makes a solid case for comprehending ourselves as agents shaped through pluralistic conversations and adjusting the processes through which we converse accordingly in order to enable transformations in understanding, if such transformation is what we seek. The basic idea is that the link between the natural interactivity of cognition (apparent in processes of orientation) and "the experienced process of creating significances during dialogue opens up the route towards a processual conception of values" (Seibt, 2015).

Here we return to Trafford's (2016) emphasis on the idea of 'shared understanding' as a process. Such a process would enable interlocutors to exceed the limitations of the perspectives they enter into the conversation with. This is what Trafford calls "transformative understanding". And his interest lies in how – under the condition of structural power and its processes – agents might come to understand such structures and each other in "ways that surpass or transcend the specific constraints acting upon them". Inherent to the idea that cognitive orientation is a mental operation that comes into being through our interactions is an interventionist paradigm which insists that intervention cannot simply be understood as disruption, but rather as the construction of shared understanding on different and new terms. This is understanding as that which is constructed in the "inter" of agent interaction (Trafford, 2016) and not as a "democratic design" set up as a dialogic interface between "concrete others" already established beforehand. In the realization of this, dialogue can be comprehended as transformative and entailing the process through which new common perspectives can be constructed out of the ones we bring into a conversation. This is to think past the dichotomy of "difference and impartiality" and examine how the "I" entering into a dialogue can undergo transformation by interacting constructively in the "space of reasons" shared by different interlocutors (Trafford, 2016). And the minimal requirement for this process to proceed is that each agent considers his or her perspective as a contingent position liable to shifts and changes through interaction, taking care to be responsive to the speech acts of others in the dialogue.

What is more important than the oppositional nature of perspectives is – as Trafford informs us – the realization that "our perspective is merely perspectival, such that new perspectives may be forged". The approach mapped out here through Trafford and Seibt intersects with the ambitions of our 'jeopardying community' and shares its general framework, but perhaps the minor nihilistic strain in the original outlook developed by Sellars (and pushed further by Brassier) has been somewhat suppressed. In any case, the emphasis here is on the 'radical intersubjectivity' that the image of this community portrays as a possibility. And as Trafford makes clear, this baseline framework suggests that ongoing and dynamic processes of interaction enable the overcoming of individual perspectives and the accomplishment of an eventual shared understanding which is *neither forged by imposing commonalities nor by exploiting incommensurability*. In Trafford's (2016) own wording, this is to say that

> [i]nstead, our orientation would be to construct perspectives that are radically intersubjective in that they are irreducible to any perspective that exists prior to our interactions. This, shared, perspective would be genuinely new, and both irreducible to, and transformative of, our individual perspectives.

Already existing social norms influence and mould agents' interactions in any dialogue, but these norms should be considered ductile and subject to continuous reshaping through dialogic interaction rather than be seen as communal agreements or implicit rules. At the same time, however, an understanding of structural power makes clear how uneven the metaphorical game-board is on which our language games take place. Possibilities for action and interaction cannot simply overwrite the structural constraints already contributing to the formation of slanted inclinations within the social landscape. So in thinking of power and how it manifests itself through our

actions, we are reminded that our interactions are influenced by the structure of social norms concerning what might be normal and abnormal, reasonable and unreasonable, etc. As Trafford (2016) notes, this is to indicate that the "space of possible interactions" is like a an uneven landscape in which some behaviours are probabilistically more possible while others might be shut out or are at least made "much more difficult for certain agents". This corresponds with Brandom's (2000: 176) suggestion that the characteristics and acceptability of the claims we make in a conversation are regulated by "shared norms that antecedently govern the concepts one deploys in making such a claim". For Brandom, such "shared norms" ought to be considered "tools" (van Goor, 2014: 78). They are the tools through which new vocabularies may be forged.

For Brandom, such new vocabularies evolve as an everyday phenomenon, and as van Goor (2014: 78) points out, he considers them the "result of a continuous, piecemeal process in which every language user participates". This is the Brandominian view on vocabulary which maintains that using a vocabulary "is to change it" and that this changeability through usage is precisely "what distinguishes vocabularies from other tools" (Brandom, 2000: 177). Trafford's (2016) account of reasoning builds on this particular dimension of Brandom's project. Simply put, this is the proposition that the norms of reasoning are like rules "only insofar as they are generated by the practices of language games themselves". The language games we play are socially embedded. And thus the Sellarsian 'space of reasons' is signalled by conversational interactions that are at once constrained by the discursive norms we use as tools while also enriching and revising those same norms.

As such, norms gain life through our interactions, and this implies that they can be changed through interaction (Trafford, 2016). This is perhaps another way of emphasising Davidson's previously mentioned point that changes to concepts are made possible through reference to what he called 'the common part'. For Brandom, this translates into an emphasis on how linguistic expression is understandable to a public to the degree that it follows on from shared norms, and is considered informative to the degree that it is able to add to the normative domain which it utilizes (van Goor, 2014: 79). This is exemplified by Brandom's oft-cited statement:

> *Every* use of a vocabulary, *every* application of a concept in making a claim, *both* is answerable to norms implicit in communal practice – its public dimension, apart from which it cannot mean anything (though it can cause something) - and transforms those norms by its novelty – its private dimension apart from which it does not formulate a belief, plan or purpose worth expressing. (Brandom, 2000: 179)

This paints a picture of a 'sapient' community practicing its freedom based on its acknowledgement of norm-governed usage of vocabulary and concept application in the public performance of communication, while understanding that those same norms are transformable due to the meeting of perspectives. As Wanderer (2008: 14) explains, Brandom makes the distinction between two different ways of acknowledging norms. The first is acknowledging a norm by being subject to it, which amounts to obeying it in practice. In this regard, happenings in nature involve implicitly acknowledging norms such that, for example, acids ought to have the effect of turning litmus paper red under certain conditions, and in doing so, it moves us to think of such a happening as acknowledging that norm.

In contrast, the second type of acknowledging norms does not imply being a subject to those norms nor obedience. Rather, it is acknowledging a norm by being sensitive to it, grasping it and understanding it. This is to say that “one acknowledges a norm by taking a normative attitude towards it”. Owing to this distinction, only the second type – acknowledgement by being sensitive to the norm – allows for the possibility of error. (Brandom, 1994: 30–31). An acid cannot be said to be bound to the norm just mentioned and not turn the litmus paper red – if this were to happen, it would mean that the acid is obeying a different norm in that particular instance. It is only when “acknowledgement of the norm involves adopting an attitude towards a performance’ that it can be considered possible for that norm ‘to be binding and yet to be disobeyed in practice” (Wanderer, 2008: 14). And it is in this sense that we are able to treat communicative performances as bound to the normative in the first place. So a general feature of Brandom’s model is taking normative attitudes towards such communicative performances by being sensitive to the norms governing them. Brandom makes the distinction between performing and assessing performances. And on his account, what constitutes the “basic building-block” of social practice is the relation between a performer (the subject of normative statuses) and his or her audience (those who take normative attitudes towards his or her performances) (1994: 508). This is what Brandom calls the ‘I-Thou’ approach to social practice, and as Wanderer (2008: 17) notes, for Brandom the concept of “a community, a We, is built out of this basic interactive I-Thou relationship”.

In light of this, Brandom’s formal model for reasoning is an ‘I-Thou’ *game of giving and asking for reasons*. In playing Brandom’s version of the game, the

interacting agents have no recourse to some original chess piece (as in the case of the bishop from our earlier example). Rather, the agents are supposed to infer the implicit rules from the language interactions themselves. This is a sophisticated model whose intricacies are not necessary for our current purpose. However, it is worth noting the emphasis Brandom places on assertions in relation to inferences. Assertion is a speech act performed in utterances of a declarative nature, a common definition is that it is a speech act in which propositions are announced as true or claimed to be so. According to Brandom (2015: 168-169), the two notions of asserting and inferring are essentially linked. This is because for Brandom, an assertion is something that can both serve as a reason and "stand in need of a reason", thus meeting the requirements of declarative sentences within the inferential language game of reasoning.

MacFarlane (2011) traces the various approaches to the notion of assertion and suggests that Brandom's approach is primarily rooted in the idea of 'assertion as commitment' due to C.S. Peirce's position on the matter expressed in the statement "to assert a proposition is to make oneself responsible for its truth" (Peirce, cited in MacFarlane, 2011). And as MacFarlane notes, this position – which he finds in the work of a list of other analytical and pragmatic philosophers, including his own – defines assertion in terms of its intrinsic effects, while understanding those effects to be: the alteration of normative statuses and the accretion of new commitments or obligations. A performance, Brandom (2000b: 189) tells us, can only count "as having the significance of an assertion if it is within the context of a set of

social practices with the structure of […] a game of giving and asking for reasons".

I want to emphasise the significance of the general and broader notion of a 'game of giving and asking for reasons' (or *gogar* for short) in the development of the postagonistic image. Whilst inferentialism – structured around discursive practices such as the *gogar* – is derived from an analysis of day to day reasoning between interlocutors, we are hard-pressed to find images that adopt it as a model for developing a politics rooted in both pluralism and scientific realism. At first estimation, it appears that the demand for such a form of realist pluralism might be asking for too much. But as I have aimed to show, taking the 'synoptic real' route leads us to the possibility of constructing images that escape the demand of sameness or uniformity but do not fetishize difference as the solution for all our political problems. My simple suggestion is that if images can play a part in the development of 'designs' that do not reproduce the limitations of parliamentarianism, but rather take up models of possible 'transformational understanding', then more curatorial attention should be paid to instigating and laying the groundwork for such image-making practices. Such images would point to the irreducibility of the eventual 'we' (established through reasoning and adopting a *gogar*) to the initial 'I' that enters into a conversation. They would function as dynamic blueprints in action for processes of transformational reasoning and highlight the orientational dimension of dialogue.

Continuing with our example of a hypothetical video-installation, the images presented to us would portray a holistic model made possible by the

reasoning-out-loud of model interlocutors working to put each other's utterances and notions of truth through the process of a *gogar*. What is important in how this image unfolds is not the result or 'ending', but the process itself, how it labours towards a shared perspective which is transformative of the individual perspectives of each model interlocutor and irreducible to them. This is to say that such a blueprint for intersubjective interaction, tethered to a structural understanding of power, would acknowledge that the supposed *concrete otherness* of all participating interlocutors is perhaps not so concrete after all, and subject to transformation through the process of reasoning itself. This is possible if the model agents in our hypothetical image take normative attitudes towards each other's communicative performances by being sensitive to the norms governing them. The collective 'putting into jeopardy' of norms which transpires within such a postagonistic moving image implies that the participating agents have come to accept the uncertainty that comes with *asserting as a form of commitment* and playing a game of giving and asking for reasons. This uncertainty in its neurobiological register is 'cognitive orientation'. For the image, it forms the basis for how the text – i.e. the dialogue the model-interlocutors partake in – advances towards a collective subject which is not an assemblage of individual perspectives but a new shared one.

The point here is that Mouffe's understanding of others as concrete, her dependency on the us/them relationship, her notion of a 'conflictual consensus', and her avowal of incommensurability all form the basis for her design of a democratic operation which provides a clear and simplified

framework that addresses the question of 'how to organize pluralism'. By positing these elements as necessarily prior to any political conversation what is reproduced time and time again is a kind of restrictive framework that is ill-equipped for altering the structural processes or norms that have shaped it. Yet, this framework continues to suggest that taking up these elements as rules will help radicalize and open up power to transformation. What it ultimately provides is an organizational model set up to save liberal democracy in its present and contingent 'European' form[60]. As organizational theorist Karl Weick (1979: 6) explains, organizational concepts usually serve "to narrow the range of possibilities" and organizational actions are primarily centred on reducing uncertainty, or as he puts it, "are directed toward the establishment of a workable level of certainty".

By designing a model for pluralism grounded on distinctions such as us/them, constitutive outsides, enemy/adversary, antagonism/agonism etc. Mouffe not only narrows the range of possibilities but provides a workable level of certainty and fixity. And this is perhaps a major reason for the art field's investment in agonistic pluralism as an assumed alternative to already existing forms of democracy. But this organizational model, as I have been implying, is unlikely to lead us out of the current quandary of democracy. Dialogue, reasoning, and the design of models that have a place for both political and scientific realism seem to be at least more promising starting positions.

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[60] The emphasis on liberal pluralist democracy being European and contingent is iterated on numerous occasions by Mouffe. See for example Mouffe, 2016, especially her response to questions put forth by members of the audience.

Conclusion

We can perhaps recall Foucault's (1971: 41) metaphor of 'surfaces of emergence' by which he meant the "specific discursive and institutional sites in which objects first emerge or are re-configured" (Hannah, 2007). Mapping the 'surfaces of emergence' of Mouffian agonism led to an understanding of how theories invested in constructing 'a people' have emerged out of different discourses on 'the real' (the impossible/the artificial). Quite literally, much political theory is a matter of embodying or voicing the 'real' that it has adopted. This mapping of the 'surfaces of emergence' of political theory – in the sense of grasping 'the real' that pushes these theories forward – seems important for a number of reasons: it helps situate our art practices in relation to a kind of genealogy of 'the real', and it identifies the historical discursive contexts from which these constructs of 'the real' have emerged and thus exposes what their limitations might be.

On this view, every 'real' has or can have a correlate in political theory and thus engage with a construction of 'a people'. Taking this into account, the synoptic real seems to be lacking such a correlate, at least in any widely recognizable sense. And perhaps this is no coincidence, since it is both challenging and challengable for the following reasons:

- It suggests that if an intervention into the politics of abstraction is to culminate in some form of emancipation, then it cannot be based on 'concrete others' and the institutionalization of incommensurability between agents. These aspects have by now become normalized and transforming them poses a challenge.

- It indicates that such intervention into the politics of abstraction must not be understood in relation to circular definitions of real abstraction, in which the reality of abstraction is explained in terms of its tendency to be casually effective, while at the same time interpreting causal efficacy as anything capable of making a difference in reality (Brassier, 2014b).
- Contra this, it suggests that intervention lies in intersubjective acts of reasoning while at one and the same time taking science seriously, two dimensions that in practice can be difficult to fuse.
- Potentially, it can mount a challenge to forms of pluralism that have refused reason or rationalism wholesale because in theory it is more open to the variety of perspectives than these forms while at one and the same time upholding the scientific image.
- It suggests a model that can help us move away from the ever-increasing ontologization of politics.

Moreover, and by way of conclusion, I want to recall 'the sites' we explored together on our journey from agonism to postagonistics. With Lyotard, we entered the courtroom and we sympathized with his 'generic wronged worker', but discovered that Lyotard's differend was symptomatic of the post-1968 idea that the "despotism of real subsumption renders ideology critique redundant" (Brassier, 2014), and that this led to the idea that interventions should be founded on differends because they exclude "cognitive verification". They cannot be verified because they are either not accepted by or refuse to submit to a regime which establishes testimonial law and litigation according to its own idiom of exchange run on the subsumption of

labour power. We left Lyotard's courtroom with the differend in hand and entered Mouffe's parliament. There, we saw how the differend was transformed into a full-blown political project that would attempt to radicalize democracy.

This ensued through the same mechanism of excluding 'cognitive verification' – by maximizing the passions and concreteness of 'others' to evade such verification –, enriched with a more complex armamentarium grounded in Laclau and Lacan, but also Schmitt and others. We then went to the park and the museum and learned that such a strategy might be used to occupy institutions and public spaces. With the radical openness of the empty signifier, democracy was supposed to transform the museum into an institution representing the people. We then booked a trip to an island with Deleuze and Tournier and tried to commit Other-cide, which could be described as an inverted form of *sensus communis*. As Shaviro (2002) notes, this particular relationship to the sensus communis is based on the

> cultivation and sharing of the highest possible degree of singularity, rather than as something generalizable into a 'community'. Aesthetic Ideas are what Deleuze elsewhere calls Powers of the False. They are modes of the virtual, as projected by the imagination.

Furthermore, we moved away from the island and the powers of the false to enter into the Sellarsian 'space of reasons'. In this space, we decoupled antagonism from Mouffe's 'enmeshed concept' of agonism and opted for a different position. As pointed out earlier by Brandom, the possibility of common conceptual norms – the norms by which we bind ourselves in using words such as 'freedom' – depends on differences in perspectives and even on disagreements. And this emphasis on perspectivality – rooted in

Sellarsian anti-foundationalism – paved the way for processes of cognitive orientation and interaction which would permit an 'eventual shared understanding' achieved neither by imposing commonalities nor by exploiting incommensurability. In turn, we arrived at what Trafford called 'radical intersubjectivity', which, unlike agonal democracy, is committed to the construction of new shared perspectives irreducible to, and transformative of, our individual perspectives. Hence, in taking up such an intersubjective approach we are leaving agonistics – at least in the sense laid bare in this project – behind and constructing a postagonistic perspective.

As such, postagonistics – as developed over the course of this dissertation – is an attempt to think how we can construct 'a people' tethered neither to a project of radicalizing democracy nor to a dependency on the 'powers of the false'. Rather, the emphasis is on the anti-foundationalist and self-correcting enterprise of knowledge through the game of giving and asking for reasons. I have used the *inaesthetics of jeopardy* to explain the methodology postagonistics uses. The inaesthetics of jeopardy is a model in which 'the real' is always in an *eventual science* that can only be reached when the current discrepancy between manifest and scientific images is collapsed through reasoning. This runs counter to both the impossible real and the artificial real, and has been labelled the *synoptic real*. This initial methodology (elaborated in more detail in Chapter 3) was further augmented through the work of Trafford on reasoning and Seibt on (intercultural) dialogue. An argument might be levelled at *reasoning* and the *inaesthetics of jeopardy* that they appear to be more in sync with idealism than realism. Here, I support Brassier's (2015) claim that

> [t]he term idealism merits strategic resuscitation as a way of reasserting the autonomy of the conceptual and combating the virulent anti-rationalism of certain contemporary strains of 'realism' and 'materialism'. 'Idealism' as a claim about the autonomy of the conceptual need not entail a 'realism of the idea' …

The Sellarsian synoptic real is indisputably a form of ‘realism’, but it is one which enables the reasserting of the autonomy of the conceptual or the ‘unnatural nature’ of reason to fully take its course. In relation to how reasoning is discussed in this project, I have suggested that the ongoing debate on ‘democracy and art’, which is also a question related to the notion of a public sphere, can begin to shift its terms of engagement. The move from participation to implication to occupation in order to arrive at reasoning requires a certain preparedness and reorientation. Although on occasion dialogue certainly does take place in some institutional frameworks, the point is that, generally speaking, there is certain ‘cluttering of the real’ that the expanded field of art has become accustomed to, and to an extent this delimits the possibilities of reasoning. Now, I want to return to ‘sites’ to briefly visit the final stop of our journey, the site of the image.

In Chapter 3, the working concept of an inaesthetics of jeopardy was developed both to clarify the synoptic real and to suggest that images too can be thought of as sites for reasoning. I adopted Badiou’s term ‘inaesthetics’, which denotes resistance to the dependence on the reflection/object relation, and discussed how this model suggested a certain determinacy as opposed to the indeterminacy of contemporary art described by Malik. However, I did not fully articulate what was meant by ‘site’. In a short essay critical of site-specific art projects, Poole (2015) develops the idea of what he calls an ‘artwork proper’. According to Poole such an art work must be

> a hypothesis; it is the happening of the 'setting down' of itself as its own *site* under, or at the base of, a given subject's presumed location; in the shape of a speculative proposition … (emphasis added)

Following on from this, although it may be argued that reasoning already takes place in everyday situations, the idea of the image as a site for reasoning is not meant to suggest the image as a mirror for everyday reasoning, by which I mean the type of reasoning one does when, for example, buying a coffee. Rather, the picture is one of reasoning as a discourse that is dependent on postulation and assertion and bound to intersubjectivity. This is of course what, after Sellars, I have called jeopardying. What is at stake is the politicization of jeopardying as a model for pluralism. Thus, when we work with images, a certain theatricalization of jeopardying is perhaps required to elucidate the effects of following Sellarsian anti-foundationalism all the way through from a political perspective. And it is in this way that the inaesthetics of jeopardy 'sets itself down as its own site' and speculatively proposes the image of a community, the jeopardying community.

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