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“First as Politics, then as Art”

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First as “Politics,” then as “Art”

Abstract

The article investigates two contemporary propositions that it seeks to dismantle: 1. The proposition “everything is political” that it takes as one of the crucial implication of the concept of biopolitics. 2. The proposition “all art is political” that it takes to be a defense mechanism against the insight of the indefensibility of proposition 1. The article demonstrates how both propositions ultimately unfold from the mythic assumption of a givenness of politics and/or art and it concludes by suggesting that only a complete suspension of any kind of givenness might be a preparation for true politics or art to come. This preparation the article delineates as fatalist preparation.

Keywords

biopolitics, Esposito, fatalism, Foucault, Hegel, political art

First as “Politics,” then as “Art”

And suddenly in the laborious nowhere, suddenly the unsayable spot where the pure Too-little is transformed incomprehensibly—leaps around and changes into that empty Too-much.

Rilke, *5th Duino Elegy*

We arrange [ordnen] it. It breaks down. We rearrange it and we break down ourselves.

Rilke, *8th Duino Elegy*

Look, I am alive. Where from? Neither childhood nor future grows any smaller... Supernumerary being—there rises up in my heart.

Rilke, *9th Duino Elegy*

Everything is Political

Not so long ago, one could have still quite easily been led to believe that everything is, at least in some sense, political. Not so long ago, one might have been tempted to assume that everything may in fact be (potentially) political; once Michel Foucault famously captured this conception, it seemed certain: “where there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault 1990: 95). And as power permeates all kinds of relations, may they be social, artistic, scientific, juridical, or of whatever kind; as “power is everywhere... because it comes from everywhere” (Foucault 1990: 93), resistance and hence politics is also, at least potentially, everywhere, because it can come from everywhere. Everything is political, as one could have believed, because power is everywhere and is always accompanied by a politicizing resistance to it. But it also seemed to be precisely their peculiarly weak “dialectical” relationship—any new progress in power produces resistance to that very power, which again through a process of assimilation ensures the very progress of power—which makes power, or more precisely, power-knowledge relations, so productive. Believing that everything is political also implied that there is nothing, no object, no issue, no subject, no entity, no site, which could not at one point become a political thing, a political object, a political issue, a political subject, a political entity, or political site for that matter.

Yet such a rendering only accounts for the very idea of, at least, the potential totalization of politics. This is to say it accounts for the “everything” (object, sites, etc.) in the proposition “everything is political” but does not account for what is meant by “politics.” It is again Foucault who

in this regard gave a famous and paradigmatic answer: As the power that is constantly facing resistance, which it itself produced and struggles to re-assimilate, is a power over life, it is defined as biopower and hence the politics related to it can therefore be defined as biopolitics. In the following I will neither reconstruct the intricacies of Foucault's own elaboration of this concept,¹ nor will I address questions whether one can or even should trace the historical origin and genesis of this form of politics. I will therefore not deal with questions such as: Did biopolitics begin with (a misinterpretation of) Aristotle and might one therefore also be able to find conceptual resource within Aristotle to counter it, as Giorgio Agamben has it, or is it rather a modern invention that co-emerged with a specific mode of government and is it linked to concepts like normality, sovereignty, liberty, as Foucault seemed to have argued? I will rather read the claim "everything is political" in a categorical way such that it neither implies a specific topological nor temporal horizon.

I will thus explore how one can justify the claim that everything is political in a conceptual manner. To investigate this justification means taking into account a peculiar concatenation of a specific concept of politics and a specific concept of life. I will demonstrate that it is highly problematic to assume that everything is political and that this very claim manifests an obfuscation, a foreclosure, an obscuration of politics. I will argue that the claim that "everything is political" although it explicitly seems to speak of politics speaks of politics in a form which prevents, hinders, blocks, and obscures politicality. In brief, I will propose that "everything is political" is an apolitical slogan, an ideological slogan that embodies a way of speaking of or about politics that actually prevents politics proper through the very form of addressing it. To render this idea intelligible, one might here think of Hegel's wonderful saying that for a certain position it holds that when it is the most dead, its favorite words are "life" and "enliven" (Hegel 2008: 10). Today, I want to argue, one might translate this criticism and state the following about the position I will subsequently be addressing: When it is the most apolitical, its favorite slogan is "everything is political." In the following I will first clarify this point through an investigation of the link between politics and life that one can find condensed in the notion of biopolitics (in one of its many formulations at least). Thereby I will also, although implicitly, address the relation between politics and ideology (in its bad version). Ideology, the bad kind, is what can be at least partially characterized by a peculiar procedure, namely that the very way of explicitly referring to a thing is the very means of avoiding it. The very act that makes one seemingly directly engage is the very manner to avoid any real engagement—one may just recall what happened after the NSA–Snowden scandal: nothing happened

¹ I have done this elsewhere, see Ruda (2011).

after it was made public, so the very means of revealing a previously unattained knowledge can serve as the very medium to hinder, block its effectivity.² I will argue that “everything is political” as a way of reading the conceptual implication of the term biopolitics can depict not only that the former is an ideological slogan in the same sense, it can moreover show some fundamental limitations of the latter term. Yet, I will contend that one should analyze this very slogan (“everything is political”) in relation to another one—and this will be dealt with in the second, much shorter part of the present article—namely that all art is political.

The present article is not at all meant polemically but as conceptual analysis, which is why I here want to draw on one reconstruction of the very foundational move of the concept of biopolitics that was presented in a very instructive manner by Roberto Esposito. I here refer to Esposito not because I think he is the most authoritative source or the coolest of all biopolitics philosophers, but rather because he claims that it is precisely the link between life and politics that has to be rethought—and this is what also motivates his complex critique of Foucault. This criticism runs as follows: Foucault only presented a negative (even if fundamentally productive) concept of biopolitics. Against this Esposito seeks to excavate another dimension of biopolitics. His main argument may be resumed as follows: Since Foucault only saw the productive yet negative dimension he foreclosed the possibility to conceive of a different conception of biopolitics and with it of a concept of politics proper. Because he only conceptualized a negative version of biopolitics, he was unable to truly think politics proper. For politics in Foucault’s conception is thereby conceptually resisting itself, or: it’s being thought and ends up being nothing but a negative conception of politics. This is an interesting argument which clearly marks the ideological dimension of the claim that everything is political that I take to be one possible articulation of the very concept of politics that is implied in the concept of biopolitics. Against Foucault, one may say, Esposito seeks to split biopolitics into two and thereby open up a domain for real politics that overcomes biopolitical totalization; “a politics of life instead of a politics over life” (Esposito 2012a: 77). But to get to this point, one first needs to elaborate Esposito’s reconstruction of the conceptual coordinates of what he calls negative biopolitics and also why he assumes that it is essentially negative.

Esposito defines politics in this model as “nothing other than the possibility or the instrument for keeping life alive” (2006: 24). This is why for him biopolitics is not only productive, as Foucault famously claimed in his *History of Sexuality I*, but also always entails a moment of negativity that he conceptually links to a broader concept, namely the notion of immunity.

² This point is one way of reading a part of the argument Alain Badiou develops (2015).

At the origin of Esposito's reconstruction of the (negative) biopolitical notion of politics lies the idea that I can only keep myself alive if I stand in a negative relation to all others and hence immunize myself from them. In this sense biopolitics implies a conception of politics that keeps life alive and is therefore always a *politics of separation*. And one may infer even further that in this context: everything is political if, and only if, everywhere there is separation. But why does this kind of politics rely on separation? Esposito answers by contending that this is because of the fact that any concept of politics *necessarily* relies on a concept of life, in this case on the idea that life is immanently self-destructive. And one can obviously think of easy evidence: animals kill other animals, animals eat plants that are also somehow alive, humans kill humans, eat animals and plants, etc. Esposito's idea is that the implied concept of life determines the concept of politics that one ends up with. No concept of politics without reference to the concept of life, yet it is the latter which determines and sets out the stakes for the former. The conception of life implied in the notion of biopolitics is one that takes life to be immanently directed against itself, as something that has a self-destructive tendency and therefore needs protection of itself against itself. For Esposito such a conception of life is at work in an amazing series of theoretical positions namely in Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Durkheim, Nietzsche, Scheler, Gehlen, Plessner, Parsons, Luhmann, Marquard, Weber, and he even refers to Freud and Marx.³

All of them for Esposito conceive of life as something that is imbued with a specific kind of self-negating negativity. In short, they all state that any form of life has a deadening tendency. Life in living negates itself and this is why the preservation of life cannot be performed by life itself. Life is sick, ill and dying of itself, or rather *life is its own illness* and to cure itself from itself, for life to survive, something else is needed, something different from life. Life's other, an other which thrives on life, operates on it and saves it, is politics. Politics is thereby defined as a practice, as discourse, which preserves life in the interest of life against life and against its worst tendencies and intentions. *Politics is the savior of life*. And it can save, preserve and hence continue life's life by performing an operation on that which in life is not—and maybe more, maybe less than—life: namely negativity. Politics operates on life by “immunizing,” this is Esposito's term, life against itself, namely by negating the immanent negativity of life. Politics in this conception is that which saves life from its self-imposed destiny, it denaturalizes life by preserving it and protecting it even against its own self-destructive desires. Life necessitates, even needs, politics to remain what it is, since it was unable to go on without it. If life were not

³ It is worth mentioning that Esposito believes that one can also find in Freud a positive, affirmative conception of life in the psychopathology of everyday life in which it is not the subject but what Esposito calls the “impersonal” that stands in the center of analysis. Cf. Esposito (2012b: 50ff., 2012c: 104–151).

separated from itself, it would stop to be what it is, would stop to live and therefore to ensure the continuation of life one needs politics. This idea is what Esposito calls the immunization paradigm of political thought.

Life here is firstly understood as biological life and therefore one can say that the *logos of bios* is an auto-destructive one. This is why politics cannot but be a politics of life, or more precisely: biopolitics. All politics is biopolitics because it is life itself that necessitates politics and hence provides the very operational domain of and for it: The task of politics is to save life from itself⁴ and as all there *practically* is, is life, any persisting practice must be political, biopolitical. Everything is political is what can be derived from a biopolitical notion of politics. *Politics kills the death inscribed into life*, it destroys life’s self-destructive tendency. With the conceptual emergence of politics, life as such is swallowed by politics or the political. With the emergence of politics, all life if it is alive is alive because there is politics. All (of) life is political, because it is politicized, that is to say: saved and separated from itself. Politics separates life from itself through negating its immanent negativity. Life in this conception needs politics to remain life, to be preserved, yet this preservation implies separation and immunization, which is precisely the opposite of any idea of communion or community for Esposito.⁵ This is why the main problem of any biopolitical understanding of politics lies in accounting for how that which is separated with the emergence of politics can again come together and form a community. Here one, obviously, cannot but think of Hobbes. In him as one of *the* modern thinkers of biopolitics in Esposito’s sense, one can clearly see how separation, immunization builds the basis for the constitution of any political community.

This means that separation (as the *modus operandi* of immunization, i.e., of politics) names the very paradoxical medium of politics (politics is separation) that is paradoxical because *only through* this *separation* it becomes *possible to relate* individual living bodies or species of living bodies to one other. One thus creates a community starting from what they as separated bodies have in common, what they share in terms of common attributes and one of the first things they share is obviously that they are separated. To take Hobbes as an example: All separated individuals share in Esposito’s reading the fear of death and hence they share precisely what cannot be shared and what thereby in his reading separates, namely anxiety. What makes them a community is precisely what separates them. Politics thus becomes the name of a discourse—a discourse of separation—that through separation relates bodies to one another. Politics of

⁴ This even plays a role in what Esposito calls thanato-politics, where some forms of life are considered to be unworthy and hence it is not as if, say, the Nazis killed people (in the sense of taking lives), rather they protected life against destructive tendencies within it. Thanatopolitics is thus a direct outcome of the biopolitical notion of life.

⁵ Cf. Esposito (2010).

and as separation is the medium, and one could also say: the language that connects the bodies. In this account of the politics of biopolitics everything is political, because there is nothing but bodies and language, bodies and their medium of relation, namely separation. A politics of life that relates separated bodies, which are separated because there is politics and it relates them through a language of what the separated bodies have in common, namely separation. Everything is political since there is nothing but separated bodies and the language of politics. Everything is political since life can only be life as politicized, rescued, separated, and thereby self-related life.

Due to the immunizing and preserving tendency of politics with regard to life, even washing one's hands becomes in this sense a political act as it preserves our lives against the destructive, threatening impact of viruses and other destructive forms of life. Everything is political, because for the biopolitical account of politics what matters is life's preservation and therefore all there is is bodies and languages.

This model of politics is the direct result of the idea that life cannot preserve itself: living bodies need the negating intervention of the discourse of politics to remain what they are, namely alive. Esposito argues that this model is the defining feature of modernity, namely that "only by negating itself can nature assert its own will to live. Preservation proceeds through the suspension or the alienation of that which needs to be protected. Therefore the political state cannot be seen as the continuation or the reinforcement of nature, but rather as its negative converse" (Esposito 2006: 33). Politics, precisely by not being something that comes naturally, by not being given from the beginning, when it is finally generated against life's paradoxical tendency to negate and seek to preserve itself at the same time, politics swallows all living things for the sake of preserving them. Politics as separation is a politics that keeps life alive and is therefore productive and self-sufficient. As Jean-Luc Nancy argued, this idea "thus amounts to asserting that 'man' is self-sufficient in the sense that he produces his own nature and, therein, nature as a whole. Until now, the vague representation of this self-sufficiency and this self-production have entirely dominated the representations of politics..." (2002: 18). Man becomes self-sufficient as political preserver of his own life or more precisely: of life in general.

Esposito seeks to counter such a negative form of biopolitics—negative because it negates the negativity in life—with another, "an affirmative biopolitics", in which politics would not be "a power over life but a power of life" (Esposito 2012b: 60). He thus tries to split biopolitics into two. Seeking to separate precisely that which separates and from this follows: if one seeks to separate that which separates, one seeks also to re-politicize politics, and if politics is that which is necessarily generated by the self-destructive tendency of life as something that denaturalizes natural life for the sake of keeping it alive, this also means *to denaturalize that*

which denaturalizes life and to... ultimately take it back to nature. This amounts to a strange identity of identity and difference, where in the end there is only pure affirmative life without any need for the former kind of politics. A life that would be (immediately identical to) politics, but this again means that everything (that lives) is political. In other words, denaturalizing what denaturalizes nature leads ultimately back to nature. If “everything is political” first seemed to be an apolitical claim because it only referred to the idea of preservation of life and did not imply any real idea of politics (this was the constitutive momentum of biopolitics), repoliticizing the negative notion of politics involved in biopolitics in my mind just directly leads to the same strange result, namely that one has to argue that life itself is political. But why should that be? Because if one politicizes politics and denaturalizes the process of denaturalization that is politics, one cannot but argue for life as such being political. But why is this problematic? Because in his account there is then no other form of politics than either mere administration of the given derivable from life (politics as negative biopolitics) or an affirmation of the naturalness of nature (the politicization of politics in biopolitics). So either politics is administration or nature is political. “Everything is political” is a slogan that encapsulates this deadlock.

Is there thus no escape? Is everything political and hence not political? If things seem to be messed up conceptually it always helps to turn to Hegel. I quote him: “The famous answer: ‘I do not see the need for it,’ given to the libeler who excused himself with the words: ‘But I have to live,’ is apposite at this point. Life ceases to be necessary in face of the higher realm of freedom” (Hegel 2008: 125). In a rather open reformulation: What if life itself, life as such, is worth nothing? What if politics cannot be derived from a notion of life? What if one first needs to separate the concepts of life and politics? Life as such then would be nothing that would, per se, be worth saving, politics would not be logically derivable from life’s constitution and the biopolitical notion of politics would rather be some kind of defense mechanism against this very insight. For Hegel, if one just starts extrapolating from his brief passage, life as such is not necessary and—in the form of mere survival—has no value in itself. The only life that is worth of being lived is a free life, a life lived with and as unfolding of an idea, namely of the idea of freedom. With Hegel one can therefore argue that if the preservation of life as such is not necessary, not-everything is political. Politics is not at all derivable from life, from a concept of life, be it negative or positive. Maybe politics should rather be envisaged as that which is necessary for life to be life, but as something which at the same time cannot be inferred from life. Maybe one should claim politics to be one of the forms of action that is necessary for life to be a real life but also as something that from the perspective of life (and also from the perspective of politics derived from life) must seem impossible. What if politics would be (a piece of) the real of life? This idea would

neither imply deriving politics from life nor a return to a politics of life but a beginning of a real, of a different life through the very advent of politics that seems at the same time necessary and impossible from the perspective of life as such. In this sense one can argue that if life in the form of survival is meaningless and worth nothing, there is simply no real life before there is politics, and there simply is no politics before... before there is a break with the idea that there is any mere life worth living, worth returning to, worth whatever. There is, in short, *no politics before there is politics*. Politics is from this perspective something that plays a crucial part in any real life worth living, in any life with an idea.

There is no life without politics and politics is therefore one of the things that truly makes life into life. But this is ultimately to say that *there is no life as such*, it emerges first and foremost with politics. When one states everything is political, this claim itself obfuscates what one needs to speak about in the very manner it speaks about politics. Everything is political is linked to a peculiar fiction, namely that one could infer and derive politics from whatever given thing that is just there, that one can derive politics from what is, be it life in the broadest sense of the term, or economics, or whatever. With Hegel one can point out that true life is not simply given, or that the givenness of life as such is worth nothing. Furthermore, one can infer that true life emerges only when something happens that cannot be derived from what is given, rather life only emerges when there is a rupture with the idea that anything is just given. Whoever thinks that everything is political does forget in advance any possibility of real politics as well as any possibility of real life. "Everything is political" is a slogan of those who naturalize politics (that itself is supposed to denaturalize life) and hence think that politics is a politics over life or of life. One thus needs to turn this idea around and assume that in fact: Nothing is, per se, political. Or even more precisely: There is nothing that can be political and hence politics seems to be impossible, and not always already potentially at work in life (for then in one Aristotelian way or the other this potential realizes itself). One must assume there will never be any true political action or organization ever (maybe ever again if one assumes that there once was politics). One thereby must assert the very outcome of the biopolitical notion of politics, even though it is rarely asserted by anyone defending this very notion. Nothing can ever be political, it is impossible that there ever will be politics and hence there will never be a life worthy of the name. So life itself has not value and politics will never ever emerge. Affirming the very impossibility of both and at the same time declaring their mutual necessary dependence marks one possible way of dealing with the deadlock pointed out. Yet, bored to death with speculative twists like this, the new intelligentsia fled from the claims that things are much more lost than they like to assume, neither satisfied with pure theory (or endless conceptual dialectical elaborations that seem to be like dialectical porn) nor with direct concrete actions, and exiled itself to art

galleries and started proclaiming: Neither feel anxious nor trapped, even in the absence of politics proper, there is a savior, art can do the job.

All Art is Political

Today it seems heretical to doubt that art, all art, is political. To start with a paradigmatic example, I once had the rather unfortunate pleasure of witnessing a lecture on improvisation in jazz music whose most essential thesis can be resumed as follows: If one witnesses a jazz band improvising, one witnesses how one has to conceive of true, that is democratic, political practice. Why? Because in jazz improvisation, everything depends on the fact that everyone has to assert his or her individual voice, that the space for doing so is granted to him or her, he or she has to create with his instrument an individualized timbre and the level of individual improvisation is necessarily working together with the improvisation of the whole band such that all musicians pay attention and listen closely to one another. Thereby they constantly negotiate their cues, the dynamics of the collective as much as of each individual with one another. The improvisation of the jazz band was thereby declared to be the paradigm of democratic political action, because for the speaker any improvisation implied that one knows the rules of a game, has acquired the capacities not to improvise (i.e., to follow rules) and this means that one can only improvise due to individual appropriation, transgression, and modification of those very rules that as such constitute the basis of a properly common activity. Jazz improvisation, this is what the speaker asserted, can therefore be taken as structural paradigm of true political practice since it manifests how real political practice, real participation, democratic negotiations are supposed to work. Jazz is thus democracy on a smaller scale. Why is this not simply nice and convincing? Is there anything to say against this? There is indeed. This is due to certain facts that are so trivially true that they are easily forgotten quite frequently: Politics is not art and democracy is a form of organization that has a history, this is to say: It is not a value in itself. These are obviously trivial insights, yet one confuses one's own gaze on such trivialities when one starts to believe that art is simply always political and, as the speaker did, simply ascribes to art the task of formulating a paradigm of politics.

One thereby loses track on the trivial insights, because one strangely starts to claim that art is a practice that can present the norm of all normative political practices, a model, so to speak, of how politics should be practiced. This is simply surprising, since politics is not jazz—and may one need to add: obviously? Strangely this is also because ultimately art would then be that which tells politics how to do politics, art would thus be a kind of politics without politics (proper). This leads to a peculiar definition of art. Peculiar because it implies a peculiar conceptual conflation: not only

is art then defined by an external measure, by an external practice, namely only via politics art can do what art is supposed to do. But at the same time art is thereby nothing but this other practice without, so to speak, the proper substance of this other practice, it is politics without politics. Thereby it is defined via an external practice but is at the same time supposed to give this other practice a normative guideline and provide it with a model. Therefore one ends with a strange result: art provides guidelines for a practice from which it constitutively depends, because it is precisely defined by its relation to it, but is nonetheless supposed to be the normative standard according to which one is able to practice this other practice. Art is politics without politics, yet politics has to follow the model that art provides for political practice. Hence, politics should seek to become like art and therefore politics should ultimately also be a politics without politics. But if all politics is politics without politics, what then is politics? Such a convoluted relation between two not really defined kinds of practices leads to the strange effect that one ultimately cannot really determine anymore what art and politics are supposed to mean.

The speaker then tried to argue that this paradox can be resolved by contending that art is supposed to be a precondition for politics, because it can train us in attaining the correct political attitude. This is a claim that seems to be surprisingly fashionable today. Imagine you are not a democrat, you see some jazz band improvise and as an effect of their performance you understand that you were previously epistemologically confused, and made, say, too substantialist assumptions about justice and truth. After seeing the jazz band perform you learn that democratic practice consists in negotiating solutions in a way that all voices are heard (at least all those voices would that are fit enough to play in the band). Yet this claim does not solve but it rather reiterates the problem of assuming that either art or politics are in some sense always already given, or in this case can be derived from one another. "All art is political" then allocates to art a similar function with regard to politics that the concept of life had in the claim that "everything is political." Art comes to the rescue of politics, since as long as there is art, there will be politics (that once saved life's life), because one can attain a paradigm of politics through artistic practices. Art thereby fulfills the role of a kind of political *Ersatzbefriedigung*, a substitute satisfaction, it is a sign that things are not as bad as long as one still can refer to political paradigms generated by art (and thereby everyone is potentially politicized). Yet, I think with this displacement from the claim that everything is political to the idea that all art is political things get even worse. If art is supposed to reassure that there still is politics, only in the domain of art, this does not simply come with the danger of confusing one's champagne drinking in a gallery with political action, but even worse, as the claim "all art is political" also obfuscates the insight into the problem even more drastically. It is like a displacing repetition of that which one does not like to or simply cannot remember: that there

simply may be no politics right now. The savior of politics is thereby part of the problem itself, which makes the problem worse, because thereby one does not only obscure the fact that there is a problem with the assumed givenness of politics, one also obscures the fact that thereby one may also have a problem with regard to the alleged givenness of art.

Christopher Menke recently articulated the following diagnosis: “Never before in modernity there was more art, was art more visible and more determining within a society than today [...] The ubiquitous presence of art [...] in society goes hand in hand with a loss of what I propose to call its force...” (Menke 2013: 11). In a similar vein, Alain Badiou has argued that today there are two dominant paradigms, two norms of how to conceive of subjectivity that both determine contemporary art production.⁶ The first one is a materialist and monist one, namely that the subject is basically identical to its body, that there is no distinction between the two. Artistic practice following this paradigm implies a kind of experiment with the limits of the body. And of course the ultimate limit of the body is death, so this implies an experiment with death that could be described as extreme body art. Recall the example of the British woman who televised her own death and claimed it to be a work of art. So, if the subject is monistically identified with its body then art following this paradigm is turned into an experiment of death in life, as an experiment with the limits of the body and hence of the subject. The second paradigm is a rather theological one that completely separates subject and body. It implies that artistic creation is rather an experiment of life in death, of living beyond one’s body, transcending it and thereby finding a new life (one may here think of Lars von Trier’s *Breaking the Waves* where there is precisely the emergence of a true act of love when there is a complete separation of the body and the subject). Interestingly enough for Badiou it is not the power of life that builds the motor of these two paradigms but rather the power of death: of life in death or death in life.

These two paradigms of conceiving of subjectivity are obviously not only at work with regard to artistic but also political practices. The *Ersatzbefriedigung* that one gets from art’s politicality is thus a very peculiar one, one that asserts the power of death, maybe a power that is related to the “death” of politics without acknowledging it. And against this background it may not come as a surprise that jazz improvisation was turned into a model of democratic practice, since at least in the Western world the so-called political framework in which “art” takes place is clearly contemporary democracy. And when Badiou claims that democracy at least in its contemporary guise represents the abolishment of politics, the absence of any real conception of politics (and hence of life) by turning politics into a gigantic operation of administrating of things, people, votes,

⁶ See Badiou (2005).

etc., that thereby obscures the very idea there can be a political action that is not simply derived from what is taken to be a given, might one not assume that the art that presents a model of democratic practice in some way reinforces this kind of obscurity, this kind of foreclosure? “Art” seems to work as an *Ersatzbefriedigung* if one assumes that all art is political simply because it is a repeated denial of assuming what one in some sense already knows, namely that there is a lack of real politics, a lack of politics of the real. But could one not also assume that this functioning of art makes the very existence of art questionable if “art” is simply said to deliver a paradigm of democratic politics?

A Plea for A Philosophical Fatalism

I will end with a some manifesto-like propositions that I think one should assert to overcome the dilemma that is encapsulated by the ideas of everything being either political as such or of art as general placeholder for politics. These propositions are elements of what I call a *philosophical fatalism*.⁷ Such a fatalism neither implies a tragic dimension, such that one foresees how there always will be a necessary conflict between one’s hopes and wishes, desires and projects and the real and objective conditions, nor a existentialist dimension such that one would need to take the absurdity of the world into account and cannot escape doing all the Sisyphean repetitive work of becoming the bearer of some existential decision. The kind of philosophical fatalism I want to defend rather has a peculiar comic dimension, because: 1. It neither assumes that things will go wrong in the future but rather implies a different relation to the past; 2. It resembles the attitude the cartoon figures have that go on running even if they already surpassed the end of a cliff. So, here are my comic fatalist propositions of what to do with the deadlock that I see with regard to politics and art today. I think one should start from the assumptions that:

1. There will never be a life worthy of this name.
2. There will never be true political action.
3. There will never be any true art.
4. Art will never be political.
5. Politics is not art and art is not politics, although their distinction does not matter anyhow, since what they have in common is that they will remain both impossible.
6. Everything is already lost and it is necessarily impossible that this situation will ever change.

By affirming these propositions, by assuming that in some sense one is already dead, that one will never be truly alive, that the apocalypse has

⁷ I extensively elaborated this conception in Ruda (2016).

already happened,⁸ that only through the affirmation of the impossibility of life, politics, and art, one may generate the preconditions a new thinkability (an impossible possibility) of life, politics, and art. Why? Because one thereby at least affirms that which stands at the ground of any true life and real politics and any true art: a necessary impossibility. Assuming them and thereby affirming points of impossibility—that is also a way of reading the true emancipatory potential of Hegel’s idea of the end of art and history—one does not simply give up, but rather one assumes the impossible and yet necessary position with which nearly ends, un-ends not a great cartoon but a great novel. In Beckett’s *Unnamable* (2009: 408), one reads: “I see nothing. It’s because there is nothing. Or it’s because I have no eyes. Or both. (That makes three possibilities to choose from).” I think one should opt for the third: we do not have eyes and there is nothing. But this seems to be a better option than to constantly see what is not there with eyes that one hallucinates. There was a great apocalypse under heaven, the situation is excellent.

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⁸ I owe this formulation to Mladen Dolar.