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**The Missing Politics of Restitution: Answering Esposito's Triptych of Political Ontology**  
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In his large body of work spanning more than forty years, Roberto Esposito presents an incredible effort to establish a living history of political ideas: actively contributing to the latest debates on community, biopolitics and postdemocracy as well as showing how these relate to older traditions of political thought. Ever since his first work on the impolitical published in 1988, Esposito has showed a paradoxical relationship to Schmittian and Heideggerian political theory: his project expresses time and again the will to go beyond Schmitt's and Heidegger's conceptualization of politics and to work at establishing new concepts for a new century. And yet, Esposito often finds himself entangled in unnecessary knots, preventing him from reaching other paths that are more necessary and salient. Esposito's work is exemplary for its consistency in terms of style, rigor and thematics; it also shines with ambition. Two main topics haunt his work: first the question of the origin of politics and second the evolution of politics and the necessity of finding a new vocabulary. This last work on political ontology (Esposito 2020b; Esposito 2021) does not deviate from these two topics, and if anything, it is a summative work and one with extraordinary ambition: providing the outline of a new political ontology which is defined by the invention of new institutions.

“Instituting Thought” presents a triptych of political ontology: *destitution*, *constitution* and *institution* based respectively on (post-)Heideggerian, Deleuzian and a neo-Machiavellian/Lefortian concepts. These three traditions have been retained since they have not only developed concepts and tools for the discourse and practice of politics but have constructed political ontologies. When reading their work and their uses, we find different ways of establishing the links between humans as beings and everyday politics. First for *destitution*,

Martin Heidegger's work has been particularly influential in the twentieth century in conceiving the relationship between being and politics negatively. The Heideggerian political ontology can be translated as "a decision not to decide" (Esposito 2021: 7) or the "prescription of its own destitution." It leads to the deliberate "abandonment of every political project" (Esposito 2021: 8) and to the complete withdrawal of politics in the sphere of being.<sup>1</sup> Second, the Deleuzian political ontology here is read in a two-fold manner: first through Antonio Negri's interpretation of Gilles Deleuze (in particular for the concept of "constituent power"), and second through the association of life and politics. Esposito (2021: 12) writes that for Deleuze "negation does not really exist, it is a false problem," the Deleuzian political ontology of *constitution* is the liberation of fluxes and pure positivity. In the second part of this article and following a certain strand in the scholarship, I show that negativity is in fact central to Deleuze's political thought and it can be employed for new social struggles. Finally and most importantly, the objective of Esposito's text is to imagine the political ontology of *institution* as an alternative to both post-Heideggerian and neo-Deleuzian political ontologies by revisiting the work of French political theorist Claude Lefort. The necessity to return to anti-totalitarianism and Lefort is implicit but easily grasped. After the election of Trump and many other far-right leaders in Europe and India, Brazil, Philippines etc. in the last five years, political theory has turned to the renewed debate on fascism and reactionary democracy (Mondon and Winter 2020). Totalitarianism is an ever-present threat, it has a ghostly presence in political theory, and any attempt to break "the dialectic of exteriorization and interiorization" (Esposito 2021: 19) means the purging of an undesirable otherness that prevents a regime from

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<sup>1</sup> The work of Giorgio Agamben on destituent power is referenced by Esposito at the end of the section on destitution and it is clearly influencing the interpretation of Heidegger's political ontology here. Interestingly, "constitution" is also indebted to Antonio Negri's reading of Deleuze; hence Esposito's own desire to add his own name to the Italian tradition of political ontology with "institution".

administering the fantasy of complete “immanentism.”<sup>2</sup> Lefort’s political thought was an attempt to pursue Merleau-Ponty’s own political trajectory and hypotheses on Machiavelli but his enterprise also belonged the period of rediscovery of French liberalism as well as establishing a revisionism of the French revolution. What is lurking behind the project of instituting for Lefort is to normalize political theory, forget about revolutions and block social struggles. It belongs to the ethical turn of French philosophy (Rancière 1999: 100-2), one that had pursued a purity of the political and a democracy without the *demos*.

The political ontology of institution is based on a politics of ambiguity, agonism and openness.<sup>3</sup> Importantly for Esposito, the creation of new institutions occurs from an already-established instituted world – while constitution creates out of nothing, institution starts from an “inevitable indeterminacy” of broken institutions (Esposito 2021: 18; Esposito 2020b). Institutions can transform themselves, drawing from the revolutionary energy that converts revolt into revolution through the process of institutionalization. Institutionalization is therefore a crucial moment in the making of new institutions, though this process is far from being linear and does not follow any possible blueprints.<sup>4</sup> Esposito briefly suggests that there are overlaps between destitution, constitution and institution but his article does not allow us much room to think about these overlaps since much energy is given to highlighting the ruptures and discontinuities rather than the continuities and intermingling of these concepts and ontologies.

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<sup>2</sup> “Totalitarianisms suppose the general immanentism, especially Nazism, where the immanence of race – of the soil and the blood – absorbs all transcendence.” (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1991: 24)

<sup>3</sup> Institution here should not be understood in a state-centric way; it is rooted in a debate in phenomenology between Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (who was also Lefort’s teacher) on constitution and institution. The notion of “institution” for Merleau-Ponty was a means to explain how meaning is produced not just at the individual and/or social levels but in relational and processual ways – inviting comparisons with Gilbert Simondon’s understanding of individuation as ontogenesis (Diprose 2010).

<sup>4</sup> I owe this point about institutionalization to George Sotiropoulos. Esposito (2019b: 140) came close to this point in a previous book on negativity, by commenting Deleuze, he wrote “institutions are models of action inscribed in our bodies. Far from belonging to the static condition of constituted power, institutions always harbour a constituent impulse, which is destined to change the preexisting norms.”

My article then adds a fourth element that conditions the three paradigms: the ontological politics of *restitution*, derived from the literature in social anthropology. To integrate environmental justice in the three-fold framework of political ontology presented by Esposito, I use the concept of restitution. For the avoidance of doubt, *restitution* is not a conservative or reactionary discourse and practice that demands to preserve, but a progressive discourse and practice coming from the Left. To emphasize the inventiveness of restitution, I want to conceive restitution as ‘reclaiming,’ following Isabelle Stengers’ own use of the term. We can think of the land restitutions that are currently happening in South Africa for instance, and what drives this process is the decolonization of “settler-colonial environmentalism” itself (Green 2020). In the final part of this article, I extend the meaning of restitution and give it an ontological edge: one that accounts for multiple worlds, composed of different modes of existence and different needs. Restitution here means to break with extractivism and the crisis of biodiversity due to destruction of habitats and worlds or with what John Law (2015) called simply “one-world world.” In the overarching late capitalist ontology, there is no room for other ontologies and ways of being but an imperative that reduces all things to a government of things. I will therefore show how Esposito misses that there are at least a thousand political ontologies that cannot be subsumed into an overarching whole, whether it is constituting power or instituting power. But restituting is not about reifying, conserving or preserving existing ontologies as late capitalist ontology does (Povinelli 2016). It is about reclaiming practices, techniques and local knowledges for new problems arising from extractivism, the climate emergency and technological disruptions. Esposito does not allow the thinking of alternative ontologies that we are desperately in need of.

***From immunity to political ontologies***

Esposito's engagement with politics is paradoxically distant or rather indirect. He does not confront head-on questions of everyday politics except through an inescapable return to the canon of political theory (Hobbes, Rousseau, Kant, Schmitt) and its minoritarian "impolitical" tradition (Weil, Bataille, Heidegger, Canetti, Arendt, Nancy). Esposito participated in the project of the "return of the political" initiated in the 1980s, in which liberals and post-Derridians alike attempted to recover the foundation of the political and establish "the political" as an autonomous space from economic and social matters. Political moments are either in the background or they sneak in the longer narrative about a forgotten lineage in political thought. One of these moments is when Esposito refers to the Occupy movement and the Arab Spring in 2011 and 2012:

When masses of people crowd into the public squares across half of the world, as is happening today, something is revealed that exists prior even to their demands. Before even being uttered, their words are embodied in bodies... pressing against the edges of our political systems. They seek to transform the systems into a form that cannot be reduced to the dichotomies that the modern political order has long produced.... The living body of increasingly vast multitudes demands a radical renewal of the vocabularies of politics, law, and philosophy. (Esposito 2015: 146-7)

Here Esposito (2015) thinks politics from the perspective of bodies and things to give consistency to his project of "affirmative biopolitics" (and distinguishing his work, as he often does, from fellow Italian philosophers, Antonio Negri and Giorgio Agamben). This project began in the late 1990s as a response to both the post-Rawlsian Anglo-American debates on communitarianism (Michael Sandel, Will Kymlicka, Charles Taylor among others) and the emerging debate on biopolitics. His remarkable work on community, immunity and biopolitics provided some tools to overcome the traditional logic of sovereignty that often blocks our understanding of contemporary politics. Replacing the traditional logic of sovereignty by the

dialectics of community and immunity helped to frame the new political realities in the 1990s and 2000s especially after the 9/11 attacks (Dillet 2018). With the end of the Cold War and the changes around the discourse of risk, security and fear, we have witnessed a growing obsession with delimiting and safeguarding personal security. It would be tempting to perceive in these new realities a return of classical liberal concepts elaborated by Hobbes and Locke, for instance. But Esposito is adamant: the traditional political concepts of sovereignty, freedom and the individual are left inoperative to think these new preoccupations at the heart of hyperindustrialized societies:

Free is he who is able to move without fearing for his life and property. This doesn't mean, however, that we're still working today within the field of inquiry that Hobbes gave birth to, nor does it mean that his categories can be employed in the current situation; if it were otherwise, we wouldn't find ourselves facing a need to propose a new political language. (Esposito 2013: 70).

At the center of this new political language was the “immunitary paradigm.” This paradigm was created by Esposito to capture the widely socially shared imperative to live side by side but without touching one another, physically and culturally. His interpretive coup is to shift our understanding of community by returning to the Latin etymology of the concept as *communitas* and *munus* (understood as gift, debt or obligation). *Communitas* and *immunitas* work as a dialectic: *communitas* is in the first instance the sharing of the *munus*, while *immunitas* is the exemption from the obligation (Richter 2016; Dillet 2018). Shifting the debate of political theory from that of democratic institutions and deliberative justice to that of the socio-anthropological situation of debt and obligation. No communities can be completely free of all immunization tendencies, in fact all beings – individuals, groups, institutions – need immunity systems to exist.

This new paradigm was immensely productive to think the contemporary and it could be applied to all sorts of micro- and macro-political examples. Community and immunity are not images of good or bad governments but tendencies: with neoliberalism, institutions have increasingly immunized against risks of all sorts (lawsuits, debts, terrorist attacks and political dissidence for instance) often based on fantastical scenarios.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, community is no longer something to be longing for or to be identified – based on a nostalgia for a time of communion that had never existed – but it can only be the experience of sharing that is never predisposed nor predetermined (Esposito 2010: 18). Community cannot exist in full, it is always immunized, but there can be no regime of total immunity either since this would lead to a situation of autoimmunity, where the destructive force attacks the body itself. Hence, community and immunity always work together, they attract and counter each other endlessly.

With the Covid-19 pandemic, Esposito’s work on immunization takes an entirely new sense: governments (like in Sweden and the UK) talk of herd immunity as an official policy to respond to this health emergency while mixed messages about preventing contagion dominate the media. Politics became closely intertwined with medicine like never before. “Today, immunity has become, in my opinion, the pivot around which all our entire modern symbolic universe revolves” (Esposito 2020b). Governments gave guidelines on how to practice immunity – how to physically distance from one another – reinforcing the immunizing tendency of neoliberal capitalism:

Giving doctors the task of political decision-making, on the one hand, strongly reduces the scope for political action and, on the other hand, radically transforms the political arena, making deviance a pathological condition (Esposito 2020b).

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<sup>5</sup> Frédéric Neyrat has developed this point in an article on “clairvoyance societies,” see Neyrat 2018.



While Covid-19 is giving a new meaning to Esposito's work on community and immunity, it is not clear whether it can be translated so easily into a practical philosophy in the face of this new crisis.

It is also surprising to read about the three paradigms of political ontology when Esposito's conceptualization of community/immunity went against the tendency to ontologize – that is, to provide an image of “space, time, the world, and man” (Esposito 2021: 1). Esposito taught us that there cannot be any political ontology precisely because closure in politics (and reality) does not exist, it is always open to new possibilities – in short there cannot be only three political ontologies but a multiplicity of them: a thousand political ontologies.

It is not always clear why political theory needs an ontology to advance new concepts. And yet the ontological turn in political theory made it possible to question the realm of the political as never before and opened existential, emotional and affective questions that were barred from old habits of politics. The very reality of politics was no longer closed to the “royal science” of political science but it could be cracked open to release new possibilities both in terms of practice and theory. The ontological turn also meant that by opening politics to metaphysical questioning, other disciplines could be mobilized to inform the research inquiry. Politics became a much larger field where everyday life but also non-humans could be taken seriously. I discuss this in more detail in the third part of this article but for now it is worth noting that “political ontology” is used differently in political theory than in the important theoretical debate in social anthropology. It is my contention that in the Anthropocene, reading social anthropology can prove immensely productive to decolonize, de-inequalize, de-patriarchize and de-carbonize political thought.

### *Political Negativity in Deleuze*

In *Third Person*, Esposito's work attempted to find a politics beyond the subject and the object (Esposito 2012; Esposito 2013: 112-122). In searching to give content to his affirmative biopolitics, Esposito became interested in Deleuze's impersonal vitalism – the emphasis on the forces of “a life” rather than on a singular and determinate life. For a short period, Esposito seemed to embrace a politics of the impersonal that avoids the juridical and moral concepts of person (and their Christian and Roman origins). Taking inspiration from Simone Weil, Maurice Blanchot and Deleuze mainly, Esposito (2013: 118) sketches a thought of the impersonal and he also notes rather evasively the “urgency” of the task. I want to highlight this specific moment in the development of Esposito's thought to provide the context of his engagement with Deleuze's political philosophy in “Instituting Thought.” The treatment of Deleuzian politics here is much more systemic and definite than in other works where the interpretation was more explorative. For Esposito, Deleuze's political ontology is one that blurs the limits between being and politics, everything is politicized – and adopting an accelerationist reading of Deleuze, he also claims:

The ultimate goal that politics should be addressing is to push capitalism to its excess, to the point of implosion. Meanwhile, there is nothing left other than to multiply the deterritorialization and vanishing lines. But how can we differentiate them from those lines activated by capital itself? In short, what would qualify the emancipatory political action? Where do we draw the line of conflict, and against which forces? The question of the negative —of its exclusion from the plane of immanence— returns. (Esposito 2021: 13)

Esposito concludes that the lack of negativity in Deleuze's politics makes it inoperable for today – and assuming he thinks of the rise of fascism around the world and particularly in Italy.

I will address this criticism to show that the political ontology of the multiple has travelled in productive ways to other fields and research inquiries.

It is notoriously difficult to reconstruct a political philosophy from Deleuze and Guattari: they did not always write directly on politics even though their work was political through and through (they wrote two volumes called *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* after all). In their final book *What is Philosophy?*, they provide an original take on philosophy, art and science and think these realms as practices that produce concepts, percepts and functions. But readers were left wondering where politics was to be placed in this constructivism, and very few ventured to recover a political thought there. It would be tempting to think that for them politics is more essential than these realms -- there has always been politics in philosophy for Deleuze -- and yet the very practice of finding the ground of politics leads to a depoliticizing enterprise.<sup>6</sup> I would argue instead that politics for Deleuze is the activity of raising problems; it is driven by the immanent practice of searching for problems in the forest of “false problems,” those that can be solved or those that distract from “real problems.” Problems are not negative or positive in themselves and it is by expressing them that the collective subject of enunciation actualizes them. Expressing problems allows us to interpret them as “real” and to show how they make us act and think in this world. Famously for Deleuze, philosophy is the art of creating concepts but what is often forgotten is how these concepts are connected to singular problems, and therefore how philosophy is closely tied to politics.

Esposito argues that Deleuze follows Heidegger in ontologizing politics, that for the two thinkers the triangulation of politics, being and difference is central but that each gives their

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<sup>6</sup> Deleuze would have certainly agreed with this statement from Jacques Rancière: “what is called ‘political philosophy’ might well be the set of reflective operations whereby philosophy tries to rid itself of politics, to suppress a scandal in thinking proper to the exercise of politics” (Rancière 1999: xii).

own meaning to this triangulation: for Heidegger, it leads to an impolitical destiny by refocusing the attention on Being, while for Deleuze “absolute correspondence incorporates politics into being to the point of blurring the limits” (Esposito 2021: 14). Heidegger presents an absolute negativity as a vortex that absorbs all possibility for political action, while Deleuze’s politics goes in the completely opposite direction: unleashing joyful fluxes and constituting the missing people. Esposito’s presentation of Deleuze’s political thought here exaggerates the joyful elements. This is unexpected to find such a reading in this text since elsewhere he noted that “all this does not mean that the negative is excluded from Deleuze’s outlook, as it too often suggested by a formulaic interpretation of his work” (Esposito 2019b: 140). On the contrary, Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge the dangers and pitfalls of “revolutionary becoming”, hence they developed what Craig Lundy (2013) called an “ethics of prudence.” Deleuze’s political ontology is affirmative and intensive, it works towards lines of flight and deterritorializations but not absolute deterritorializations since it is very much aware of the pitfalls, the traps, the dangers that are laid on the path to “constitution.” In an important work on Deleuze, David Lapoujade makes this point powerfully: “How many misunderstandings have resulted from Deleuze’s affirmation of joy, as if joy were the affirmation of a positivity that knows nothing of the dangers. And there is no shortage of dangers” (Lapoujade 2017: 318):

You may make a rupture, draw a line of flight, yet there is still a danger that you will reencounter organizations that restratify everything, formations that restore power to a signifier, attributions that reconstitute a subject— anything you like, from Oedipal resurgences to fascist concretions. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 9)

Deleuze wrote many pages about limits and in a way we should read his political ontology as one of limits and negotiations between a total chaos and absolute Outside that is threatening and yet absolutely necessary for creativity and positivity, and a normalizing and atrophying

inside that is responsible for the life of sad affects: “Will the war machine destroy us or will it destroy the limits that subject and enslave us? We cannot know in advance; it all has to do with experimentation” (Lapoujade 2017: 319). Politics for Deleuze is not a problem-solving exercise or the creation of policies and eloquent speeches but it is deeply linked to the “plane of organization” (Deleuze and Parnet 2006: 97; Sotiropoulos 2019). It proceeds from the construction of the plane of organization but without reproducing the hierarchical and authoritarian models of the state:

As we know, the revolutionary problem today is to find some unity in our various struggles without falling back on the despotic and bureaucratic organization of the party or State apparatus. (Deleuze 2004: 259)

The recent discourse on political ontology in anthropology is precisely an attempt to find convergence in local struggles against the extractivist ontology that destroys the plurality of modes of being and modes of feeling. Hence, the kind of reading and writing of Deleuze we practice has consequences when we turn in the next section to the ontological politics that recent social anthropologists have presented. The work of Deleuze and Guattari has become hugely influential but there are also tendencies to depoliticise and turn the practice of reading Deleuze into a scholastic one. When we are looking for a political Deleuze, we need to use him and his concepts to fit the problems of our time. And if our contemporary period is all about precarity, flexibility and deterritorializing fluxes, we need to interrupt and reterritorialize on new localities. “What is the point of dodging the present for becomings when our present is in charge of dodging itself, of fleeing itself, in caricatures of nomads and lines of flights?” (Bergen 2015: 12) We need to “use negativity and not wait for a possible catastrophic apotheosis of the market empire... the same negativity that Deleuze excluded from his thought... the very negation that lines of flight avoided” (Bergen 2015: 12). Esposito does not include the minoritarian use of Deleuze’s political negativity. Many have focused on this political

negativity to think the present condition and imagine new forms of resistance and invention. Famously in his interview with Negri in 1990 on control societies, Deleuze notes that there is an abundance of communication and withdrawing from these constant fluxes might prove to be effective: “to create vacuoles of noncommunication, circuit breakers, so we can elude control” (Deleuze 1995: 175). Deleuze’s negativity then interrupts constitutive power, it makes connectivity inoperative and asks one to inhabit the cracks of existing structures.

My point here is far from being a hermeneutic quibble, Esposito’s reading of Deleuze’s politics leads him to overlook the thousand ontologies that social anthropologists have brought our attention to. Indeed, to discuss political ontologies in social anthropology means something quite distinct from political theory but much can be gained from confronting the two approaches. One of the things that anthropologists have in common is that they start from a Deleuzian openness to different forms of conjugating politics and being via becoming.

### ***Restituting a thousand political ontologies and dissensual world-making processes***

Esposito’s operationalized definition of political ontology, as the “relation between being and politics”, is simple enough to encompass a variety of contemporary and historical positions bearing in mind the issue of “lexical heterogeneity” (Esposito 2021: 2). In this final part, I want to displace Esposito’s understanding of political ontology to include the concept of “world.” This concept has a long tradition in continental philosophy (Gaston 2013) but rather than referring to this tradition, I use the recent literature in social anthropology on the pluriverse and the existence of a multiplicity of worlds (de la Cadena and Blaser 2018; Escobar 2020).

When we consider political ontology as a world-making process then we recognize that a multitude of beings constitute the political. Every year languages go extinct and when a

language disappears, it is not simply a vocabulary and a grammar that disappear but knowledge in the form of literature and culture, as well as modes of being and relations with nonhumans (Scott 2013). The impoverishment of the world in worldling practices is a central aspect of the Anthropocene and late capitalist ontology. I suggest extending Esposito's operationalized definition of political ontology as follows: it is the relation between being and politics *and the worlds that they make*. In the face of the increasing destruction of the world and worlds, the task of politics today is to multiply the world, to cultivate singularities so as to create new worlds.

When we introduce the notion of world in politics, we enter the speculative terrain of political ontology: "The problem with ontology is not knowledge or representation, but engagement with and for a world" (Stengers 2018: 85). It is therefore surprising that Esposito does not address this fundamental concept for political ontology. Of course, there are several ways of understanding ontology: as a region of knowledge (the study of being), as method in anthropology (Holbraad and Pedersen 2017), and finally as a social practice, "the engagement with and for a world" as Stengers puts it. This belongs to a tradition of theory as practice, to participate in a world-making project.

The absence of "world" from Esposito's text is striking precisely because of the entanglement of his work with modernity's deliberate project to destroy the world. This is my hypothesis. The world-destroying drive of modernity is to establish a metaphysical individualism that automatically excludes other beings from its ontology, leading to a separation of living beings – an "ecofragmentation" (Morizot 2020: 28). Modern political thought is deeply complicit in presenting a political ontology that is compatible with extractivist practices of the worst sorts. Is it not time for political thought to reconstitute and reclaim the multiple ecologies that were

excluded or deliberately exploited in establishing human autonomy? Hence the question for ontological politics today is: how do we break away from liberal political ontology that constrains the limits between humans and nonhumans and re-integrate the speculative world-forming dimension of ontological politics? This question was also formulated differently by Stengers:

What haunts me is the following: what can we make today that can eventually become a resource for the next generations? The emerging and intelligent social and ecological culture in resurgence in devastated milieus is part of these resources. *We cannot ask them if they are capable of saving us* (Stengers 2019: 43, my emphasis).

Many young people in Europe and other parts of the world have constituted this resurging “social and ecological culture” that Stengers is referring to. They manage to contest monoculture and the “one-world world” (Law 2015) by joining efforts to rethink their relations to the earth and territories. By composing differently with it, whether by developing permaculture or setting up huts and new dwellings in Notre-Dame-des-Landes or other ZADs, they do not simply praise other ontologies for developing the right mode of being – romanticize animists for instance – but they invent new practices. Recognizing other ontologies is not radical enough, it is too structuralist and stuck into Western taxonomical categories, rather it is through the performance of relations that the pluriverse exists (Blaser 2019: 90).

For Esposito, the instituting power takes place in “the already established” (Esposito 2021: 18), it draws from the past and present conflicts to produce a social unity. When we examine world-making processes politically, we also find agonist and dissensual practices. Esposito’s question in the age of Trump and Brexit is “how can conflict produce order, without slipping into absolute antagonism?” (Esposito 2021: 19) This question recalls the agonist tradition in political theory. For instance, Rancière who has famously shown that politics is based on



dissensus rather than consensus notes that this dissensus is also based on recognizing the existence of different worlds – of course “world” for Rancière here means something very different from social anthropologists but I want to stretch out that notion of world to its full conceptual potential. The notion of “world” is in fact not central to Rancière’s own political theory, and yet he notes that “politics is made up of relationships between worlds” (Rancière 1999: 42). What Rancière means here is the necessity for a tension between different worlds for the *sans-parts* (literally “those without a share”): “the world where they are and the world where they are not, the world where this is something ‘between’ them and those who do not acknowledge them as speaking beings who count and the world where this is nothing” (Rancière 1999: 27). Politics starts in this intolerable conflict; it is intolerable since equality is taken to be the starting point of community and a condition of possibility for politics. The main problem with the liberal ontology is that behind the unnerving equivalence of all things (Nancy 2007), it makes all other ontologies inaudible and it hides “ontological conflicts” as well as the counter-hegemonic world-making practices. This applies both for Rancière’s own analysis of politics as relationships between worlds as well as for world-making processes examined by social anthropologists. In Peru for instance, to be indigenous according to Marisol de la Cadena (2008: 342) is to be seen as being “illiterate” and “to be ‘taken care’ of by politicians.” She notes that even indigeneity in Bolivia or Peru are conceived differently and without guarantees, rejecting a “historically linear notion of indigeneity” (de la Cadena 2008: 343). The affirmation of indigeneity in Peru is therefore difficult due to the overcoding by the state institutions and politicians’ rhetoric but politically powerful since it introduces ontological conflicts into the political arena:

Corporations want a mining (or logging) ‘concession’ of land classified in internal geopolitics as ‘*tierras eriazas*’ (allegedly empty land); local ‘populations’ respond and say

that those *tierras eriazas* also have another meaning: they are a special kind of water, a sentient entity, a repository of medicinal herbs. (de la Cadena 2008: 346-7)

Mountains, rivers and lakes become political actors and establish an ontological conflict, in which indigeneity plays a large role in shaping. Defending a territory as a place and a world brings new alliances in politics, de la Cadena notes.

An increasing number of environmental protests also emphasize their ontological dimensions: for instance Notre-Dame-des-Landes, France, protesters fought for years against the establishment of a new airport and the destruction of the local ecology – their slogan “No to the Airport and its World!” Defending territories from large-scale extractive operations is not to adopt an “indigenous way of life,” celebrate dispossession or to re-colonize indigenous groups but to account for social movements and *restitution*. According to this scholarship (Escobar 2020: 25), political ontology records “the large number of protests and demonstrations by indigenous people, Afro-descendants, and peasants in Latin America, to defend their relational territories-world from the ravages of large-scale extractive operations.” Drawing from the literature of decolonial and indigenous studies does not mean to speak for someone but *to bear witness* to the becoming-autonomous of many communities “faced with the ravages caused by a world that has arrogated to itself the right to be ‘the world’” (Escobar 2020: 25).

To conclude I want to come back to Rancière and the use of political ontology. As Matthew Lampert (2020: 21) brilliantly comments: “the political content of theory is determined not by the effects of its consumption but rather by the conditions of its production and dissemination.” Political ontology can only be useful in transcribing the relations between being, politics and world as “participant questions” rather than “apolitical observer questions” (Lampert 2020: 22,

emphasis removed). It should be also made clear that noticing these world-making relations does not mean to invoke the ontic as a privileged site for politics (as opposed to the ontological), otherwise we would continue to operate within a two-fold Heideggerian framework. If we take the thousand political ontologies seriously, politics and ontology are no longer separate realms. A good use of political ontology would be to question the relations of power in the production of (a)political theory. Stengers (2018) brings a useful distinction between at least two ways to do political ontology. (1) There is *a consumerist/entrepreneurial logic* of political ontology (Stengers 2018) – one that feeds on other worlds to experience otherness and competes for a readership – and (2) *a situated tradition* that narrates conflicts and bears witness to the news from the extractive drift as well as the participation in world-making. If politics is the relationship between worlds, we can neatly bridge Esposito’s own triptych of political ontology with the multiple worlds. Three political ontologies are not sufficient to account for a thousand political ontologies; the triptych overlooks other modes of being that successfully escape the liberal logic of profit-making and ownership both in knowledge production and in sensibility.

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