

SECURING THE STATE: POLITICAL LEGITIMACY AND THE RHETORIC OF
NEGATIVE AESTHETICS

by

Ethan William Stoneman

BA, University of Pittsburgh, 2006

MA, University of Colorado at Boulder, 2009

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This dissertation was presented

by

Ethan William Stoneman

It was defended on

December 6, 2013

and approved by

Dr. Don Bialostosky, Professor, Department of English

Dr. John Lyne, Professor, Department of Communication

Dr. Gordon Mitchell, Associate Professor, Department of Communication

Dissertation Director: Dr. John Poulakos, Associate Professor, Department of Communication

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Ethan Stoneman, Ph.D.

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This study aims to make a rhetorical intervention in the aesthetics of politics and political legitimacy. Much of the research on this topic suggests that politics is unavoidably aesthetic and, on this basis, conceives of the state's political legitimacy in terms of the capacity to elicit broad-based aesthetic approval. What this research has yet to address is the likelihood that members of a given society will disagree over what is deserving of aesthetic praise combined with the tendency of aesthetic feeling to degenerate over time. These tendencies, I argue, indicate that the problem facing political legitimacy is primarily a matter of overcoming a rhetorical crisis in the aesthetics of politics. My central idea is that the state can regain aesthetic control by circumventing or transcending beauty altogether. This strategy comprises rhetorical maneuvers that exploit the emotive power of aesthetics without appealing to beauty itself or inducing in citizens their feeling for the beautiful. By interrupting beauty as both a point of contention and a source of entropy, these circumventing tactics enable the state to pull off what would otherwise remain a pipe dream—the acquisition of aesthetic value without the rhetorical limitations imposed by direct appeals to beauty.

In Chapter 1, I examine how the state employs rhetorical techniques that transform perceived aesthetic disturbances into opportunities for engendering and maintaining diffuse subjective

adherence to the state. Chapter 2 frames Aristotle's theory of tragic catharsis as a mode of persuasion useful for renewing a community's political identity and strengthening its commitment to the task of constitutional preservation. In Chapter 3, I show how Kant's aesthetics provides a model for conceiving of the sublime as a rhetorical operation that can transfigure overwhelming, fear-inducing appearances into an experience of freedom that is nevertheless caught up in a relationship of political dependence. In Chapter 4, I look at how the state creates and maintains a sense of the Freudian uncanny, exploiting figures of an omnipresent, malefic Other to recreate a disposition favorable political legitimacy. I conclude by highlighting the implications of these rhetorical strategies for the nature of political order as such.

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CHAPTER 1 – CIRCUMVENTING BEAUTY, LEGITIMATING ORDER

[If] man is ever to solve that problem of politics in practice he will have to approach it through the problem of the aesthetic, because it is only through Beauty that man makes his way to Freedom. – Friedrich Schiller 1794

People lose faith in leaders much more easily than they lose confidence in the system. All the indicators that we have examined show that the public has been growing increasingly critical of the performance of major institutions. [And yet there] has been no significant decline in the legitimacy ascribed to the underlying political and economic systems. – Seymour Martin Lipset and William Schneider 1983

Free consent may thus be the antithesis of oppressive power, or a seductive form of collusion with it. – Terry Eagleton 1990

One of the most salient yet often overlooked ideas in the history of political thought is the notion that the good or successful polity is the one modeled after beauty. Understood by Aristotle as comprising orderly arrangement, proportion, and definiteness (or clarity), beauty has occupied a central place in the actual and imaginary organization of society, and for good reason: more than any other standard, beauty appears to offer either a universal form of political justice or a template for long-term political stability. In either case, however, beauty's political value—specifically, its value to the political state—hinges on people's perception of beauty in the socio-political order, that is, on their recognition of the polity as a beautiful object, deserving of fondness and admiration. From the state's perspective, then, beauty is at once a constraint on its right to rule and a powerful resource. If the state can successfully promote itself as an object of beauty and so elicit and control a corresponding feeling for the beautiful, then it virtually assures

the popular acceptance and recognition of its authority, specifically, of its *legitimacy* or monopoly right or to make rules and issue commands and to enforce them by coercion against the members of its society. If, however, the state cannot effectively demonstrate its aesthetic integrity, then it risks becoming an object of reflection and thus opening itself to all manner of critique. In the absence of aesthetic anchoring and support, the state's claim to political authority is, like any other proposition, contestable, subject to disagreement. No longer *prima facie*, the state's authority is subject to controversy.

Unlike most typical aesthetic objects—whether of art or nature—the state *qua* political object is not perceived directly via the senses but through the mediating effects of language. Thus, the state's claim to beauty is, much like its claim to legitimacy, a rhetorical problematic, i.e., something that as a matter of contingency and for the sake of appearance (*doxa*) could be said to invite recourse to the available means of persuasion. In light of the state's need to secure belief in its authority, the invitation to rhetorical action takes the form of an imperative or practical necessity. At the same time, given the problematic's aesthetic and practical demands, the state is constrained to seek broad-based consensus, to demonstrate its beauty not to the one or the few but to a significant swath of popular opinion and belief, namely, the body politic. As a result, state-sponsored agencies tend to forgo rational argument and debate, relying instead on a rich collection of non-rational, emotive “persuasives” to induce in citizens their feelings for the beautiful—or at least feelings of a positive kind—with the aim of articulating these emotional states to the established political order. These persuasive tools typically include a range of symbols, rituals, and stories, from statues and monuments commemorating important people and events in a nation's history, to flag-saluting ceremonies and parades, to political myths that reinforce belief in a nation's sacred origins and providential destiny. Rhetorically, they amount

to exceptionally efficient persuasive maneuvers, providing maximum impact for minimal content. What is more, because such tactics are themselves aesthetic, influencing conscious belief through intuition and feeling, they do not easily allow for counter-argument. The overall, cumulative effect of these maneuvers is an aesthetic—because perceived to be aesthetic—state. *Ipso facto*, it is a state virtually immune both to rational. Hence, for statist politics, the rhetoric of aesthetics provides an extremely useful legitimization strategy, enabling the state to bypass the inexpedient and somewhat risky tactics of argument and debate, while insulating it against untoward, politically “incorrect” modes of doing and saying.

All things being equal, the status quo would appear to favor the aestheticization of the state. That is to say, on the face of it we could reasonably expect a well-established state to succeed in convincing the body politic of its aesthetic (i.e., positive, intrinsic, unassailable) value. Indeed, much of the current research in what is typically referred to as the “aesthetics of politics” (e.g., Chytry 1989; Eagleton 1990; Ankersmit 1996; Scarry 1999; Kateb 2000; Clifford 2002; Wingo 2003; Rancière 2004; Docherty 2006; Bronner 2012; and Huemer 2013) tacitly supports this expectation, albeit in a variety of ways. What this research has yet to address, however, is the likelihood that members of a given society will disagree over what is deserving of aesthetic praise combined with the tendency of aesthetic feeling to degenerate over time. These tendencies, I argue, indicate that the problem facing political legitimacy is not, primarily, a matter of demonstrating rational-legal authority or of implementing a fairer decision-making procedure but of overcoming a crisis in the aesthetics of politics (a crisis that is one part controversy, one part stasis).

Given rhetoric’s power both to create *homonoia* (likemindedness) and to strengthen existing commitment, I treat the crisis in the aesthetic of politics as a rhetorical exigence and

pose the following question: in securing its claim to political legitimacy, how does the state manage the rhetorical problematics of aesthetic disagreement and aesthetic decay? My central idea is that rather than appealing to a shared sense of beauty—a maneuver that would likely aggravate or at best delay the problem—the state circumvents or transcends beauty, employing rhetorical maneuvers that exploit the emotive power of aesthetics without appealing to beauty itself or inducing in citizens their feeling for the beautiful. Instead of originating in an intrinsic, positive value, this power derives negatively from the perception of an imminent threat to the body politic, either to its collective way of life or to the individuals comprising it. In effect, these disturbances amount to conditions of rhetorical possibility through which the state can identify with the citizenry-at-risk—thereby sharing the role of victim—or, transcending victimage, safely (i.e., persuasively and with minimal opposition) reassert its prerogative to rule over the members of its society. In either case, the state’s claim to beauty is either overlooked or taken for granted, while the question of its authority is either forgotten or indefinitely suspended. Thinking with the state, these circumventing strategies, which interrupt beauty as a point of contention and a source of entropy, pull off what would otherwise remain a pipe dream—the acquisition of aesthetic value without the rhetorical limitations imposed by direct appeals to beauty.

Collectively, these strategies comprise what I consider rhetorical techniques of negatively aesthetic modes of political experience. As I demonstrate in this and the following chapters, they constitute a distinctive and unusually powerful means of securing the widespread belief in one aspect of the state’s political authority, namely, its political legitimacy.¹ The purpose of this study is twofold. First, at the conceptual-theoretical level, it aims to introduce the concept of negative aesthetics to the interdisciplinary field of political rhetoric and communication and to

¹ Political obligation—i.e., the obligation on the part of the citizenry to obey its government—is the second aspect of the state’s political authority.

show how the rhetoric of negative aesthetics can further the political end of securing diffuse subjective adherence to the political state or polity. Second, it strives to point beyond itself to facilitate the identification and critique of certain recurring general features pertaining to the ongoing attempts, undertaken by the owners and managers of rhetorical power, to create and strengthen a positive consensus vis-à-vis the political legitimacy of the governing regime.

I pursue these objectives over the course of five chapters, focusing on three negatively aesthetic categories that exhibit something of a family resemblance: the tragic, the sublime, and the uncanny. Chapter 1 continues to lay the groundwork for an inquiry into the political ends of the rhetoric of negative aesthetics. Following the political philosopher Michael Huemer, who claims that “without a belief in authority, we would have to condemn a great deal of what we now accept as legitimate” (2013, 12), I examine how the state, in attempting to maintain the belief necessary for its legitimacy, avails itself of aesthetics as a means of political rhetoric.² I argue that this legitimization strategy ultimately struggles to succeed over the long-range, requiring something stronger than the appeal of beauty. This “something,” I argue, is provided by the suggestion of aesthetic violence and the fear to which it is likely to give rise. The aesthetic categories of the tragic, the sublime, and the uncanny constitute three distinctive yet related methods for rhetorically controlling this affective phenomenon.

Chapter 2 frames Aristotle’s theory of tragic catharsis as both the means and the effect of a non-representational rhetorical process, one that, by means of facilitating civic purgation, renews a community’s political identity and so strengthens its commitment to the task of preserving the constitution. Although the procedure of civic purgation (ostracism) facilitates the

² Among libertarians, particularly libertarian anarchists, this emphasis on the rhetorical (cognitive) basis of political legitimacy has achieved commonplace status. See also Gerard Casey, who argues, “In order for the state to function, the mass of the people has to believe in its legitimacy” (2012, 27), and Anthony de Jasay, who reduces political legitimacy to “the propensity of its [the state’s] subjects” to believe that they have an obligation to obey its commands (1997, 76).

instauration of community *ethos*, the process is tragic, I argue, not by virtue of its potential to effect a purifying purgation but on account of its capacity to clarify, and thereby affirm, the grounds for political inclusion (and exclusion). At the same time, however, given the teleological status that Aristotle assigns to catharsis—i.e., catharsis as *the end* of tragic drama—ostracism discloses a basic truth about tragic clarification, namely, that catharsis is at once greater and less than tragic drama: less because it is a component of tragedy but greater because it is in a sense separable from the dramatic art, free to function in other contexts and able to subserve heteronomous purposes. Hence, my second argument, which builds on the first, is that the rhetoric of tragic catharsis not only identifies a tragic dimension of politics but also dissociates the tragic from the domain of tragedy proper, preserving its performative character while freeing it from the unique constraints of poetic representation. Thus liberated, the tragic dimension of politics allows for the possibility of misclarification vis-à-vis a regime and its constitution. But unlike dramatic representation, which may either fail to clarify or clarify in the wrong way, political catharsis admits of a strategic use of misclarification, a parallel rhetorical process whereby the apparent clarification of one form of government displaces or dissimulates the one that is actually in power. As a rhetorical technique of misclarification, the tragic retains its preservative function, but with a twist: it now preserves the current regime, indirectly, by simulating the appearance or character of another.

In Chapter 3, I argue that Kant's theory of the sublime provides a model for conceiving of the sublime as a powerful rhetorical operation that by means of manipulating the imagination restores the emotive non-cognitive conditions that legitimate political order on an affective level. As I demonstrate, a crucial part of this operation is the transfiguration of overwhelming, fear-inducing appearances into an experience of freedom that is nevertheless caught up in a

relationship of dependence between government and the governed. If the tragic secures consent to the prevailing political order by way of strategic appearance, then the sublime ensures such consensus by dominating a certain subjective experience, creating a binding force for a relatively non-coercive or non-absolutist system of rule. In this regard especially, Kant's theory of the sublime is not only applicable to rhetoric but constitutes a significant gain in the political efficacy of the sublime. Over against the possibly alienating effects sublime terror, the Kantian sublime exercises control while dissimulating the reality of its dominion. Although Kant's political philosophy favors a republican form of government, the relationship he posits between the imagination and reason commits his understanding of the sublime to a vertical power structure, in which a hierarchical political order is reified as subjective experience. This reification, I argue, amounts to what I refer to as the rhetorical institution of the political sublime. And as in the case of the tragic, the political sublime owes its rhetorical effectivity to a precise emotive process. But unlike political catharsis, under the influence of the sublime this process consists not in a signifying process but in the formalization of an intense mental movement.

In Chapter 4, I demonstrate how the state exploits the figure of the malefic, alien Other so as to give rise to a sense of the Freudian uncanny, specifically, to the emergence of an existential fear vis-à-vis the return of superannuated modes of thought. I argue that this existential quality of the uncanny, combined with the perceived omnipotence of the figural Other, facilitates an imminent shift in political legitimation by state power from the assurance of constitutional protection to that of the personal safety state, thereby reducing the state's political legitimacy to a basic policing function. But unlike the rhetorical institution of the political sublime, which secures subjective adherence to state power negatively, by means of an implicit promise of future success, the figural dimension of the uncanny Other engenders and maintains the specter of an

unfalsifiable threat, the reality of which can neither be independently verified nor denied. Hence, the procession of uncanny Others and Otherness, I argue, enables the state to nourish and exploit an environment of fear, which is equal parts real and neurotic. At the same time, it grants the state monopolistic right to determine its own level of unfalsifiable success in combating the Other's incursions.

1.1 LEGITIMACY PROBLEMS

For better or worse, virtually all Westerners today are creatures of the state. So too, increasingly more and more of the world's population is falling under some form of state-rule. What is more, under the aegis of supranational institutions like the UN and WTO, more and more of the world's previously self-determining nation-states are yielding their autonomy to an internationalist global state. According to Max Weber's classic definition, the state refers to a compulsory political organization with a centralized government that successfully upholds the claim to the monopoly of political decision-making and of the legitimate use of physical force in a bounded territory (1946, 78).³ While the concepts of the state and the government are closely

³ The above definition is a slight reworking of Weber's definition, which reads: "Today, however, we have to say that a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory" (1946, 78). To be sure, the monopoly of violence is central to political legitimacy. Yet, as a number of thinkers since Weber have pointed out (e.g., Simmons 2001; Buchanan 2002; Huember 2013), so, too, is the state's monopoly to make certain sorts of law (e.g. statutory and regulatory law), which, of course, the state enforces by coercion against the members of its society. This fairly simple definition of the state, however, conceals a basic difficulty in any attempt to provide an exact statement of the nature, scope, or meaning of the state. Cudworth et al. argue that there is no academic consensus on the meaning of the state and that any definition is politically loaded (2007, 1). And according to Andrew Vincent, "The state is one of the most difficult concepts in politics.... One of the most intractable problems," in scholarly debates concerning the state, "is that there is little agreement on what is being studied" (1992, 43). Even the act of defining "the state," argues Clyde W. Barrow, can be seen as part of an ideological conflict—different definitional choices leading to different theories of state function, which, in turn, validate different political aims and strategies (1993, 10–11). Nevertheless, the most commonly used definition is that of the German sociologist Max Weber, whose definition defines the state in terms of organization, rather than function (see Cudworth et al., 2007, 95). On the distinction between organizational and functional definitions of the state—i.e., between the state as a set of institutions consisting of definite power relations and as a specific function or end requiring a certain institutional ensemble—see Dunleavy and O'Leary (1987, 6) and Hay et al. (2006, 10).

related, they are distinct. Whereas the state is an abstract entity, a more or less permanent organization that functions independently of any particular set of individuals, the government is the administrative bureaucracy that controls the state apparatuses at a given time (see Sartwell 2008, 25; Casey 2012, 12).⁴ Governments, in other words, are the institutional means through which state power is chiefly employed and maintained, while the state is served by a continuous succession of different governments (or is interrupted in the event of a sudden, violent, and illegal seizure of state power). According to the anarchist anthropologist Harold Barclay, each successive government is composed of a specialized and privileged body of individuals who occupy the positions of political power and monopolize political decision-making. They are thus separated by both status and organization from the population as a whole (1990, 31 ff. cf. 2003, 11–25). The function of such an administrative bureaucracy is to enforce existing laws and legislate new ones, to arbitrate conflicts, and to manage systemic crises. In some societies, typically those associated with a monarchical, aristocratic, or plutocratic form of rule, the administration is controlled often a self-perpetuating or hereditary class. In others, such as representative democracies, the political roles or offices remain, but there is frequent turnover of the people actually occupying the positions.

Although from the perspective of human history, the emergence of the modern state, first in Western Europe, and then almost everywhere else, is a very recent phenomenon, the state-form emerged whenever and wherever it became possible to centralize power in a durable way. Indeed, two of the first known states of the Western world, Athenian democracy and the Roman Republic, developed in the Greek city-state of Athens around 550 BCE and in central Italy

⁴ On account of its systemic nature, Crispin Sartwell describes the state—with some justice—as both “an external representation—the imaginary entity with which other states deal” and “an internal representation—the government *as embodied* in a single phrase, as in ‘The United Kingdom’ or ‘The Democratic Republic of the Congo.’ It is a personification and a name for the government,” but not the government itself (2008, 31; my emphasis).

around 509 BCE, respectively. According to political scientist Brian Nelson, although primitive state-forms existed before the rise Athenian democracy, the Greeks of classical antiquity were the first people known to have explicitly formulated a political philosophy of the state and to have rationally analyzed its political institutions. Prior to this, he argues, states were described and justified almost solely in terms of religious myths (2006, 17). On this view, the appearance of the state-form is closely related to and accompanied by changes in political thought, especially those changes concerning the understanding of legitimate state power.⁵

Even excepting the early examples from classical antiquity, the emergence of the modern state has meant that the problem of political authority, or legitimate domination, has preoccupied political philosophers for roughly the last 500 years. Typically, philosophers, joined now by political scientists, approach the subject of legitimacy by posing a series of related questions: “Do we need political authority, and, if so, how should it be constituted? Under what circumstances, if any, do states wield legitimate political authority? How far are we as ordinary citizens obliged to obey the laws they make and follow their other dictates? Should legitimacy be tested dichotomously (legitimate versus illegitimate) or on a scale from complete acclaim to complete rejection? Can the legitimacy of a political system be judged in terms of subjective adherence of the people? Is the support of the majority a valid test of legitimacy?”⁶ These questions, while bearing significant political and ethical implications, are nevertheless distinct from the concerns of political efficacy or *Realpolitik*, specifically of how to secure and maintain subjective belief in the necessity if not the normative validity of the prevailing political order.

⁵ The classical statement of the modern state is made at the moment of the European state’s liberation from empire and church by Thomas Hobbes in his *Leviathan* (originally published in 1651). The modern “nation-state” is typically dated to the Peace of Westphalia, 1648.

⁶ This tradition of inquiring into questions pertaining to legitimacy stems back at least as early as Xenophon’s *The Education of Cyrus*, in which Xenophon demonstrates that successful tyrannies are those that by means of legitimacy transformed the brutal power of material force and constraints into recognized authority.

From the practical or pragmatic point of view—that of the state’s—the significance of subjective adherence consists not in its validity as a measure of legitimacy, that is, not in validity *per se*, but in its effectivity with respect to shoring up the authority of political (state) power. To be sure, the state does indeed rely on a form of legitimacy in order to maintain its political dominance. But this reliance primarily consists in the people’s *belief* in the legitimacy of the existing political system rather than whether the apparatus of government accords with, say, a consistent and agreed upon system of abstract rules and laws.

The practical consideration of legitimacy, however, poses an immediate problem for political authority, namely, the question of how to secure and maintain public belief in and support for the state. As the political theorist Jonathan H. Schaar remarks, in a somewhat lamenting tone, current definitions of legitimacy tend to dissolve the concept into belief or opinion (1981). But regrettable or not, once legitimacy is considered in terms of political utility, the pressing question, from the state’s perspective, is how to operationalize authority so that it is recognized *as* authority. For there is an important distinction to be made between the legitimacy ascribed to the state by philosophers, advocates, and politicians and that which is (or likely would be) effective in obtaining the assent of the people who make up the body politic.⁷ Among the available means by which the state achieves popular consensus, we may identify two fairly obvious and basic methods. The first is the use of pure force or executive power. However, as Siniša Malešević points out, “coercion in itself is insufficient (and often in the long run counter-

⁷ Recently, the political philosopher Michael Huemer has acknowledged that many government policies if not the state itself depend on belief in authority (2013, 8–12). Following Ajume Wingo’s notion of “veil politics” (2003), Huemer claims that the modern state and its governments “rely on a rich collection of nonrational tools, including symbols, rituals, stories, and rhetoric, to induce in citizens a *sense* of the government’s power and authority,” a sense which he considers “emotional and aesthetic rather than intellectual.... This sense,” he concludes, “can be expected to influence our conscious beliefs through our intuitions” (2013, 116; emphasis in original).

productive),” since it tends to create the conditions of resentment leading to sedition (2002, 85).⁸

Another option is the appeal to pure authority, like that of the shaman or wise man whose disciples follow his (rarely her) instructions without any compulsion. But whereas the use of force tends to produce dissent, pure authority simply allows for disobedience. In either case, authority is effectively undermined or at least exposed to undue risk.

In the twentieth century, political sociologists Max Weber and Seymour Martin Lipset were two of the first prominent intellectuals to consider seriously the relationship between legitimacy and subjective adherence. According to Weber, every state must rely on one or other form of legitimate domination to uphold its existence.⁹ Regardless of the particular form of legitimacy, he argues, the authority of any given political order primarily consists in the widespread belief of individuals and groups in its normative validity (1978, 212–15).

Nevertheless, beyond tacitly appealing to the consensual power of the status quo, Weber’s concept of legitimate domination merely presupposes belief in the legitimacy of the political system. So despite prioritizing belief, Weber cannot (or, at least, does not) account for how a particular system might overcome challenges to its legitimacy, nor does he consider the available means for resolving a legitimization crisis should one occur.

Seymour Lipset, while also understanding legitimacy in terms of belief, improves upon Weber by focusing on the relationship between legitimacy and effectiveness, arguing that the stability of a regime depends on the relationship between these two concepts. On his view, effectiveness amounts to the “extent to which the system satisfies the basic functions of

⁸ As Condorcet suggested in 1794, as the French Revolution was preparing to yield its place to a new despotism, “force cannot, like opinion, endure for long unless the tyrant extends his empire far enough afield to hide from the people, whom he divides and rules, the secret of his power and his weakness,” i.e., that real power lies not with the oppressors but with the oppressed (2012, 20).

⁹ Weber identifies three forms of authority or legitimate domination: rational-legal, traditional, and charismatic (1978, 215–16). He also implicitly accepts the idea of mixed legitimacy.

government” (1959, 77).¹⁰ According to Mattéi Dogan, for Lipset, “The relationship between legitimacy and the effectiveness of a political system is of crucial importance because the presence or absence of one can, in the long run, lead to the growth or loss of the other” (1992, 123).¹¹ However, like Weber, Lipset’s account ultimately does not address the effectiveness of legitimacy as such (i.e., its efficacy in creating and supporting public belief and support), only the relationship *between* effectiveness and legitimacy, which is a different, albeit related, matter. On Lipset’s view, when faced with a crisis of effectiveness, such as an economic recession, the stability of the regime comes to depend, to a large extent, on the degree of legitimacy that it already enjoys. Once the crisis has passed, he argues, the effectiveness that had been lost is more or less automatically regained. Thus, a loss of effectiveness does not, according to Lipset, result in a corresponding loss of legitimacy, at least in the short-term.¹² The idea here, shared by other political analysts (e.g., Eckstein 1966; Dahl 1971), is that legitimacy, once obtained, is preserved by virtue of a reservoir of goodwill and support—what the ancient Greeks calls *eunoia*—on which the system can draw in times of crisis or diminishing effectiveness. But while the operative assumption here would appear to be, like Weber’s, that legitimacy is a more or less self-sustaining civic phenomenon, Lipset acknowledges the very real possibility of delegitimation and the tendency of delegitimated regimes to result in the breakdown of political authority. This eventuality is often referred to as a legitimization crisis, and it is the specter of just such a crisis that haunts every state, regardless of its form of government or characteristic mode of legitimization (see Habermas 1975, 68–74). The self-sustaining reservoir of goodwill, in other words, is not necessarily a self-regenerating wellspring of good faith. Popular belief in legitimate

¹⁰ According to Lipset’s definition, widely accepted, legitimacy is “the capacity of the system to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society” (1959, 77).

¹¹ For an illustration of this relationship, see Lipset’s matrix (1959, 81).

¹² That Lipset does not concern himself with the effectivity of legitimacy as such is reflected in the tendency to collapse any distinction between effectiveness or the loss thereof and the perception of relative effectiveness.

domination can run dry, and inasmuch as the state is a permanent rather than temporary political order its success depends upon keeping up or replenishing the reserves of popular support. Lipset and others ultimately cannot account for the processes or mechanisms whereby the state and its governments maintain the subjective adherence that ensures the effectiveness of legitimacy itself—that is, apart from the effective performance of government, however that effectivity may be construed or, more importantly, perceived by the people.¹³

1.2 AESTHETICS: THE KEY TO LEGITIMACY

Because of the problematics of effectuating legitimacy, philosophers and political leaders have often turned to aesthetics and judgments of beauty as providing both a model of the consensual state and a possible means of creating substantive and resilient popular support for political order.¹⁴ Indeed, the appeal to beauty is so strong, or believed to be, that much of Western political philosophy since the Enlightenment, whether guided by practical or moral considerations, is driven by what George Kateb refers to as “aesthetic impulses” (2000), by which he means the desire either to bring the seemingly non-beautiful or inaesthetic under the domain of beauty or to expand beauty’s sphere of influence so as to color aesthetically objects of a more practical or moral interest. While such aestheticizing impulses date back as early as classical antiquity, they culminate in the Western tradition in the British moral sense

¹³ This blind spot regarding the effectiveness of legitimacy also applies to so-called “minimalist” definitions of legitimacy, such as the one proposed by Juan Linz. According to Linz, we may define legitimacy in the minimalist sense of “the belief that in spite of shortcomings and failures the political institutions are better than any other that might be established and therefore can demand obedience” (1988, 65). The concept of “diffuse regime support” developed by David Easton (1965), while conceptualizing legitimacy in terms of the distribution of support and of the intensity of that support among the people, does not address the issue of maintaining such a workable distribution.

¹⁴ By “aesthetics,” I mean simply the critical or appreciative perception of beauty, conceived as a positive, immediate, and intrinsic value, as well as the critique of that perception (i.e., the principles concerned with the nature and appreciation of the beautiful). For this definition, I am indebted both to George Santayana’s *The Sense of Beauty* and Monroe C. Beardsley’s “History of Aesthetics.”

philosophers of the eighteenth century and the German tradition of aesthetic political philosophy, beginning with Johann Winckelmann's *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* ("The History of Art in Antiquity") of 1764 through Jürgen Habermas' communicative aesthetics in the twentieth century.¹⁵

For British moral sense thinkers like Shaftesbury (1999) and Francis Hutcheson (2004), aesthetics functions as shorthand for the introjection of abstract reason or rational order by the life of the senses, such that the whole of social life is aestheticized.¹⁶ What this signifies is a social order so spontaneously cohesive that its members no longer need to think about it. On this view, a sound political regime is one in which the law of authority is no longer viewed or felt to be external to individuals but is lived out through the feelings and senses and experienced as the unthought principle of free identities. As literary critic Terry Eagleton, argues, "The aesthetic is in this sense no more than a name for the political unconscious: it is simply the way social harmony registers itself on our senses, imprints itself on our sensibilities." So too, "The beautiful

¹⁵ Anticipated by the pre-Socratics' anthropomorphic philosophy of *cosmos* (celestial order), the wedding of beauty to politics received its first thorough, albeit indirect, treatment in Plato's political masterpiece, the *Republic*. Here the importance of conceiving politics vis-à-vis beauty is established analogically by means of organic unity: the constitution of the ideal political community (the *kallipolis* or "beautiful city") corresponds to the organization of the healthy body, both of which are arranged harmoniously, as well as pyramidally, according to the specialization of their parts, e.g., the head (rulers or philosopher kings), the heart (the auxiliaries or guardians), and the stomach (farmers and other craftsmen) (369b-372d, 414b-415d, 423d). Plato's indictment of poetry, in Book X, is symptomatic of a deeper aesthetic—or, in pre-eighteenth century parlance, "poetic"—concern, namely, the safe-keeping of the beautiful city's organic unity. Thus for Plato, the greatest evil for a city is that which tears it apart and makes it many instead of one, while the greatest good is that which binds it together and makes it one (462a-b). Aristotle echoes these considerations, as well as Plato's expressive mode, when, in the *Politics*, he imports his ethical notion of "due proportion" to highlight the aesthetic/poetic underpinnings of political arrangement (1284b7-12; see also 1987b, 3). Indeed, it is this poeticized rendering of politics and political community that Friedrich Schiller evokes early in his *Letters*, disparaging "the new spirit of government," for not rising to higher forms of organic existence but degenerating "into a crude and clumsy mechanism" (35). Although not typically associated with this tradition, Pieter Duvenage (2003) maintains that Habermas's work on aesthetic rationality is central to understanding his theoretical enterprise of communicative rationality.

¹⁶ Some scholars treat of moral sense theory (also known as sentimentalism) as the empiricist version of ethical intuitionism (i.e., the general position that humans possess some type or degree of non-inferential moral knowledge. For an appraisal of the British moralists as ethical intuitionists and a defense of ethical intuitionism in general, see Michael Huemer (2008). With respect to the connection between the so-called morality and aesthetics, British moral sense theorists like David Hume described this so-called sense in terms of an increasing refinement in aesthetic sensibility. Belonging to our immediate experience, morality discloses the moral order to us insofar as it possesses the unerring intuition of aesthetic taste (see Eagleton 1990, 32 ff.).

is just political order lived out on the body, the way it strikes the eye and stirs the heart” (1990, 37). As such, the aesthetic names the relay or transmission mechanism whereby the law of authority is converted into a law that is not a law—or, according to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, an authority which is not an authority (1987).¹⁷ Aesthetics thus comes to stand for the ultimate binding force of state and society, the essence of which Francis Hutcheson captures in his famous aesthetic axiom that beauty consists in “unity in variety and variety in unity” (2004, 28–30; my paraphrasing). Anchored as it is in our most basic instincts, aesthetics—as sensibility (Hume) or the sense of beauty (Santayana)—represents a spontaneously cohesive and consensual order, which requires no further legitimation beyond that of its own intrinsic and immediately felt value. “Like the work of art,” argues Eagleton, this unity “is immune from all rational analysis, and so from all rational criticism” (1990, 38). To aestheticize political order, then, to render it beautiful, is to make legitimate domination ideologically effective, that is, pleasurable and intuitive, self-ratifying and self-sustaining. For if aesthetics names a process for ideologically reconstituting the human subject from the inside—for rooting politics in a refashioned subjectivity—then it becomes inconceivable that the subject, once aestheticized, could ever meaningfully reject the law of authority (or rationality of law), much less violate the injunctions of state power. By subjectivizing authority, aesthetics thus offers a conceivable if not actual means of short-circuiting the possibility of disobedience, contestation, and dissent,

¹⁷ Although not a moral sense theorist, Jean-Jacques Rousseau encapsulates the aesthetic nature of the ideal political state in his description of the law of authority. On his view, the most important form of law is the one “is not engraved on marble or bronze, but in the hearts of citizens. It is the true constitution of the state. Everyday [sic] it takes on new forces. When other laws grow old and die away, it revives and replaces them, preserves a people in the spirit of its institution and imperceptibly substitutes the force of habit for that of authority. I am speaking of mores, customs, and especially of opinion, a part of the law unknown to our political theorists but one on which depends the success of all the others” (1987, 172). Yet as we will see, to the extent that Rousseau’s appeal to public opinion and custom fails to consider the possibility of fragmentation or dissent, his vision of an introjected, self-sustaining political order is not guarantee order so much as it serves as philosophical *deus ex machina*.

translating political order into a form of unthinking convention and social practice, a second nature.

Echoing British moral sense theory, the German tradition of an aesthetic political philosophy saw in aesthetics the ideological bonding essential for creating and maintaining the ideal of a well-ordered political state.¹⁸ In *The Aesthetic State: A Quest in Modern German Thought*, Josef Chytrý offers an impressive account of the effort of German theorists over the last two centuries to use aesthetics as a common point of departure for a political philosophy.¹⁹ What primarily attracted these German theorists to an aesthetic political philosophy was the intuition that the work of art effects a harmonious integration of its constituent parts. Hence, much like the moral sense philosophers, classicists like Herder and idealists like Hölderlin came to view aesthetics as the key to achieving social cohesion as well as the model or hegemonic strategy for upholding the state. Aesthetics, in other words, designated something other, or greater, than the work of art, denoting an instrument or mode for unifying the individual and the state. The work of art simply exemplifies such unification and serves as an ideal for the political community. Friedrich Schiller, who according to Chytrý is the central figure of this tradition, encapsulates this ideological view when he writes that “if man is ever to solve that problem of politics in practice he will have to approach it through the problem of the aesthetic” (1982, 9). For Schiller, the atomization of society could only be successfully counteracted by impulses toward synthesis

¹⁸ Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt, who was very much influenced by this German tradition, and Hegel in particular, began his illustrious cultural history of the Italian Renaissance with an aesthetic proposition: namely, that wherever the excesses of political egoism and violence is “overcome or in any way compensated a new fact appears in history—the State as the outcome of reflection and calculation, the State as a work of art” (1958, 22).

¹⁹ F. R. Ankersmit’s proposes an alternative aesthetic political philosophy, one that he considers to be diametrically opposed to the German one. Rather invoking unity as the watchword of aesthetics, Ankersmitt appeals to aesthetics in order to argue “for the *brokenness* of the political domain” (1996, 18). In opposition to the unification of the individual and the state, which also would involve the identification of state and society and of the representative and the represented, Ankersmitt defends a kind of aesthetic political philosophy that acknowledges and embraces “an irrevocably broken world, a world without *tertium*, a world whose components are as irreducible to each other as a painting and what it depicts” (53).

that he considered to be the defining characteristic of the “Aesthetic State” or “Aesthetic Society.” It is only in the aesthetic state, Schiller argues, that justice can be done to all the faculties of the individual human being, and that these can most completely develop in the fullest interaction with others. Commenting on Schiller, Chytry writes: “By promoting empathy and an awareness of others, aesthetic sensibility gives rise to the development of a society in which the individual becomes, as it were, the state itself” (1989, 85). For the German tradition, too, beauty or taste is shorthand for a spontaneously consensual order, aesthetics the language of solidarity. “Taste alone brings harmony into society,” writes Schiller, “because it fosters harmony in the individual.... [Only] the aesthetic mode of communication unites society, because it relates to that which is common to all” (1982, 215). At the same time, for the German theorists as a whole, this unification is subservient to a project of fundamental ideological reconstruction, of bringing society and the individuals composing it into line with the aestheticized and hegemonic state, that is, the state perceived as an organic whole, its power recognized as legitimately dominant. The question that emerges within this tradition, however, is how the state is to achieve such an aesthetic makeover. If, as Schiller contends, the transformation is to come about by means of the aesthetic mode of communication, then what, we may ask, are the means available to this mode? Of what does it consist? How does it work? What are the mechanisms of control, the likelihood of success, the prospects of opposition? The question, it would appear, is not one but many. Rather than providing answers, however, Schiller and company leave us wondering.²⁰

²⁰ Miguel Tamen indirectly discusses the rhetoric of Schiller’s “aesthetic or beautiful communication,” arguing that for Schiller the expression refers “to the achievements of art and to its mysterious overall quality we now take for granted and call ‘cultural value.’” Paying attention to the centrality of “form” vis-à-vis Schiller’s aesthetics, he forwards the ironic conclusion that Schiller’s wishes for a beautiful mode of communication are fulfilled “by the kind of language most successors of Schiller (including Schiller himself) have opposed” on aesthetic grounds: the formalised languages used e.g. by Logic” (1995, 481). Without disagreeing with the logic of this argument, I maintain that Tamen’s conclusion does not address the problematic for Schiller of how communication may be so aestheticized that it adequately performs the consensual tasks requisite for maintaining the ideal of a well-ordered political state.

1.3 AESTHETICS: AN EFFECTIVE (& AFFECTIVE) THEORY OF PERSUASION

Thus, apart from the ambiguity of “aesthetic communication,” for the British moral sense theorists and German political philosophers, aesthetics promises to equip the state with an effective persuasive theory, one that, in introjecting an abstract theory of rule, appears, ironically, to rest on nothing more intellectually reputable than a species of mental taste or subjective experience. It is little wonder, then, that political philosophy and science have at times been loath to consider seriously the importance of rhetoric with regard to questions of political authority.²¹ Nevertheless, as even rhetoric’s staunchest critics admit, the effectiveness of legitimate domination—a political system’s capacity to secure and maintain popular support, to be politically effective—depends almost entirely on the effective (i.e., persuasive) use of symbols and symbol systems.²² That is to say, subjective adherence to and belief in the state as political hegemon relies on the suasive and attitudinal functions of language, and these functions are typically contra-purposive with respect to teaching on an intellectual level (though, to be sure, rhetoric can also be made the object of systematic study). In the *Statesman*, for instance, Plato’s

²¹ See Bryan Garsten’s *Saving Persuasion: A Defense of Rhetoric and Judgment*, for an examination of political philosophy’s at times strained relationship to “the art of persuasion” and a vindication of rhetoric’s importance in revitalizing democratic political discourse.

²² Recently, American rhetoricians have sought to problematize “persuasion” as the end of rhetoric, proposing alternative standards for assessing rhetorical effectivity, e.g., epistemic value (Scott 1967), interpellation (Charland 1987), invitation (Foss and Griffin 1995), re-signification or performativity (Butler 1997), productive interpretation (Leff 1997), articulation (Greene 1998b), and tropological play (Kaplan 2010; see also de Man 1979), to name only a few. However, with respect only to the autonomous ends of rhetoric—i.e., leaving aside any consideration of the heteronomous ends that rhetoric is made to serve, ends that rhetoric invariably does serve—these criteria necessarily come to appeal to persuasion or persuasiveness as their ultimate standard of effectivity: e.g., rhetoric invites response only insofar as people are persuaded of, come to believe in, the reality of the invitation, regardless of speaker/author intent, and allowing for the possibility of negative invitation (provocation). This is not to say that rhetoric does not invite, articulate, or involve inventional interpretation, only that persuasion includes these functions, subsuming them as different suasive possibilities. In the European tradition, scholars from outside the discipline of rhetoric have also begun to rethink rhetoric in terms other than or in addition to persuasion, offering highly original yet equally idiosyncratic definitions. A representative sampling might include Levinas’ violent conversation (1969, 70), Valesio’s “the functional organization of discourse” (1980, 7), Eagleton’s “the sensuous body of a discourse” (1990, 115); Barthes’ “subtly articulated machine” (1994, 16), Foucault’s effective lying productive of “a constraining bond” (2011, 14), etc. Although expressing a bias toward the truth-telling philosopher as against the rhetor, Foucault’s pejorative definition, I believe, is closest to the mark, at least with regard to the use of rhetoric for the ends of furthering the state’s interests.

Socrates defines rhetoric as expert knowledge “capable of persuading mass and crowd, through the telling of stories, and not through teaching” (304d), while assigning control of such expertise to the statesman (304a). Similarly, Aristotle subordinates rhetoric to the science of politics, by which he means state management, writing that “Speech based on knowledge is teaching, but teaching is impossible [with some audiences]; rather, it is necessary for *pisteis* [“means of persuasion”] and speeches [as a whole] to be formed on the basis of common [beliefs and opinion]” (2007, 1.1.12). For only on this basis can the owners and managers of rhetorical power ensure, to the best of their ability, maximum impact, both in terms of extent and intensity. In keeping with this view, the contemporary historian of rhetoric Renato Barilli argues that rhetoric is *technē* (“technique,” or “art”) in the fullest sense: “the activity it performs is not only cognitive but transformative and practical as well. It does not limit itself to conveying neutral, sterilized facts...but its aim is to carry away the audience; to produce an effect on them; to mold them; to leave them different as a result of its impact,” to reach the emotions “and leave an effect on ‘experience’” (1989, x).²³ From the state’s perspective, then, rhetoric constitutes a potentially decisive *technē* or strategy for maintaining popular belief and support vis-à-vis the legitimacy of state power, for strengthening commitment to the status quo. Although consensus may be arrived at through means of argument and debate (à la Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969), or in the context of an “ideal speech community” (à la Habermas 1970), for the state these methods are at once impractical and ineffectual—at worst, counterproductive. As Gerard Casey astutely points out, “The belief in the legitimacy of the state is all the more effectively planted in the minds of its citizens if it is never actually argued for or justified (that might raise doubts) but simply

²³ For Plato, *technē* refers to a rational enterprise, the procedure of which can be explained as contributing to an end, in this case, the end of persuasion (e.g., 1987, 465a). The irony of aesthetics mentioned above thus reappears apropos of rhetoric, conceived as a rational enterprise for producing potentially non-rational effects.

conveyed inchoately as a foundational principle” (2012, 27).²⁴ In terms of persuading a population of the state’s political legitimacy, rhetoric’s strength consists in forgoing controversy and public debate in favor of persuasive tactics (means of persuasion) capable of exerting maximum emotive impact and of exploiting that impact in the service of order.

Among the available means of persuasion, none is perhaps more subservient to the end of political order than the appeal to beauty. Certainly, this intuition has not been lost on the practicing political elite, regardless of whether this insight lays claim to irrefutable, objective verity. From the U.S. Constitution’s “more perfect Union” to the reappearance in the twentieth century of John Winthrop’s image of “a shining city upon a hill” (1630/1838), American political discourse has been keen to avail itself of the language of beauty, working either to imbue the state with a sense of beauty or to reinvigorate its waning aesthetic appeal.²⁵ We see a similar aesthetic impulse in 1930s Germany, in which calls for the restoration of a true “*Heimat*,” the name of a redeemed whole, served as a rallying cry for a nostalgic right that sought its home in a national or *völkisch* community.²⁶ Far from signifying political anomalies, these and other

²⁴ On the notion of foundational principles, or myths as foundational narratives, see Ludwig Wittgenstein (1969, 117–9).

²⁵ On January 9, 1961, President-Elect John F. Kennedy resuscitated the phrase “a city upon a hill” during an address delivered to the General Court of Massachusetts. President Ronald Reagan used the image as well, on several occasions, and to great effect, first, in his impromptu concession speech at the 1976 Republican National Convention, then again, in his 1984 acceptance of the Republican Party nomination, and again, in his January 11, 1989, farewell speech to the nation (see Reagan 2003). Ronald Reagan’s son, Michael Reagan, preserved his father’s predilection for this image, titling his 1997 book *The City on a Hill: Fulfilling Ronald Reagan’s Vision for America*.

²⁶ The aestheticized idea of the *Heimat* or *völk* community is of course of a piece with the Nazi project of genocidal purification. As Peter Viereck argues, the Third Reich was regarded at the deepest level as the sacred *Heimat* of the unified *völk* community. Those who were taken to Nazi concentration camps were those who were officially declared by the SS to be “enemies of the *völk* community” and thus labeled a threat to the integrity and security of the *Heimat* (1965). Of course, this is not to suggest that the political appropriation of aesthetics is inherently to some degree racist or fascist. Rather, the relationship between aesthetics and fascism is accidental, as is the relationship between aesthetics and any system of government or social organization. F. R. Ankersmit, in his work on the aesthetics of politics, goes to great lengths to distinguish a democratic or republican conception of aesthetic politics from a non-democratic, potentially authoritarian one. On his view, what is unique to the former is the conviction that “legitimate power can arise solely in a situation where the distinction between the state and society, between the representative and the represented, is as clear as possible” (1996, 53). By contrast, non-democratic conceptions of

attempts to aestheticize order suggest a basic human tendency, one that makes possible an almost unthinking rhetorical political strategy. In this regard, Homer's immortal *Iliad* is testament both to the strength and universality of beauty's unquestioned (and unquestionable), mobilizing power: 'Who on earth could blame them? Ah, no wonder the men of Troy and Argives under arms have suffered years of agony all for her, for such a woman. Beauty, terrible beauty!' (3.156–) Notwithstanding Helen of Troy's untold, mythical beauty—or, for that matter, the putative beauty of the *völkisch* community or of the territorial association “the United States”—from a rhetorical or pragmatic perspective, what is of principal concern is not whether some one or thing is really and truly beautiful, nor is it whether or to what extent an object (real or imagined) embodies an abstract standard of beauty. When the end is to create or sustain adherence to political order, the principal concern becomes that of persuading a sufficiently broad swath of popular opinion that the existing political state is a beautiful one. The exigence, then, becomes a matter of eliciting what Santayana describes as “an affection of our volitional and appreciative nature”—i.e., the sense of beauty—and of doing so in such a way that this pleasure is regarded as or felt to be a quality objectified in the prevailing political order (1955, 31).²⁷ The advantage of this maneuver is singular, if not obvious. Unlike appeals to morality or economic value, neither of which are intrinsically valuable, beauty is an ultimate good,

aesthetics politics hold to the view that the best we can hope for politically is an identification of state and society and of the representative and the represented.

²⁷ According to the history of aesthetics, the relevant distinction is that which distinguishes a subjective-epistemological perspective from an objective-ontological one. From the epistemologist's frame of reference, beauty consists, in the first instance, in a positive, intrinsic value, the immediate perception of which is a pleasure, that is, a pleasure felt independent of concepts or practical entanglements. Beauty, then, on this view, resides in a subjective response, enjoyment. As Immanuel Kant, the most radical proponent of this view, asserts, “*beautiful is what we like in merely judging it*” (1987, 174; emphasis in original). More recently, Santayana has proposed the more moderate and, I think, more reasonable definition, which holds that “Beauty is pleasure *regarded* as the quality of a thing,” i.e., beauty as objectified pleasure (1955, 31; my emphasis). By contrast, the ontological approach to aesthetics, which begins in the classical tradition of poetics, maintains that beauty resides in phenomenal, empirical objects or their relations themselves, that beauty enjoys a certain independent existence vis-à-vis human perception and the life of the senses. A typical example of the ontological approach is Aristotle, who divides beauty into its “main species,” or objective qualities: “orderly arrangement, proportion, and definiteness [or clarity]” (1935, XIII.iii.10– 12).

pleasurable in its immediate perception, rather than in consequence of the utility of an object, act, or event. Beauty is thus unique from both an axiological and rhetorical perspective.

For that reason, I propose substituting for Schiller's "aesthetic mode of communication" the less ambiguous notion of the rhetoric of aesthetics.²⁸ If aesthetics is to serve the state as an effective mode of communication—specifically, an affectively or emotively effective mode—and if the standard of effectivity is popular belief in and support for the state's claim to legitimate domination, then, in the final analysis, this mode would seem to consist in persuading the majority of the state's inherent beauty. That is, its distinctive rhetorical power would appear to reside in objectifying pleasure *as a dimension* of the established and dominant political order. Within these parameters, beauty is employed as a means of introjecting or interiorizing political order; of creating affirmative consensus vis-à-vis the system of political rule; of persuasively articulating that system with a universal ideal; of mediating between a civil-economic society of labor and need, on the one hand, and the ideal of a well-ordered political state, on the other. Consequently, the aesthetics of the state circles back to the practical problem relating to authority and legitimate domination, namely, that of effectuation. If beauty is a potential means of winning over a population, and thereby of securing the effectiveness of the state's political legitimacy, then the question remains, how can the state activate or effectively avail itself of this rhetorical

²⁸ By the phrase "rhetoric of aesthetics," I have in mind something distinct from Steve Whitson and John Poulakos' understanding of the aesthetics of rhetoric (1993; 1995; see also Ayotte et al. 2002). By way of Nietzschean aesthetics, in particular those passages in *The Will to Power* devoted to art (§§ 794–853), Whitson and Poulakos highlight rhetoric's "aesthetic" capacity to transform the limits of signification and forge new vistas of possibility—of meaning, perception, feeling, and the like. This emphasis, they argue, serves to demonstrate the proper scope and function of rhetoric, which, although a productive art in the Aristotelian sense, is not productive of truth or knowledge and hence of no epistemic value. In contradistinction, the rhetoric of aesthetics—and, as we will see below, of "negative aesthetics"—places emphasis on the rhetorical (i.e. suasive) uses of aesthetics and considers aesthetics as a resource or means of rhetorical effectivity. The two perspectives, however (the aesthetics of rhetoric and the rhetoric of aesthetics), are more than compatible. Indeed, the rhetoric of aesthetics, as I understand it, presupposes an aesthetic understanding or dimension of rhetoric, one that is different from but in conversation with the rhetorical ends of aesthetics.

power and maintain it once activated? While the idea of beauty seems to yield a gain in rendering political legitimacy rhetorically effective, from the standpoint of the state beauty is no more than an attractive rhetorical proposition. Still at issue is the practical necessity of discovering how to exploit beauty so as to cultivate perceptions and beliefs advantageous to the state. This demand, in turn, requires attending to the unanimity, intensity, and duration of beauty's potential, subjective effects. Consideration of these issues shows that the rhetoric of beauty runs up against several difficulties, which it inherits from the field of aesthetics—difficulties that in the domain of political legitimation translate into constraints on rhetorical effectivity or the making of political consensus.

1.4 PROBLEMS IN THE RHETORIC OF AESTHETICS

The first problem bearing on the rhetoric of aesthetics is at once philosophical-epistemological and operational: how does one persuade another that a particular object, e.g., the state, is beautiful? Beauty, as we have seen, is an intrinsic positive value, a pleasure that is felt in its immediate perception. As we have seen, it is an emotion that gives satisfaction, or pleasure, to some fundamental need or capacity of the mind. If this is the case, then the pleasure in which beauty and aesthetic judgment consist is independent of reason and understanding. For reason and understanding, as mental faculties or modes of perception, are logical and rational; they presuppose fixed ideas and work to establish new ones. They are thus productive, dependent on external ends, and interested in seeing those ends realized. Beauty, in contrast, which works solely on and through concept-free feeling, is a purely subjective (aesthetic) mode of perception, meaning that beauty and aesthetic judgments of the beautiful are ends in themselves, or

autonomous, free of all external ends or purposes, including political agendas.²⁹ None of these observations, however, preclude beauty from serving as an accessory or in a dependent capacity (see Kant 1987, §16). Ideas and things, insofar as they are precipitated by emotions, can incorporate pleasure and thereby acquire what Santayana refers to as an “aesthetic colouring” (1955, 70). Although this coloring may be the last quality we notice in objects of, say, practical interest, its influence is nevertheless very real. Hence, this coloring effect is not limited to judgments of beautiful works of art or natural objects but can extend, equally, to constitutional arrangements or state formations. Although the aesthetic love or pleasure felt in relation to a political system is usually disguised under some moral label (e.g. love of justice), the essential right of any political organization or the belief in such right is purely aesthetic. At the same time, however, beauty’s status as a positive, affective value, at once intrinsic and immediate, would appear to seal off the sense of beauty from the political effectivity of conventional argument and persuasive action in general. For whereas beauty conceived as an idea may allow for the possibility of rhetoric’s winning someone over by means of reasoning or conventional argument, beauty as subjective sense or objectified pleasure does not. What is more, rhetoric is also disabled with regard to preventing one’s falling out of beauty, powerless to revive an affective appreciation for an idea or thing that was at one time an object of aesthetic enjoyment.

Outside the fictional realm and its dystopian nightmares of mind control, beauty as a felt value is not a realistic end of persuasion. Beauty can be communicated, but the nature of such communication is purely expressive, the expression, Kant writes, of “our feeling in a given

²⁹ For that reason, according to Kant, pleasure in an aesthetic judgment would thus consist in a formal purposiveness, by which he means, “The consciousness of a merely formal purposiveness in the play of the subject’s cognitive power, accompanying a presentation by which an object is given” (1987, 68), i.e., “a purposiveness without a purpose; a purposeless purposiveness” (73). According to Terry Eagleton, Kant’s reduction of beauty to the subjective purposiveness of the presentation of a thing amounts to an ideologically understanding of aesthetics. On Eagleton’s view, Kant’s aesthetics is a “heuristic fiction” (1990, 85), “the very paradigm of the ideological (93–4).

presentation universally communicable without mediation by a concept” (1987, 162). Of course, this universal communicability is not identical to universal feeling vis-à-vis what is presented, as we will see, and aesthetic feeling cannot simply be transposed to a person or persons by means of expressive communication, just as it cannot be imposed through persuasion.³⁰ Nevertheless, as Santayana flatly states (in keeping with the dreams of aesthetic political philosophy), the aestheticization of politics is not only possible but also, insofar as the aim of any political system entails securing longstanding, widespread support, necessary. While beauty can function or be made to serve as a substantial persuasive force, increasing the likelihood of persuasive uptake or assent, *suasion to beauty*—the rhetoric of aesthetics—is severely limited in its capacity both to acquire new converts or to prevent the already initiated from falling out of beauty, regardless of domain (politics, art, morality, etc.). The aestheticization of politics, when it occurs, happens gradually, over time, entering into and thereby reconfiguring a community’s storehouse of common sense and common feeling, becoming, as it were, superstitious—perhaps natural and noble, in some cases, but nevertheless superstitious. Regardless of the epistemic claims or status of political beauty, the objectification of aesthetic pleasure in the idea of the state does not result from intentional practice or grand strategizing. This is not to say that human agency is missing or absent, that actual people and groups of people are somehow excluded from exerting influence

³⁰ At most, beauty can exert persuasive force by means of what William Fusfield refers to as “reiterative compositional strategies” or strategies of communicative display and declaration. Such rhetorical strategies are potentially useful for the state’s rhetoric of aesthetics, since they function outside the parameters of conventional argument standards such as the argumentative case “a set of reasons and inferences in support of a specified conclusion,” in this case the state’s beauty (1997, 134; cf., Anderson 1985). Nevertheless, when concerning the aesthetics of politics reiterative rhetoric does not, as Fusfield maintains, increase the likelihood of persuasive uptake, if by that he understands the causation of belief. At most, the rhetoric of declaration may strengthen already existing commitments to political authority. Accordingly, it would serve one of the particularized functions assigned by Celeste Condit to epideictic discourse, namely, that of responding to the exigence of authority, of playing a crucial role in processes of communal construction and preservation of authority (1985, 290–91). However, as I argue below, the effectivity of reiterative rhetoric in shoring up the aesthetic state is, from the state’s perspective, a necessary but insufficient means of combatting the inevitable withering away of beauty and hence of maintaining subjective adherence and intensity of support.

over the state's aesthetic refashioning; rather, the assertion merely underlines the accidental, involuntary nature of the overall (and ongoing) process itself, which is disclosed by the fact that aesthetic consecration is always more than the sum of the individual, collective efforts that go into the historical aestheticization of a given political system—whether such efforts are considered synchronically, at any given time, or diachronically, through their evolution over time.

All the same, beauty's relative immunity from suasion would not pose a problem for political authority if not for the variety of states and their governments, on the one hand, and the variety of aesthetic sense or taste, on the other. Thus, the second difficulty pertaining to the aesthetics of politics concerns the unanimity of aesthetic judgments in connection with the objectification of pleasure in the state apparatus. Although epistemologists like Kant and Edmund Burke forward an understanding of taste that is at once uniform and universal, both acknowledge the very real possibility of discrepancy between individuals' aesthetic responses. Yet each is adamant that aesthetic variability should be laid at the door of individuals, rather than of taste, which remains self-identical throughout its manifold presentations or embodiments.³¹ Taste itself, in other words, is stable and unchanging, despite the divergence in aesthetic response (either according to the subjective history of an individual's aesthetic judgments or the

³¹ To be clear, my decision to highlight the aesthetic judgments of individuals rather than the shared aesthetic sense of communities is simply one of convenience. It does not express an underlying preference for or commitment to the idea of the autonomous individual. That individuals' aesthetic judgments may come into conflict with one another is entirely consistent with the communal nature of judgment, namely, with the fact that people make decisions not in a vacuum but in line with a community's storehouse of beliefs and values (allowing, of course, for the fact that the storehouse itself is conditioned by aesthetic principles). As even the transcendental idealist Kant is forced to admit, if only implicitly, communities are not always, or even usually, in agreement with one another; certainly, they do not always share the same standards of judgment. However, this should in no way take away from the fact that disagreements between communities—whether of aesthetics, morality, or art—affect individuals nor that individual judgment within communities is itself prone to variability. Although outside the scope of my argument, Hans-Georg Gadamer's critique of aesthetics, which he lays out in the first part of *Truth and Method*, hinges on his success in accusing epistemologists like Kant of reducing "the sense of community," or *sensus communis*, to the *subjective* universality of aesthetic taste, and thereby of doing away with it (see 19–34 and 41–2).

discrepancy in judgment between individuals). Leaving aside considerations of verity, what this line of argument underlines is the sheer obstinacy of aesthetic judgments as such, even—or especially—judgments about taste itself, i.e., about what constitutes “good” taste. In view of such recalcitrance, and much to the chagrin of philosophers hard pressed to defend “a science of taste” (e.g., Burke), aesthetic conflicts are practically irresolvable. According to the moral sense theorist David Hume, notwithstanding the possibility of “some defect or perversion in the faculties,” in matters of taste “a certain degree of diversity in judgment is unavoidable, and we seek in vain for a standard, by which we can reconcile the contrary sentiments...because there is no standard by which they can be [made compatible] (1998, 150). But as we have seen, even if there were such a standard it would be incapable of winning over new converts, of creating new adherents or subjects of beauty, of eliciting what is not, in some form, to some degree, already present in a subject’s body of experience—the feeling or sense of beauty, specifically, the objectification of pleasure in the qualities or elements of some object, either of the senses or the imagination. Such a hypothetical standard would be therefore useless in the attempt to win over new converts, to fashion new adherents or subjects of aesthetic “truth.” For at issue in aesthetic conflict is not the idea of beauty per se (e.g., not whether beauty is properly viewed as an epistemological or ontological proposition) but beauty as a mode of experience, which, since it consists in the immediate perception of intrinsic positive-value, we regard as essential to our very sense of being. As feeling beings we are thus unwilling and unable to be persuaded that our sense of beauty is incorrect or in any way deficient. From the state’s perspective, beauty’s resistance to reason and argument is as effective as it is problematic. It is effective so long as the citizenry perceives the state and its governing apparatus as a beautiful socio-political arrangement, for then legitimacy is virtually unassailable—disagreement and disobedience,

unthinkable; however, it is equally problematic if the state's claim to beauty fails to create or command consensus, since the rhetoric of aesthetics remains powerless to win the hearts and minds of the unconverted. Hence, what promises to be the most advantageous means of maintaining legitimate domination appears, in the final analysis, to be simply that and nothing more: an instrument for maintaining but not creating adherence to the prevailing political order, for keeping alive the support of the hardline true believers but not for expanding that base.

Unavoidable and irresolvable, conflicts between aesthetic judgments of taste simultaneously extend and realize the problem of rhetoric's inadmissibility vis-à-vis aesthetic conversion. In terms of political legitimacy, this foreclosure is particularly problematic: it not only precludes the reconciliation of competing judgments of the beautiful but also undermines the possibility of reaching compromise. For the recalcitrance of aesthetic judgment is of a piece with an inclination toward absolutism, the tendency to regard one's own aesthetic sensibility as embodying the universal standard of good taste. In the domain art, aesthetic absolutism has supplied the basis for much of modern criticism, since it is only by virtue of a universal standard (so the thinking goes) that the would-be critic can legitimately pass judgment on a work of art. But whereas in the domain of art any number of objects may fulfill the absolute and universal requirements of taste, in the domain of politics aesthetic sensibility is brought under the control of the model. Accordingly, the model of political beauty—the idealized state—appropriates and colonizes the universal standard of taste, in every instance that this mode of judgment is brought to bear on constitutional arrangements and the attending organizations of society. The aestheticized state, in other words, is a singularity, which does not allow for scale; rather, it demands universal assent and permitting of variety only insofar as it alone marks the convergence of a multiplicity of aesthetical political judgments. While taste may allow for any

number of, say, beautiful paintings, politicized taste acknowledges only one beautiful state. For that reason, the aesthetics of politics is always a contest for what Kant refers to as “exemplary validity,” i.e., the hegemonic struggle whereby a particular content attains to the status of a universal (1998, B151; see Arendt 1992b, 84). Just as the aestheticized state remains more than the sum of its agential parts, political aestheticization itself amounts to a zero-sum game. Hence, the aesthetics of politics entails not only the state’s claim to beauty but also, and necessarily, its claim to exemplary beauty, which is a singular hegemonic status. Unlike the disinterestedness of the beautiful work of art, the beautiful work of political institution demands exclusive allegiance. To perceive a state as beautiful is, in effect, to make the aesthetic but no less political judgment that *only that state* is beautiful, that its form, and its form alone, embodies the political species of beauty.³² Like aesthetic sensibility, the aestheticization of the state tends toward absolutism. At the same time, this process goes one step further, since, by substituting a singular model for a universal standard, it monopolizes the standard (at least in a specific domain, for a particular realm of being), thereby acquiring the exclusive determining rights of aesthetic judgments of political taste. The aesthetic state is thus an absolutist and totalizing proposition: it is no longer a state but The State, or The Aesthetic State.³³ The problem with this, however, is that the tendency toward totalizing absolutism does not enjoy universal persuasive appeal but remains, by its very nature, eternally contestable. As thinkers like David Hume aver, and others such as

³² Of course, the form itself is always already monopolized by a particular content. So for instance, despite the fact that the whole of Europe and most of South America consists of liberal democratic systems of government, as do many other countries in the world, much of U.S. discourse—official, partisan, and vernacular—persist in describing the United States as the last or most important bastion of freedom and civil rights. The widespread appeal of this commonly held belief is testament not to any empirically verifiable truth content but to the aesthetic coloring of these and other values and their subordination to the aestheticized state. They are rhetorical proofs, in other words, of political aestheticization.

³³ On this view, then, it is the prerogative of such a state to decide which of the other existing states have a legitimate share in The State’s exemplary beauty and to what degree. Incidental to the agon of geopolitics, those states are deemed relatively beautiful that affirm the exclusive right of The Aesthetic State to determine and rank the value of all other states. This “dutiful” acknowledgment earns states titles such as “ally” or “client.”

Kant imply, this contestation is both unavoidable and irresolvable but through coercive measures.

In addition to this totalizing tendency, which, with respect to rendering legitimacy effective, is likely to end in irresolvable disagreement or *stasis*, the aesthetic state is at once a fragile and temporary one, comparable to the fragile impermanence of goodness and love. For those whose sense of beauty accords with the state's presentation of self, the state registers as the objectification of aesthetic pleasure and therefore commands a seemingly spontaneous consensual power. Yet, in itself, this rhetorical power—distinct from the power of conversion—is insufficient to the task of maintaining, consistently, an optimal level of intensity, or quantity of support, much less of maintaining the distribution of that zeal among the consensual body politic. Inasmuch as beauty constitutes both the means and the end of the idealized state, the rhetoric of aesthetics is unable to preserve the very consensus (the *homonoia* or “likemindedness”) that it both engenders and objectifies in the aesthetically representative state. Like the problem of unanimity, then, the third difficulty in the aesthetics of politics stems from the rhetorical limitations inherent in beauty, i.e., the restrictiveness that aesthetics exerts on suasive action. However, in contradistinction to the problem of aesthetic conflict, and the impossibility of aesthetic conversion, that of the intensity and diffusion of popular support issues from a failure of beauty as such, namely, that while beauty is necessary for power it does not itself contain it. Edmund Burke is perhaps the person most responsible for popularizing the political ramifications of this defect, writing that “we submit to what we admire, but we love what submits to us; in one case we are forced, in the other flattered, into compliance” (1998, 147). Beauty, in other words, which on this view appeals mainly to the “domestic” affections of love and tenderness, amounts to a vital symbol of free bondage. Yet as Rousseau highlights, the nature of this freedom is not

that of consensual compliance to order; rather, it suggests an impossibly lawless lawfulness, a destabilizing oxymoron that subjects beauty and, consequently the aesthetic state to a kind of ceaseless self-undoing. Instead of maintaining strong belief and consensual adherence to order, beauty enervates the affective basis of popular support. Rather than strengthening commitment to the state's political authority, beauty—because it is neither rational nor coercive—allows for that commitment to weaken, encouraging by means of inability and license the erosion of its own rhetorical effectivity and hence that of the state's aesthetic grounding.

Thus, the aesthetics of politics culminates in the paradox whereby a seemingly spontaneous order spontaneously devolves into a state of unfeeling political entropy, transforming the consensual body politic into what Burke describes as a people “grown torpid with the lazy enjoyment of...security” (1968, 156). Terry Eagleton argues, taking his cue from Burke, argues that this failing results in the following, now-familiar, political dilemma: “only love will truly win us to the law, but this love will erode the law to nothing. A law attractive enough to engage our intimate affections, and so hegemonically effective, will tend to inspire in us a benign contempt. On the other hand, a power which arouses our filial fear, and hence our submissive obedience, is likely to alienate our affections and so spur us to Oedipal resentment” (1990, 55).³⁴ Thus, the final stage of beauty—its best-case scenario—returns the state to its starting position, reinstating the problematic of how to make the state's claim to political legitimacy rhetorically meaningful, that is, of how to recreate the subjective conditions guaranteeing the state's legitimate domination over the long-range. Even so, one need not accept

³⁴ Almost fifty years ago, Rudolf Arnheim turned to the work of art in an attempt to reconcile the contradiction between the striving for order in nature and human beings and the principle of entropy implicit in the second law of thermodynamics. Owing to the effects of “[d]isintegration and excessive tension reduction (simplicity),” entropy, he argued, could best be combatted by the presence of the presence of vital “articulate structure,” [a] high level of structural order.” However, while structure on this view would be a necessary prerequisite for art, “What is ultimately required,” he added, “is that this order reflect a genuine, true, profound view of life” (1971, 29). How a particular political order could simultaneously offer such a vision while avoiding the simplicity demanded by the exigence of securing diffuse subjective adherence is unclear.

the extremity of Burke's critique (i.e., that beauty ultimately issues in death) to see the validity in the argument that beauty tends to lose its effectiveness and intensity and that the state, insofar as its legitimacy hinges on the aesthetic, will likewise suffer from entropy and degenerate over time.³⁵ Hence, rather than responding to the eventual crisis, Lipset's appeal to the state's reservoir of goodwill and Weber's to a self-sustaining status quo merely beg the question. Although the problem of entropy is not, like that of aesthetic disagreement, irresolvable, it is unavoidable. What is more, the degeneration is irreversible. On this point, aesthetics and native wit are in agreement: beauty fades, irrevocably. While measures exist that can alleviate or forestall the decay of beauty, such courses of action ultimately serve only as band-aids, makeshift and temporary solutions to inevitable wide-ranging problems, maintaining a prolonged state of deterioration rather than providing a workable remedy or effecting a reversal of time's degenerative effects. This applies to cosmetic surgery as well as to the rhetoric of nationalistic ceremonies and public display of patriotic fervor.³⁶

1.5 CIRCUMVENTING BEAUTY: THE RHETORIC OF NEGATIVE AESTHETICS

The might of kings is based on reason and the folly of the people; indeed, much more on folly. The greatest and most important thing on earth has weakness as its foundation. And that foundation is wonderfully sure, since there is nothing surer than that the people will be weak. What is based on reason alone is very ill-founded, like the appreciation of wisdom. – Blaise Pascal 1670

³⁵ As per the beautiful according to Edmund Burke, which, writes Frances Ferguson, "has been joined with physical and political entropy issuing in death" (1992, 52).

³⁶ Indeed, Plato was the first to compare a certain practice of rhetoric to cosmetics, arguing in the *Gorgias* that "what cosmetics is to gymnastics, sophistry is to legislation" (465c). Notwithstanding Plato's primary concern of instituting a juridico-legal order that would ensure the moral goodness of the people, the comparison between rhetoric and cosmetics is apt, though for a reason entirely different than the one Plato advances. Whereas Plato's criticism assumes rhetorical effectivity, albeit an immoral and politically destructive one, aesthetic entropy is problematic only insofar as the rhetoric of aesthetics is ineffective over the long-range.

...scare the hell out of the American people. – Republican
Senator Arthur Vandenberg to President Harry S. Truman
1947

In light of these observations, the rhetoric of aesthetics appears to be exceedingly limited in what it and its actors can reasonably hope to accomplish, particularly, with regard to the instauration and long-term maintenance of a consensual political order whose locus is the state and its governing apparatus. Instead of providing a cure-all for problems concerning political legitimacy, aesthetic persuasiveness culminates in and must necessarily be reconciled to its own unalterable and unavoidable constraints, namely, the irresolution of aesthetic disagreement and the irreversibility of aesthetic entropy. In the final analysis, the potential boon that aesthetics offers to processes of legitimation—an emotive power immune to argument and rational critique—is offset by the byproducts of conflictual stasis and degeneration over time. To be sure, the rhetoric of aesthetics remains an attractive mode of rendering political legitimacy effective, of engendering and maintaining a well-ordered political state. Moreover, inasmuch as aesthetic value is—as both Santayana and, more recently, Elaine Scarry (1999) maintain—intrinsic (i.e., a value in and of itself), political legitimacy as a whole, regardless of the particular form of domination, necessarily appeals to and grounds itself in the objectification of pleasure, irrespective of any consideration to rhetorical effectivity.³⁷ This is significant because it means that the aesthetics of politics is not merely the brainchild of eighteenth century Continental philosophy, that the invocation of beauty for political ends is not simply a platitude common to

³⁷ This applies both to the theory and practical work of legitimation. As Davide Panagia has recently demonstrated, the aesthetics of politics animates even the dispassionate analytical rigor of John Rawls' theory of distributive justice (2006, 68–95; see Rawls 1999). This necessary implication of aesthetics, by aesthetics, is similar yet distinct from Jacques Rancière's aesthetic understanding of politics. On this view, aesthetics primarily refers not to subjective sense or judgments of taste but to the distribution of patterns of perceptual experience, or partitions of the sensible world, which determines a mode of articulation between forms of action, production, perception, and thought—of being, doing, and saying. Rancière thus aligns himself with the aesthetics of politics only so as to stand apart from it, offering a general definition consisting of conceptual coordinates and modes of visibility and sayability, which are at once operative in and constitutive of any given political domain (see 1999, 57–9; 2003; and Rancière et al., 2012).

electoral campaigns and encomia for the nation-state. Against the possible charges of esotericism or “mere rhetoric,” the axiological primacy of beauty points up the aesthetic tendency of political systems and beliefs, which would include both the state (along with the apparatus of government) and its processes of legitimation. To the extent that authority is, from the state’s perspective, a fundamental exigence, the aesthetic dimension of political order cannot be exorcised or displaced by an apparently non-aesthetic constitutional arrangement or rational procedure of government. If, as Jacques Derrida claimed in the wake of Soviet Communism, “no disavowal has managed to rid itself of all of Marx’s ghosts” (1994, 37), then aesthetics constitutes the ineradicable double of politics, now as always. Just as Marxism was and quite possibly remains the haunting specter of the new world order (neoliberalism, finance capitalism, etc.), aesthetics is the specter that haunts all systems of rule that rely on some form of political legitimacy in order to maintain domination over their subjects, that is, all modern and a good many pre-modern states.

Given this spectral quality, the emerging problematic is the following: how or in what ways does the state efficaciously manage the deadlock and decay resulting from its aesthetic consecration? Appearances notwithstanding, aesthetics does not resolve the problematic of effectuating legitimacy—that is, of engendering diffuse subjective allegiance to an existing regime and, then, of maintaining that adhesion at an effective level of intensity. Instead, as we have seen, aesthetics only serves to complicate, delay, or aggravate the exigence of securing authority through persuasive means. The question remains pertinent and equally pressing even if we altogether deny the aesthetic tendency of political legitimacy or qualify the extent to which it actually influences subjective adherence and, hence, the effectiveness of legitimate domination. As a mode of communication that works through affective, unthinking sensibility—our so-called

primordial instincts—aesthetics constitutes a persuasive resource that both haunts and entices systems of power. For that reason, aesthetics is likely to be exploited for the purpose of maintaining the dominance of a well-ordered political state even if aestheticization as a process is not an apparently predominant tendency inhering in a specific political order. Further, while aesthetic coloring may be the last quality we notice in objects of practical interest, its influence upon us, by means of such objects, is still very real. Constitutional arrangements and political systems become aesthetic when they come to be prized in themselves, intrinsically, just as intrinsic value is testament to the acquisition of aesthetic coloring. Consequently, the crisis in the aesthetics of politics is something that all states will either be forced to confront and deal with in some way or simply accept. But acceptance here would amount to a fatalistic resignation to the tides of history. In the absence of a rational standard by which to reconcile contrary aesthetic judgments and in view of the degenerative tendency of beauty, I contend that the state can manage the aesthetic crisis of political legitimacy only by means of circumventing beauty and in such a way so as to suspend aesthetics as both a point of contention and a source of entropy. Overcoming beauty, then, demands a mode of persuasion that functions apart from aesthetics but one whose effectivity does not primarily consist in cogent argument or public debate.

With regard to the prevailing political order, circumventing the state's aesthetic dimension requires a model of rhetorical effectivity at least as powerful as that pertaining to beauty. Such a model, I argue, is provided by the underside of aesthetics in the form of several negative categories, typically expressed as substantivized adjectives, for instance, the tragic, the comic, the sublime, the absurd, the grotesque, the uncanny, the pathetic, etc. Variety notwithstanding, these categories are consubstantial in that each represents a mode of experience suggestive of that which, in the aesthetic domain, comes closest to signifying evil: ugliness. But

ugliness is not merely the absence of the beautiful but instead stands for the objectification of displeasure or other unpleasantness—in a word, aesthetic violence. Hence ugliness, or the ugly, functions as the generic name for any number of aesthetic disturbances, by which I understand those phenomena that either interrupt an established aesthetic state or prevent one from taking shape. Like the positive value of beauty, ugliness as objectified aesthetic violence is immediately perceived and, for a time at least, intensely felt. Consequently, ugliness is also likewise immune both to rational critique and to subjective transposition via argument or explanation. Yet it would be a mistake to confuse what is a common basis in ugliness for all that is essential to the categories. As modes of experience, the categories of negative aesthetics are not states of inactivity but entail the productive resolution or transmutation of ugliness. The suggestion of aesthetic “evil” is simply an inescapable consequence of laboring with anti-aesthetic material.³⁸ Separately or taken as a whole, they constitute species belonging to a common genus of creative subjectivity, that is, processes or operations for dealing with what would otherwise be merely ugly. In this capacity, the experiential categories of negative aesthetics reveal an effective persuasive theory that, similar to the persuasive theory of beauty, discloses a technique—cognitive-transformative-practical—that by means of affective influence produces an experiential, subject-shaping effect, which is adaptable for both inner- and other-directed modes of communication, i.e., communication that takes either the self or the other as its object or target audience. Simply put, the categories constitute modes of creative experience that are suitable for persuasive action. What is more, they suggest a distinctive though non-exclusive model of

³⁸ In this context, the prefix “anti-” is nearly synonymous with “negative.” My decision to privilege the latter is primarily owing to two considerations: first, to distinguish my project and the concept of negative aesthetics from Hal Foster’s enormously influential collection, *The Anti-Aesthetic*, which, despite its rejection of aesthetic pretensions to wholeness, harmony, and the self-evidency of value and identity, is neither concerned with the political nor grounded in a coherent argumentative framework; second, to indicate that negative aesthetics is not antithetical to aesthetics but rather complicates the meaning of aesthetic sense, feeling, and judgment. For that reason, I also employ the phrase “quasi-aesthetic/s.”

rhetorical effectivity that consists in the strategic modification or persuasive uses of aesthetic violence.³⁹ Of course, as in all matters of rhetoric, the strategic ends are themselves extra-rhetorical.

In terms of the state's legitimacy, the rhetoric of negative aesthetics provides an invaluable resource for exploiting an emotive power that while comparable to beauty avoids directly appealing to beauty itself and so circumvents the irresolution of aesthetic conflict while simultaneously slowing or suspending beauty's inevitable decay. Because the manifestation or perception of ugliness is anathema to something as fundamental (to our subjectivity) as aesthetic sensibility, the administration, management, or processing of that aesthetic violence offers a powerful strategic means for securing widespread, intense adherence to order, that is, for creating and sustaining commitment to the state and its governing apparatus. At a basic level, then, the state's circumvention of beauty by means of negative aesthetics relies on a simple yet effective rhetorical strategy: occulting the aesthetics of politics with an imminent threat to the body politic, either to its collective way of life or to the individuals who comprise it. Such interposing enables the state either to identify with the citizenry-at-risk—thereby sharing the role of victim—or to transcend victimage and assume a police-like function by means of which the state renews its reputation as civil redeemer, guardian of law, order, and life. In each case, the state's claim to beauty is either overlooked or taken for granted, while the question of legitimacy is suspended, subjected as it is to a state of exception. Aestheticization is thus secured by virtue of its circumvention, preserved through its suspension and its being forgotten. If the rhetoric of aesthetics promises to afford the state legitimacy without legitimacy, lawless lawfulness, etc.,

³⁹ To be clear, in forwarding this model of rhetorical effectivity, I am not arguing that rhetoric itself is essentially negatively aesthetic, i.e., that it should be principally understood in terms the categories of negative aesthetics. Rather, I am only arguing that as a means of rhetoric the categories make possible certain strategies or rhetorical opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable.

then the rhetoric of anti- or negative aesthetics short circuits that process, thereby avoiding the pitfalls of a persuasive strategy aimed at eliciting the sense of beauty.

Among the range of possible anti-aesthetic legitimation strategies, there are three that, owing to a common feature, deserve special treatment and can be said to comprise a distinct class: the tragic, the sublime, and the uncanny. Unlike other similar strategies (e.g., the comic or grotesque), these three rely for their effectivity on what H. P. Lovecraft describes as the “oldest and strongest emotion of mankind” (2005, 105), namely, fear. And while this common basis may serve as a distinguishing feature vis-à-vis the categories of negative aesthetics, it is even more significant in the context of political legitimacy (and, for that matter, political rhetoric in general), since, as Aristotle tells us, “the many naturally obey fear” (1999, 1179b12). Yet an unqualified use of fear does not guarantee popular acceptance and recognition of the state’s authority, at least not over the long-range. To be sure, fear is a powerful emotion, perhaps the most powerful. But it is also, and in equal measure, unstable—its effects, unpredictable and often difficult to control. Moreover, unmitigated or relentless fear tends to produce the same curvilinear effects as outright coercion. Hence Machiavelli’s counsel that “a ruler should make himself feared in such a way that, if he does not inspire love, at least he does not provoke hatred” (1995, 52) is not limited to monarchies or authoritarian regimes but applies to all types of constitutional arrangements. Of course, the most basic means of avoiding such provocation, as Isocrates well knew, consists in directing fear outward, diverting it away from the state or head of state and toward a common enemy or threat—i.e., in making something other than the state the object of fear (see Isocrates 1928b; see also Vitanza 1997, 123–37). There is, however, an additional stratagem for capitalizing on the rhetorical value of fear without suffering from the disadvantages of hatred, one that can operate independently or in conjunction with mere

avoidance. This ploy involves combining fear with or parlaying it into a different emotion or affective state (which would nevertheless retain its basis in fear). Consequently, if the rhetoric of negative aesthetics is to use fear to its advantage then it must, at the very least, avoid incurring the people's hatred and, if possible, productively transform fear into something that, while not totally lacking in fear, operates on a different affective register. With these observations in mind, I maintain that the politico-rhetorical strategies designated by the tragic, the sublime, and the uncanny—i.e., those comprising a fear-inducing class of negative aesthetics—avoid hatred by transforming fear into a potent yet simultaneously complex, even contradictory, mental movement.

In the following three chapters, I demonstrate how rhetoric both makes possible and then avails itself of the tragic, the sublime, and the uncanny so as to secure political legitimacy, understood as popular subjective adherence to the state. In explicating these conceptual categories, I draw on three founders of discourse: Aristotle (the tragic), Immanuel Kant (the sublime), and Sigmund Freud (the uncanny). Although this choice is convenient—one major thinker per category—it is not arbitrary. In addition to sharing an affective common denominator (fear), each category lays claim to what Michel Foucault terms a founder of discourse or discursivity, which creates “the possibilities and the rules for the formation of other texts,” thereby establishing “an endless possibility of discourse” (1984, 114). That is to say, Aristotle's *Poetics*, Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, and Freud's “The Uncanny,” initiate or, in Kant's case, reconstitute their respective discourses of the tragic, the sublime, and the uncanny. Other possible discourses in the field of negative aesthetics (e.g., the grotesque or the comic) cannot lay claim to such foundations, at least not in terms of conceptual development. Moreover, the problematic I am addressing concerns the aesthetics of politics, not the history of concepts, and

therefore does purport to make any claim on the history of ideas. For that reason, each chapter indulges in a certain hermeneutic license regarding the implicit rhetorico-political possibilities inhering in each quasi-aesthetic concept. In each of the following three chapters, I proceed inferentially, explicating the tragic, the sublime, and the uncanny, respectively, in order to show how each of these negative aesthetic categories provides the rhetorical means—the distinctive yet complementary possibilities—through which the state may circumvent both beauty and the counter-productive effects of fear in the ongoing attempt to shore up and instaurate its political legitimacy. In so doing, I aim to demonstrate how the rhetoric of negative aesthetics fulfills the political promise of beauty, succeeding where beauty tragically fails, that is, in accomplishing a non-rational consensus—a lawless lawfulness, a beauty without beauty—mediated by negative pleasure and embodied in the political state.

CHAPTER 2 – CLARIFYING THE CONSTITUTION:
RHETORIC AND THE TRAGIC DIMENSION OF POLITICS

*And whether they purge the city for its benefit
by putting some people to death or else by exiling them . . .
so long as they act to preserve it on the basis of expert
knowledge and what is just, making it better than it was so
far as they can, this is the constitution alone we must say is
correct, under these conditions and in accordance with
criteria of this sort. . . .* – Plato 360 B.C.E.

*Although the villagers had forgotten the ritual and lost the
original black box, they still remembered to use stones.*
– Shirley Jackson 1948

When in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle refers to rhetoric as an art subordinate (*hypotautein*) to political science, it would appear as though he is derogating the persuasive use of civic discourse, as he does in the *Rhetoric* when accusing it of dressing “itself up in the form of politics” (1.2.7).¹ However, in light of his regard for the study of politics, the remark is more of a compliment than a disparagement: rhetoric is subordinate to political science (*politikē*) because it assists in achieving happiness for all the citizens of a city. Alongside generalship and household management, rhetoric, Aristotle tells us, is one of “the most honored capacities” (1999, 1094b3–5). His attentiveness to rhetoric focuses on the role of persuasive speech in directing judgments affecting life-in-common. Thus, without dismissing Plato’s criticism that rhetoric can and often does function as “an image of a part of politics” (1987, 463d), Aristotle articulates and affirms rhetoric’s potential to subserve politics, either as an instrument of public policy, by securing the

¹ The Greek words “*hypotautein*” literally mean “under her” (“she” being political science).

common good, or as an expression of civic morality, by instructing citizens to virtue (Johnstone 1980; Halliwell 1996; Hauser 1999; and Walzer 2000).

So long as rhetoric plays a supporting role with respect to politics, allowing the latter to determine its own ends and then facilitating the realization of those ends, Aristotle is willing to consider it as “some offshoot [*paraphues*] of dialectic and ethical studies (which is rightly called politics)” (2007, 1.2.7). Referring to this passage, Arthur E. Walzer highlights how, for Aristotle, “The [offshoot] metaphor suggests that the character of rhetoric, as an instrument of essential civic institutions, is shaped and sustained by the constitution [*politeia*] and political tradition, as inextricable from them as branch is from stem and root” (2000, 43; see also Reeve 1996). Even so, to the extent that rhetoric is a political instrument it must simultaneously preserve the constitution that gives it its shape.² Regarding the importance of preservation, Aristotle does not privilege a specific type of constitution but values preservation as a good in itself. On his view, the constitution is more than a body of principles and precedents according to which a city-state is governed; it amounts to the animating force of a city-state, an agency that determines “the way of life of the citizens” (1998, 1295a40-b1, 1328b1-2), as well as the governing body, or sovereign office (*arkhē*) (1278b8–10, 1289a15–18). For that reason, he argues throughout *Politics* Book V that altering, or modifying, a community’s constitution would threaten to destabilize the community as a whole. Hence, while the benefits of public policy and civic morality are sufficient to account for Aristotle’s affirmation of rhetoric’s place in civic life, they are ancillary to what he sees as rhetoric’s chief political office, namely, preserving the constitution, whatever its form and irrespective of its conception of the ultimate end of the city-state.

² Walzer’s argument that Aristotle “called for a rhetoric under the direction of politics” is unassailable (2000, 51). I am only drawing attention to the obverse of Walzer’s interpretation, namely, that Aristotle’s offshoot metaphor also implies an active understanding of rhetoric vis-à-vis politics.

That rhetoric has a role to play in preserving the constitution is fairly evident in the *Rhetoric*, but what this task entails is less obvious. Presumably, it would involve advocating for public policy in line with the advantages of preservation—“for all people are persuaded by what is advantageous, and preserving the constitution is advantageous” (2007, 1.8. 1–2)—and edifying people “in a way that suits the constitution” (1998, 1310a19–20). Yet Aristotle suggests another possibility: that rhetoric’s preservative function is to be understood in relation to a constitution’s “*characteristic forces of corruption*,” to wit, those things or tendencies that are opposed to the political community’s organizing principle (2007, 1.4.12; emphasis in original). For Aristotle, then, the threat of corruption would constitute rhetoric’s most basic political exigence. Although (sound) public policy and civic morality can further the end of preservation, neither directly addresses the principal demand of preservation—combating forces of corruption. Scholars, particularly rhetoricians, have yet to approach Aristotelian rhetoric in a way that frames rhetoric’s relationship to politics apropos of the opposition between preservation and corruption. But apart from describing the usefulness of certain constitutional topics in deliberative rhetoric, the *Rhetoric* neither elaborates on how nor specifies the conditions under which rhetoric could competently respond to the danger of corruption. However, certain of his works other than the *Rhetoric* are suggestive in this regard.

To begin with, the *Politics*’ wholesale recommendation of ostracism (1284b3–20) indicates that rhetoric could aid in preserving the constitution by facilitating the purgation of certain human contaminants—elements that because hostile to a political community’s way of life embody its corruptive forces. Nevertheless, civic purgation, or exile, is in itself no guarantor of long-term stability; indeed, as Sara Forsdyke has demonstrated at length, the Athenian institution of ostracism functioned pragmatically to, among other things, curb the unlimited and

violent practice of intra-elite politics of exile in pre-democratic Athens (2005, 149-65). As an outgrowth of this function, ostracism surpassed simply placing restrictions on the politics of exile to perform what Forsdyke identifies as the affirmative ritualistic function of sustaining political identity, or collective unity. In that capacity, ostracism served as a means of instaurating the socio-political order, of enacting the (political) community as such: “By collectively determining who was to be excluded from the community, the Athenians directly articulated the grounds for inclusion, and in doing so reestablished the basis for group membership” (159). In other words, if ostracism’s pragmatic effect was to remove unwanted members from the community, then the articulation of communal identity and cohesion worked rhetorically *to clarify* the bonds of political friendship (*philia*) and as a result of that to strengthen the constitution along its affective dimension. Part of Aristotle’s genius was to observe how civic purgation, or ostracism, could serve not only as a procedure of expulsion but also as an occasion for clarifying the appropriate forms of political association and attachment. Yet whereas friendship figures prominently in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and is featured in Book II of the *Rhetoric* as one of the emotions useful for facilitating judgment, clarification enjoys pride of place in the *Poetics*. Aristotle’s technical term for clarification is, of course, catharsis, and together with the pragmatic and symbolic effects of ostracism, it, too, indicates, how rhetoric may address itself to the lofty task of maintaining a political community’s constitutional integrity. Put another way, when employed in a civic context, the concept of clarification, or tragic catharsis, forms the basis for demystifying Aristotle’s implicit claim that rhetoric’s foremost political function consists in preserving the constitution against forces threatening political corruption.

With these observations in mind, the present chapter proposes to consider how tragic clarification can function rhetorically to further the ends of legitimation. Hence, it goes beyond a

rereading of Aristotle's political rhetoric to inquire into the politico-rhetorical capacity of tragic catharsis as such, that is, as conceived as a distinctive mode of negative aesthetics. Aristotle's discourse is nevertheless pivotal, providing the initial framework or conceptual apparatus for conducting such an analysis. Thus, beginning with the *Politics*' emphasis on preservation and its endorsement of ostracism, this chapter argues, first, that Aristotle's theory of constitutions enables a rethinking of the tragic as a means of instaurating political legitimacy. To that end, it presents tragic catharsis as both the means and the effect of a non-representational rhetorical process, one that, by means of facilitating civic purgation, renews a community's political identity and so strengthens its commitment to the task of preserving the constitution. Although the procedure of ostracism facilitates the instauration of community *ethos*, the process is tragic, I argue, not by virtue of its potential to effect a purifying purgation but on account of its capacity to clarify, and thereby affirm, the grounds for political inclusion (and exclusion).³

At the same time, however, given the teleological status that Aristotle assigns to catharsis—i.e., catharsis as *the end* of tragic drama—ostracism discloses a basic truth about tragic clarification, namely, that catharsis is at once greater and less than tragic drama: less because it is a component of tragedy but greater because it is in a sense separable from the dramatic art, free to function in other contexts and able to subserve heteronomous purposes. Hence, my second argument, which builds on the first, is that the rhetoric of tragic catharsis not only identifies a tragic dimension of politics but also dissociates the tragic from the domain of tragedy proper, preserving its performative character while freeing it from the unique constraints

³ Ostracism, in other words, initiates the tragic process productive of catharsis but only insofar as it contributes to and is conditioned by the goal of preserving the constitution. And this, in turn, requires that it first subserve the instrumental aim of clarifying the (political) community as such; in itself purgation is not cathartic, regardless of any potentially purifying effect it may have on the body politic.

of poetic representation.⁴ Thus liberated, the tragic dimension of politics allows for the possibility of misclarification vis-à-vis a regime and its constitution. But unlike dramatic representation, which may either fail to clarify or clarify in the wrong way, political catharsis admits of a strategic use of misclarification, a parallel rhetorical process whereby the apparent clarification of one form of government displaces or dissimulates the one that is actually in power. As a rhetorical technique of misclarification, the tragic retains its preservative function, but with a twist: it now preserves the current regime, indirectly, by simulating the appearance or character of another.

2.1 TRAGIC CATHARSIS: FROM POETIC TO POLITICAL CLARIFICATION

Aristotle's definition of tragic drama is remarkable if for no other reason than that it posits catharsis as the end, or final cause, of all good tragedies. According to the *Poetics*' formal definition, tragedy is a representation (*mimesis*) of a complete action that by means of painful and disturbing emotions, especially those of pity (*eleos*) and fear or terror (*phobos*), accomplishes the catharsis of such emotions (1987a, 1449b25–27).⁵ Originating in the context of medicine or ritual, the term “*katharsis*” literally means the “cleansing,” “purification,” or “purgation” of what is “filthy” or “disgusting” (*miarōn*) (Langholf 1990).⁶ For Aristotle, when the resources of poetic representation are employed to tragic effect, the result is the catharsis of

⁴ The emancipation of “the tragic” thus differentiates my argument and the focus of this chapter from those recent attempts to articulate rhetoric either with tragedy (e.g., Burke 1973; Farrell 1993, 101 – 40; and Crick and Poulakos 2008) or tragic catharsis (e.g., Walker 2000a; Kastely 2004; and Kenny 2006).

⁵ Although Aristotle tends to single out pity and terror as the emotions most appropriate to tragedy, he suggests that tragedy stirs other painful and disturbing emotions. For instance, in the *Poetics* he includes anger (*orgē*) as one of the emotions to be aroused by the reasoning in tragedy (“pity, terror, anger and suchlike”; 1456b1); see also the *Rhetoric* (1.2.8) and *Politics* (1342a12), where he treats painful emotions as a class, implying that any such emotion is capable of aroused in such a way as to produce tragic catharsis. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he expands the list to include envy, hate, longing, and jealousy (1105b21).

⁶ In discussing the deduction of the best change of fortune, Aristotle alludes to this antithesis, arguing that since tragedy “should represent terrifying and pitiable events...it should not show...decent men undergoing a change from good fortune to misfortune; for this is neither terrifying nor pitiable, but shocking [*miarōn*]” (1987a, 1452b31–6).

painful and disturbing emotions, in particular the emotions of pity (*eleos*) and fear (*phobos*). To the extent that a given tragedy accomplishes this end it will induce feelings of satisfaction and enjoyment in the audience; like the practice of medicine, catharsis leads to pleasure by “operating” on the emotions.

Linguistic origins notwithstanding, contemporary scholars are in general agreement that for Aristotle catharsis refers neither to a medical practice designating bodily purgation nor to a sense of spiritual purification, or ritual cleansing, but instead acts as a stand-in for a *mimetic* (representational) mode of emotional clarification: “The term *catharsis*,” argues Ekaterina V. Haskins, “can be translated only by a word indicating intellectual illumination rather than a release or purging of bottled up emotions” (2004, 52). She continues, “Rather than making us sob in pity or tremble with fear, tragedy is supposed to clarify why we should feel these emotions” (54). Moreover, as Martha C. Nussbaum argues—taking her cue from Leon Golden’s trilogy of essays (1962; 1969; and 1973)—“When we examine the whole range of use and the development [of catharsis and related words]...it becomes quite evident that the primary, ongoing, central meaning is roughly one of ‘clearing up’ or ‘clarification,’ i.e. of the removal of some obstacle (dirt, or blot, or obscurity, or admixture) that makes the item in question less *clear* than it is in its proper state” (2001, 389).⁷ But whatever the provenance of catharsis, according to Aristotle the desired outcome of cathartic learning is to effect a “due proportion” in the emotions (1987b, 3), such that audiences come to experience them correctly, namely, “at the right times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right ways” (1999,

⁷ Although Nussbaum and Haskins have recently helped to popularize the “clarification” thesis (vis-à-vis “purgation” and “purification”), the interpretation is itself not new. Indeed, in the mid-twentieth century Ernst Cassirer (1944) and Erich Fromm (1956) had already assumed “clarification” as the most appropriate translation.

1106b22–23).⁸ Setting aside the issue of the extent to which catharsis is *emotional* (see Haskins 2004, 53–4), and of how intelligent emotions are or may be in themselves, what is clear is that for Aristotle the pleasure deriving from tragic illumination is one of learning, of moving from a particular instance to a universal awareness or inference about certain powerful emotions and their importance to inner experience and everyday life. Nussbaum captures this idea when she writes, “We could say, then, that . . . pity and fear are not just tools of a clarification that is in and of the intellect alone; to respond in these ways is itself valuable, and a piece of clarification concerning who we are. It is a recognition of practical values, and therefore of ourselves, that is no less important than the recognition and perceptions of intellect. Pity and fear are themselves elements in an appropriate practical perception of our situation” (2001, 390–91). By clarifying such painful emotions, catharsis affords insight—intellectual, emotional, and practical—into pitiable persons, along with their situations, and the terrifying forces and circumstances with which they contend or within which they are caught.⁹

Despite the close association of catharsis with tragic drama, Aristotle’s inclusion of catharsis in the *Politics* (see 1341a23, 1341b38–42a28) suggests another avenue for approaching

⁸ Despite the growing consensus among scholars to translate Aristotle’s use of catharsis as clarification, some commentators continue to interpret catharsis in terms of a purgative-therapeutic function. As Richard Kearney argues, catharsis, according to Aristotle, “literally *purges* two of our most basic affects—*pathos* and *eleos*—until they are distilled and sublimated into a healing brew. It might almost be compared,” he continues, “to a homeopathic remedy which finds the vaccination or antidote within the disease, turning malady into health” (2007, 52). Certainly, he is not alone in this interpretation, and not only with respect to the educated non-specialist. In the *Birth of Tragedy*, for instance, Nietzsche argues that in order to comprehend the supreme value of tragedy, we must experience it—like the Greeks did—as “the essence of all prophylactic healing energies” (99). Simultaneously, however, he criticized Aristotle for misinterpreting this preventive function—which was also a stimulating power—in terms of a pathological-moral process deriving from extra-aesthetic spheres of experience (105–106). My opting for “clarification” rather than “purgation” or “purification” is not because I necessarily think that “clarification” is the “right” translation—that Nussbaum is correct and Nietzsche is wrong—but because “clarification” better serves rhetoric in promoting the end of preservation. In other words, my decision is based first and foremost on interpretive utility rather than philological fidelity.

⁹ In the extant fragments of the *Tractatus Coislinianus*, Aristotle claims that comedy too accomplishes catharsis; but rather than working on such negative emotions as pity and fear, comedy accomplishes the catharsis of laughter (1987b, 3.1, 4). While it may seem strange to a modern audience to consider laughter as an emotion, both Aristotle and Plato were prone to equate the physical effects of an emotion with that emotion. Compare the *Poetics* (1453b5), where Aristotle talks of tragedians making audiences “shudder and feel pity” instead of merely feeling it.

the civic role of catharsis. As Kenneth Burke maintains, “Those paragraphs in the *Politics* at least give reason to infer that the treatment [of catharsis] in the *Poetics* was not essentially different [than its treatment in the *Politics*].” Such an inference, he adds, would itself warrant a move to reconsider tragic catharsis from a political point of view, to reframe catharsis in terms of its civic motives (1959, 337).¹⁰ In allowing for this reconsideration, however, we would do well to bear in mind the following caveat from David J. Depew that, “[One] cannot project the catharsis of the *Politics* onto the theory of tragedy in the *Poetics* and then read the latter back into the *Politics*, as has commonly been done” (1991, 369), because, “The catharsis of the *Politics* is a psychological effect paradigmatically seen in people who throw themselves into the frenzy of Dionysian music” (368). Nevertheless, it is not unreasonable to draw inferences between these two works with a view to analyzing the potential of catharsis—understood as a multivalent mode of clarification, in contrast to the effects of orgiastic revelry—to affirm the political community as such. To be sure, Burke perhaps concludes too much by arguing that Aristotle’s consideration of catharsis does not admit of radical difference, that his treatment of catharsis in the *Politics* parallels what we find in the *Poetics*. But this overstatement does not invalidate, nor does it undermine, Burke’s prompting to reconsider tragic catharsis from the perspective of the *Politics* or, what amounts to the same thing, to examine the *Politics* in light of Aristotle’s understanding of tragic catharsis. To deny *clarification* a claim to political involvement, based merely on a semantic disjunction in Aristotle’s use of the word “catharsis,” would also be to conclude too much. With these considerations in mind, I turn to Aristotle’s *Politics* to demonstrate that his normative theory of preservation, read in light of his endorsement of ostracism, provides the basis for conceiving of a political, non-representational perspective on

¹⁰ Presumably, the paragraphs Burke has in mind are those sections in the *Politics* that focus on the educative role of *mousikē* (1341a23, 1341b38–42a28).

catharsis, according to which ostracism, by means of effecting a purifying purgation of the body politic, accomplishes the clarification of the political community as such. In other words, rather than dismissing outright the possible political valence of poetic catharsis, I propose extending this concept to the domain of politics, as explicated in the *Politics*, in order to examine whether and how political activity may avail itself of cathartic clarification.

2.2 ARISTOTLE’S THEORY OF CONSTITUTIONS:

HAPPINESS, JUSTICE, AND THE AXIOM OF PRESERVATION

Over against the *Nicomachean Ethics*’ emphasis on happiness (i.e. activity of the human soul in accord with excellence over a full life), the *Politics* prioritizes the constitution (*politeia*), or the immanent organizing principle, of the city-state. As the *telos*, or final cause, of a political association, the constitution establishes both the basis of political rule and the form of the (political) community (1274b32-41, 1276b1–11). In order to classify the range of city-states, in *Politics* Book III Aristotle distinguishes between correct and deviant constitutions, using as a basis for their separation the degree to which a constitution looks to the common advantage (1278b10).¹¹ On this view, the correctness of a constitution consists in its aiming at the common benefit, deviance in the use of public office for private advantage (1279a26–31).¹² But regardless

¹¹ In the *Rhetoric* Aristotle follows Plato’s division in the *Republic* (544c), enumerating democracy, oligarchy, aristocracy, and monarchy (1.8.3), while in the *Politics* he keeps closer to the traditional Greek view, conceding initially that a constitution can be governed by “the one, the few, or the many” (1279a28). He then revises this view by adding that each form of rule admits of two types, one of which is correct, the other deviant. The correct form of rule by one person is a monarchy or kingship; its deviant form is a tyranny. Rule by the few is an aristocracy if correct, an oligarchy if deviant. And rule by the many is correct when it is a polity but deviant when a democracy (1998, 1279a33–79b8). Nevertheless, the discrepancy of the exact number of constitutions is less important than the qualitative differences between them.

¹² Just what exactly Aristotle means by the common benefit is not altogether clear, though I tentatively accept C.D.C. Reeve’s interpretation that the group whose benefit is the common one is composed of all those “who have an unqualifiedly just claim to be unqualified citizens of the constitution,” including all their wives and children (1998, lxviii). For differing interpretations of how Aristotle understands common advantage, see also Fred Miller (1995) and Richard Kraut (2002).

of the correct/deviant typology for Aristotle the principal difference between any two constitutions is their disagreement over the essence of happiness (*eudaimonia*), over that in which happiness precisely consists. While acknowledging that all city-states aim for happiness as the highest good, Aristotle nevertheless maintains that each constitution conceives of happiness differently as comprising different means: “it is by seeking happiness in different ways and by different means that individual groups of people create different ways of life and different constitutions” (1998, 1328a41–28b2). Different political communities, then, by variously seeking happiness, will come to adopt different aims or goals, and the notion of living and doing well will vary from one constitution to the next.¹³ Hence, just as Aristotle considers constitutions to be irreducible to a common form, so too he sees happiness as marked by variety, encompassing “the complete activation of the virtues” (1998, 1332a8–9), in the case of the best forms of government (i.e. monarchies and aristocracies), as well as the range of less exceptional or qualifiedly good types of happiness that characterize inferior types of regimes (see for instance.¹⁴

Owing to these different conceptions of happiness, Aristotle argues that constitutions are similarly diverse with respect to political justice (*dikaiosunē*). For whereas all constitutions agree that justice consists in the distribution of equal political goods (citizenship, political office, or

¹³ Aristotle implies such variance in living well when, in the *Politics*, he writes that a constitution is “what the end is of each of the communities” (1289a14-17).

¹⁴ For the best constitutions—that is, either monarchies or aristocracies (1289a26–32)—happiness is unqualifiedly good and blessed (1324a23–25). Because they constitute “a complete activation of the virtues” (1332a8–9), their happiness is choiceworthy in itself and self-sufficient (1999, 1097a30–34, 1097a8–9). The goal of a polity, the second best kind of constitution, is a similar sort of happiness, though it is more modest and hence more realizable for most people and most city-states (1998, 1295a25–40). Oligarchical happiness is mere life, as opposed to living well, that is, in accordance with the virtues; oligarchies achieve their goal by pursuing wealth or property (1280a25–32). Not much better is the goal of democracy, since it also conceives of happiness as consisting in life rather than living well (1280a31–32); it differs from oligarchy only slightly in that, instead of wealth or property, it places a premium on freedom as such as well as the freedom to satisfy non-rational appetites (1310a29, 1317a40–41, 1258a3–4; 1999, 1095b14–17). Though Aristotle regards tyranny as a deviant form of monarchy, he describes it as a mixture of extreme oligarchy and extreme democracy (1998, 1310b2–7). For that reason, tyrannies achieve their goal in the unbridled pursuit of wealth, property, and physical gratification.

arkhai, authority, etc.) to equal people—“equal shares for equal people” (1999, 1131a30–31; see also 2007, 1.9.7)—and are united with regard to what constitutes equality in *things*, e.g. one seat in the assembly is equal to any other, they disagree about what counts as equality between persons (1998, 1280a16–19). Equality, so the thinking goes, must accord with worth; however, since the basis of an individual’s political worth is determined by the degree to which that person contributes to the happiness for all, and so helps to further the constitution, this basis will be different from one political community to the next: “For all agree that the just in distributions must accord with some sort of worth, but what they call worth is not the same; supporters of democracy say it is free citizenship, some supporters of oligarchy say it is wealth, others good birth, while supporters of aristocracy say it is virtue” (1999, 1131a25–29; see also 1998, 1283a24–26). Notwithstanding certain qualitative differences between city-states and their regimes, Aristotle concedes that most (perhaps all) actually existing constitutions are in a simple, unqualified sense, in error, that is, incapable of ever correctly distributing political power (1998, 1301a36–37). But rather than conclude from this that most constitutions are corrupt, Aristotle provocatively claims, “[All] dispute somewhat justly” (1283a30; see also 1999, 1134a24–30). The same holds true as concerns happiness: few, if any, city-states are completely happy; nonetheless, they still enjoy their own paradigms of happiness which give them unity and definition.

Thus, given that non-ideal constitutions may be adequate to their own conceptions of the end of the city-state, Aristotle cautions against attempts at constitutional reform, stating that the task for legislators and statesmen is to preserve the current state of the political community—both its form of government and partial political justice—so as to ensure the accomplishment of the aims specific to the constitution. Arguing by analogy to physiognomic beauty, Aristotle

reasons that just as a hooked or snub nose may deviate from what is best (a straight nose) and remain beautiful to look at, so too a constitution may deviate from what is best, yet remain happy and just, although not without qualification (1998, 1309b23–30). In support of this relativistic interpretation of Aristotle’s theory of constitutions, Arlene W. Saxonhouse argues, “The greatest task for the Aristotelian statesman for whom the *Politics* is written is not really the establishment of a just regime which can combine public and private virtues....The task for the statesman is rather how to preserve the current regime” and its constitution (2004, 43).¹⁵ And this requires, above all else, promoting the community’s paradigm of justice—that which accords with the community’s conception of happiness—by means of various legal enactments, educational policies, and any number of institutionalized practices. For Aristotle, the final end of non-ideal constitutions is not to someday reach the goals set out by monarchies and aristocracies, nor should it be the desire of their political leaders or citizens. Rather, what happiness entails and justice implies is nothing but the long-term, stable realization of the final end of a particular city-state, and this means preserving the constitution as it currently exists. As Saxonhouse claims, for Aristotle, “Preserving a regime becomes the path to justice, its corruption to injustice” (44). Indeed, he regards preservation as advantageous to any constitution, whether correct or deviant, simply because it coincides with a community’s principle of political justice. That is why in the *Politics* Aristotle recommends that democratic and oligarchic legislators “should consider a measure to be democratic or oligarchic not if it will make the city-state be as democratically

¹⁵ Although Saxonhouse correctly asserts that the opposition that Aristotle establishes is not virtue versus corruption but corruption versus preservation, it should be emphasized that in the case of aristocracies political justice coincides with the rule of the *aristoi*, i.e. the best or most virtuous persons. Accordingly, for aristocracies the opposition between corruption and preservation is at once an opposition between virtue and corruption. However, regardless of the form of government, political justice is capable of serving as a potential if not always effective *means* of preserving the constitution. For a contrasting, less relativistic interpretation of Aristotle’s emphasis on stability, see Martha C. Nussbaum, who argues, “We should notice...that Aristotle’s interest in stability in political life is tempered by his concern for other social values, such as the autonomy of individual choice and civic vitality” (2001, 352). While Nussbaum is not incorrect in her observation, her reading is perhaps biased toward Aristotle’s idealization of aristocracy.

governed or as oligarchically governed as possible, but if it will make it be so for *the longest time*” (1320a1–4; my emphasis). Thus, what is of primary concern to Aristotle is stability, not that those in power be motivated by civic virtue to act on behalf of the common benefit nor that they cultivate such virtue among citizens. Consequently, for him the corruption of the political community is a change in form—a change in or deviation from the constitution—not a betrayal of the common good. Or rather, since genuine public interest is equivalent to the preservation of the political status quo, corruption consists in a city-state’s transformation from one form of government to another, whether from a democracy to a tyranny or an oligarchy to a democracy. “That is why,” Aristotle reasons, “legislators and statesmen should not be ignorant about which democratic features preserve a democracy and which destroy it, or which oligarchic features have these effects on an oligarchy” (1309b35–38). Given the virtual impossibility of ever correctly distributing political power, and of ever appeasing everyone’s demands, the type of constitution being preserved is irrelevant. For Aristotle, stability is (or ought to be) the primary political concern for all city-states; any change to a political community’s organizing principle, whether to a “better” or “worse” regime or laterally to a different partial ideal of political justice, is corruption.

Favoring the importance of preservation over against transformation or reform commits Aristotle to approving of certain measures advantageous both to strengthening the public’s commitment to the ideals of the constitution and safeguarding against what Aristotle in the *Rhetoric* identifies as a constitution’s characteristic forces of corruption. As J. Peter Euben comments, for the ancients—Aristotle in particular—political corruption names a disease of the body politic: “It has less to do with individual malfeasance than with systematic and systemic degeneration of those practices and commitments that provide the terms of collective self-

understanding and shared purpose” (1989, 222–3). But, he adds, “Corruption is not only the absence of an element or principle; it may involve the presence of some foreign element that debases or undermines the whole” (222). That is to say, for Aristotle conditions conducive to political corruption include not only forces inimical to the constitution but also the instantiation of these forces in exceedingly powerful persons or associations, whether because of wealth, social capital, or any other source of political power (1998, 1284a17-21, 1284b25–33; see also 2007, 1.4.12). Any type of political superiority, if of a certain magnitude, threatens to disturb the stable, long-term achievement of the final end of the community. To disregard increases in political leverage or authority incommensurate with the ideals specific to the city-state is to run the risk of fostering a nascent political faction which could prove too powerful for the city-state and its governing class (1998, 1302b14-16). A likely result of this negligence would be if not the total disintegration of the constitution then at least a change in the organizing principle of government itself. Aristotle opposes this kind of change on aesthetic grounds as much as on political ones: “For no painter,” argues Aristotle, “would allow an animal to have a disproportionately large foot, not even if it were an outstandingly beautiful one, nor would a shipbuilder allow this in the case of the stern or any of the other parts of the ship, nor will a chorus master tolerate a member of the chorus who has a louder and more beautiful voice than the entire chorus” (1284b7-12).

In the interest of maintaining a state of “due proportion,” Aristotle therefore endorses wholesale the practice of ostracism.¹⁶ Although predominantly an Athenian institution for

¹⁶ In fourth-century Athens, ostracisms were held once a year at a fixed date (the sixth division of the ten month political calendar). As Forsdyke reports, “The first step in any ostracism was that the question was put to the assembly of the Athenians as to whether they wished to hold one....If the Athenians decided to hold an ostracism, then the actual ostracism took place a short time afterward” (2005, 147–8). In contrast to the violent, pre-democratic expulsions among elites, a person exiled by a vote of ostracism was assured that he could return to Athens after ten years (the term of exile) with his property intact and citizenship rights restored. For more on the procedure of

removing exceedingly “outstanding” citizens from the city-state, ostracism, he claims, could prove expedient for all types of constitution, the deviant as well as the correct (1998, 1284b3–20). According to Forsdyke, “What is important for Aristotle is whether these expulsions are done in the interest of the community as a whole” (2005, 275–6; see Aristotle 1998, 1284b21–22), i.e. whether the purgation of a city-state’s human contaminants is advantageous to stability over the long-range. For a city-state like Athens, in which equality is defined democratically in terms of the freedom of the *dēmos*, i.e., “the people,” it is necessary to remove those who are outstanding in any form of political strength, especially with respect to wealth and property. For fourth century writers in particular, ostracism was almost solely regarded as a means not of punishment for wrongdoing but of restoring democratic equality and of recommitting the citizen-body to its political justice. In the case of Themistocles (exiled 472/471 BCE), ancient literary sources interpret his ostracism as a judicious response to his having accrued excessive power. Plutarch, for instance, writes, “Well then, [the voters] visited him with ostracism, curtailing his dignity and pre-eminence, as they were wont to do in the case of all whom they thought to have oppressive power, and to be incommensurate with true democratic equality” (1914, 22.3). Making use of Themistocles’ ostracism to rebuke his contemporaries for their civic apathy, Demosthenes declaims, “Yet consider how our ancestors castigated those who had done them wrong, and ask whether their way was not better than yours. When they caught Themistocles presumptuously setting himself above the people, they banished him from Athens, and found him guilty of siding with the Medes” (1935, 23.204–5).¹⁷ Even though Aristotle does not explicitly link his endorsement of ostracism back to the *Poetics*, it is reasonable to assume that,

ostracism in democratic Athens, see Josiah Ober (1989, 73–5), Mabel Lang (1990, 1–2), and Forsdyke (2005, 146–9).

¹⁷ Confirming these interpretations, Frank J. Frost states, “So far as we can interpret Themistocles’ actions, he never once promoted any policy that would have given the *Demos* greater power” (1980, 29); see also Lang (1990, 142–61) and Forsdyke (2005, 176–7).

much like Plutarch and Demosthenes, he considers ostracism to be beneficial to the end of political community—expedient to preservation, in his nomenclature—by virtue of its capacity *to clarify* the ideals specific to the constitution.

If Aristotle's emphasis on political stability makes possible something like a theory of ostracism, it is this: by pragmatically removing certain deleterious persons (human obstacles) from the city-state and so symbolically purifying the body politic, ostracism functions ritualistically to occasion an affective, clarifying affirmation of the political community as such. In poetic-aesthetic terms, the achievement of due proportion vis-à-vis the emotions simultaneously parallels and is partly constitutive of a state of political harmony, i.e., of due proportion vis-à-vis the city-state or *polis*. That is to say, in helping to maintain a community's due proportion, civic purgation provides for the educative end of cathartic learning in a political context, namely, to clarify both the organizing principle of the community as well as the emotional response necessary to preserving the constitution in its existing state. To the extent that catharsis is made to serve an expressly political function, it simultaneously, albeit indirectly, subserves the appearance of beauty in politics—the main species of which, according to Aristotle, are “orderly arrangement, proportion, and definiteness [or clarity]” (1935, XIII.iii.10–12). For these reasons, ostracism makes possible a distinctively political species of catharsis, one that works rhetorically to renew the political identity of a given community and to strengthen the citizenry's identification with the current apparatus of government. In turn, however, these politically cathartic effects make possible another kind of rhetorical process: the *mīmēsis* of the appearance or character of a particular type of constitution, an imitation that may take effect either in the presence or absence of a regime corresponding to the public identity of the city-state, along with its putative principle of justice.

2.3 THE RHETORIC OF OSTRACISM: ENACTING THE TRAGIC DIMENSION

Although the practice of ostracism is in some measure itself rhetorical—functioning cathartically to strengthen commitment to the constitution—Aristotle’s *Politics*, when read alongside the *Rhetoric*, admits of a quasi-counterfactual model of ostracism according to which rhetoric both facilitates civic purgation and, of equal importance, secures the clarifying effects of ostracism vis-à-vis the constitution.¹⁸ In the opening sections of the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle assigns to rhetoric the function of upholding the true and the just, of persuading an audience to make judgments consistent with these values (1.1.12). But as he emphasizes in the *Politics*, audiences do not judge *in vacuo* but as citizens belonging to a particular constitution (1297b36-1298a3). Hence, when members of a political community address or are addressed by their compatriots on matters pertaining to the city-state, they do so—or, on Aristotle’s view, ought to do so—in their capacity as citizens, that is, with a view to furthering the final end of the constitution. According to Aristotle, rhetoric is a political art only insofar as it contributes to achieving the long-range goals of the current constitution or regime. For him, this qualification determines the sole duty of deliberative rhetoric: exhortation (protreptic) or dissuasion (apotreptic) in line with what is either advantageous or harmful to a given constitution. As he writes in the *Rhetoric*, “[A deliberative speaker] should not forget the ‘end’ of each constitution; for choices are based on the ‘end.’ The ‘end’ of democracy is freedom, of oligarchy wealth, of aristocracy things related to education and the traditions of law, of tyranny self-preservation. Clearly, then, one should distinguish

¹⁸ The model is quasi-counterfactual because, on the one hand, the Athenian procedure of ostracism did not allow for a formal debate in the assembly on the question of ostracism, but, on the other hand, there was informal debate about who should be ostracized. As Forsdyke argues, “We may imagine that this informal debate among citizens took place not only in the theater, but in private (domestic) and public settings (agora) throughout Attica” (2005, 162). For discussions on the informal transfer of information among the Greek city-state, see Virginia J. Hunter (1994) and Sian Lewis (1996).

among customs and legal usages and benefits on the basis of the ‘end’ of each, since choices are made in reference to this” (1.8.5).

Ostracism, conceived as a means of redressing an imbalance in the political community, and thereby of subserving political justice, would thus fall under Aristotle’s rubric of political topics for deliberative rhetoric, specifically, the subject of legislation (2007, 1.4–8) or forms of constitution ([Aristotle] 2011, 1423a23). On the importance of this subject, he states, “[It] is necessary [for the speaker] to know how many forms of constitution there are and what is conducive to each and by what each is naturally prone to be corrupted, both forces characteristic of that constitution and those that are opposed to it. By *characteristic forces of corruption* I mean that except for the best constitutions, all the others are destroyed by loosening or tightening [their basic principles of governance]” (2007, 1.4.12; see also 1998, 1290a22–29 and 1301b15–20). In the event that the superiority of an outstanding citizen is such that either it constitutes a force in opposition to the constitution or threatens to corrupt the city-state by loosening its specific ideals, citizens are obliged—not by written law but in the interest of preservation—to persuade one another, first, to vote in favor of holding an ostracism and, following that, to vote to ostracize that citizen whose superiority puts him so at odds with the collective unity and the accomplishment of long-term stability.¹⁹ Despite the fact that Aristotle does not explicitly relate rhetoric to the practice of ostracism, if ostracism is or could be beneficial to preserving the constitution, then rhetoric *qua* political art is perforce implicated in the business of civic purgation—ostracism being preceded and in part effected by persuasive speaking. Moreover, by helping to remove persons obstructing the community *telos*, exhortations designed to ostracize

¹⁹ Ostracism in this account would not appear to be effective in countering a force of corruption that threatened to “tighten” a constitution’s basic principles of governance. Ostracism is only suitable as a means of preventing a constitution from becoming something other than what it is. For instance, it could conceivably help to prevent a democracy from becoming a tyranny, but it would be useless in trying to prevent a democracy from becoming too democratic.

result in the catharsis of the community's organizing principle, articulating the grounds for exile while simultaneously clarifying the collective unity. In this capacity, rhetoric functions as something of a rallying cry for the constitution and its form of government, motivating the citizenry to preserve the city-state and winning them over to the cause of maintaining the political status quo.

In view of this preservative function, exhortation throws into relief an implicit political function of accusation (*katēgoria*). For whereas exhortation on the whole may frequently make use of the rhetoric of accusation, when the aim of exhortation is to bring about a civic purgation, accusation will be indispensable to rhetorical effectivity. Not to put too fine a point on it, in the absence of accusation, ostracizing exhortations would be unintelligible, or even absurd. To be successful, not to say comprehensible, appeals to civic purgation must presuppose not only an obstacle to preservation but also the establishment of that obstacle's magnitude and facticity.²⁰ Since accusation is therefore necessary to the rhetoric of political catharsis, it, too, will have a share both in clarifying the political community and in bringing to the fore the gravity of combating forces of corruption. Although this implicit function disturbs Aristotle's division of the deliberative and judicial genres, it simultaneously grants to one of the ends of judicial rhetoric (accusation) a political purpose otherwise unavailable. At the same time, it liberates accusation from generic constraint having to establish wrongdoing, which Aristotle defines as "doing harm willingly in contravention of the law," written or unwritten (2007, 1.10.3). Insofar as ostracism furthers preservation, it is not a penalty for wrongdoing, much less a corrective to

²⁰ Although Halford Ross Ryan is correct to treat accusation and apology (*apologia*) as a speech set, arguing that "the critic cannot have a complete understanding of accusation or apology without treating them both," in the context of ostracism, in which accusation is not generic but a dimension of exhortation, apology does not afford the critic (or historian or theorist) much insight into "the accuser's motivation to accuse, his [sic] selection of the issues," etc. (1982, 254). On the related topic of the punitive dimension of public apologetic speech, see Adam Ellwanger, who argues that public apologies often serve "as ritualistic public punishment and humiliation" (2012, 309).

vice or an incentive to virtue. Rather, it is a mechanism for stabilizing the city-state and for articulating and affirming the socio-political order.

Given that the procedure of ostracism did not provide for formal accusation and defense, there are no known examples from the ancient world that would illustrate the relationship between ostracism and the rhetoric of accusation. However, the literary exercise *Against Alcibiades*, at one time attributed to Andocides, offers a hypothetical example that demonstrates how the rhetoric of accusation could inflect ostracizing exhortations and so help to accomplish the end of political catharsis.²¹ Written in the form of a judicial speech that urges the Athenian Assembly to ostracize Alcibiades, the text attempts to establish certain facts of Alcibiades' private and public life to highlight how they are out of keeping with the community's principle of democratic equality. Reproving the (imaginary) audience, in a tone similar to that of Demosthenes, the text decries both Alcibiades and the audience: "I am astonished . . . at those who are persuaded that Alcibiades is a lover of democracy, that form of government which more than any other would seem to make equality its end (13). . . . [He] shows the democracy to be nothing better than a sham, by talking like a champion of the people and acting like a tyrant, since he has found out that while the word 'tyranny' fills you with concerns, the thing for which it stands leaves you undisturbed" (27). Alcibiades, according to this account, obstructs the political community but only insofar as the citizens are unwilling to defend the interests of the city-state as such, that is, to support the constitution: "Men of sense should beware of those of their fellows who grow too great, remembering that it is such as they who set up tyrannies" (24), who show themselves "superior to the community" (29). Only after thus accusing Alcibiades and

²¹ Today, Andocides' authorship is generally regarded as spurious, but even in antiquity the authorship was questioned. As Douglas M. MacDowell states, "The best conclusion is that Andocides is not the author, and that the piece was written in later times as a literary exercise by someone trying to imagine what a speech at an Athenian ostracism might have been like" (1998, 160).

appealing to the audience's sense of civic duty does the text enjoin the Assembly to vote in favor ostracizing Alcibiades, though at this point the case made against "the accused" is such that it almost renders explicit exhortation superfluous, or, in Aristotle's language, enthymematic. To be sure, although ostracism did not allow for formal debate, either in the Assembly or the courts, we may imagine that in other public settings, the agora in particular, appeals designed to ostracize would include, as a rhetorical precondition, accusations regarding the quality and extent of a citizen's nonconformity vis-à-vis the current constitution, whatever its type may be.

In addition to the rhetorical categories of exhortation and accusation, ostracism occasions and is conditioned by the clarification of the emotional bonds of political *philia*. As we have seen with respect to ostracism's affirmation of the constitution, civic purgation is not the end of political catharsis but the means both of clarifying the community's political identity and of unifying its citizens around the task of preservation. And this, it will be observed, requires inculcating via the emotions a sense of civic responsibility. By persuading one another to ostracize a compatriot, citizens clarify both the end of the political community and the nature of that which characteristically threatens its stability, i.e. its characteristic forces of corruption. In so doing, they supply others with emotive inducements to safeguard the city-state against those outstanding persons whose superiority represents a threat to the collective unity, thereby clarifying the emotions constituent of civic engagement and hence of political *philia*. Although in the *Rhetoric* Aristotle maintains that the primary function of emotional appeals is to affect an audience's dispositions so as to make them favorable to the judgment sought (1.2.5), his subordination of rhetoric to political science implies another purpose of appealing to an audience's emotions: the clarification of emotional propriety, of which emotional responses are

politically appropriate given the constitution and the particular circumstances.²² Intellectually, these two functions are compatible; in practice they are virtually coterminous. For in making it clear why someone or something should be, say, feared, speakers simultaneously employ fear as a means of bringing about the desired judgment. In this way, they give political presence to the emotions, conditioning the non-rational appetites in view of their potential to instaurate the constitution at an attitudinal level.²³ Citizens engaging in the rhetoric of ostracism therefore arouse emotions to the effect that their arousal not only facilitates the desired judgment but also makes their fellow citizens feel fear or anger or indignation, as Aristotle admonishes, at the right times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way (1999, 1106b22-23), thus providing for the collective catharsis of that emotion as well as for its articulation with the aim of preservation. Emotional catharsis, in other words, enhances the catharsis of constitutions—provided that it inspires commitment to the city-state (to its political justice and the current regime)—while fostering political *philia*, viz., the mode of being-together *qua* citizens that the political community affords.

Despite the potential of all emotions to strengthen a citizenry's commitment to the constitution, the emotions most expedient to this end are those that Aristotle associates with the end of tragic catharsis, namely, pity and fear. For this reason, Aristotle's conception of tragic catharsis complements the *Politics*' axiom of preservation, rounding off what I have been

²² This interpretation resonates with arguments made by W. W. Fortenbaugh (2002) and Nussbaum (2001, 383) concerning Aristotle's understanding of emotions and emotional appeals. For them, on Aristotle's view, emotions are not divorced from cognition but grounded in rational beliefs about the world. Accordingly, they can be altered (e.g., clarified vis-à-vis the advantageous) through reasoned argumentation.

²³ This is crucial for Aristotle and for understanding his overall conception of rhetoric and the limitations of *logos*. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*' transition to politics, Aristotle contends that arguments alone are inadequate to making most people virtuous and utterly ineffectual with regard to those who "live by their feelings": "What argument, then, could reform people like these? For it is impossible, or not easy, to alter by argument what has long been absorbed as a result of one's habits." Consequently, he proposes employing other means of moral education, the use of fear in particular, arguing that, "For the many naturally obey fear, not shame; they avoid what is base because of the penalties, not because it is disgraceful" (1179b11-17).

describing, and what we may now designate, as a rhetorical perspective on political catharsis, that is to say, the political tragic. According to this perspective, *the tragic* is not the effect of dramatic representation but of a rhetorical process that by means of clarifying the tragic emotions instaurates the city-state and its governing regime. (As we have seen, among the available means of tragic catharsis, civic purgation is perhaps one of if not the most expedient.) Consequently, rhetoric discloses the autonomy of *the tragic*—conceived as a functional category of negative aesthetics and in contradistinction from tragedy proper. Through ostracism, rhetoric activates the tragic as a dimension of politics, articulating pity and fear with a mode of intersubjectivity appropriate to the constitution and the existing state.

Notwithstanding that pity appears *prima facie* at odds with exhortations to ostracism, the arousal of pity is uniquely suited to inspire a sense of protectiveness, to motivate those affected to dedicate themselves to the task of safeguarding someone or something from injury. On this account, ostracizing exhortations would almost necessarily involve the appeal to pity vis-à-vis the constitution. As Aristotle defines it, pity is “a certain pain at an apparently destructive or painful event happening to one who does not deserve it and which a person might expect himself or one of his own to suffer, and this when it seems close at hand” (2007, 2.8.2). Thus, in making a case for ostracism, citizens elicit pity for the constitution as a living thing undeserving of harm. But this immediately raises a problem, since for Aristotle pity is antithetical to fear or terror, by which he means “a sort of pain and agitation derived from the imagination of a future destructive or painful evil” (2.5.1). Accordingly, the closer a person’s connection to someone who is threatened by unwarranted harm, the more that person’s pity is overcome by dread: “in that case,” Aristotle states, “they feel for them as they feel about their own future suffering.” Moreover, “the dreadful is something different from the pitiable and [in the case of opposing

sides] capable of expelling pity and often useful to the opponent” (2.8.12). This is so, he argues, because, “[Things] are fearful that are pitiable when they happen or are going to happen to others,” but vice versa when pitiable things happen either to us or to those with whom we feel consubstantial (2.5.12). However, given that Aristotle assigns to tragedy the function of resolving the antithesis between the “movements” toward (pity) and away from (fear), there is no reason to reject the possibility—implicit in the *Poetics*—that a similar resolution would obtain in the realm of civic discourse. As John T. Kirby affirms, “There is [in Aristotle] a poetics of rhetoric...as well as a rhetoric of poetics” (1991, 213). This insight into the aesthetic basis of Aristotelian rhetoric suggests something more profound than the poetic flourishes of epideictic; it points to a mode of spectatorial (i.e., aesthetic) enjoyment that is not merely passive but that results from some sort of emotional experience provided by the transfigurative combination of pity and fear into something pleasurable.²⁴

In being persuaded that it would be prudent to ostracize an outstanding member of the community, citizens come to experience both pity and fear and to experience them together in relation to the constitution. Indeed, the modern expression “fear for”—understood to mean a feeling of anxiety concerning someone or thing’s safety and well-being—captures quite nicely the coming together of pity and fear in a compound emotion (pity-fear). In the context of

²⁴ To be sure, the epideictic language of praise and blame may also stake a claim to the rhetoric of political catharsis, serving as something of a civic disinfectant against excess and deficiency, while simultaneously giving presence to the standards according to which each citizen is held politically accountable. As a *dimension* of political rhetoric, epideictic can thus function as a prophylactic against those impurities that threaten to overwhelm the body politic and weaken its principle, purifying the attitudinal errors hampering a community’s political *telos* and thereby fostering the *synanthropos*—that is, the being-fellow-human—specific to its constitution. Moreover, in the event of a situation demanding civic purgation, epideictic language can also prepare the body politic to perform its ethico-political responsibility. Somewhat along these lines, Celeste Condit argues that epideictic discourse sustains communities by helping them overcome problems that contribute to degeneration and decay (1985). Two of the primary ways that epideictic serves this end is by defining and shaping the community: “The community renews its conception of good and evil by explaining what it has previously held to be good or evil and by working through the relationships of those past values and beliefs with new situations” (291). Taking a more Isocratean approach to epideictic, Takis Poulakos shows how epideictic can also serve the opposite dual-function of criticizing and transforming the socio-political realm (1988).

ostracism, we may observe how these seemingly opposite emotions coincide by reading Thucydides' account of Hyperbolus' ostracism alongside the faux speech *Against Alcibiades*. Writing on the exceptional nature of Hyperbolus' ostracism, Thucydides confirms, albeit indirectly, that the usual grounds for ostracism were fear of another's power and reputation, stating, "They [the anti-democratic Samians], killed Hyperbolus, one of the Athenians, a despicable person who had been ostracized not on account of fear of his power and importance but on account of his evil ways and the shame he brought to the city" (1998, 8.73). This passage reveals that a person's failure to achieve excellence (either in character or thought) is not in itself threatening to political stability, not deserving of fear and certainly not of ostracism; for that, a person's vice (e.g. ambition or vanity) would have to be coupled with a certain degree of political leverage and then parlayed into a form of power incommensurate with the city-state's political justice. In contrast to mere ethical disapproval, fear of another's *power* culminates in fear experienced *for* that person or thing to which such power poses a threat. In the political realm, what is thus endangered is the political identity of the city-state. Similarly, the writer of *Alcibiades* demonstrates how evoking pity for the constitution entails eliciting fear of inordinate political power: "Obedience to the magistrates and the laws is to my mind the one safeguard of society; and anyone who sets them at naught is destroying at one blow the surest guarantee of security which the state possesses." And, paralleling Thucydides' juxtaposition of moral censure and political consternation, the author adds, "It is hard enough to be made to suffer by those who have no conception of right and wrong; but it is far more serious when a man who knows what the public interest requires, acts in defiance of it. He shows clearly...that instead of holding that he ought himself conform with the laws of the state, he expects you to conform with his own way of life" (19). Insofar as citizens persuade one another to pity the integrity of the political

community, to fear for its *ethos* or way of life, identifying with its principle of justice and seeing themselves in terms of its conception of happiness, their pity takes on the emotive characteristics of fear, terror, and dread. But because this fear of corruption is felt in relation to the constitution, and not in relation to the individual, it strengthens rather than expels pity, refracting it, along with fear, throughout the citizenry.

By way of ostracism, rhetoric's catharsis of pity and fear overcomes the motivation for partisanship, clarifying the bonds of political *philia* and solidifying the collective unity by making the many *feel with one another as one*. Such emotional bonding is akin to a leap of faith in that it requires not only a belief in the community—and a belief of one's belonging to the community—but also a passionate commitment to its preservation and the long-term realization of its goals. As Josiah Ober argues, in practice the Athenian procedure of ostracism worked to clarify the central message of Cleisthenes' democratic reforms, which is summed up by the word *isonomia*. According to Ober, "The Athenians of 508/7 might have interpreted *isonomia*...broadly, as 'equality of participation in making the decisions (laws) that will maintain and promote equality and that will bind all citizens equally'" (1989, 75). Rhetoric that facilitates ostracism has recourse to this affirmation of being duty-bound, of sharing equally in the responsibility to make weighty, perhaps unpleasant, decisions affecting life-in-common and of owning them once made. What is more, ostracizing exhortations rely in no small part on the efficacy of just such an appeal. That is why the author of *Against Alcibiades* begins the exhortation/accusation by driving home the need for citizens to undertake together the responsibility of civic engagement, averring, "I consider it the duty of the good citizen, not to withhold himself from public life for fear of making personal enemies, but to be ready to face danger for the benefit of the community" (1). Through affirming the obligations of citizenship,

rhetoric designed to ostracize clarifies the emotional ties that undergird political association. But rather than serving to educate citizens on the definitions or causes of emotions (in the manner of Book II of the *Rhetoric*), rhetoric engenders a way of experiencing emotions as engagements with the world, of feeling correctly and of feeling together as friends—not in virtue or pleasure or utility but, politically, under the banner of *isonomia*. To provide a political gloss to Aristotle’s common definition of friendship, ostracism fosters a sense of sharing pleasure in preserving the constitution and distress when confronted by forces of corruption, “not for some other reason,” but because of the nature of political friendship (2007, 2.4.3).²⁵ As a result, citizens gain insight into the filial bonds constitutive of political community and commit themselves to the obligations that these bonds carry, including the obligation to exile one of the community’s members for the sake of the community itself. Rhetoric may in that way help to accomplish the catharsis not only of pity and fear but also of political *philia*, thus affirming the collective unity and strengthening the citizen-body’s commitment to the task of preservation.

Through the civic purgation of persons whose superiority is believed to constitute a threat to the constitution, the catharsis of political identity both parallels and diverges from a more ancient Greek rite involving the ritualistic killing of the *pharmakos*, or scapegoat. According to René Girard, the ritual aimed “to produce a replica . . . of a previous crisis that was resolved by means of a spontaneously unanimous victimization” (1977, 94; see also Derrida 1981, 128–34). By recreating, for instance, the conditions of an unpremeditated lynching, the sacrificers hoped to reestablish the feelings of social accord necessary to restoring order in the community. Similar to candidates for ostracism, “[The] victim,” he argues, “is considered a polluted object, whose living presence contaminates everything that comes in contact with it and whose death purges the

²⁵ That is, although the collective decision to ostracize may not itself be experienced as pleasurable, the subsequent catharsis – of justice and friendship – is a source of aesthetic enjoyment. This owes primarily to the resolution of pity and fear.

community of its ills” (95). Not surprisingly, scapegoating also accomplishes the resolution of contrary emotions: “On the one hand he is a woebegone figure, an object of scorn . . . a butt for all sorts of gibes, insults, and of course, outbursts of violence. On the other hand, we find him surrounded by a quasi-religious aura of veneration; he has become a sort of cult object” (95). Yet despite these similarities—as well as the possibility that ostracism is a rationalized form of the scapegoat ritual—the victimization of the *pharmakos* is a metonymic reduction of “[all] the dangers, real and imaginary, that threaten the community,” whereas the pity-feared citizen of ostracism is a representation, an exemplar, of a particular force of corruption specific to a political community (94; see Burke 1969a). By inducing the emotions of pity and fear, ostracizing rhetoric serves to clarify citizens’ political responsibility; it does not function as a panacea for social calamities. More precisely, this mode of clarification affirms the importance of preserving the constitution and the justice it embodies, and of maintaining the political community in a state of due proportion or beauty.

And yet, despite Aristotle’s emphasis on clarification, rhetoric’s effectuation of the tragic in politics entails a certain process of simulation in which the real, actually existing regime is eclipsed and replaced by a simulacrum, or appearance, which may or may not coincide with the *arkhē* that ostensibly defines the current regime. Hence the “reality” of political catharsis, and, ultimately, of the political community as such, amounts to what the French critical theorist Jean Baudrillard refers to as a semiotic “reality effect” (1981, 160), i.e., the world or an aspect of the world as it is filtered, processed, and sustained by the play of signs and signifying processes.²⁶

²⁶ Baudrillard’s genealogy of simulacra, which argues, among other things, that the emergence of simulation is a function modern information and communication technologies is thus shown to be historically inaccurate (see for instance his “The Order of Simulacra”). But according to William Merrin—a charitable critic—for Baudrillard the simulacrum is concept meant to refer only to the image and its efficacy. Accordingly it is an ancient concept whose influence, albeit variable, appears or is discoverable within the philosophical, theological, and aesthetic traditions of every culture (2006, 28 ff.).

Aristotle, for his part, was by no means ignorant either of the possibility or the potency of such an effect—his concept of “*bringing-before-the-eyes*” (*pro ommaton poiein*, or “visualization”) referring to an action-based metaphor that allows the hearer to visualize both the action and the metaphor it represents (2007, 3.11.1; cf. 3.10.6–7). But the effect of simulation goes beyond signifying things engaged in activity (*energeia*), liberating or dissociating the mode from the things of representation, the symbol for the thing symbolized. By signifying a type of political experience, the tragic does not attest to the reality of, say, a democratic regime but rather points up the rhetorical power of an emotive process, one that is capable of reproducing the appearance of a certain political reality and thereby of transforming that appearance into an unquestioned category, one that is perceived to be natural and external to the rhetorical process of tragic catharsis. For that reason, the tragic in politics cannot be isolated from the possible performance of a sleight of hand, that is, from misdirection or, in our terminology, misclarification. In this, the politico-rhetorical context, the clarification of emotions and of the constitution does not necessarily reflect or represent the material conditions of the political community so much as it maintains and reproduces common belief in a common political reality, namely, belief in the mode of allocation of the *arkhē* by which the current regime identifies itself in exercising a certain dominion (*kurion*) vis-à-vis the non-governing elements, the parts or parties, of the city-state. Hence, in a strange turnaround, Aristotle’s practical-productive philosophy comes to resemble the sophistic approach to language, which, among other things, regards linguistic power as consisting in the capacity not only to exploit but also, and at a more fundamental level, to create and disseminate belief. As a rhetorical effect of the tragic, such belief takes the form an active belief in the identification of the political community with its putative principle of justice, thus maintaining community values and a common attitude of mind, despite or, rather, *because*

of appearances.²⁷ In view of this productive capacity (to create belief by means of appearance), the rhetorical force of the tragic process, its characteristic style, is such that it hypostatizes or *realizes* politics as a purely symbolic constitutional order, one that simultaneously displaces politics as a form of distribution in line with a principle of justice. And this displacement occurs regardless of whether or to what extent the two “realities” contradict or coincide with one another. Insofar as the appearance of, say, democracy, is rhetorically successful (i.e., believable), it will render ineffective any accusation to the contrary, any accusation charging that the appearance of democracy is illusory, an appearance that, in simulating political reality at once dissimulates the real effects of a non-democratic form of rule, the operation of non-democratic forms of action, and the sure-footed posture of non-democratic ruling class.²⁸

The rhetoric of political catharsis nevertheless retains its strategic use-value. That is, there is no contradiction here between the politics of preservation and the rhetorical process of misclarification. In simulating the dominant characteristic of the community, the tragic function of rhetoric persists in its office of furthering political stability over the long-range. It continues to foster consensus, or political like-mindedness, shaping and reinforcing the attitudes of mind supportive of the regime in power and of political order in general—even if those attitudes are conditioned by beliefs that are *prima facie* in tension with the institutional apparatus of the *arkhai* and the relationship of mastery played. Political order, the authority of the political community, is still rhetorically instaurated. But something else takes place in this symbolic

²⁷ Perhaps the clearest articulation of this view of creative power of language is that espoused by Thrasymachus in his fragment “The Constitution” (Sprague 1972, B1, p. 89–91).

²⁸ The problematic of distinguishing appearance from reality, although stemming from classical antiquity’s opposition between being and becoming, culminates in the modern world in the figure of Nietzsche, who asks, “The true world is gone: which world is left? The illusory one, perhaps?...But no!” he replies, “*we got rid of the illusory world along with the true one!*” (2005, 171; emphasis in original). Later, Derrida’s destabilizing practice of deconstruction will run wild with this aphorism, translating it into the paradoxical logic of undecidability. See, for instance, his “Force of Law” (esp., “the ghost of the undecidable,” 24–26) Indeed, we will turn to a more careful consideration of undecidability in the negative aesthetics of politics in the fourth chapter.

process of political renewal and in consequence of the misclarifying clarification of the tragic in politics; a new possibility opens up for the politics of preservation, one that while in principal available to any regime is most fitted to preserving the oligarchical ordering of the political community over against the freedom of the *dēmos*.²⁹ This possibility, which is already implicit in misclarification, consists of the strategic use of political catharsis to simulate one regime so as to promote the long-term stability of another. Accordingly, the rhetoric of tragic simulation at once makes possible and relies for its effectivity on a basic misrecognition of the operative principle of governance.

We can see the how and why of this strategic misrecognition by highlighting that for Aristotle the identification of the political community with a principle of justice is as much an identification of community “parts,” or parties, with political attributes (*axiai*), of which there are three: wealth of the smallest number, the virtue of the best, and the freedom that belongs to the people. But this materialistic reduction of principles to parts similarly reduces the number of real, or determinable, parties. “Aristotle,” writes political philosopher Jacques Rancière, “who is at pains in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and book III of *Politics* to give substance to the three parts and the three ranks, freely admits in book IV and also in *The Athenian Constitution* that the city actually has only two parties, the rich and the poor: ‘almost everywhere the wellborn and the welloff [sic] are coextensive.’ The arrangements that distribute powers or the appearances of power between these two parties alone...are required to bring off that community *aretē* that the *aristoi* will always be lacking” (1999, 11).³⁰ Moreover (and more important where rhetoric is

²⁹ In other words, this something else transforms the “even if” of contrary attitudes into a resource of rhetorical effectivity, strategically rendering an accidental or contingent success.

³⁰ C. D. C. Reeve’s translation of this passage from the *Politics* differs slightly: “For among pretty much most people the rich are taken to occupy the place of noble-and-good men” (1998, 1294a19–20). For Aristotle’s discussion of community in terms of parts and parties, see his *Athenian Constitution*, in which he defines the *dēmos*—the gathering of men of no position—as those citizens who “had no part in anything” (43). In

concerned), this reduction of community parties into a bipolar opposition between the rich and the poor automatically grants to the former a rhetorical superiority based on the nature of the “remaining” *axiai*—and it does this long before and independent of the mass media and present-day propaganda. Simply put, freedom, the attribute of the people—the position of those who have absolutely no other, the poor—is not real in the sense of designating a positive, determinable property but is pure invention, an empty property determined negatively by what it is not—i.e. virtue and wealth, which in the final count is reducible to wealth pure and simple.³¹ At the same time, freedom is not a peculiar attribute of the people, since it is counted as a common virtue, belonging to everyone, rich and poor alike. This means, first of all, that ostracism, functioning as an instrument of political clarification, cannot contribute to preserving oligarchy in the straightforward manner of expelling from the city those persons embodying its characteristic force of corruption. To do this, an oligarchical ruling class would have to pull off the impossible feat of ostracizing its freest member. But even given the eventuality of ostracizing an oligarch on the grounds of his having formed inappropriate connections with the *dēmos*, the purgation would take as its object not the *axia* of freedom but the *act* of attempting to create sedition. For freedom is not only indeterminable, and thus incapable of being definitely ascertained, calculated, or identified, but also non-exclusive, the common of the community, of all its parts and parties. Rich oligarchs do not lack freedom by virtue of the fact that the people, the poor, lack wealth or position; indeed, oligarchs do not lack freedom at all. Rather, the people who make up the people (and who, according to the *Athenian Constitution*, have no part in anything) are simply free *like* the rest. It is the people’s complete lack of position that makes the

Disagreement, Rancière takes liberty with passage, pushing this definition to its logical conclusion to define the people as “a part of those who have no part” (14 *passim*).

³¹ Even as an indeterminable property, argues Rancière, the freedom of the *dēmos* reduced the natural domination of the nobility to a domination based solely on wealth and property, transforming their absolute right into a particular *axia* (1999, 7–8).

dēmos appear as though it alone may legitimately lay claim to freedom, an appearance that by its very nature can be made to work either to the advantage or the disadvantage of the people that make up the *dēmos*.³²

Perhaps counterintuitively, then, Aristotle's translation of justice into parts and parties (elements and credentials) reveals that, in terms of strategic use-value, tragic simulation or political misclarification tends to support not democracy but oligarchy. And it does so indirectly, by preserving the appearance of democracy. There is, in other words, an apparent twist in logic involved in the rhetorical process of political catharsis: namely, that what initially looks like an inapplicability of the tragic vis-à-vis oligarchies is for that very reason a means of rhetorical effectivity available, uniquely if not exclusively, to a regime grounded in the *axia* of wealth and legitimated by virtue of its dominance over the long-range. Unlike freedom, or virtue for that matter, wealth is easily determinable, so much so that it is the lack of wealth that predominantly defines not only a free people but also its corresponding form of government. (Conversely, the coincidence of good birth and wealth would seem to favor wealth as the invariable determining factor.) Since the appearance of democracy fundamentally rests on some form of the negation of wealth, or the apparent curtailment of its influence, democracy as a constitutional form that shapes a citizenry's way of life is likewise fairly easy to simulate; in terms of susceptibility, then, democracy, for Aristotle, would describe a regime virtually reducible to the play of appearances, one whose existence or existential "proof" primarily consists in keeping up democratic appearances.³³ In other words, the appearance of democracy—through whatever means, e.g., institutional, rhetorical, spatial, etc.—can subserve constitutions based on either the principle of

³² According to the account given in *The Athenian Constitution*, the *dēmos* is composed of those who have no position, those who "had no part in anything." (43).

³³ This qualification of democracy is needed in order to distinguish democracy as a constitution from democracy as either the practice or principle of social equality—the latter proving itself quite resilient and recalcitrant to non-democratic systems of government.

freedom or the principle of wealth; or, in conjunctural terms, such an appearance can help to further both but never at the same time. Ostracism, conceived as the initiating mechanism of political catharsis, and, consequently, of tragic simulation, is thus transformed from a democratic institution into part of a rhetorical process that is capable of turning democracy against itself by means of its own simulated or misclarified appearance. “For politics, writes Rancière (taking his cue from Aristotle), “is a question of aesthetics, a matter of appearances. The good regime is one that takes on the appearances of an oligarchy for the oligarchs and democracy for the demos. Thus the party of the rich and the party of the poor will be brought to engage in the same ‘politics’” (1999, 74). On that account, sensible oligarchies preserve themselves not by combating freedom—a logical absurdity if freedom is, as Aristotle says, a common feature of the community—but by simulating democracy, that is, by ostracizing (some of) the wealthy or wealthiest parts of their own party.

In so doing, oligarchies help to reproduce what amounts to the rhetorical basis of democracy—namely, its affective and intersubjective conditions of fear, pity, and *philia*, as well as belief in the perceptible reality of a democratic regime and the democratic mode of allocation of the *arkhai* by which the regime is publicly identified.³⁴ For what the tragic in politics clarifies is not the apparatus of government as such, only the appearance of parts and forms of government, a constitution in name only. In the event that, as far as the people are concerned, democratic appearances win out over a contrastive institutional reality, the community’s political identity, and hence the exercise of a certain *kurion*, will be misrecognized as democratic (see

³⁴ Through an irony that during the twentieth and twenty-first century has come to define much of our socio-political reality, the rhetoric of fear tends to create and sustain the conditions that give rise to fear. In that capacity, we may legitimately describe it as productively counterproductive and very much so. See Chapter Three on the Freudian uncanny for a detailed discussion of how the exploitation and reproduction of fear is essential to legitimating and maintaining “the personal safety state.” For a recent study on democracy’s congeniality to oligarchy, from classical antiquity to the contemporary era, see Jeffrey A. Winters (2011).

Bourdieu 1991, 163–70). Hence, contrary to the modern era’s tendency to associate the aestheticization of politics with the rise of fascism—to historicize the aesthetics of politics—the tragic dimension reveals an alternative relationship between politics and appearances, one that privileges not some form of autocratic rule but the surreptitious preservation of oligarchy; at the same time, it shows that the “aesthetics” of politics (i.e., its appearancing or apparency) is tied not to the conflict between left and right wing political parties and systems but to that most basic political of conflicts, the opposition between the rich and the poor.³⁵ If there is a tragedy here, and not merely the tragic, it is that Aristotle’s vindication of the art of civic discourse makes possible a technique for manufacturing the believable appearance of democracy in the form of a *mise en absence*, a presence in absence, which is realized and reproduced solely by virtue of the democratic instantiation of the *pathē* of pity and fear, conjoined with the public feeling of democratic friendship. All of which presupposes belief in the guiding influence of freedom and the preservation, first and foremost, of that belief over against institutional reality.

So notwithstanding the appearance of a city’s return to a state of “due proportion,” or beauty, such keeping up of appearances—democratic or other—does not involve public argument or debate over the nature or desirability of the existing political order, over the arrangement and proportionality of the city’s parts. Nor does it ensure the coincidence between the city’s public image and the actual mode of allocation of the “offices,” or *arkhai*, by which a regime defines itself. Rather, the city’s image substitutes for the exercise of dominion by the city’s dominant element (i.e., supplants the relationship of mastery played out in the institutional

³⁵ The argument that the aestheticization of politics is tied to a particular system of government or constitutional arrangement was made popular by Walter Benjamin in the epilogue to his “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” According to Benjamin, “The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life.... Communism responds by politicizing art” (241–2).

apparatus). Although the rhetoric of cathartic simulation may continue to defend the true and the just, it does so on two different levels of perceptible reality—of “definiteness”—which may or may not coincide: (1) the arrangement offices followed by the exercise of political power and (2) the simulation of such a configurable function. And this split is totally in keeping with the distinction between rhetoric and philosophy. For just as rhetoric designates a domain separate from that of philosophy, the political philosophy of preservation remains distinct from the tragic dimension or the rhetoric of political catharsis. Nevertheless, it is by virtue of this differentiation that rhetoric can further the end of preservation without having to engage directly the question of preservation as such and, consequently, of whether what is ostensibly being preserved is as beautiful as it appears—is beautiful in the way that it appears to be beautiful. And ostracism, for its part, is an effective means not only of preserving order, or its appearance, but also of preserving rhetoric’s distance from philosophy. And this is wholly in keeping with Aristotle’s axiom that rhetoric concerns itself with “the means” that contribute to a given end but never the ends in themselves (2007, 1.6.1).³⁶ As such the political function of the tragic neither involves nor encourages deliberation about the possible benefits or disadvantages of preserving one regime over against another; nor does it promote the interrogation of whether or to what extent a city-state is as it appears to be, as those occupying the offices of the institutional apparatus claim it to be. What is more, the tragic emotions of fear and pity, when activated through the institution of ostracism, produce an “accidentally” dissuasive effect vis-à-vis inquiries into the politics or rhetoric of preservation, an effect made all the more effective because operates, primarily, on the

³⁶ Aristotle’s theory of rhetoric, of course, is not uncontested. Regarding rhetoric’s relationship to means and ends, Isocrates, in his *Nicocles*, advances an alternative conception, according to which “rhetoric” (i.e., *logos politicos*) does not culminate in the advocacy of predetermined ends but moves to inquire about ends themselves, including possibilities not yet acknowledged or disclosed. For it is by means of rhetoric that we “seek light for ourselves on things which are unknown” (1928a, 8).

level of appearance, and appearances, for better or worse, are exceptionally difficult to disprove, virtually immune to falsifiability and the rhetoric of critique.

2.4 THE PERSISTENCE OF POLITICAL CATHARSIS

Although Aristotle does not relate the *Politics*' axiom of preservation back to the *Poetics*, his understanding of catharsis as a multivalent mode of clarification provides a basis for fleshing out the political office he assigns to rhetoric: defending a city-state's constitution against its characteristic forces of corruption and thus furthering the realization of its final end, i.e., stability over the long-run. Although recent readings of the *Rhetoric* have provided insight into rhetoric's usefulness as an ethico-political instrument, what has not yet been highlighted is the basis of this effectivity, namely, the importance of preservation vis-à-vis corruption. This opposition, I have argued, has consequences for Aristotle's understanding of the interrelationships between not only rhetoric and politics but also tragic catharsis. Specifically, it implies a rhetorical process that by means of facilitating ostracism accomplishes the clarification, or catharsis, of the political community as such (its principle of political justice as well as the bonds of political *philia*). Thus actualized, what I have been calling the tragic dimension of politics achieves both more and less than the end of poetic tragedy: less in that political catharsis does not include the representation of a single, complete action, but more since, along with clarifying the grounds of political belonging, it involves a purifying purgation of the body politic. But rhetoric in this capacity also entails a complicated form of identification that clarifies the emotional bonds and hence the meaning of political friendship. The result is an instauration of the constitution, whose condition is crucial to the long-term stability of the political community and its corresponding regime. Kenneth Burke was perhaps one of the first scholars to draw attention to the overlap in Aristotle

between rhetoric, poetics, and politics, yet his suspicion regarding the rhetorical impact of tragic frames (1969b, 38–41; 1973), combined with his focus on the cycle of guilt-redemption-victimhood (1989), worked against the possibility of his discovering an affirmative capacity of political catharsis. As Jeffrey Walker points out, Aristotle’s conception of rhetoric as “a *technē* of emotional *katharsis*” highlights rhetoric’s role in arousing emotions for the purpose of improving the faculty of practical wisdom (2000a, 85). To the extent that pathetic appeals accord with what is true and just, citizens engaged in the rhetoric of political catharsis not only assist in effecting civic purgations but also serve as agents in the political betterment of their fellow citizens, redirecting, reshaping, and reconditioning the emotions—specifically, pity and fear—in such a way that they are more likely to be felt at the right time, in the right way, and toward the right things. By clarifying the emotions for the purpose of strengthening the political community, rhetoric offers instruction in the civic emotions, saying in effect, “Given our constitution, this is the appropriate emotional response to the problem we are facing. The situation and our political identity oblige us to feel this way so as to make a difficult yet necessary decision.” In so affirming the citizenry’s emotional resolve, rhetoric clarifies the conditions under which emotions may be considered politically appropriate, and in that moment of clarification rhetoric transforms the emotions into an instrument of constitutional efficacy, thereby bridging the gap between private feeling and civic responsibility.

At the same time, however, the conception of rhetoric as a *technē* of political *katharsis* admits of another type of logic or rationality, one that, although maintaining the true and the just, operates at the level of appearances and their play, i.e., of the apparently true, the seemingly just. On the one hand, this functionality is *prima facie* an uncontroversial fact about rhetoric, and, what is more, Aristotle’s axiom that rhetoric deals in probabilities (*eikota*) and signs (*sēmeia*)

and is thus stylistically capable of bringing-before-the-eyes suggests a keen awareness of rhetoric's relationship to appearance (2007, 1.2.14). On the other hand, however, we should not read into this emphasis on appearance a philosophical pronouncement on the ontological juxtaposition of being-and-becoming, permanence-and-change. If we take seriously the axiom that rhetoric is about appearance, then we place ourselves squarely within the realm of purely ontic considerations, as opposed to considerations of the nature, property, or conditions of being (the so-called real world of things-in-themselves), as well as considerations of "the ontological difference" separating being from what Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* (1028b, 2–7) and elsewhere calls "thinghood." Thus, in separating the play of appearance from practical wisdom, I am drawing attention to the possibility that things are not always as they appear, that appearances can achieve relative autonomy vis-à-vis the things of which they are appearances or representations, and that the relationship between things and their appearances is not easily sorted or assessed by the rational ability to decide how to achieve a certain end or to reflect upon and determine good ends consistent with the aim of happiness or living well. In the domain of politics, belief in the presence of a principle of justice and in the truth of its appearance at once presupposes and works to sustain another more basic one, viz., belief in the correspondence of a community and regime's public appearance with the institutional apparatus and the relationship of mastery played out in it—i.e., the place and mode of allocation of the *arkhai* by which the regime defines itself in managing the city and exercising power. Insofar as practical wisdom concerns the pragmatic or ethical selection of ends, it does not affect the quality, quantity, or fact of these beliefs, does not tip the scales of belief one way or the other. To the extent that practical wisdom is a factor in the play of political appearances, it comes into play "after the fact," that is,

in helping to determine whether preservation of the status quo—i.e., what appears to be the status quo—is to the advantage of the individual making the decision or the community as a whole.

With these considerations in mind, I have also argued that the clarification involved in the rhetoric of ostracism, as well as the rhetorical effect of ostracism itself, goes some way toward creating or reproducing the appearance of a healthy (or healing) political community. And this appearance, I maintain, proves itself capable of functioning and of exerting influence—of creating its own reality effect or believability—in relative isolation from the goings on of government. In this capacity, it also redefines the parameters of risk, clarifying for the citizen body the city's characteristic forces of corruption and inculcating a civic sense of fear and pity and a political friendship steeped in both. In so doing, ostracism not only strengthens commitment to the constitution, but, just as important, it also liberates the appearance of the *politeia* from the functioning of its institutional apparatus. And the stronger the reality effect of this appearance—intellectually, emotively—the more likely that it will supplant the reality of the actual operations of government, the authority that directs and maintains the city in accordance with the prerogative of the dominant element, “party,” or faction. As we have seen, however, this substitution does not imply an ontological privileging of one kind of reality effect over another; rather, it signals a conflict of appearances, in which one type of appearance corroborates another in the manner of representation. Thus, if in the *Politics* Aristotle presents readers with mimetic *katharsis* (clarification via representation), then in the *Politics*, as refracted through the *Rhetoric*, he offers us the prospect of a cathartic *mīmēsis* (representation via clarification), one that clarifies the stuff of politics through simulating the appearance or character of the constitution, reinforcing the apparent veracity this appearance by means of the tragic emotions of fear and pity. It is thus of little consequence if the emotional clarification accords with constitution-

specific conceptions of the true and just (i.e., those characteristic of the ostensible constitution). Instead, the issue is which principle of justice is truly in force over against the appearance of justice and its truth? And practical wisdom is, on its own merits, incapable of providing a reliable answer, of sufficiently putting the issue to rest.

In this chapter, I have characterized this process, whereby political appearances are dissociated from their institutional context, as a potentially misclarifying simulation, arguing that the clarification elicited by ostracism allows for the ever-present possibility that the center of political authority can be recognized in the form of a fundamental misrecognition, that the regime can secure the grounds of affective legitimation by virtue of misclarifying and, for that reason, misleading appearances. Indeed, as we have seen, Aristotle recommends the use of deceptive appearances as a means of furthering the ends of preservation. That the resulting misrecognition could be facilitated and in large part reproduced through the intersubjective experience of pity and fear is testament not necessarily to Aristotle's holistic vision of practical-productive arts but to the politico-rhetorical effectivity made available by the tragic dimension and the forcefulness of simulated appearance. In view of this two-pronged strategy, we may justifiably conclude that the political exploitation of the tragic owes its efficacy to the rhetorical process of cathartic *mīmēsis*, while the process itself is legitimated in terms of its political expedience vis-à-vis the end of preservation. In a roundabout way, this renews the possibility that practical wisdom may stake out a role for itself in the process but only insofar as, given certain favorable conditions, it results in the selection of the tragic as a rhetorical means of furthering the end of the constitution—whatever kind of constitution it may be.

In view of this process, community *ethos* is strengthened, but only if it appears to accord with the aims of the ostensible constitution, the putative *ethos* of the seeming *political*

community. That being the case, one of the most pressing questions to emerge from a critique of political catharsis is whether and how it operates in today's Western democracies. While dismissing ostracism as a relic of early experiments in democratic governance is quite understandable, the prosecution of certain white-collar crimes provides a kind of civically cathartic spectacle that is adapted to current political sensibilities and conditioned by a number of interrelated, though not necessarily coordinated, rhetorical acts. Take for example the indictment of Bernard Madoff for massive fraud in 2008: at the very least it suggests that, despite the absence of state sanctions, Aristotle's notion of rhetorical catharsis cannot easily be disregarded as an archaic practice or antiquarian interest. Nomi Prins' claim that, "The bloodlust reserved for Bernard L. 'Bernie' Madoff and the other new villains ultimately only serves to cloak larger systemic crimes" (2009, 5), is not a counterargument, even if it is true. In fact, the argument that scapegoating a few people who take advantage of financial systems will not lead to reform is precisely one of the purposes served by the rhetoric of political catharsis. What remains at issue, and what Aristotle enables us to see, is the capacity of rhetoric not to clarify the wrong emotions per se but—and this is Prins' point—to direct them at the wrong objects—if by "wrong" we understand that which is in tension with the common belief or public image as to the *politeia's* characteristic style, i.e., its manner of directing and maintaining the government of the city. For it is conceivable, not to say likely, that the rhetoric involved in politicizing the tragic could preserve a constitution by clarifying emotions in the "wrong" way, that is, in a way suitable to another political system but nevertheless beneficial to the governing class. It becomes possible, in other words, to promote a democratic sensibility or habit of mind that, while capable of preserving democratic identity and combating forces of democratic corruption, is at the same time vulnerable to manipulation by means of the strategic or misleading play of appearances.

Work camps and massive deportations, monstrous as they are, are not the only ways of effecting political catharsis. From a rhetorical perspective, the most persuasive (or purifying) purgations are those that elicit spectatorial enjoyment. The critical purchase implied by such a perspective might consist of inquiring into the ways in which rhetoric works cathartically to preserve the very power structures that it ostensibly challenges. Aristotle may not approve of this application, but he provides the tools necessary for carrying it out.

What the tragic cannot account for, however—what it cannot absolutely prevent—is the possibility that people, even the people, may come to reject or at least grow suspicious of those appearances elicited and sustained by instances of government-sponsored ostracism, regardless of whether such instances are official or unofficial, regular or irregular. This refusal can assume one or two general forms. First, it can emerge as an accusation that the appearances of, say, democracy do not correspond to lived reality, however this reality is understood, that, appearances and prevailing attitudes notwithstanding, the organization and management of collective life does not adequately reflect the way of life that could reasonably be expected given the purported constitution. Although the tragic dimension is not amenable to public argument and rational debate, the perceived non-coincidence of the allocation and exercise of political power with the regime's public image, including common belief in that image can give rise to the resentment attending the feeling of one's having been duped, which in turn can lead to an attitude of non-compliance, disbelief, and discredit with regard to political power and authority. Whether there is any merit to such accusations and feelings of resentment is another matter entirely. Second, the refusal may arise from the conflict between the desire for a different constitution and the aim of preserving the existing order. This possibility, which is independent though not exclusive of the charge of simulated appearances, forwards the conviction that

another “way of life,” another regime, is possible but, more important, preferable to the current state of affairs, real or merely apparent. In either case, the result is more or less the same: a potential weakening of a regime’s odds of maintaining consensus vis-à-vis political order and its uncontested control of that order, as well as its likelihood accomplishing the end of preservation over the long-range. For refusal of the current order not only leads to irresolvable difference and political stasis (intellectually if not in practice), but, from the perspective of hegemony, it also threatens to create and foster the sedition that will either delegitimize or, worst case, overthrow the government. In order to stave off such an eventuality, some other means of securing consensus is required, something emotively powerful enough to preclude the emergence, in thought, of attitudes hostile to the ruling order. In the next chapter, we will examine how the rhetorical institution of the sublime as a kind of dominating form constitutes just such a means, advancing on and adding to the rhetoric of negative-aesthetics. For unlike the political function of tragic catharsis, the sublime *qua* form does not appeal to anything as specific, and hence contestable, as a constitution. With the sublime, we move into the realm of unadulterated emotive force, the dominion of the imagination.

CHAPTER 3 – DISCIPLINING THE IMAGINATION:
THE RHETORICAL INSTITUTION OF THE POLITICAL SUBLIME

Good things and bad come from much the same sources.
– Longinus 1st century AD

The Sublime dilates and elevates the Soul, Fear sinks and contracts it; yet both are felt upon viewing what is great and awful. – John Baillie 1747

Further, the process of transformation, even if it brings revolutionary change, is likely to be a long one, absent some catastrophic and catalyzing event—like a new Pearl Harbor. – The Project for the New American Century 2000

Like the tragic, the sublime designates a quasi-aesthetic category, a negative species of aesthetics, which takes shape within the classical rhetorical tradition. Like tragic drama, it too lays claim to an urtext: pseudo-Longinus' rhetorical treatise, *Peri Hypsos*—literally translated as *On Height* but more commonly as *On the Sublime* (or *On Great Writing*).¹ Apparently about the principles of good or great writing, the work is also singularly concerned with examining the emotive power of language, viz., the sheer power of language and the effects of rhetorical style. Longinus organizes his theory of language's potency around a concept he terms "the sublime," or perhaps "sublimity," by which he understands a measure of the impact that language combining "strong and inspired emotion" with "vigor of mental conception," or great ideas, has on its audiences (1991, 10). Jane Tompkins, in fact, writes that "for Longinus, language is a form

¹ Despite the uncertainty of authorship, for the sake of continuity with critical discourses and for convenience, I will refer to the author of *Peri Hypsos* as Longinus. The translation I am using, by G.M.A. Grube, opts for the title *On Great Writing (On the Sublime)*.

of power,” arguing further that his “notion of the sublime is equivalent to a conception of poetry as pure power” (1980, 203). This power, Longinus demonstrates, consists in transporting, or elevating, both speakers and audiences so as to achieve *ekstasis* (ecstasy or displacement), i.e., a mental state—beyond *logos* (reason)—of equal parts wonder, awe, and astonishment. *On the Sublime*, then, advances the rhetorical tradition of exploring the sheer emotional power of words, a tradition that extends back to Gorgias and to what Thomas M. Conley refers to as the “motivistic” model of rhetoric (1990, 23).² As Jeffrey Walker argues, Longinus’ notion of *hypsos* represents a return to “a basically Gorgianic theory of stylistic suasion” (2000b, 119; see also O’Gorman 2004 and Kellner 2005).

In keeping with the Gorgianic theory of persuasion, the ultimate purpose of *On the Sublime* and of the sources of sublimity is to equip rhetoricians with the means that enable one to wield sublime power and to exercise that power over others. As Conley points out, rhetorics of classical antiquity—though we may justifiably expand his frame to include rhetorics of any period—might be viewed as responses to prevailing political conditions. At the same time, however, he argues, they had, and continue to have, “implications for the realities of political life,” as well as for political ideals (1990, 20). In view of these implications, the motivistic model of rhetoric suggests a vertical, non-democratic structure, one in which the orator who knows the art of manipulating hearers may eventually rule over them like a master over slaves—a politico-rhetorical structure that exerts tremendous influence when it functions well but which is nevertheless unstable (and unprincipled). Such a model, both of politics and its rhetorical style, stands in stark contrast to that of the more democratic model that appears in the fragments of

² By “motivistic,” Conley understands that model of rhetoric chiefly concerned with the manipulation of the audience by means of a process that resembles modern behavioral conditioning by stimulus and response (1990, 6–7, 20–24).

Protagoras and reappears in the surviving rhetorical works of Isocrates and Cicero. According to the latter, rhetoric seeks to arrive at *homonoia* (likemindedness or consensus) and *euboulia* (good counsel) among the body politic and to do so by means of eloquence and the process of public deliberation and debate (see for instance, Isocrates 1928a; 1929, 253–9). Fundamentally horizontal, the Protagorean-Isocratean model relies on a consensual vision founded on the premise that all questions are debatable by equals, so long as (1) the persons debating have representative authority and (2) debate occurs within the context of a democratic assembly offering a way toward the resolution of collective problems or controversies. Nevertheless, the “controversial” model does not for that reason enjoy a monopoly on consensus; it merely privileges a certain kind of consensus-seeking process. The motivistic model is also capable of creating likemindedness. But whereas the horizontal-controversial model aims at creating consensus within a bilateral framework—one in which the relationship between speaker and audience is more or less symmetric, in which both sides to a controversy are founded on the hearer’s *doxa*—the motivistic model seeks consensus arrived at within a unilateral, asymmetric transaction between an active speaker and a passive audience. In the former, controversy, debate, and eloquence are regarded as the only reasonable alternative to force and deception. In the latter, no alternative to force and deception is required—nor, technically speaking, is such an alternative possible, since persuasion, on this view, is essentially a simple matter of stimulus and response, “a sort of sublimated coercion” (Conley 1990, 6). Consensus, then, if it is possible, is achieved “motivistically” or emotively by non-rational means. The sublime, as initially conceived by Longinus, constitutes one such means. As a rhetorical force, as pure linguistic power, the sublime achieves consensus not through securing widespread assent to rational propositions, not by means of free and open debate between equals, but by accomplishing a unity

of emotive effects. Moreover, according to Longinus the motivistic force of the sublime so strong that it can overpower arguments seeking to offset sublime *ekstasis*. For the sublime, he writes, is “like a thunderbolt”—“an irresistible force beyond the control of any audience” (1991, 4), which, when fully formed, precludes effective rational opposition.

Notwithstanding the power of sublime language to elevate and displace, the so-called “Longinian sublime” is limited to the extent that its vision of rhetorical power neglects the world of material things, including the mind’s interaction with that world. However, beginning in the eighteenth century, theorists such as John Dennis, Joseph Addison, and John Baillie began to recast the sublime in terms of the transformational power of language—what Addison calls “description”—arguing that the sublime emerges at the point where the grand or terrifying object is converted into an idea (see Hope Nicolson 1959; Eagleton 1990; and Ashfield and de Bolla 1996).³ This transformational power thus immediately evokes or blurs into questions of “the ontological status of the sublime,” that is, of the sublime’s ultimate grounding or foundation (Shaw 2005, 47). In contrast to the Longinian sublime, for many of the eighteenth century theorists, the origin or cause of the sublime does not consist in an aspect of language or in elements of style; rather, its ontological status is that of an epistemological response engendered by means of a linguistically mediated interaction between mind and object, a mediating idea, which, according to John Dennis, “transforms the material object, suffusing its...status with iconic significance” (1996, 35–6). There is perhaps more continuity than discontinuity between Longinus and the eighteenth century’s discourse of the sublime than discontinuity. However, in

³ According to Joseph Addison, certain sublime phenomena, such as storms, earthquakes, and other disasters, are subject to “Descriptions” (1965, 416). By means of Description, argues Addison, the mind is able to compare “the ideas that arise from words, with the ideas that arise from the objects themselves.” In the case of, say, hideous objects, the cause of pleasure resides in the capacity to reflect on and admire the transformational capacity of language, that is, to relish the artistry that can change a threatening phenomenal, empirical object into a mental image that no longer “presses too closely upon our senses” (*Spectator* 418).

the eighteenth century, we may perceive the beginning of a change in focus from the production of sublime language to the experience of the sublime itself.

Consequently, these theoretical advances do not result in a severance of ties to the Longinus so much as they help to extend and round out his original formulation of the sublime. In particular, Longinus' view of the sublime as a powerful force implying a vertical political structure is preserved in Edmund Burke's emphasis on terror and "natural" hierarchy. Writing in 1757, the philosopher-cum-statesman Burke claims, in his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, that the predominant quality of sublime *qua* subjective experience is "whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror" (1998, 86). This stress on the negative aspects of the sublime marks the crucial difference between Burke and his post-Longinian predecessors. According to Ronald Paulson, whereas someone like Addison regards the sublime as "liberating and exhilarating, a kind of happy aggrandizement," Burke sees it as "alienating and diminishing" (1983, 69). However, Burke argues that a contradictory mode of pleasure may nevertheless be derived from this unpleasant experience. With the emphasis on the psychological effects of terror, Burke's writing on the sublime constitutes a decisive double shift, recapturing Longinus' sense of sublime power as a kind of mastery or dominion while simultaneously moving the discourse of the sublime away from mere linguistic performance toward the mind or faculties of the spectator. In effect, this dual emphasis brings the political implications of the Longinian sublime to the fore, assigning sublime power to the political end of maintaining a traditional (i.e., hierarchical) rule of law and order. For Burke, the sublime crushes us into admiring submission, and is thus capable of securing a people's respect but not its love: "We submit to what we admire, but we love what submits to us; in one case we are forced, in the other flattered, into

compliance” (1998, 147). As Terry Eagleton argues, Burke sees in the sublime a “virile strenuousness,” a power that “rouses our filial fear, and hence our submissive obedience” (1990, 54, 55). And yet, for this very reason, the sublime presents Burke with something of a political paradox. Simply put: as a crushing terror that elicits respect without love, the sublime risks creating the alienation and resentment that will undermine the consensual order it is intended to support.

Writing at the heels of Burke’s *Enquiry*, Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* of 1790 radicalizes Burke’s shift in the discourse of the sublime, while avoiding the political problem of an effective yet self-undoing order. Unlike Burke, who while at no point conceding the radical possibility that sublimity is simply an effect of language nevertheless acknowledges language’s part in playing midwife to what is “conversant about terrible objects,” Kant, in his theory of the sublime, makes no special allowances for the effective use of symbolic expression, in effect stating that the transformational power of language has little to no bearing on the emergence or experience of sublime feeling. Even more radically, Kant excludes objects of experience from the provenance of the sublime. In keeping with his project of transcendental idealism, which holds that human beings experience only appearances and not things in themselves, Kant maintains that the sublime is purely subjective, an aesthetic judgment “whose determining basis *cannot be other than subjective*,” neither dependent on nor concerned with the usefulness or existence of an aesthetic object (1987, 44).⁴ What is more, he argues, aesthetic judgment

⁴ According to Kant, aesthetic judgments are “reflective” rather than “determinative” judgments. In making a reflective judgment, the subject seeks to find an unknown universal for given particulars, whereas in making a determinative judgment, the subject subsumes given particulars under universals that are already known. As Kant puts it: It is one thing to say that “certain things of nature, or even all of nature, could be produced only by a cause that follows intentions in determining itself to action”; and quite another to say that “*the peculiar character of my cognitive powers* is such that the only way I can judge [how] those things are possible and produced is by conceiving...a cause that acts according to intentions, and hence a being that produces [things] in a way analogous to the causality of an understanding” (1987, 280). In the first part of the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant discusses the four possible reflective judgments—the agreeable, the good, the beautiful, and the sublime. These are the only four

constitutes a mental faculty, or mode of perception, distinct from either reason or understanding. Accordingly, the sublime judgment is not cognitive, not logical or rational; it does not presuppose fixed ideas, and it does not work to create new ones. Rather, the sublime works entirely through our feelings and is absolutely free of all ends or purposes. Thus, while Burke displaces the sublime from an ontological to an epistemological register, Kant pushes the implications of the shift to their logical epistemological conclusion. At the same time, he agrees with Burke that sublime feeling involves displeasure—e.g., fear and amazement bordering on terror. On Kant's view, the sublime manifests itself not in terms of harmony but of disharmony or of struggle between the faculties of imagination and reason. This intra-subjective conflict, he argues, while initially giving rise to a sense of displeasure, nevertheless results in the reconciliation of reason and imagination, in which the imagination, by striving to attain to reason, experiences a sense of freedom, while simultaneously confirming the supremacy of reason vis-à-vis both the imagination and the sensible world of which it is a part. For that reason, Kant's radical theory of the sublime avoids Burke's dilemma of demoralization at the hands of crushing terror. With the Kantian sublime, the subject not only undergoes a negative, mediated pleasure but also comes to experience the feelings of admiration and respect for that part of itself which is supersensible—free to the extent that it is wholly undetermined by the sensible world.

Kant's epistemological take on aesthetic judgment would appear to debar the sublime from any rhetorical application, including political utility. Nevertheless, in this chapter, I argue that Kant's theory of the sublime provides a model for conceiving of the sublime as a powerful rhetorical operation that by means of manipulating the imagination restores the emotive non-cognitive conditions that legitimate political order on an affective level. As I demonstrate, a

possible types of reflective judgment, as Kant relates them to the "Table of Judgments" from the *Critique of Pure Reason* (B95).

crucial part of this operation is the transfiguration of overwhelming, fear-inducing appearances into an experience of freedom that is nevertheless caught up in a relationship of dependence between government and the governed. If the tragic secures consent to the prevailing political order by way of strategic appearance, then the sublime ensures such consensus by dominating a certain subjective experience, creating a binding force for a relatively non-coercive or non-absolutist system of rule. In this regard especially, Kant's theory of the sublime is not only applicable to rhetoric but constitutes a significant gain in the political efficacy of the sublime. Over against the alienating effects of Burke's sublime terror, the Kantian sublime exercises control while dissimulating the reality of its dominion. Although Kant did not express Burke's loyalist convictions, favoring instead a republican form of government, the relationship he posits between the imagination and reason commits his understanding of the sublime to a vertical power structure, in which a hierarchical political order is reified as subjective experience. This reification, I argue, amounts to what I refer to as the rhetorical institution of the political sublime. And as in the case of the tragic, the political sublime owes its rhetorical effectivity to a precise emotive process. But unlike political catharsis, under the influence of the sublime this process consists not in a signifying process but in the formalization of an intense mental movement.⁵

⁵ Although the Kantian sublime qualifies as a category of negative aesthetics, in the following explication of this concept I remain faithful to Kant's terminology, which treats of the sublime as an *aesthetic* judgment. According to Kant, reflective judgments of the sublime are to be considered aesthetic because, as in the case of the aesthetic judgment of taste, they meet the four conditions described by the "moments." That is to say, the satisfaction that is an essential component of the judgment the sublime must be represented as: universally valid (quantity), disinterestedness (quality), subjective purposiveness (relation), and necessity (modality). "For, since judgments about the sublime are made by the aesthetic reflective power of judgment," he writes, "the liking for the sublime, just as that for the beautiful," must be represented "as follows: in terms of *quantity*, as universally valid; in terms of *quality*, as devoid of interest; in terms of *relation*, [as a] subjective purposiveness; and in terms of *modality*, as a necessary subjective purposiveness (1987, 100). Nevertheless, the feeling on which sublime judgment is based is, in contrast to the feeling of the beautiful, characterized by initial disharmony between the faculties. For that reason, Kant regards all judgments of the sublime as presupposing a negative pleasure, even though the judgments themselves would positive judgments.

3.1 KANT'S "ANALYTIC OF THE SUBLIME"

In a brief yet immensely influential treatment of the sublime, the Kant of *The Critique of Judgment* presents the sublime as an intense sensory response that discloses the superiority of a rational faculty over sensibility and the imagination. Properly understood, the sublime does not refer to qualities inhering in phenomenal, empirical objects of experience; rather it describes an affective movement of the mind, an intense feeling of amazement bordering on terror that results in a sense of elevation and exaltation. Nevertheless, it is precisely those chaotic, boundless, and terrifying objects of phenomenal experience that evoke the feeling (and judgment) of sublimity, that is, of reason's overcoming of the sensible world and of the imagination's striving to represent the unrepresentable: "it is...in its chaos that nature most arouses our ideas of the sublime, or in its wildest and most ruleless disarray and devastation, provided it displays magnitude and might" (99–100). Although these feelings are aesthetic, and therefore feelings of pleasure, in a pure aesthetic experience of the sublime, the subject does not feel an unambiguous positive pleasure—as in a liking for beauty—but, as a result of the disharmonious relation of his or her imagination (or sensible faculty) and reason, feels a mixed, indirect, or negative pleasure.

In contrast to the experience of beauty, in which the imagination is in "restful" accord with the understanding, when undergoing the sublime the mind is agitated, harmonizing with itself only by virtue of the contrast between the powers of reason and imagination. Kant compares this agitated state to a vibration, describing the mental movement of the sublime as "a rapid alternation of repulsion from, and attraction to, one and the same object" (1987, 115). For that reason, an object eliciting in us the feeling of sublimity gives us simultaneous pleasure and displeasure. "Hence," Kant argues, "the feeling of the sublime is a feeling of displeasure that arises from the imagination's inadequacy...but is at the same time also a pleasure, aroused by the

fact that this very judgment, namely, that even the greatest power of sensibility is inadequate, is [itself] in harmony with rational ideas, insofar as striving toward them is still a law for us” (114–5). In other words, the pleasure of sublimity is negative not only because it involves repulsion from an object—a sense of the mind’s being overpowered or overwhelmed—but also because it negatively reveals reason’s supremacy over the sensible world, which includes the sensible faculty of the imagination. As Kant reiterates throughout the “Analytic of the Sublime,” reason humiliates both the imagination and sensibility (e.g., 98, 124, 127, *passim*). But, he is quick to add, the effect of this negativity is the augmentation of positive pleasure, “the feeling of a momentary inhibition of the vital forces followed immediately by an outpouring of them that is all the stronger” (98). Thus, in addition to a simultaneous repulsion and attraction to an object, the sublime involves something like a dam-and-release mechanism. Building on Kant’s analogy, we could depict this mental movement as an upward-downward vibration, downward because of the imagination’s debasement and upward because of the release or outpour of our “vital forces” that simultaneously accompanies and is made greater by this humiliation (see Clewis 2009, 61). On this view, the sublime is a serious emotion, one that moves us by virtue of a temporary (and temporal) blockage to a pleasant awareness of our supersensible nature and the ascendancy of reason.

This process of experiencing the sublime does not have to end with the feeling of a mixed pleasure that is caused in this way. Having felt this mixed pleasure, the subject can proceed to reflect on its true ground, which for Kant is the rational or moral idea.⁶ And this reflection, he

⁶ On the relationship between the sublime and the rational or moral idea, see Myskja (2002, 61–2, 74–7), Gasché (2003, 130), Kirwan (2004, 12, 23), and Robert Clewis (2009, 58–61). Gasché and Kirwan maintain that certain feelings simply *are* aesthetic judgments, that feeling and judgment are more or less identical. Accordingly, both characterize the sublime feeling as the sublime judgment. In contrast, Myskja and Clewis hold that the basis for the judgment of the sublime “is found,” according to Myskja, “in the feeling only” (2002, 158). Unlike the physiological changes associated with feelings, judgments possess a propositional character. Certainly, this quality need not be

argues, is the judgment that can accompany feelings of sublimity. However, Kant is aware that this reflection is not automatic, that the feeling of pleasure does not necessarily lead the subject to identify the genuine cause of the sublime experience. When the subject fails to recognize this true ground a subreption occurs “in which respect for the object is substituted for respect for the idea of humanity within our[selves, as] subject[s]” (114; cf. 209 n.2 and 1998 A311, B368).

When we call objects themselves sublime, we commit a subreption, since the sublime is properly predicated not of the object, or of nature, but of a certain inner experience, one that by means of disharmony and frustration negatively presents reason’s independence from determination by sensible impulses. For Kant this reveals that the experience of the sublime is based on human freedom, specifically, on the rational idea of humanity in our subject and the capacity to resist and overcome sensible nature. Rhetorically, one could argue that committing a subreption is to think or judge metaphorically, that is, to transfer “the sublime” from the subjective to the empirical, phenomenal plane of reference. However, since statements such as “That mountain is sublime” attempt to name aesthetically something that cannot be thus named, it is more accurate to describe subreption as a species of catachresis, i.e., as a transfer of a term (“the sublime”) from one place to another when no actual, proper words exists.⁷ Although prodigious objects and powerful forces may have definitional or “proper” names (e.g., “mountains” or “hurricanes”),

strictly understood in terms of an assertion or utterance—e.g., in the manner of a speech act. For “judgment,” writes Clewis, “can also refer to the response to or experience of something in a certain way,” as in, “I judge a thing to *be* sublime when I experience it *as* sublime” (2009, 60). Although this sense of “judging” is much closer to “feeling” than the two are distinct.

⁷ The difference between metaphor and catachresis was clearly defined as early as Quintilian’s discussion of catachresis in the *Institutio oratoria*. Here he defines catachresis (*abusio*, or abuse) as “the practice of adapting the nearest available terms to describe something for which no actual [i.e., proper] term exists” (2002, 8.6.35–36). As Patricia Parker argues, “[Catachresis] is a transfer of terms from one place to another employed when no proper word exists, while metaphor is a transfer or substitution employed when a proper term does already exist and is displaced by a term transferred from another place to a place not its own” (1990, 60). An earlier treatment, [Cicero’s] *Rhetorica ad Herennium* blurs the distinction by defining catachresis as “the inexact use of a like and kindred word in place of the precise and proper one.” This view, while not incorrect, does not clearly distinguish catachresis from metaphor.

they necessarily lack original aesthetic titles. Notwithstanding the potential advantages that subreption offers the phenomenology of everyday of experience—that is, subreption as shorthand for describing complex mental phenomena and the effects on consciousness of experiential objects—the ascription of sublimity to an external thing or object is aesthetically catachrestic. Accordingly, we would not be off the mark in describing subreption as an aesthetic sub-species of catachresis or an aesthetic instantiation of a rhetorical figure.

Despite grounding the sublime in an agitated mental movement, Kant readily acknowledges that our experience of the sublime is typically a response to an object (or event) of nature, one that acts as a stimulus or provocation of sublime feeling and judgment. Moreover, he argues that this movement can be set into motion in two distinct ways and thus divides the mind's being simultaneously attracted and repelled into two different varieties of sublimity.⁸ Explicitly, he identifies two basic types of aesthetic judgments of the sublime: the mathematical (or quantitative) and the dynamical (or qualitative) (§28).⁹

Kant begins §25 of the *Critique* by nominally defining the sublime on the basis of the magnitude (i.e., the proportion of space and time phenomena occupy vis-à-vis other phenomena), specifically, on the basis of the absolutely large or great: “We call *sublime* what is *absolutely large*. To be large and to be a magnitude are quite different concepts.... Also, *saying simply* that something is large is quite different from saying that it is *absolutely large*.... The latter is *what is large beyond all comparison*” (1987, 103). Through our encounter with vast formless objects—

⁸ Nevertheless, since sublimity is properly predicated of the subject having the experience of the sublime—specifically, of a subject's ideas of reason—objective properties are not the primary factor in whether or not an object can elicit the sublime.

⁹ Recently, however, Robert Clewis has appended Kant's typology, arguing that there are not two but three basic kinds of aesthetic experiences of the sublime (2009). Thus, to the mathematical and dynamical he adds the moral as a third type of Kantian sublimity. I return to the idea of a moral sublime below vis-à-vis enthusiasm as a sublime mental state. For the provenance of the terms “mathematical” and “dynamical” see Kant's first *Critique* (1998, B202).

say, a boundless, raging ocean, violent volcanoes, thunder clouds flashing with lightning—we are led or stimulated to estimate the greatness of their magnitude by reference to the absolute measure, namely, infinity as a whole. Indeed, what is truly sublime in the judgment of the mathematical sublime is the idea of infinity (the *absolutely large*) as such. And this idea, Kant claims, does not have a standard outside of itself but contains its own standard: “It is a magnitude that is equal to itself.” For that reason, “It follows that the sublime must not be sought in things of nature, but must be sought solely in our ideas,” in this case, the idea of infinity (105). Yet in searching out this standard that is “beyond all comparison,” the imagination as the sensible faculty for estimating magnitude, is led into a regress that quickly overwhelms its capacity of comprehension; the imagination simply cannot comprehend infinity in a single intuition and therefore cannot even begin to represent it adequately. The experience is too great for the imagination to “take it all in” at once (see Burnham 2000, 91). But, *ipso facto*, Kant writes, “[This] inadequacy itself is the arousal in us of the feeling that we have within us a supersensible power; and what is absolutely large is not an object of sense, but is the use that judgment makes naturally of certain objects so as to [arouse] this (feeling)...” (1987, 106). In other words, the felt frustration of the imagination’s inadequacy gives way to a feeling of pleasure deriving from the awareness that this inadequacy in respect to an idea of reason exemplifies our ultimate vocation: that our supersensible power of reason is superior to sensibility and therefore capable of transcending the limitations of the phenomenal world, including those of our finite, phenomenal existence (Clewis 1989, 99–100). As recent commentators have pointed out (Guyer 1993; Allison 2001; and Clewis 2009), for Kant this theoretical superiority to sensible nature can be viewed as a type of negative practical freedom in that it reveals to us or reminds us of our independence from determination by sensible nature. For that reason, Kant supplements his

initial formula, adding, “*Sublime is what even to be able to think proves that the mind has a power surpassing any standard of sense*” (1987, 106). For in the encounter with the concept of the infinite or infinity, the subject either becomes aware or is reminded of being superior to nature by virtue of vocation as a rational supersensible being.¹⁰

In contrast to the mathematical sublime, the dynamical sublime is not grounded on an idea of infinity, at least not in any obvious sense, nor is it stimulated by the vastness of objects. If the mathematical sublime occurs when we cannot absorb the object, the dynamical sublime occurs when we feel awe or fear before an object of overwhelming *power*. §28, “On Nature as Might,” is the only section in the *Analytic of the Sublime* that deals primarily with the dynamical sublime rather than with the mathematical sublime or with some dimension of both forms (quality or modality). Here Kant defines might as “an ability that is superior to great obstacles,” arguing that it is to be regarded as having dominance if it “is superior even to the resistance of something that itself possesses might” (119). From this definition he claims that if we judge aesthetically that “nature as a might” has no dominion over us, then we are experiencing the dynamically sublime, for like the mathematical sublime, it too reveals our freedom and superiority to nature.¹¹ So too, although a powerful natural object initially acts as a stimulus of the aesthetic experience, the actual judgment of the dynamical sublime is based on the

¹⁰ There are both psychological and conceptual-analytic arguments for Kant’s articulation of the mathematical sublime with negative freedom. For an example of the psychological argument, see Henry Allison (2001, 325–6, 399 n.42). Compare with Robert Clewis who proposes an alternative conceptual-analytic type of argument (2009, 64–6).

¹¹ The outer nature against which the aesthetic subject judges itself superior includes those objects that by virtue of their power and might elicit the sublime. Such objects include the range of phenomena that since Thomas Burnet’s *The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1680–1689) were regarded as exemplifying the sublime—e.g., the brooding intensity of the mountain crag, a lofty waterfall on a mighty river, a prodigious, raging storm, etc. Indeed, Burnet was one of the earliest aestheticians to articulate the infinite with objects that evoke the sublime. See Marjorie Hope Nicolson (1959, 210–14). However, as a theorist of “the natural sublime,” Burnet located the origins of sublimity in the external world or in the divine, rather than in the supersensible faculty of reason. Of course, for Kant, the same objects can be vast *and* powerful, since sublimity is predicated of the subject and not the properties of objects.

supersensible idea of our own reason and on the revelation of its superiority vis-à-vis the sensible world. But unlike aesthetic judgments of the mathematical sublime, if nature is to be judged dynamically sublime it must involve the arousal fear; it must be represented as arousing fear:

If we are to judge nature as sublime dynamically, we must present it as arousing fear. (But the reverse does not hold: not every object that arouses fear is found sublime when we judge it aesthetically.) For when we judge [something] aesthetically (without a concept), the only way we can judge a superiority over obstacles is by the magnitude of the resistance. But whatever we strive to resist is an evil, and it is an object of fear if we find that our ability [to resist it] is no match for it. Hence nature can count as a might, and so as dynamically sublime, for aesthetic judgment only insofar as we consider it as an object of fear (119).

Kant's point in this passage is to distinguish an aesthetic judgment of the sublime—i.e. one whose determining ground is subjective—from logical judgments based on concepts. Thinking conceptually, one can logically judge an object as possessing might. In order for the judgment to be aesthetic, the judgment of the object's might must be determined by an affective response to it, namely, by the amount of fear it would produce in our efforts to resist it.

To this, Kant adds another fundamental distinction: that the might of nature is aesthetically disclosed in one of two ways—either through actual or imagined fear. He writes, “We can...consider an object *fearful* without being afraid *of* it, namely, if we judge it in such a way that we merely *think* of the case where we might possibly want to put up resistance against it, and that any resistance would in that case be utterly futile” (1987, 119–20). Although in judgment of dynamical sublimity the object must be imagined or represented as arousing fear, the subject cannot actually be afraid when making a judgment of sublimity. Rather, he or she

must be disinterested regarding whether or how the object satisfies our desire for self-preservation, welfare, or happiness (see n4 above). To be sure, we fear whatever overpowers us if we try to resist it, and nature counts as dynamically sublime insofar as our capacity to resist it is not a match for its power. However, Kant tells us, if one were in an actual state of fear, then that person would simply “flee from the sight of an object that scares us, and it is impossible to like terror that we take seriously” (120).¹² Of course, Kant maintains that judgments of the dynamical sublime *qua* aesthetic judgments involve feelings of (negative) pleasure. Accordingly, as in the mathematical sublime, in the dynamical sublime one must become aware or be made conscious—via the might demonstrated by nature—of her true vocation as a rational and therefore supersensible being. As sensuous finite beings subject (without) to determination by natural causality and (within) to sensible impulses, human beings do not possess a power that is comparable to nature’s dominion—hence our fear at imagining a situation in which we confront something that overpowers our capacity to resist (e.g. God). But as creatures possessing a non-natural supersensible faculty, we become conscious of our superiority to nature, both within and outside us: “Whatever arouses this feeling in us, and this includes the *might* of nature that challenges our forces, is then (although improperly) called sublime” (123).¹³ Fearfulness is thus found attractive insofar as it presupposes and “reveals in us...an ability to judge ourselves

¹² This is similar to the way that Aristotle treats the relationship of tragic *katharsis* to pity and fear: “the poet should use *representation* to produce the pleasure [arising] from pity and terror” (1987a, 1453b11; my emphasis). However, as I argued in the last chapter, tragic catharsis may result from rhetorical processes of representation in addition to the dramatic representation of a complete action. For a contrast on the relationship between fear and the sublime, see Edmund Burke’s *Enquiry* (esp. Part I, Sections III, VII, and XVIII). For useful commentary on how Kant departs from Burke’s thinking on this matter, see Paul Crowther (1989, 108–11).

¹³ To experience the dynamically sublime, Kant argues, one must be in a position of safety or one in which the subject does not perceive an imminent danger to him or herself. However, this condition is ancillary to the revelation of our true vocation as rational supersensible beings, which requires disinterestedness: “Hence if in judging nature aesthetically we call it sublime, we do so not because nature arouses fear, but because it calls forth our strength (which does not belong to nature [within us]), to regard as small the [objects] of our [natural] concerns...and because of this we regard nature’s might...as yet not having such dominance over us, as persons, that we should have to bow to it if our highest principles were at stake and we had to choose between upholding or abandoning them” (121; cf., 129).

independent of nature” (120–21), as well as “our superiority to nature within us, and thereby also to nature outside us (as far as it influences us)” (123). Here, as in the mathematical sublime, it is not nature as such that is truly sublime but the vocation of our capacity as supersensible beings.

Although Kant characterizes both the mathematical and the dynamical sublime in terms of reason’s ascendancy vis-à-vis the phenomenal world, in both types of aesthetic judgment the initial disharmony between reason and the imagination eventually gives way to a reconciliation that is ultimately satisfying, despite its remaining a negative pleasure.¹⁴ This satisfaction occurs, he argues, once the imagination has succeeded—albeit through its very failure—in revealing a capacity to transcend the sensibly given (the superiority of reason) and/or in disclosing a practical power not to be determined by sensibility (practical freedom). In the mathematical sublime, the imagination fails to synthesize the manifold of shapes or sensations and thus falls short of the ideal of infinity or the concept of the infinite. As a sensible faculty, the imagination proves to be inadequate to the law of reason, which demands that “every appearance that may be given us [be comprehended] in [an] intuition of the whole,” wherein the absolute whole (infinity) functions as a “determinate measure that is valid for everyone [i.e., universal] and unchanging” (i.e., necessary) (114). This failure to comprehend a totality of intuitions creates a tension or contrapurposive relation between reason and the imagination, the effect of which is a mental shock or intense mental movement. This tension not only points to the affective bipolar structure of mathematical sublimity but it also reveals the presence of the faculty of reason. Although the imagination fails to comprehend infinity as an absolute measure, this failure, by virtue of

¹⁴ Although Kant characterizes pleasure in the sublime as resulting from the simultaneous repulsion and attraction to an object, this dam-and-release mechanism is triggered differently according to whether the aesthetic judgment is of mathematical or dynamical sublimity—or, in terms of objective properties, according to whether the object eliciting the sublime judgment is vast or powerful. In §24, he tells us that in the mathematical sublime the imagination refers its agitation to reason as “the *cognitive power*” (i.e., the faculty of cognition or theoretical reason), whereas in the dynamical sublime the imagination refers to reason as “the *power of desire*” (i.e., the faculty of desire or practical reason). Of course, he adds, “[In] both cases the purposiveness of the given presentation will be judged only with regard to these *powers*,” that is, “without any purpose or interest” (101).

disclosing the superiority of a supersensible faculty, enables the subject to become aware of his or her transcendence and transcendental freedom vis-à-vis the limitations of finite phenomenal existence. By contrast, in the dynamical sublime the problem for the imagination is not so much that it fails reason—since reason does not demand our refutation of nature’s claim to dominion over us as it demands the synthesis of a manifold—but that as a sensible faculty the imagination is of a piece with the very sensible nature that is revealed to be transcended the supersensible faculty of reason. Here, too, this transcendence reveals or implies a power to overcome determination by natural and sensible causes, thereby leading the subject to reflect on the supersensible idea of his or her own practical freedom (and possibly other moral ideas as well). Hence, in both the mathematical and the dynamical sublime, the imagination’s initial frustration is simultaneously experienced as a pleasure arising from our awareness that the imagination’s inadequacy (negatively) demonstrates the vocation of our capacity, namely, to make reason triumph over sensibility. This does not necessarily mean that reason and the imagination are thus permanently reconciled to one another but that the affective nature of the sublime is such that the agitation between faculties will tend to resolve itself temporarily in judgments of sublimity.¹⁵

Implicit in this account of reconciliation is that the imagination’s initial failure is productive of at least two positive effects. First, argues Kant, in failing either to overcome nature’s might or to represent infinity, the imagination undergoes or feels itself extended, expanded, or raised up (1987, 105, 121, 129). This experience is different depending on whether the sublime experience is mathematical or dynamical. In the mathematical sublime, this

¹⁵ According to Lyotard, this resolution amounts to an impossibility and is a sheer fabrication on the part of Kant. Rather than demonstrating the superiority of reason vis-à-vis the imagination, the conflict between the faculties confirms the inadequacy of the imagination and reason to each other. Inasmuch as the imagination is a faculty belonging to the sensible world, this intra-subjective conflict is also, he argues, a conflict between the material world of objects and the mind. What happens in the sublime is nothing short of a crisis, a “violent disproportion,” in which we witness *the differend*, i.e., the straining of the mind at the edges both of itself and of its conceptuality (1994, 234, 237, 239; see also 1988, 12 and 21–2).

expansion is caused by reason's demand for the infinite, which the imagination, however much it is extended, cannot reach or comprehend in a single intuition. In dynamical sublimity, the extension owes to the fact that the imagination recognizes the capacity of certain powerful objects to humiliate our capacity to resist their might. It does this by means of "exhibiting those cases where the mind can come to feel its own sublimity," that is, by presenting various cases in which our sensible being feels threatened by such superior force or power (121). Despite these differences—or, despite the different reasons for this expansion—in both the mathematical and the dynamical sublime the extension of the imagination counts as a type of freedom, since the imagination feels a kind of freedom in trying to transcend its own limitations. The aesthetic judgment of the sublime "strains the imagination to its limit, whether of expansion (mathematically) or of its might over the mind (dynamically), and it strains the imagination "because it is based on a feeling that the mind has a vocation that wholly transcends the domain of nature (namely, moral feeling)" (128). For that reason, the experience of the sublime is an admixture of fascination and horror, on the one hand, and elevation, uplift, and exaltation, on the other. Second, the ultimate harmony (via initial conflict) between the imagination and reason reveals, as we have seen, the presence and superiority of the faculty of reason. Thus indirectly, the imagination's failure shores up reason by promoting its aims. It enables the subject to become aware of his or her practical freedom, that his, his or her transcendence or transcendental freedom. The imagination serves the interests of reason through its sacrifice, "in return for which it reveals in us an unfathomable depth of this supersensible power, whose consequences extend beyond what we can foresee" (131), i.e., by making the mind aware of its rational superiority to sensibility and intuition.

Given this interplay between reason and the imagination, Kant argues that the sublime's bipolar, positive-negative structure is not simply made up of either a positive valence that merely attracts or a negative one that only repels but that it combines both aspects in a feeling of "admiration or respect" (1987, 98). For Kant, respect in general refers to the "feeling that it is beyond our ability [as natural, finite beings] to attain to an idea *that is a law for us*" (114). Reason, as that which contains the idea of independence from determination by natural and sensible causes, arouses respect by virtue of the imagination's inability either to fulfill reason's demand for infinity or to resist whatever is an evil for us. Reason is thus revealed as the source of what is worthy of respect, namely, a law. In that capacity, Kant tells us, reason serves as one of the sources of the (negative) satisfaction that is felt in the sublime, if not the primary source. According to Žižek, respect would thus appear to account for why an object evoking feelings of sublimity gives us simultaneous pleasure and displeasure: such an object "gives us displeasure because of its inadequacy to the Thing-Idea, but precisely through this inadequacy it gives us pleasure by indicating the true, incomparable greatness of the Thing, surpassing every possible phenomenal, empirical experience" (1989, 203). This importance notwithstanding, Kant also tells us that satisfaction in the sublime involves the feeling of amazement or astonishment (*Verwunderung*), as he writes, an "*amazement bordering on terror*," "horror," and "a sacred thrill" (129).¹⁶ For Kant, astonishment encapsulates the forceful, striking movement of the mind in which the sublime consists; more so than the feeling of respect, amazement characterizes the feeling of a momentary inhibition of the vital powers followed immediately by an outpouring of

¹⁶ Edmund Burke also associated the sublime with astonishment. In the *Enquiry*, Burke claims that the sublime in nature causes astonishment, which is "that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror...the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it.... Astonishment...is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree; the inferior effects are admiration, reverence and respect" (1998, 101). As we see in this passage, Burke also associates admiration and astonishment.

them that is all the stronger (1987, 98). It is an affect—that is, an intense, fleeting feeling—but one felt in consequence of the dam-and-release mechanism that is initiated when one attempts to represent or imagine vast and powerful objects. Specifically, it is an affect that occurs “when we present novelty that exceeds our expectation” (133; cf. 242–3).¹⁷ As John Usher writes roughly three decades before Kant’s *Critique*, the power of the sublime is such that it “takes possession of our attention, and all our faculties, and absorbs them in astonishment” (1996, 147). However, Kant quickly dissociates admiration from amazement, describing admiration as “an amazement that does not cease once the novelty is gone” (1987, 133; cf. 243), one “that keeps returning” even after the disappearance of the “doubt as to whether one has seen or judged correctly” (243).¹⁸ According to Robert Clewis, “When an event unexpectedly goes against one’s expectations, which are ordered by general rules, one is initially astonished [i.e., amazed] or wonders about it, and this astonishment often turns into admiration” (2009, 186). But whether the sublime elicits amazement as such or admiration as a peculiar type of amazement (prolonged and perhaps calmer), the sublime remains a mental shock. What sets it apart as an affect is its tendency to persist even when the initial doubt about one’s judgment or perception subsides. Along with the feeling of respect, it describes the affective nature, the intense feelings, comprising the felt experience of both the mathematical and dynamical sublime.

In addition to the feelings of respect and admiration that accompany the imagination’s being elevated, Kant identifies aesthetic enthusiasm as a mental state characteristic of sublime

¹⁷ For a more thorough account of the distinction between amazement and admiration

¹⁸ Similarly, Longinus argues, “We might say of all such matters that man can easily understand what is useful or necessary, but he admires what passes his understanding,” or, in Kantian terms, the faculty of representation (1991, 48). Whereas being convinced of the truth of something is usually within one’s control, amazement or admiration is the result of an irresistible force beyond the control of any audience.

experience.¹⁹ As with the feelings of respect and admiration, enthusiasm is a feeling or affect that can be rendered aesthetically sublime: “it is a straining of our forces by ideas that impart to the mind a momentum whose effects are mightier and more permanent than those of an impulse produced by presentations of sense” (132). On this view, enthusiasm partakes of the tensions and intense movements that characterize sublime experience as such. As an affect, it exhibits the mental agitation of attraction-repulsion, dam-and-release, which is felt in consequence of encounters with vast or powerful objects. As Slavoj Žižek points out, enthusiasm is “an example of purely negative presentation,” i.e., the “successful presentation by means of failure, of the inadequacy itself” (1989, 204). In contrast to respect and admiration, there is a sense in which enthusiasm is sublime in itself; more precisely, aesthetic enthusiasm is at once a component, or affect, of the sublime and a form of sublime in its own right (see Clewis 2009, 183–94).²⁰ Meaning to say that it, too, helps make up the negative pleasure that constitutes satisfaction in the sublime. Although Kant nowhere makes this explicit, it is an implication of the above claim that enthusiasm, when aesthetically instantiated, amounts to a straining of our forces. Whereas respect and admiration are merely felt in consequence of certain judgments or perceptions, in enthusiasm the imagination is un-reined, unbridled (*zügellos*), as it is in both the mathematical and the dynamical types of sublimity. However, just as these types of aesthetic judgment enlarge or expand the imagination vis-à-vis reason’s demand for totality or the imagined presentation of a mighty force or superior power, enthusiasm encourages the imagination to try to represent an

¹⁹ Kant’s conception of aesthetic enthusiasm is distinct from that of *practical* enthusiasm, which Kant describes as having to do with desires, intentions, and agency (1978, 158; cf. 228–9) and which may be closer to our ordinary understanding of enthusiasm than aesthetic enthusiasm.

²⁰ Robert Clewis has recently made the case for considering enthusiasm as an instantiation of what he considers “the moral sublime,” a third type of sublimity that he appends to the mathematical and dynamical. However, compare to Lyotard’s account of the incommensurability of morality and the sublime in terms of his concept of the differend (1994, 224–39).

unrepresentable idea of reason through its own image, ideas such as God or the republican form of government.²¹

Indeed, it is aesthetic enthusiasm that, as we will see, simultaneously links the sublime to politics and frustrates the desire to establish or maintain deliberation as a viable means of doing politics. For as Kant maintains, the intense, bipolar structure of the sublime is such that it not only frustrates and encourages the imagination but in so doing also threatens to overwhelm reason and the careful consideration required by the promotion of prudential ends. Although the imagination ought to remain under the rule of reason, which gives the imagination its very expansion, sometimes it does not; sometimes reason is overwhelmed or co-opted by affect in the guise of reason. As Kant reminds us, affects, particularly those tied to the feelings of sublimity, are ambiguous. Enthusiasm can enlarge the imagination, but it can just as easily “exclude the sovereignty of reason” at least momentarily.

3.2 THE POLITICS OF THE SUBLIME

In a series of lectures given in 1970, Hannah Arendt provocatively claims that if there exists a political philosophy in Kant, “then it seems obvious that we should be able to find it...in his whole work and not just in the few essays that are usually collected under this rubric” (1992a, 31). In reconstructing this “hidden” philosophy, she privileges certain topics that she considers central to the third *Critique*, which, she maintains, are of “eminent political significance” (14), specifically, the particular, the faculty of judgment, and the sociability of man (*Geselligkeit*). On her view, the interrelation of these concepts point to a kind of cosmopolitanism wherein the

²¹ Throughout his corpus, Kant highlights two examples of aesthetic enthusiasm: that of the Jewish law (*Exodus* 20:4) prohibiting the fashioning of graven images of the divine and the idea of the republic that occupied the European imagination before, during, and after the French Revolution (on the latter, see Huet 1994; Neculau 2008; and Clewis 2009, 200–15).

public realm is constituted “by the critics and the spectators, not by the actors or the makers” (63), that is, by those who form judgments or reflect upon human affairs—in community with others and according to the standard of perpetual progress or peace—by those who decide, “by having an idea of the whole, whether, in any single, particular event, progress is being made” (58). These perspectives of the spectator and progress coincide in the seeming contradiction of Kant’s assessment of the French Revolution, which combines both an almost boundless admiration for the French Revolution with an equally boundless opposition to any revolutionary undertaking on the part of the French citizens. According to Arendt this tension results from the clash in Kant between the principle according to which one should act and the principle according to which one should judge. “What constituted the appropriate public realm for this particular event,” she argues, “were not the actors but the acclaiming spectators,” those who judge according to the standard of progress rather than, say, the sensory ideal of happiness (61). From this reflective or aesthetic point of view—that of the disinterested spectator who thinks and judges and publicly—the event’s importance lies precisely in its opening up new horizons for the future, viz., in the realization of the idea of a republic form of government—and in the revelation (in the present) of undisclosed possibilities involving the securing of rights established by a just government.

Aside from the *Critique*’s potential importance to reconstructing Kant’s implicit political philosophy, his understanding of judgments of sublimity has bearing on the aesthetic significance of certain political events—of the French Revolution, to be sure, but also of any object that could elicit the kind of mental shock that attends the sublime’s simultaneous feelings of attraction-repulsion, pleasure-displeasure, and so on. Although the “Analytic of the Sublime” was published in the year following the outbreak of the French Revolution, Kant’s formal

assessment of the event did not appear until the publication five years later (1795) of “An Old Question Raised Again: Is the Human Race Constantly Progressing?” (Part Three of *The Conflict of Faculties*). Without explicitly framing the event in terms of the sublime (mathematical or dynamical), he describe the spectators’ enthusiasm as an intense mental movement:

The revolution of a gifted people which we have seen unfolding in our day may succeed or miscarry; it may be filled with misery and atrocities to the point that a sensible man, were he boldly to hope to execute it successfully the second time, would never resolve to make the experiment at such cost—this revolution, I say, nonetheless finds in the hearts of all spectators (who are not engaged in the game themselves) a wishful participation [or exaltation] that borders closely on enthusiasm, the very expression of which is fraught with danger; this sympathy, therefore, can have no other cause than a moral predisposition in the human race (302).

As Arendt points out, the emphasis here is on the spectators, not the actors, the practical outcome, or the actuality of the Revolution, e.g., from the burning of the Bastille to the execution of the royal family and the bloody conflict between the Girondins and Jacobins. From a political standpoint, what matters to Kant is only the status of the Revolution as a supersensible idea of reason, that is, its emergence into history as a signal of moral progress. According to Robert Clewis, “The onlookers’ enthusiasm functions not as intuition that schematizes or represents a concept, but as a phenomenal hint of a moral predisposition...and thus of human freedom” and the idea of progress (2009, 174). In other words, their enthusiasm reveals itself as grounded on the right to a republican constitution that would protect the rights of the citizens and prevent the

political freedom of a citizen from being limited unjustly either by an individual ruler or the State.

However, of equal importance in this evaluation is the sublime mental movement that characterizes this enthusiasm—this “wishful participation” bordering on enthusiasm. As Philip Shaw remarks, in some contrast to Arendt’s liberal interpretation, Kant is “not so much interested in the politics of the Revolution, as in the feeling it arouses in its spectators” (2006, 86). Indeed, since the Revolution as idea cannot be represented as a whole by any object or sensible intuition—since it cannot be given sensual form—it at once frustrates and stimulates the imagination to rise above the level of experience, or sensible realm, and to take flight in enthusiasm (Clewis 2009, 173–76, 191–4; Shaw 2006, 80, 86–88; and Huet 1994). Like the Jewish commandment not to make graven images, the Revolution encourages enthusiasm as the unboundedness of the imagination, combining the supersensible idea of transcendental (political) freedom with feelings of both elevation and exaltation, without which it would not be a feeling of the sublime (Kant 1987, 109). The imagination is thus enlarged but only *by virtue* of its inadequacy to represent the idea of freedom. Or, put otherwise, in failing “to attain to an idea *that is law*,” the imagination experiences freedom or partakes of the idea of freedom by way of the feeling of respect. Accompanying this (negative) satisfaction is the fear-inducing power demonstrated by the Revolution itself as aesthetic “object.” For the enthusiasm of the “uninvolved public looking on” expresses not only respect for the idea of a republic but also an enthusiasm “fraught with danger.” Nevertheless, the spectators feel and express their enthusiasm without actually participating in the event, and thus without actually being afraid, even though the situation or political atmosphere is capable of arousing fear, whether of persecution, ostracism, or death. This would seem to qualify the Revolution—or, to be precise, the feeling it

arouses—as an instance of dynamical sublimity: as an aesthetic response to fear-inducing power (that of the revolutionaries), the Revolution reveals or implies a power to overcome sensible nature, expanding the imagination not only, via enthusiasm, by demonstrating the impossibility of granting sensual form to supersensible ideas but also by encouraging the onlookers to refute the event’s claim to dominion over their being, that is, to feel themselves as transcending the limits imposed by their own sensible embodiment (see Crowther 1989, 146–7).²² What is more, in this overcoming of corporeal pain, or fear pertaining to the finitude of sensible being, the onlookers come to feel the peculiar kind of amazement that Kant describes as admiration (*Bewunderung*). And this admiration, which persists long after 1799, is felt both for the rational capacity to transcend sensible impulses and nature and for the ideas (Ideas) of freedom and progress that enter into the historical arena under the banner of the Revolution.

Despite the historical and philosophical significance of Kant’s aesthetic interpretation of the Revolution, his articulation of the sublime with this political event stands in stark contrast to another, equally notable, aesthetic gloss of the Revolution. Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, published the same year as the *Critique*, not only repudiates the political efficacy of the Revolution but also—and more important for our purposes—denies the event any basis in sublime feeling. Availing himself of his earlier work in aesthetics, *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), Burke sets out to reclaim the sublime for the purpose of constitutional preservation, distinguishing between (1) the false, or revolutionary, sublime and (2) its true, constitutional counterpart under the British

²² For contrasting views on how to qualify the sublimity of the Revolution, see Bjørn K. Myskja and Robert Clewis. Myskja characterizes as sublime the revolutionaries’ acts, claiming that their enthusiasm would be an instance of the dynamical sublime (2002, 300); whereas Clewis regards the idea of the republic as sublime and characterizes enthusiasm for that idea as an instance of what he terms “the moral sublime” (2009, 191–4). See also Neculau (2008), whose reading is comparable to Myskja’s, and Marie-Hélène Huet’s eclectic essay (1994), which reads the Revolutionaries’ anxiety about the nature of representation through the lens of the Kantian sublime.

system—between the pernicious inflation of revolutionary discourse and the “natural” hierarchies embodied in the British constitution. Although Burke vacillates on whether the “radical” sublime is false because it is ridiculous, and therefore neither serious nor terrifying, or because the misrule and excess exhibited by the revolutionaries is truly terrifying, truly threatening to a stable social order, in either case the revolutionaries’ actions do not result in admiration (see Furniss 1993, 135–7 and Shaw 2006, 63–70).²³ What appalls Burke is that the unfettered energy of revolutionary zeal should be permitted to upend the beauty of social concord “the pleasing illusions, which made power gentle, and obedience liberal, which harmonized the different shades of life, and which, by a bland assimilation, incorporated into politics the sentiments which beautify and soften private society” (1968, 171). Under the British system, by contrast, “the spirit of freedom” is tempered by “an awful gravity”—the true, loyalist sublime—which preserves “the pleasing illusions” of domestic peace and social harmony: “This idea of a liberal descent inspires us with a sense of habitual native dignity, which prevents that upstart insolence almost inevitably adhering to and disgracing those who are the first acquirers of any distinction. By this means our liberty becomes a noble freedom. It carries an imposing and majestic aspect” (121). In the event that the spirit of freedom is not thus tempered and the revolution is allowed to overcome the minds of men “grown torpid,” the sublime degenerates into a mere “stage effect” (156), propped up by outbursts of “exultation and rapture” (93). But as critics both recent and past have argued, Burke’s attempt to assert the integrity of a loyalist sublime versus a revolutionary sublime—and to reduce the latter to a dramatic or textual performance—reflects a struggle to maintain the boundaries between words and things (see

²³ Tom Furniss, a sympathetic reader of Burke, provides the following rationalization: “Consider Burke’s dilemma. On the one hand he must portray the Revolution as ridiculous so as to maintain ‘a certain ironic distance.’ Yet, at the same time, he must persuade his readers that the Revolution is ‘sheer terror because it will not keep its “distance”’ (1993, 135).

Ferguson 1992, 135–7). The emphasis on “stage effect,” in other words, exposes a fault line within the *discourse* of the sublime, such that the distinction between the true and false sublime no longer applies; or more exactly, the distinction reveals its own insecurity by pointing up the tension between two opposing discourses, loyalist and revolutionary. What Burke fails to mention but what his own arguments imply is that each discourse is capable of producing a reality effect, that is, of being made real through language, argument, and interpretation and thus “true” in its effects. This, in turn, undermines the authority of Burke’s own *Reflections*, since it, too, is just one more discourse in search of an audience to confirm its “truth.” As Thomas Paine astutely argues, “I cannot consider Mr Burke’s book in scarcely any other light than a dramatic performance; and he must, I think, have considered it in the same light himself, by the poetical liberties he has taken of omitting some facts, distorting others, and making the whole machinery bend to produce a stage effect” (1995 [1791], 110). Of course, what Paine fails to observe is that all discourse, loyalist *and* revolutionary, is equally performative. The separation of the false sublime from its authentic counterpart is impossible to sustain, or, more precisely, their line of separation points up the fact that it could always be differently drawn—that it could always be demonstrated or made to be otherwise.

This struggle in Burke’s writings between the sublime object and its discursive performance points up a similar tension in the Kantian sublime, one that also extends to his aesthetic interpretation of the Revolution. For Kant, the apparent tension is not so much between words and things as between phenomenal objects and the supersensible power of reason. According to Philip Shaw, in the case of the French Revolution, “the feeling for the sublime dimension of progress is brought about only within the context of an empirical event.... We can [thus] conceive of freedom only in the context of history, which amounts to saying that concepts,

such as freedom, cannot, in the end, be extracted from real-world experiences.... The sublime belongs to the sphere of reason, yet it is manifested through real world objects, such as oceans and mountains, and real-world events, such as storms and political revolutions” (2006, 87). Kant’s stipulation that strictly speaking there is no such thing as the sublime object, while anticipating this criticism, merely displaces this tension to the initial conflict between the faculties of reason and the imagination. As the deconstructionist Paul de Man argues, the problem is more serious than the co-implication of the conceptual and the material. On his view, “We are clearly not dealing with mental categories but with tropes and the story Kant tells us is an allegorical fairy tale” (1990, 104–5). As such, the model that Kant uses to articulate the supersensible is not properly speaking philosophical, “but linguistic,” describing “not a faculty of the mind...but a potentiality inherent in language” (95), specifically the metaphoric capacity of substitution and exchange.²⁴ From this perspective, Kant’s sublime reading of the French Revolution amounts to just one more story of an event in European history, an alternative story to the one that Burke tells—where the inflationary discourse of the revolution opposes the authentic, loyalist sublime of tradition, hierarchy, and social accord. Consequently, the veracity of Kant’s political allegory is likewise a stage effect, dependent upon its capacity to produce reality effects, upon whether, how, and to what extent it is accepted, believed, and felt to be true. That Kant tells a very different story than Burke is however incidental to the “expressive uncertainty” that haunts them both (Burke 1998, 103). In either case the origin of the sublime is

²⁴ Commenting on this interpretation by de Man, Andrzej Warminski maintains that the (mathematical) sublime should be seen in terms of “a familiar metaphoric-metonymical tropological system of substitution and exchange...a bordered-off intuition which amounts to an impossible metaphor of infinity, and, *as impossible*...a blind metonymy or, better, a catachrestic positing” (2001b, 967; cf. 2001a). Jean-François Lyotard provides a different rhetorical reading of the Kantian sublime, one that makes use of a figure of thought, the *antistrephon*, to interpret rather than debunk the model. Referring to the interplay between the imagination and reason, he writes, “The process consists in displacing the examination of judgment from its (negative) quality to its (assertive) modality: you say that...is not, but you affirm it. The *modus* of a proposition is in effect independent from its content, the *dictum* (1994, 128).

exposed as residing not in empirical objects but in mental states. So too, the emphasis in both is not on empiricist renderings of the sublime but on the analysis of sublimity as a mode of consciousness. Although neither Burke nor Kant concedes the radical possibility that sublimity is an effect of language, the priority that each assigns to the mind of the spectator seems to affirm this as a possibility. At any rate, the emphasis on the spectator doubles back on the philosophy, undermining the interpretive authority that would seek either to secure for an event a basis in the sublime or to dissociate it altogether from any sublime effect. In Kant's case, de Man concludes the story of reason's triumph over the imagination is shown, in the last instance, to be dependent on a linguistic structure "that is not accessible to the powers of transcendental philosophy" (1990, 97).

Although other twentieth-century critics, mainly poststructuralists, argue that Kant's analysis of the sublime contains a pressure point that reveals the dependency of consciousness on the transformational power of language, this kind of immanent critique does not take us much further than the text itself (despite its yielding novel interpretations of the Kantian system).²⁵ Such interpretive interventions, while highlighting the instability of meaning within the structure of the sublime, fail to hit upon the crux of the matter, namely, of how this uncertainty has implications for civic discourse and the interpretation of events affecting life-in-common. Otherwise stated, critics like de Man, in pointing to the *rhetoricity* of Kant's analysis, are concerned only with rhetoric's "nuts and bolts"—tropological maneuvers and figural displacements, along with the range of ambiguities inhering in the sublime *qua* linguistic system.

²⁵ Jacques Derrida, for instance, argues that Kant's philosophical "system" of the sublime is a double operation, "both limited since what is presented remains too large [in the case of the mathematical sublime]...and unlimited by the very thing it presents or which presents *itself* in it," e.g. the concept of infinity. But, he concludes, the limit as such "does not exist" for the simple reason that it has no supersensible or extra-discursive origin (1987, 144–5). According to Derrida, the sublime in Kant's philosophy is produced a structural blip or necessary accident. For other similar interpretations of Kant's theory of the sublime—i.e., those focusing on its entanglement with language and the ambiguity this entails—see Jean-François Lyotard (1989), Lacoue-Labarthe (1993), and Jean-Luc Nancy (1993).

The benefits of this mode of rhetorical criticism aside, this approach fails to consider the *rhetorical* implications of this rhetoricity. In other words, it neglects to relate this rhetoricity back to the ontological assumption that, according to Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, has informed the history of rhetorical theory since classical antiquity: “that man is, by nature, subject to and capable of persuasion” (1998, 23). The technical aspects of rhetoric—figures and tropes—are therefore ancillary to language’s capacity to produce a persuasive or impressive effect on its audience. What is more, Campbell reminds us via Kenneth Burke, the rationale for persuasion consists in “the need to create unity, to overcome the division to which man is, by nature, heir” (28). As Edmund Burke was well aware, language succeeds, and succeeds imperfectly, by means of “conveying the *affectations* of the mind from one to another,” of fostering the congregation of minds through affective experience (1998, 104).

Hence, from a rhetorical perspective, how or why Kant disagrees with Burke over the aesthetic *meaning* of the Revolution is less important than the simple fact of their disagreement. For each interpretation is an implicit request for agreement, an attempt by means of conveyance to reduce uncertainty and establish the affective “reality” of the event. If tropes and figures have a role to play in this process, it is conditional on their capacity not to create but to *reduce* uncertainty, to make ongoing sense of appearances that, according to Thomas Farrell, “admit to a tension between their stability and ‘the shifting way in which they appear’” (1993, 27).²⁶ As a method, he argues, rhetoric “engages modalities of appearance insofar as they admit open-ended themes involving emotion, conviction, and judgment” (25). And this points to the more profound sense in which Kant’s application of the sublime in “An Old Question” is rhetorical: as persuasive performance it attempts to negotiate the stability of aesthetic judgments of the

²⁶ On the use of synecdoche for rhetorical, i.e., persuasive, effect, see Ned O’Gorman (2008). Although O’Gorman employs the figures synecdoche and metonymy to analyze the sublime in presidential discourse, I argue in the next chapter that these figures are also operative in the rhetorico-political uses of the uncanny.

sublime and the apparent formlessness of the Revolution itself. Moreover, in writing not only about but also for the spectators (or anonymous reading public), Kant endeavors to create an affective experience that would yield such reflective judgments, to offer a provisional, but engaged, sense of meaning vis-à-vis a changing complex of appearances. However, as Burke's counter-statement reveals, this engagement is conditioned at the outset by the possibility of contention and controversy. Indeed, the situation could not be otherwise. If the Revolution were incontestably sublime—if its sublimity were not in some way contingent or merely probable—then there would be no pressing reason to request another's assent to and approval of that sublimity. That it is contestable points up the rhetorical dimension of Kant's aestheticized approach to political philosophy. To return to Hannah Arendt, who introduced this section, "The validity of these [aesthetic] judgments never has the validity of cognitive or scientific propositions.... Similarly, one can never compel anyone to agree with one's judgments—'This is beautiful' or 'This is wrong'...one can only 'woo' or 'court' the agreement of everyone else.... And in this persuasive activity one actually appeals to the 'community sense'" (1992a, 73). However, as should be evident, the sublime does not elicit judgments of beauty or taste. The negative pleasure it affords is much more serious and complicated than beauty's charms and delights, its rhetorical effectivity, if it has one, more powerful. For these reasons, the sublime does not have recourse to the same persuasive appeal as the beautiful; it requires something other than "community sense," something more forceful than mere "wooing."

3.3 NEITHER MONSTROUS NOR HORRIFIC: THE POLITICAL SUBLIME AS RHETORICAL FORM

In contrast to aesthetic judgments of taste—the judgment by which an object is declared beautiful—sublimity is not grounded in the notion of common sense (*sensus communis*). Regarding this ground, John Poulakos argues, “In the idea of common sense Kant locates not only the principle of judgments of taste but also the necessary condition for universal communication. According to him, all judgments of taste and all attempts to communicate such judgments presuppose a common sense, an abstract and intangible fund of sensibilities in which all people participate by virtue of their communal status. As such common sense provides the larger context within which judgments of taste are possible and communicable” (2007, 347; see Kant 1987, 87, 159–62). But things are quite different with respect to aesthetic judgments of the sublime. For although the pleasure we take in the sublime is, according to Kant, “a feeling of our supersensible vocation,” there is “no justification for simply presupposing that other people will take account of this feeling of mine and feel a liking when they contemplate the crude magnitude of nature” (1987, 158). Lyotard, writing on the communication of this sublime feeling, writes, “There is no sublime *sensus communis*” (1994, 228; cf. 1989, 402ff.). Whereas the demand of taste is ‘immediate’ and universal ‘apart from a concept,’ the sublime needs the mediation of a concept of reason— viz., “freedom as absolute causality”—that is felt subjectively (231). The Kantian sublime remains an aesthetic judgment but has its ground in the (moral) idea of human freedom. Accordingly, the sublime both presupposes and is in a position to reveal this ground as negative practical freedom—freedom as independence from determination by sensible impulses or as the capacity to resist and transcend the sensibly given.

Yet, at the same time, Lyotard maintains, the sublime demands to be communicated.²⁷ Like the judgment of taste, it, too, lays claim to universal validity, though apart from the context of the *sensus communis*. As Robert Clewis argues, vis-à-vis the Revolutions' revelations of freedom under the idea of a republic, "Everyone who views the events from an aesthetic perspective is required (though not expected) to agree." The sublime judgment, he argues, "is not to be expressed by just one or two spectators, but is required of 'all' cultivated, informed, and disinterested spectators of the event" (2009, 174; see also Arendt 1992a, 52–8; Lyotard 1989, 401–5; and Lyotard 1994, 226–31). Kant's own "An Old Question" reveals if not the necessity then the tendency to make the attempt at communicating sublime feeling. The same holds true of his competitor's *Reflections*. However, the absence of a *sensus communis* corresponding to such feeling is testament to the difficulty in securing the universal validity of sublime judgments. Regardless of the possible philosophical limitations of Kant's idealism—that is, the extent to which the sublime is dependent on language and materiality—the disagreement between Kant and Burke over the aesthetic valence of the Revolution points to the problematic of establishing consensus on matters pertaining to judgments of the sublime. Consequently, if there is something about (or behind) the sublime that demands to be communicated, then this something is at once irreducible to a concept or "Idea" of reason and other than reason's (allegorical) rise to supremacy. Rather, it amounts to the demand to overcome division or, in Kant's language, the demand to bridge the gap between universality as requirement and the likelihood of particularity

²⁷ According to Lyotard, "The demand comes to sublime feeling from the demand to be communicated inscribed in the form of the moral law [respect], and this latter demand is authorized by the simple fact that the law rests on the...Idea of freedom.... Far from being 'immediate' like the demand of taste [or beauty], far from being a universality 'apart from a concept'...the universality in question in sublime feeling passes through the concept of practical reason. If one does not have the Idea of freedom and of its law, one cannot experience sublime feeling (1994, 231).

and difference—both the particularity of discrete phenomenal objects and of the disparate judgments elicited by potentially fear-inducing and awe-inspiring objects.

From a rhetorical perspective this tension between the universal and the particular is less an aporia—less a requirement of reason—than a provocation, yielding what Farrell via Aristotle refers to as “a rhetorical mood of contingency,” by which he understands the unsettledness of appearances wherein differences crystallize in opposing directions (1993, 27).²⁸ To the presupposition regarding the mind’s changeability via persuasion, Aristotle appends the further condition that rhetoric is concerned only with, or only ever seriously engages, those things that could be otherwise—“that seem capable of admitting two possibilities” (2007, 1.2.11). However, if we grant to Kant the separation of the sublime from a community’s storehouse of shared sensibility, then this provocation to rhetoric would seem to reproduce the problematic of overcoming division. In terms of Lloyd Bitzer’s notion of the rhetorical situation (1968), the sublime’s divorce from commonly held beliefs (*ta endoxa*) would appear to constitute a constraint on rhetorical effectivity. For Aristotle, as for the whole of the Western rhetorical tradition, all rhetorical appeals are grounded in *ta endoxa*.²⁹ “Acquired by virtue of one’s

²⁸ On Farrell’s view, the contingency of appearances is of rhetorical value because it facilitates “propitious conduct and judgment” (1993, 27). While that may be true, an action or manner of acting can only qualify as propitious vis-à-vis a specific end or purpose. Farrell acknowledges this axiom, if only implicitly, holding that the advantageousness of contingency consists in making possible, by means of rhetoric, the *re*-presentation of “appearances shared by assembled human beings...in the guise of a practical consciousness which guides and legitimates collective human conduct.” Thus, rhetoric and appearances are propitious, he argues, *in relation to* “the continual reinvention of human agency, which, in turn, offers some preliminary construal of their ethical possibility” (32). Presumably, they are or could be propitious with regard to different ends. But on this point, Farrell’s advocacy for a certain ethics of rhetoric—specifically, a rhetorically inflected model of Habermas’ universal pragmatics—conflicts with his theoretical-descriptive account of rhetoric as a method for engaging contingent appearances. As I argue below, the contingency of appearances is also advantageous for the state and the end of instaurating political legitimacy. In this scenario, Farrell’s preferred ends of renewed human agency and ethical possibility are either contrapurposive to that of the state or at the very least radically modified.

²⁹ Even Farrell, in trying to carve out rhetoric’s place among language arts, argues that rhetoric “approaches appearances through the interpreted lens of interested common opinions (*endoxa*)” (1993, 31). Nevertheless, as I argue below, the political sublime constitutes an attempt, enacted by means of rhetoric, to form and frame appearances “in excess” of *endoxa*.

participation in a community of people,” writes Poulakos, “these beliefs function as invisible criteria that regulate the audience’s judgments regarding the reasonableness of an argument, the desirability of a proposed course of action, or the elegance of an oration” (2007, 348). This includes, he argues, the appeal to one’s sense of beauty. Without this basis for appeal, the sublime is, *prima facie*, at a disadvantage relative to the effective—i.e., rhetorical—communication of judgments of taste; without a *sensus communis* the sublime does not merely admit of two possibilities it potentially multiplies them, exacerbating the unsettledness of opinion and frustrating the attempt to offer a provisional, affective sense of meaning vis-à-vis the shifting ways in which certain empirical, phenomenal objects appear. In the absence of *doxastic* appeal, what could be a provocation for overcoming division, or opposing judgments, comes to resemble an obstruction to rhetoric and threatens to forestall the possibility of instituting division in the first place, not to mention the search for approval, the request for agreement, or the attempt to secure consensus.

Notwithstanding the differences separating judgments of taste from judgments of the sublime, the communication of beauty indicates how this negative constraint on communicating the sublime—i.e., its divorce from the *sensus communis*—can function as a condition of possibility. As Poulakos argues, the communication of beauty “cannot proceed via arguments seeking to prove that something is beautiful...nor can it proceed from arguments seeking to establish practical benefits.... Rather, it is to reveal one’s felt delight in the encounter with,” say, a beautiful flower, “and, at the same time, to request the other person’s assent to and approval of the flower’s beauty” (2007, 349). Instead of appealing to reasoned argument—e.g., claim, evidence, and warrant—for Kant, the revelation or disclosure of beauty appeals to a shared capacity for beautiful feeling, as well as to a shared, communal sensibility, a “common sense,” of

what counts as such a feeling. Presumably, this is what Arendt has in mind when she writes of wooing or courting the agreement of everyone else, of the persuasion involved in appealing to a community's sense of beauty —namely, that “consent on aesthetic matters can be secured [only] by appeals to feeling,” i.e., via *pathos* as a mode of persuasion (Poulakos *ibid.*). The sublime, as an aesthetic feeling, is in this way linked to the communication of judgments of taste. For whatever else it may be—allegory, structural blip, happy accident, mediated pleasure, etc.—the sublime is first and foremost an intense feeling or mental shock. Hence, whereas the beautiful is communicable by means of subjective revelation—i.e., revealing one's felt delight in a judgment of beauty—the sublime cannot be similarly communicated but instead must be *instituted as mental movement*. Instituting this movement, then, is the sublime's unique provocation to rhetoric, while the institution itself constitutes a mode of rhetorical effectivity. Or, to recall Edmund Burke, it is the sublime as “expressive uncertainty” that provokes rhetoric as response, viz., the heightened contingency that attends appearances demonstrating either overwhelming power (nature's dominion) or overpowering formlessness (the absolutely great). Hence, the tension in Kant between consciousness and the transformational power of language is not only a philosophical problem nor is it merely a rhetorical/structural effect; rather, it designates a condition of rhetorical effectivity, that which enables the institution or persuasive communication of the sublime as mental movement: the transformation of fear-inducing appearances (objects and events) into experiences of freedom, the transfiguration of what might otherwise be perceived as monstrous or horrifying (or ridiculous) into an admixture of fear and exaltation.³⁰

³⁰ This transformation, of course, may first involve inducing fear—with fear itself seen as a rhetorical effect. Nonetheless, the sublime proper (i.e., the Kantian sublime) consists in pleasure's mediation by displeasure, that is, in the simultaneous feeling of repulsion *and* attraction.

If, as Farrell claims, rhetoric's method is to make ongoing sense of appearances—to engage “modalities of appearance” that are ambiguous or equivocal and incomplete in their particularity—then the rhetoric of the sublime does not so much make sense of appearances, does not so much make them intelligible, as it employs them so as to transcend the parameters of common sense and, along with them, the logics of rationality and prudential interest.³¹ Like the beautiful, the sublime points to a mode of feeling. But since the latter cannot presuppose common sense, and therefore cannot simply appeal to common feeling and sensibility, it must work to create and sustain the conditions of assent via affective unity or fellow feeling (*compassion*). Over against the disclosure of beauty, the communication or rhetoric of the sublime names the institution of the sublime itself, signaling at once a communicative mode of overcoming sensible determination and an emotive process for exacting consensus. But rather than appealing to commonly held beliefs, consensus in the sublime—or the sublime *qua* affective agreement—involves transcending the *sensus communis* itself.³² This is at once a constraint on the rhetoric of the sublime and a boon to the sublime's rhetorical power: it is a constraint since overcoming is “required,” but it is an advantage because, if successful, such overcoming promises to unify a broad swath of commonly held yet conflicting beliefs, interests, value, etc., and to do so expediently, without the strictures of reasoned argument and debate. The irony, of course, is that the sublime's rhetorical efficacy consists in expedience but an expedience that is independent of public deliberation and quite apart from the prudential selection of means-to-end.

³¹ I readily acknowledge that this is at some odds with the purposes to which Farrell attaches to rhetoric. See above note.

³² Indeed, according to Ned O’Gorman, this is the function of Longinus’ notion of the rhetorical sublime: “the overcoming of a practical and deliberative orientation towards public discourse” (2006, 892; see also O’Gorman 2004).

Adding to this expedience is the affective nature of the sublime as a mental movement possessing *form*. Not only does the sublime transcend *endoxa* but, as we have seen, it also constitutes an emotive force, one that is predicated on the bipolar structure of pleasure-displeasure, or displeasure's mediation of pleasure. As Žižek states, "Above all...Beauty and Sublimity are opposed along the axis pleasure-displeasure: a view of Beauty offers us pleasure, while 'the object is received as sublime with a pleasure that is only possible through the mediation of displeasure' [Kant]. In short, the Sublime is 'beyond the pleasure principle,' it is a paradoxical pleasure procured by displeasure itself.... This means at the same time that the relation of Beauty to Sublimity coincided with the relation of immediacy to mediation—further proof that the Sublime must *follow* Beauty as a form of mediation of its immediacy" (1989, 202). Despite the obscurity of Žižek's prose, what this passage clarifies is the sublime's grounding in a mediated form of pleasure. As George Santayana writes, the sublime is one of those "species of aesthetic good" which seems to please via the transformation of negatively felt value into a positive one (1955, 125). As we have seen, in Kant this transformative mediation consists in a damn-and-release mechanism, the inhibition of our vital forces followed by their outpouring, humiliation and ascendancy. But Žižek's emphasis on form underscores something else, namely, the possibility of the sublime's being instituted or put into force—the sublime as a formal, mediating operation. Yet, given the affective nature of the sublime, which, as Lyotard reminds us is "Violent, divided against, itself...simultaneously fascination, horror, and elevation" (1994, 231), the sublime as form must describe a specific type of subjective configuration.

Writing outside the history of the sublime, Kenneth Burke provides a definition of form that encapsulates both the structure and strength of this aesthetic violence. On his view, "Form is the creation of an appetite in the mind of the auditor, and the adequate satisfying of that appetite.

This satisfaction...at times involves a temporary set of frustrations, but in the end these frustrations prove to be simply a more involved kind of satisfaction, and furthermore serve to make the satisfaction of fulfillment *more intense*” (1968, 31; my emphasis). This understanding of form not only rearticulates the possibility of instituting the sublime but also highlights the emotive force of such institution. Form frustrates desire by postponing satisfaction but in so doing ultimately intensifies the resulting pleasure. The aesthetic pleasure of the sublime is thus distinguished from that of beauty in terms both of quality and intensity. So even though the sublime cannot avail itself of the spontaneous consensus afforded to the revelation of beauty, the sublime as mediated pleasure—as form—promises to yield maximum rhetorical impact by means of a vital register of aesthetic effect. Even if Kant’s sublime is nothing more than a story (à la de Man), this does not deprive it from producing real aesthetic effects: respect (*law*), admiration (amazement), and enthusiasm.³³ Here, again, we see how a deficiency on communicating the sublime can be parlayed into a powerful resource: the sublime is capable not only of transcending *endoxa*, capable of expanding the psychic borders of a collective identity, but also, with respect to the rhetoric of beauty, of producing a superior emotive force. And both of these capacities reinforce the sublime’s resistance to counter-statements or counter-movements. As a rhetorical force, Longinus tells us, the sublime is more powerful than the charming turn of phrase or the convincing argument, as “an irresistible force beyond the control of any audience” it dominates, masters the hearer (1991, 4, 24).³⁴

³³ Philip Shaw commenting on Edmund Burke’s position writes, “That such a fabrication should compel its readers to embrace a coherent political position, for King, Church and constitution, a position with real effects in the real world, is no doubt astonishing but not all that surprising” (2006, 71).

³⁴ As Longinus’ seventeenth-century translator Nicholas Boileau-Despréaux writes, “The sublime is not strictly speaking something which is proven or demonstrated, but a marvel, which seizes one, strikes one, and makes one feel” (quoted in Lyotard 1991, 97).

At the same time, however, this irresistible quality throws into relief the political stakes involved in rhetoric's instituting of the sublime. In contrast to the reasoned arguments of deliberation and debate, and in contradistinction to the allures of beauty, the *agon* characterizing sublimity constitutes a zero-sum game. Just as the category of the political consists in the friend-enemy distinction, the sublime recognizes only winners and losers, hoarding rather than sharing its spoils. Given this aspect, it is little wonder that Lyotard views a politics of the sublime as leading to "terror and massacre" (1989, 409) or that in the modern era the articulation of the sublime has become hegemonically linked, both positively and negatively, with fervent and forceful political action—in Kant and Burke, to be sure, but also in the works of Joseph de Maistre, Thomas Paine, Friedrich Schiller, George Sorel, George Bataille, and others (see Goldhammer 2005).³⁵ This tendency has led some theorists and critics to deprecate the employment of the sublime in politics. Donald Pease, for instance, writes, "Despite all the revolutionary rhetoric invested in the term, the sublime has, in what we could call the politics of historical formation, always served a conservative purpose" (1984, 275). Ned O'Gorman, while largely agreeing with Pease's assessment, lays stress on the *rhetorical tendency* of the sublime to serve such a univocal political purpose, arguing that the sublime "tends to grant political power to the owners and managers of rhetorical power," thus often helping to "reify rather than challenge dominant power" (2006, 905). Indeed, rhetoric is never a matter of necessity, never fulfills an "always." Inasmuch as the power of the sublime derives from rhetoric's aesthetic effectivity, the political purpose with which the sublime can be aligned is (necessarily) a matter of probability contingency; that is, the *politics* of the sublime is a matter of "fixing" appearances so that they accord with a certain vision of order and of maintaining this fixity over the long-

³⁵ Nevertheless, Lyotard does allow for what he refers to as "an aesthetic of the sublime in politics" (1992, 85). This aesthetic, he argues, would work on the understanding that for "Ideas, there are no presentable objects—there are only *analogia*, signs, hypotyposes" (84).

range. The opposition between Kant's "An Old Question" and Edmund Burke's *Reflections* as emblematic of this rhetorical axiom as it is of the division between liberal (or republican) and conservative perspectives.

Although this contingency does not do away with the sublime's conservative tendency, its capacity to grant or deprive power signals the continued need for existing regimes to colonize or establish control over the production of sublime effect. Political valence aside, "Sublimity," argues James McDaniel, "is...not just an aesthetic category concerning the commerce between form, matter, and idea; it is a political category concerning *power*."³⁶ Whereas Lyotard, Pease, and O'Gorman see this power as grounds for dismissing the political valence of the sublime—O'Gorman going so far as to refer to the political sublime as "an oxymoron"—what McDaniel remind us is that politics, whatever else it may be about, concerns power, since it is constitutes a mode of experience by means of which "we are forced into a relationship of admiration" or respect (2000, 54). Consequently, the nature of sublime effect suggests a virtually automated technique of consensual power, one that in reconciling our creative powers maintains them in a hierarchical arrangement in which reason is not only superior to the imagination but also respected and admired. Thus, without equating sublime force with political power, we can say, along with Salim Kemal, that the sublime as an aesthetic category promises to "*promote a unity between individuals on the basis of their subjectivity*" and to do so forcefully—violently—without wooing and without reasoned debate, establishing a community of feeling subjects who are linked by ineffable reciprocity of affect and aesthetic judgment (1986, 76). But this community in no way bears the horizontal markings of egalitarianism. As a function of vertical

³⁶ See also Terry Eagleton, who argues over against poststructuralists like Lyotard and Derrida that rather than seeing the sublime only in terms of "a point of fracture and fading, an abyssal undermining of metaphysical certitudes," we should also leave open the consideration of how the sublime "operates as a thoroughly ideological category" (1990, 90).

reconciliation—one involving the feelings of respect and admiration—the sublime indicates the aesthetic basis of political order as such, the affective legitimation underwriting consensual subordination to a system of rule. But even though this consensual power is nearly automatic in its effects, the sublime as foundation of such effects is not. Inasmuch as the sublime is a matter of political contingency, it names the struggle over who or what can lay claim to the role of reason. Consequently, the sublime’s efficacy in strengthening commitment to a given regime hinges on its ability to convince the governed that the system of rule, and that system alone, possesses the requisite power to submit formlessness to form, to demonstrate superior might, or to represent the unrepresentable.

Nevertheless, given the contrapositional relation between reason and the imagination, the State’s entitlement to ascendancy, its “proof of reason,” is won out not through the assertion or convincing display of power (much less by means of argument) but as a result of the imagination’s failure to resist and overcome determination by reality. But this failure does more than reveal a cognitive incapacity; it creates feelings of disharmony and displacement. As Terry Eagleton astutely puts it, “the sublime is a kind of anti-aesthetic which presses the imagination to extreme crisis, to the point of failure and breakdown, in order that it may negatively figure forth the Reason that transcends it” (1990, 91). If in judgments of beauty we ascribe to an object a felt harmony of our own creative powers—“the consciousness,” according to Eagleton, “that we are at home in the world” (1990, 85)—then in the case of the dynamical and mathematical sublime we are, as Joshua Gunn and David E. Beard put it, unsettled and threatened, made to feel not at home but homeless, painfully aware of our finitude (2000, 275). Colonizing the sublime in the service of order is thus, in the first instance, a matter of prefiguring that order’s dominance by bringing about a crisis in the imagination. And this crisis consists both in the subject’s feeling

out of joint internally, with itself, and externally with regard both to the demands of reason and the sensible world. In this way, the relationship between governments and the governed more than parallels that between reason and the imagination. For just as the ascendancy of reason is inscribed in the imagination's failure to transcend the sensible nature, so too, the superiority of governments is inscribed in the inadequacy of the imagination to rise above the world of needs and desire and attain expert knowledge. Political authority, in other words, relies on the inability of the governed to choose the good solutions that will solve societal problems, to comprehend the state of things (the "givens") and cipher the dictates of objective necessity. Notwithstanding that every system of rule presupposes this inability, political authority cannot assume that the governed sufficiently understand their limitations. And, of course, this is no more than a euphemism for the governing maxim that the ruling order cannot simply bank on humility or submission on the part of the governed but must create or at least facilitate the circumstances under which the population comes to understand and accept its inferiority. Indeed, what Kant misses in his controlled enthusiasm for the French revolutionaries is that the revolution, along with the support it inspires, is not so much a stimulus for the sublime as it is made possible by the political order's failure to effectuate sublime feeling and judgment. If the sublime may tend to support, as O'Gorman argues, the dominant order, then it does so by prefiguring that order's ascendancy, and this can only happen by dominating or humiliating the population by means of the imagination. Rhetorically, this debasement of the imagination functions much like a prolegomenon or *proem* to the politicization of the sublime, pave the way for the articulation of this capacity to a governing intelligence. In terms of Burke's notion of form, it prefigures the superiority of reason by negatively recalling and then postponing satisfaction in one's appetite for harmony and accord—both within oneself and with respect to one's felt relationship to the

world. However, to the extent that this recollection is caught up in the process of instituting aesthetic legitimation for ruling order (or aesthetic coloring), it is always already caught up in a system of political representation—one that is to varying degrees hierarchical and grounded in the conventional symbols and structures of authority. The institution of sublime form does not begin with elevation but with an aesthetic crisis resulting from the imagination's inferiority in relation to the demands of reason as well as to the so-called demands of necessity or, aesthetically, what Kant calls the determination of sensible nature. That is, political control over the sublime demands that the system of rule produces or reactivates the affective conditions that enable or justify hierarchy, and this requires the domination of the governed by means of the imagination.

Given this prefiguration by means of failure, the articulation of reason with political order requires that the state first demonstrate this failure by persuading the population of its rational inadequacy. Such demonstrations proceed by eliciting this deficiency in connection with the inability of the governed either to grasp the totality of things, in the case of the mathematical sublime, or to resist and overcome something that possesses dominion, in the case of the dynamical. That is, the savings gained in merely having to demonstrate inferiority is counterbalanced by the exigence of having to accomplish this failure by means of humiliating the imagination with respect to fear-inducing objects and events. Rhetorically, then, the range of chaotic, boundless, and terrifying objects of phenomenal experience are not obstacles but constitute a species of "the available means of persuasion." But this persuasion, as we have seen, is one that shares little in common with the rhetoric of argument and debate, coinciding instead with techniques of a purely motivistic, borderline coercive, nature. When tied to the ongoing project of political instauration, the mathematical and dynamical forms of sublimity amount to

something other than aesthetic modes of experience: they are two distinct but overlapping types of strategies for creating a community united by the repulsion that it feels toward objects of overwhelming formlessness and/or overpowering might, as well as the subsequent repulsion felt toward the community itself, which forms the basis for its self-understanding. This repulsion, as we have seen, is characterized by a sense of estrangement, humiliation, and inadequacy, by the feeling of displacement occasioned in part by the qualities of certain phenomena but also by the strategies whereby these qualities are highlighted, fixed, and made to appear as if they are insurmountable for the population of the governed. As instruments of political consensus, fear-inducing objects create or renew the conditions of affective subordination by eliciting the pain of inadequacy and incompleteness, the displeasure of unassuaged desire—of failing to submit formlessness to totality or to demonstrate a capacity superior to the power of dominion—the humiliating awareness of ignorance and inferiority. Consensus is thus cemented around the fear of a society grouped around the idea of what amounts to a protectionist police state. At the same time, this consensus creates a community of sentiment that, all things considered, is nothing more than a community of fear. Nevertheless, this fear for certain empirical, phenomenal objects translates into respect or admiration for that which is revealed to possess a superior power. In this way, the sublime is not simply a rhetorical means of securing political order; it is a strategy of *realpolitik*, specifically, of practicing a politics of fear while disguising the fact.

In the brief history of the twenty-first century, such humiliation of the imagination, and of the citizenry, is not the exception that proves the rule but the rule itself, the affective or rhetorico-aesthetic standard of political legitimacy. How else to understand like the apocalyptic coverage of September 11, 2001, and in the ensuing weeks, or the running commentary provided by news reporters, talking heads, government officials, and the like? The round-the-clock

bombardment of overpowering images accomplished nothing short of the debasement of a population, activating the social imaginary only to demoralize its inadequacy. By continuously exhibiting the devastating effects of sheer violence, the authorities and their media constructed, in Kant's language, a power "superior to the resistance of something that itself possesses power"—that is, the imagination of the governed, or what in academic parlance is euphemistically referred to as civil society. As a result, the citizenry was made to feel not only helpless but also humiliated, held captive to a vision machine that fixed the appearance of devastation as an act of terror and a declaration of war, a matter to be handled by the technocratic operators of military power and counterintelligence.³⁷ The situation was more or less the same with respect to the events leading up and surrounding to the US Congress' passing in 2008–2009 of "TARP" (Troubled Assets Relief Program) and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.³⁸ Although the object of terror changes, from *terrorism* to "the economy," the framing and the message remain virtually the same: "the givens and solutions of [the problem] simply require people to find that they leave no room for discussion, and that governments can foresee this finding which, being obvious, no longer even needs doing" (Rancière 2010, 1). In both instances, the object of fear—being at once too powerful and too chaotic or formless—is such that nothing can be done except what the state and its apparatus of government are already doing. At least this is the implicit message. And yet, the government does not have to prove its claim to

³⁷ On the rhetorico-political effects of 9/11 *qua* spectacle, see Paul Virilio's *Ground Zero* and Retort's *Afflicted Powers* (esp., 16–37).

³⁸ Although the so-called bailout did not enjoy the widespread, intense enthusiasm that could easily be observed in the effort to eradicate Islamic-fundamentalist terrorism in the Middle East, we should keep in mind that the bailout was only ever possible by virtue of the reliably obliging US taxpayers. To be sure, the dependable assistance was given begrudgingly. But its very facticity reveals the presence and effectiveness of sublime respect as much as the absence or attenuation of enthusiasm. For a recent and critical look at the intensive history of the bailout and its ongoing aftereffects, see investigative journalist Matt Taibbi's "Secrets and Lies of the Bailout." Despite the righteous indignation that fueled the short-lived Occupy Wall Street demonstrations, the public exhibition of anger and resentment was isolated or at least concentrated in the financial sectors of major US cities. The major political institutions, though not loved, were merely respected, while the complicity of the state as a whole was, for the most part, respectfully ignored.

reason, does not have to convince the population that the determination of reality is its exclusive province. Because the establishment enjoys the “benefit of assumption,” its ascendancy is inscribed in the demonstrated inadequacy of the population; that is, the dominance of order is a function simply of the imagination’s failure either to represent the unrepresentable or to resist and overcome dominion. The articulation of order with reason simply results from the negative revelation that says in effect that the system of rule is solely accountable for all the forms of security against threats that are themselves multiform, whether terrorism, the economy, or even the weather. If such annexations carry any propositional content, it is simply the presupposed virtue of all governments, democratic or not, namely, that only political authority possesses the necessary rationality to pronounce on the state of things as well as to determine both the appropriate and the standards determining what is appropriate in the given situation. Ironically, then, the sublime’s transcendence of common belief and opinion culminates—as it does in the tragic—in the restoration of a core political belief: the necessity of the state and its apparatus of government.

Although this crisis in imagination prefigures the ascendancy of order *as* reason, something else is required to ensure a population’s affective commitment to order or—what amounts to the same thing—the consensual subordination of the governed to their government: in a word enthusiastic approval of hierarchy as such. In the absence of coercion or force, submission to political authority entails the controlled elevation of the dominated, or the expansion of its so-called “vital forces.” Hence the rhetorical efficacy of sublime form—its dam-and-release mechanism— which, by temporarily inhibiting the forces of the imagination, “leads to their outpouring that is all the stronger.” Unlike the sublime affects of respect and admiration, enthusiasm results not from the presentation of inadequacy as such but from the imagination’s

subsequent collaboration with sublime form, viz., the imagination's identification with reason's ascendancy (see Edmund Burke 1968, 58–9). In large part, this imaginary participation is provided by the democratic principle of free and popular decision, which is proclaimed sovereign over the people's choice of its governors and thus regarded as the legitimating principle of all democratic regimes. In representing the *demos*, government speaks and acts on behalf of the people, as a “We,” activating the conditions under which the so-called represented identify with those words and deeds and, consequently, with the proposed solutions to societal problems. Nevertheless, this collaborative expectancy, or vicarious elevation, must itself be made subject to vertical control, and this requires not simply humiliating the imagination but disciplining it so that the imagination's subsequent upward movement—the release of its vital forces—is rendered dependent on the substitution of political order for the capacity of reason. In other words, the state, if it is to create and sustain the affective conditions fostering assent to state rule, must establish what Michel Foucault calls “a constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination.” According to Foucault, this articulation points up the essence of discipline: increasing certain aptitudes or capacities of the body while reversing the power that might result from this increase, thereby severing that power from its corporeal origins and turning it into “a relation of strict subjection” (1977, 138). In the case of the sublime, however, this increase pertains not to the physical capacities inhering in the materiality of things but to the affective forces of feeling and judgment. Following the prefiguration of order, then, is the mediation of pleasure, the elevating collaboration by means of form, whereby the imagination feels itself reconciled with the capacity of reason, if only temporarily. While such reconciliation aids in supporting the sublime affects of respect and admiration, it goes one further by engendering enthusiasm for the fact of political hierarchy as such. If respect and admiration stem

from failure, and the presentation of inadequacy, enthusiasm for subordination results from the identification with the governing order that is believed to be capable of determining the dictates of objective necessity.

At the same time, however, if this identification with order is to reinforce rather than undermine a system of rule, then the population's pleasure in overcoming the world of needs and desires—its freedom via sublime form—must be controlled by an articulatory practice that preserves the fundamental alterity between governments and the governed, even as it elicits affective participation on the part of the governed. Perhaps the most expedient tactic for simultaneously elevating and disciplining the imagination consists in articulating fear-inducing objects with a complete political exigence.³⁹ Although political exigences can take any number of forms, the most powerful (rhetorically, aesthetically), politically advantageous, and ubiquitous is what George Kateb describes as the demand “to preserve or advance a distinctive culture or way of life” (2000, 8).⁴⁰ Unlike the plurality of specific, potentially satisfiable demands—such as the demand for higher wages or gender equality in pay—the demand for preservation does not speak to any discernible material interest; rather, it is a universal demand, which functions as an empty signifier to cancel or collapse a plurality of different interests into a chain of equivalences (see Laclau 1996, 36–46). Hence, the widespread support for “preservation”—its efficacy—results from a universalizing-equivalential kind of articulatory gesture, since, as Ernesto Laclau argues, “It is only by privileging the dimension of equivalence to the point that its differential

³⁹ By this I mean an exigence that is at once engendered and resolved by the same system of rhetoric, that that same complex of rhetorical production may both create and respond to the same exigence. On the idea that an exigence can be caused or made possible by rhetoric while simultaneously eliciting or requiring rhetoric as a means of resolution, see Scott Consigny (1974), who synthesizes the opposing views of Lloyd Bitzer (1968) and Richard E. Vatz (1973).

⁴⁰ Although Kant does not attach great importance to preservation, Edmund Burke regards the sublime as an antidote to socio-political dissolution. France Ferguson, commenting on Edmund Burke's political juxtaposition of the beautiful with the sublime, argues that “After the beautiful has been joined with physical and political entropy issuing in death, the importance of the sublime in exciting the passions of self-preservation becomes apparent” (1992, 52).

nature is almost entirely obliterated” (1996, 39). But in contrast to the operation of hegemony, whereby a particular demand becomes “the locus of equivalential effects” (43)—i.e., becomes the stand-in for the universal—the demand for preservation constitutes a pregnant nothingness, as unifying as it is empty, a rhetorical black hole that is virtually immune to concrete representation but not for that reason inefficient.⁴¹ What enables this wide-ranging, centripetal function is that the necessity implicit in preservation does not appeal to commonly held belief or opinion, does not encourage the weighing of alternative courses of action, but elicits an emotive response, one that is rooted not in the rationality of the emotions but in an ontological anxiety concerning finitude and alterity. George Bush’s slogan of September 20, 2001, that “These terrorists kill not merely to end lives, but to disrupt and end a way of life” is exemplary in this regard (*Washing Post*), as is the joint statement from 2008 by John McCain and Barack Obama describing their shared view that “The effort to protect the American economy must not fail” (Zeleny 2008).⁴² Articulating this urgent need—whether in connection with eradicating terrorism or saving the so-called new economy—amounts to a triggering of the dam-and-release mechanism that is necessary for the institution of political sublimity. At the same time this articulation prevents this double-movement from occurring independent of an awareness of the State, which substitutes for the supersensible faculty of reason. The work of rhetoric, then,

⁴¹ Again, this “un-occupied” universality is at odds with Laclau’s understanding of the hegemonic mediation of the universal with the particular. Slavoj Žižek, for instance, in explicating the efficiency of hegemony, argues, “[Each] apparently universal ideological notion is always hegemonized by some particular content which colours its very universality and accounts for its efficiency” (2008, 204). “The same goes for *every* universal ideological notion: one always has to look for the particular content which accounts for the specific efficiency of an ideological notion” (205). Although I am not interested in considering whether or to what extent “preservation” is an ideological notion, I am tacitly arguing that the rhetorical efficiency of a universal demand—which is perforce a *rhetorical* efficiency, if it is an efficiency at all—does not in every case rely on what is regarded as a “typical” representation of that universal. Indeed, the argument that “typicality” accounts for efficiency is to put the cart before the horse, or to commit an *hysteron proteron*, since it begs the question of how a particular content becomes (is made) typical.

⁴² That promise, which was not limited to US elected officials but included representatives throughout the industrialized (or post-industrialized) world, resulted in the pouring trillions of dollars, euros, yen, etc. into the financial system. “And when that response proved too feeble,” writes Greek economist Yanis Varoufakis, “our presidents and prime ministers...embarked upon a spree of nationalizing banks, insurance companies and car manufacturers that put even Lenin’s post-1917 exploits to shame” (2013, 2).

consists not so much in persuading individuals to view certain objects or events as horrifying but to interpellate them as victims, as political subjects belonging to an endangered mode of existence. As a result, this maneuver mediates a double transference: it simultaneously projects the ontological anxiety over finitude onto a political *ethos* while interiorizing a political threat as though it appertained to one's social and, by extension, one's natural being. But it accomplishes something else, too, something that results from this transference but is not reducible to it: the colonization of sublime form and the affective instauration of political order. While the exigence of preservation elicits affective outpouring, the proposed measures or good solutions provided by "democratic" governments are not the preserves of free choice but of the necessity of things—and only the state possess the expert knowledge, or rational capacity, to choose the good solutions that will solve the problems of political finitude. In the politics of the sublime, freedom is simply the misnaming of necessity.

As a capstone of the political sublime, this process, whereby the institution of sublime form is brought under political control, is cinched by the naming of the sublime object or event, i.e., what Kant describes as a subreption. As the final maneuver in the institution of sublime form for political ends, subreption ascribes the sublime to phenomenal, empirical objects of experience rather than to the mental movement. In so doing, it substitutes the names for things and, ultimately, the names as things for sublime experience. To the extent that such naming is successful, i.e., inasmuch as the name is hypostatized and comes to serve as a stand-in for the affective experience, it appropriates for itself, in abbreviated form, the power of sublime experience. In philosophical discourse, subreption of "the sublime" is usually tacit—a practical shorthand descriptor for a somewhat complicated affect. In the domain of politics, however, the sublime subreption is at once explicit and strategic. Although the substantivized adjective "the

sublime” is seldom encountered in political rhetoric, names meant to recall sublime feelings are quite common, at least as common as the institution of sublime form. Indeed, such names serve not only to elicit the sublime but, in so doing, to control, *indefinitely*, the discursive parameters for treating of what are, in effect, sublime objects. Indeed, subreptions such as “9/11” and “The Bailout,” or, before them, “Pearl Harbor” and “The New Deal,” help to reveal an archaeology not of knowledge but of rhetorical effectivity (see Foucault 1972).⁴³ What these and other similar epithets disclose is the relative success or failure of attempts to conceal while simultaneously exploiting the subjective basis of the sublime, of attempts to objectify, or *realize*, the persuasiveness of form in a name that requires little else than its continual invocation. The effect of such names and naming is nothing less than the fixing of appearances already fixed by virtue of sublime form, and this capping effect is the reason why subreption rounds out rhetoric’s institution of the political sublime. For it renders the sublime “thing,” the sublime interpretation of that thing, incontestable, enabling and irrationalizing the emotional gestalt of fear, awe bordering on terror, enthusiasm, and respect by making it “right” and indisputably so. Nevertheless, given that sublime form is instituted and accomplished hierarchically via the ascendancy of authority or executive power, this objectifying maneuver simultaneously works to

⁴³ This is closely related to Michael Calvin McGee’s notion of the ideograph, i.e., an ordinary language term found in political discourse. It is also refers to “a high-order abstraction representing collective commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative goal” that “warrants the use of power, excuses behavior and belief which might otherwise be perceived as eccentric or antisocial, and guides behavior and belief into channels easily recognized by a community as acceptable and laudable” (1980, 15). On a speculative note, I propose the following analogy: a (political) subreption (e.g., 9/11) is to an ideograph (global terrorism) what a proper noun is to a common noun. However, whereas the distinction between types of nouns is one of relative uniqueness the relationship between subreptions and ideographs is also causal. That is to say, subreptions have the power to generate new or resignify existing ideographs. While, as noted above, the effect of such ideographic subreptions may be the assurance of what Farrell calls “propitious conduct and judgment,” the advantage may be at cross-purposes with “the people” and the democratic ideal of a self-determining or autonomous society. As McGee asserts: “The end product of the state’s insistence on some degree of conformity in behavior and belief, I suggest, is a rhetoric of control, a system of persuasion presumed to be effective on the whole community. We make a rhetoric of war to persuade us of war’s necessity, but then forget that it is a rhetoric—and regard negative popular judgments of it as unpatriotic cowardice” (6). Propitious, indeed.

shore up those very same symbols and structures of authority and to justify the outpour of its vital forces, the reassertion of its ethico-political vocation: “freedom.” And this simply means that the interpretation or subreption of an event as sublime is more than an act of framing. It is an enactment; the act of framing is at once the construction of the frame itself. That is, the making sublime *is* the sublime, but a key component of this making is, of course, concealing this fact—which is actually two: 1) that the sublime is man-made artifact and 2) that the product consists in the process, which is then erected and preserved as a living fossil, a potentially ever-renewable form of rhetorical energy.

3.4 THE LIMITS OF FORM

In this chapter, I have focused on the question of whether and how the sublime, conceived as an intense mental movement or negative pleasure, could function rhetorically to shore up affective support for the prevailing political order, and of whether in so doing the sublime could either avoid creating or in some way mitigate the countervailing effects of alienation and resentment. In answer to this two-step-question, I turned to Kant’s “Analytic of the Sublime,” arguing that his theory of the sublime lends itself to the following interrelated themes: the institution of the sublime as a rhetorically formalizing operation; the disharmony and eventual reconciliation of the faculties of reason and the imagination; and the transformation of overwhelming and overpowering appearances into an experience of transcendental freedom. In addressing these themes, I argued that the Kantian sublime, which includes two species of sublimity (the dynamical and the mathematical), subserves the preservation of the existing political order by reifying the hierarchical system as subjective experience, by reproducing the inequalitarian relationship of the governed to a higher political authority in the interplay of the

imagination and reason. And yet, as I have shown, this argument itself raises the further question of how, given the autonomy of sublime experience (i.e., the independent and pleasant awareness of reason's ascendancy, of our own supersensibility), a system of rule could colonize the sublime such that the experience of freedom is felt as a function of the prevailing order. For the owners and managers of rhetorical power, this appropriation requires a rhetorical maneuver that would short-circuit the free play of the imagination and reason and in such a way that the governing apparatus could annex to itself or serve as the stand-in for reason—thus, surreptitiously anthropomorphizing the faculty as Governmental State Reason. As I argued, this can be orchestrated by fixing fear-inducing appearances so that they appear to threaten not the sensuous finitude of individual subjects but a collective way of life—whatever individual subjects may suppose that to mean. Laminating this colonizing sequence is the proper naming of such appearances, what Kant terms subreption, whereby a name like “Pearl Harbor” serves as a cleanup or whitewashing device that dissimulates the act of rhetorical institution while simultaneously constituting an automatically renewable source of future political mobilization and continual assent to hierarchical rule.

In contrast to the tragic, what is perceived to be at risk in the sublime fixing of appearances is not the collective identity of a *politeia*, or constitutional way of life, but a bare, generic way of life, only minimally determined and even then by other empty signifiers such as citizenship or purchasing power. What is more, the quantity of such “empty” threats is greater than those that are hegemonized by a particular political identity, and in two respects: first, the universal appeal of a generic way of life is virtually all inclusive, covering the broadest possible swath of public sentiment; second, affective responses at the individual level are maximally intense (demoralization acting as the limit beyond which the maximum begins to undo itself à la

Burke's crushing terror). These gains in rhetorical effectivity protect sublime institution from the kinds of resistance that jeopardize the political utility of cathartic *mīmēsis*, since what is perceived to be at risk of destruction is not limited by one's political preference or commitment to a particular form of government. As a blank slate upon which people project whatever they hold most dear—e.g. relationships, quality of life, hopes and aspirations, etc.—“way of life” does not easily admit of opposition. Although both the tragic and the sublime are fundamentally non-rational models of rhetorical effectivity, the sublime is, overall, more resistant to critique.

Nevertheless, as a rhetorical operation in the service of hierarchy, the sublime discloses its own characteristic weak spots. This weakness is subsumable under the heading of the limits of form. The pleasure of the political sublime, which is to say the accomplishment of the sublime as formalized mental movement, consists in no small part in the anticipation that the humiliation of the imagination—and of the people—will resolve itself in a moment of vicarious triumph and exaltation. But this means that the welled-up assertion of Reason's supremacy, the expected demonstration of redemptive political authority, is ultimately promissory in nature, resembling a loan predicated on the good faith of an imminent return. The state, in other words, on pain of rhetorical ineffectivity must at some point make good on their tacit promise either to submit formlessness to the rational explanation, in the case of economic crises, for instance, or to demonstrate a power superior to objects possessing might, as instanced in so-called acts of war or terrorism. Good faith holds out only for so long before it turns into its opposite, that is, before the institution of sublime form retroactively unravels itself—which occurred at the heels of the bailout of the U.S. financial system circa 2008 but took more than a decade with respect to the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq.

When political authority fails to offer tangible, unambiguous proof of success—rationally or militarily—its status is effectively demoted from that of all-powerful Reason to the scrap yard of imaginative failure, leading to the possibility of enthusiasm’s re-emergence as an imaginative striving to attain to reason itself, that is, apart from political order. In the next chapter, I examine a third and final category of negative aesthetics, the uncanny, which, in contrast to the sublime, offers a way around the limits of form. By creating an environment of anxiety tied to a procession of unfalsifiable maleficence, the uncanny renders incomprehensible the very distinction between government failure and success, thus constituting perhaps the most resilient and easily renewable source of affective legitimacy.

CHAPTER 4 – UNMAKING REALITY:

UNCANNY FIGURES AND THE RETURN OF THE PERSONAL SAFETY STATE

It is not possible for us to cement an enduring peace unless we join together in a way against the barbarians, nor for the Hellenes to attain to concord until we wrest our material advantages from one and the same source and wage our wars against one and the same enemy. – Isocrates 380 B.C.E.

The people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same way in any country. – Gestapo Reichsmarschall Hermann Goring 1946

*We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors...and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do. – Senior adviser to former President George W. Bush, as quoted in the *New York Times Magazine*, October 17, 2004.*

Today, the uncanny is an accepted and popular concept in various disciplines of the humanities, recently crossing over to the “hard” science fields of robotics and artificial intelligence. Genealogically, however, the uncanny is unique among other aesthetic and anti-aesthetic concepts. Compared to the tragic and the sublime, the uncanny as a distinct concept is still quite young. According to Anneleen Masschelein, “The term was not considered as an aesthetic category and there was no theoretical or philosophical discourse before the twentieth century” (2011, 3). A theory of the uncanny before the twentieth century can only resort to the

occurrence of the word or to descriptions of the phenomenon in literary texts and artistic sources. By common consent, writes Martin Jay, “the theoretical explanation for the current fascination with the concept is Freud’s 1919 essay, ‘The Uncanny’” (1998, 157), according to which the uncanny is the feeling of fear and unease that arises when something familiar becomes strange and unfamiliar. Despite earlier forays into the uncanny—e.g., attempts by Ernst Jentsch in the field of psychiatry, Friedrich Schelling in idealist philosophy, and Rudolf Otto in theology—Freud’s essay was the first to elevate the phenomenon and the word “*unheimlich*” to the status of a concept.¹ Moreover, his foundational essay remains the primary focus of attraction in the continuing fascination with the uncanny in both culture and theory (see Royle 2003, 14). At the same time, however, the Freudian uncanny exceeds the boundaries of a strict psychoanalytic framework, opening up onto the fields of philosophy, linguistics, anthropology, and literary criticism. Hence, the concept is unique not only among aesthetic or anti-aesthetic concepts but also among other Freudian, or at least Freudian-psychoanalytic, concepts.

This popularity and polyvalence notwithstanding, the uncanny has yet to be articulated with the ends of rhetoric or considered seriously as a means of persuasion, political or other.²

¹ Freud himself was very much aware of these earlier attempts to theorize the uncanny and cites both Jentsch and Schelling in “The Uncanny.” Indeed, the essay, in part, reads as a critical response to Jentsch’s definition of the uncanny as “intellectual uncertainty.”

² Perhaps one of the reasons why the uncanny has yet to be articulated with rhetoric is its ambivalence vis-à-vis the classical rhetorical tradition. For, if by the uncanny, we understand “the opposite of what is familiar,” then it would seem that the uncanny both corroborates and contradicts fundamental principles of the classical rhetorical tradition. On the one hand, it confirms Aristotle to make language unfamiliar as a means of achieving clarity, recommending the use of stylistic devices that defamiliarize language—so long as the writer or speaker arrives at the mean between ordinary speech and poetic language as appropriate to the subject. “To deviate [from prevailing usage],” he states, “makes language seem more elevated; for people feel the same in regard to word usage as they do in regard to strangers compared with citizens. As a result, one should make the language unfamiliar; for people are admirers of what is far off, and what is marvelous is sweet” (2007, 3. 2. 2–3; see also 1987a1458a18–58b5). On the other hand, it seems to conflict with Cicero, who writes, “[The] study of the other arts draws as a rule upon abstruse and hidden sources, whereas all the procedures of oratory lie within everyone’s reach, and are concerned with everyday experience and with human nature and speech. This means that in the other arts the highest achievement is precisely that which is most remote from what the uninitiated can understand and perceive, whereas in oratory it is the worst possible fault to deviate from the ordinary mode of speaking and the generally accepted way of looking at things” (2001, 1.12) Yet as in the case of the sublime, there is an important distinction between the uncanny as it

The most notable exception to this non-relationship is the French poststructuralist Jacques Derrida, who, in a series of lectures on the future of Marxism, explores the “political” dimension of Marx’s uncanny figuration. Nevertheless, the analysis does not treat of the uncanny as an instrument of political legitimacy or consensus making. Rather, it focuses on the “spectral” quality of Marx’s current status, insisting on the structure of uncanny haunting, which Derrida sees as exemplified by the ghost’s return or, more precisely, a sense of waiting for that return. Derrida’s uncanny is thus not so much a negative affect, or source of discomfort, as a trope signifying all that is excluded, denied, or ignored by the global hegemony of the capitalist state (e.g., the underemployed and the permanent members of a growing global diaspora but also the contradictions of the free market, the spread of nuclear weapons, inter-ethnic wars, and the hypocrisy of international law). In that capacity, Marx’s uncanny specter—his ghost’s return—serves as a representative figure or bricolage of the many specters that necessarily haunt the structure of capital’s state-sanctioned, state-enforced hegemony. Given that hegemony, according to Derrida, “organizes the repression and thus the confirmation of a haunting” (1994, 37), no interior can be made safe from the incursions of the alien other. Yet beyond serving as a watchword for radical critique or as a bulwark against the temptations of conjuring away the repressed, Derrida’s re-imagining of the Freudian uncanny appears to lack any real rhetorical power. This is an unfortunate oversight, since, as we have seen, threats to an interior—whether to a constitutional arrangement or way of life—can serve as effective means of creating and maintaining subjective adherence to the state and thus of instaurating political order. Hence,

refers to a quality of language and the uncanny as an affect realized or made possible by means of language. As I argue in this chapter, the uncanny’s rhetorico-political value consists not in the use of unfamiliar language but in creating, via symbolic expression, a sense of unreality characterized by anxiety and fear. With respect to contemporary communication scholarship, virtually no precedent exists for analyzing the uncanny from a rhetorical perspective. Notable exceptions include Joshua Gunn’s *Modern Occult Rhetoric*, in which he acknowledges Freud’s “The Uncanny” in relation to occultism (241), and Bradford Vivian’s *Being Made Strange*, which attempts to defamiliarize the rhetorical tradition by reconsidering its principles in light of poststructuralism.

from a theoretical standpoint, the uncanny remains naïvely inexperienced vis-à-vis the ends of rhetoric, particularly the aim of securing political legitimacy.

Although Freud did not speculate as to the political uses of the uncanny—much less develop it in the direction of political legitimacy and the rhetoric of the state—his insight into the affective nature of something familiar suddenly becoming unfamiliar highlights the uncanny’s potential to further the state’s rhetorical demands. This prospect, I argue, consists not in the return of the repressed but in the return of the surmounted. According to Freud, the uncanny admits of two species: the first, deriving from repressed childhood complexes, centers on the individual and involves a harking back to earlier, single phases in the evolution of the sense of self; the second, which originates in superseded stages of psychosocial development, evokes those surmounted, superannuated modes of thought belonging to “the old *animistic* view of the universe” (2003b, 147). In each case, the emergence of the sense of the uncanny is owing to the return of something once familiar but since “forgotten,” that is, either repressed by the individual psyche or surmounted by the social and its storehouse of common knowledge and belief. Consequently, argues Freud, the uncanny is in fact nothing new or alien. As a type of objectified displeasure, the uncanny refers to something that is familiar and old-established in the mind but whose familiarity has become alienated via a process either of individual repression or societal supersession. Although the first species has undoubtedly received more scholarly attention than the second one (Derrida’s “hauntology” included), only the psychosocial variety makes possible a certain rhetorical effect that by means of blurring the boundary between fantasy and reality raises the question of material reality and the possible suspension of belief in its actuality. Unlike the first species, which lays stress on psychical reality and the undifferentiated ego, the second rekindles surmounted modes of thought and thus translates the *residua* of outmoded beliefs as

newly fashioned animistic convictions. Hence, the return of the surmounted, as opposed to the repressed, is the return—in secular, post-Enlightenment guise—of the belief in a hostile universe replete with omnipotent, secret harmful forces and malefic, quasi-supernatural Others. That such animistic convictions are not consciously acknowledged or explicitly affirmed is no contradiction of the reality or likelihood of uncanny fear and dread. Indeed, the uncanny presupposes an active yet non-conscious conflict between animistic convictions and those belonging to a rational-scientistic worldview. Without it, the uncanny would simply lose its conditions of possibility.

In this chapter, I demonstrate how the state exploits the figure of the malefic, alien Other so as to give rise to a sense of the uncanny, specifically, to the emergence of an existential fear vis-à-vis the return of superannuated modes of thought. I argue that this existential quality of the uncanny, combined with the perceived omnipotence of the figural Other, facilitates an imminent shift in political legitimation by state power from the assurance of constitutional protection to that of the personal safety state, thereby reducing the state's political legitimacy to a basic policing function. But unlike the rhetorical institution of the political sublime, which secures subjective adherence to state power negatively, by means of an implicit promise of future success, the figural dimension of the uncanny Other engenders and maintains the specter of an unfalsifiable threat, the reality of which can neither be independently verified nor denied. Hence, the procession of the uncanny Other, I argue, enables the state to nourish and exploit an environment of fear, one that is equal parts real and neurotic. At the same time, it grants the state monopolistic right to determine its own level of unfalsifiable success in combating the Other's incursions.

4.1 FREUD'S UNCANNY:

FEAR OF UNCERTAINTY AND THE RETURN OF THE SURMOUNTED

By common consent, the theoretical inspiration for the twentieth-century's fascination with the concept of the uncanny is Freud's 1919 essay "The Uncanny" ("Das Unheimliche"). The essay, which purports to engage in an aesthetic investigation from the perspective of psychoanalysis, understands aesthetics not in the restricted sense of theories of beauty but as relating "to the qualities of our feeling" or affects. Accordingly, the psychoanalyst's interest in aesthetics tends to focus on those particular areas that have been marginalized or neglected in the specialist literature, particularly those areas that elicit feelings of displeasure or create a sense of unease. Freud thus singles out the uncanny as the most representative of such aesthetic topoi. "On this topic," he argues, "we find virtually nothing in the detailed accounts of aesthetics, which on the whole prefer to concern themselves with our feelings for the beautiful, the grandiose and the attractive—that is to say, with feelings of a positive kind, their determinants and the objects that arouse them—rather than with their opposites, feelings of repulsion and distress" (2003b, 123). As an aesthetic concept, the uncanny belongs to the realm of the frightening, of what evokes a sense of fear and dread.³ Yet, as Freud points out, the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense and is commonly confused with what arouses fear in general. Nevertheless, he insists that we may presume that there exists "a specific affective nucleus," which would justify the use of a special conceptual term and distinguish the "uncanny" within the field of the frightening.⁴ In trying to isolate the nature of this nucleus from fear in

³ Although Freud could just as easily have considered other negative aesthetic categories—such as the sublime, the tragic, or the grotesque—his choice to single out the uncanny is probably a result of marginal status in the history of aesthetics, though this status has significantly shifted as a result of the increasing popularity of the uncanny in scholarly discourse.

⁴ Before attempting to isolate the uncanny's so-called "affective nucleus," Freud identifies what he sees as the primary difficulty attendant upon the study of the uncanny, viz., that people differ greatly in their sensitivity to this

general, Freud pursues two courses of inquiry: the first concerns the semantic content of the word “*unheimlich*,” while the second is essentially thematic in its orientation, examining a range of persons and things, sense impressions, experiences and situations that tend to evoke a sense of the uncanny and then inferring its affective nucleus from what all these have in common. Both approaches, argues Freud, lead to the same conclusion, namely, “that the uncanny is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar” (2003b, 124).⁵ Thus, as a distinct type of fear, Freud understands the uncanny as the feeling of unease that arises when something familiar suddenly becomes strange and unfamiliar.

Starting with an investigation into the semantic content that has accrued to the German word “*unheimlich*,” Freud follows Friedrich Schelling in defining it as the name for everything that ought to have remained hidden and secret and has become visible or come into the open (2003b, 132).⁶ At the same time, Freud observes, “[It] seems obvious that something should be frightening precisely because it is unknown and unfamiliar. But of course,” he adds, “the converse is not true: not everything new and unfamiliar is frightening.” In opposition to the 1906 essay by Ernst Jentsch, according to which the essential condition for the emergence of a sense

kind of feeling, acknowledging that in comparison with, say the sublime, the uncanny is exceptionally obtuse in this regard. In response to this potential problem, Freud points out that such affective variability is not unique to the uncanny but plays an important part in other areas of aesthetics, too. As we will, from a rhetorical standpoint, this obtuseness is not so much a theoretical shortcoming, or difficulty for aesthetics, as it is a resource of symbolic effectivity.

⁵ In a work of around the same period, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (or. pub. 1921), Freud employs the concept of the uncanny to make sense of the phenomenon of mass formation, arguing, as he does in “The Uncanny,” that “the characteristic of uncanniness suggests something old and familiar that has undergone repression” (1959, 73). Indeed, as Anneleen Masschelein contends, “The Uncanny” is situated “at the intersection of different generic affiliations in Freud’s oeuvre” (2011, 20). In addition to figuring into Freud’s inquiry into group psychology, the uncanny also plays a role in his analysis, in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, of seemingly meaningful coincidences, déjà vu and superstitions, prophetic dreams, and presentiments (1901/1965, 330 ff.), and, in *Totem and Taboo* (1913/1950), of motifs from primitive societies and mythology. Earlier, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud includes a footnote on the uncanny feeling associated with the fear of being buried alive (1899/1955, 400n3.).

⁶ In English the nearest semantic equivalents for *unheimlich* are “uncanny” and “eerie,” though etymologically the word corresponds to “unhomely.” For Schelling’s definition and proposed origin of the uncanny, see Anthony Vidler’s *The Architectural Uncanny* (26–7).

of the uncanny is intellectual uncertainty, Freud argues that, “Something must be added to the novel and the unfamiliar if it is to be uncanny” (2003b, 124 –5; see Jentsch 1996). Likewise, if the theorist is to grasp the essence of the uncanny, then he or she must go beyond what Freud sees as “a mere equation of the uncanny with the familiar” and inquire into that which ensures an essential, or at least a non-accidental, link between the unfamiliar and the frightening (2003b, 125). On Freud’s view, it is language that provides the basic, albeit preliminary, material for uncovering this relationship, especially given the linguistic negation of the prefix “un,” in both “*unheimlich*” and “uncanny.” Without any knowledge of the development of the German or English language, we can see that the lexical form of the uncanny derives from its linguistic contrary, “*heimlich*” or “canny” (read: “homey” or “homely”).⁷ If we take things step further, Freud points out, and examine the semantic content of the word “*unheimlich*,” what we notice is the lexical ambivalence that word “*unheimlich*” shares with its linguistic contrary, “*heimlich*” or “homey.” Much like the etymological root of the word “taboo,” which encompasses the antithetical meanings of “sacred” and “unclean” (see Freud 1950, 24, 32, 84), “*unheimlich*” diverges in two contrary directions, comprising a sense both of the familiar (homely) and unfamiliar (unhomely). This semantic ambivalence, which, according to Freud is a residual trace of primitive language, suggests if not the immediate or representative cause of the uncanny then at least the linguistic substratum underlying those objects or motifs that may evoke in us a sense of the uncanny.⁸ Thus, in an unexpected reversal, Freud concludes that the uncanny does not

⁷ On the conceptual and linguistic derivation of words from definitional context or from words of opposite meaning, see Kenneth Burke’s notion of the paradox of substance (1969b, 21–6).

⁸ In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud claims that it was common in primitive languages for words to encompass their negation or opposite meaning (e.g., “altus” means “high” and “deep,” “sacer” means “sacred” and “accursed”). Although the ambivalence of ancient languages disappeared in the course of cultural development, Freud maintains that its traces can still be found in modern languages. In accordance with such linguistic ambivalence, the reactions words like “taboo” are equally ambivalent, eliciting the simultaneous response of “awe” and “disgust,” attraction and repulsion. See *Totem and Taboo*, ch.2, “Taboo and Emotional Ambivalence.” As we will see, the experience of the uncanny is itself both disturbing and pleasurable on account of the residual ambivalence of *heimlich-unheimlich*.

stem from the sudden appearance of something alien or unfamiliar but “is in some way a species of the familiar” (2003b, 134). What was meant to remain secret and hidden is somehow related to a conflicted desire to return “home,” to what was once familiar, comfortable, or intimate. From a theoretical point of view, it would appear as though the sense of familiarity accomplishes two things: it establishes a non-accidental link, or affective predisposition, between the unfamiliar and the frightening; in so doing, it rounds out the affective core of the uncanny, distinguishing it as a special type of fear.

Notwithstanding the theoretical advance afforded by the semantic content of *heimlich-unheimlich*, language alone, Freud recognizes, cannot account for the conditions under which the familiar becomes uncanny and frightening, nor can it serve to identify those objects and situations liable to elicit a feeling of the uncanny. Thus, following Jentsch, Freud chooses the example of E.T.A. Hoffman’s 1817 short story “The Sandman” as an occasion for an exploration of uncanny effects as well as for an investigation into how the familiar could play midwife to a kind of fear or unease (see Hoffman 1982).⁹ According to Jentsch, *“In story-telling, one of the most reliable artistic devices for producing uncanny effects easily is to leave the reader in uncertainty as to whether he has a human persona or rather an automaton before him in the case of a particular character. This is done in such a way that the uncertainty does not appear directly at the focal point of his attention, so that he is not given the occasion to investigate and clarify the matter straight away”* (1996, 13). That is, Jentsch singles out intellectual uncertainty as the exemplar of uncanniness, specifically, the uncertainty, doubt, or hesitation concerning the

⁹ Although not entirely convinced by Jentsch’s arguments, Freud takes them as a starting point for his own investigation, if only because Jentsch reminds Freud “of one writer who was more successful than any other at creating uncanny effects,” i.e. Hoffman (2003b, 135). Freud’s quotation of this passage, cited in “The Uncanny,” is altered to read: ‘One of the surest devices for producing slightly uncanny effects through story-telling...is to leave the reader wondering whether a particular figure is a real person or an automaton, and to do so in such a way that his attention is not focused directly on the uncertainty’ (135).

boundaries between our living selves and our dead, automaton-like simulacra.¹⁰ In this connection, he refers to the impressions made on us by waxwork figures, ingeniously constructed dolls, and automata. Hence, it is little wonder that in his analysis of “The Sandman” Jentsch focuses on the seemingly animate doll Olympia, to the exclusion of all other potentially uncanny motifs. Without disputing the possibility either that such objects may tend to produce intellectual uncertainty or that such hesitancy may itself provoke “slightly uncanny effects,” Freud argues that this motif of the doll “is by no means the only one responsible for the incomparable uncanny effect of the story, or even the one to which it is principally due” (2003b, 136).¹¹ Against this interpretation, Freud claims that the Sandman’s principal source of uncanniness attaches directly to the figure of the Sandman and therefore to the idea of being robbed of one’s eyes.¹² Appealing to psychoanalytic experience, Freud traces the uncanny element of blindness back to castration anxiety, i.e., the anxiety caused by the infantile castration complex, whose displaced effects, he argues, account for the fear evoked by Hoffman’s Sandman figure (see Freud 1962, 61–2). In other words, Freud’s interpretive intervention results in ascribing the emergence of the sense of the uncanny to an infantile factor, specifically, the *repressed* childhood complex stemming from the fear of castration.¹³ Where infantile complexes that have been repressed return with vivid and real force, an uncanny effect is produced (as is the case with the sandman of Nathaniel’s

¹⁰ Without acknowledging Jentsch’s influence, Todorov, unlike Freud, emphasizes hesitation as fundamental to uncanny experience (1975, 44–6).

¹¹ Indeed, Freud only takes issue with Jentsch’s privileging of intellectual uncertainty as the paradigmatic source of the uncanny. After critiquing Jentsch’s position, he even allows that “[An] uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary, when a symbol takes on the full function and significance of what it symbolizes, and so forth” (2003b, 150–51).

¹² The relationship between the Sandman and the eyes is not unique to Hoffman but dates back to traditional Northern European folklore. As a mythical character appearing in many children’s stories, the Sandman is said to sprinkle sand or dust on or into the eyes of a child at night to bring on dreams and sleep.

¹³ Freud suggests that there are possibly other examples of the uncanny, also present in “The Sandman,” which likewise derive from infantile factors. But rather than generalizing from this one example, Freud merely proposes an object-strategy whereby the theorist or critic inquires into those motifs that produce an uncanny effect to see whether they too can reasonably be traced back to infantile sources.

childhood who returns in the later figure of Dr. Copelius to reactivate the torturing fear from blindness harassing the hero of the story).

On the basis of this discovery, Freud provisionally emends his definition of the uncanny so that the uncanny is “something familiar that has been repressed and then reappears, and that everything uncanny satisfies this condition” (2003b, 152). Hence, the conflicted desire to return “home,” to that which is familiar, manifests in the uncanny as an overcoming of the split or alienation that is expressed as anxiety about castration (either imagined in the past or feared in the future) (see Jay 1998, 157–8). At its deepest level, Freud suggests, the desire is for reunion with the mother’s body.¹⁴ Yet the experience of undergoing the return of the repressed is not straightforwardly pleasurable, since the desire for such overcoming is at once disturbing and pleasurable—never capable of achieving complete satisfaction or of discharging tension (see Ronen 2009, 42–8). If there is a secret nature to the uncanny, then it consists in the return of the repressed. For Freud, then, the uncanny names that species of the frightening in which “the frightening element is something that has been repressed and now returns” (Freud 2003b, 147). That is, the experience of the uncanny *brings back* something familiar that has undergone repression. Although Freud grants that not every motif capable of producing an uncanny effect may be as identifiable as the Sandman, he maintains that some of the most prominent of such motifs will tend to involve this “harking back to single phases in the evolution of the sense of self, a regression to times when the ego had not yet clearly set itself off against the world outside and from others” (143). And as the example of the Sandman illustrates, the uncanny materializes something of an impossible point of view: it is a point of view that combines the primary perspective of the infant with that of the adult who has already repressed his/her primary desire.

¹⁴ The desire for such reunion is heightened when the uncanny involves the womb fantasy. “Here too,” writes Freud, “the uncanny [the ‘unhomely’] is what was once familiar [‘homely’, ‘homey’]” (2003b, 151; see also 1955, 399–400).

Despite the difference in approach between Freud's thematic and semantic inquiries into the uncanny, his examination of the Sandman motif—or repression thesis—confirms his earlier supposition regarding the interrelationship between uncanny fear and the ambivalence of *heimlich-unheimlich*: “[If] psychoanalytic theory is right in asserting that every affect arising from an emotional impulse—of whatever kind—is converted into fear by being repressed, it follows that among those things that are felt to be frightening there must be one group in which it can be shown that the frightening element is something that has been repressed and now returns. This species of the frightening would then constitute the uncanny, and it would be immaterial whether it was itself originally frightening or arose from another affect.” Consequently, this explains “why German usage allows the familiar (*das Heimliche*, the ‘homely’) to switch to its opposite, the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*, the ‘unhomely’)” (2003b, 147–8). For the uncanny element is not so much what is new or strange but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed. Indeed, according to Freud, the negative prefix “*un-*” is not merely a linguistic negation but an indicator of repression (151; see Masschelein 2011, 8–9). At the same time, this linguistic sign parallels Freud's hypothesis in *Totem and Taboo* concerning the residual traces of primitive or ancient languages in modern languages. Just as infantile factors continue to influence the individual psyche—cropping up incognito as symptoms in daily life and in pathology—so too, certain archaic remnants common to primitive languages maintain an active, albeit “clandestine,” presence in the normal, everyday commerce of social life.¹⁵ In the case of language, as in the case of the mind, the uncanny points to the return of something familiar that has been lost or made inaccessible either to the individual or collective unconscious.

¹⁵ Freud's thesis in *Interpretation of Dreams* that the mechanisms of contradiction and negation do not operate in the unconscious provides a further, though retroactive, link between onto- and phylogenesis. Like the unconscious, primitive languages frequently included words that encompassed their negation or opposite (see 318, 326, and 337).

In addition to substantiating Freud's conjecture about "*unheimlich*," the connection between psychic repression and linguistic residua points up the convergence via the uncanny of the axes of ontogeny (the development of the individual) and phylogeny (the development of society), centered around the cornerstones of ambivalence, castration, repression, narcissism, death, and art. According to Freud, language not only signals the workings of unconscious mechanisms like repression but also carries the traces of earlier stages of psychosocial development, particularly, argues Freud, "the old *animistic* view of the universe" (2003b, 147).¹⁶ In other words, the ambivalence that characterizes "*unheimlich*" is a vestige of the ambivalence that characterizes the primitive mind as well as its language; the conception of animism, Freud claims, is a direct consequence of this ambivalence. The complex etymology of the word "*unheimlich*" is an emanation of this ambivalence connected with the primitive mind, and, in keeping with Freud's observations on the relationship of psychoanalysis to aesthetics, it elevates the notion of uncanniness (as well as the "aesthetic") to a more general realm of the affect, rather than merely "artistic" or "literary." Although the word is not in itself prone to elicit uncanny effects, it suggests the fundamental interrelatedness of onto- and phylogenesis, of individual and collective psychology. As Freud demonstrates throughout *Totem and Taboo*, culture and society develop according to the same mechanisms at work in the development of the child. As a living receptacle of earlier stages in human development, language thus preserves in fossilized form an

¹⁶ According to Freud, this view is characterized "by the idea that the world was peopled with human spirits, by the narcissistic overrating of one's own mental processes, by the omnipotence of thoughts and the technique of magic that relied on it, by the attribution of carefully graded magical powers (*mana*) to alien persons and things, and by all the inventions with which the unbounded narcissism of that period of development sought to defend itself against the unmistakable sanctions of reality" (op. cit.). See also the third chapter of *Totem and Taboo*, "Animism, Magic and the Omnipotence of Thoughts."

animistic conception of the world, one that corresponds to the “primitive” stage in infantile development and amounts to the phylogenetic equivalent of narcissism.¹⁷

In light of this connection between the psyche and the social, Freud’s allusion to a primary phase when the ego has not yet been differentiated from the external world points to a second source of the uncanny: “It appears that we have all, in the course of our individual development, been through a phase corresponding to the animistic phase in the development of primitive peoples, that this phase did not pass without leaving behind in us *residual traces* that can still make themselves felt, and that everything we now find ‘uncanny’ meets this criterion that it is linked with these remnants of animistic mental activity and prompts them to express themselves” (2003b, 147).¹⁸ Different stages succeed one another but not without leaving traces, meaning that the advent of a new stage does not entail the complete disappearance of the preceding one. Hence, just as the experience of the uncanny brings back something familiar that has been repressed, so too, the uncanny can also emerge where primitive beliefs that have been superseded gain a sudden affirmation (for instance, when a wished-for death of a hated person is actualized soon afterward, taken as a proof that a wish of the heart can gain power in actual life as part of a primitive animistic view of the world surrounding the subject).¹⁹ Anything that reminds modern man of such superseded beliefs, such as ambivalence, projection, or the omnipresence of thought, is experienced as uncanny, just as the return of repressed childhood complexes. Consequently, argues Freud, “[The] uncanny element we know from experience

¹⁷ Indeed, the primitive stage of animism—with its characteristics of ambivalence and the like—is the phylogenetic equivalent of narcissism, what Freud in “The Uncanny” refers to as “primordial narcissism” (142).

¹⁸ As Anneleen Masschelein notes, this passage from “The Uncanny” summarizes the main elements of the third essay of *Totem and Taboo*, Freud’s most ambitious work and his only sustained attempt to explore the interrelatedness of onto- and phylogenesis (see Masschelein 2011, 27–35).

¹⁹ This example, recapitulated by Freud in “The Uncanny,” is a story of “a patient” (i.e., the Rat Man) who ascribes his beneficial stay in a spa to a certain room adjacent to that of a beloved nurse. When he returns there and the room turns out to be occupied, he wishes for the new occupant to die. When this actually happens, he attributes it to the “omnipotence of his thoughts” (Freud 1909/1989, 312–13) and characterizes it as an “‘uncanny’ experience” (Freud 2003b, 146)

arises either when repressed childhood complexes are revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs that have been *surmounted* appear to be once again confirmed” (155). On this view on, then, the return of surmounted, superannuated modes of thought constitutes a second source of uncanny effects, a second species or variety of the uncanny. If in the return of the repressed, the uncanny derives from repressed childhood complexes, then in the return of the surmounted the emergence of a sense of the uncanny stems from the remnants or residual traces of animistic convictions. Whereas in the former the uncanny traces its origins back to an infantile factor, in the latter the uncanny results from what Freud comes close to calling the primitive factor.

Despite the fairly obvious distinction between individual pathology and society or culture, Freud maintains that with respect to the uncanny the distinction between primitive and infantile origins is often a hazy one. Toward the close of “The Uncanny,” he writes, “[We] must not let our preference for tidy solutions and lucid presentation prevent us from acknowledging that in real life it is sometimes impossible to distinguish between the two species of the uncanny that we have posited. As primitive convictions are closely linked with childhood complexes, indeed rooted in them, this blurring of the boundaries will come as no great surprise” (2003b, 155). At least one commentator, Anneleen Masschelein, affirms the significance of this qualifying move, arguing, “In the final analysis, it does not matter whether a topic belongs to individual or collective psychology, nor does it make a difference whether Freud is dealing with pathology or with phenomena from daily life, with anthropological data or with superstitions, with mythology or with literature.” Regardless, she concludes, “Psychoanalysis ultimately aims at the processes or the machinery behind certain phenomena and shifts” (2011, 33). And yet this claim begs the question, to what extent is the uncanny a psychoanalytic concept? Masschelein

herself raises doubt concerning the relationship between the uncanny as a concept (what she refers to as an “unconcept”) and the psychoanalytic framework, highlighting the fact that the uncanny was at no time a major psychoanalytic concept. What is more, argues Masschelein, “Even if the uncanny is the Freudian uncanny, it can no longer be considered a psychoanalytic concept and one may even wonder whether this was ever the case” (4). For that reason, she argues, the uncanny “was not so much tainted by the criticisms against psychoanalysis and could be rediscovered and reclaimed in the wake of the poststructuralist predilection for the marginal and the forgotten” (127).²⁰ As Susan Bernstein puts it, the uncanny is ambulatory and frustrates efforts to pin it down (2003; see also Hook 2003).²¹ Even Freud—who in the classificatory opening remarks of “The Uncanny” takes great pains to demonstrate the suitability of psychoanalysis vis-à-vis the uncanny—repeatedly suggests that the uncanny in art (if not in life) exceeds the grasp of psychoanalytic inquiry and should be studied by aesthetics.²² Finally, when the essay is considered within the framework of Freud’s phylogenetic theory of art, the peculiar power of the writer to create or suppress uncanny effects is situated on a more primitive level than that of the ontogenetic approach to the modern psyche.²³

²⁰ Notable poststructuralist appropriations of the Freudian uncanny include those by Hélène Cixous (1976), Jacques Derrida (1994), and Nicholas Royle (2003). Although each brings a unique perspective to bear on the uncanny, these perspectives are united in their attempt to reframe the concept as a style of thinking, writing, or teaching that perpetually postpones closure, one that questions and destabilizes the status and possibility of concepts. Nicholas Royle, whose work stands out for being the first monograph devoted to the subject, sums up this method of thinking as that which “is never fixed, but constantly altering... (the) unsettling (of itself)” (2003, 5). In a radical expansion of Freud’s concise definition, the uncanny thus amounts to a strategy and an attitude of defamiliarization and perpetual critique.

²¹ In that respect, the uncanny calls to mind the itinerancy characteristic of both the Older Sophists and their practice of a “tactical” rhetoric, that is to say, “a calculated action [or procedure] determined by the absence of a proper locus” (de Certeau 1984, 37; see also Poulakos 1995, 25–32). Rhetoric also shares with the uncanny a resistance to easy definition. As Wayne Booth puts it, “No one definition will ever pin rhetoric down” (2004, 3).

²² Nevertheless, given Freud’s reduction of aesthetics to the study of beauty and its effects, it is unclear how aesthetics as he understands it could adequately deal with the sense of the uncanny.

²³ On Freud’s theory of art as a phylogenetic phenomenon, see *Totem and Taboo* (113) and his analysis of literature in “The Creative Writer and Daydreaming” (2003a).

Regardless of whether the uncanny is a psychoanalytic concept, that is, of whether psychoanalysis is uniquely suited to account for uncanny effects, Freud makes a convincing case for why we ought to treat the varieties of the uncanny separately—or at least, why we would be justified in so doing—namely, “the reality test.” Unlike the uncanny effects associated with the castration complex, the womb fantasy, and other complexes stemming from a range of infantile factors and repressed desires, those associated with “primitive,” animistic convictions tend to involve a testing or questioning of the parameters of our given, taken-for-granted reality, the objectivity of established, agreed-upon reality. On this point, Freud remarks, “Where the uncanny stems from childhood complexes, the question of material reality does not arise, its place being taken by psychical reality. Here [at the level of desire and childhood complexes] we are dealing with the actual repression of a particular content and the return of what has been repressed, *not with the suspension of belief in its reality*” (my emphasis). Although one “could say that in the one case a certain ideational content was repressed, in the other the belief in its (material) reality...such formulation probably stretches the concept of ‘repression’ beyond its legitimate bounds” (2003b, 155). In place of repressed childhood complexes, the species of the uncanny that derives from superannuated modes of thought materializes via the production of effects associated with the omnipotence of thoughts, instantaneous wish fulfillment, secret harmful forces, unintended repetition, the return of the dead, and the double (or *doppelgänger*)—virtually any superstition we believe we have surmounted. According to Freud, the conditions enabling such uncanny effects do not stem from something that was once familiar and then *repressed*; rather, they result from those jarring moments when we are faced with the apparent reality of something that we have until now considered to belong strictly to the realm of the

imaginative, that is, when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, as in the case of the return of the dead:

We—or our primitive forebears—once regarded such things as real possibilities; we were convinced that they really happened. Today we no longer believe in them, having surmounted such modes of thought. Yet we do not feel entirely secure in these new convictions; the old ones live on in us, on the look-out for confirmation. Now, as soon as something *happens* in our lives that seems to confirm these old, discarded beliefs [these animistic convictions], we experience a sense of the uncanny, and this may be reinforced by judgments like the following: So it's true, then, that you can kill another man just by wishing him dead' (2003b, 154).²⁴

Thus, over against his reservation about whitewashing the convergence of onto- and phylogenesis, or the homology between the individual and collective psyche, Freud maintains that the division between “the primitive” and “the infantile” remains “an important and psychologically significant distinction,” from a theoretical point of view, to be sure, but also from the perspective of so-called “real-life experience.” Theoretically, as we have seen, the species of the uncanny that arises from superannuated modes of thought involves a question—or, more accurately, a questioning—of material reality, whereas the uncanny stemming from childhood complexes does not. Rather than approach the former from the standpoint of repression, it is more accurate to take account of “a perceptible psychological difference” and

²⁴ Literary critic Stanley Cavell, in his 1986 Tanner Lecture, devotes his attention to exploring “the uncanniness of the ordinary” in everyday experience (1988, 153–78). As something that happens in our lives, the uncanny is not so much a source of fear but a kind of “decreation” of ordinary reality, a receptivity to the “familiar invaded by another familiar,” which reveals it in a new light” (1989, 47). For a social-psychological account that sees the uncanny as arising from an admixture of differing senses of the familiar—i.e., of two familiars foreign to one another—see Brady Wagoner (2008).

describe the animistic convictions of “civilized man” as having been more or less completely *surmounted*. At the same time, the range of real-life experiences that give rise to this variety of the uncanny is wider, more diverse, than that which engenders a return of the repressed. For that reason, Freud concludes, the uncanny we know from experience belongs mainly to that species deriving from outmoded beliefs. For not only does the return of surmounted beliefs impinge on the modern mind’s rationalistic orientation toward the world but it also threatens to do so with relative frequency, insofar as such convictions have not been wholly and definitively rejected by the unconscious.

At least three implications result from Freud’s dissociation of superannuated modes of thought from repressed desires vis-à-vis the uncanny, all three of which stem directly from his notion of the reality test. First, it reveals that condition which is necessary for securing the emergence of a sense of the uncanny. As Freud admits, the revised definition of the uncanny—according to which the uncanny signals the reappearance of something familiar that has been repressed—is incomplete, and on two counts: a) it is couched only in terms of repression; b) it posits a necessary but by no means sufficient condition. But even if we were to expand the definition so that the familiar encompassed both repressed desires *and* outmoded beliefs, it would still lack a condition that, given a fear-inducing person, place or situation, could serve as a virtual guarantee for the production of uncanny effects. On this point, observes Freud, “Our proposition clearly does not admit of its logical converse. Not everything that reminds us of repressed desires, or of superannuated modes of thought belonging to the prehistory of the individual and the race, is for that reason uncanny” (2003b, 152; cf. 124–5). For that reason, he argues, “[We] should probably be prepared to assume that other conditions, apart from those we have so far laid down, play an important part in the emergence of the sense of the uncanny”

(153). Although Freud nowhere explicitly identifies such conditions, the type of fear elicited by the return of surmounted modes of thought provides one. When distinguishing between the two species of the uncanny, he describes the fear elicited by superannuated beliefs in terms of the reality test: the fear involved in this variety of the uncanny “is thus solely a matter of testing reality, a question of material reality” (154). Significantly, this condition would appear to be unavailable, or inaccessible, to that species deriving from childhood complexes and the excessive stress that is laid on psychical reality, an implication which once again raises the question of whether and to what extent the uncanny is a psychoanalytic concept—or even to what degree psychoanalysis is equipped to treat of it. For while the condition of “reality-disturbance” does not guarantee that everything reminding us of our prehistoric animistic convictions will engender uncanny effects, it suggests that only such reminders can produce a sense of the uncanny and, moreover, that the return of the repressed is uncanny only insofar as it is attached in some way to the return of a surmounted belief that disturbs our stable sense of reality.

This condition of reality testing suggests a second implication resulting from Freud’s distinction between two species of the uncanny, namely, a renewed significance of Jentsch’s interpretation of the uncanny. In other words, Freud’s stipulation regarding the fear of the uncanny more or less directly corroborates Jentsch’s original hypothesis that the essential condition for the emergence of a sense of the uncanny is intellectual uncertainty. Without acknowledging any positive connection to Jentsch’s work, Freud ultimately defends the position that a sense of the uncanny “can arise only if there is a conflict of judgment as to whether what has been surmounted and merits no further credence may not, after all, be possible in real life” (2003b, 156). This summation of Freud’s argument thus reveals what “The Uncanny” has gone to great lengths to conceal: the ambiguity animating *unheimlich-heimlich*, which evokes a special

feeling of fear, does in fact issue from intellectual uncertainty, viz., from a conflict of judgment appertaining to the nature of reality and our belief in it. Even so, Freud's tacit confirmation of Jentsch's insight into the uncanny alters the determinant of intellectual uncertainty. Although Freud's uncanny is triggered in the subject by an insoluble hesitation, this indecision is not finally grounded in a conflict of judgment as to whether a given object can be cognized as animate or inanimate (as in the case of the doll Olympia); rather, fear of the uncanny stems from the appearance of indeterminacy, or the introduction of doubt, vis-à-vis the markers of agreed-upon, common sense reality and from the intuition that such signposts are not as stable and reliable as we believe them to be.

Tzvetan Todorov, in his structuralist approach to the genre of the fantastic, captures the sense of this uncertainty when describing what he considers the uncanny "in the pure state," that is, as a distinct, albeit broad, literary genre: "In works that belong to this genre, events are related which may be readily accounted for by the laws of reason, but which are, in one way or another, incredible, extraordinary, shocking, singular, disturbing or unexpected, and which thereby provoke in the character and in the reader a reaction similar to that which works of the fantastic have made familiar" (1975, 46). The uncanny, in other words, produces a reaction of hesitation or indecision (the predominant response to the fantastic) mixed with feelings of fear and foreboding, one that, as Todorov claims, is shared by both protagonist and reader alike. Hence, the uncanny materializes in the perceived inability to dismiss *with certainty* the reality of some thing—whether object, event, or situation—which common sense holds to be an impossible unreality, and in combination with the fear that this uncertainty affords. In the final analysis, then, it is the suspension of belief in a common sense, *doxastic* reality that constitutes the essential condition for the emergence of the uncanny and its associated effects—the return of the

surmounted that unexpectedly appears as an ontological blip in our perceptions of phenomenal, empirical world. As a result, objects embodying the ambiguity of animate/inanimate may very well cause the sense of the uncanny but only insofar as this intellectual uncertainty disturbs the parameters of accepted reality.

Finally, in keeping with Todorov's remarks about the uncanny in literature, Freud's roundabout vindication of intellectual uncertainty has implications for the relationship between literature (fiction specifically) and life, between so-called "fictional reality" and what passes, for Freud, as "real life," or "common reality." According to Freud, "The distinction between what is repressed and what is surmounted cannot be transferred to the uncanny in literature without substantial modification, because the realm of the imagination depends for its validity on its content being exempt from the reality test" (2003b, 155). The paradoxical upshot, then, is that "many things that would be uncanny if they occurred in real life are not uncanny in literature," and, vice versa, "that in literature there are many opportunities to achieve uncanny effects that are absent in real life" (155–6). Be that as it may, Freud's strict demarcation between "common" and "fictional" reality (i.e., between real-life experiences and those of readers of imaginative literature) overlooks the extent to which the uncanny functions to complicate the division between these two realms of experience. Although fiction may indeed afford "possibilities for a sense of the uncanny that would not be available in real life" (2003b, 157), the *sine qua non* of the uncanny undermines if not the intelligibility of such a distinction then at least its claim to irrefutable, objective verity. For if the emergence of the uncanny results from something akin to an ontological blurring effect, such that the impossible impinges on the real, then it is reasonable to assume that one of the possible byproducts of such ontological ambivalence would be the increasing resemblance of common, everyday reality to any number of the fictional realities with

which experience has furnished us. The opposite, of course, does not hold: the uncanny in fiction does not admit of a similar colonization on the part of real-life experience—even if the fiction under question is an uncanny example of social realism. Nevertheless, once we reject the rigid, naïve opposition between common and fictional reality, it becomes possible if not necessary to extract the concept of the uncanny from its purely psychological/psychoanalytic context and treat it as a category with larger social and cultural implications, indeed one with a certain political charge. And after Freud, this liberation is exactly what takes place.

4.2 THE UNCANNY GROWS UP, SORT OF...

JACQUES DERRIDA ON SPECTERS AND HAUNTINGS

Jacques Derrida is perhaps the first theorist to pick up on this latter implication with the aim of expanding the concept so as to explore the nature of literature, reading and the dialogical text, conceptuality, *mimesis*, and, most important, the relation between reality, fiction, and truth. In a footnote to his 1970 “The Double Session” (included in his widely read collection, *Dissemination*), he frames the intellectual uncertainty characterizing the uncanny in terms of “undecidability,” which he sets apart from other forms of lexical ambivalence, e.g., that of words containing their opposite term:

We are referring less to the text in which Freud is directly inspired by Abel (1910) than to *Das Unheimliche* (1919), of which we are here, in sum, proposing a rereading. We find ourselves constantly being brought back to that text by the paradoxes of the double and of repetition, the blurring of the boundary lines between ‘imagination’ and ‘reality,’ between the ‘symbol’ and the ‘thing it symbolizes’.... The reference to Hoffman and to the fantastic, the considerations

on the *double meaning* of words...(to be continued). (1981, 220 n32; see also 248 n52 and 268 n67)

The exact passage to which Derrida is referring emphasizes not the lexical ambivalence of *heimlich-unheimlich* (the lexical inquiry in “The Uncanny”) but the confusion that arises when the boundaries between fantasy and reality begin to blur—i.e., “when a symbol takes on the full function and significance of what it symbolizes” (Freud 2003b, 150). In other words, the undecidability that Derrida highlights vis-à-vis fiction and reality is a function of the ambivalence, initiated by the uncanny, between literary and referential language.²⁵ This potential to create ontological ambivalence between the fictive and the non-fictive, between life and fiction, attracted a number of literary theorists to the Freudian uncanny, thinkers such as Samuel Weber (1973), Hélène Cixous (1976), Harold Bloom (1981), Neil Hertz (1985), Stanley Cavell (1988), and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe (1998). Their dense, complex, and imaginative discussions facilitated the concept’s dissemination into a broad range of disciplines and fields, each of which entailed new questions and perspectives—in architectural and visual studies (Vidler 1992; Donald 1995), cultural history (Castle 1995; Collins and Jervis 2008), sociology

²⁵ According to Anneleen Masschelein, Hélène Cixous’ “Fictions and Phantoms, written in 1972, just two years after Derrida’s “The Double Session,” is very much motivated by the same concerns and metaphors, “to the extent that it could be read as an elaboration of Derrida’s comments on ‘The Uncanny’” (2011, 112–13). Indeed, the word “undecidable” occurs with reference to the very same passage in Freud. Cixous writes, “We shall allow ourselves to be guided at times by and against Freud’s design, by what is certain and by what is hypothetical, by science and fiction, by the object that is symbolized and by that which ‘symbolizes.’ We shall be guided by ambivalence and in conformity with the undecidable nature of all that touches the *Unheimliche*: life and fiction, life-as-fiction, the Oedipus myth, the castration complex, and literary creation” (1976, 526). On the implications for the reception of the conceptual status of the word “*unheimlich*,” see Cixous (ibid., 528). Almost twenty years later, undecidability would prove crucial to Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s understanding of the uncanny in *Typographies: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, where he writes: “in its undecidability, the *Unheimlich* has to do not only with castration (this *also* can be read in Freud), the return of the repressed or infantile anxiety; it is also that which causes the most basic narcissistic assurance (the obsessional ‘I am not dead’ or ‘I will survive’) to vacillate, in that the differentiation between the imaginary and the real, the fictive and the non-fictive, comes to be effaced (and mimesis, consequently, ‘surfaces’)” (1998, 195).

(Gordon 2008), religious studies (Jonte-Pace 2001), “trauma theory” (Heischman 2002; Connolly 2003), even robotics and artificial intelligence (Mori 1970/2012), to name only a few.²⁶

Nevertheless, it is Derrida’s treatment of Marx in lectures he gave at the University of California, Riverside, in 1993, that deserves pride of place with respect to translating the uncanny to the realm of politics and thus to adding an explicitly political dimension to the uncanny. In his *Specters of Marx*, Derrida returns to the uncanny to place it at the heart of his study of what is left of the legacy of Marx after the fall of the Communist regime, foregrounding the uncanny, “spectral” quality of Marx’s current status. Remaining largely faithful to the Freudian framework, Derrida examines this legacy as a return of the repressed, while at the same time making the self-consciously untimely gesture of facilitating the resurrection of the legacy’s corpse, or more precisely its ghost. “At a time when a new world disorder is attempting to install its neo-capitalism and neo-liberalism,” Derrida remarks, “no disavowal has managed to rid itself of all of Marx’s ghosts. Hegemony still organizes the repression and thus the confirmation of a haunting. Haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony” (1994, 37). Thus for Derrida, the uncanny functions as a destabilizing concept that disturbs not readers of fantastic literature or neurotic patients but the ethical and political order, disrupting the triumphal discourse of liberal democracy and undermining, with a sense of worry, the euphoria of the market economy.

As both Ernesto Laclau (1996) and Martin Jay (1998) argue, the significance of Derrida’s resuscitation of the Marxian legacy consists not so much in his analysis of the continuing relevance of Marx’s actual arguments as in his insistence on the structure of uncanny haunting,

²⁶ This dissemination coincides with a stabilization and relative reduction of meaning when the concept is canonized. The most common links established in this double-movement are either to Todorov’s theory of the fantastic or to the deconstructive-poststructuralist readings of the concept but “always,” according to Masschelein, “with Freud as the common denominator” (2011, 126).

which, according to Derrida, is exemplified by a sense of waiting for the ghost's return.²⁷ Over against the rhetoric of one-directional temporality—captured in the eschatological, sometimes celebratory, themes of the “end of history,” the “end of Marxism,” etc.—Derrida defends a repetitive time that is perpetually “out of joint,” one that inaugurates “a new thinking of borders, a new experience of the house, the home and the economy” (1994, 219). With recourse to Heidegger's concept of *Unheimlichkeit* (unhomeliness), Derrida argues that the seemingly positive category of “*heimlich*”—itself deeply fraught in Freud's discussion of its ambivalence with “*unheimlich*”—expresses the same ambivalent structure that characterizes Heidegger's description of *Dasein*'s relation to the world, namely, the “structure of unfulfilled longing for an eerily familiar home that, however, was never really inhabited and therefore can never be regained” (Jay 1998, 160). In typical deconstructionist fashion, Derrida concludes by arguing that no interior can be made safe from the incursion of the alien, exterior other, that no inside—whether that of a concept (e.g., being, time) or of an ethico-political order (e.g., liberal democracy)—can ultimately be protected against infiltrations originating in an excluded outside. Just as in the case of the doll Olympia, where indeterminacy erodes the distinction between animate and inanimate, for Derrida, the alternative between the canny and the uncanny is likewise undecidable. However, by blending the uncanny with Heideggerian unhomeliness, he elevates undecidability from the domain of psychology (and literature) to that of ontology. On this view, the uncanny is not simply a psychological sentiment but also a fundamental dimension

²⁷ Although original (and somewhat notorious), Derrida's redefinition of the uncanny in terms of a post-Marxist hauntology was nevertheless anticipated in 1977 by Jeffrey Mehlman, in his *Revolution and Repetition. Marx/Hugo/Balzac*. Focusing on the motif of the specter in the *Communist Manifesto* and relating it to Freud's uncanny, Mehlman attempts to reveal what the text represses in a series of (compulsive) repetitions and displacements.

of *Dasein*, one that, according to Heidegger, “enters into the existential ‘mode’ of the ‘*not-at-home*’” (2000, 233).²⁸

Rather than abandon the political import of the uncanny, Derrida articulates this existential-deconstructionist conclusion to what he refers to as Marx’s “spectrology.” According to Derrida, plural “specters” are needed to prevent the homogenization of the human project into “a totalized metaghost or singular *Geist*,” to disrupt the installation of a fundamental *horizon*, that which establishes both the limits and the terrain of any possible object and that, as a result, makes impossible any “beyond”; the specters of Marx—or those who are excluded from the abstracting, dominating power of Capital, the displaced and exiled—constitute just such a plurality and so deny the accomplishment of final closure, the presence of full emancipation. This preventative or disruptive capacity, Derrida, argues, is the hidden telos of Marx’s own project. In a pun on “ontology,” Derrida proposes a “hauntology,” by which he understands a philosophy of haunting, of the return of the repressed, in which the spectral takes precedent over being and existence, juxtaposing this hauntology to the more traditional ontology of metaphysics. He argues, “[It] is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept. Of every concept, beginning with the concepts of being and time. That is what we would be calling here a hauntology. Ontology opposes it only in the movement of exorcism. Ontology is a conjuration” (1994, 161). Thus, the uncanny becomes not a source of fear and unease—or at least not that alone—but a bulwark against the dangerous temptations of conjuring away, or

²⁸ As Heidegger writes in *Being and Time*: “In anxiety, one feels ‘*uncanny*.’ Here the particular indefiniteness of that which *Dasein* finds itself alongside in anxiety, comes proximally to expression: the ‘nothing and nowhere.’ But here the ‘uncanniness’ also means ‘not-being-at-home’ [*das Nicht-zuhause-sein*]. . . . On the other hand, as *Dasein* falls, anxiety brings it back from its absorption in the ‘world.’ Everyday familiarity with the world collapses. *Dasein* has been individualized, but individualized as Being-in-the-world. Being-in enters into the existential ‘mode’ of the ‘*not-at-home*.’ Nothing else is meant by our talk about ‘uncanniness’” (233).

exorcising, plural specters in the name of a redeemed and totally realized whole, the political (phylogenetic) equivalent of narcissistic wish-fulfillment—a restoration of a true *Heimat*.

Of course, to introduce the word “*Heimat*” is to foreground the political stakes in Derrida’s resurrection of the uncanny, for, according to Martin Jay, “historians have long recognized the talismanic power of that word in a Germany that yearned for the secure, communal identity that modernization seemed to destroy.” Notwithstanding the occasional leftist appropriation, “*Heimat* served as a rallying cry for a nostalgic right that sought its home in a national or *völkisch* community” (1998, 161). Derrida’s Marxian reworking of the uncanny, with its valorization of hauntology as an alternative to the ontology of Western ethico-political order, is in fact aimed at the latest version of this desire for canny belonging, a nostalgia that, at the time of Derrida’s writing, had begun taking shape in the integral nationalisms that had emerged in the wake of Communism’s collapse. Seen in this light, the institution of the United States Department of Homeland Security was as much about exploiting and renewing the desire for communal identity as preventing terrorist attacks within the *Hiemat*. Certainly—and at the very least—the desire for an alleged lost moral wholeness and sanitized domesticity was instrumental in justifying the government’s widespread security efforts over the long-range.

Despite the continued relevance and critical cachet of the uncanny, Derrida’s elevation of spectral uncanniness to an inherently benign solvent of homogeneity and totalizing closure is not without its difficulties. First, from a political or critical-theoretical point of view, there is an irony, and certain naïveté, in embracing the uncanny, wholesale, as an equally talismanic antidote to narcissistic, illusory notions of home (and of the homeland). As Jay points out, “[One] salient form of the return of the repressed in the current scene is, after all, precisely the purifying nationalism and ethnonarcissism that hopes to exorcise the alien within and achieve

authentic cultural integrity” (1998, 161). Likewise, the recurring campaign to re-empower the so-called “moral majority” and restore respect for Victorian-Protestant values and solutions to social problems by the Ann Coulters and Glenn Becks of the world indicates a desire for the return of a phantasmatic home, for a familiar home that was never really occupied. Hence, argues Jay, “Not every ghost who comes back is like that of the anti-totalizing Marx whose untimely virtue Derrida now defends.... There is, in other words, a danger in the valorization of uncanny repetition without resolution and the power of haunting per se. For in celebrating spectral returns as such, the precise content of *what* is repeated may get lost” (161–2).²⁹ Counterbalancing any potential unsettling effect of the uncanny—which, when realized, works to undermine fixed and definitive distinctions between the fictive and the non-fictive, the inside and the outside, the animate and the inanimate—is the uncanny’s potential to express the very homesickness, the same desire for ontological solidity, that Derrida’s hauntological project tries so hard to undo. It is as if for every specter signifying the return of Marx there is another specter either of equal or greater strength that is a testament to the conjuring power of anarcho-capitalism and the self-enclosed narcissism of “free” markets.

This tension between the uncanny as bulwark against restorative, fundamentalist nostalgia and the uncanny as a presage of a redeemed ethico-political wholeness suggests another difficulty in Derrida’s hauntological reworking of the Freudian uncanny. From a rhetorical perspective, the indiscriminate valorization of the uncanny not only overlooks the content of what is repeated, conjured, or instantiated but also the rhetorical efficacy of political appeals to the uncanny as such. Martin Jay’s critical observations, though they hint at the unifying power of the uncanny in the hands of a nostalgic right, similarly fail to address the

²⁹ As Jeffrey Mehlman points out, “[What] is *unheimlich* about the *unheimlich* is that absolutely *anything* can be *unheimlich*” (1977, 6).

uncanny in terms of its symbolic effectivity. At most, his arguments concerning the appeal to a lost moral wholeness imply that the uncanny is politically persuasive only insofar as it rekindles and promises to satisfy the longing for the beautiful. To be sure, beauty, as we have seen, is foremost among the resources of persuasion. But, as we have also seen, the uncanny, while quasi-aesthetic in nature, is not a variation of the beautiful. Derrida's analogical use of repression, coupled with his de-emphasis of the role of fear, conceals the affective nature of the Freudian uncanny. Unless we are to concede the uncanny to hauntology, we must agree with Ruth Ronen, who argues that the uncanny, as an aesthetic feeling "exceeds the distinction between beauty and its opposite, between the pleasing and the anxiety-provoking object" (2009, 42). For that reason, consideration of the political uses (and abuses) of the uncanny will have to approach it apart from the beautiful. This, in turn, requires inquiring into the unique rhetorical effectivity of the uncanny, specifically, its pliancy vis-à-vis the manipulation of beliefs and the formation of attitudes for political ends.

Derrida insights into the uncanny are nevertheless crucial to this investigation into the rhetorical fashioning of the political uncanny—i.e., the uncanny as a means of persuasion in the service of politics. Specifically, his fitting of the uncanny to questions of order and his articulation of uncanny effect to existential anxiety make significant strides in liberating the uncanny from its dubious relation to psychoanalysis and connecting it with concerns that go beyond those of a clinical setting. So too, Derrida's earlier work on the undecidability between fiction and life assists in transporting the uncanny from the realm of literature, while simultaneously problematizing literature as a domain distinct from non-fiction, everyday life. Derrida, however, does not explicitly link up these two paths of inquiry, and his strides toward further conceptualizing the uncanny abandon Freud at those points where Freud's thinking on the

uncanny could have advanced Derrida's own, namely, "the primitive" factor (either alongside or in place "the infantile") and the centrality of fear to the uncanny as quasi-aesthetic affect.

Irrespective of Freud's potential usefulness to hauntology or deconstruction in general, when considering the uncanny's rhetorical efficacy in connection with politics, Freud's understanding of the uncanny is also—despite the aporias and other shortcomings—indispensible. Over against Derrida's deconstructionist appropriation of the uncanny, according to which the uncanny is employed as just one more instrument in the ongoing critique of Western ontology, Freud's investigation of *unheimlich* interprets the uncanny through the lens of the emotions. That is, Freud's essay focuses on the emergence of a sense, an experience, of a special kind of fear, of having perceived something thought to be familiar suddenly appearing somehow, also, strange. What Derrida cannot account for, in any way, is the fact that Marx's specters were frightening to no one in particular. Even if, retroactively, we were to consider the apparent spike in international terrorism as a manifestation of the spectrally excluded, this perception alone does not explain how or why it is frightening, to whom, to what extent, or to what end. In contrast, according to the Freudian model, the uncanny is primarily an affect, an emotion, i.e., a thing "through which, by undergoing change, people come to differ in their judgment and which are accompanied by pain and pleasure" (Aristotle 2007, 2.2.8). For these reasons, my approach to uncanny political rhetoric is guided by both Derrida and Freud, applying the Freudian uncanny in light of undecidability and the emphasis on political order, with, of course, the appropriate emphases of unity of effect and legitimation.

4.3 ON THE ORDER OF PERSONAL SAFETY:

FICTIONAL REALITY AND THE FIGURAL OTHER

*...something like a rhetoric or grammar of the numinous
and the uncanny... – Siegbert Salomon Prawer 1963*

“Fear,” writes the French critical theorist Paul Virilio, “is very resourceful and can use anything at hand, but it has a very concrete explanation. The modern version of fear comes at a time in history when three major fears (the balance of terror with the atomic bomb, the imbalance of terrorism with informational bombs and the great ecological fear with the fear of the explosion of a genetic bomb) have displayed their incredible conditioning power” (2012, 42). The tendency to treat fear like cash ready for any kind of investment is a widely acknowledged phenomenon. So too, rhetoric’s capacity to turn the capital of fear to any kind of profit, commercial or political, is a justifiably popular belief, if not common knowledge. As one of the *basic emotions*, fear is a universally recognized subjective and physiological experience.³⁰ However, as Virilio’s comment suggests, the historical conditions and environmental triggers of fear admit of variety rather than uniformity (change as opposed to permanence), while the experience of fear in today’s “developed countries” is unique to its historical circumstances. Or rather, what is unusual about the distinctly modern version of fear, what changes, is not fear as such but a particular, and increasingly common, instantiation of fear, one that exists not in place of but alongside the more familiar, transcultural experiences.

Notwithstanding the unprecedented proliferation of fear, the most distinctive aspect of the modern version of fear, argues sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, is the breakdown between the

³⁰ Today, as per discrete emotion theory, psychologists and neurologists speak of “basic emotions,” by which they mean a set of innate neurological packages (i.e., syndrome), distinguishable by an individual’s hormonal reactions, musculature, and facial expressions. Accordingly, such emotions are cross-culturally recognized. In a cross-cultural study of 1972, Paul Ekman and his colleagues concluded that there exist six basic emotions: anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise (Ekman 1992). For a simultaneously charitable and critical account of this neurological understanding of emotions, see Robert C. Solomon’s *The Passions* (150–70).

measures or actions inspired by fear and the existential tremors that cause it. He writes, “The most seminal distinction of the present-day avatars of the fears that were *otherwise familiar* in all previously lived varieties of human existence is perhaps the decoupling of fear-inspired actions from the existential tremors that generate the fear which inspired them. In other words: the displacement of fear—from the cracks and fissures in the human condition where ‘fate’ is hatched and incubated, to the areas of life largely unconnected to the genuine source of anxiety” (2007, 13; my emphasis). Consequently, he adds, “No amount of effort invested in those areas is likely to neutralize or block the source, and so it proves impotent to placate the anxiety, however earnest and ingenious that effort might be. It is for this reason that the vicious circle of fear and fear-inspired actions rolls on, losing none of its impetus—yet coming no nearer to its ostensible object” (ibid. cf. 10, 16, 57).³¹ The existential tremors are, in themselves, not novel; “existential quakes” have accompanied humans throughout their history. However, attending these familiar tremors is the *recognition* of humans’ increasing inability to predict them, much less to prevent them or curb them. The reasons for this cognitive change are multiple—e.g., the dismantling of state-built and state-serviced defenses against individual misfortunes, the withering of arrangements for collective self-defense (trade unions and other instruments for collective bargaining), and the erosion of territorial sovereignty and state boundaries vis-à-vis trade and capital, crime and terrorism, violence and weapons, surveillance and information. Notwithstanding the diversity of such disconcerting tendencies, the cumulative effect is more or less uniform, both qualitatively and quantitatively; it is as though the “openness” of open society has given way to a proliferation of uncounted and uncountable dangers, intellectual and material,

³¹ On the idea that modern society’s preoccupation with safety and security actually gives rise to risk, see the sociologist Anthony Giddens, who defines so-called “risk society” as “a society increasingly preoccupied with the future (and also with safety), which generates the notion of risk” (1999, 3).

of diffuse existential anxieties, ambient fears, and securitarian obsessions.³² Consequently, the “openness” of the open society comes to mean, simply, a society increasingly exposed to the blows of fate, more and more susceptible to events beyond the control of individual and collective action. The irony, as Bauman points out, is that the ubiquity of danger precludes the possibility of existential security, virtually assuring that fear-inspired actions only ever reproduce the very insecurities they are ostensibly meant to reduce, destroy, or prevent. Stockpiling supplies, installing alarms, buying insurance, driving armored vehicles, etc.—any of the number of security measures individuals undertake to cope with every fresh fear, every new insecurity only produces its opposite, an ambience of fear and an ever immediate and tangible obsession with all things related to security.

In the United States at least, the unifying thread of these diffuse fears and securitarian anxieties is fear of the figural or tropological Other (see Monahan 2010, 150 ff.). Thus, while British journalist Anna Minton is surely right in maintaining that, “Fear breeds fear” (2011, 171), now as always, so too, the propagation of fear—as an attitude of mind—is accompanied by or caught up in certain rhetorical processes (e.g., performances, artifacts, and structures) that play both midwife and custodian to the cycle of fear and fear-inspired actions. Far from unfamiliar, this threading function of the Other is nevertheless made strange in that, in its modern form, the Other now serves as a rhetorical figure, or trope: a synecdoche that, by means of representing a range of present-day fears and of interconnecting them through a signifying “knot,” designates *human* maleficence and malefactors as such. According to Kenneth Burke’s “Four Master

³² The ubiquity of floating and diffuse threats (both named and unnamed), ushers in a society whose openness—once the touchstone political self-assertion—acquires a new gloss, undreamed of by Karl Popper (1971). Bauman captures this shift in meaning when he writes, “If the idea of an ‘open society’ originally stood for the self-determination of a free society cherishing its openness, it now brings to most minds the terrifying experience of a heteronomous, hapless and vulnerable population confronted with, and possibly overwhelmed by forces it neither controls nor fully understands; a population horrified by its own undefendability and obsessed with the tightness of its frontiers and the security of the individuals living inside them” (2007, 7).

Tropes,” synecdoche works bilaterally, stressing “a *relationship* or *connectedness* between two sides of an equation, a connectedness that, like a road, extends in either direction, from quantity to quality or from quality to quantity” (509). The synecdoche, in other words, is a rhetorical process of associating part and whole in which “either the whole can represent the part or the part can represent the whole” (508).³³ À la Thomas Farrell, the synecdochic Other embodies the standard rhetorical motive to “offer a provisional, but engaged, sense of meaning in particular to a changing complex of appearances” (1993, 28), to counterbalance the insecurity of the present and uncertainty about the future by making “ongoing sense of appearances” (25). By enabling the identification of the whole as a totality that is qualitatively identical with the parts that appear to make it up, the synecdochic Other integrates a wide range of diffuse existential anxieties by means of a common heading or identity (see White 1986, 73). In other words, the Other not only represents each of its parts but, in so doing, it also represents the attempt to give a human face and thus a determinable cause to any number of floating, diffuse threats (to one’s own person and its extensions), to trace back any case of malignance, genuine or putative, any failure to achieve full security against the human potential for destruction and harm, to some evil intention, plot, or conspiracy that, once discovered, can be rooted out and destroyed. In Bauman’s framework, then, the synecdochic Other works to bridge the cleft between measures inspired by fear and the tremors that caused them, undermining the self-reproducing capacity of fear and returning the “blows of fate” to their proper place within the cracks and fissures in the human condition.

³³ Historiographer Hayden White, drawing on Burke, emphasizes that synecdoche is an integrative process, useful for “identifying the whole as a totality that is qualitatively identical with the parts that appear to make it up” (1986, 73). Or as Burke puts it, the synecdoche moves freely between microcosm and macrocosm, container and contained, sign and the thing signified, material and the thing made, cause and effect genus and species, etc” (1969a, 507–8).

Nevertheless, the synecdoche's apparent capacity to render modern fears manageable belies its inherent tendency toward abstraction. Along with creating a dispersed and interconnected order, synecdoche also results in the (accidental) devaluation and (eventual) erasure of the corporeal (i.e., the phenomenal, empirical objects of experience). As the master trope of today's otherwise familiar fears, the Other is no longer restricted to some individual, or even some category of individuals, suspected of carrying danger; it no longer designates those persons and groups of persons who have put themselves, or been forced, beyond the bounds of the community and denied the right of settlement or temporary stay. Once it is synecdochically refigured, the Other grants purchase to the incorporeal and abstract, substituting, for instance, the idea of "suspicious categories" in place of individual evildoers and interrelating them via a chain of equivalential, whole-for-part logic, i.e., by means of a specific figural process of associative meaning-making (Bauman 2006, 123). The Other thus comes to include every stranger—foreigner, neighbor, passer-by, loiterer, etc.—and so expands the comprehensiveness of the grounds for mistrust and suspicion. On Burke's view, this expansion of meaning is totally in keeping with the predominant tendency of synecdochic figures to convert meaning "upwards." Depending on a network of symbolic associations and interrelated meanings, synecdoche, he claims, is "a one-way process of magnification, a *writing large*" (1984b, 134). Despite its capability to move bilaterally from quantity to quality or from quality to quantity, synecdoche's upward conversion almost always lacks "a compensatory process of *writing down*" (ibid.), that is, to move from "quality" back down to "quantity," from signifier to signified, from effect to cause, or from whole to part. This is not to say that the figure of the international terrorist or of an illegal immigrant, for instance, does not evoke a particularly acute fear within the newly configured discursive landscape, only that, as a rhetorical figure, the Other's categories of

suspicion include these and other objects of fear without being (metonymically) reducible to any one or any one set.³⁴ What is more, the synecdochic Other serves not only as a representation of scattered fears and diffuse dangers but also as a generic persona, or character, one that is readily adaptable to the needs of any situation calling for a culprit or criminal intent, which is to say virtually any instance of insecurity (real or imagined). For while the Other does not create these needs or securitarian obsessions per se, it enable the construction of a social reality in which any number of existential fears necessitates the identification of wickedness or evil intent as the origin.³⁵

In view of rhetoric's constitutive capacity to make meaning possible—i.e., to disclose worlds and generate conditions of possibility—the figural, synecdochic Other is a “fiction” or condition of meaning that ushers into existence not a figure of the subject but the appearance of an object, one whose rhetorical power consists in repositioning the parameters of common, established reality according to the specter of malign intent, or the totality of secularized evil forces. In its tropological guise, the Other only ever points to relationships (between present-day fears), but relationships, argues Hayden White, that are nevertheless experienced “as inhering within or among phenomena but which are in reality relationships existing between consciousness and a world of experience calling for meaning” (1986, 72). Hence the Other is realized in discourse and experienced in thought not in terms of its potential associative use-value but as a real (i.e., phenomenal, empirical) thing, as nebulous as it is concrete. The fear attending the Other, which enhances its reality effect while instilling a sense of urgency,

³⁴ On the difference between synecdoche and metonymy, see Kenneth Burke's “The Four Master Tropes.” See also, Ned O’Gorman (2008), in which he links up these two tropes with the sublime vis-à-vis Eisenhower and his rhetoric concerning nuclear power.

³⁵ Hence, the reason why this kind of identification tends toward an upward conversion is twofold: not only is the whole (the Other) the go-to representation for a range of dispersed parts but also even in the event that one of these parts functions as stand-in for the whole such a part merely reflects the weight of the totality, referring its own content back to the whole.

transforms this object-which-is-not-one into an irresolvable exigence—an ineradicable surplus of existential fear. Instead of granting more control to human agents and institutions, the unifying power of the Other, by populating the universe with innumerable sources of malefic danger and evil intent, maxes out the human ability to manage those threats related to security and safety that stem from a genuinely or putatively social origin. Embodying the attempt to put a name and a face to certain of our modern fears, the synecdochic Other, which replaces individuals for suspicious categories, assures only that the representation of these fears will remain inexplicably faceless (which is not to say unnamed), aggravating rather than mitigating the sentiments of existential insecurity and scattered fears. The face of many of our modern fears is for that reason faceless. The villain is at once everywhere and no place in particular.

This depiction of a distinctive modern version fear, with its emphasis on a newly configured Other, thus articulates a modern version of the uncanny. Zygmunt Bauman alludes to as much, when describing the diffuse but ubiquitous sense that the avatars of today's fears are known yet unfamiliar. The surplus of existential fears, of fears uncoupled from their sources—and, in the case of the Other, of fears whose potential causes are at once everywhere yet untraceable—signals not the Progress of Enlightenment thinking but a return of the animistic convictions that, according to Freud, characterized a primitive stage societal development. ““Progress,”” writes Bauman, “once the most extreme manifestation of radical optimism and a promise of universally shared and lasting happiness, has moved all the way to the opposite, dystopian and fatalistic pole of anticipation: it now stands for the threat of a relentless and inescapable change that instead of auguring peace and respite portends nothing but continuous crisis and strain and forbids a moment of rest” (2007, 10). With the apparent expansion of “fate” over an increasingly broad swath of modern society and everyday life, the story of modern fear

reads as though Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos had taken up with or assumed control of scientific rationality, effectively undermining the tools and resources for adequately discovering and implementing solutions to socially produced troubles or for validating and sustaining the sentiment of security, along with self-confidence and self-assurance. Over against the many philosophical doctrines of fatalism—particularly Nietzsche’s, according to which fatalism refers to an attitude of resignation (“Mohammedan fatalism”) in the face of inevitability (1996, §61)—the frightening power of today’s “fate” (or “Fates”) breeds an attitude of panic, agitation, and obsession with regard to everything related to security and safety.³⁶ Of course, this is not to say that the present-day fears entail a belief in the reality of the Fates from Greek and Roman mythology. However, it is the case that the current milieu points to, is symptomatic, of a breakdown in those markers of certainty constitutive of common reality and essential to the division between the fictive and the non-fictive.³⁷

Unlike Derrida’s specters of Marx, which relies on a metaphorical rendering of repression, the insecurities of the present owe their uncanniness, primarily, to the reappearance, or reactivation, of superannuated modes of thought, residues or traces of the first primitive conception of the world, animism. Thus, modernity’s otherwise familiar fears are unfamiliar to the extent that they establish links to an outmoded sense of familiarity, i.e., to remnants of animistic activity and attitude of mind. As the immaterial embodiment of these uncounted and uncountable “new” fears, the Other contains, and so transfers to its contained parts, what is

³⁶ This is what allows the Other to function as an irresolvable exigence: ineradicability notwithstanding, the effect is the obsessive-compulsive search for its, in Lloyd Bitzer’s phrase, “positive modification” (1968, 7).

³⁷ Incidentally, we can now say that the constitutive model of rhetorical effectivity proposed by Greene and company is inflected by a “subterranean” concern with rhetoric’s capacity to produce quasi-uncanny effects. For in constructing and remaking reality, rhetoric shifts the markers of certainty constitutive of what passes for common reality. Insofar as this process is productive of fear it would qualify as a properly uncanny technique. Bradford Vivian (2004), writing at the intersection of rhetoric, poststructuralism, and continental philosophy makes a similar point by arguing how rhetoric itself is “made strange” once it is liberated from the ontological assumptions of representation.

perhaps the strongest residual trace of surmounted convictions: reviving, in attenuated form, the idea that the world is peopled not by human spirits, per se, but evil intent, hostile machinations.³⁸ But this associative feature of recalling fears from the primitive past is more expansive than it may appear. For insofar as fear of the Other serves as the unifying thread for a range of diffuse fears and anxieties (something on the order of a representative anecdote for today's insecurities), it not only interrelates these unpleasant emotions but also redoubles their affectivity by means of the uncanny. Moreover, if the Other is at once representative of the present-day avatars of fear and an uncanny representation, then uncanniness is not incidental but definitive of modern fear. So, for example, the three major fears cited by Virilio are heightened by a similarly animistic conviction, the fear of each bomb (atomic, informational, genetic) involving something akin to the attribution of magical powers (*mana*) to alien persons and things, powers that are rendered all the more frightening on account of the Other's malefic intent and evil designs. Likewise the more general fear attending the "openness" of open society is frightening, first and foremost, by virtue of the apparent ubiquity of ill will, an animosity believed to stem from criminal alterity (inasmuch as the concept of origins remains even vaguely intelligible). The added twist is that today's openness, both in its intellectual and material forms, is already uncanny, harking back to a pre-individuated state of mind and a corresponding state of society, in which boundaries were believed to be susceptible to any number of foreign invasions and fear was attached to the ever-present threat of alien, inimical objects and forces. Thus, in a sense, we return to Derrida's basic insight into the nature of *heimlich-unheimlich*, its undecidability—in this case, the undecidability

³⁸ For Freud, the strongest example of evil intent is the so-called "evil eye," according to which the evil intentions that are ascribed to someone reach such intensity that they are considered harmful in reality according to the mechanism of the "omnipotence of thought" (see 1950, 107–13).

between inside and outside, since no interior can be made safe from the incursions of an alien and therefore dangerous other.³⁹

The figural Other is thus an *uncanny* figure that, in its confirmation of surmounted beliefs related to a primitive past, both promotes and ensures the vicious cycle of fear and fear-inspired actions—if not the continued separation of fear-inspired actions and their root causes. If evil intent comprises the semantic core of a totality that is identifiable with, or representative of, any number of our modern existential fears, then the uncanny acts as the rhetorical guarantor of the ineradicability of the fear. For the belief in an immanent, secularly inflected evil is no less metaphysical or magical than a transcendent one: any gain in security—assuming, that is, that such a gain could ever meet objective standards and be verifiably measured—is immediately occulted and superseded by the painful remembrance of evil’s indestructibility. As a form of signification relying on imagery and association, the Other is not a useful concept—not even a concept at all; rather, it is an impossible object, or meta-object, one that supplies conditions of *impossibility* with regard to positive modification and successful resolution. As both Freud and Derrida acknowledge, the comforts of *heimlich* (of a predictable and therefore manageable world) are always already fraught with dangers, the intuition of which, if not the “reality,” is automatically and perpetually renewable. Moreover, the ontological distinction between words and things makes probable that any attempt to exorcise, conjure away, or extirpate the malefic-synecdochic Other will result in failure, and for the very simple reason that figural relationships,

³⁹ Indeed, speed theorist Paul Virilio, writing outside the influence of deconstruction, has devoted much of his work to analyzing the erosion of the inside-outside distinction and the effect of this development on the political and cultural categories of the domicile, the city, and the nation-state. Of his many works, see in particular *City of Panic*. In a recent interview with David Lyon, Zygmunt Bauman focuses on this blurring in connection with modern cities, arguing that guarding the city no longer means guarding against the dangers oozing from outside the city: “The urban citadels of security have turned through the centuries into greenhouses or incubators of genuine or putative, endemic or contrived dangers. Built with the idea of cutting out islands of order from a sea of chaos, cities have turned into the most profuse fountains of disorder, calling for visible and invisible walls, barricades, watchtowers and embrasures—and innumerable armed men” (2013, 103).

however meaningful they may be, do not correspond to phenomenal, empirical relationships.

From a rhetorical standpoint, however, the constitutive power of the Other works to dissimulate this basic ontological difference, disclosing and making possible a fictional reality that takes on a life of its own, at once encouraging and frustrating the constant pursuit of achieving full security against all the world's bogeymen.

"Like liquid cash ready for any kind of investment," writes Bauman, "the capital of fear can be turned to any kind of profit.... And it is." Nevertheless, the rhetorical pull of the uncanny Other favors certain avenues of exploitation rather than others. By expanding the categories of mistrust and suspicion, the Other works to sap the ability to trust in the constancy and reliability of human companionship and association, thereby undermining the collective foundations that make possible anything resembling existential security. At the same time, it identifies within a totality a range of scattered fears and diffuse dangers that are in no way diminished, or perceived to be, by institutionalized, communally endorsed, and state-supported insurance policies against individual misfortunes (i.e., the social "welfare" state). "And so," Bauman continues, "it is *personal safety* that has become a major, perhaps even *the* major selling point in all sorts of marketing strategies. 'Law and order,' increasingly reduced to the promise of personal (more to the point, *bodily*) safety, has become a major, perhaps *the* major selling point in political manifestos and electoral campaigns...constantly replenishing the capital of fear and adding still more to the success of both its marketing and political uses" (2007, 12–13).⁴⁰ To put the matter in familiar terms, this means that the vicious circle of fear and fear-inspired actions has been "displaced/shifted from the area of security...to that of safety," with the result that the discourse

⁴⁰ Paul Virilio, ever the kindred spirit to Bauman, makes a similar point. He writes, "On top of national security, based on the armed forces, and social security, underdeveloped as it is in a number of democratic states, we must now add the crucial issue of human security [i.e., safety], which would extend the old public interest of the state" (2007b, 66). The author would like to note that in the middle of writing out this quotation, he was interrupted by an automated telemarketing call on his cellular phone, alerting him about the FBI's statistics regarding home break-ins.

of the former is increasingly hegemonized by the latter (13). Although Bauman does not connect this rendition of the politics of fear to the Freudian uncanny, much less to the figural Other, he correctly identifies one of the predominant tendencies in the political management of present-day fear: facilitating the imminent shift in legitimation by state power from the assurance of constitutional protection against the vagaries of the market, and of social degradation in general, to that of the personal safety state. However, given the uncanny Other's definitive role both in the modern variety of fear and in the emergence of a corresponding, alternative legitimation of state authority, it should come as no surprise that rhetorical strategies based on this figure are indispensable to replenishing the political coffers of fear, and thus vital to reharnessing popular existential anxieties to the new political formula of the "personal safety state."⁴¹

Thus, in the service of state authority—of adding to the success of a form of legitimation based on safety—the uncanny Other functions as both a trope and *topos*. It thereby designates a rhetorical or "argumentative" strategy as much as an associational, imagistic form of signification. As such, it admits of a two-pronged rhetorical strategy, one that by helping to sustain a sense of the uncanny, both tropologically and argumentatively, reinforces belief in the

⁴¹ This shift itself has something uncanny about it—since the "new" source of state legitimation is really the return of the state's most basic function (since Hobbes' *Leviathan*): protection of the "existential" rights of citizens. Indeed, despite Bauman's well-reasoned arguments on this point, this legitimating function remains the basis for any libertarian or individualist anarchist argument against the so-called social welfare state (in all of its varieties). See for instance Robert Nozick's classic (and in some circles infamous) libertarian critique in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. According to Jacques Rancière, "the protectionist police state" is the state reduced to "the purity of its essence," by which he understands an archaic and, from the state's perspective, optimal form of *consensus* (i.e., the presupposition according to which every part of a population, along with its specific problems, can be incorporated into a political order and taken into account) (2010, 111). Like Bauman, he argues that such a state is supported by "a community of sentiment," or community of fear, whose emergence is linked to the weakening of social systems of protection and the establishment of a new relation between individuals and "a state power that is made for security in general" (112). Even more recently, Brad Evans has argued that the real triumph of liberal reason is not evidenced by some universal ascription to liberal values but through a "global imaginary of threat which, casting aside once familiar referents that previously defined the organization of societies, now forces us to confront each and every potential disaster threatening to engulf advanced liberal life" (2013, 2). The contemporary period is thus marked not by exceptional moments of crises but by a new terrifying normality, a psychosocial state of affairs that ushers in a new leviathan-like political state.

necessity of a personal safety state as well as in the eventuality of such a state's achieving full "security." The two parts comprising this operation are metonymic applications of the Other, combined with a non-rational variant of what Kenneth Burke calls "administrative" rhetoric. From the standpoint of rhetoric's constitutive or meaning-making capacity, each of these parts functions to hypostatize a fictional reality (i.e., a set of quasi-animistic convictions tied to an inimical Other), but a reality that is conducive not only to legitimating specific actions of a state authority whose function is increasingly reducible to the protection of personal safety but also to legitimating the very grounds on which the state bases its claim to legitimation. For a world rife with *human* maleficence and malefactors is one in constant need of protective assurance. In the context of safety, the issue is not whether such a hypostatized reality is "really real," somewhat real, or not at all—the rhetoric of Other having already rendered such distinctions undecidable; rather, the fundamental rhetorical exigence—that which *can* be "positively" modified (positively, that is, from the state's perspective)—concerns the reproduction of the tangle of fear and fear-inspired actions or, more specifically, the preservation of an attitude of mind in which both the reserves of existential fear are inexhaustible and the theoretical and experiential distinction between real and neurotic fear/anxiety is undecidable.⁴²

For that reason, the rhetorical strength of the synecdochal Other to unify a range of scattered fears is also, from the State's viewpoint, its greatest weakness: in tending toward the abstract and incorporeal, the uncanny Other runs the risk of diluting its fear-inducing capacity—of producing a sense of mundane unease rather than a species of fear—and of encouraging an attitude of fatalistic acquiescence, resignation in the face of inevitable doom. As such, the Other's figural signification is at some odds with its potential to give rise to a sense of the

⁴² By "real" fear or anxiety, I understand a reaction to the perception of a danger, coming from the outside world or reality—an expression of the drive to self-preservation. In contrast, neurotic fear is a general condition of worry and anxiety that is no longer connected to a danger.

uncanny, its representative danger matched, in the last instance, by the danger of being perceived for what it really is—an unalterable, un-modifiable obstruction to full safety. In contrast to this tendency toward upward conversion, metonymy, argues Burke, converts downward, conveying “some incorporeal or intangible state in terms of the corporeal or tangible,” an “archaicizing device” (1969a, 506), or “*terminological* reduction” (507), which stresses a unilateral connectedness, e.g., from quality to quantity, container to contained, signifier to signified, and so forth.⁴³ That is to say, as an associative model of signification, metonymy’s tendency is to assign priority to the parts for the ascription of meanings to any putative whole appearing to consciousness, rather than assigning priority to the whole for the identification of a totality that is identical to the parts. In realizing this opposing tendency, metonymy thus serves as a potential counterbalance or rhetorical corrective to the incorporeal, abstracting excesses of synecdoche. Nevertheless, instead of constituting two separate meaning-making (meaning-guiding, meaning-enabling) models, “Metonymy,” claims Burke, “may be treated as a special application of synecdoche” (509), as a shift in perspective from one type of figural (non-scientized) explanation to another. As Ned O’Gorman has recently argued, “The difference between metonymy and synecdoche is consequently a matter of emphasis, direction, and intensity within the process of associating part and whole” (2008, 50). Whereas the synecdochic Other places emphasis on the ever-present specter of human maleficence as a totalized whole, metonymic applications of the Other “reduce” this amorphous threat to apparently specific and slightly more corporeal instances of evil intent. In that way, metonymy compensates for the gradual and potential loss, over time, in the immediacy and tangibility of fear as it relates to the uncanny Other.

⁴³ In something of a happy coincidence, Burke, drawing implicitly on Nietzsche’s “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense,” describes the representative tendency of metonymy as “a second ‘carrying over’ from the spiritual back into the material” (1969a, 506; see Nietzsche 1999).

In the context of subserving the legitimating function of the personal safety state, metonymy and synecdoche work in conjunction, preserving and aggravating the uncanny fear of the Other. On one side of the equation, the synecdochic Other, in constituting the Other as an integrating, uncanny figure, provides the conditions of possibility for any metonymic instantiations. As “quality,” or “container,” it points to a reserve of uncanniness that by virtue of its potentially all-inclusive suspicious categories can be applied to any person or class of persons—whether real or fictive. It contains, in other words—in its associative configuration of the Other—un-individuated Otherness, a reserve of uncanniness, that at once includes and is representative of any specific or specifiable “quantity,” any would-be individuated Other; it is the condition of possibility for malign human agents and malefactors. On the other side of the equation, metonymic applications of the Other, in drawing upon this reserve of uncanny (and criminal) alterity, reinvigorate the grounds of this Other-based uncanny fear. The synecdochic Other, because of its tendency toward the abstract, is constrained not in its capacity to produce but to sustain its rhetorical effects. It tends to empty its signifying function of any symbolic value, becoming as it were an empty signifier. To be sure, empty signifiers do not by virtue of their emptiness automatically cease to exert influence, to produce rhetorical effects. (The history of politics and political theory would be nonexistent or amount to experiments in absurdity if the principles of freedom, justice, and equality, in the last instance, ever really meant anything.) However, the rhetorical effectivity of empty signifiers, or pure signs, presupposes their articulation with particular, concrete signifieds. Metonymy, in representing the whole for the part, provides the raw material for such meaningful (meaning-making, meaning-enabling) articulations, recasting the empty signifiers as reality, objectifying the signs and making the word flesh. Unlike political disputes over beauty, the metonymic instantiation of the uncanny Other

does not end in or even encourage stalemate; rather, these metonymic applications, both separately and together, re-stimulate the coffers of fear, effectively realizing the big (synecdochic), malevolent, and uncanny Other. Metonymy not only induces a species of fear, it not only depends for its effectivity on the resources of synecdoche but also works backward, so to speak, to instaurate the grounds of its own rhetorical power. The dialectic between the metonymic and synecdochic Other thus results in an apparent paradox, for in taking from the synecdochic Other, metonymy gives back (like love, like Apollo) in spades. For that reason, the relationship is not merely dialectic but also symbiotic.

Aside from replenishing the capital of uncanny fear, metonymic applications of the Other have a direct role to play in producing that species of uncertainty which is definitive of the uncanny, namely, the blurring of the boundary between reality and fantasy. Like the synecdochic Other, metonymy rekindles the superannuated workings of our cognitive faculties. But whereas the signifying power of synecdoche consists in an upward conversion culminating in an abstract Other, metonymy performs a second, “archaicizing” maneuver that articulates the Other as signifier with an *apparent* signified, atavistically transferring reducing the Other into a material sign or corporeal manifestation of evil intent. With each metonymic reduction—Islamic terrorist, illegal immigrant, double agent—the particularized Other assumes a representative function vis-à-vis the totality of human maleficence, hegemonizing the Other just as safety comes to occupy the place of security. Crucially, however, this rhetorical process does not diminish any potentially uncanny effect related to instantiated Other, for the simple reason that the process does not substitute thing for symbol so much as it substitutes one kind of symbol, or symbolic relationship, for another, one differing in direction and emphasis. Indeed, the rhetorical effectivity of the metonymic Other to give rise to a sense of the uncanny advances on that of its

synecdochic counterpart to the extent that it grants to the Other (now terrorist, now immigrant, now pedophile, now spy, etc.) the *appearance* of material reality. In so doing, metonymy dissimulates the fact of its own rhetoricity, rendering undecidable the distinction between fantasy and reality. But something else occurs as a result of this archaicizing: the symbolic reduction of an abstract totality to one of its quantifiable parts performs the generically uncanny function, articulated by Freud, of “a symbol [taking on] the full function and significance of what it symbolizes” (2003b, 150–51).⁴⁴ However, in the case of the metonymic applications of the *Other*—and the same could perhaps be said for metonymy in general—the thing symbolized does not correspond to an objective, empirical object but is instead just another signifier in a chain of increasingly corporeal or reductive symbols—e.g. from the Other to the terrorist, from global Islamic fundamentalism-based terrorist to Al-Qaeda agent or sleeper cell—and, most recently, the so-called self-radicalized American. (The point is perhaps more evident if we substitute the noun-forming suffix “ism” for that of “ist,” since the former, in denoting an action, a system, or an ideological movement, reveals the abstracting power inherent yet concealed in metonymic translations.)

Nevertheless, such inverse subreptions—in which the symbol or idea is substituted for phenomenal, empirical reality—are not for that reason unbelievable, nor are they any less uncanny, less impossible, than the abstract, unquantifiable Other. Although metonymy, like any trope, deals in relationships that are in reality relationships existing between consciousness and a world of experience, these relationships are experienced, as Hayden White reminds us, as inhering within or among phenomenal, empirical objects of experience. Thus, in particularizing a

⁴⁴ As a trope, metonymy cannot escape its inherent rhetoricity: although experienced as inhering within phenomena or among empirical objects, metonymy is only ever a *relationship* existing between consciousness and a world of experience. Hence, its corporeality is only apparent, fictionally real relative to the less corporeal figure of synecdoche, yet not for that reason experienced as any less real.

totality of human maleficence, metonymy not only makes possible the perception of a corporeal uncanny Other but also gives immediacy and tangibility to our fear/s of that Other that is not one. In the 2004 documentary *The Power of Nightmares: The Rise of the Politics of Fear*, writer and produce Adam Curtis argues that global terrorism is, by and large, “a fantasy that has been exaggerated and distorted by politicians. It is a dark illusion that has spread unquestioned through governments around the world, the security services, and the international media.” The same can be said regarding the seeming eternal return of nuclear threats in connection with so-called “rogue states” and of the unmedicated mass shooter: they are dark illusions made real by their dissemination and subsequent production of material effects (see McHoul and Grace 1997, 21–2); they are uncanny fictions that make possible a world of meaning and experience—at once hostile and inhabitable—one that is otherwise unavailable because nonexistent. Undoubtedly, the threat of global terrorism and other similarly frightening Others is assisted by material, real-world events and their publicity; nevertheless such objects of fear are only ever believable, albeit unbelievably dark, fictions, i.e., figurations effectively masquerading either as empirically determinable objects or as material relationships existing essentially and permanently within phenomena. Ultimately, the phenomenal existence of metonymic evil is, in Karl Popper’s language, “unfalsifiable” (1959). Yet such quasi-supernaturalism is not in itself rhetorically impotent. As Rumsfeld understood all too clearly—arguing vis-à-vis weapons of mass destruction that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence—falsifiability does not necessarily translate into rhetorical inefficacy.⁴⁵ As Aristotle realized long before logical

⁴⁵ Speaking at a press conference held at NATO headquarters, Brussels, Belgium, June 6, 2002, former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld addressed the absence of evidence linking the government of Iraq with the supply of weapons of mass destruction to terrorist groups, repeating comments made earlier at a Department of Defense news briefing on February 12 of the same year: “Now what is the message there? The message is that there are no “knowns.” There are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say there are things that we now know we don’t know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don’t know we don’t

positivism and present-day spin doctoring, “[Even] if we were to have the most exact knowledge, it would not be very easy for us in speaking to use it to persuade [some audiences]” (2007, 1.1.12).

Contributing to the rhetorical efficacy of such fictional realities is the undecidability of fear itself, as it is experienced in relation to an unfalsifiable object. In accordance with the ambivalent register of metonymic Others, the fear felt in response to such figural objects is at once real and neurotic, with the result that the distinction between real and neurotic fear is as undecidable as the fictional reality of the objects themselves. Although the paradoxical nature of this impossible fear would seem merely to undermine the believability or rhetorical efficacy of the Other, in truth, both the object and the resultant fear mutually reinforce one another: the Other *qua* an uncanny and therefore ineradicable figure constitutes, via the symbiosis of metonymy and synecdoche, an ever-renewable or ever-present source of fear, while the fear of the Other, once instituted, serves as an affective rationalization (in the absence of falsifiability) for belief in the Other’s existence. Each side of the equation, in other words (the object and the object of fear), laminates the other’s reality. Rather than weakening belief in the existence or extensiveness of elusive yet ubiquitous malefactors, real-neurotic fear recreates or props up the reality of those impossible objects that give rise to it. What is more, this fear—because its causal objects do not admit of any criteria for determining their claim to phenomenal, empirical

know. So when we do the best we can and we pull all this information together, and we then say well that's basically what we see as the situation, that is really only the known knowns and the known unknowns. And each year, we discover a few more of those unknown unknowns. ... It sounds like a riddle. It isn't a riddle. It is a very serious, important matter. ... There's another way to phrase that and that is that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. It is basically saying the same thing in a different way. Simply because you do not have evidence that something exists does not mean that you have evidence that it doesn't exist. And yet almost always, when we make our threat assessments, when we look at the world, we end up basing it on the first two pieces of that puzzle, rather than all three.” According to this tripartite typology, the uncanny Other would qualify as the second type of known, a known unknown. Recently, Slavoj Žižek has extrapolated from these three categories a fourth, the unknown known, by which he understands that which we intentionally refuse to acknowledge that we know, “the disavowed beliefs, suppositions and obscene practices we pretend not to know about, even though they form the background of our public values” (2004).

reality—proves to be exceedingly recalcitrant, not only immune to counterargument but entirely independent of and unaffected by rational argumentation. It is an attitudinal state of mind that becomes increasingly unshakable as it becomes a mass phenomenon, that is, once the reality of its objects enters into the storehouse of common belief and opinion, redrawing—or rather undrawing—the long-established categories that made possible the demarcation of common, everyday reality from fantasy.

This blurring both of reality and fantasy and of real and neurotic fear subserves the personal safety state because it enables the state to sustain, indefinitely, belief in the possibility of achieving security even as it continually repackages and reconditions the fear of an uncanny and therefore absolutely ineradicable Other. With regard to the signifying power of metonymy, the avatars of modern evil combine the specter of an ever-present inimical Other with the “If it bleeds, we can kill it” rationality of American blockbuster action movies. The state and its subsidiaries are thus able to successfully promulgate the idea that the evil, fear-inducing Other is manageable but only insofar as citizens are willing to endorse any number of extreme police-like measures, including torture, domestic spying, gun control, rendition, preemptive warfare (and now pre-emptive cyberwarfare),⁴⁶ assassinations, the expansion of martial law power and the

⁴⁶ In the spring and summer of 2012, President Obama signed two executive orders which expanded the state’s emergency powers. Executive Order 13618, signed in the summer, provides the Department of Homeland Security with emergency powers over civilian telecommunications, including private telephone, cellular, and wireless networks. Signed earlier in the spring, The National Defense Resources Preparedness (NDRP) Executive Order gives the president virtually complete control over the entire U.S. economy—including energy, transportation, human resources, raw materials—upon his or her declaration that “national defense” requires doing so. Concerning cyberwarfare, *The New York Times* reports that a secret legal review on the use of America’s growing arsenal of cyberweapons, concluded that the president can authorize pre-emptive cyberwar attacks, “if the United States detects credible evidence of a major digital attack looming from abroad” (Sanger and Shanker 2013) The move is part of efforts to expand the ability of the American military to use new technologies to carry out acts of aggression—with Iran and China the most immediate targets. Apparent novelty notwithstanding, this expansion of executive power is not simply the doing of a particular administration; rather, it points up a trend inherent in the modern state. As Mary L. G. Theroux claims, writing in *The Huffington Post*, “[When] we pause to consider every ‘unprecedented’ extension of executive power, we find precedents galore.” Obama’s (NDRP) is “simply an extension of the Defense Production Act of 1950, which has been reauthorized and amended to be continuously in force ever since,” just as former President George W. Bush’s “oft”-decried USA PATRIOT Act was itself rooted in

militarization of domestic police forces, etc. The list goes on and on and will continue to grow for the simple reason that the uncanny Other cannot be extirpated; for one cannot destroy that which technically does not exist, an un/real object, an idea. And as Bernard Stiegler recently emphasized, “[An] idea does not exist, has not existed, and will never exist (2011, n30, 169). Nevertheless, as a metonymy, or metonymic construction, the uncanny Other will *persist* as so many corporeal yet no less malefic fictions, reconfiguring the parameters of reality and reconstituting the grounds of fictional reality, so long as people continue to believe in it. And given that the motivating conditions of such belief (i.e., the real fears that are also neurotic) are virtually unassuageable and, from the onset, self-reproducing, the burden of proof for any metonymic Other shifts away from the positing of belief to pronouncements of—to use Stiegler’s rhetorically salient phrase—“disbelief and discredit,” effectively displacing the default position from unbelief, or nonbelief, to incontrovertible (because common) knowledge. At the same time, however, and by virtue of its apparent corporeality/mortality, the particularized uncanny Other will encourage the corresponding belief, typically present only in the form of an unstated assumption, that the destruction of any or all agents of malice is eventual if not inevitable, *provided* that the state dedicates itself to the task of implementing the policies necessary to securing the conditions of safety and of restoring the existential assurances of *heimlich*—despite the ontological impossibility of ever completing such a project. By promulgating the uncanny figural Other, the state makes possible the appearance of a believable exigence—that is, a thing, other than it should be, and capable of modification—thereby inoculating the citizenry against the “dangers” of resignation, or, conversely, maintaining an attitude of expectancy, viz., the

Clinton-era ‘anti-terrorist’ legislation, which weakened individual privacy protections and loosened judicial oversight of domestic spying activities (2012).

anticipatory fulfillment of an unfulfilled longing for a familiar home, the restoration, at long last, of a true *Heimat*.

Thus, beyond legitimating the function of the personal safety state, the uncanny Other commands—to the point that it almost automates—a consensual process vis-à-vis state-built, state-endorsed, and state-supported protections against the incursions of the malefic alien Other. And this operation of widespread general agreement is as multi-directional as it is an inbuilt function of the rhetorical Other—integrating, along a horizontal axis, political leaders from opposing parties, separate branches of state-power, media outlets perceived to represent competing biases, differences within the *sensus communis*, etc., and, upwardly, along the vertical axis, the collective organization of the body politic, or *demos*, and the corporate organization of the state. The protective measures resulting from such agreement, however, amount to something more than the material traces of rhetorical effectivity; they, too, participate in sustaining the fear-inducing fictional reality of the uncanny Other. In other words, the safety assurances sought in any number of state-serviced or state-subsidized security regulations, which run the gamut from the now quasi-defunct color-coded advisory system to preemptive war, constitute part of the consensus-making process itself. For that reason, they instantiate what Kenneth Burke refers to as the administrative mode of rhetorical effectivity, a mode consisting of all those “devices which have a directly rhetorical aspect, yet include operations not confined to sheerly verbal [or symbolic] persuasion,” such as the display of force as a mode of persuasion (1966b, 301).⁴⁷ As Bauman demonstrates, the state’s defensive fear-inspired measures perform an administratively

⁴⁷ For Burke’s original formulation of administrative rhetoric, see his discussion, in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, of Machiavelli’s political theory (158–66). Burke’s originality notwithstanding, in the *Poetics* Aristotle anticipates such an administrative function, when suggesting that there is a rhetoric of action as well as of works. He writes, “In the incidents too [the poet] clearly should use some of the same elements when he needs to make things [e.g.] pitiable, dreadful, important or probable” (1987a, 1456b2–4).

rhetorical function by recasting “the somber premonitions as daily reality, making the word flesh” (2007, 9), thereby brining about that ironic state of affairs wherein today’s security generates forms of insecurity, either as a by-product or as deliberate policy. The process, however, is not for that reason illogical, since by hypostatizing the figural Other—i.e., by reaffirming the reality of the Other as object of fear—such measures reproduce the cognitive-affective conditions that result in the demand for a state dedicated to the office of maintaining personal safety, often at all costs, and so provide for or reinforce the grounds of their own legitimation, in advance and in the absence of public argument or debate.⁴⁸

In hypostatizing the uncanny Other, the state not only automates the process of its own legitimation but also gives rise to a set of secondary uncanny effects (specifically, those effects associated with the omnipotence of thought, e.g., repetition compulsion and wish-fulfillment), each of which helps to sustain the self-propagating capacity of fear and thereby also helps to preserve the automated rhetorico-political efficacy of uncanny fear. Whereas the uncanny Other laminates the reality both of fear and its object (both the affect and its conditions), the state’s protective assurances against the imaginaries of human maleficence serve as a rhetorically administrative sealant or guarantor of the laminating process; that is, they underwrite both the signifying conditions of uncanny fear and the affective, reifying conditions of the figural Other. Simultaneously, however, these measures—which are not merely legitimated but dictated by the community of fear—cannot but succeed in demonstrating if not their success then at least the necessity of an increasingly police-like safety state or unchecked executive power. Just as there nowhere exists criteria either for assessing the reality of the particularized Other or measuring its potential to inflict harm, so too, it is equally impossible to determine the relative failure/success

⁴⁸ The critical social theorist David L. Altheide makes a similar argument, albeit from a social-interactionist perspective (2006, 113–32).

of any given security measure undertaken in response to such alien, inimical Others. Whether any new set of safety measures is objectively successful is irrelevant from the standpoint of state strategy—assuming for argument’s sake that such objective standards are even possible; they are rhetorically effective, independent of extra-rhetorical results—even if such results were somehow demonstrably shown to be unsuccessful or even counterproductive—because they are themselves uncanny, i.e., compulsive repetitions, or “real-world” wish-fulfillments and self-fulfilling prophecies, that ceaselessly self-reproduce their own conditions of *necessity*. In so doing, they ensure two things, simultaneously: first, that “success,” or the achievement of full security, will only ever be asymptotic but, second, that people will continue to invest in the illusion or fictional reality that such victory is attainable—albeit only by the saving grace of the personal safety state. This result, which amounts to the state’s true accomplishment, not only secures the assent of the governed but also promotes the expansion of state power, justifying or necessitating the unlimited and for the most part uncontested extension of state-endorsed security to the domain of social life. And insofar as growth is a necessary sign (*tekmērion*) of health, this expansion works to assure state authority, indefinitely, over the long-range.

Thus, the figural and administrative resources of rhetoric undergird the personal safety state by making possible and available to the state the authorial license and privilege that fiction enjoys in arousing and inhibiting a sense of the uncanny. Indeed, the widespread approval of this retrograde state function relies on the state’s capacity to exploit the rhetorical potential of the uncanny, that is, to create a fictional reality based in and contributing to an administration of fear involving the ever-present threat of an unfalsifiable or undecidable Other—but one that is nevertheless realized, again and again, in thought, word, and deed. Given the widespread and overpowering effects of this fiction, Stiegler’s remark that “a fiction...only lasts as long as

people believe in it” is anything but superfluous; it is a timely response and a reminder of a half-remembered truth. For the uncanny in politics is nothing but a ruse, a rhetorical setup—or, less euphemistically, a conspiracy, but one that is enacted not by human agents so much as by the agency of state-sponsored rhetoric: a conspiracy that consists solely in a believable fiction, a story that without ever ending nevertheless endlessly repeats itself and is for that reason always already believable.

4.4 “REAL” MAGIC

In this chapter, I have focused on Freud’s concept of the uncanny, raising the question of its rhetorical efficacy vis-à-vis the state’s claim to legitimacy. I have shown that the Freudian uncanny, conceived as both rhetorical instrument and subjective effect (or affect), lends itself to the themes of animism, the specter of the malefic alien Other, and the blurring of the boundary between reality and fantasy, real and neurotic fear. Addressing these themes raises the question of why the state would have recourse to a mode of negative aesthetics when the latter threatens to subvert the rationalistic worldview upon which political legitimacy itself depends. In answer to this question, I have argued that the uncanny’s capacity to subvert the parameters of established reality simultaneously undermines the ability of the body politic either to verify or contradict the reality of state-confirmed maleficence as well as the state’s assurance of personal safety in the face of such perceived danger. Like the sublime, the efficacy of the uncanny relies on a kind of good faith in the state and in state-issued proclamations. But unlike the limits of sublime form and the prospects of retroactive failure, the uncanny eludes or short-circuits the assuredness of rational judgment, renewing—indefinitely, and again and again—the people’s good faith in the state apparatus and the non-rational hope for the eventual end of existential

fears of the Other's incursions. Whether the state is lying is almost beside the point. The uncanny, empowered by the twin engines of hope and regenerative fear, sabotages not just Enlightenment thinking but the very distinction between reality and fiction, real-world and fantasy, reason and unreason. Freud, it seems, came very close to realizing something of the societal and political implications of the uncanny. "Towards real experience," argues Freud, "we generally adopt a uniformly passive attitude and succumb to the influence of our material environment. To the writer, however, we are *infinitely tractable*; by the moods he induces and the expectations he arouses in us he can direct our feelings away from one consequence and toward another, and he can often produce very different effects from the same material" (2003b, 157–8). But Freud's thinking here is not sufficiently uncanny. Rather than demonstrating the veracity of the real-fictive distinction, the uncanny makes possible the transplanting of such authorial control to the domain of everyday social reality, including the domain of politics—often to great rhetorical effect. In this chapter, I have shown that one of these great effects consists in facilitating the shift in political legitimation by state power from the assurance of constitutional protection to that of the personal safety state. In this endeavor, the state is assisted by a general climate of uncanny fear, which, like the neurotic fear it nourishes, is seemingly self-perpetuating and answerable to no one or thing in particular.

Commenting on anthropologists' "discovery" of the rhetorical function in magic, Kenneth Burke argues that notwithstanding rhetoric's possible beginnings in magic (e.g., Gorgias and Plato's notion of rhetoric as a form of *psychagogia* or soul leading), rhetorical effectivity has always consisted in the hortatory or realistic function of language: "But now that we have confronted the term 'magic' with the term 'rhetoric,' we'd say that one comes closer to the true state of affairs if one treats the socializing aspects of magic as a 'primitive rhetoric' than

if one sees modern rhetoric simply as a ‘survival of primitive magic.’ *For rhetoric as such is not rooted in any past condition of human society. It is rooted in an essential function of language itself, a function that is wholly realistic, and is continually born anew; the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols*” (1969c, 43).⁴⁹ For that reason, he concludes, “The use of symbols, by one symbol-using entity to induce action in another (persuasion properly addressed) [and to form attitudes in other human agents] is in essence not magical but realistic” (46). Nevertheless, and I think Freud is right on this, the efficacy of a certain practice of rhetoric (perhaps not straightforward exhortation), may be rooted in an animistic view of the world, what Burke refers to as the primitive orientation. Indeed, Burke himself acknowledges this, or at least allows for it, when he dissociates persuasion to attitude from persuasion to action. The fact that as a culture or species we may no longer give credence to animistic beliefs does not do away with residual traces—the indelible imprint—left by our pre-or early history. Although exhortation appears to be a rational endeavor, attested to by the rationality of debate and public forums, the power of non-rational appeals, as well as the reliance on such appeals by any number of rhetors, calls into question rhetoric’s claim to “realism.” And while aesthetics in general serves such a non-rational function—and is for that reason often aligned with or made to serve political purposes—the uncanny enjoys the added benefit of blurring the lines between fantasy and reality, of *real-izing* the hidden, secreted connections between a range of phenomena that are rationally believed to have no causal

⁴⁹ Despite such realist claims, in an earlier work, Burke sings a somewhat different tune, arguing, “The magical decree is implicit in all language; for the mere act of naming an object or situation decrees that it is to be singled out as such-and-such rather than as something-other. Hence, I think that an attempt to *eliminate* magic, in this sense, would involve us in the elimination of vocabulary itself as a way of sizing up reality. Rather, what we may need is *correct* magic, magic whose decrees about the naming of real situation is the closes possible approximation to the situation named (with the greater accuracy of approximation being supplied by the ‘collective revelations’ of testing and discussion)” (1973b, 4; see also 1984b, 59–65 and 1966c).

relationship to one another. We do not need a Manchurian candidate to see how words continue to work their magic and to work like magic in today's political environment. The uncanny, as I have demonstrated, is one such means of working "real" magic. Yet the rhetorical implementation of the uncanny and of various uncanny figures raises an additional question, namely, "What are the long-term consequences of a state form of power that relies on negative aesthetics, on the emotive efficacy of the tragic, the sublime, and the uncanny? What is ultimately at stake in the state's circumvention of beauty?" The next chapter takes up this question and suggests an uncomfortable albeit speculative conclusion.

CHAPTER 5 – CONTROLLING AESTHETIC VIOLENCE:
RHETORIC’S VEIL OF APPEARANCE AND THE RATIONALITY OF CIVIL
DISSUASION

Control: To control a bad situation, you seek either to eradicate the evil or to channelize the evil. Elimination vs. the ‘lightning rod principle,’ whereby one protects against lightning not by outlawing lightning but by drawing it into a channel where it does not damage. – Kenneth Burke 1937/1984a

The paradox of success is based on the tendency of some valuable common good, trait or bond to fade. The inevitable crisis thus plays a redemptive role, which brings about the revival of the very thing whose demise it was that put the ‘system’ into a downturn and delivered the crisis itself.... [Crisis] is a prerequisite for the next upturn, for a revitalization of the whole ‘ecology’ of power, wealth and domination. – Yanis Varoufakis 2011

Whereas republican opinion rested, from the very beginning, on the art of oratory and reading, post-republican emotion rests, for its part, on sound and light. In other words, on the audio-visibility of a spectacle or, rather, of an incantatory liturgy that is only apparently secular... – Paul Virilio 2007

This study began by considering an alluring political dream—the vision of an aestheticized, beautiful state—and the inevitable souring of that dream. Although dating back as early as the pre-Socratic notion of celestial order or *cosmos*, the wedding of beauty to politics began in earnest in the modern era. According to the eighteenth century British moral sense theorists as well as a range of German poets and philosophers, aesthetics offers a mediating device whereby the state could secure its political legitimacy and hence its dominion over the

social order, as well as the political process determining that order. Over against the state's frequent appeal to rational-legal authority, the efficacy of which derives from the popular perception that the state's power is based in established law and custom, aesthetic power—its persuasive “authority”—consists in what Santayana describes as the objectification pleasure, that is, the immediate perception of an intrinsic positive value (beauty or the beautiful) in either an intelligible or phenomenal, empirical object. Anchored in our most primordial instincts, beauty constitutes an emotive force, requiring no further proof of existence—no further “legitimation”—than the pleasurable excitation it causes in the observer. At the same time, this anchoring renders beauty immune from all rational analysis and so from all rational criticism, short-circuiting the possibility of effective discursive contention. Aesthetics thus affords the state an efficient and efficacious mode of political rhetoric, one that ensures and virtually automates widespread adherence to the prevailing political order. What is more, beauty's immediacy assumes the adjunct responsibilities of mystifying the rules that regulate the socio-political order and concealing the suasive action guaranteeing subjective adherence to the state's political authority.

Appealing though it may be—from the perspective of political power, anyway—this vision of an aesthetically grounded political order is spoiled by the emergence of at least two difficulties, both of which involve rhetoric's limitations vis-à-vis aesthetic sensibility and judgment. The first constraint, which revolves around the possibility of inducing aesthetic judgment, originates in what is *prima facie* a rhetorical advantage, namely, beauty's immunity to *logos*. To be sure, the aesthetic is a distinctive and powerful mode of persuasion, one that is capable of positively uniting society through a species of mental taste. But, as we have seen, this potential strength runs up against the reality that aesthetic taste or judgment simultaneously is

and is not *rhetorical*, properly speaking. On the one hand, the sense of beauty is necessarily contingent, admitting of variety such that any particular aesthetic judgment of taste could always be otherwise, that no judgment of taste is ever necessary or logical. Rhetoric, which, among other things, is a *technē* that both influences and effects judgment, presupposes contingency and so concerns itself with things that are capable of being other than they are. For that reason, aesthetic judgment is potentially rhetorical, that is, open to or susceptible of persuasive technique. On the other hand, aesthetic sensibility, which admits of variety, tends toward dogmatic absolutism. Whether or to what extent the claim to universality is warranted or correct is irrelevant; aesthetic judgments of taste are felt and thus believed to be both incontrovertible and exclusively true.

The first rhetorical constraint on the politics of aesthetics results from the tendency of aesthetic judgment toward dogmatic absolutism. In terms of absolutism, the simple fact of aesthetic variety ensures the likelihood of aesthetic conflict while precluding a viable standard by which to resolve it. At the same time, the dogmatism of any given aesthetic judgment serves to inoculate that judgment against the force of argument, thereby rendering rhetoric's capacity to influence such judgments, as well as the sensibility on which they are based, unrealizable and effectively meaningless. A thing or idea can be made beautiful, but it is either immediately perceived to be beautiful or not, and no amount or variety of suasive action can alter that fact of perception. This applies equally to instances of rhetorical discourse: a persuasive speech, for instance, can be eloquently wrought and perceived as beautiful, but it cannot *convince* someone of its beauty, neither can anyone else. The same holds true for the state: a prevailing political order may very well objectify aesthetic pleasure and thereby acquire an intrinsic value; however, if David Hume is right in claiming that "the sentiments of men...differ with regard to beauty and

deformity,” then the state searches in vain “for a standard, by which we can reconcile the contrary sentiments” (1998, 150). Hence, while in theory aesthetic sensibility and aesthetic judgments of taste guarantee the effectiveness of political legitimacy—comprising, in effect, the necessary subjective basis of all forms of legitimacy—the likelihood of irreconcilable aesthetic conflict combined with the recalcitrance of aesthetic judgment to persuasive action ensure against the realization of that promise. In short, they void the warranty, theoretical assurances notwithstanding.

The second difficulty in the aesthetics of politics, which involves an additional limitation on rhetoric’s effectivity in relation to beauty, stems from what the Greek economist Yanis Varoufakis refers to as the paradox of success. According to Varoufakis, “The paradox of success is based on the tendency of some valuable common good, trait or bond to fade,” producing at first entropic effects and then a crisis of value (2013, 35). If, in the case of aesthetic disagreement, the limitation consists in irresolvable stasis born of a certain close-mindedness, in the context of the paradox of success the limiting condition appertains to beauty’s tendency to produce entropic effects. Like all values, but also all living or dynamic things, beauty is subject to the natural process of degeneration and decay. So while beauty may function as a powerful tool in the instauration of authority—helping to overcome the inevitable problem of entropy—it can do so only until it, too, begins to suffer from entropy, at which point beauty finds itself caught up in the paradox of its own success, in need of some restorative instrument or action. Such a “boost,” if it exists, must originate outside of beauty, since the addition of “more” beauty would be ineffectual. Given the subjective basis of aesthetic sensibility the solution would necessarily have to consist in amplifying or in some way strengthening a community’s sense of beauty. Yet just as aesthetic conflict is rhetorically intransigent, so too is aesthetic entropy.

Certainly, attempts to effect a positive modification of aesthetic decay fare better than efforts at resolving disagreements in aesthetic judgments of taste. But the successful reinvigoration of beauty cannot go on indefinitely. Over time, beauty's newly acquired energy or strength becomes weaker, less vigorous—entropic—until, eventually, at an undisclosed and unpredictable future date, the bottom drops out completely. Consequently, even if the state were to enjoy aesthetic consensus, the subsequent emaciation of that harmony and accord would render it and the body politic itself utterly effete. What is more likely, however—given the unlikelihood of perfect consensus—is that the state would discover itself to be in a situation in which the segments of the population motivated to political action would be those in possession of or animated by aesthetic sensibilities antithetical to the sense of beauty objectified in the prevailing political order. Put simply, in this context the byproduct of the paradox of success amounts to a clearing the way for a potentially effective dissensus—singular or polyvalent—against the state.

Together or individually, these rhetorical impossibilities signal a crisis in the aesthetics of politics, souring all attempts to ground the state's political legitimacy in the sense of beauty. However, with respect to the crisis of aesthetic entropy, Varoufakis identifies a cyclical process that while not resolving the crisis once and for all promises to restore or reinvigorate the appreciative perception of the state's beauty. Drawing on Richard Goodwin's pioneering work on the prey-predator dynamic of class struggle (1967), he argues that the paradox of success is of a piece with a cyclical narrative in which crises play both a retributive and a redemptive role. Within this boom to bust (to boom again) dynamic, the crisis, in its redemptive function, "brings about the revival of the very thing whose demise it was that put the 'system' into a downturn and delivered the crisis itself. From fluctuations in the relative size of prey and predator populations in the world...to the wage and employment dynamics in our market societies, crises deliver both

retribution and redemption” (2013, 35). For that reason, concludes Varoufakis, “crisis is a prerequisite for the next upturn, for a revitalization of the whole ‘ecology’ of power, wealth and domination” (36). What is more, the process is “natural”—simultaneously accidental (unplanned) and recurrent—and autonomous, requiring nothing outside of the system or “ecology” in which it occurs. Even so, despite the attractiveness of this model, the situation is qualitatively different when the thing at issue is not the fluctuation of a system (open or closed) or the values within that system but a fall in the appreciative or affective *perception* of value as such. While fluctuations can and do occur with respect to the perception of value, such variation is not self-regenerative, meaning to say that the crisis of a particular sense of value, say, beauty, in no way guarantees its own healthy recovery, much less a regularly recurring one. Sometimes a value simply withers away or undergoes radical transformation, such that it is no longer recognizably the same. But even if the self-reproductive cyclical process coming out of the paradox of success were applicable to aesthetics, inasmuch as political legitimacy is caught up in aesthetics, it must either come to terms with its aesthetic finitude or find some means whereby to overcome the crises in the rhetoric of aesthetics.

To be sure, the state has recourse to types of legitimacy that do not involve direct appeals to beauty, that is, to legitimization strategies that do not consist in objectifying pleasure in the state apparatus of government. Nevertheless, even allowing that the non-aesthetic modes are subject to their own limitations, aesthetic consecration—i.e., the acquisition of intrinsic value or aesthetic coloring—is an implicit, non-conscious aim of all strategies for securing and maintaining political authority. As George Santayana suggests, and others like George Kateb and Elaine Scarry have more recently affirmed, this unacknowledged tendency toward aesthetic value is an impulse innate to political philosophy as well as to the efforts of regimes to stake out their

political legitimacy—a tendency that is no less in force if it fails to actualize or succeed, either in the short-term or over the long-range. Hence, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a distinctive “aesthetic mode” or type of legitimacy. Insofar as such a mode is intelligible it functions simply as a shorthand for an impulse basic to the human condition of labor, work, and action, one that, in any mode of human activity, can be more or less refined or predominant, explicit or intentional.¹ Regardless of this classificatory issue, the fact remains that the effectiveness of any type of political legitimacy presupposes successful aestheticization, such that the extent and intensity, among the body politic, of the appreciative perception of beauty serves as the universal standard for measuring subjective adherence to the state’s claim to legitimate domination. That being the case, we may reasonably infer that all governing regimes, especially the successful ones, must at some point come to terms with the inevitable crises in the aesthetics of politics—both the paradox of success and the stasis of aesthetic disagreement. Each constitutes a foreboding presence, a spectral haunting, looming large over the project of political legitimacy, even in its most rational guise.

In view of these risks to legitimacy, which are as problematic for the prevailing political order as they are unavoidable, the state finds itself in the situation of having to discover the means either of weathering beauty’s delegitimizing effects or—better, if possible—of aggressively managing the aesthetic crisis, such that its entropic effects are slowed, its divisiveness held in abeyance, muted, or indefinitely concealed. In the present study, I have focused on the latter possibility, the combative option, arguing that one of if not the most

¹ As is typical in academic scholarship, my use of “the human condition” draws on Hannah Arendt’s tripartite classification of activity: labor, work, and action. By “labor,” she understands the activity corresponding to the biological process of the human body (“The human condition of labor itself”); “work,” that which correlates to the unnaturalness of human existence; and “action,” the activity consistent with the human condition of *plurality*, i.e., the fact that “men [sic] live on the earth and inhabit the world” together (1998, 7; for the distinction between “earth” and “world,” see Martin Heidegger’s *The Origin of the Work of Art*).

advantageous strategy for controlling the crisis in the aesthetics of politics consists in circumventing beauty to the greatest extent possible. In effectuating this policy or plan of action, the state, I claimed, has recourse to certain rhetorical weapons (i.e., modes or processes) that not only bypass the aesthetic impulse toward immediate, intrinsic value but also secure the affective basis of legitimate domination. These suasive weapons, we have seen, comprise those categories of experience indicative of aesthetic violence, categories that I have variously labeled negative, quasi-, or mediated aesthetics, because they imply the sense of beauty through the suggestion of aesthetic evil. To that extent, each category constitutes a possible gain in rhetorical effectivity, commanding the emotive power of beauty while avoiding the quagmire of aesthetic disagreement and decay—rhetoric’s impossibilities vis-à-vis the aesthetic domain. By the same token, these processual categories enjoy relative autonomy in relation to the more rational modes of discourse, in particular the *logos* of argument and law.

Among the range of possible anti-aesthetic legitimation strategies, I identified three that could be said to constitute a distinct class, three unique but complementary rhetorical processes advantageous to securing adherence to the prevailing political order: the tragic (or tragically cathartic), the sublime, and the uncanny. What sets them apart as a class is a common reliance on fear and the transformation of fear into a powerful yet simultaneously complex, even contradictory, mental movement. By means of tragic clarification, fear of a communal threat merges with pity for the political community to create a widespread *fearing for*, an intersubjective feeling of anxiety concerning the safety and well-being of a collective way of life. Through the institution of the sublime as formalized affect, fear of boundless or mighty objects gives way to a sense of awe and amazement, one that is likewise experienced collectively, by the public, but in relation to a transcendent power that simultaneously elevates and disciplines a

reverentially submissive body politic. With the agency of the uncanny, existential fears concerning figures of human malevolence bring about and then become indistinguishable from a neurotic fear/anxiety that simultaneously instaurates and hypostatizes a malefic yet secularized universe. Coming out of this reliance on the polyvalence of fear is the capacity to affect political judgment, that is, to manipulate appearances relating to the state, the body politic, and any number of real or imaginative objects of fear and to do so in such a way so as to engender and maintain the affective basis of the state's political legitimacy, regardless of type.

With respect to overcoming beauty, from the state's perspective these modes of anti-aesthetic persuasion provide what amounts to a back door means to achieving the spontaneously consensual effects associated with beauty. Rather than directly appealing to beauty—or eliciting aesthetic judgments of taste, in some way—the strategy of aesthetic circumvention hinges on a basic rhetorical technique: transforming a crisis of political legitimacy into a crisis affecting either the body politic as a whole or the mass of real individuals that make up that body. The potency of this transformation—its center of power—consists in substituting for the exigence of political authority the urgent need or demand for preserving the existing state of affairs, an undetermined yet qualitative way of life that is widely felt to be synonymous with life itself. Although the shift may appear to be slight, somewhat trivial or superficial, substituting preservation for political legitimacy is an understated yet artful maneuver in getting around the aesthetics of politics and thereby in overcoming, even perhaps avoiding, an otherwise inevitable crisis. Insofar as the aesthetics of politics implies a rhetorical situation, it necessarily involves—as a constitutive operation—an artful (i.e., productive) presentation of an exigence. This production, in its turn, entails an act of dissimulation, one that either conceals the exigence of political authority behind the public appearance of preservation or superimposes the two, such

that preservation of life and preservation of the regime are regarded as effectively and apparently interchangeable. If, in the domain of political philosophy, we may follow John Rawls in postulating a hypothetical veil of ignorance—behind which parties to a social contract are without information that would enable them to tailor principles of justice favorable to their personal circumstances—then, in the domain of political rhetoric, and on condition of the efficacy of negative aesthetics, we may assume the functional existence of a veil of appearances—behind which the exigence of preservation surreptitiously displaces that of political legitimacy (see Rawls 1999, §24: 118–23).² In responding to the need for preservation, the state is in fact reacting to the crisis of its own legitimacy, whether the crisis is in full swing or at the beginning stages of need. In the context of political legitimacy, the aesthetic circumvention afforded by the tragic, the sublime, and the uncanny is essentially a matter of bringing about unity of effect by means of exigence control.

The resulting consensus, which at its core is affective in nature, is thus of a piece with the more or less indirect instauration of the state's political authority.³ Of course, since each of the negative aesthetic categories furnishes the state with a range of distinctive politico-rhetorical possibilities, the indirectness of the legitimating effects varies from one to another. For convenience's sake, we may represent this variability on a scale from most to least direct. In the context of tragic clarification (the most direct means of instauration of the state), a collective way of life or a community's *ethos* is so thoroughly identified with the current regime/state that the constitutional arrangement becomes coterminous with the community and to such an extent that

² See Ajume Wingo's *Veil Politics in Liberal Democratic States* for an earlier and similar play on Rawls' famous concept of the veil of ignorance. See also Michael Huemer (2013, 116–23).

³ For that reason, the movement from the tragic to the sublime also manifests a decreasing overtness with respect to constitutionality or "politicalness." If in the context of the tragic the good state is hegemonized by a particular constitution or principle of justice, then by the time we move through the sublime to the uncanny the state is divested of any political content beyond that of the most basic police function, i.e., the assurance of individual safety.

that the political community is—i.e., is perceived to be—*the* community. For that reason, preserving the community against threats of corruption is equivalent to preserving the existing political order. Although the sublime also involves a positive identification between state and society, through the institution of sublime form (i.e., the movement from inhibition and debasement to elevation and freedom), the state is negatively revealed as a political agency transcendent of both the sensible world and civil society. No longer coextensive with the community, the state emerges as the collective's sole redeemer, performing the role of a real-world *deus ex machina*, which, appearing at the eleventh hour, promises safety from the ever-present dangers of chaos and finitude.

Finally, there is the uncanny, whose subjective fortification of the state is at the furthest remove from the effort to restore affective political legitimacy. And yet what the uncanny lacks in terms of direct support vis-à-vis the state's claim to legitimate domination, it more than makes up for in terms of its visceral impact. Compared to the tragic and the sublime—both which command, to a considerable extent, affective power—the uncanny comprises a primal force and in a double sense of being both primeval and basic to inner experience. By means of a malicious and figural other, the uncanny renews, under any number of secular guises, the “primitive” and fearful belief in an animistic universe fraught with malign, omnipresent forces. Instantiations of this Other thus work to replace or supplement a widespread concern for collective security with an obsessive concern for personal safety, according to which existential fears *centering on* individuals and their “possessions” supersede the higher or more sublimated fears pertaining to a way of life. However, as in the case of sublime form, the uncanny's separation from the state and its struggle for legitimacy is not for that reason politically (i.e., rhetorically) ineffective. Just as the sublime subserves legitimacy by renewing belief in the savior state, so too, through the

agency of the uncanny Other the state emerges as the sole guarantor of individual safety. The political status quo is thus reduced to the prerogative of the state, newly refurbished in its most essential guise: the personal safety state.

Although one can clearly see that a parallel drop in overt politicalness occurs as a result of the decrease in direct instauration—witness the movement from constitutional concerns to existential panic—less obvious, perhaps, is the simultaneous reduction in the state’s capacity to maintain effective control over the *suggestion of aesthetic violence or evil*. Through the agency of tragic clarification, the state enjoys a maximum of control, since it administers or presides over those institutions responsible for undertaking the process of civic purgation. To be sure, the state does not create its own forces of corruption or the embodiments of those forces—or rather, we do not need to assume total manipulation (or “blowback”) to understand the rhetorical effectiveness of political catharsis. In the context of Greek ostracism, state control of the tragic is relatively passive, relying as it does on the automatic functioning of a state-sanctioned but ultimately democratic practice, that of ostracism. Passivity, however, should not conceal the fact that ostracism serves to strengthen commitment to the apparent constitutional arrangement, thereby reinforcing the affective basis of the state’s political legitimacy, irrespective of whether the political appearance corresponds to the actual governing apparatus and its operative principle of justice. Indeed, the contrary perception—that ostracism was or is a spontaneous democratic practice, relatively independent of state influence—works to the state’s advantage, dissimulating the extent to which the state controls the tragic function of civic purgation, without actually modifying that magnitude. Of course, the state need not take a backseat role in effecting the tragic but can take active charge of the process. With or without the institution of ostracism, the state may initiate the tragic through prosecuting certain federal cases, or, as in the case of

whistleblowers like Edward Snowden, by simply labeling certain domestic persons as enemies of the state—who, despite self-imposed exile, must be extradited so as to be ostracized within and in accord with a state-sanctioned juridico-political process. In contrast, the sublime and the uncanny require materials beyond the control of the state. But whereas the sublime is in need only of objects (real or imagined), the uncanny presupposes an already existing climate of uncertainty and fear. More than likely, the environment that lends itself to uncanny images and associations is one conditioned by the sublime—those intense, collective experiences set in motion by the threat of overwhelming or overpowering phenomena. Nevertheless, just as the state cannot control the *emergence* of sublime “objects,” so too, the state is forced to make do with the subjective history—the mood or overall pervading tone—of its citizenry, a state of mind or feeling that is always in some excess of the mind of the state. Even so, the uncanny and the sublime compensate for their relative incapacity to manage the first appearance of non-artistic aesthetic violence—i.e., to manufacture a community’s initial aesthetic disturbance—by supplying the state with, on the one hand, an unsurpassable emotive force (the sublime) and, on the other hand, an ever-renewable source of hopeful anxiety (the uncanny).

Yet the question regarding the state’s capacity to control the *emergence* of aesthetic violence suggests another—one that I have not directly addressed but which, based on the preceding arguments, I can now concisely answer—namely, the question of control regarding the long-term *effects* of negative aesthetics, that is, of how long the processes may be expected to remain rhetorically effective before a decrease in rhetorical value or a curvilinear effect comes into force. For it would seem that in circumventing beauty the boost in affective legitimacy afforded by negative aesthetics leaves the underlying crisis untouched and that the crisis in aesthetics, rather than being overcome, is simply held in a temporary state of abeyance, lying in

wait and ready to reassert itself “the morning after,” that is, once the intoxicating effects of the tragic, the sublime, or the uncanny have begun to wear off. The question, then, is “How long until sobriety kicks in, until the spell loses its effectiveness? And then what?” The question, however, while important, overlooks or downplays what is really at stake.

First, owing to its emotive power, the rhetoric of negative aesthetics does not merely suspend *the question* of legitimacy, nor does it simply circumvent beauty and the crisis in aesthetics. Rather, in accomplishing both, rhetoric configures or, in the context of a rational-legal order, fundamentally alters the *sensus communis*, bringing about something akin to Nietzsche’s demand for a transvaluation of values, albeit without the need or compulsion (see esp. 2002, §203). Specifically, it effects in the body politic an apparently secularized version of Pascal’s wager, transposing it from its intended religious context to the civic domain of public opinion and common belief: “Let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God is. Let us estimate these two chances. If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation that He is.... There is here an infinity of an infinitely happy life to gain, a chance of gain against a finite number of chances of loss, and what you stake is finite. And so our proposition is of infinite force, when there is the finite to stake in a game where there are equal risks of gain and of loss, and the infinite to gain” (1995, §233). To be sure, once secularly transposed, all of the wager’s key elements undergo a writing down, or downward conversion, such that He becomes the State and the infinitely happy life is converted into a life safe from existential fear or a collective way of life secure against threats to the community. Nevertheless, the nature of the wager, including its cognitive effect, remains the same: belief in a higher power is more advantageous than disbelief. So too, in each context (religious and secular) this belief goes beyond the acceptance of a truth-claim or probability, implying trust, faith, and confidence

in that power: in a word, submission. Hence, the object of belief is at once a capacity—the power to do—and the authority or exclusive right to exercise that power. In the context of political legitimacy, the rhetoric of negative aesthetics functions to reactivate this “pragmatic” belief and in so doing gives it pride of place among society’s political values—irrespective of the type of legitimacy embraced either by civil society or the state. Individually or together, the tragic, the sublime, and the uncanny cut across the different types of legitimacy, as well as the different types of government, short-circuiting the ongoing process of legitimation while simultaneously circumventing the irresolvable crisis in the aesthetics of politics that would otherwise be unavoidable. Although this (dys)functional belief may be subject to a recurrent pattern of decline and regrowth, it never simply disappears from the storehouse of common feeling. Rather, inasmuch as it takes root in the body politic, its emotive force exerts a permanent conditioning effect, such that even in dormancy it remains in force as a living potentiality, one that can be continually exploited simply by means of the suggestion or appearance of aesthetic violence.

Second, this wager—which is also shared by the state—reveals something else about the impact of negative aesthetics over the long-range, namely, that the rhetorical effectivity of circumventing beauty consists, in part, in civil dissuasion, specifically, in dissuading society from a belief in its own autonomy vis-à-vis the state apparatus of government.⁴ Indeed, the acceptance and recognition, by the people, of the state’s practical necessity presupposes while enacting what, in a different context, Paul Virilio terms “civil deterrence” (2007b), a negative form of persuasion, whereby the body politic is discouraged from freely pursuing the project of self-determination. Embodied in a secularized version of Pascal’s wager, this deterrence seems reasonable enough. However, as critics of the wager have pointed out, the reasoning and thus

⁴ That is, the state, for its part, makes a similar wager, supposing that the possible gains afforded by effective political legitimacy are well worth the possible costs.

reasonableness of the wager is specious; it relies on an assumption (i.e., that the state is at worst a necessary evil) that by its very nature is non-demonstrable, merely hypothetical. In the hands of early social contract theorists like Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, it achieves a near mythical status, immortalized as it is in the figural state of nature. But above all—casuistry notwithstanding—the supposition is effective, a resource easily exploitable and regularly utilized by the state and its rhetoric. Adding to this effectiveness is the fact that civil dissuasion is non-ideological, in the sense that its capacity to deter society from self-rule is independent of those systems of ideas and ideals which form the basis of economic or political theory and policy, such as the ideology of republicanism. This is why the state does not need to lose sleep over the occasional unpopular administration and why it can easily withstand governments widely perceived to be borderline illegitimate or corrupt. In the final analysis, the state is not so much ideological as it is a rhetorical substratum, reducible to a wager, which is transversal of all political ideology. So long as the citizenry is made to remember the stakes of the wager—that the state's *raison d'être* is not “political” (i.e., not a *raison d'état*) but necessary—the state may rest assured that the vast majority of its citizens will continue to make the “safe” bet. As I have demonstrated, the categories of negative aesthetics, particularly those involving fear, provide the state with a singular and powerful means of reanimating the basic supposition upon which political legitimacy ultimately depends and, thereby, of reactivating a primordial affective condition of civil deterrence.

And this dissuasive effect points up a hidden truth about the rationality of the state form as such: over against the apparent rationality of the state's *claim* to legitimacy—a rationality that is not limited to rational-legal authority—the state engenders and maintains its actual legitimacy by means of non-rational persuasion. And this mode of persuasion, which proceeds via the

suggestion and control of aesthetic violence, throws into question the meaningfulness of juxtaposing consent with coercion. The rhetoric of the state thus raises the question, “How does the state maintain its rule?” and, consequently, “How does it order society?” George Santayana, in a letter dating from 1950s, suggests a possible answer when he writes, “[There] are three Orders of Society: the Generative, that grows up of itself: the Militant, which is imposed on mankind in all sorts of contradictory ways by bandits, conquerors, prophets, reformers, and idealists; and the third, the Rational order, which doesn't exist except in the imagination of philosophers” (2008, 189). Given the non-rationality of the state’s legitimacy, and assuming, like the anarchists, that the state is an artificial superstructure apart from the spontaneous organization of society, we are left with a provocative hypothesis, namely, that the state is inherently militant, that it rules by fiat disguised as rational consensus. Necessarily complicit in this rule are those modes of quasi-aesthetic experience that, springing from the sources of our being, ensure and account for the state’s transcultural longevity. And rhetoric, for its part, succeeds where only it can, concealing the extent to which reason and emotion can be parlayed into an effective mechanism of coercive consensus, consensual submission.

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