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# The Outside of the Political

Schmitt, Deleuze, Foucault, Descola  
and the problem of travel

A thesis submitted to  
The University of Kent at Canterbury  
in the subject of Politics and Government  
for the degree of doctor of philosophy

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-

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# Abstract

Is everything political? Is ‘the political’ the ground on which we establish laws and policies? Ever since Carl Schmitt’s *The Concept of the Political* (1922), these questions concerning ‘the political’ have dominated the debate in political philosophy. This dissertation begins with this debate by studying the totalising and unsustainable political metaphysics of Schmitt. By operating a displacement, the question of the possibility of an ‘outside’ in the political metaphysics of Carl Schmitt is transformed when reading the two French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault.

Deleuze and Foucault help us to move away from the political voluntarism found in Schmitt to what we call ‘involuntary politics’. In chapter 2, we revisit Heidegger’s question ‘what is called thinking?’ that was so essential to Deleuze but find that Deleuze and Heidegger answered the question differently. While Heidegger answered this political question by the statement ‘we are not yet thinking’ and that it is the duty of philosophers to ‘think’, for Deleuze, thinking can happen in many different spheres (in cinema for instance) as well as in politics. A politics of thinking is for Deleuze, for instance when he claims that the Left wants people to ‘think’, a way to be disposed to receive the event. This involuntary politics does not imply a resignation to the status quo: stupidity is both the absence of thought as well as the origin of all thought for Deleuze. In chapter 3, we demonstrate that Michel Foucault’s politics was already developing in his early writings on literature, and that we cannot ignore the literary debt that Foucault’s political theory owes to his conceptualisation of the role of literature in society. For Foucault, literature is capable of creating a space that reflects, diagnoses and subverts politics; therefore, while literature enjoys a position external to politics, it is however not *autonomous* from politics.

Finally, the thesis turns to the problem of travel; the hypothesis guiding this last part is that travel presents itself as an almost all-too-obvious example (or a paradigm) of the outside of the political. Yet travel meets anthropology, and the questions of

contemporary tourism that inhabit our modernity are also the subject of many anthropologists (Marc Augé, Jean-Didier Urbain, Rachid Amirou). But anthropologists also ask questions about nature and culture that find resonance in the project of travel, and one cannot fully understand the purpose of travel and tourism without taking seriously the idea that the anthropologist is a professional traveller. In chapter 4, we deconstruct the commonly accepted opposition between travel and tourism to find in contemporary critical anthropological thought, in chapter 5, the conditions of possibility of contemporary travel. The interesting element of travel is that it is symptomatic of our contemporary social world, to the extent that the following question haunts the thesis: is travel the outside of politics?

In chapter 5, Descola's controversial table of the four ontologies allow us to conclude this dissertation with both concrete (since it is based on ethnographic works) and speculative arguments about ontological breaks, both the difficulty and the richness of an individual voyage from one ontology to another as well as the transformation of a single ontology, since these ontologies are far from being stable, ahistorical and fixed. What are the political consequences of thinking the world as being composed of a multiplicity of worlds? This raises problems about cultural and ontological relativism that will be discussed in the conclusion of chapter 5.

# Table of contents

INTRODUCTION .....	9
A question of method.....	14
What is political ontology? .....	18
PART 1: THE SPECTRE OF SCHMITT’S POLITICAL CATEGORIES.....	22
CHAPTER 1: A WORLD WITHOUT AESTHETICS .....	23
Schmitt: the name and the work.....	23
Section 1: The political against the monopoly of the state .....	29
The state of nature as the essence of the political.....	34
The return of the state in Schmitt’s work.....	39
Section 2: The process of exclusion (exception, suspension, decision).....	43
Existentialism in Schmitt .....	48
Some remarks on the language of politics: polemics or dialogue? .....	58
Section 3: The aesthetic play .....	61
The logic of myths.....	64
The banality of the aestheticisation of politics .....	71
The aesthetic judgment and Leviathan’s frontispiece.....	74
Conclusion.....	76
Transition to Part 2.....	77
PART 2: THE FRAGILITY OF DELEUZE’S AND FOUCAULT’S POLITICAL THOUGHT.....	82
CHAPTER 2: WHAT IS CALLED THINKING? WHEN DELEUZE WALKS IN HEIDEGGERIAN PATHS... ..	83
‘Philosophy merges with ontology’ .....	84
Section 1: Asking the question: What is Called Thinking? .....	87
Locating thought .....	92
The thinking path.....	93
A typology of signs, and thinking as an involuntary practice.....	95
Section 2: Reading ‘The Image of Thought’ .....	96
A typology of signs 2 .....	107
Language and translation .....	109

Section 3: Nihilism and thought.....	110
Thinking in relation to science, arts and politics .....	115
Deleuze’s question: what is called cinema-thinking? .....	118
Section 4: Stupidity, or answering the question ‘what is called thinking?’ .....	122
 CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE, HISTORICAL NOMINALISM AND POLITICS IN FOUCAULT.	129
Section 1: The epistemic status of literature in the early Foucault (transgression, contestation, outside) .....	135
Finitude and transgression.....	143
Non-knowledge and limit-experiences .....	146
Section 2: The object ‘literature’ .....	149
The context: against Sartre, but with Barthes and Bataille .....	149
Reading ‘Language and Literature’ (1964).....	152
Section 3: Explaining the disappearance of the object ‘literature’ in Foucault	161
Section 4: The question of autonomy of literature, or asking the question ‘what is literature?’ .....	166
From the nonplace of literature to the space of institutions .....	171
Foucault’s transition from literature to history, and the making of nominalism .....	180
Section 5: Foucault’s historical nominalism.....	183
Conclusion: Carrying the Political to its limits .....	188
Transition to Part 3.....	189
 PART 3: THE SEARCH FOR THE OUTSIDE IN A FINITE WORLD, AND THE PROBLEM OF TRAVEL TODAY .....	195
CHAPTER 4: THE DECONSTRUCTION OF TRAVEL .....	196
Section 1: The deconstruction of travel .....	198
Prolegomena to a critique of libidinal-political economy of travel.....	200
The dogmatic image of travel .....	207
The United Nations World Tourism Organisation .....	209
Section 2: The birth of tourism, and the discovery of finitude (18 <sup>th</sup> century)	215
The Grand Tour and overseas travels .....	217
What is a ‘relation of travel’? Travel as a nominalist practice.....	222
When philosophers read travellers and vice-versa. The case of Rousseau-Bougainville-Diderot.....	227
Conclusion: On the persistence of exoticism in French thought.....	241

CHAPTER 5: WHAT IS AN ONTOLOGICAL BREAK? .....	244
Current anthropology as a condition of possibility of travel .....	244
Section 1: Augé and the impossible voyage .....	246
Section 2: From Lévi-Strauss to Descola, or the political birth of classification .....	252
Lévi-Strauss's cosmopolitics.....	256
Section 3: The structural anthropology of Descola .....	260
The Great Divide .....	260
Interiority and exteriority in Descola .....	262
Descola's four ontologies .....	266
Section 4: What is the outside of naturalism? Experimenting with ontological breaks.....	278
Travel and ontology.....	280
The pitfalls of cultural relativism and the alter- <i>anthropos</i> to come .....	283
Conclusion.....	290
CONCLUSION .....	292
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	300