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Politics in Tension.
Counter-Currents for a Post-Critical Age

Domination without Emancipation: Time for Post-Critical Politics?

A radical critique of domination will lead to emancipation: during the past centuries, such a hope has fueled decades of (often successful) political struggles, and thus deserves much respect and gratitude. Should it continue to structure our current conception of political activism? That is much less clear. Many voices and many arguments seem to undermine our faith in this typically "modern" take on politics. The Leftist critique of domination marching towards ever more freedom and equality seems to have lost a great deal of its traction over the past four decades. At best, it has slowed down, to the point of almost complete stasis. At worst, it has totally derailed. Should the traditional heralds and heroes of emancipation see in this pause an opportunity to gather their forces, before resuming their triumphant march forwards towards social Progress? Or should they suspect their very banner to have become somewhat obsolete?

While acknowledging the proven merits of the critique of domination towards emancipation, this article suggests supplementing—not necessarily replacing—this traditional triangle with a *politics of tensions* more closely articulated with our contemporary economy of attention. It will be left to the reader to decide whether this politics of tensions is just another form of politics, able to help us renew our intellectual and practical toolkit to intervene more effectively in the current and future evolutions of our ever changing societies, or whether what is proposed here is the very negation (and denial) of what politics is, and should be, all about. I, for one, humbly confess to see equally good reasons to defend both of these apparently incompatible opinions.

But before sketching this proposal of supplementation, let us briefly survey some of the good reasons that can make us weary of the current valences of each of the three corners of the modernist triangle.

Domination clearly is the least objectionable of the three. The domination of capital over workers has rarely been so absolute and shameless. The domination of colonizing nations and populations over the rest of the world has certainly altered its modalities over the last hundred years, but it maintains a world order in which people of European descent keep exploiting the labor, resources and cultures of the Global South, with important (but not yet game-changing) challenges coming from the far East. Within the Global North, while the status of women, racial and gender minorities has nominally improved over the last 50 years, social and economic domination proves dramatically persistent under the thin shellac of legal equality. Furthering the struggles against domination launched at the end of the 18th century with the Haitian Revolution and the *Declaration of the Rights of Women* clearly remains on the order of the day.

Of course, conceptions of domination (most prominently in the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu) often run the risk of reducing dominated parts of the population to the status of merely passive victims: but only minor adjustments are necessary to correct this. For half a century, Cultural Studies have taught us to pay more attention to the multiple forms of (often surprising, creative and inspiring) agency developed among those who constantly invent new ways to deflect, dodge, neutralize, ridicule, and counteract the power used to oppress them.

Emancipation will be harder to salvage. Three major objections can be turned against its promise, a promise that has been so efficient in empowering disenfranchised populations with hopes of a better future. First, of course, the track records of supposedly emancipated societies have not been as convincing as one had initially hoped for. The USSR, Communist China, Cuba, Cambodia, North Korea, Venezuela could hardly be depicted for very long as external models to emulate. When milder forms of socialist parties have managed to democratically come to power (in France in 1981, in post-Franco Spain, or Syriza in Greece in 2015), their realist turn while in government has quickly deflated any serious promise of emancipation. But this typical "post-modern" distrust of political will is by far the most rehashed and the least interesting objection of the three.

The second objection does not stress the abyss that separates the ideals from their realizations, but questions the validity of the ideal itself. Why in the world would one want to be "emancipated"? Slaves, serfs, servants and children, for sure, crave to no longer be kept "under the authoritative hand" (*mancipatio* or *mancipium*) of a master or a patriarch. And, metaphorically, anybody put under the institutional tutelage of another person may legitimately desire to become autonomous from this dependence. Several recent thinkers, however, have raised doubts about the ideal of "individual autonomy" that has played such a central role in modernist political philosophy. Bruno Latour stresses the importance of the "attachments" which bind us together, simultaneously tying us to each other (i.e., restricting my individual freedom to choose whatever pleases me) and providing us with the collective strength that constitutes our necessarily related agency (i.e., empowering me actually to do, with the help of others, what I choose). Donna Haraway, Anna Tsing and Karen Barad, among many other ecofeminist thinkers, and along with Tim Ingold, show how "entangled" we are in the web of life, and how the very notion of each individual "giving himself his own law" (auto-nomy) is both unrealistic and dangerous. Bernard Aspe or Jason Read turn to Gilbert Simondon' concept of transindividuality to better understand our necessary co-evolution with other humans and non-humans (technical objects in particular), within complex milieus of co-action, taking us quite far from the imaginary of self-mastery made to shine at the horizon of political emancipation.[1]

The third objection to the ideal of emancipation comes from considering the unsustainability of our modern conception of the economy, which has beendenounced by a renewed wave of environmentalism. In a recent essay[2], French philosopher Pierre Charbonnier has retraced the historical conjuncture in which a certain conception of freedom developed that was thet based on the presupposition of a limitless availability of natural resources. To make a long story short, the ideal of political emancipation is heavily indebted to an economic fantasy of unlimited growth that proves more damning every day.

For at least these three sets of reasons, our contemporary challenge may be to conceive of political actions that fight the countless injustices of domination without being in a position to make

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[1] See for instance, Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into the Modes of Existence,* Harvard University Press, 2012; Karen Barad, Meeting the Universe Halfway. On the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning, Durham: Duke University Press, 2007; Jason Read, *The Politics of Transindividuality*, Chicago: Haymarket, 2016.

[2] Pierre Charbonnier, *Abondance et liberté. Une histoire environnementale des idées politiques*, Paris : La Découverte, 2020.

any promise of future emancipation—since growing out of the legal *mancipatio* of a human tutor can in no way "free" us from our mutual attachments, from the meshwork of intra-dependencies that entangle us within our environments, nor from the finite resources that necessarily limit the extension of our freedoms.

The third corner of the modernist triangle, the practice of *critique* to denounce, analyze, understand, and ultimately tear down domination, can also be subjected to a series of three reproaches: its arrogance, its misuse, and its counter-productivity[3]. Whoever criticizes someone or something tends to place himself above the person, the institution or the event that is criticized: the critique "knows better" what could and should have been done. There is thus something inherently arrogant in a gesture that can only be made from above, from the superior point of view of a better knowledge towards the inferior status of a lesser understanding. Hence a somewhat contradictory posture within modernist politics: domination is denounced from a domineering position of critique; emancipation is promoted with the *mancipium* of a superior authority.

While this structural contradiction could in principle be neutralized by a careful practice of respectful (constructive) criticism, 20th-century Leftist politics have amply demonstrated a poisonous tendency for critique to corrode, splinter, and undermine the opportunities to gather forces around a common cause. Ideologues and theorists have reserved their sharpest and most violent critiques for the faction that was closest to their overall position, driving dynamics of inner divisions and splits that have considerably weakened these movements. Most critiques waste everybody's time, either by raising objections that the criticized person (and her readers) were already well aware of, but could not address within the limits of their statement, or by reproaching them not to have done or said something different than what they did or said (thus frequently ignoring what they actually put forth). Our intellectual conversations would be much richer if we were to stick to two basic rules of interaction: 1° in each particular thing one encounters, let us try and take what is good and fruitful in it (Spinoza, *Ethics*, V, 10); 2° instead of condemning others for writing or doing what they did, let us show and teach by example what and how one can do better.

Finally, probably as a result of its arrogance and its misuses, critique can often be shown to be counter-productive. A common reproach made to politics-as-usual, as practiced in Parliaments and reflected in the media, concerns its drift towards bickering. "People" are *not* stupid, even those fed on Fox News: people—i.e., we—know very well that most of what politicians throw at each other is disingenuous, overly critical posturing, largely disconnected from the substantive issues at hand. More importantly, even a most superficial understanding of the attention economy should teach us the "Mae West" lesson: "there is no such thing as bad publicity" (more accurately attributed to 19th-century publicist Phineas T. Barnum). To criticize someone or something results in fueling it with more attention than it deserves; by doing so, one often strengthens what one intends to denounce. Here again, proposing better alternatives is much more important than locking the debate on the terms chosen by one's adversary. More generally, the productive part of critique is its capacity to expose, explain, and thus counter-effect, the causes that allow for a certain form of domination to impose its oppressive effects. Even if our understanding is intrinsically linked to our judgement, we would generally be much better off without the accusations and condemnations that litter our political conversations.

What could politics look like, after the necessary attempts to counter oppressive forms of domination have gotten rid of the lures of emancipation, as well as of the traps of critique? It is such a tentative post-critical and post-emancipatory politics that the following sections will try and sketch.

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[3]   A recent book directed by Laurent de Sutter, *Postcritique* (Paris, PUF, 2019) has collected a few arguments for the shift towards a post-critical age. See also, by the same author, *Indignation totale*, Paris: Editions de l'Observatoire, 2019.

Party Lines and Undercurrents

The storming of the Republican presidential primaries by a media-obsessed businessman in the USA, along with the victories of the Marchers [*La République en marche!*] in France or the Five-Star Movement in Italy, are often interpreted as heralding the end of twentieth-century-styled political parties (that is, parties supported by an ideology, based on a coherent vision of the world, and precisely identifiable on a political spectrum moving from the far left to the far right). Such an interpretation forgets – or refuses to acknowledge – that for a long time already a Democrat in the U.S. South can hold positions that are more conservative than a Republican from Massachusetts. Or that the French Socialist Party has been persistently divided and energized by a huge variety of currents, eventually debilitated by the obligation to form a toothless "synthesis" (an insipid art most infamously practiced by former President François Hollande).

If the present decomposition of the European "Left" indicates anything, it may be that *the most pertinent level for analyzing contemporary political evolutions is not so much that of the parties, but that of underlying currents.* The two levels are not of course mutually exclusive. If currents remain scattered and divided, they are shuttered from the framework of representative politics inherited from the nineteenth century; and the major challenge of the art of politics is to assemble a cluster of currents into a party in a consistent, dynamic and galvanizing (i.e., not toothless and insipid) way. The "Left" has been doubly incapable of overcoming this challenge, which has led to its contemporary decay, thus opening a two-lane street for the advance of the "far-center" (pro-business Marchers in France, liberal-democrats everywhere), soon to be overtaken by the far-right (xenophobic Frontists, nationalists and white supremacists).

We can turn to common language to better understand the distinction between party lines and undercurrents. As in any other common language—insofar as it carries the fine grain of popular wisdom resulting from centuries of cooperative practices, social frictions, mediated conflicts and innovative adjustments—the French language indicates a suggestive way to understand how political parties neutralize political dynamics as much as they embody them. The expression *en prendre son parti*, literally "to take one's party" (roughly equivalent to the English expression "to accept one's lot"), refers to a moment of resignation, wherein what was originally undesirable, or even unacceptable, ends up being seen as the only option left. "To take one's party" thus amounts to renounce one's ambition, desire or rightful claims, in order to follow the path of least resistance or of most achievable second best.

Contrary to the organic unity the Communist Party had hoped to achieve during a few decades of the 20th century (with some real successes, but at an overall heavy price)—an unrealistic dream that eventually lead the Left to fragment itself in a ridiculous plethora of microscopic sectarian entities spending most of their energy in internecine quarrels and fraternal detestation—contemporary parties may be best considered as opportunistic coalitions among various currents who continuously try to pull it in their direction, resulting in a "party line" drawn just before the breaking point.

The past four decades have witnessed, on the face of it, a dramatic backlash in terms of the traditional Left vs. Right mapping of politics. In Europe, Socialists have discredited themselves by endorsing neoliberal "reforms" (privatization of public services, disassembling of the Welfare State, "tough-on-crime" policies, indifference towards the evils of social inequalities), capitulating to the economic and financial flows induced by globalized capitalism. They certainly acted politically, even if it led to avoiding politics altogether (beyond its managerial form). But their narrative of irresistible globalized flows has emptied institutional politics of its very foundation (the possibility of opposition). In other words, the neoliberal backlash imposed itself by promoting the image of a world of flows devoid of counter-currents.

It's not surprising that representative politics dissolve in such a world (as demonstrated by the rise in abstention rates), since everyone is called on to resign oneself [*en prendre son parti*] to a single party line, already drawn by the calculations of orthodox Economists. Party politics has reduced itself to promoting the acceptance of an inescapably unfair collective destiny, in which everyone is the rival of everyone else, but in which a happy few seem positioned to win-it-all at the expenses of too many. Such a (non) choice can only lead to an explosive mixture of acrimony and indifference, between which our contemporary political affects dangerously oscillate, with a strong inclination for tilting towards fascistoid reactions in times of collapse.

At the same time, however, very lively cultural undercurrents have deeply altered the way the majority of our populations see themselves. With considerable independence and mistrust towards political parties, social movements driven by other forms of activism have successfully promoted and spread a number of struggles against long-lasting forms of domination, in terms of racial equality, womens' rights, gay rights, animal rights, environmental awareness, neurodiversity. All these undercurrents are opposed to a certain circulation of capital and power flows among us. Nowadays, *politics lives by counter-currents that refuse to "take the party" of domination* (en prendre leur parti). They are perceived as political insofar as they counter a certain flow of domination. Indeed, it is precisely *against* a preexisting current that a gesture or a collective acquires form and consistency in a political landscape.

Eighteen Political Counter-Currents

At first glance, a *politics of currents* would identify the basic unit of institutional politics with activist sensibilities that are attuned to the basic currents that animate and antagonize social life[4]. I have proposed a rough (and partisan) mapping of such currents and counter-currents in my 2018 book entitled *Political Counter-Currents*, identifying eighteen polarities that offer a poetic cartography of the material and mental energies whose contradictions structure our present and future.[5] I will list and characterize them here very concisely, in order to illustrate what types of currents I have in mind. It would of course be useful to refine their characterization, and especially to identify others.

Even if the book was published a few months before the Yellow vests [*Gilets jaunes]* movement took to the streets of France in 2018, triggered by a mobilization against an increase in gas prices and speed limits on country roads, my first polarity contrasted the *Automobilists*, who think in terms of individual will, seeing the world from behind their windshield and steering wheel, considering others as rivals for parking spaces and obstacles to faster driving, and listening to hate radio while stuck in the traffic jams duringtheir daily commute, with the *Medialists*, who approach the world in terms of common causes and of the social conditioning of reality by the media/milieu. A second polarity opposed the *Sovereignists*, eager to assert their personal and national mastery over themselves, building walls to make sure foreign influences be kept at bay, to *Dividualists*, who conceive of their personal and collective identities (personhood, nationality, ethnicity) as inherently divided, partial and inescapably schizophrenic. A third polarity divided the world between *SlowDownists*, who resent and denounce the absurd speed imposed upon us, in all aspects of our existence, by an imperative to think, communicate, and work ever faster than before, and *Accelerationists*, who blame our exhaustion and

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burn-out on the fundamentally backwards nature of capitalist domination, stuck as it is on obsolete rules of property that prevent our socio-political relations to keep in sync with our technological potentials for emancipation. The fourth polarity distinguished *HomeOwnerists*, defending their right to keep their home, backyard and way of life insulated from the outside world by gates and locks, from *Inseparationists*, who stress the impossibility (and undesirability) of tightly separating the constantly interpenetrating spheres of our existence on the surface of this one planet.
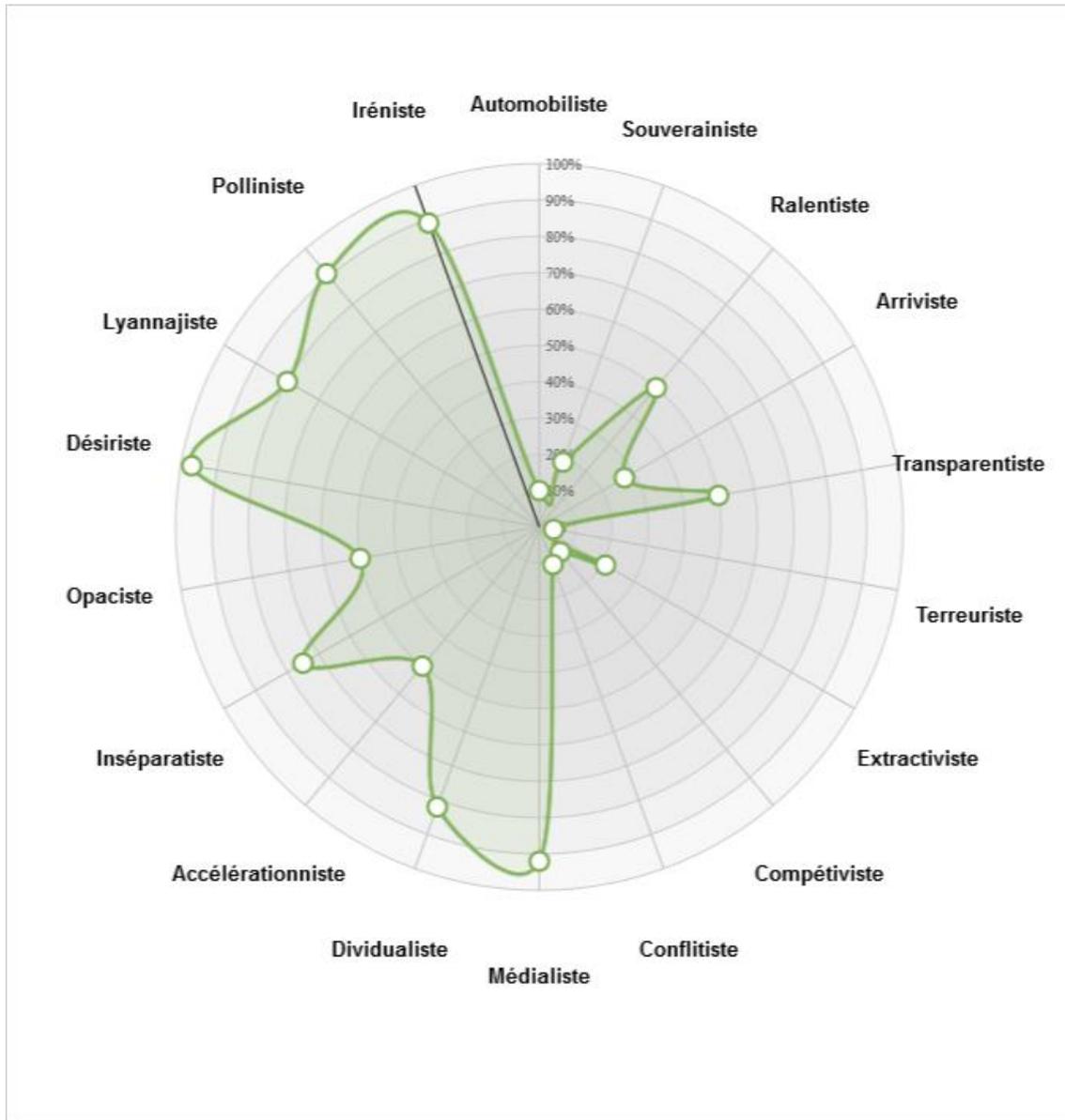

Figure 1: Self-perceived ideological profile of the author,
according to Jonathan Favre-Lamarine's visualization device.

A fifth polarity set the *Transparentists*, who expect all processes to be transparent, documented, accountable, paper-trailed, against the *Opacists*, who consider a certain amount of opacity

as a precondition for privacy and diversity. A sixth polarity contrasted the *(Anti-)Terrorists*, who either resort to terror-inducing tactics or legitimate counter-terror in the name of defending our safety against whomever is accused to threaten it, with the *Desirists*, who believe the best way to safeguard and nurture our sociability is to foster desires rather than to propagate fears. A seventh polarity opposed the *Extractivists*, who approach our social and natural world as being full of itemizable resources ready to be exploited to our profit, to the *Lyannajists*, who see our only real strengths and wealth in the solidary entanglements that tie us to each other across species. As an eighth polarity, the *Competivists*, who place financial competitiveness and rivalry for limited resources as the only (Darwinist) rule of survival between individuals and nations, are contrasted with the *Pollinists*, who locate our most important sources of wealth in activities of pollination that are generally unaccounted for in the price-indicators that skew our dominant perception of competition. The ninth and final polarity opposed *Conflictualists*, who believe political change can only be carried out through confrontations and power struggles, to the *Irenists*, who are most weary of avoiding war, most aware of our common interdependency, and most eager to defuse conflicts through creative lines of flight.

After the book was published, Jonathan Favre-Lamarine, a Swiss designer, devised a clever tool that invited readers to position themselves somewhere along the continuum sketched by these nine polarities, generating a graphic representation of each person's (self-perceived) multi-dimensioned ideological profile[6]. While the visual result can easily be translated into the traditional polarity of Left vs. Right (*figure 1* revealing a clearly leftist inclination, for instance), the multiplication of the contrasts can be used to fine-tune this rough opposition, which probably remains decisive, but which hides as many features as it reveals about our current political situations.

One of our most urgent challenges may be to build up common fronts of resistance, through coalitions that would unite us behind a selected number of largely consensual demands—and this may certainly re-compose a battlefield between a Left- and a Right-wing. This much needed task, however, will have to be aware of the variety of currents and countercurrents that always threaten to undermine and split such coalitions. My book hoped to contribute to this preliminary mapping through a certain poetical renewal of our political vocabulary—which explains, but probably does not suffice to excuse, why other more obvious, and more important, polarities were omitted, like the *Equalists* vs. the *Supremacists*, the *LGBTists* vs. the *Patriarcalists*, the *Veganists* vs. the *Omnivorists*, or even the *Undercommonists* vs. the *Managerialists*.

Whatever the labels, my main point here is to understand the dynamics that are at work below the surface of more or less cleverly designed party lines.

The Economy of Attention and the Politics of Tensions

In its recent European use, the label "populist" serves to disqualify anyone who refuses to consent to the supposedly scientific laws of markets and financial flows. With a banker at their head, the French Marchers (*La République en marche!*) are the standard-bearers of the financial markets (*marchés*), drumming up the competitive beat to which we're all expected to march (*marcher*)—under the recurrent whip of endless "reforms" designed to make us work more efficiently. But the apathy brought about by the mantra of TINA (There is no alternative) has given an unhoped-for visibility to any movement claiming to counteract market domination. Assuming the position of a counter-current to the biased party line (*parti pris*) of flows has become the proof of political authenticity.

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[6]   This tool is available at https://jfavlam.gitlab.io/contre-courants-politiques/#/about. I am deeply grateful to Jonathan
      Favre-Lamarine for taking the time to develop it.

The most reactionary and conservative currents and parties easily profit from this situation, since their hallmark is to position themselves against the movement of time as well as against any form of becoming that upsets the well-engrained modes of domination. They can simultaneously win on two fronts: on one hand, they denounce financial globalization as a transnational attack on national sovereignty; on the other, they defend traditional values against inner enemies portrayed as foreign agents. Xenophobia, patriotism, religious fundamentalism (Christian or Hindu, as much as Islamic), intolerant fetishization of the patriarchal Family, of the police order, of Secularism (*Laïcité*): all such marks of identitarian difference to the party line of flows become powerful attractors of attention and affectivity by crowning themselves with the magical aura of Resistance.

"Populism" needs to be understood in its causes, rather than simply disqualified and condemned. The often superficial and simple analyses that are articulated under the heading of *the economy of attention* would benefit from a more profound sensitivity to the valid reasons that push our affects to embrace "bad" causes. Of course, we should not underestimate the media enthrallments created by the various entertainment industries[7]. From the old-fashioned daily press to cinema, radio, and television, all the way to digital platforms that target us through the aid of self-learning algorithms, our attention is constantly being attracted, captivated, magnetized, and enlisted in the desire for name-brand products (Nespresso), in the fear of certain populations (African-American young men, Latinos, Roma, veiled women), or in the acceptance of certain fetishes (anti-terrorism, employment, GDP growth).

If we look at the stock value of Google and Facebook, attentional flows constitute the merchandise that generates the highest profit rates. But the very real exploitation of the economy of attention should not obscure the underlying importance, and still underestimated potential, of *the politics of tension*. The first perspective considers the attraction that an image, a story, or a slogan exerts on a particular public at a given moment in terms of bait (a hook, an attractor, as "priming"), which localizes the problem on an intermittent relationship between a particular (attracting) object and a particular (attracted) subject, all considered and accounted for in terms of flows (click flows, re-tweets, investment flows). But this attraction can also, in a more interesting way, be envisioned from the perspective of *a magnetic field* that inscribes the attentive subject and the attentional object in the *electric tension* maintained by two opposing polarities. These opposite poles can easily remain hidden from view: their effects only become visible once a certain distance and altitude are taken towards them. Indeed, phenomena resulting from electromagnetic polarization affected human existence for thousands of years before we began to come to an understanding of their invisible causes (which only were discovered in the eighteenth century).

Our power of analysis thus benefits by substituting a vocabulary of *currents* for a (related but distinct) vocabulary of *flows*. To speak of *flows* invites us to imagine measurable quantities of various entities (liquids, raw materials, merchandise, labor force, money, information, images) moving from a point A to a point B within a certain period of time, which is a function of their travel speed. While air currents and marine currents follow this same imaginary, the model of an *electric current* has the particularity of turning our perception away from distances or speeds of electron flows (which we can scarcely imagine), and instead focuses our attention on the underlying presence of a stable polarity that structures surface circulations (*figure 2*). The electromagnetic imaginary, using the discourse of currents, makes us attentive to the permanence of the differentials that motivate and mobilize the exchange of words.

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7   For the notion of *media enthrallments*, see Yves Citton, *The Ecology of Attention*, Cambridge: Polity, 2017, and *Mediarchy*, Cambridge: Polity, 2019.
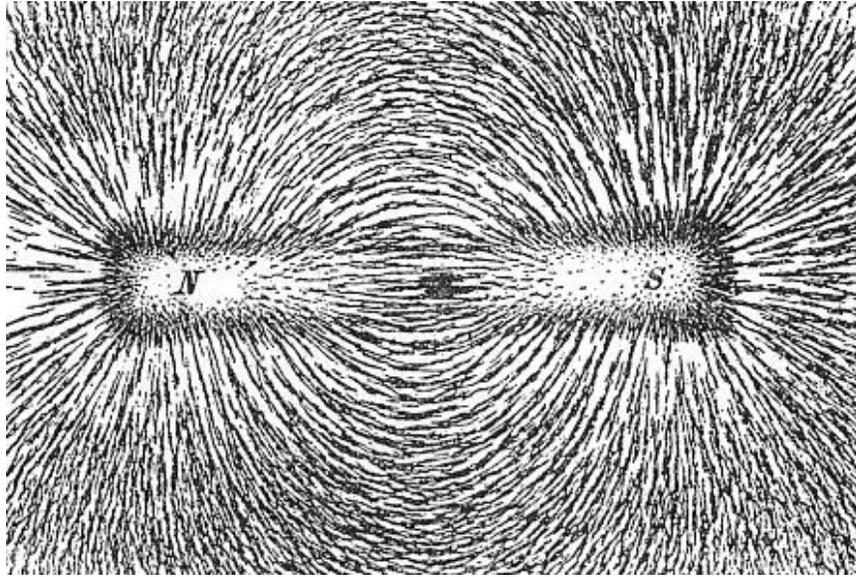
Figure 2: A magnetic field
Newton Henry Black, Harvey N. Davis, *Practical Physics*, The MacMillan Co., 1913, p. 242.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=73846

Addressing political questions from the perspective of the polarities that energize them allows for a double reframing of our tired and rather discouraging political spectacle. Firstly, one is no longer dazzled by the staging of political debates, since our attention moves from the (extremely repetitive) thematics that are discussed to the *modalities of their composition and framing* that determine what is being spoken of and it what terms. In other words: instead of seeing what is presented (such as the evolution of employment rates, public deficits, competitiveness), we instead look to the flashlight that chooses to illuminate a certain problem rather than another.

But a second displacement occurs that is just as important. Before posing the question of what the flashlight is illuminating, we should first ask ourselves what powers its light. And the response to this second question helps us respond more appropriately to the first. That is: before tearing ourselves to pieces over the unemployment curve or the reduction of the number of civil servants, let's first observe not only the flashlight that illuminates the surrounding darkness, but also and especially the battery which supplies its current, as well as the nerve tensions of the person holding it. It is from the observation, selection, and interpretation of these multiple sources of tension – heterogeneous but formidably interlinked – that we can better understand our attentions and inattentions of the moment. The economy of attention needs to be completed with a politics of tensions, since the latter is what powers the former (electrically, magnetically, affectively).

Media Electrifications and Political Counter-Currents.

The reader will have grasped by now that the insistent recourse to electromagnetic metaphors (battery, pole, flashlight, current, tension, attraction, magnetization) is not purely analogical, even if they were elaborated with poetic license and literary freedom. The materialist study of electronic currents that physically circulate between us, as well as within us, runs parallel to the interpretative study of the symbolic magnetizations that influence our behavior. It's clear that behind each televised image or photograph posted on Instagram is a camera, the nerve tension of a finger which releases the shutter,

and the brain that anticipates the effect of a particular framing. But there is also the network of EDF [*électricité de France*] and the nuclear reactors of Areva – whose electric currents, economic interests, and political influence contribute to facilitate or inhibit the circulation of certain flows of images and currents of ideas over others.

A politics of tensions must strive to conceive the continuity, as well as the marge of relative autonomy, that both unite and distinguish – without ever really separating – the electrification of our technical apparatuses and the impulses of our nervous systems. If our collective mediatized attention chooses certain fragments of reality rather than others, in order to charge certain objects with political tensions, it happens according to the material polarisations that structure and reproduce (indirectly, and often through complex and pliable intermediaries) our institutions and social inequalities. At any given time period, the media electrifications that populate political imaginaries with their familiar figures (such as the President, the leader of the opposition, the CEO, the terrorist, the veiled woman, suburban youth, the unionist on strike, the traveler infuriated over another day of transportation strike) constitute a symbolic infrastructure in which polarisation plays a role as fundamental as that of the + and the – in an electric battery.

Approaching institutional politics in terms of counter-currents means granting a double status to the notion of opposition. On the one hand, as mentioned earlier, it's clear that what moves without encountering (human) resistance is not part of the political sphere. A current of air in an empty room does not generate debate. Only in the context of constructing a dam does a waterway become political. Politics only exists, in this eminently modern viewpoint, through *counter*-currents. Interest arises only for those movements that *oppose* a particular current visible within a given circulation of flows.

But as we've just seen, the merit of an electromagnetic imaginary lies in its ability to conceive of opposition not as something occasional, but structural. From the perspective of a battery or an electric circuit, the positive pole does not come *before* a negative pole, which would only come later as a reaction to a preexisting feature of the world. Resistance is not reactive but constitutive of electric tension. The two poles + and – are strictly contemporary, co-present, intrinsically linked to each other like two sides of the same coin. Even if they "oppose" each other, it would be absurd to "choose" one at the exclusion of the other, since neither would exist without its opposite. Their opposition does not arise from an exclusive rivalry, but from a constitutive and dynamic *tension*.

This is the way to understand and use the eighteen polarities sketched earlier. The political counter-currents conceived in terms of these polarities do not correspond to separate political parties (on the model of territorial partitions), which would ask us to choose our exclusive belonging to one or the other among the terms in opposition. The pairing of *Transparentists* vs. *Opacists*, for instance, puts in tension two counter-currents that certainly oppose each other, but whose existence nonetheless depends on each other in the form of a *contrast*. They are constituted in their contradictory co-presence: they only exist as counter-currents to each other, without either one having primacy over the other— though within a certain magnetic field that has been greatly altered over the recent years by the development of big data, face recognition, and surveillance capitalism.

The model presented here is not one of an exclusive partition, but of a participative sharing (*partage*), understood in the sense of slicing different parts of a cake for those who partake in the same shared meal. Individually as well as collectively, we are necessarily divided between two poles, in the same way that, wherever we live on the planet, we necessarily live at a certain distance from the North pole and from the South pole, since life is impossible to sustain while residing on one of the poles themselves. Politics of tension constitute our condition of existence, as human consumption (unequally concentrated among a few rich nations) exceeds the limits of the planet in an increasingly patent and preoccupying manner. We can't learn to live on this planet, necessarily and willingly together, unless we manage to *adjust* – in the sense of regulating, but especially in the sense of making more just – the

tensions that a participative sharing imposes on us. Mapping the political counter-currents that move through us, at the individual as well as global level, may provide a useful prelude to this work of adjustment.

Post-Critical Vectorialist Power and the Triumph of Hingery

So what sort of politics do the previous pages speak of? The politics presented on TV programs? The politics that happen during the daily negotiations of Ms. Mayor? The politics that get decided when a lobbyist enters a legislator's office? The politics of putting one's physical well-being at risk to face off riot police come to evict a ZAD [*zone à défendre*]? The polarities and counter-currents mentioned above span all these scenarios, precisely because they all participate in the same fields of tension and are articulated within them.

Concerning standard "party politics," they are certainly exasperating when they bore us with empty slogans, sometimes denounced as such, other times piously dissected by a clique of exegetes of our common stupidity. But even when reduced to the personal affairs of media-friendly figures, whose scandals and outrageous behavior exhaust our attention and insult our collective intelligence, contemporary party politics reveal important underlying tensions – though not without bringing about a significant loss of meaning, among other calamitous effects. Given the way our current electrified media world functions (and it could function differently), the personalization of politics is harmful but perhaps inevitable. The best thing to do is to push it further, rather than powerlessly lament it. As nauseating (and/or ridiculous) as they can be, "scandals" and "affairs" that implicate political figures at least have the merit of bringing to light the source of the circulation of certain currents that feed political electrification. They effectively produce the displacement mentioned above, if only we get into the habit of turning our attention away from the visible theme (what a President says) towards the flashlight which illuminates it (what a President does, in favor of whose interests).

The key to take this mediatized politics of tensions to a higher level—and not to repeat the self-defeating righteous mistakes of the Trump years—is to adopt a radically post-critical stance: *Never criticize what your opponent says* (no matter how outrageous it may be)! The Mae West lesson ("There is no such thing as bad publicity") is central to any proper understanding of the attention economy. When denouncing your opponent's idiocy, you strengthen his position, by the very fact of attracting more attention towards the agenda that he dictated with his statement. No better way to get buffoons elected into White Houses. Ignore your opponents, never respond to them, always be on the attack! Uncover what they do but wouldn't want too many people to know! Disclose who supports them, for what motives, with what returns on investments! In other words: choose *your* tensions—don't let anybody entrap you in theirs!

Plenty of interesting questions arise, even in the most stultifying affairs that debase politics to politicking, once our attention has been sharpened to what Emily Apter has cleverly analyzed as *Unexceptional Politics*[8]. From what position in the field of socio-economic tensions does a particular legislative initiative, or gridlock, emerge? Which power source allows the initiative to make visible a particular issue by attempting to address it? Personal scandals tend to hide actual political problems, while often revealing the true problems of the politics of tensions. The idiocy of mediatized affairs – understood in the etymological sense of the Greek term *idiôtès,* which doesn't mean an "imbecile", but a "private individual" – actually help to conceive the politics of tensions in another way. Entering into the details of who contacted whom, at what time, exerting what sort of pressure on them, to obtain what in exchange, takes us from the abstract sky of ideas into the concrete realities of power. Indeed, for

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[8]   Emily Apter, *Unexceptional Politics. On Obstruction, Impasse and the Impolitics*, New York, Verso Press, 2017.

better (softening ever-too-rigid rules) or worse (taking advantage of loopholes for personal gain), the realities of power are rarely based on questions of principle, and most often arise from practical handiwork.

What obstacle can be put in place to obstruct a harmful action to the community? How to encourage beneficial behavior? What wrench can be thrown to block which part of a nefarious machine? In other words: where should a levee be erected, and with what material? Where should a backdoor be opened, and to what end? Or, as is more often the case: what is the criteria for opening the door or closing it? In other words, in its concrete exercise, *politics is an affair of hinges* (*une histoire de gonds*)[9].

For a number of years now, McKenzie Wark has drawn our attention to the crucial role played by "vectors" in our intensely electrified societies—to the point of toying with the idea that the capitalist class is now being overtaken by a "vectorialist class"[10]. Vectorialist power comes from owning and controlling the vectors through which our communications take place. And since what is communicated among us draws its value from those who devote some of their attention to it, the vectorialist class effectively controls the production of value in our society.

How does one control a vector? In our world of currents and counter-currents, vectorialist power decides to interrupt the flows or to let them pass, reverse their course, tilt them this way or that way, to the left or right, diminish or accelerate their output, filter their content. In the space inhabited by human bodies, these operations occur through walls, doors, roads, stairs, turnstiles, barriers. In the electronic world, they occur through microprocessors, switches, gates, cables, servers and platforms. Between national borders as between computers, only in rare cases does nothing pass (an impassable wall?), and equally rare are those in which everything can pass without any constraint (a limitless public square?). Most often we arrange our living environments around gates, which we can, according to the needs of the moment, keep *more or less* open or closed. *Hinges* are thus central, though little celebrated, elements of our ways of living and sharing our territories of existence. Hinges are the main power tools of vectorialist domination.

Our microprocessors are nothing other than stripes of little hinges. They are conceived to be switched between an *on* mode, in which a current passes, and an *off* mode, in which it doesn't. Ubiquitous digitalization – which penetrates ever more intimately our territories and physical existence, by saturating them with sensors and switches that monitor and control our every gesture and action – involves implanting an army of little hinges around us, and soon within us. The enormous equipment currently being employed on behalf of artificial intelligence is an enormous "hingery".

From this discussion, we can arrive at a very general definition of *politics in the vectorialist age*: that which decides on the implantation and the operational modalities of hinges. This applies to every level of our existence, from microprocessors to bathroom doors (*figure 3*) and all the way to the thousands of kilometers traced by the frontier between Mexico and the United States. And whether they speak of the economy, of finance, of security, of censorship, of the job market, of taxes, or of welfare programs, *politicians' talk is a talk of hingery* (*les politiciens disent des gonneries*). Such is their function within our representative democracies: to give voice to the desires, fears, interests, and hopes of seeing barriers more or less open or closed in various instances.

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[9]   In the original French version, this whole section plays with the phonic proximity between the word *gond* ("hinge") and the word *con* ("idiot"). Many tongue-in-cheek sentences in the following paragraphs invite the reader to a double interpretation of political *gonnerie* (a word made up by the author) as meaning both political "hingery" and political "bullshit" (*connerie*).

[10] McKenzie Wark, *Capital Is Dead. Is This Something Worse?,* New York, Verso, 2019.
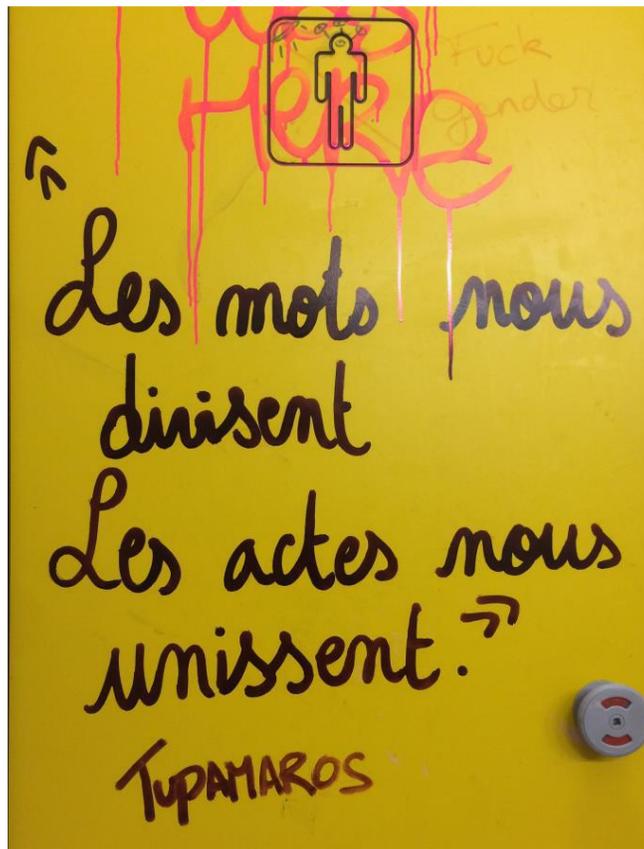
Figure 3: Bathroom door at the University Paris 8 with a graffiti:
"*Words divide us. Acts unite us.*" (2018) (photo by YC)

Of course, professional politicians are not the only ones to talk of hingery. Striking workers and students who block university campuses are also involved in hingery, by letting in certain employees, negotiators, students, teachers, administrative personnel, or journalists, based on their function within a particular place. Facebook engineers apply hingery when they reconfigure the terms of service regulating the access to our (supposedly) personal data: they selectively open or close the door to such data and determine the price of entry. If, as Jeremy Rifkin observed, our societies have entered the "age of access", then our era is likely to see the triumph of hingery.

Currently, the vectorialist triumph of hingery is also *the triumph of bullshit* (*le triomphe de la connerie*). According to the technical definition provided in 1986 by Harry G. Frankfurt, "bullshit" is spoken whenever the speaker does not care whether what is said is true or false, because the only thing that matters is the impact it will have on the listener/reader, an impact that is expected to flow in the interest of the bullshitter[11]. Frankfurt's theory has recently experienced a revival, due to its uncanny illustration by the flows of bulltweetting emitted from the White House. But its validity extends to the vectorialist class as a whole: Facebook, Twitter, Apple, Amazon, Verizon or Orange don't care whether what passes through their vectors is true or false, right or wrong, good or bad, as long as it attracts

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[11] Harry G. Frankfurt, "On Bullshit", *Raritan Quarterly Review*, 6 (2), 1986, p. 81-100. The article came out as a book, under the same title, published by Princeton University Press in 2005 and translated into French as *De l'art de dire des conneries* (Paris, 10/18, 2006).

attention, and rakes up profits. Vectorialist power, based on hingery, can thus be considered as *intrinsically post-critical*.

Binarists and Potentialists

To see (or hallucinate) hinges everywhere is not, however, sufficient to advance our understanding of the politics of tension. The most important thing to remember is that *not all hinges/bullshits are born equal*. This inequality will allow me to conclude by analyzing a tenth and final political polarity, whose contrast helps us grasp the tension that is likely to become central with the expansion of digitization.

The electrification of our everyday lives is based on devices whose functionality is essentially binary: powered *on* (the device is switched on, the current passes) or powered *off* (the device is switched off, the current doesn't pass). This mechanical logic of all or nothing still regulates the elementary components of our computers (at least until quantum computation arrives, which is only in its first stages): everything ultimately rests on the transition from *on* to *off*, on the discrete (discontinuous) alternation of 0 and 1.

But the nerve electrification of the sensory systems responsible for human thought is based on swarm behavior that seems irreducible to (and of a higher complexity then) our (current) microprocessors – at least as far as we can tell, and as far as we're unwilling to project the mechanical model of cybernetics onto the biological functioning of our brain.

Two abstract models of hingery emerge from this opposition (which goes beyond simply registering the distinction between the mechanical and the biological). They distinguish two broad types of machines, living or otherwise, according to their level of organization. The first model functions according to the strictly binary choice of *on* or *off*, 1 or 0, yes or not, present or absent, black or white. In this model, hinges only serve to switch the door from an open state to a closed state, and vice versa. There is no third possibility.

The second model allows for an organism to modulate its reactions according to perceived *nuances* within a continuum, with threshold effects arising according to given sampling ratio. This means, for example, that it can produce a sound moving from one octave to the one above it, without any audible interruption, or alter itself continuously form purple to red within a rainbow. Hinges here allow for a *relative* opening of the gate, in such a way that *more or less* current can pass according to need, where the door will often be neither completely open nor completely closed, but (a little) open and (a little) closed at the same time.

It should be clear that the distinction between these two models of hingery is of crucial importance for possible conceptualizations of the politics of tension[12]. Likewise for the status of the other polarities presented above.

The *Binarists* – close travel companions of the *Conflictualists* – rightly emphasize that, sooner or later, politics consists in choosing to do or not to do, to accept or to oppose, to vote *for* or *against*. For them, hinges ultimately mean open or closed doors. This seems to be the case as soon as we look at the concrete details of particular cases. From an abstract point of view, a border is certainly meant to be permeable (neither completely open nor completely closed), such that the door is left partially open and capable of moving on its hinges. But when abstraction hits the concrete ground, the binary nature of

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[12]   Franco 'Bifo' Berardi has very suggestively contrasted the *connective* (digital) mode of relations between beings to the *conjunctive* (analog) mode in *And. A Phenomenology of the End*, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2015.

politics becomes dramatically clear, for instance when anyone approaches the arrival counter at any US or Schengen area border control without a visa[13].

In the eyes of *Binarists*, modulations appear as illusions of abstraction, or as a luxury of the rich. Observed from the fine grain of their concreteness, sociopolitical realities are determined by switches and circuit-breakers, whose rigidity is only exacerbated by ubiquitous digitization. *Binarists* are no cheerleaders of binarity: they are the first to deplore its absurdities or cruelties. But they lay claim to a realism that considers these effects as ineluctable—even more in a digital age of ubiquitous computation ultimately based on current passing or not passing within a microprocessor.

At the other pole, enthusiasts of modulation could present themselves as *Potentialists*. They are not satisfied with reducing the continuum of the rainbow to the discontinuity of a limited set of pre-programmed colors, which will impose a response *for* or *against* to any conceivable question. Their instrument of choice is the *potentiometer* which, similar to the volume control on an audio device, allows for the modulation of the effective power of an operation within a given potential. The potentiometer appears as the instrument of adjustment *par excellence* – the magic button of political wizardry. Contrary to common wisdom, the *Potentialists* claim the superiority of the analog[14].

Their fundamental demands involve using the potentiometer to quell the most menacing tensions, and also to clear a path for claiming new rights. The first and last gesture of political hingery consists, according to the *Potentialists,* to put a foot in a door that is about to close, or to block a current that exerts a harmful action, in order to put in its place a modulator that allows for the reinvention of the dividing lines between the "open" and the "closed". Following this logic, each implantation of a potentiometer leads to the emergence of a new potential. Collective political power does not arise from a simple stocking up of force, nor from the mere interruption of flows, but from the refinement of our mutual capacities of adjustment.

According to *Binarists*, the two poles in opposition are attractors. Every political action ultimately tends towards one of them, since any action is constrained by the exclusive choices that are forced on us by the given state of our concrete realities. According to *Potentialists*, the poles are the two extremes that mark the limits between which each of us has to situate herself, always somewhere between the two – though not necessarily in the middle. The first group calls on us to choose our party between the counter-currents sketched above; the second invites us, less towards compromise, and more towards the challenge of "disparity" [*la disparation*]. The philosopher of technology Gilbert Simondon defined the latter as the stereoscopic ability to make emerge, from two contradictory images (that which my left eye receives and that which my right eye receives), a third dimension (depth), thus allowing the apparent contradiction to be resolved with creativity.[15]

Of course, the very notion of counter-currents, as it was presented in the earlier sections of this article, pays tribute to Binarists, as the eighteen neologisms were organized around clearly contradictory polarities. These polarities impel us, sooner or later, to consider the basis of our everyday decisions, to vindicate one pole rather than the other—as soon as one leaves the poetic sphere of a thought experiment in order to confront the painful dilemmas generated by the various forms of domination that brutalize our social realities. However, multiple occasions in the preceding pages have subscribed to the Potentialist faith. The above polarities have been presented as reference points, rather than calls to adhere to one pole at the exclusion of the other. The visual dashboard provided earlier by

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[13] Strong *Binarist* arguments can be found in Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds,* London: Bloomsbury, 2013 or in Bernard Aspe, *Les mots et les actes*, Caen: Éditions Nous, 2011.

[14] See Brian Massumi, "On the Superiority of the Analog", *Parables* for the *Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation,* Durham: Duke University Press, 2002. The same author provides strong *Potentialist* arguments in *The Power at the end of the Economy*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.

[15] Cite text by Simondon.

Jonathan Favre-Lamarine (*figure 1*) invites the reader to evaluate how far she is ready to go in each of the opposed directions. It operates as a potentiometer insofar as it allows the user to finely modulate her position in the tensional field drawn by each polarity.

Complicate Politics, Politicize Complexity

How, then, can such a politics of tensions contribute to our political orientation? By drowning us in twenty counter-currents, each dressed up in far-fetched neologisms? Doesn't it render the map of our political engagements even more illegible than the actual chaos of the party system? If one is serious about overcoming our current impotence, *shouldn't our politics be about simplifying things*?

Beneath their diversity, the belief in the need for simplification may be what unites the first group of the ten polarities elaborated represented on the right side of the dashboard. The Automobilists, the Sovereignists, the Slowdownists, the HomeOwnersists, the Transparentists, the (Anti-)Terrorists, the Extractivists, the Competivists, the Conflictualists, the Binarists all will find, each for different reasons and each in a different way, that the counter-currents sketched out in this book blurs politics through an extravagant literary fantasy that uselessly complicates what should instead be made accessible by clear explanations and simpler means. And they would be right.

For the past half-century, the discourses on the necessary consideration of "complexity" – however true and stimulating that they can be – have certainly had a demobilizing effect. Since everything is so maddeningly entangled, triggering the worst unexpected consequences even when the original intentions were noble and generous, how presumptuous can one be to even attempt to radically transform our societies? All we can do is throw our arms in the air, hope for the best, pity the victims, and provide humanitarian aid to appease momentarily the most intolerable catastrophies…

Discourses of complexity did bring to light the violence done by the simple responses, inherited from traditional ideologies, when they are cut and pasted onto the fragile subtlety of the multiple, interlinked layers that compose social realities and political problems. Of course, the social sciences should continue to devote all their efforts to explain social effects by their necessarily multiple causes. It is indeed urgent to grant them (at least) as much attention (and funding) than to the "harder" techno-scientific disciplines, since our very survival depends on them as much as on technical or managerial innovation. The true problem, however, is to measure to what degree the awareness of the complexity of the social leads to a political paralysis, inhibiting any action whose results may easily backfire on the best of intentions.

Not everyone is paralyzed. We know of hyperactive politicians, who hurriedly reform in every direction, without concern for the social calamities incurred by the simplistic dogmas in the name of which they justify their reforms, who progressively reduce public liberties to tighten their grip on the power apparatus, or who eagerly dismantle environmental regulation to make sure their friends in the business world can fully profit from the last drops of prosperity before our common collapse. Their immunity to ethical apprehension relative to complexity no doubt arises from their stubborn faith in constructing markets into self-regulating mechanisms, in traditional hierarchies of domination, or in the idea that self-interest is never so well served as by oneself.

If the Medialists, the Dividualists, the Accelerationists, the Inseparatists, the Opacists, the Desiderists, the Lyannajists, the Pollinists, the Irenists and the Potentialists share a common belief – which is far from certain – it may be that they concern themselves with the inevitabilityof complexity. In their eyes, a carefree simplification of our scruples towards complexity can only worsen problems, never find (sustainably satisfactory) solutions. The shared sensibility that aligns these currents is no doubt their bias in favor of an AND… AND… logic, one which attempts to avoid, for as long as

possible, responding to any injunction that would be imprisoned in an exclusive choice of the type OR...OR....

The tension between these two constellations of counter-currents thus appears in all its cunning irony. If one decides to follow the second group in their reluctance to take sides for or against, one effectively makes a (binary) decision to side with those currents that refuse to take sides – thereby ruling in favor of the first group!

Thus, there is no final re-alignment possible of the twenty counter-currents around the traditional Left vs. Right divide. On the one hand, it is healthy to lament complication, and to work on clearing a path to more simplicity. While it is important not to suffer complexity like a curse, it may be crucial to reclaim it as a fundamental issue and as a most urgent imperative. It thus may be necessary to begin by complicating politics (a little), in order to be in a position to *politicize complexity*. This, in any case, is the gamble of what I have presented above. Politicizing complexity means seeing the plurality of counter-currents that animate our (sometimes contradictory) engagements as a mark and motor of a future politics, rather than as a simple obstacle to be overcome. Politicizing complexity means putting the tensions that result from this pluralism as the source, the finality, and the dynamic basis for future forms of activism.

What's Left in a Politics of Tensions and Counter-Currents?

A strong objection can be raised to the politicization of complexity as well as to the whole reasoning proposed in this article: the lack of traction that has characterized Leftist politics over the past decades is due to too much talking and not enough acting. As succinctly stated by a graffiti tagged on a bathroom door of the university of Paris 8 at Saint-Denis, *Words divide us, actions unite us* (*figure 3*). If one is expected to measure all the possible unintended consequences of one's action, one is paralyzed. More concretely in the case of Leftist politics: the Left needs to spend much less of its energy on intellectual speculation in academic journals, and much more time on political organization in the social territories that are so badly mistreated by ecocidal and sociocidal capitalism.

The next phase of a strong Leftist revival—which may very well be accelerating in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemics—should be devoted to taking an active part, at the grassroots level, in the many conflicts that are currently brewing on social and environmental issues; to organizing wide coalitions beyond and above the tensions and turmoil of our conflicting counter-currents; and to enacting the mediatization of such coalitions in the viral forms of communication made so powerful by the internet and social media[16]. The (impossible?) challenge of such a program would be to build such a revival, not on the denial and obfuscation of the tensions, fragilities and ambivalences delineated in this article, but on their very dynamics.

To prepare for this, and as a summary to this very preliminary reflection, I could imagine the resurrection of a reference to the political Left on at least three grounds. First, and least problematically, a post-critical Left would continue to push forward the demands for equality traditionally identified with social progress. Taking into account the "redshift" which, for two centuries, had led yesterday's progressives to become today's centrists, and tomorrow's conservatives, the egalitarian front now encompasses not only political rights and economic welfare, but also gender and racial issues, cultural diversity, vectorialist power, post-national migrations, anti-speciesism and environmental ecophilosophy. This first definition of the Left would be fairly comfortable insofar as it

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[16] This is the program I attempt to sketch in *Dévisager l'ennemi? Conflits, coalitions, contagions*, Paris: Les Liens qui Libèrent, 2021.

keeps pushing the modernization front beyond the current limitations and inconsistencies of the modernist project.

A second definition, however, could elevate the acceptance of the fragilities and uncertainties linked to the increasing complexity of our social systems to the status of a new marker for what it means to stand on the Left side of politics. As indicated above, most of the polarities located on the right side of Jonathan Favre-Lamarine's graph have in common the desire to hold on to reassuring well-accepted solutions and worldviews, while those on its left side tend to run against well-established and dominant common opinions. This second criterion is much more disturbing than the first, since the willingness to confront the mindboggling complexities of our entanglements, and the readiness to acknowledge the tentative nature of the explanations and solutions one promotes, may lead to redrawing the ideological divide quite far from its traditional distribution along clear party lines. According to this second criterion, an article from the (neoliberal) *Economist* weekly may be situated to the Left of an editorial by a Trotskyite columnist, while certain legitimate denunciations of social injustices may end up to the Right of the spectrum, due to their authoritative tone or to their oversimplification of the complexities at hand.

A third, and even more destabilizing, possible redefinition of the Left would push one notch further the Capitalocenic challenge of confronting the tensions that tear us *from the inside*—tensions for which the term "complexity" is in fact a rather weak expression, and for which "schizophrenia" would no doubt be much more accurate. This challenge involves learning to live and situate oneself in a world of contradictory counter-currents, where each and everyone—with a degree of exposure to risk very unequally allocated—is not so much expected to take side, as to negotiate the inner and exterior tensions resulting from our unstable and multidimensional positioning, somewhere along the continuums that the twenty polarities described above barely begin to map. In the maelstrom of our world economy more and more narrowly constrained by the limits of our global ecology, we are all called to identify, simultaneously and alternatively, with the fish in the whirlpools, with the constructors of the dams that kill the fish, with the consumers of the electricity generated from the dam, with the fishermen robbed of their job by the disappearance of the fish, if not with the fishermen's dogs who enjoy their unemployed companion to stay home and walk them more often. If they help to identify some of the multiple dimensions of this maelstrom, the twenty neologisms presented here might not be superfluous. What they attempt to map out is less a political landscape than a deeply disorienting schizophrenia. And one way of redefining the Left might be to identify it with the (embarrassed and embarrassing) willingness to acknowledge the schizophrenic nature of our modes of living and thinking.

Hence a post-critical list of open questions, ruling out the very possibility to close this reflection on a self-assured conclusion designed to assert an undisputable truth. Can the counter-currents, nerve tensions and magnetic fields discussed in the previous sections result in anything that could look like a politics? Or are they bound to paralyze our political agency even further, emblematizing a denial of politics rather than its renewal? Can an openly schizophrenic Left become a powerful attractor for a newly politicized people that is currently emerging?, Has the lack of such a people been cruelly missing only because of a refusal to face its intrinsically ambivalent constitution? Or is it our very schizophrenia that prevents us from devising a leftist politics with actual traction in our actual world, which is dramatically drifting into the arms of right-wing rulers leading it (and us) towards self-destruction? Does seeing allies as well as enemies each time we look at ourselves in the mirror signal the mutation of politics to a higher level of complexity? Or does it ring its failure and demise? Should we lament and mourn such a demise, or rejoice in it?

Could the recent electroshock triggered by Covid-19 pandemics help us see that confrontational politics, traditionally conceived upon a model of war between enemies, needs to be complemented with

viral politics, where bits of code are successful when they manage to be accepted and reproduced within their hosts[17]? Can such a "viropolitics" generate new models of understanding and new modes of intervention by inquiring and exploiting the superposition of three deeply interrelated forms of virality—*biological* virality (Covid-19), *software* virality (Wannacry ransomware) and *media* virality ("going viral" on social media)? Aren't the relations between a guest and its host a promising field of study and experimentation for such a viropolitics in a world of tensions and counter-currents dominated by the hosting power of the vectorialist class?

If what's Left in viropolitics asks to be articulated in terms of furthering equality, of addressing the challenges of complexity, and of acknowledging our schizophrenic ambivalences, can it content itself with merely asking questions upon questions? Shouldn't it require its proponents to launch empirical investigations, targeted interventions, insidious penetrations, victorious contaminations? Could it count on you to join in?

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[17]   For a first approach to such viral politics, see Frederic Bisson, *Virus Couronné. Prolégomènes à toute viropolitique future qui voudra se présenter comme science*, Paris : Questions Théoriques, 2020 ; Thierry Bardini, *Capitalisme génétique*, Paris : Les Liens qui Libèrent, 2021.