

“Affective Communicative Democracy”

Paper Presented at Western Political Science Association Annual Meeting, San Francisco,

CA, March 2018

Glenn Mackin

Associate Professor of Political Science

Eastman School of Music

University of Rochester

gmackin@esm.rochester.edu

This is a first draft of the paper; please do not circulate or cite without permission

Contemporary political theorists love stories. Like everyone else, we love the pleasure that they bring. More often, at least professionally, we love using them as objects of study and important sources of theoretical reflection and insight. Whether this interest in stories amounts to yet one more “turn” in political thought, I cannot say. What is clear, however, is that there are two broad and overlapping versions of this interest in stories. First, political theorists examine stories as *representations* of political phenomena (mourning, kinship, race, sexuality, work life, and so on). Through interrogations of these representations, political theorists often use stories to reveal unquestioned assumptions and theoretical biases either in the story or in various theoretical approaches. As representations, in short, stories might open up a different way of thinking about important aspects of political life.

The second orientation toward stories, while not ignoring their representational aspects, focuses on how stories structure social life directly. Stories don’t just entertain, and they don’t just depict aspects of political life; they already present in social life, affecting and effecting it directly. Here the theorist analyzes the ways in which people take up, identify with, or re-enact the characters and motifs that appear in stories (even the term “political actors” points in this direction, suggesting an association of political activity with theatrical performance). Honig’s (2001a) examination of foreign founder stories exemplifies this approach. At first, she reads these stories as representations. The foreign founder stories mark and work through the forms of unwilled power and authority she examines in the paradox of politics (in which the democratic people is supposed to will the law, but also must deal with the ways in which they are already shaped by laws, institutions, and powers they cannot will). Yet she also explores how the stories shape subjects and the conflicts they have. Foreign founder stories don’t just represent the paradox of politics; they “script” ongoing political conflicts, as can be seen in debates in the U.S. about immigration. In their

simultaneous love and fear of the foreigner, participants in these debates re-enact the roles and ambivalences that we see in stories about foreign founders, such as the film “Shane.” This re-enactment of narratives occurs even in putatively “objective” philosophical analyses. Honig (2007, 2009) argues, for instance, that Habermas’s universal, rationalist, and procedural account of modern constitutionalism (unwittingly?) enacts the structure of a *bildungsroman*. It seems that both the philosopher and the political actor succumb to the poet.

For many political theorists, these findings about the power of stories illustrate the need for an “aesthetic turn” in the study of politics (cf. Kompridis 2014). Partly inspired by Arendt and/or Rancière, these theorists argue that the traditional “rationalist” conceptions of politics associated with Rawls and Habermas are incomplete. Politics cannot be conceived as the adjudication of conflicts over interests and values. It is, rather, an *essentially* aesthetic conflict over what is sensed and how one senses. Before one determines whether an interest or value is legitimate or how one might respect it, the argument goes, there an aesthetic disclosure of the world: a representation of the set of identities, spaces, objects, topics, and organizations, and a collection of more or less pre-rational processes by which actors identify with or re-enact these representations. So as Rancière puts it, politics involves both “argument and the opening up of the world where argument can be received and have an impact” (1999: 56); and for most theorists of the aesthetic turn, this world opening is logically and temporally prior to rational argument, for it is what allows one to perceive something as an interest or value in the first place (cf. Zerilli 2005: 166-168; Panagia 2009). Instead of spending their time examining how political actors adjudicate validity claims, political theorists should examine how actors enact, contest, invent, and disseminate aesthetic representations.

Broadly speaking, I believe this orientation toward politics has been quite valuable. It is surely true that aesthetic representations play an important role not just in political life but also, as I show in section 1, in the presentation and reception of political theory itself. At the same time, I also wish question the nature of this world disclosing power and its relationship to the “rational” processes of adjudicating interests and values. In particular, I take issue with the tendency of some working in the aesthetic turn to set world disclosure into a binary opposition with reason and then to prioritize the latter over the former. Because it depends on a prior aesthetic world disclosure, we are told, rational cognition and discussion tends simply to reproduce that world. Reason, therefore, becomes complicit not so much in generating equality and freedom, but in reproducing sclerotic, moribund, or hierarchical organizations of the world. Aesthetic transformations, by contrast, then become the source of radically democratic disruptions of sense that occasion the “reconfiguring of our associational lives” (Panagia 2009: 3). The opportunity to enact more egalitarian, democratic, or just reconfigurations of social life, in other words, comes from outside of processes of rational adjudication, from the irruptions that attend forms of aesthetic practice and experience.

One set of problems with this way of conceptualizing the matter is political: in associating radical democracy with pre-cognitive and affective irruptions, one runs the risk of interpreting oppositional political movements in much the same terms as their opponents do, as senseless and unruly disturbances of the peace (for an extended discussion of this issue, see Mackin 2017). In the present, however, I leave aside these kinds of political concerns in order to examine a more theoretical problem. Prioritizing world-disclosure over the rational aspects of politics makes it difficult to conceptualize the creative and critical interventions that they prize.

Consider Honig again. Throughout her work, she frequently asks her readers to engage in critical and creative interventions into those stories. For example, she argues that democratic actors are better off adopting Freud's Moses story as their founding myth (2003: 39-40); she also argues that, in response to the formative power that public things¹ exert on us, "we would do well to acknowledge [public things'] power and, when appropriate, to allow that power to work on us or work to lessen or augment it" (2017: 28). Think about what Honig is asking us to do. We must in some way distance ourselves from the scripts and public things that have shaped us, determine which ones to adopt, augment, or lessen, and then come up with creative strategies to effect these changes. My broad question, then, is how we should understand this "distancing" and how this practice is compatible with the world-disclosing powers associated with stories. How should we understand the process by which actors adopt or enact a story? Is it a pre-rational succumbing to a new image, or is there something more to it? And who is the "we" in Honig's statement about how we should respond to the power of public things? One of Honig's main themes is that we are always-already shaped by narratives, institutions, laws, and public things. So how is it possible for us to distance ourselves from these powers so that we can decide whether it is appropriate to allow those formative powers to work on us? Is the "deciding we" some sort of "inevitable remainder" that can never be fully assimilated by the powers that shape it, as she suggests in her account of agonistic democracy (cf. 2008: 186)? Does this idea of an inevitable remainders mark a peculiar retreat back into a theory of rational subjectivity, as if

¹ To be sure, public things are not *merely* stories. Part of Honig's point is that their "thingness," their durability, has a power to thwart or support human projects. Nevertheless, the fact that they are *public* things is essential, and their publicness is a product of patterns of interpretation and receptivity. This is to say that the existence of public things is at least in part a product of a cultural script, and that this explains the need for Honig's argument: she wants us to defend public things (as opposed to allowing the forces of neoliberalism to make everything private) on the grounds that such things are necessary conditions for democratic life (see Honig 2017: 28).

there is always some non-mimetic subjectivity that always remains “outside” of the power of stories?

My contention, in any case, is that because they set aesthetic world-disclosure into conceptual opposition with practices of rational and critical reflection, existing approaches to the aesthetic turn in political theory are not well-equipped to address these kinds of questions. Once this conceptual opposition is in place, we can only conceive of aesthetic world-disclosure as overwhelming or interrupting critical and rational reflection (for better or for worse, depending on one’s point of view), or we must understand (or hope that) rational reflection as somehow governing aesthetic experience. Either conception of the relationship leads to difficulties. If aesthetic experience is primary, it becomes difficult to understand what one is doing when one “chooses” to enact or contest this or that aesthetic image. Yet if rational reflection governs aesthetic experience, which in turn makes it difficult to understand how aesthetic transformations can occur, except through entirely anarchic and “wild” irruptions (cf. Panagia 2009). I therefore propose a supplement to the main thesis of the aesthetic turn. It is true enough that rational argument depends upon an aesthetic disclosure of a world in which the argument can be received. But theorists of the aesthetic turn miss the fact that the reverse is equally true: the aesthetic disclosure of the world occurs in and through linguistic form and practices. The philosopher and political actor might succumb to the poet, but the poet also takes the form of the philosopher. And this form matters.

In order to develop this supplement and its implications for understanding critical reflection and creative intervention, I turn to an unlikely source: Jürgen Habermas, or more specifically, Gregg Miller’s (2011) reconstruction of him. Habermas is an unlikely partner, because he is usually read as seeking to purge, govern, or contain aesthetic representations

and powers so as to defend a rationalist and proceduralist account of political life. However, as Miller argues, there is a dual aspect to Habermas's conception of communicative rationality. It involves a collection of procedures *and* forms of aesthetic world-disclosure (see Miller 2011: 33). Along with an intersubjective account of communicative reason, in which reason appears not as the capacity of an isolated subject but instead as immanent in the communicative procedures Habermas reconstructs, the theory of communicative action also presents an intersubjective account of mimesis: the affective, aesthetic, and world disclosing powers that generate *meaning*. The performance of the procedures of communicative reason must *also* be understood as mimetic processes of subject-formation, and vice versa. This account, I argue, offers a useful account of the affective and formative powers that Honig and others identify in stories, and it also helps explain how these powers might mesh with (and not simply undermine) practices of critical reflection. As theorists of the aesthetic turn argue, communication involves a set of ungovernable world-disclosing and subject-forming powers that arise with understanding meaning. Yet these powers proceed through a collection of coherent and legible practices of role-taking, and these practices provide the perspective from which actors can critically evaluate performances and the stories they encounter. We no longer need to search for something "outside" of mimetic powers that subjects can use to critically evaluate their performances or invent new ones; critical evaluations and creative transformations occur within mimetic practices and experiences.

1 Metalepsis and political theory

In order to prepare the ground for my re-reading of Habermas, I aim to show that Habermas has often been misread. He is not the rationalist and proceduralist he is made out to be (or that he presents himself to be). Instead, he incorporates issues of aesthetic world-disclosure into the very heart of his theorizing. To show this, I wish to identify a curious

rhetorical and narratological motif in Habermas's normative theory, namely, his use of metalepsis. In Genette's (1980) now classic analysis of the device, narratological metalepsis refers to a paradoxical mixing of the world in which a narrative is being told and the world that the narrative depicts. In some cases, the metalepsis becomes explicit, as when the narrator affects or intervenes in the world s/he is narrating (or vice versa), or when two distinct narrative worlds start to interact with one another (as in the film "Sliding Doors"). However, John Pier (2013) argues that it is a latent feature of all narratives. Consider a famous case in Balzac's *Illusions Perdues*, where the narrator suspends the narration of the story to provide a commentary: "While the venerable churchman climbs the ramps of Angoulême, it is not useless to explain...." The narration draws attention to the illusions that constitute the narration as such. Specifically, it creates the illusion of simultaneity and the possibility of the paradoxical merging of worlds. The reader is positioned as being with (in the same time and place) as the narrator. In addition, the time being narrated (the time in which the "venerable churchman" is climbing the stairs) is presented as contemporaneous with the time in which the reader and narrator (appear to be) interacting: we are to imagine that the churchman continues to climb the stairs as the narrator explains something else to us. This creates a curious illusion, as if the narrator and the reader interacting contemporaneously, and as if the narrator/reader's world could interact with that of the churchman (we could imagine, for instance, ignoring the narrator's metacommentary to watch the churchman as he climbs the stairs). The point, at any rate, is that this metalepsis is partly how the authority and meaning of the narration gets achieved. Narration works through a kind of willful self-forgetting of the illusory nature of these various worlds, and this self-forgetting occurs through the device of metalepsis.

This kind of metalepsis also operates in political theory. Miller's (2011) reading of Kant's concept of moral autonomy can serve as illustrative example (cf. 150-151 n. 54). As is well known, Kantian autonomy does not refer to an unregulated freedom to do whatever one wants; rather, it requires a conscientious and reasoned obedience to the moral law. To be free (autonomous) one must will rationally, which is to say, one must will in a way that is free from all desires and external considerations. When willing rationally in this way, one must will the moral law, and moral action (which is the same as free action) occurs insofar as one obeys that moral purely out of respect for it and not out of any other inclination. This is why Kant argues that moral action must be opposed to any kind of mimesis (see Kant 1993: 20-21). One cannot be moral by imitating other models, for such imitation would be a form of heteronomy. Autonomy requires that one obey one's own rational will, and this is the same as obeying the moral law purely out of respect for it.

Yet on Miller's reading, there is an ambiguity about whether acting out of respect for the law can be a choice—and thus a moral action at all—in Kant's sense. Consider Kant's definition of respect: "The immediate determination of the will by the law, and the consciousness thereof, is called respect, and is hence regarded as the effect of the law on the subject and not as the cause of the law" (1993: 14 n. 14). Miller's analysis of this passage reveals that Kant's conception of autonomy is bound up with mimesis in two ways. First, the story Kant tells about acting out of respect for the law is a story about the mimetic formation of the rational subject. Respect for the moral law, and therefore autonomy itself, is not the product of one's free and rational action. It is the *effect of the law on the subject*. The law, Miller argues, has now become the agent, and the subject has become passive. One very capacity for rational willing/freedom is caused by an external source. The moral law stamps the subjects' souls, substituting a law-governed will (*wille*, in Kant's terminology) for an

undisciplined one (*willkür*). There is even an emotional component to this. The experience of acting out of respect, Kant goes on to explain, is not the same as acting out bodily inclination or fear, but “it has at the same time something analogous to both” (Kant 1993: 14 n. 14). Thus, autonomy occurs insofar as we act out of respect for the law, but respect has now become the product of the law itself, which causes us to act in ways that are analogous to acting out of fear. The autonomous subject, it seems, is always-already a mimetic one.

Miller’s discussion also points to a second aspect of mimesis in Kant’s account, and this second aspect illustrates the *metalepsis*. We can see a glimpse of it in Kant’s curious assertion that respect “is hence regarded as” the effect of the law on the subject. This phrase, Miller argues, suggests that the whole account of autonomy—that the law stands outside the subject and then causes a feeling of respect—is a *representation* of the law and its effects. It seems Kant has become more poet than philosopher. He posits an *image* of the moral law as independent, self-originating, and majestically indifferent to human desires, and then asks his readers to act *as if* this image was already “there” causing their rational will. This is the moment of *metalepsis*. Kant’s phrase, “is hence regarded as,” casts his account of the respect for the moral law as a story, as a kind of linguistic image, and then paradoxically merges that world with the world shared between author and reader. We are to imagine that the world in which rational subjects are those who lose themselves to the law is contemporaneous with the scene of the narrator’s argument to the reader, and indeed, that the world that Kant is narrating is simply true. It is through this *metalepsis*, through this fantastic merging of worlds, that Kant’s analysis of autonomy develops causal power. Kant has constructed an image of the moral law, and then through *metalepsis*—through a willful self-forgetting of the illusory nature of Kant’s account of the law—one is to find that this law has already affected us.

Perhaps unsurprisingly given Habermas's indebtedness to Kant, there is a similar logic in Habermas's (1996, 1998, 2001) reconstruction of the principles of constitutional democracy. Habermas is best known for his reconstruction of the principles of modern constitutions in conceptual and procedural terms. Constitutions, he argues, should be understood as legally institutionalized procedures that make the rule of law co-equal with principles of popular sovereignty. The procedures by which the people exercise its sovereignty necessarily encode a schedule of individual rights (e.g., rights of equal treatment under the law, legal protections, and so on), but it is only through equal participation in forming the law (i.e., through the exercise of popular sovereignty) that the content of those rights can be legitimately developed. This is the normative substance of modern constitutions because it is through the realization of these principles that constitutional procedures achieve a universal point of view: everyone's voice can be heard in forming the law, and everyone's status is equally protected.

Yet as critics of his proceduralism often point out (see Butler 2000; Honig 2001, 2007, 2009, 2013), Habermas also "supplements" his procedural account with empirical events. Honig's primary example of this supplement is Habermas's appeal to the constitutional conventions in "Philadelphia" and "Paris," or at least he "reasonable trace" of those events, as the "great, dual historical event" that inaugurates modern constitutional discourse (see Habermas 2001: 768; Honig 2007: 11).² This reference to Philadelphia and

² In reference to Kant, Habermas writes: "It is true that, in the 'Conflict of the Faculties,' Kant went beyond the systematic boundaries of his philosophy and raised the French Revolution to the level of a 'historical sign' for the possibility of a moral progress of humanity. But in the theory itself, we find no trace of the constitutional assemblies of Philadelphia or Paris—at least not the reasonable trace of a great dual historical event that we can now see in retrospect as an entirely new beginning. With this event began a project that holds together a rational constitutional discourse across the centuries" (768).

Honig's reading of this passage, however, misses what Habermas is trying to say here. She describes Habermas as being "puzzled" with Kant, and of misremembering what Kant said (she correctly notes, for instance, that Kant did not raise the "French Revolution" to the level of a historical sign, but rather the spectators' response to the revolution). Habermas is worried, Honig argues, Kant's appeal to the French

Paris is not the only example we could point to. Similar appeals litter Habermas's writings on modern constitutions. In his defense of the universal character of constitutional principles, for instance, he curiously refers to Americans as "Jefferson's fortunate heirs" (1996: 63). His point in this passage is that anyone, even those who are not Jefferson's fortunate heirs, can adopt the impartial perspective of the universal point of view. Yet in identifying a set of people who are the "fortunate heirs" of a founder of the constitution, he also describes the U.S. constitution in a way that cements Americans' attachment to its universal content (for a discussion of Habermas's efforts to generate emotional attachment to constitutional principles, see Markell 2000).

The same motif occurs in his emphases on the dynamic character of the constitution. Although he cites "Philadelphia" as one of the dual historical events that inaugurates rational constitutional discourse (2001: 768), he also acknowledges that the constitution written there by no means meets the normative substance he identifies in his principles. Although he does not discuss this explicitly, it is easy enough to identify the shortcomings of the Philadelphia

Revolution will encourage emotional attachment to the wrong aspects of the events in question—not to the constitution or its reasonable trace, but to the tumult and violence of the revolution. However, this does not seem to be an accurate description of what Habermas is up to in his reference to Kant. In the paragraph just prior to the one Honig quotes, Habermas states that the "internal connection between will [as embodied in principles of popular sovereignty] and reason [as embodied in legally guaranteed individual rights] can develop only in the dimension of time." He's articulating a methodological commitment here; any analysis of constitutional principles must occur in conversation with the actual historical development of constitutional discourses. This observation, in turn, leads to his reference to Kant. Why? Habermas is conceding that Kant *also* appeals to historical events to develop aspects of his theory. The trouble, according to Habermas, is that Kant's appeal to historical events only occurs in his discussions of whether human beings progress; one finds no such historical analyses in Kant's theoretical account of constitutions (in, for instance, the *Metaphysics of Morals* or in the essay, "Theory and Practice"). Habermas's critique of Kant's appeal to the French Revolution is not that Kant's reference might encourage people to attach to the wrong thing. Rather, the critique is that, notwithstanding Kant's historical references to the French Revolution, Kant's account of constitutions remains overly abstract and ahistorical.

Honig misses this because she, like most of Habermas's readers, is captivated by the image of his theory as essentially rationalist and proceduralist. As I will argue throughout section 2, we should drop this assumption. Habermas at implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) intertwines the rational and procedural account of validity with an account of the affective dimensions of the experience of understanding. Because these affective dimensions of understanding are ungovernable, Habermas knows that his rhetorical appeals—his efforts to attach a people to the constitutional principles he articulates—might misfire. I will discuss this issue further at the end of section 2.

constitution, both in terms of the procedures by which it was produced and the framework of government the convention produced. The process by which delegates were chosen excluded the majority of the population; the delegates conducted their deliberations in secret, and the document was ratified through voting processes that, again, excluded the majority of the population. It is little surprise, then, that the constitution that was adopted encoded massive injustices, not to mention that it created a set of idiotic governing institutions (the electoral college, the Senate, the lack of explicit a massive number of veto points, and so on) that haunt the U.S. to the present. Yet for Habermas, these kinds of shortcomings by no means invalidate the constitution. For a constitution is not just a document; it also refers to a collection of discourses that aim to realize constitutional principles more fully over time. Conceived in this way, it becomes possible to argue that the past two hundred years of constitutional history show that the constitution is self-correcting (2001: 774). Groups that were excluded, treated unequally, and oppressed during and after the ratification of the constitution have fought against such phenomena, sometimes winning reforms that help remedy such issues; and later generations now recognize, Habermas (falsely) contends, that these reforms mark important achievements in the realization of constitutional principles: “In retrospect, [all parties] agree that with the inclusion of marginalized groups and with the empowerment of deprived classes, the hitherto poorly satisfied presuppositions for the legitimacy of existing democratic procedures are better realized” (2001: 775).³

³ Habermas’s historical claim, as Honig notes, is wholly inaccurate (see her essay “Dead Rights/Live Futures” or something like that). Indeed, in the current political climate, it reads like a parody to say that in retrospect all the parties agree that, say, expanding women’s rights or expanding voting rights taps into and more fully realizes the normative principles embedded in the Constitution. Empirically speaking, it seems absurd to say that everyone is committed to the project of tapping the normative substance of the constitution so as to realize it more fully. Americans may be “Jefferson’s fortunate heirs,” but given the history of white supremacy in the U.S., that inheritance is considerably more ambiguous than Habermas suggests. On the other hand, Habermas’s claim here might not be intended as an empirical description of the positions of all parties. It might instead be a hoped-for outcome of the sort that Kant describes in aesthetic judgment (see Kant [CITE]; see also Honig 2007: 11, n12, who makes the same point).

I am less interested in the accuracy of Habermas's historical references than I am in the question of why he makes them and what effects they produce. Why does he appeal to Philadelphia and Paris as the "great, dual historical event" that inaugurates constitutional discourse? Why does he cast Americans as Jefferson's fortunate heirs, and why does he insist on re-writing the history of oppression as the history of constitutional progress? Honig's suggestion is that Habermas wants to avail himself of the emotional resonance of these examples so as to promote a kind of constitutional patriotism. He doesn't just want a set of justified procedures; he wants a people for whom such principles *matter*. This means that Habermas's invocations of the history of constitutionalism are not merely rhetorical. Or perhaps it is better to say that that rhetoric is never "merely." As Honig emphasizes, the attachments Habermas aims to promote are essential to the success of the constitutional procedures. For without the emotional attachments, without an actual commitment to equality, constitutional procedures become are likely to become "mere procedures," empty processes that people might engage in out of self-interest and that can therefore be colonized by undemocratic ethoi such as neoliberalism (see Honig 2017; Brown 2015, Dean 2015).

The problem, Honig argues, is that Habermas can't have his affective cake and procedurally eat it too. The particularities that make it possible for Philadelphia and Paris to spark people's imaginations, passions, and affective attachments also cast doubt on the universality of Habermas's principles. The affective appeals work insofar as one locates the universal constitutional principles within a *particular* story. Habermas casts Philadelphia and Paris as a singular event that inaugurates a constitutional discourse, and "we the people" are invited to identify ourselves with those who inaugurated those events, as participating, that is, in the same project (see Habermas 2001: 775). Yet it is not difficult to see how these

affective identifications depend on excluding other stories and identities. Habermas's story, in other words, might help "us" to identify with universal constitutional procedures, but only by constructing us in a particular way that excludes alternative formations. To see this we need only imagine Habermas citing the Iroquois constitution instead of Philadelphia and Paris as the beginning of the constitutional project "we" are called on to renew. In principle, such an alternative proper name would not alter the conceptual reconstruction of constitutional principles, but the meaning and reception of these principles would undergo potentially significant transformation, as would the meaning and reception of the documents created in Philadelphia and Paris. Perhaps, for instance, the suppression of American Indian discourse and history might become visible as part of the tradition that current generations must deal with.

Or if we don't want to identify an alternative originary moment for constitutional discourse, we might instead reinterpret that moment. One could read Philadelphia and Paris as Habermas suggests, as the opening section of a political romance, such that the reader might identify with the young constitution that is coming of age. Yet one could also read Philadelphia as a tragic loss in which alternative political formations got defeated, or as a key moment in which the history and perspectives of indigenous people were suppressed, or as a moment (portentous or quotidian, depending on one's point of view) in the entrenchment of American slavery. What we see, in sum, is that Philadelphia and Paris might not only embody the "reasonable trace" of a universal constitutional discourse; they might instead (or in addition) signify moments of regression or betrayal.

All of this illustrates Habermas's indebtedness not just to Kantian rationalism but also to Kantian metalepsis. Habermas, like Kant, has not so much *discovered* a collection of universal constitutional principles as constructed a particular *image* of them. Notice, for

instance, fantastic nature of the story Habermas is telling about his constitutional principles: they began in a singular historical event that somehow takes place in two different places and at two different times; they generate a discourse that self-correcting, such that everyone views themselves as an “heir,” and such that what we inherit allows us to automatically know which policies promote and which policies retard the achievement of the normative principles; and they produce a current set of inheritors who agree that previous expansions of rights were correct and remain committed to continuing those expansions. What is curious, then, is not Habermas’s commitments to rational constitutional procedures, but rather that so many of his readers (both his supporters and his critics) seem to forget that this is an image. Through the use of metalepsis, Habermas blurs the temporality and subject positions of constitutional discourses: his readers are asked to act *as if* those principles were/are already present, that they shaped a group of people into “founders” and others into the descendents of those founders, and that they influence(d) them/us to construct, modify, and fight over political institutions in the right ways.

To this extent, Honig is right to argue that Habermas’s proceduralism depends on alternative modes of politics—on affect, enthusiasm, and (dis-)identification—that he tends to disavow. On the other hand, I also wish to challenge the rhetorical presentation of this claim. Honig, like nearly all of Habermas’s defenders and critics (and in accordance with his presentation of himself) assumes that Habermas is ultimately a rationalist and proceduralist. This is why the exposure of his reliance on affect, enthusiasm, and (dis-)identification stands as a *critique*. But what if that assumption is wrong? What if, instead of reading Habermas as a rationalist and proceduralist who disavows his dependency on affect and enthusiasm (and the indeterminate, frightening, and passionate modes of politics that produce them), we read him more or less explicitly intertwining his procedural account of constitutional principles

with their apparent opposites? Might his use of metalepsis be less a *problem* for his putatively rationalist theory than a sign that most political theorists have been misreading it? And if so, might his approach open up the space for re-thinking the relationship between the universal and the particular, and between the critical and creative capacities associated with reason and the mimetic powers that shape rational subjects in the first place?

2 The mimetic aspects of reason

Describing the role of mimesis in a political theory is a difficult task. Partly this is because, as Potolsky (2006), mimesis is an extraordinary mime, “changing its name and interpretive scope to suit each new environment” (6). It is nearly always present in theoretical analyses of politics, but it is not always named as such, and when it is, the language used to describe it frequently slides into obscure metaphor. I mentioned in my opening remarks that scholars of stories often approach stories from two perspectives: as representations of phenomena and as phenomena that (somehow) structure social life and action. These two orientations toward stories parallel the two basic ways that people examine mimesis (see Miller 2011: 14; Potolsky 2006; Halliwell 2002). The concept of mimesis, Miller argues, plays an important concept in two overlapping traditions, one aesthetic and one anthropological. Within aesthetics, mimesis refers to the relationship between the aesthetic product and the “original” (or real) object it represents. Although it’s not clear how this happens (hence the reason for studying it!), it seems obvious that the painting of a bowl of fruit looks like or mimes the actual bowl of fruit.⁴ Yet the same peculiar relationship between the original (or real) and the copy occurs in all the arts. The music sounds like or makes present an emotion, and the theatrical performer speaks in the voice of another. Even our apparently non-theatrical social performances contain these sorts of representations: we

⁴ One important debate here has to do with whether the imitation seems convincing because it resembles nature, or whether it works because it operates in accordance with existing cultural assumptions about nature.

“dress up” for professional activities, which is to say that we mime existing social model of the “dressed up professional,” and our hand gestures often mimic our speech, as when we press our forefingers to our thumbs to convey the delicacy or technicality of the idea that our speech is trying to convey. These phenomena give rise to questions not only of how this imitation is possible and/or what “originals” might mean, but also to the politico-ethical questions of representation, i.e., to questions about the fairness, or the harms and marginalizations, of a representation. We want to know not just whether Habermas’s representation of American constitutional discourse as a *bildungsroman* accurately captures the original historical events, but also how his representation marginalizes other perspectives, voices, and identities.

In the anthropological tradition, mimesis does not refer so much to questions of representation but to the *practice* of imitation, of “making oneself similar, or speaking in the voice of another, or acting as another would act” (Miller 2011: 14). Imitation, it turns out, is a central component of human activity, learning, and identity formation. Children mime various things in child’s play, but so do adults, as I did when I got over the stage fright of teaching precisely by imitating the model of a “professor.” One can see a similar orientation in the cliché, made popular in Alcoholics Anonymous literature, stating that one should “act as if you had faith and faith shall be granted unto you.”⁵ What we discover is that imitation is not just “harmless play.” It produces a kind of noncognitive transformation of the self and the world we inhabit. The process of imitating a social role might change one’s habits, gestures, and forms of thought. It might even “re-enchant” the world: through the imitation of representations (i.e., models), one might take on the forms of speech and ethical

⁵ The cliché partakes in both of the basic traditions of mimesis. In the anthropological register, it offers advice: If one imitates the model of a “faithful person,” then eventually the model will imprint itself on one’s soul; on the aesthetic register, the maxim is phrased in a way that mimics Biblical tropes and figures.

obligations of the profession, so that one accepts and works to uphold its values; and the objects and accoutrements associated with it (the clothing, the rituals, the pieces of chalk) become meaningful.

Both of these aspects of mimesis saturate contemporary political theory. When, for instance, Zerilli draws on Wittgenstein's claim that the sense of logical necessity arises only insofar as we are captured by a picture, she draws on both meanings of mimesis. There is a picture (representation) of the world that someone implicitly adopts, and the adoption of the picture shapes the person's thought and action, enabling and foreclosing certain modes of action (see Zerilli 2005: 167-168; see also Zerilli 2012, 2017; and Wittgenstein 1958, section 115). The same motif occurs in Honig's paradox of politics and in her analysis of "public things." Honig argues that the paradox of politics—in which there must be "good people" to will good laws and institutions, but good laws and institutions are necessary to produce good people—draws attention to "the law's formative powers, its never fully-willed role in processes of subject-formation" (2007: 8). To be sure, the not-fully-formed people also affirm, negate, or augment the law that has (partially?) formed them. Still, their actions, desires, and identities are formed in and through a law that imposes itself on them irresistibly, prior to (and enabling of) any willing of it. There is a similar logic to Honig's analysis of public things. Using Winnicott's analysis of transitional objects as an inspiration, Honig argues public things have the power to impress their unitariness, stability, and (relative) permanence on a people: public things "help collect diverse citizens into self-governing publics divested of fantasies of omnipotence and invested with a sense of integrated subjectivity, responsibility, agency, and concern" (2017: 17).

It is in this context that we can understand Miller's striking assertion that the history of political philosophy can be read as a history of how various theorists conceptualize and

locate the point of *irresistible* mimetic power (2011: 39). The idea is that all political philosophy implicitly or explicitly tells the story of how various things (public or otherwise), models, cultural roles, or divine beings impress themselves onto subjects. Think of Plato's divinely harmonious cosmos that imprints itself on the philosopher's soul, along with his hope that philosophical rule might imprint this harmony on the city as a whole (cf. Miller 2011: 41ff); or Descartes' God who stamps the cogito, allowing it to perceive the world as it is (Miller 2011: 39); or Freud's child who develops a self by identifying with (and fearing) the father (Potolsky 2006: 118ff); or Marx's subject whose consciousness formed (though also distorted) in and through class relations (cf. Potolsky 2006: 137-138).

Although it is not widely recognized, the same is true of Habermas. In a previous work, I documented one example of this (see Mackin 2013, chapter 1). Habermas's conception of reason is essentially social and communicative. This means, among other things, that Habermas's subject is intersubjective to its core. Because one only becomes a subject through processes of socialization, there is an "other" at the heart of one's very sense of self. This other cannot be understood through a concept, since it is only through this otherness, through miming words and gestures that are not one's own, that one can engage in rational reflection in the first place. Here I wish to follow Miller to identify another key role of mimesis in Habermas's thought, namely, the role of mimesis in the activity and experience of coming to understand another. Not only does Habermas pay close attention to the noncognitive (or pre-cognitive) relations to others that form the very possibility of the "rational" subject, (cf. Vetlesen 1997, Mackin 2013: 27ff; Miller 2011: 69ff), but he also more or less explicitly places mimesis at the heart of communicative action.

At times Habermas explicitly acknowledges this. For instance, he tells us, "there is already a mimetic moment in everyday practices of communication, not merely in art"

(1985a: 81). He also refers to the idea that “art can find resonance in the mimetic relations of a balanced and undistorted intersubjectivity of everyday life” (1985b: 202). In both cases, Habermas insists that mimesis does not just operate in the domain in which his “official” theory locates it, that is, in the domain of aesthetics, which through processes of modernization, has become differentiated from issues of truth and moral rightness. Rather, he locates mimesis in everyday communication, even in the idealized version of this practice.⁶

But even leaving these acknowledgments aside, Miller’s close reading of his theory of communicative action shows that mimesis plays a central role in it. Habermas’s “rational procedure” that tests validity claims is nothing more than a procedure of mimetic role-taking. Plato banned poets who speak in the voices of multiple characters. Yet Habermas’s communicative actors must do just that. They must learn to switch roles and speak in each other’s voices, ideally in every other’s voice. Consider Habermas’s universalization principle (U), which is supposed to govern the morality of communicative exchange: “For a norm to be valid the consequences and side effects that its general observance can be expected to have for the satisfaction of the particular interests of each person affected must be such that all affected can accept them freely” (1990: 120). In the current context, the important bit is not the way in which (U) defines the general interest, but the fact that this principle is “intended to compel a universal exchange of roles” (1990: 65). Unlike Kant’s “monological” categorical imperative, which Habermas argues creates a procedure of moral reasoning in which one projects one’s assumptions on the other, (U) demands and only emerges in actual

⁶ Miller highlights another curiosity of Habermas’s statement (see 2011: 32, where Miller also discusses Habermas’s other statements about the mimetic aspects of communicative action). Habermas locates “mimetic relations” in an “undistorted intersubjectivity.” This is peculiar because mimesis is usually cast as the opposite of “undistorted.” It refers to the image or representation that necessarily misrepresents reality or transforms the subject prior to (or at least in a way different from) rational decision-making. In this passage, however, Habermas converts an irrational mimesis into its apparent opposite, an undistorted and balanced dimension of social relations. I will explore the idea of a “rational mimesis” further in section 3.

communication. Through the procedures of moral argumentation, one is forced to “exchange roles with each and every other” (1982: 257). In short, the procedure that (U) establishes is nothing more than a practice of universal pantomimesis (Miller 2011: 63).

Yet the role of mimesis in communicative action goes beyond its procedural aspects. It also appears as a kind of power that might transform the self, that produces important affects and effects on those who engage in the role-taking. Recall why Plato banned mimetic poetry from his ideal city. It must be banned because it will harm the actors’ (and audience’s) souls. It’s not just that good theater frequently depicts beings behaving badly, which encourages actors and audiences to imitate bad models. If that were the only problem, an outright ban would be unnecessary; we could instead simply ensure that actors only perform good models. The outright ban on mimetic poetry therefore stems from a different concern. Imitating others, especially when imitating multiple others, produces thin and chaotic souls, both for the actors who imitate many models and for the audience who might take such role-taking as a model for them to imitate. People who constantly play at mimesis are likely to lose their integrity; they “lose themselves” in a multiplicity of roles, becoming susceptible to any desire they might have or to any politician’s beautiful speech. Habermas does not think that mimetic role-taking necessarily creates the soul chaos that Plato worries about. He does agree, however, that the practice affects and effects the individual’s sense of self, her orientations, and her competencies.

In fact, Habermas’s whole conception of communicative action requires the “soul-effects” that role-taking can produce. He distinguishes communicative action from strategic action primarily in terms of the orientation and disposition of the actors. Actors who engage in “success-oriented action” adopt an “objectivating attitude.” They treat the other and the speech situation as objects that they can manipulate to achieve their goals, as an advertiser

does when s/he determines that X phrasing is most likely to cause the consumer to buy a product. By contrast, in communicative action—that is, in action oriented toward mutual understanding—one must adopt a “performative attitude.” One must be oriented toward the other not as an object but as a fellow speaker, as one who has a point of view that one is seeking not to manipulate but to understand. This orientation, Habermas insists, is necessary to produce language’s illocutionary force, binding effect (*Bindungseffekt*) that allows actors to coordinate with one another on the basis of *meaning*. It is the *Bindungseffekt* that occurs in communicative action that permits one to understand something as a question, an order, an invitation, an offer of a reason, etc., and to act accordingly. So how does this *Bindungseffekt* come about? Habermas is quite explicit: the “performative attitude” that produces illocutionary force “*is rooted in the mimetic act of role-taking*—that is, in ego’s making his own the expectation that alter directs to him” (1984: 390, emphasis mine). If language use is to become meaningful, if it is to produce mutual understanding and not just perlocutionary success, actors must do more than simply fulfill the formal procedures of the speech situation. They must be affected (perhaps even effected) by the other. The moment of understanding—that unforced force that arises in experiencing meaning—has become the moment of irresistible mimesis, in which the other’s position, perspective, and expectations stamp themselves on the subject.

Thus, if communicative action is to occur, it must involve procedures of mimetic role-taking *and* the kind of creative orientations and affective experience that Arendtians and post-structuralists say do not exist in Habermas’s dry proceduralism (see for instance Honig 2007: 8ff). It is no doubt true that Habermas devotes most of his theoretical attention to the procedural aspects. When, say, feminists argue that a patriarchy exists and that it is manifest in the pervasiveness of sexual assault and harassment, Habermas’s “official” analysis of

communicative action invites us to examine the formal properties of this event. We would see, for instance, the formal grammar of the argument—the way it installs the first-, second-, and third-person perspectives—and one would focus on the normative principles (U) that operate within it. The feminist “I” addresses a “you,” but in order to present reasons that could be convincing to the second-person, the I must be aware of the interchangeability between positions (see Habermas 1990: 154). This awareness, in turn, implicitly refers to a third-person perspective, and it is from this implicit third-person perspective that one can assess the extent to which the reasons offered could in fact be convincing to both positions (see Miller 2011: 106).

Such a formal analysis of the speech situation might be useful in explaining how it is possible for actors to generate legitimate truths and norms about the claims that feminists raise. Yet *within* these procedures there is also the lived experience of understanding these communicative moves. The adoption of the third-person perspective, for instance, might alter an arguer’s sense of herself; it might lead to a realization that her personal experience links up to broader structures of power. By the same token, hearing and understanding her claim might challenge one’s existing sense of the world as unproblematic and more or less just. Or it might challenge what Rancière calls the “partition of the sensible,” including one’s status as a privileged male who does not normally have to take such issues into account. *Understanding* the claim, in short, might lead to Ego’s transformation, as the other’s perspective becomes part of the self. This, in turn, might involve a painful, exuberant, or uncanny loss of the self and/or the world in which one operates. If it is to generate illocutionary force, the taking of a “yes” or “no” position vis-à-vis another’s validity claims cannot be quite as banal as Habermas’s anodyne language suggests. For as White and Farr

(2012) point out, a “yes” or a “no” does not just affirm or negate a validity claim; it might also affirm or negate a world and one’s place in it (cf. White and Farr 2012: 37-38).⁷

From this point of view, the metalepsis we saw in Habermas’s examination of constitutional principles is less a deviation from the rational essence of his theory of communicative action and than a consistent development of it. Habermas does not set rationalism and proceduralism in opposition to mimesis. Rather, he examines the rational and procedural aspects of communication, morality, and law while simultaneously utilizing mimetic powers. This becomes explicit in Habermas’s recent writings about the debates about international law and the European Union’s constitution. For Habermas (2006) the main challenge to constitutionalizing international law (and the EU’s constitution) is not so much that procedures are lacking. Internationally, there is a kind of “proto-constitution,” a collection of legal instruments and organizations that regulate relations between states; and in the EU, there is a formal set of constitutional procedures. The problem is that these proto-constitutions lack the political institutions (specifically, the informal and small-d democratic communication flows) to lend them force.

This leads to Habermas’s curious defense of the EU and his critiques of how most politicians have defended it. As Simone Chambers (2016) points out, Habermas calls on Europeans to imagine (i.e., to act *as if*) the history of the EU were in fact a history of constitutionalization. This is a pretty explicit moment of metalepsis, since his here version of history is in some sense false; after all, the EU started simply as a trade block. However, the goal is not to tell a true history of the EU, but to induce/create a public that feels (and

⁷ It is important to emphasize the “might” here. These transformations might also not occur; one’s interlocutor might claim that, or act as if, one is not making any claim at all. For instance, one’s interlocutor might claim or act as if one is not capable of making claims, that one is simply crying in pain, or that one is being duped, used, or paid by “outside agitators,” and so on. In short, it is always possible for others to argue that there is in fact no real argument going on at all. This is one of the consequences of the fact that the experience of understanding is ungovernable. It is never possible to guarantee that one’s validity claim, or one’s aesthetic disclosure of the world, will be received as such.

perceives themselves to be) part of a common project of granting one another equal rights and participating in self-governance. Thus, on Habermas's account, the problem with most defenses of the EU is that they have tended to eschew this work of political world-building. Many politicians defending the EU emphasize only the economic benefits and legal stability that the EU creates. This might get some people to perceive the EU as strategically useful, but it will not work to get people to see the EU constitution as *theirs*, as a joint project that they are carrying out and fighting over. Without that kind of identification, the project EU constitutionalization is doomed, beset on one side by various xenophobic powers, and lacking the affective attachments necessary for people to defend the project as meaningful. None of these arguments should be surprising at this point. They represent Habermas's efforts not just to defend constitutional principles but to channel mimetic power in a way that can attach a people to them.

In sum, my main contention in this section is that Habermasian communicative action has a dual character. There is a set of formal and abstract procedures and norms, but there is also the experience of understanding, produced by mimetic achievements, that occurs within those procedures. This observation generates the main question Habermas leaves us with: How do these different aspects of communicative action interact? This question is not simply an artifact of Habermas's thought, though as I will argue in the next section, he has a productive way of thinking through it. As I suggested in my introductory remarks, the question also emerges in nearly all of the recent examinations of the aesthetic dimensions of politics. If, as theorists of the aesthetic dimensions of politics argue, politics is as much an aesthetic clash of sense as it is a clash of validity claims, then what is the relationship between these two kinds of clashes? Do the communicative principles and procedures that regulate the production of valid norms—the ones Habermas is most famous

for reconstructing—also structure, govern, or regulate the mimetic powers by which “worlds” and identities get formed and transformed? Or is it the other way around? That is, are the mimetic powers that operate in the experience (logically or temporally) *prior* to the procedures by which clashes of interests and values get processed? If so, should we see the persuasion with reasons (or participation in communicative procedures) as a form of enchantment, a succumbing to the most affective and seductive speech? My suggestion, in any case, is that Habermas provides a unique approach to these questions in that he refuses to prioritize one aspect of communication over the other. The two dimensions of communication arrive in one blow, as it were.

3 Mimetic reason and rational mimesis

So we have two hypotheses. The first is that the speech norms and procedures that Habermas reconstructs somehow govern, fence in, or regulate mimetic powers. The second is an inversion of this idea: mimetic powers are prior to “reason,” in the sense that reason depends upon a prior picture of the world. We may dispense with the first hypothesis immediately. For Habermas the procedural and rational aspects of communicative action cannot regulate, control, or govern the experience of understanding. Habermas acknowledges this explicitly when he observes that “the potential of unleashed communicative freedoms does contain an anarchistic core” (1996: xl). The generation of meaning, the experience of understanding on which communicative action depends, is potentially exuberant, transformative, even ecstatic. The experience of understanding can involve a mesmerizing “flash of insight” that can transform oneself and one’s world. If so, then Habermas’s formal reconstruction of grammar positions, and his insistence that there are principles that communicative actors presuppose as they work to achieve mutual understanding, operate at a different register of experience than the experience of

understanding (cf. Miller 2011: 65). The formal existence of the first-person grammar position does not necessarily matter for participants who might be experiencing a significant (and ongoing) transformation of their sense of self and their relations to others (cf. Miller 2011: 62). By the same token, (U) requires communicative actors to adopt the perspectives of others as they test validity claims, but it by no means can govern how (or whether) this process might change the very context or the identities of the “all” whose perspectives one must take into account.

There is another why the formal procedures and principles cannot simply be understood as a fence around the mimetic powers of subject-formation. Just like the legally institutionalized procedures of a constitutional democracy, the procedures of communicative action cannot work if actors experience its principles and structure merely as constraints that they must prudentially take into account as they act; they must also be able to experience these principles and structures as their own. The rules, roles, and structures must become meaningful parts of their identity. Thus, communicative structures and norms cannot be understood as always-already “there” guiding participants’ performances; they must instead (or in addition) become the *products* of communicative actors’ practices of role-switching and the soul-effects those practices produce. Communicative actors must produce them anew in each encounter (cf. Miller 2011: 65).

This generates an important reinterpretation of Habermas’s discourse ethics and the analyses of politics and law he builds out of it. One of my dissertation advisors once jokingly summarized Habermas’s position as: “because we communicate with one another, we are normatively committed developing a European-style social democracy.” The joke, of course, trades on one of Habermas’s apparent positions—that norms of equality and mutual respect are speech norms built into the very infrastructure of communicative action. As Rancière

puts it in his critical description of the idea, the activities of speaking to another and of coordinating action on the basis of that speech becomes the way in which “justice forces its way into social relationships” (Rancière 1999: 44). We can think here of Fredrick Douglass’s speech, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” In particular, I wish to focus on his famous refusal to “argue” that slavery is wrong. He grounds this refusal in part his examination of the laws that regulate the conduct of slaves. Douglass acknowledges that the laws are inegalitarian; for example, it was illegal to teach a slave how to read, and the law prescribed different and more severe punishment for crimes if those crimes were committed by slaves. Yet Douglass does not criticize the law for encoding inequality; rather, he argues something close to the reverse: because these legal regulations implicitly acknowledged that slaves were human beings who could be held responsible for their actions. The mere fact that the law prohibited teaching slaves how to read, he argues, means that the law also acknowledged that slaves were already capable of reading and therefore equal; after all, there were no similar laws banning the teaching of cows to read. Habermas appears to adopt a similar logic in his analyses of discourse ethics. No matter how inegalitarian the relationship might seem, the mere fact that a superior addresses a subordinate and coordinates action on the basis of that address means that egalitarian speech norms are operative. The superior presupposes that the subordinate can understand the address, and that this understanding inserts egalitarian principles (even if only counter-factual ones) into the relationship.

We can now say, however, that this interpretation of Habermas’s discourse ethics is misleading. Indeed, it succumbs to the Habermasian metalepsis. It forgets that Habermasian speech norms cannot regulate the experience of meaning; they are instead a post hoc articulation of the affective experiences of understanding through which actors are formed and transformed (see also Miller 2011: 107). The norms that Habermas reconstructs must be

understood as a collection of images that might insert egalitarian principles into communicative situations. Return to Douglass for a moment. From the fact that the law calls for capital punishment when a slave commits a crime Douglass deduces that the law implicitly acknowledges that the slave is a moral and responsible being—an equal who therefore deserves equal treatment (citizenship rights, rights guaranteeing one’s capacity to pursue one’s own life plan, and probably some kind of rights to the material resources necessary to exercise these rights). But is this deduction “logical”? As Rancière or Zerilli might note, it depends on what organization of the world one is assuming (see Rancière 1999: 48-49; Zerilli 2012: 15ff). It is always possible, and this is precisely what supporters of slavery argued, to create a division between different ideas of “understanding.” The slave can understand language well enough to understand an order and obey it, but they lack the ability to formulate orders, or to act independently of them (for a good discussion of this point in Rancière, see Nichanian 2012). Given that perceptual organization of the world, Douglass’s deduction is not logical at all. So Douglass presents an argument, but he also invokes an aesthetic image of a world in which that deduction would be logical. He is using the resources available (the fact that slaves are recognized in law) to invent a new image of equality (the image of a society without slavery, the image of a black person who is a full human being) and insert into his audience’s experience (see also Frank 2010: 209ff; for a different and more critical reading of Douglass’s speech, see Mills 1998: 167ff).

So too with Habermas’s reconstruction of speech norms such as (U). These are not quasi-transcendental deductions of the presuppositions that actors must take on as they try to come to agreement about truth or rightness. They efforts to use various resources (e.g., the fact that one has to switch roles in order to issue orders at all) to construct an image of equality and insert it even into the most hierarchical social relations. Communicative

understanding always involves mimetic practices (role-taking) and experiences (transformations in one's self and one's world, even if they are quite mundane). Habermas's speech norms, then, simply reveal the ongoing possibilities for reinterpreting these practices and experiences so that one might invent and act on a more egalitarian set of norms. His reconstructions of speech norms might therefore sensitize actors (and political theorists, who interpret actions) to these possibilities, so as to induce further egalitarian inventions. That is how justice forces its way into social relationships: Not automatically through speech norms that are already "there," but through creative invention, as participants act *as if* egalitarian norms were present and binding on all communicative actors.

This is not to say that the theorists of the aesthetic turn are right after all, that the aesthetic presentation of images is prior to rational argument. The idea that Habermas's speech norms are inventions does not mean that his theory must be understood "merely" as an effort to seduce actors with affective images. We may dispense with that hypothesis as well. For Habermas, mimetic powers arrive in linguistic form. They occur within and through coherent procedures, identities, and practices. This is the intuition that Habermas is getting at when he says that one of the goals of his project is to reveal "the rational core of mimetic achievements" (1984: 390; see also Miller 2011: 32). So Habermas does not just present an account in which reason depends on mimetic practices and experiences; he also presents an account in which mimesis is *articulate* (cf. Miller 2011: 31). Mimesis occurs in and through a coherent "language game," and the implicit rules, roles, and practices of this game provide the perspectives from which the participants can critically evaluate their own (and others') performances and invent new images.

Think of the game of chess. Mastering the rules of this game requires not just the ability to understand what moves are allowed, but also the ability to understand one's moves

in relation to one's opponent ("if I do X, then my opponent can do Y"); this capacity, in turn, also entails the ability to adopt a third-person point of view, the point of view of the spectator. To play chess, one must be able to pursue one's own cause while simultaneously evaluating that cause from that point of view. Something similar is true of the capacity for critical reflection and creative intervention in the context of communicative action. One must be able not just to construct grammatically correct speech acts but to understand those speech acts in relation to one's interlocutor. This requires role-switching, which in turn implicitly refers to a third-person perspective, that is, the perspective of the observer who can evaluate one's own speech acts.

This invites us to re-think the implications of accepting that the subject is formed mimetically. We can accept the idea that stories have the power to shape subjects without viewing this power as a (welcome or unwelcome) threat to the subject's autonomy and the critical reflection and creative transformation that autonomy supposedly underwrites. In fact, these powers become perceived as threats to autonomy only insofar as we assume that autonomy is the capacity of an isolated subjectivity who stands "outside" of various powers and chooses which ones to create, augment, or resist. Habermas's turn to communicative action decisively rejects such a notion. Role-taking—and the transformations that occur therein—is what we are, or as Miller more precisely puts it, it is *how* we are (2011: 106). Yet this role-taking involves a coherent and historically situated set of identities, perspectives, and practices. Specifically, role-taking allows the actor to adopt and identify with the third-person perspective of the spectator. The observer's perspective one uses to evaluate one's performances is already part of us; it is how we are. Thus the fact that the subject is formed mimetically does not undermine the capacity for critical reflection; indeed, the whole conceptual opposition between rational/critical reflection and mimetic transformation

collapses. Communicative actors might experience profound aesthetic transformations (in their identities, in their experiences of the world), but those experiences occur through determinate forms, a collection of coherent rules and roles that one can interpret and articulate in retrospect and/or from the perspective of the observer. There is no autonomous subjectivity or collection of “mere procedures” that govern mimetic powers, or that are interrupted by them. Autonomous subjectivity is already mimetically formed, and “mere procedures” already involve the adoption of aesthetic models and forms. There is no opposition between rational form and mimesis; there is only the ongoing flow of intersubjectivity, of the transformative experiences of meaning and of the critical appropriations and rearticulations of that experience.

Works Cited

- Brown, Wendy. 2015. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. New York: Zone Books.
- Butler, Judith. 2000. *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. With Ernesto Laclau and Slovoj Žižek. London: Verso.
- Chambers, Simone. 2016. “Kickstarting the Bootstrapping: Jürgen Habermas, Deliberative Constitutionalization, and the Limits of Proceduralism.” Paper Presented at the Association for Political Theory Annual Meeting, Columbus OH.
- Dean, Jodi. 2015. “Neoliberalism's Defeat of Democracy.” *Critical Inquiry* (October).
- Douglass, Fredrick. 2003. “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” in *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins.
- Frank, Jason. *Constituent Moments: Enacting the People in Post-Revolutionary America*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Gennette, Gerard. 1980. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, (Jane Lewin, trans.). Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1984. *The Theory of Communicative Action, volume I: Reason and the Rationalization of Society* (Thomas McCarthy, Trans.). Boston: Beacon Press.

- Habermas, Jürgen. 1985a. "A Philosophico-Political Profile." Interview by Perry Anderson and Peter Dews. *New Left Review*. 151, 75-105.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1985b. "Questions and Counter-Questions," in *Habermas and Modernity* (Richard Bernstein, ed.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1990. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (S. Nicholsen and C. Lenhardt, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1996. *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*. Translated by William Rehg. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1998. *The Inclusion of the Other*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 2001. "Constitutional Democracy: A Paradoxical Union of Contradictory Principles?" (William Rehg, Trans.). *Political Theory*, 29 (December), 766-781.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 2006. "Does the Constitutionalization of International Law Still Have a Chance?" *The Divided West* (Ciaran Cronin, ed.). Cambridge: Polity Press, 113-193.
- Halliwell, Stephen. 2002. *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems*. Princeton: University of Princeton Press.
- Honig, Bonnie. 2001a. *Democracy and the Foreigner*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Honig, Bonnie. 2001b. "Dead Rights, Live Futures: A Replay to Habermas's 'Constitutional Democracy.'" *Political Theory* 29 (December): 792-805.
- Honig, Bonnie. 2007. "Between Decision and Deliberation: Political Paradox in Democratic Theory." *American Political Science Review*, 101:1, 1-18.
- Honig, Bonnie. 2008. "An Agonist's Reply." *R & R*.
- Honig, Bonnie. 2009. *Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Honig, Bonnie. 2017. *Public Things: Democracy in Disrepair*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1993. *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (James Ellington, trans.). Indianapolis: Hackett Press.
- Kant, Immanuel. 2011. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. (Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, Trans.). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kompridis, Nikolas (ed.). 2014. *The Aesthetic Turn in Political Thought*. New York: Bloomsbury.

- Mackin, Glenn. 2013. *The Politics of Social Welfare in America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mackin, Glenn. 2017. "Black Lives Matter and the Concept of the Counterworld." *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 459-481.
- Markell, Patchen. 2000. "Making Affect Safe for Democracy? On 'Constitutional Patriotism.'" *Political Theory*, 28 (February), 38-63.
- Miller, Gregg. 2011. *Mimesis and Reason: Habermas's Political Philosophy*. Albany: SUNY University Press.
- Mills, Charles. 1998. "Whose Fourth of July? Fredrick Douglass and 'Original Intent.'" In *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 167-200.
- Nichanian, Daniel. 2012. "Contesting Claims to Mastery: Responsiveness and Jacques Rancière's Politics of the 'As If.'" Paper Presented at the Midwest Political Science Association Annual Meeting.
- Panagia, Davide. 2009. *The Political Life of Sensation*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Pier, John. 2013. "Metalepsis," in Living Handbook of Narratology. <http://wikis.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php/Metalepsis>, accessed March 15, 2018.
- Potolsky, Matthew. 2006. *Mimesis*. New York: Routledge.
- Rancière, Jacques. 1999. *Dis-Agreement: Politics and Philosophy*, (Julie Rose, Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Vetlesen, A.J. 1997. "Worlds Apart? Habermas and Levinas." *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 23 (1), 1-20.
- White, Stephen and Farr, Evan Robert. 2012. "No-Saying in Habermas." *Political Theory* 40 (1), 32-57.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1958. *Philosophical Investigations*. (G.E.M. Anscombe, trans.). Englewood Cliffs: Prentice.
- Zerilli, Linda. 2005. "We Feel Our Freedom: Imagination and Judgment in the Thought of Hannah Arendt." *Political Theory* 33 (2), 158-188.
- Zerilli, Linda. 2012. "Value Pluralism and the Problem of Judgment: Farewell to Public Reason." *Political Theory* 40 (1), 6-31.
- Zerilli, Linda. 2017. *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.