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By Bruno Latour

This is Bruno Latour's provisional introduction to Bruno Latour & Peter Weibel Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy, catalogue of the exhibition held at ZKM, Karlsruhe, 20 March - 7 August)*

âThe aide said that guys like me were "in what we call the reality-based community," which he defined as people who "believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality." I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. "That's not the way the world really works anymore," he continued. "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality -- judiciously, as you will -- we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do." [1]

Some conjunctions of planets are so ominous, astrologers used to say, that it seems safer to stay at home in bed and wait until Heaven sends a more auspicious message. It's probably the same with political conjunctions. They are presently so hopeless that it seems prudent to stay as far away as possible from anything political and to wait for the passing away of all the present leaders, terrorists, commentators and buffoons who strut about the public stage.

Astrology, however, is as precarious an art as political science; behind the nefarious conjunctions of hapless stars, other much dimmer alignments might be worth pondering. With the political period triggering such desperation, the time seems right to shift our attention to other ways of considering public matters. And "matters" are precisely what might be put center stage. Yes, public matters, but how?

While the German Reich has given us two world wars, the German language has provided us with the word Realpolitik to describe a positive, materialist, no non sense, interest only, matter-of-fact way of dealing with naked power relations. Although this "reality," at the time of Bismarck, might have appeared as a welcome change after the cruel idealisms it aimed to replace, it strikes us now as deeply unrealistic. In general, to invoke "realism" when talking about politics is something one should not do without trembling and shaking. The beautiful word "reality" has been damned by the too many crimes committed in its name.

What is the res of Respublica?

By the German neologism Dingpolitik, we wish to designate a risky and tentative set of experiments in probing just what it could mean for political thought to turn "things" around and to become slightly more realistic than has been attempted up to now. A few years ago, computer scientists invented the marvelous expression of "object-oriented" software to describe a new way to program their computers. We wish to use this metaphor to ask the question: "What would an object-oriented democracy look like?"

The general hypothesis is so simple that it might sound trivial -but being trivial might be part of what it is to become a "realist" in politics. We might be more connected to each other by our worries, our matters of concern, the issues we care for, than by any other set of values, opinions, attitudes or principles. The experiment is certainly easy to make. Just go over in your head any set of contemporary issues: the entry of Turkey into the European Union, the Islamic veil in France, the

spread of genetically modified organisms in Brazil, the pollution of the river near your home, the breaking down of Greenland's glaciers, the diminishing return of your pension funds, the closing of your daughter's factory, the repairs to be made in your apartment, the rise and fall of stock options, the latest beheading by fanatics in Falluja, the last American election. For every one of these objects, you see spewing out of them a different set of passions, indignations, opinions, as well as a different set of interested parties and different ways of carrying out their partial resolution.

It's clear that each object -each issue- generates a different pattern of emotions and disruptions, of disagreements and agreements. There might be no continuity, no coherence in our opinions, but there is a hidden continuity and a hidden coherence in what we are attached to. Each object gathers around itself a different assembly of relevant parties. Each object triggers new occasions to passionately differ and dispute. Each object may also offer new ways of achieving closure without having to agree on much else. In other words, objects - taken as so many issues - bound all of us in ways that map out a public space profoundly different from what is usually recognized under the label of "the political." It is this space, this hidden geography that we wish to explore through this catalogue and exhibition.

It's not unfair to say that political philosophy has often been the victim of a strong object-avoidance tendency. From Hobbes to Rawls, from Rousseau to Habermas, many procedures have been devised to assemble the relevant parties, to authorize them to contract, to check their degree of representativity, to discover the ideal speech conditions, to detect the legitimate closure, to write the good constitution. But when it comes down to what is at issue, namely the object of concern that brings them together, not a word is uttered. In a strange way, political science is mute just at the moment when the objects of concern should be brought in and made to speak up loudly. Contrary to what the powerful etymology of their most cherished word should imply, their Res-publica does not seem to be loaded with too many things. Procedures to authorize and legitimize are important, but it's only half of what is needed to assemble. The other half lies in the issues themselves, in the matters that matter, in the res that creates a public around it. They need to be represented, authorized, legitimated and brought to bear inside the relevant assembly.

What we call an "object-oriented democracy" tries to redress this bias in much of political philosophy, that is, to bring together two different meanings of the word representation that have been kept separate in theory although they have remained always mixed in practice. The first one, so well known in schools of law and political science, designates the ways to gather the legitimate people around some issue. In this case, a representation is said to be faithful if the right procedures have been followed. The second one, well known in science and in technology, presents or rather represents what is the object of concern to the eyes and ears of those who have been assembled around it. In this case, a representation is said to be good if the matters at hand have been accurately portrayed. Realism implies that the same degree of attention be given to the two aspects of what it is to represent an issue. The first question draws a sort of place, sometimes a circle, which might be called an assembly, a gathering, a meeting, a council; the second question brings into this newly created locus a topic, a concern, an issue, a topos. But the two have to be taken together: Who is to be concerned; What is to be considered?

When Thomas Hobbes instructed his engraver on how to sketch the famous frontispiece for Leviathan, he had his mind full of optical metaphors and illusion machines he had seen in his travels through Europe.[2] A third meaning of this ambiguous and ubiquitous word "representation," the one with which artists are most familiar, had to be called for to solve, this time visually, the problem of the composition of the "Body Politic." Up to now it has remained a puzzle: How to represent, and through which medium, the sites where people meet to discuss their matters of concern? It's precisely what we are tackling here.[3] Shapin and Schaffer might have renewed Hobbes's problem even more tellingly when they redrew his monster for their frontispiece and equipped his left arm not with the Bishop's

crozier, but with Boyle's air-pump.[4] From now on, the powers of science are just as important to consider: How do they assemble, and around which matters of concern?

But in addition to the visual puzzle of assembling composite bodies, another puzzle should strike us in those engravings. A simple look at them clearly proves that the "Body Politic" is not only made of people! They are thick with things: clothes, a huge sword, immense castles, large cultivated fields, crowns, ships, cities and an immensely complex technology of gathering, meeting, cohabiting, enlarging, reducing, and focusing. In addition to the throng of little people summed up in the crowned head of the Leviathan, there are objects everywhere.

To be crowded with objects that nonetheless are not really integrated into our definition of politics is even more tellingly visible in the famous fresco painted by Lorenzetti in Siena's city hall.[5] Many scholars have deciphered for us the complex meaning of the emblems representing the Good and the Bad Government, and have traced their complex genealogy. But what is most striking for a contemporary eye is the massive presence of cities, landscapes, animals, merchants, dancers, and the ubiquitous rendering of light and space. The Bad Government is not simply illustrated by the devilish figure of Discordia, but also through the dark light, the destructed city, the ravaged landscape, and the suffocating people. The Good Government is not simply personified by the various emblems of Virtue and Concordia, but also through the transparency of light, its well-kept architecture, its well-tended landscape, its diversity of animals, the ease of its commercial relations, its thriving arts. Far from being simply a décor for the emblems, the fresco requests us to become attentive to a subtle ecology of Good and Bad Government. And modern visitors, attuned to the new issues of bad air, hazy lights, destroyed ecosystems, ruined architecture, abandoned industry, and delocalized trades are certainly ready to include in their definition of politics a whole new ecology loaded with things.[6] Where has political philosophy turned its distracted gaze while so many objects were drawn under its very nose? A new eloquence

In this show, we simply want to pack loads of stuff into the empty arenas where naked people were supposed to assemble simply to talk. Two vignettes will help us focus on those newly crowded sites.

The first one is a fable proposed by Peter Sloterdijk.[7] He imagined that the U.S. Air Force should have added to its military paraphernalia an "inflatable Parliament" which could be parachuted at the rear of the front, just after the liberating forces of the Good had defeated the forces of Evil. On hitting the ground, this parliament would unfold and be inflated just like your rescue dingy is supposed to do when you fall in the water. Ready to enter and take your seat, your finger still red from the indelible ink that proves you have exerted your voting duty, Instant Democracy would thus be delivered! The lesson of this simile is easy to draw. To imagine a parliament without its material set of complex instruments, "air-condition" pumps, local ecological requirements, material infrastructure, and long held habits is as ludicrous as to try to parachute such an inflatable parliament into the middle of Iraq. By contrast, probing an object-oriented democracy is to research what are the material conditions that may render the air breathable again.

The second vignette is the terrifying one offered by the now infamous talk former Secretary of State Colin Powell gave to the United Nations on February 5th, 2003 about the unambiguous and undisputable fact of the presence of weapons of mass destructions in Iraq.[8] No doubt, the first half of the representation -namely the assembly of legitimate speakers and listeners- was well taken care of. All of those sitting around the UN Security Council horse shoe table had a right to be there. But the same can't be said of the second half, namely the representation of the facts of the matter presented by the Secretary of State. Every one of the slides was a blatant lie -and the more time has passed the more blatant it has become. And yet their showing was prefaced by these words: "My colleagues, every statement I make today is backed up by sources, solid sources. These are not assertions. What we are

giving you are facts and conclusions based on solid intelligence" (my emphasis). Never has the difference between facts and assertions been more abused than on this day.

To assemble is one thing; to represent to the eyes and ears of those assembled what is at stake is another. An object-oriented democracy should be concerned as much by the procedure to detect the relevant parties as to the methods to bring into the center of the debate the proof of what it is to be debated. This second set of procedures to bring in the object of worry has several old names: eloquence, or more pejoratively, rhetoric, or even more derogatory, sophistic. And yet these are just the labels that we might need to rescue from the dustbin of history.[9] Mr. Powell tried to distinguish the rhetoric of assertions from the undisputable power of facts. He failed miserably. Having no truth, he had no eloquence either. Can we do better? Can we trace again the frail conduits through which truths and proofs are allowed to enter the sphere of politics?

Unwittingly, the Secretary of State put us on a track where the abyss between assertions and facts might be a nice "rhetorical" ploy, but it has lost its relevance. It would imply, on the one hand, that there would be matters-of-fact which some enlightened people would have unmediated access to. On the other hand, disputable assertions would be practically worthless, useful only insofar as they could feed the subjective passions of interested crowds. On one side would be the truth and no mediation, no room for discussion; on the other side would be opinions, many obscure intermediaries, perhaps some hecklings. Through the use of this indefatigable cliché, the Inflationary Parliament is now equipped with a huge screen on which thoroughly transparent facts are displayed. Those who remain unconvinced prove by their resistance how irrational they are; they have unfortunately fell prey to subjective passions. And sure enough, having aligned so many "indisputable" facts behind his position, since the "dispute" was still going on, Powell had to close it arbitrarily by a show of unilateral force. Facts and forces, in spite of so much vibrant declarations, always walk in tandem.

The problem is that transparent, unmediated, undisputable facts have recently become rarer and rarer. To provide complete undisputable proof has become a rather messy, pesky, risky business. And to offer a public proof, big enough and certain enough to convince the whole world of the presence of a phenomenon or of a looming danger, seems now almost beyond reach -and always was.[10] The same American administration that was content with a few blurry slides "proving" the presence of non-existing weapons in Iraq is happy to put many brackets around the proof of much vaster, better validated, more imminent threats, such as global climate change, diminishing oil reserves, increasing inequality. Is it not time to say: "Mr. Powell, given what you have done with facts, we would much prefer you to leave them aside and let us instead compare mere assertions with one another. Don't worry, even with such an inferior type of proof we might nonetheless come to a conclusion and this one will not be arbitrarily cut short."?[11] Either we should despair of politics and abandon the hope of providing public proofs altogether, or we should abandon the much worn out cliché of incontrovertible matters of fact. Could we do better, and manage to really conclude a dispute with "disputable" assertions? After all, when Aristotle -surely not a cultural relativist! - introduced the word "rhetoric" it was precisely to mean proofs, incomplete to be sure but proofs nonetheless.[12]

This is what we wish to attempt: where matters-of-facts have failed, let's try what I have called matters-of-concern. What we are trying to register here in this catalogue is a huge sea change in our conceptions of science, our grasps of facts, our understanding of objectivity. For too long, objects have been wrongly portrayed as matters-of-fact. This is unfair to them, unfair to science, unfair to objectivity, unfair to experience. They are much more interesting, variegated, uncertain, complicated, far reaching, heterogeneous, risky, historical, local, material, and networky than the pathetic version offered for too long by philosophers. Rocks are not simply there to be kicked at, desks to be thumped at. "Facts are facts are facts"? Yes, but they are also a lot of other things in addition.[13]

For those who, like Mr. Powell, have been used for ages to get rid of all oppositions by claiming the superior power of facts, such a sea change might be met with cries of derision: "relativism", "subjectivism", "irrationalism", "mere rhetoric", "sophistry"! They might see the new life of facts as so much subtraction. Quite right! It subtracts a lot of their power because it renders their life more difficult. Think of that: they might have to enter into the new arenas for good and finally make their point to the bitter end. They might actually have to publicly prove their assertions against other assertions, and come to a closure without thumping and kicking, without alternating wildly between indisputable facts and indisputable shows of terror. We wish to explore in this catalogue many other realist gestures than just thumping and kicking. We want to imagine a new eloquence. Is it asking too much from our public conversation? It's great to be convinced, but it would be even better to be convinced by some evidence.[14]

Our notions of politics have been thwarted for too long by an absurdly unrealistic epistemology. Accurate facts are hard to come by and the harder they are, the more they entail some costly equipment, a longer set of mediations, more delicate proofs. Transparency and immediacy are bad for science as well as for politics; they would make both suffocate.[15] What we need is to be able to bring inside the assemblies divisive issues with their long retinue of complicated proof-giving equipment. No unmediated access to agreement; no unmediated access to the facts of the matter. After all, we are used to rather arcane procedures for voting and electing. Why should we suddenly imagine an eloquence so devoid of means, tools, tropes, tricks and knacks that it would bring the facts in the arenas through some uniquely magical transparent idiom? If politics is earthly, so is science. From objects to things

It's to underline this shift from a cheapened notion of objectivity to costly proofs that we want to resurrect the word "Ding" and use the neologism Dingpolitik as a substitute for Realpolitik. The latter lacks realism when it talks about power relations as well as when it talks about mere facts. It does not know how to deal with "indisputability." To discover one's own real naked interest requires probably the most convoluted and farfetched inquiry there is. To be brutal is not enough to turn you into a hard-headed realist.

As every reader of Heidegger knows, or as every glance at the English dictionary under the heading "Thing" will certify, the old word "Thing" or "Ding" designated originally a certain type of archaic assembly.[16] Many parliaments in Nordic and Saxon nations still activate the old root of this etymology: Norwegian congressmen assemble in the Storting; Icelandic deputies called the equivalent of "Þingmen" gather in the Althing;[17] Isle of Man seniors used to gather around the Ting;[18] the German landscape is dotted with Thingstätten and you can see in many places the circles of stones where the Thing used to stand.[19] Thus, long before designating an object thrown out of the political sphere and standing there objectively and independently, the Ding or Thing has for many centuries meant the issue that brings people together because it divides them. The same etymology lies dormant in the Latin *res*, the Greek *aitia*, and the French or Italian *cause*. Even the Russian soviet still dreams of bridges and churches.[20]

Of all the eroded meanings left by the slow crawling of political geology, none is stranger to consider than the Icelandic Althing since the ancient "thingmen" -what we would call "congressmen" or MPs- had the amazing idea of meeting in a desolate and sublime site which happens to sit smack in the middle of the fault line that marks the meeting place of the Atlantic and European tectonic plates. Not only Icelanders manage to remind us of the old sense of Ding, but they also dramatize to the utmost how much these political questions have also become questions of nature. Are not all parliaments now divided by the nature of things as well as by the din of the crowded Ding? Has the time not come to bring the *res* back to the *Respublica*?[21] This is the reason why we have tried to build the provisional and fragile assembly of our show on as many fault lines from as many tectonic plates as possible.

The point of reviving this old etymology is that we don't assemble because we agree, look alike, feel good, are socially compatible, wish to fuse together, but because we are brought by divisive matters of concern into some neutral, isolated place in order to come to some sort of provisional makeshift (dis)agreement. If the Ding designates both those who assemble because they are concerned as well as what causes their concerns and divisions, it should become the center of our attention: Back to Things! Is this not a more engaging political slogan?

Gatherings is the translation that Heidegger used to talk about those Things, those sites able to assemble mortals and gods, humans and non-humans. There is more than a little irony in extending this meaning to what Heidegger and his followers loved to hate, namely science, technology, commerce, industry, and popular culture.[25] And yet this is just what we intend to do in this book: the objects of science and technology, the aisles of supermarkets, financial institutions, medical establishments, and computer networks -even the cat walk of fashion shows!-[26] offer paramount examples of hybrid forums and agoras, of the gatherings that have been eating away at the older realm of pure objects bathing in the clear light of the modernist gaze. When we say "Public matters!" or "Back to Things!" we are not trying to go back to the old materialism of Realpolitik, because matter itself is up for grabs as well. To be materialist now implies that one enter a labyrinth more intricate than that built by Daedalus.

In the same fatal month of February 2003, another stunning example of this shift from object to things was demonstrated by the explosion of the shuttle Columbia. "Assembly drawing" is how engineers call the invention of the blueprint.[27] But the word assembly sounds odd once the shuttle has exploded and its debris has been gathered in a huge hall where inquirers from a specially designed commission are trying to discover what happened to the shuttle. They are now provided with an "exploded view" of a highly complex technical object. But what has exploded is our capacity to understand what objects are when they have become Ding. How sad that we need catastrophes to remind us that when Columbia was shown on its launching pad in its complete, autonomous, objective form that such a view was even more of a lie than Mr. Powell's presentation of the "facts" of WMD. It's only after the explosion that everyone realized the shuttle's complex technology should have been drawn with the NASA bureaucracy inside of it in which they too would have to fly.[28]

The object, the Gegenstand, may remain outside of all assemblies, but not the Ding. Hence the question we wish to raise: What are the various shapes of the assemblies that can make sense of all those assemblages? Questions we address to the three types of representation brought together in this show: political, scientific, and artistic.

Through some amazing quirk of etymology, it just happens that the same root has given birth to those twin brothers: the Demon and the Demos -and those two are more at war with one another than Eteocles and Polyneices have ever been.[29] The word "demos" that makes half of the much vaunted word "demo-cracy" is haunted by the demon, yes the devil, because they share the same Indo-European root da- to divide.[30] If the demon is such a terrible threat, it's because it divides in two. If the demos is such a welcome solution, it's because it also divides in two. A paradox? No, it's because we ourselves are so divided by so many contradictory attachments that we have to assemble.

We might be familiar with Jesus's admonition against Satan's power,[31] but the same power of division is also what provides the division/divide, namely the sharing of the same territory. Hence the people, the demos, are made up of those who share the same space and are divided by the same contradictory worries. How could an object-oriented democracy ignore such a vertiginous uncertainty? When the knife hovers around the cake of common wealth to be divided in shares, it may divide and let the demon of civil strife loose, or it may cut equal shares and let the demos happily apportioned. Strangely enough, we are divided and yet might have to divide, that is to share, even more. The

"demos" is haunted by the demon of division! No wonder that this show offers, I am afraid, such a pandemonium. Politics is a branch of teratology: from Leviathan to devils, from Discordia to Behemoth, and soon a whole array of ghosts and phantoms. Tricks and treats all the way down. No representation without representations

Michael Frayn's play Democracy begins with the grating noise of a worm, a little bug that at the onset is supposed to make the whole decadent West crumble like a wooden house eaten up by termites while the sturdy and united DDR emerges from chaos.[32] The same noisy worm is heard again at the end of the play, but this time it's the whole Soviet Bloc that, unexpectedly, lies in dust while democracy -- "the worst form of government, except for all the others," as Churchill famously said -- keeps on munching and worming along.

A demon haunts politics but it might not be so much the demon of division -this is what is so devilish about it- but the demon of unity, totality, transparency, and immediacy. "Down with intermediaries! Enough spin! We are lied to! We have been betrayed." Those cries resonate everywhere and everyone seems to sigh: "Why are we being so badly represented?" Columnists, educators, militants never tire of complaining of a "crisis of representation." They claim that the masses seem no longer to feel at ease with what its elites are telling them. Politicians, they say, have become aloof, unreal, surrealistic, virtual, and alien. An abysmal gap has opened between the "political sphere" and the "reality that people have to put up with." If this gap is yawning under our feet much like the Icelandic fault line, surely no Dingpolitik can ignore it.

But it might also be the case that half of such a crisis is due to what has been sold to the general public under the name of a faithful, transparent and accurate representation.[33] We are asking from representation something it cannot possibly give, namely representation without any re-presentation, without any provisional assertions, without any imperfect proof, without any opaque layers of translations, transmissions, betrayals, without any complicated machinery of assembly, delegation, proof, argumentation, negotiation, and conclusion.

In 2002 in the course of another exhibition called "Iconoclasm", many of the same authors have tried to explore the roots of a specific form of Western fanaticism. If only there was no image -that is, no mediation- the better our grasp of Beauty, Truth and Piety would be. We visited the famous iconoclastic periods from the Byzantine to the Reformation, from Lenin's Red Square to Malevich's Black Square, to which we added the less well-known struggles among iconoclasts and iconodules in mathematics, physics and the other sciences.[34] We wanted to compare with one another the various interference patterns created by all those forms of contradictory attitudes toward images. Scientists, artists, and clerks have been multiplying imageries, intermediaries, mediations, representations while tearing them down and resurrecting them with even more forceful, beautiful, inspired, objective forms. We reckoned that it was not absurd to explore the whole Western tradition by following up such a ubiquitous double bind. Hence the neologism Iconoclasm to point at this ambivalence, this other demonic division: "Alas, we cannot do anything without image!" "Fortunately, we cannot do anything without image!"

Iconoclasm was not an iconoclastic show, but a show about iconoclasm; not a critical show but a show about critique. The urge to debunk was no longer a resource to feed from, we hoped, but a topic to be carefully examined. Like the slave who was asked to remind emperors during their triumphs that they were mere mortals, we had asked an angel to come down and suspend in mid-air the arm that held the hammer, an angel that could mutter in the ear of the triumphant idol-breakers: "Beware! Consider what you strike at with so much glee. Look first at what you might risk destroying instead!" Once the destructive gesture was suspended, we discovered that no iconoclast had ever struck at the right target. Their blows always drifted sideways. For this reason, even Saint George, we thought, looked more

interesting without his spear.[35]

Our aim was to move the collective attention, as the subtitle of the show, "beyond the image wars in science, religion and art," clearly indicated. This "beyond" was drawn, very simply, by taking into consideration the other half of what they were all doing: those we were following were never simply tearing down idols, burning fetishes, debunking ideologies, exposing scandals, breaking down old forms but also putting ideas onto pedestals, invoking deities, proving facts, establishing theories, building institutions, creating new forms, and also destroying unexpectedly and unwittingly other things they did not know that they cherished so much. By bringing destruction, blunder, plunder, and construction together we hoped to foster a new respect for mediators.

Obviously, there is something in the way flows of images create access to Beauty, Truth and Piety that has been missed by idol-breakers over the ages. To summarize our attempt in one simile, I proposed to say that Moses, in addition to being tongue-twisted, might have also been a little hard of hearing and that's why he had understood "Thou shall not make unto thee any graven image" when he had been told: "Thou shall not freeze frame." If you stick to them, images are dangerous, blasphemous, idolatrous; but they are safe, innocent, indispensable. "Truth is image, but there is no image of Truth." [36] This solution might offer, we thought, a possible cure against fundamentalism, that is, the belief that without any representation you would be represented even better.

Iconoclasm, however, carefully excluded politics. This was done on purpose. There is no activity where it is more difficult to pay due respect to mediators; no calling more despised than that of politicians; no sphere more inviting for irony, satire, debunking, derision than the political sphere; no idols more inviting for destructions than the Idols of the Forum; no discourse easier to deconstruct. On political rhetoric, critique has a field day. By kindergarten, toddlers have already grown cynical on all political matters. In a show that was about critique, adding politics would have skewed the whole project and visitors would have left even more iconoclast than when they had entered.

But once we have moved beyond the image wars, once we have regained a good grasp of the masses of intermediaries necessary to represent anything, once we have moved back to things, could we extend the same attention for mediators to the most despised activity, namely political spin? Is it possible now to tackle the question of political representation with care and respect? Even more extravagant: Is it possible to tackle it uncritically? Just try to imagine a show about politics that would not be about debunking, exposing, revealing, or smashing the idols down. Do you really want to take politics positively? Indeed.

"Handicapped of all nations, unite!"

What makes it so difficult to stare straight at the Gorgonian face of politics, is that we seem to delight in adding to it some even more distorting traits. Not happy with Frankenstein, we want to hybridize it with Quasimodo. Monstrous it is, yet this is not a reason to transform it into a painting by Hieronymus Bosch. Or rather, Bosch is painting our own internal Hell which might not bear that much of a relation with the specific monsters of politics.[37] What frightens us so much in collective action, the reason why we delight so much in despising it, is that we might see reflected in its distorted mirror our own grimacing faces. Are we not asking from the assembly something it cannot possibly deliver, so that talking positively of politics horrifies us because it's our limitations that we are not prepared to accept? If it's true that representations are so indispensable and yet so opaque, how well prepared are we to handle them? When hearing the call for assembling at the Thing, are we able to accept that we are radically and basically unfit to take a seat in it? Do we have the cognitive equipment required for this? Are we not, on the whole, totally handicapped?

Instead of the radiant citizen standing up and speaking his mind by using his solid common sense, as in Rockwell's famous painting "Freedom of speech", should we not look for an eloquence much more indirect, distorted, inconclusive? In this show, we want to tackle the question of politics from the point of view of our own weaknesses instead of projecting them first onto the politicians themselves. We could say that the blind lead the blind, the deaf speak eloquently to the deaf, the crippled are leading marches of dwarfs, or rather, to avoid those biased words, let's say that we are all politically-challenged. How would it look if we were chanting this more radical and surely more realistic slogan: "Handicapped of all nations, unite!"[38] After all, was not Demosthenes, as much as Moses and many other legislators, speech-impaired?[39] Are we not all when our time comes to speak up?

The cognitive deficiency of participants has been hidden for a long time because of the mental architecture of the dome in which the Body Politic was supposed to assemble. We were told that all of us -- upon entering this dome, this public sphere -- had to leave aside in the cloak room our own attachments, passions and weaknesses. Taking our seat under the transparent crystal of the common good, through the action of some mysterious machinery, we would then be collectively endowed with more acute vision and higher virtue. At least that was the idea, no matter if the machinery was the social contract or some other metamorphosis: the selfish narrow-minded worm will re-emerge as a brightly colored collective butterfly.[40]

During the Enlightenment, architects took this virtual reality so literally that they actually drew and sometimes built those domes, globes and palaces.[41] Later, during the time of revolutions, other builders gave a shape to this public sphere that was no longer limited to deputies and congressmen, but included the whole people or the proletariat or the volk.[42] They distributed speech differently, they imagined another way to compose the body, the procedures were modified, they arrayed much vaster masses, but it was still under a dome that they marched and chanted. From Boullée to Speer, from Pierre-Charles L'Enfant to the new Scottish parliament, from John Soane to Norman Foster, it seemed possible for architects to provide a literal rendition of what it means to assemble in order to produce the common will.[43] Individuals might be corrupted, feeble, deficient, but above their weak heads there was a heaven, a sphere, a globe under which they all sat. Just before the French Revolution, Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès imagined a parliament so big -and so virtual- that it extended to the whole of France, tiers after tiers, all the way to the furthest provinces.

Unfortunately, much like the Tower of Babel, those "palaces of reason" -to use the name of many city halls in northern Italy- are no longer able to house the issues they were supposed to gather. Commentators of the "events" of May 1968 in France were amused to see that the turbulent demonstrating crowds passed by the National Assembly without even looking at it, as if its irrelevance was so great that it could not even invite abuses. How irrelevant they might seem now that the global has become the new name of the Body Politic. Where would you assemble the global? Certainly not under golden domes and kitsch frescoes where heroic senators and half naked Republics are crowned by laurels descending from clouds. Why are politics always about imitation? There is Robespierre imitating Cicero, Lenin mimicking Robespierre. In the name of the common good, forests of Greek columns have been erected across the Western world -while the "mother of all parliaments" in Westminster remained faithful to the dark, cramped, uncomfortable cave of stalls, spires and gargoyles. Neo-gothic, neo-classic, neo-modern or neo-postmodern, those spaces were all "neo", that is, trying to imitate some venerated past.[44] But you might need more than imitation to build the new political assemblies. Covering the Reichstag with a transparent dome -in effect fully opaque- as Foster did, doesn't seem nearly enough to absorb the new masses that are entering political arenas. If it's true that a parliament is a complex machinery of speech, of hearing, of voting, of dealing, what should be the shapes adjusted to a Dingpolitik? What would a political space be that would not be "neo"? What would a truly contemporary style of assembly look like?

It's impossible to answer this question without gathering techniques of representation in different types of assemblies. The effect we wish to obtain is to show that parliaments are only a few machineries of representations among many others and not necessarily the most relevant or the best equipped.

It's likely that fundamentalists will not like our show: they think they are safer without representation. They really believe that outside of any assembly, freed from all those cumbersome, tortuous and opaque techniques, they will see better, farther, faster and act more decisively. Inspired directly by the Good, often by their God, they despise the indirectness of representations. But realists might appreciate it because if we are all politically-challenged, if there is no direct access to the general will, if no transparent dome gives any global visibility, if, at best, blind lead blind, then any small, even infinitesimal innovation in the practical ways to represent an issue will make a small, that is, huge difference. Not for the fundamentalist, but for the realists.

Ask the blind what difference it makes to have a white cane or not. Ask the deaf what difference it makes to be instrumented with a hearing-aid or not. Ask the crippled, the advantage they see in having a slightly better adjusted wheelchair. If we are all handicapped, or rather politically-challenged, we need many different prostheses. Each object exhibited in the show and commented in the catalogue is such a crutch. We promise nothing more grandiose than a store of aids for the invalids who have been repatriated from the political frontlines -and haven't we all been badly mauled in recent years? Politics might be better taken as a branch of disability studies.

From an Assembly of Assemblies...

An exhibition cannot do much, but it can explore new possibilities with a much greater degree of freedom because it is so good at thought-experiments, or rather Gedankenaustellung. One of those attempts is to design not one assembly but rather an assembly of assemblies, so that, much like in a fair, visitors or readers can compare the different types of representation. This is what we have attempted here.

Scientific laboratories, technical institutions, marketplaces, churches and temples, financial trading rooms, internet forums, ecological disputes -- without forgetting the very shape of the museum inside which we gather all those membra disjecta -- are just some of the forums and agoras in which we speak, vote, decide, are decided upon, prove, are being convinced. Each has its own architecture, its own technology of speech, its complex set of procedures, its definition of freedom and domination, its ways to bring together those who are concerned -and even more important those who are not concerned - and what concerns them, its expedient way to obtain closure and come to a decision. Why not render them comparable to one another?

After all, they have never stopped exchanging their properties: churches became temples before becoming city halls;[45] heads of state learned from artists how to create through publicity a public space;[46] it is deep inside convents that the complex voting procedures have been prepared and constitutions been written;[47] while laboratories are migrating to forums, the tasting of products borrows heavily from laboratory;[48] supermarkets are taking more and more features that make them look like contested voting booths;[49] but even the most abstruse models of physics have to borrow heavily from social theories.[50] On the other hand, financial institutions seem to gather more information technologies than parliaments.[51] The quietest sites of nature have become some of the most contested and disputed battlegrounds.[52] As for the World Wide Web, it begins by being a mess and slowly imports all sorts of virtual architectures but only very few reproduce the even more virtual space of the original parliaments;[53] artistic installations borrow more and more from scientific demonstrations;[54] technical know how absorbs more and more elements from law.[55] There is no river that flows anymore from mountain to sea without being as equipped in speech making

instruments than humans through opinion polls.[56] Such is the constant commerce, the ceaseless swapping, the endless crisscrossing of apparatuses, procedures, instruments and customs that we have attempted to weave through this show and this catalogue.

To collect such an assembly of assemblies, we have not tried to build around them an even bigger, a more all-encompassing dome. On the contrary, we have offered to link them through the humble and mundane back door of their representation machineries. We would like visitors and readers to move from one to the other by asking every time the three following questions: How do they manage to bring in the relevant parties? How do they manage to bring in the relevant issues? What change does it make in the way people make up their mind to be attached to things?

We hope that once this assembly of assemblies is deployed, that which passes for the political sphere, namely the parliaments and the offices of the executive branches, will appear as one type among many others, perhaps even a rather ill-equipped type. This approach to presenting the representation technology of parliamentary life will not seek to ridicule the its antiquated ways. On the contrary, it seeks to learn how they parliaments could be enlarged or connected or modified or redrawn.[57] Instead of saying that "everything is political" by detecting dark forces hidden beneath all the other assemblages, we wish on the contrary to locate the tiny procedures of parliamentary assent and dissent, in order to see on what practical terms and through which added labor they could, one day, become pertinent. In this show, we hope visitors to shop for the materials that might be needed later for them to build this new Noah's Ark: the Parliament of Things. Don't you hear the rain pouring relentlessly already? And Noah for sure was a realist.

...to an Assembly of Dissembling

There might just be another reason than the weak imagination of architects for not having a well-designed dome under which to assemble: getting together might not be such a universal desire after all! No matter how wide you stretch it, the political horizon might be too small to encompass the whole Earth. Not only because parliaments are too tiny, not only because a parliament of parliaments would require the use of many different machineries now dispersed among different gatherings, but because the very idea of a political assembly might not be shareable in the end. The urge for political representation might be so much of a Western obsession that other people might object to being thus mobilized or called for. And this objection too has to be registered in our show.

If you read the UNESCO literature, it seems that the whole world aspires to become one under the aegis of democracy, transparent representation, and the rule of law. But what if every time this inflatable parliament was being dropped in, many other voices were raised: "No Politics Please!", "No representation!", "Not with you", "No democracy, thanks", "Would you please stay as far away as possible", "Leave us alone", "I'd rather not".[58] What if the disagreements were not the sort of issues that divide people in the normal state of things, but were bearing instead on the very way to assemble at all? What if we had to imagine not an assembly of assemblies, not even an assembly of ways of assembling, but an assembly of ways of dissembling?

And yet this is just what happens when you begin to listen to other voices. Not because they are exotic, far fetched, archaic, irrational, but because they too claim that making things public might be a much more protracted affair than entering into the realm of politics -even widely enlarged. Under the thin veneer of "democracy for all" will soon appear another crisis of representation, one much wider and deeper because it will strike at the heart of what it is to represent at all.

Listen to the Japanese tradition: the very word representation strikes their ears as quaint and superficial.[59] Listen to the Jivaros: their highly complex rhetoric of agonistic encounters aim at not meeting in the same assembly.[60] Listen to the Jihadists calling for the extension of the Oumma. The

word "demokrata" remains an imported vocabulary that resonates more like a term of abuse than any deeply cherished value.[61] There are many other ways to assemble than under the aegis of a political intent.[62] And when highlanders of New Guinea assemble to vote using a complex procedure imported by helicopter from Australian-trained scrutinizers, can we measure how much they have transformed it?[63] Even in our own lands obsessed by the transparent republic, much effort is put into doing just the opposite, that is, in making things secret.[64] What if one of the causes of fundamentalism was that all those other ways of gathering find themselves, in the end, badly represented? As if the usual garment of politics was too narrow for them? As if they never had room to assemble with the other things they are attached to, such as their gods, their divinities, their scruples of conscience. It's as if the whole definition of politics inherited from the conflicts between church and state had to be discussed again.[65]

To see politics as a problem of collecting, where if you don't manage it properly you disappear into chaos, seems to be the problem of only a fraction of humanity, i.e. those obsessed by the link between their cosmic and social order.[66] And even among those, the idea of politics as speaking one's mind in the middle of an assembly seems to be a rather provincial notion. According to Fran