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FallSemester

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1. For the spontaneous energies at the heart of urban life to coalesce into a free form of politics, does it take a moderator?

What makes a city urban? In a way this is a primary question of the political. Given that *polis* means “city”, literally speaking, the term *political* designates matters that pertain to life in town. Etymology is no substitute for actual experience of such matters. But it might open up a path to some of the experiences that a term got charged with in (what may have been) its original context of use. So if we accentuate the presence of *polis* in *political* and amp up its resonances, the question “how is this political?” will start to resonate with questions like “how does this matter to our life in the city?” or rather “how does this relate to the things that shape the way we live together in this place?” It’s a city conversation. And as such it may be understood in *technical* terms as a concern with how to make things work, better, or at all, in places where people share space and spent time together. “How are we going to

make this work, here, now?” Hearing these resonances of *polis* in *politics* accentuated and amplified, an everyday scenario comes to mind that might epitomize this aspect of the political. You’re out in town with friends or new acquaintances and somehow asks: “Does anyone feel like having some food? Anyone know a good place to eat around here?” In the short silence that tends to ensue, the agonies and potentials of the political lie dormant. Who is to now say what people could now want to have and where the group should therefore be heading? Perhaps it’s not even much of a group but people who only just met and have no understanding of each others preferences, appetite or dietary concerns. And even if that should be so, if, for instance you are out with your partner or family, and you are very well informed about what the other(s) like or dislike, it tends to not make decisions any easier. On the contrary. To know what someone (or oneself) desires is already difficult enough. But to then to determine objectives and take decisions on the basis of this knowledge, on behalf of other people’s desires, with the aim to somehow conjoin and satisfy them, is really hard. Who is to do it? Everyone? Ideally yes. But what if none steps forward to make a propositions because everyone knows the blame will be on them if they take people to a place and it turns out they don’t like the food. Or if it should be good, but requires an effort to get to, who will actually tack along? That’s politics in a nutshell.

I recall one such political moment when, after a book launch in the east of Berlin, we tried to figure out where to go to eat, a friend from Greece suggested we go to

a new Greek restaurant in the west. Initial enthusiasm ebbed off on the subway when it turned out the place was literally on the other side of town. The train was busy so we didn't actually realize how many of us slipped out on stations on the way but when we arrived, there were 5 people left from the original group of 20 or so. The place was great, the food exceptionally good, it was late, and they actually re-opened the kitchen for us. I was really glad we went all the way. But on the way, obviously, the initial group had disbanded. Would it have been worth trying to hold it together and, for pragmatism's sake, go somewhere local? Perhaps it was not much of a tragedy anyhow? People after all know what's best for them, so all who got out on the way, surely knew where they were going. Why would one even consider friends and acquaintances as a group in need of being affirmed and sustained as a group by means of collective decision making processes? Will that not always entail forcing things that cannot, and therefore should not be forced? Particularly not in a city. For what would the city be, if not this porous place, with openings and passages on all sides? Why then would we not want to accept that dispersal and dissipation are motions much better fit for city living than coordinated movements of larger groups over longer periods of time and distances? On each stop of the subway, many subway doors slide open simultaneously, and there are numerous stops. In the polis, energies will flow how they flow, through the paths in its maze, this way or that way, along the wires and pipes, wherever there are opening. And that's fine, no? Shouldn't a politics that understands the ways the *polis* moves be hands-off when it comes to attempts to hold people together,

because to force cohesion would be to destroy the very spirit of urbanity one was hoping to act and decide on behalf of? Moralists are particularly prone to making this mistake, because they need to feel that there was universal validity to their choices, so they force everyone to stay on board and carry a decision, failing to see that cities don't move that way; they don't need universals and wouldn't be able to support them anyhow, because, for good reasons, in cities energies disperse, people go separate ways, somewhere, elsewhere or just home to have dinner and rest.

But is it really a matter of morals, a question of *morale*, to bring and hold a polis together? Indeed, there are many scenarios in which those who feel responsible for organizing things in the hope that they may be in the interest of others are left pleading. Desperately, they might end up appealing to the people in whose interest they believed to have set up things, to keep up the morale, follow through with a project or plan and not jump ship, even if takes more time or bigger efforts than expected, to get where one thought one was going. It's never pretty to be caught in this position. Especially not when you sense everyone around you is checking their watches and calculating the chances to still catch the next train home if they left now. Why would you want to be in the position of having to conjure up reasons for people to stay on? When the polis offers so many exits and each, in its own right, would seem instantly seems infinitely more convincing a choice than holding on to some yet to be justified common good. Why would you want to put yourselves through this ordeal of organizing a *polis'* politics? Well, it may simply because you sense,

hope or have seen on previous occasions that the exchange between people, friends and strangers can acquire a certain quality when sustained for a while. Precisely because the momentum of urban energies tends to be centrifugal, it can build up to something special when held in focus for long enough. Tension rises, wattage mounts, so power is boosted and a particular qualitative leap may occur. A scenario that comes to my mind is one my mother related to me. She recalls that some of the early Fluxus performances she attended in Germany in the early Sixties generated the kind of intense collective momentum that brought the politics in the room into clear focus, she says, because the organizers locked all exit doors when the event began. Since there was no way people could escape, all politics in the room were brought out and acted upon, in chaotic, yet somewhat cathartic manner.

Probably no health and safety department in the Western world would tolerate such a move in art today; and it's a fair guess that the Fluxus organizers' readiness to take such drastic measures might have been informed by their wartime and pre-war experiences of social brutality (or, as my mother says, the memories of being locked in air raid shelters together). There is no reason to speculate about going back to this. It's maybe just a simple realization. To create the kind of momentum that might make the multiplicity of divergent appetites of people in a city coalesce may require energies to be focused and sustained in one place for long enough to let a qualitative leap occur. Spinoza could indeed be entirely right when he contends in his 'Ethics' that the one true

way for such a transformative confluence of desires to occur is in the sign of a life-affirming joy. What else could it be? Good energy (aka fun) is the force that truly brings and keeps people together. It needs no organizers to lock the doors when the party is rocking. None would dream of leaving because everybody knows they are free to go. But right there and then stars are aligned in the unique constellation that will permit people to take things to the next level. We know that this is real and possible and that this is what we love cities for. That they are populated by selfish moody individuals (like us), so that, when against all odds, energies coalesce and create the lived experience of people beginning to realize a common good, it is, as Hannah Arendt nonchalantly puts it, a “miracle”, always unexpected, never likely, but given the political potentials of the *polis* genuinely possible at any time.¹ If we trust this experience and accept that there is not much of an alternative to good energy when it comes to bringing and holding a *polis* together, the practical challenge may simply lie in finding ways to make it more likely for such energy to flow, than not.

From which position, however, are such considerations of the common good being voiced? What implicitly underpins such ruminations about organizing politics — about “finding ways” to make energies flow — is the assumption that politics await someone to organize them, and that this someone could be you. Why else would you communicate your expertise in political processes if not to (tacitly or overtly) advertise your own

1 Hanna Arendt: *The Human Condition*, Chicago/London 1998, p. 184.

competencies in such matters? Is this not preposterous in and of itself? If we believe that for urban group processes to develop into something truly miraculous it's vital that they find their own momentum and rhythm, than we should also see that these things are best not tinkered with. So, if it should be the case that, within the urban force-field of interest and desires, truly positive energies will only flow when they do so *out of spontaneity*, there would be no need for a moderator. To write about spontaneous energies as if one studied them to learn how they could be directed, would not only compromise the writing, it would give the game away: that the writer in fact dreamt of being the leader. And what would this be, if not preposterous? Perhaps it really is. And this could easily be confirmed. Is it not usually so that the person who, on a night out, asks aloud "so where do you guys want go for food?" tends to be overly concerned, not just with the others' needs, but also very much also with his or her own wish to feel needed by others? Why else would you take it upon yourself to offer yourself up as a facilitator to help (and guide) the group in making up its mind, if you didn't secretly think you were chosen for that job? And who gave you that idea? Relax. Let people go where they want to go. You are hungry too. So why try to represent general hunger when no such representation is required since everybody could perfectly well act on behalf of their own appetite?

Yes, but what if they don't? What if everybody arrives with expectations, yet remains reserved, unwilling to be the one taking initiative, expecting something to happen, yet ready to disband if nothing does? What if

you sense that this is so, but you, on your part, don't feel stifled by the accumulated expectations? Then what's wrong with taking a leap into the middle of the group, so as to, with a laugh and a few easy words dispel the awkwardness and simply signal that tonight it's you who's going to play the fool and ask aloud for what people want? Next time you meet, someone else might volunteer to take on that role, so you do it this time, no big deal. Call it good political intuition, but if you have it, so you intuitively judge the situation right, it might be exactly what's needed when a group petrifies itself, looking into the mirror of its own desires. Such intuition, however, it seems, can only flourish and help bring about good moments, when the social dynamics, into which it intervenes, have a certain fluidity, an urban humor, if you will. This is because, only when such fluidity prevails, people will more likely be ready to, equally intuitively, grasp that your willingness to take initiative does not imply an attempt to seize power, but is merely constitutes an offer to temporarily operate as the medium, or conduit, for the group to channel its energies into a common politics (dinner together and beyond). True urban fluidity could therefore be seen to thrive on quick intuitive exchanges in which the one who helps barter a deal that allows everyone to keep moving could be anyone present; anyone who happens to have the right intuition when stepping up to the plate in the given situation. It's understood that in another situation it might — and will — be someone else.

Fundamentally, this is an issue of trust. Trust is the most important resource, the *conditio sine qua non*, the one thing you cannot do without, the very element

of that permits the polis to come into its own and do and sustain its politics, fluidly, according to its own terms. Trust opens up the temporal horizon for the sustenance and sustainability of arrangement that are premised on negotiability and change. As in the example of the intuitive moderator's mandate, the very condition for rendering a moderating agent acceptable is trust in the unspoken understanding that if I do it now, you will do it tomorrow. No matter then, if I fail, things stay awkward or I succeed in moderating but also broker the deal in ways that may not be to my disadvantage, I trust you to readjust, or tip, the balance when you take your turn to moderate, next time, and so on, infinitely and indefinitely. Experience would seem to show that a vital condition for creating such trust, however, is that people involved in urban exchanges recognize each other as equals. If that is so, they know that if another person takes the initiative and lead in negotiations on one day, it might as well be them, on another day; so that the act of taking initiative on one's own part is not perceived as diminishing the power of others to equally do so, on their own terms. The sense of equality urban exchanges establish in urban terms may reflect differences of race, class and gender, provocatively so. Yet it will more likely do so by way of jokes, nick-names and other provocations that test the other's ability to play the game, in an urban style, by reciprocating friendly abuse and matching wit. In the urban way then, trust is traditionally built up, even and especially between people with different backgrounds in terms of race, class and gender, when people see that you can make a joke and take a joke,

and come back the next day with a better one. Like in traditional forms of bartering and haggling, trust is built up — and determines the value and price of the object haggled over — when both parties render themselves touchable, to a degree (by staying in the shop or stall long enough to narrate parts of their family background, needs and urgencies, Southern Mediterranean style, or at least engage in a quick-witted exchange over the counter, cornerstone style). Depending on the traditional prejudices in place in a particular place many people will obviously have it much harder than others to get in on this game. But it is a mark and measure of a truly urban environment that practically everybody may be able to enter exchanges as equals, if they learn how to play their cards wisely.

On the one hand, a truly urban environment may also be characterized by its self-healing capacities. So if trust is disappointed, political wisdom and a certain sense of longevity might allow for ties that are broken on one occasion to be mended on a later date, when some of the anger has faded. On the other hand, it may equally be true that relations based solely or primarily on trust (and no internalized sense of principles or outward order of discipline) are also prone to devastating fallouts. Analogous to the break-up in an intimate relationships, the ramifications of a violation of trust in a politics chiefly reliant on this affective ties can be devastating. The history of feuds between, not just individuals, but clans or tribes continues today, in many parts of the world, the art world being no exception, especially in local contexts,

where a restoration of urban spirits would require outsiders to come visit and be accepted as mediators.

While it can always occur under infinitely many circumstances, the loss of trust often goes hand in hand with a sudden sense of inequality. One of politics' most bitter ironies lies in the fact that this sense of inequality — which dissolves trust into the poisonous resentment, suspicion and vengefulness — is actually more likely to be harbored by social majorities, than minorities. Spinoza already lucidly pointed out that a false sense of superiority and an aggressive sense of inferiority are flip sides of the same coin. It is a sign of the times, for instance, that those most vocal about their loss of trust in politics are the (formerly) dominant males. They lose trust in the society they feel the right to dominate, if that society denies them a position of dominance. Starting from a minoritarian position, on the contrary, it is clear from the start that there is no way around politics since you have to negotiate your way into things, form allegiances, build up trust, get to know people who may help get you into business, and so on. For those, however, for whom resentments have replaced trust, the world presents itself as divided by trenches, so the best one can do is choose a (real or imaginary) war in which to take sides. The sense for the very need and possibility to engage in the daily business of political negotiation then is lost. For those who lost their trust there is no city anymore. There never was one to be rebuilt.

The aversion to anything urban tends to most forcefully express itself in a deep suspicion towards all forms of

moderation. In the light of this suspicion, the intuition that propels someone to step in and moderate will inevitably read as an attempt to reach for power, motivated, not by an intuitive impulse and fluid attunement to the given situation, but by something more solid, rigid and fixed, a hidden agenda, what else could it be? From this point of view the mandate to moderate desires and thereby give political agency to a group can neither be temporary nor based on intuition. It is the position of leadership that is perceived to be at stake. So when there is no understanding of the possibility that temporary intuitive alignments can make a *polis* move, the resolution to the agonies of conflicting interest will be sought in finding the one single man who can best embody an air of resolve. The suspiciousness of the disgruntled and patriarchal tradition here feed into each other with chilling effectiveness. The deep irony lies in the fact that, in the name of politics, the leader is lifted into power by the one desire that he aligns: the desire to be *freed from politics*, the wish to escape from the awkwardness of not knowing who is to take initiative, the yearning to be cut free from the messy entanglements that politics arise from a *polis*, in short, the hope that with the arrival of the leader politics will be done with, for good (be it at the price of war).

2. Think modern, act postmodern! The double standards conservative radicals (Neoliberals) seek to wrench premodern cultures of urban politics and trade in.

One would think that, since big cities are a product of modernity, the politics of urban intuition too should

be a fruit of modern sensibilities, and that, conversely, suspicion and thirst for rulers should be a relic of the pre-modern culture of peasants and serfs. Ironically, it may be the other way around. This is because the one criterion which urban moderation will never be able to fulfill is the one criterion which, after the Reformation, modern ideas of governance put at the center of what people expect, namely *transparency*. One direction, one will, one solution, one clear perspective, one thing, one plan and one leader that everybody can *understand*: this is the idea of transparent governance. By virtue of being rational it should be understandable by all, and ‘understanding’ here is interpreted in literal terms as explicit agreements based on unequivocally stated objectives. Intuitive urban moderation cannot meet any of these demands. On the contrary, it needs a certain degree of opacity in order for it to work. Moderators will never be neutral but will most likely also advance some of their own interests. In the process of translating interests a moderator will of course also manipulate the translation, in the awareness and understanding, that each party will manipulate what is said, in their turn, until, in this back and forth of mutual manipulation, some formulation of general interest is reached which everybody has felt free to tweak to their relative advantage. The terms reached in this manner in fact hence will, and in fact, must remain opaque and fuzzy enough for those whose interests have been somewhat compromised by the deal to still be able to keep face and accept the resolution without too many hard feelings, because the way the compromise is phrased doesn’t rub it in that they had to give up some ground. In this regard, the sense of urban intuitive politics in fact

is much more likely to be a survivor from pre-modern cultures of bartering among traders with equal status, skills and interests on a bazaar or city market. Here rules are not stated, but tacitly understood. Part and parcel of this type of 'understanding' is that there may be rules but the ways of how and to what degree they apply is subject to infinite negotiation. Transparency — literal declarations of intent, larger visions or projects executed according to preconceived plans, a 1:1 interpretation of every utterance made — bring death to this premodern political culture of urban negotiation.

In fact, this is the very end to which they were invented and designed in the first place when religious reformers like Luther insisted that the word of God had a literal meaning and hence gave you a straight deal, in order to not just battle but actually extirpate the culture of corruption endorsed by the older religions' notions of negotiable meanings and possible transubstantiations E.g.: Father, son or holy spirit? Cup of wine or blood of Christ? It's all a matter of changing perspectives... This is how Roman Catholics had it. Reformation on the contrary taught people to be radicals and insist that the *radices*, the roots, should match the fruits, as it were, that a good man and leader should say what he does and do what he says, so that any honest man will 'tell it like it is' and know that 'what you see is what you get' (please add rural drawl at will). Children raised in modernity's radical religions are hence no longer educated or otherwise prepared to realize that politics are in a mess because that's where they belong and arise from: from the city with all its immersive entanglements and awkward reserves that constitute

urban realities. From the vantage point of the reformed, all that remains of the original politics is its ugly and most tangible aspect of corruption. The fluidity and fun of diplomacy, on the other hand, is lost on anyone who identifies politics with ideological resolve and fails to see that, in the name of radical resolution, he might actually only opt for the escape from the political and the mess that, by rights, it is in.

The ironies become most painful when radical modern reformers purport to reinstall the original fluidity of the *polis*' bazaar and 'liberate the markets'. Yet, they do so using all the means of modern planning, central global governance and the full force of the rule, that is, means designed to tear out the very root from local urban trade. In other words, the irony of Neoliberalism lies in conservative radicals using modern means to stamp out the very thing that they profess to be in pursuit of: the spirit of free trade. What results from this are the absurdities and sheer political destruction produced by the measures currently imposed by the European North (spearheaded by my home country, Germany), on the South, Greece being the focus (but Spain, Portugal and Italy may be next). The stated objectives are to teach the people of the South how to do business freely, yet properly and trust the State, pay taxes and put money in the banks. Greece' failure to comply is seen as a sign as proof of the country's inability to keep up with contemporary standards. The standards set by conservative radicals, however, are impossible to meet because they are double: The people of the reformatted and industrialized societies of the Capitalist North have gone through several generations, being trained in a

particular form of schizophrenia, to *think modern and act postmodern*.

To think modern means to declare your objectives, pay some taxes and do the paperwork required to pledge your allegiance to the State and its juristic and bureaucratic apparatus — so as to receive the benefits of having property protected by police forces and have public funds pay for the upkeep of the infrastructure needed to keep goods and people circulating. To act postmodern at the same time means to understand the social contract on which modern public institutions are based as an *empty formalism*. Understood as mere formalities, social ties are not seen as binding. Unbound from any social content, self-interest can hence be pursued in utterly ruthless ways, as long as the *empty form*, i.e. the outward appearance of nominally legitimate interests is preserved. The modern State apparatus is affirmed pro forma as a shell to prevent economic dispersion, while its the life of the State is hollowed out from within like a ripe pumpkin. Thinking modern, the radical ‘neoliberal’ conservative governments of the North force the Greek State to assert its power (through austerity measures), so as to contain the dissipation of its finances and hold the national economy together as a legitimate framework. Acting postmodern, they also force the State to hollow itself out and sell off its assets so that there are enough chips on the table to allow for high-end speculation.

It’s no wonder that a country of the South like Greece cannot meet the advanced double-standards of the post-modern post-industrial North. Like the Italian

South, too, the country was never modernized to the extent that it could now rely on legal-bureaucratic formalisms and public infrastructures as a given, so as to take things to the next level of abstract accumulation and white collar crime. The modern rule that rules always apply – for the majority of citizens so those in higher regions can act freely – may have never gained full acceptance in these parts of the world. On the contrary, on street level, the interpretation of how and if rules apply, remains negotiable, so that *practically everybody* can do original politics and freely negotiate with (or cheat on) everybody else. It's utterly ridiculous for the North to enforce economic de-regulation in regions where the modern rule of rules was never fully established in the first place. How can you possibly even pretend you could teach people free market thinking who invented mercantilism and practice it, in its original spirit of infinite negotiability, to this very day. Given the utter absurdity of the stated agenda, and contrary to any form of 'free market thinking', the measures imposed on Greece effectively, and paradoxically, put pressure on the State to reassert itself in front of its people as the empty modern form, apparatus and container within which accumulation can be pushed towards postmodern turbo-levels of top-end speculation.

I recall a conversation with a local participant in a conference in Tbilisi, Georgia, six years ago, who, as we were discussing the subject of corruption, explained how the recent 'neoliberal' reforms in his country had effectively consisted in precisely this systemic form of reorganizing the national economy. General dealing

and wheeling in the first years of the former Soviet satellite state's independence had apparently led to great amounts of currency and capital to dissipate on street level. Hence there was a limit to the amount of accumulation to be reached in top level trading and crime. Too much currency and capital had already seeped out on the *bottom end* of the economy into everybody's pockets. The main objective of the reforms in Georgia, the participant was saying, had been to patch up the porous bottom, by means of rigid State measures and policing of everyday affairs, so as to keep enough currency and capital in the economy for the top end to have the stakes on the table needed for high-end gambling. If that was true, it would be hard not to see the parallels to the processes underway in the European Union today.

The difference, however, seems to be that — and I now rely on accounts of the situation in Greece related to me by Greek colleagues — the attempt to tighten the bottom and push all leverage up to the top, partially succeeded but failed miserably on the whole. Whatever large-scale assets the State could push up and out into the spheres of high-end gambling has, at this point, been sold off to international bidders (German companies being in the front row), leaving nothing more to scrape out. Yet, instead of sealing off the bottom, the force of the austerity measures actually punched it through, leaving the economy and politics equally bottomless. In a country where trust in the modern State apparatus is a virtue traditionally shared by very few, seeing a powerless government being forced to play the bully by bullies from outside,

only served to destroy whatever little trust was left. Economically, one friend recounted, that even middle-class household, rather than putting their incomes in the local banks, moved whatever money they had out of the country. Politically, another colleague said, the loss of trust was so contagious that it spread from national to personal matters and left people eyeing each other suspiciously. She also added that whatever initiative was left to do business, didn't keep people inside the State but led them to leave it and try their luck in neighboring countries. Apparently Bulgaria now sees Greek businesses growing because, over there, things can still be negotiated the old way.

3. Penso di no ma spero di si: Re-learning the politics of hope – and recalling how pockets of air got introduced to the city.

It may only be a historical footnote. But if one were to study the ways trust is reorganized once the designated authorities loose it, the circumstances under which the mafia was born and blossomed in Sicily may actually prove to be exemplary.² After, in Sicily, weakened landowners had already sold off parts of their land in the early 19th century, a large-scale redistribution of property occurred after the rebellions headed by Giuseppe Garibaldi in the mid-19th century overthrew the political order and led Sicily 1860 to join the Italian Kingdom on its way to becoming a unified State. In this scenario of shifting powers

2 I am very much indebted to my partner, Federica Bueti, for explaining this history to me and taking me to places around Sicily.

and properties changing hands, law enforcement personnel had to be re-recruited locally, leading to the creation of a new group of intermediaries between the peasant population and the weak old, or unfamiliar new authorities. Following the intuition that the ‘devil you know is better than the one you don’t’, people could be persuaded that the intermediaries they were dealing with directly, knew the life of the people much better than the new or weak owners (in far away places) and could hence be trusted to truly represent the common cause, literally the common thing — *la cosa nostra*. Accepted as a familiar, hence credible embodiment of power, the *Cosa Nostra*, aka mafia, could then trust people to maintain their allegiance to them, even when they were using violence against those selfsame people. A brief summary of such a long history can barely pass as analysis. But if there is a bottom line to this story it may lie in the realization that, when societies are shaken to the core, the ties that kept trust invested in the previous order are cut, leaving trust, the common resource of politics and trade alike, up for anyone to mine who is close enough to the source to tap it, quickly and constantly. The *Cosa Nostra* then emerge as the prototype organization of *trust-mongers* and false mediators who capitalize on the life blood of politics and trade, trust, when it no longer flows into the cities and society at large.

So, if we also approached current developments from the vantage point of such cultural histories, we might feel compelled to paint the picture black. On the one hand, the push-up policies of (self-styled neoliberal) conservative radicals leave the modern State hollowed

out, an empty infrastructure of forms, put to work as a corsage of tightened bureaucratic means, designed to stop dispersion and press capital to the top end of speculation. Thus cut off from its forms of societal expression, trust, the content, element and fluidum of urban politics and trade, lies isolated as a resource in the hollow shell of the State, ready for any secondary trust monger to exploit who can get close enough to the people. If you add the two tendencies together you get the picture of a post-political, post-urban wasteland, ruled by suspicions and mafias. (And perhaps this is China and Russia today.)

Yet, to paint the picture that black would be to ignore that cities have a habit of keeping themselves alive, and that true politics and trade will always remain inseparable from the sheer recalcitrance of a metropolis. Pessimistically, one could hold against this, that the fate of Manhattan, New York and Paris should be proof enough that the push-up policies of the new order make life on the bottom impossible and have more empty offices and condos built on the top. So cities do die, because this policy kills them. Optimistically, however, one could contend that where there are desires there is porosity, just as there will eventually be leakage wherever water goes, so that wherever people get together there is bound to be politics and trading, bartering and haggling. It only takes one person to ask among friends 'Where are we going to go for food tonight?' and you are right in the middle of it all. The point may simply be to teach each other again how to be urban and trust ourselves to be the city and let the city live like cities can.

Refreshing one's urban education might entail reanimating the premodern intuitions of fluid moderation in politics and trade, that is, to *learn from the South*, if you will. The biggest obstacle on the way is the need to bring back some trust, some rhythm and rhyme into the urban flow. One cannot underestimate how traumatic the effects of events that destroy trust can be. They might be edged into a city's subconscious for generations. At the same time, there is always a chance of meeting a stranger, who simply does not know, and hence is happy to invest trust in a constellation that, were he or she to know it, would otherwise be hopeless. Naiveté can be a way of rebooting politics. If there is a task for the traveling artist or intellectual it might lie somewhere there, perhaps, in naively stumbling into situations where people who have resolved to never talk to each other again in their lives, might suddenly be faced by the need to, together, answer the question: "So where do you guys go for food around here?" Another aspect of trust married with recalcitrance is hope sustained by the knowledge of negotiability. This summer, we visited a music festival in the Calabrian mountains and one of my partner's friends was carrying two bottles of home-made red wine in his backpack. Knowing that, as a rule, festival organizers everywhere make sure that no outside alcohol and glass bottles enter festival grounds, I asked him whether he really thought he could get the wine in. He laconically responded "*penso di no, ma spero di si*" — I think no, but I hope yes. When the security guard at the festival entrance, as was to be expected, pulled out his bottles, he delivered a short speech on the indecency of robbing

a man of the fruits of his own garden, and thereby left the guard, a man with a garden himself most likely, no chance but to let him pass unbothered, with the wine. For a Northerner like me, with an education in advanced fears and pessimisms, the line “*penso di no, ma spero di si*” was definitely a lesson in spirited politics and trade.

The other memory in need of being refreshed may be precisely to grasp once more what the intuitions were that made up the political content of heartfelt modernity before that content was carved out and sold off to leave only hollow institutional forms behind. This is an artistic and intellectual, as well as affective task. It would be easy to say that the original modern intuition was that of reformation: the rule that rules should always apply and fixed literal meaning must replace the hell of permanent negotiation. But perhaps the radical reformer’s stance does not exhaust the spectrum of modern intuitions. There may be yet others. A famous one is an intuition scribbled in the margins of a legal paper, Friedrich II of Prussia drafted in 1740: “den hier mus ein jeder nach Seiner Faßon Selich werden (sic)” — (as here everybody needs to get to heaven / reach happiness according to their own way / mode or fashion), a sentence which sealed the Prussian policy of tolerating religious minorities (Huguenots or people of Catholic or Jewish confession). The link between *Faßon and Selich*, fashion (mode, manner) and spiritual happiness could be of interest here, because it ties the modern form of living life your way, undisturbed, in the city, to the content of spiritual happiness. As a politics to be

practiced in urban life, these modern modalities of different fashions of happiness implied the need for manners that allowed these fashions to *differentiate* themselves. To think that this simply meant to keep religious matters private would be too literal an interpretation, especially assuming that cities at the time in Prussia might not have been big enough yet for people to pretend they didn't know what religion their neighbor was practicing. Effectively, the politics of permitting fashions of happiness to differentiate themselves, entails the necessity to learn how to give one another space: This space (that allows one to be other) is not defined in negative terms (as the absence of religion, because knowledge of the other's confession will have been present. It is rather conceived as a positive space that can become the meeting place and site for modern urban life, a space that does not need to be filled, literally, precisely because everyone knows how crowded it already is. So the space between people and fashions becomes a medium in its own right, to be molded in forms of architecture and manners to the effect that some air is breathed into the social.

This may be the one intuition of urban politics and trade, the North might be able to offer the South. Driving in Palermo, for instance, you quickly learn that in an urban culture of permanent intimate negotiability the concept of space in between, of air, simply does not exist. The second a couple of inches of free space emerges between bumpers, a car will pull in and take it. The only way to get through the city is literally to drive bumper to chassis, all the time. Every pocket

of air fills up in seconds, with cars, people, words, and unfortunately also with 'spazzatura': trash which is dumped at liberty in every temporarily unused space, street corner or curb on the roadside, as a casual designator of the fact that this empty space does not exist and hence the garbage disposed there has disappeared into a black hole. It might be the confessions of a desperate Prussian gasping for air, but given all the advantage of relearning what philosophies of negotiability ("*penso di no, ma spero di si*") the original cultures of urban politics and trade have to offer, the one amendment that a northern modernist might want to add to the constitution of the original city may simply be: Behold, the space between people, even if vacant, might need to be understood as the ether, in which the latencies can reside that potentially animate politics and trade in the city as much as actual bumper to bumper interactions.

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