

THE DISEMBODIMENT OF POLITICS AND THE FORMATION OF POLITICAL SPACE Questioning Lefort's Concept of Democracy

TOMAŽ MASTNAK

We made good use of Lefort, more than ten years ago, when we struggled for democracy in Slovenia. From his work we took a potent argument: If a basic characteristic of democracy is that the place of power is empty, then it cannot be appropriated by any one, and the struggle for power is legitimate. The Party that had, by then, professed its adherence to democratic politics should cease to claim power as its own and instead enter competition with the other political agents that had taken shape. And indeed, under pressure from what we often uncritically called civil society, the Party did »descend from power« and engage, as a party, in the »struggle for power.« Lefort most probably did not know that he was with us. Had he known, as one of those rare western intellectuals who has shown not only keen interest in, but also a clear understanding of, what was happening in the communist part of Europe (to which testify his writings from the late 1940s onward), he might have been sympathetic to our endeavours. He might even have agreed to write a brief preface to a selection of his writings in Slovene translation that I proposed in those years. With the current reign of democracy, public intellectual debates in this country have receded and thinking about political matters, in particular, has come near to disappearing from the public sphere. The appearance of Slovene edition of Lefort's essays¹ may be a sign that things are again shifting. To newcomers, they will open a fresh perspective on political philosophy. But how are those of us who used Lefort's writings years ago going to read – that is, re-read – them today? In particular, what is one to think of the celebrated *lieu vide du pouvoir* in the light of a decade of global democratic triumphalism and its local manifestations, and without immediate practical concerns in mind?

Lefort has articulated his idea of power as an empty place, central to his

¹ Claude Lefort, *Prigode demokracije*, ed. Jelica Šumič-Riha (Ljubljana: Liberalna akademija, 1999).

notion of democracy, many times. He has repeatedly argued, most often against the background of his critical analysis of totalitarianism, that the specific trait of modern democracy is that the place of power becomes an empty place. This means, to put it simply, that no one can occupy that place, that those who exercise public authority cannot appropriate power for themselves, that power is impersonal. The place of power is a symbolic, not a real, place. Democratic power emanates from the people and is based on popular sovereignty. But neither do the people hold power nor does power incarnate them. Rather, they exercise their sovereignty through universal suffrage, which periodically dissolves them into political atoms, pure numbers, calculable units. The operation of general elections discards any image of the social body and does away with organicist or corporatist representations of society. It creates the »zero point of sociality« that is, at the same time, the »zero point of power.« Power constituted in such a way, through negation of a presupposed substantial reality of society, is itself devoid of substantial reality. The idea of consubstantiality of power and society is thereby dispelled together with the idea of substantiality of power and society. Moreover, because the constitutive logic of democratic power rejects any idea of a unitary social body or any idea of community, of all the known regimes democracy is the only one that allows social divisions to display themselves and play out their consequences. Accordingly, democratic power can neither represent nor embody a social totality. But society is given form through the institution of power. More specifically, the new »determination-figuration« of the place of power as empty gives evidence of a »mise en forme« of society that is specific to modern democracy and without precedent. To think of the institution of power is to think of the »principle of the institution of the social.«²

Insisting on the symbolic nature of democratic power in particular and of the political – that is, of those principles that generate society in its different forms – in general, Lefort has argued that it is impossible to reduce democracy to a system of institutions.³ He has, correspondingly, shown little interest in details of the democratic institutional setting (*dispositif institutionnel*). What he has nevertheless considered important enough for his argument to mention, is that the institution of democratic power implies the institutional-

² See Claude Lefort, *L'invention démocratique* (Paris: Fayard, 1981), 95, 126, 153–6, 180; *Essais sur la politique: XIX^e-XX^e siècles* (Paris: Seuil, 1986), 27-8, 38-9, 257, 264-5; *La complication: Retour sur le communisme* (Paris: Fayard, 1999), 189.

³ *L'invention*, 97; *Essais*, 23; on »les principes générateurs de la société,« cf. *ibid.*, 256, 261. Already in his reading of Machiavelli, Lefort insisted that »les *nuovi ordini* du prince ne se laissent pas réduire à un corps d'institutions qu'on pourrait décrire.« *Le travail de l'oeuvre: Machiavel*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 342-3.

zation of conflict, the legitimacy of conflict among »collective wills« on a »political scene« and, in turn, incessant »democratic debate« in a »public space.« Free competition among rival »political formations« and the legitimacy of debate on the legitimate and the illegitimate require a number of conditions recognized and protected by law: freedom of speech, freedom of association and assembly, free circulation of people and ideas, and the guarantee that the minority (once a parliament is elected and a government constituted) retains the right to representation and can act in opposition to the majority (which must be prevented from using the coercive powers of the state for its own benefit). Free competition among political rivals presupposes, that is, the existence of »formal liberties« and of the right to have rights.⁴ From another perspective, also foundational to democracy is the separation of civil society (or, simply, »society«) from the state on the one hand and the distinction between political power and the state apparatus on the other. Power, law, and knowledge are disentangled, and the autonomy of different social spheres (such as culture, economy, science, education, and health care) is preserved. As a result, the heterogeneity of society is not repressed.⁵

The »birth of democracy« marks a »mutation of a symbolic nature,« and the best evidence for this type of transformation is given by the »new position of power.«⁶ This new position of power is actually the representation of power as an empty place. As such, it is linked to »a discourse« that shows that power does not belong to any person, that those who exercise it neither possess nor incarnate it, and that the exercise of power is subjected to periodically organized competition, so that the authority of those who are in charge is constituted and reconstituted in accordance with the manifestation of popular will.⁷

But while speaking of the »birth of democracy« implies the idea of democracy's entering into historical time, and while Lefort is clear in conceiving of modern democracy as a specific historical form of society, he is surprisingly vague about when, and how, modern democracy emerged. He links the emergence of democracy to the »democratic revolution« (while at the same time pointing to the limitations of this Tocquevillian concept), and locates the development of democratic society in the nineteenth century.⁸ Arguably, the historical emergence of democracy is not his main problem as a political philosopher. But his analysis and interpretation of modern democracy is clearly historically informed. Lefort has not worked on a »genealogy of democratic

⁴ *L'invention*, 153, 157-9, 180; *Essais*, 27-8, 53, 55, 267.

⁵ *L'invention*, 94, 102-3, 159; *Essais*, 28, 267.

⁶ *Essais*, 26.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 265.

⁸ *L'invention*, 179-80; *Essais*, 299.

representations,«⁹ yet he has worked with one. I see the »historical material« he has been referring to as limited and, as such, affecting the validity of his conceptualization of the symbolic mutation that gave birth to democracy.¹⁰

Part of what I see as a problem is that, for Lefort, a critique of totalitarianism (to be precise: communist totalitarianism) functions as the key to understanding democracy. In a sense, democracy is the opposite of totalitarianism. As the mirror image of totalitarianism, democracy becomes a predominantly derivative, negative, concept. Nevertheless, I find the linking of analysis and interpretation of democracy and totalitarianism both relevant and productive. Such linking may alert us to weaknesses and vulnerabilities, even pitfalls, of democracy; it may disturb the democratic slumber into which we have been lulled in the past decade. But I am afraid that, when the defining characteristics of democracy obtained through a critical study of an experience of our own lifetime are held to be the explanation of the symbolic mutation marking the advent of modern democracy, we run the danger of anachronistic interpretation of history and of ending up with an ahistorical concept of democracy. While I am generally convinced by Lefort's critique of totalitarianism and impressed by his definition of democracy, I do not see how his studies of the history of political thought, impressive in their own way, could lead to the same conceptual conclusions as his studies of twentieth-century totalitarian power.

In this article, I will explore this possible incoherence in Lefort's writings by discussing his defining characteristics of democracy from a broader historical perspective. While the concept of the empty place of power does not necessarily follow from Lefort's own analyses of historical languages of democracy and discourses on democracy,¹¹ characteristic traits of democracy as he defined them are to be found in historical contexts he did not discuss. Some of those contexts are not directly related to the »democratic revolution« but are directly relevant for the conceptualization of democracy as put forward by Lefort. A prime example is the invention of the state as the modern form of public authority whose nature corresponds to a large degree

⁹ *Essais*, 299.

¹⁰ For exceptions, see the following footnote.

¹¹ An exception may be Lefort's commentary on the American revolution, but the »empty place of power« is here applied on, rather than derived from, the material researched by Gordon Wood. Introduction to Gordon S. Wood, *La création de la république américaine*, trans. F. Delastre (Paris: Belin, 1991), 27. Other than French political traditions are also discussed by Lefort in »Foyers du républicanisme,« in *Écrire: A l'épreuve du politique* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1992), but this discussion does not bear on the *lieu vide du pouvoir*. More relevant for articulating the principles that can be seen as productive for his conceptualization of democracy than Lefort studies of democratic discourses and discourses on democracy seems to me his study of Machiavelli, *Le travail de l'oeuvre*.

with the nature of democratic power as specified by Lefort. Lefort's concept of democracy is greatly weakened because he neglected to discuss the relationship between the invention of the state and the invention of democracy. A reason for this omission lies in Lefort's selective reading of the history of political languages. He has focused on the demise of the king's body as the necessary condition for the disembodiment of power and for the advent of democratic society as a bodyless society. But, as I will argue, of no lesser importance than the dismissal of the king-centred political theology for the emergence of the type of power characterized by Lefort as democratic, was the crisis of republican ideas and ideals of politics. Rather than discussing the decline of republicanism as a prerequisite for the formation of modern democracy, however, Lefort has interpreted democracy as republican. In this I see a limitation of not only Lefort's account of the »birth of democracy,« but of his very concept of democracy as well. As I will show in the concluding part of this article, it was the dissolution of the body politic (an idea or image central to republican politics) that made possible the formation of political space. That dissolution of the body politic and the formation of political space were effected by the emergence of political parties. Lefort has not discussed political parties and has hardly ever used the term political space. But the idea of political space is a necessary condition for speaking of a place of power and, consequently, also of the democratic representation of power as an empty place.

1. The Invention of the State and the Impersonalization of Power

My questioning of Lefort's concept of democracy begins with the realization that some of the important traits of modern democracy as he defines them actually appear to be characteristic of the modern form of public authority, the state. Lefort has rightfully criticized socialists for having failed to understand the nature of the Soviet regime and singled out as a reason for this that the political left had »lacked a theory of the state or, more fundamentally, a concept of political society.«¹² But a theory of the state is marginal to his own conceptualization of democracy. A reason for this may lie in his having inscribed characteristics of the state into the concept of democracy. As a result, a concept of the state is largely absorbed into Lefort's concept of democracy. Only the inabsorbable remnant of the state concept is called »the state,« and even this figures, in Lefort's writing, mainly as a possible threat to

¹² *L'invention*, 92.

a smooth (even if conflictual) functioning of democratic logic.¹³ In Lefort, the democratic invention blinds us to the invention of the state.¹⁴

A detailed discussion of the invention of the state is obviously not my purpose here. But the following points are relevant for my discussion of Lefort's concept of democracy. Like the »birth of democracy,« the invention of the state was a »symbolic mutation.« And like the advent of modern democracy in Lefort's account, the invention of the state as a new type of public authority was made possible by radical shifts in political language, generating a new »representation« of power. To consciously echo Lefort's concept of democracy, the emergence of the state was the invention of impersonal public authority, of the impersonality of power. The state was impersonal in a double sense. Its »doubly impersonal character« implied the separation of public power from both the ruler and the ruled, from both those who governed and those who were governed: the state's authority was distinguished, on the one hand, from that of the »rulers or magistrates entrusted with the exercise of its powers for the time being« and, on the other, from the authority »of the whole society or community« over which its powers were exercised.¹⁵ In contrast to the Aristotelian regime, *politeia* (the concept that, from the »rediscovery« of Aristotle, dominated medieval conceptions of power and was only shattered with Machiavelli), that was the source of law, with the invention of the state, law came to be seen as the source of the regime¹⁶ and became, in this sense, disintricated from power. With the articulation of »reason of state,« the principle of knowledge as well was taken away from the ruler; linked to impersonal public authority, knowledge became impersonal.¹⁷ The state was neither the power of a corporation, *universitas* (conceived, in the Middle Ages, as the legal person of a preexisting group), nor a corporation in power but was »artificial in order to abstract from any regime that might be lurking

¹³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 160 ff.

¹⁴ Ernst. K. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), and Joseph R. Strayer, *Medieval Statecraft and the Perspectives of History* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1971) – to which one should add idem, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1970) – can hardly be seen as authoritative accounts of »l'avènement de l'État moderne« (*Essais*, 317 n. 23), whatever their other merits.

¹⁵ J. H. Shennan, *The Origins of the Modern European State, 1450-1725* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1974), 9, 114; Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 2: 353; idem, »The State,« in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, ed. T. Ball, J. Farr, and R. L. Hanson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 112.

¹⁶ Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., »On the Impersonality of the Modern State: A Comment on Machiavelli's use of *Stato*,« *The American Political Science Review* 77 (1983), 850.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 855-6.

behind the medieval corporation.«¹⁸ At the same time, the state was not identical with the community that was the source of law beyond communities (corporations) existing under the law, that is, it was not identical with the community in the broadest sense of the word, conceived politically as, for example, *universitas rei politicae* or *universitas civium*.¹⁹ Unlike medieval corporatism that had demanded that the people obey as individuals while they commanded as *universitas*, the state presupposed free individuals who obeyed as citizens.²⁰

What Lefort has described as »disembodiment« of power²¹ and seen as specific to modern democracy was actually at work a few centuries before the »democratic revolution« took off. With Hobbes, the »foundational philosopher of our political institutions,«²² impersonal public authority was clearly freed from social determinations. For »a more curious search into the rights of States, and duties of Subjects, it is necessary,« Hobbes wrote, »that they be so considered, as if they were dissolved, (i.e.) that wee rightly understand what the quality of humane nature is, in what matters it is, in what not fit to make up a civill government, and how men must be agreed among themselves, that intend to grow up into a well-grounded State.« The duties of subjects were owed exclusively to the state, neither to the person of a ruler nor to a multiplicity of jurisdictional authorities, be they local or national, civil or ecclesiastical.²³ The state, on the other hand, was regarded as a power distinct from the power of citizens, as »having its own Rights and properties« to the effect that »neither any one Citizen, nor all of them together« were to be accounted its equivalent. In other words, the state could not be seen as »the powers of citizens under another guise.«²⁴ »It had to remain essentially im-

¹⁸ Ibid., 852.

¹⁹ Ibid. Cf. John of Salisbury, *Policraticus* IV,2 (ed. and trans. C. J. Nederman, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 30); Marsiglio of Padua, *Defensor Pacis* I,xii,3-5 (ed. R. Scholz, *Fontes iuris Germanici antiqui*, Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1932-33; trans. and ed. A. Gewirth, Toronto: University of Toronto Press in association with the Medieval Academy of America, 1980).

²⁰ Mansfield, »On the Impersonality,« 852.

²¹ Cf. *L'invention*, 65; *Essais*, 27; Introduction to Wood, *La création*, 24, 27. Lefort referred to Gordon Wood's notion of the »disembodiment of government« (*The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* [New York: W. W. Norton, 1972], 383 ff.). Cf. n. 27.

²² Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572-1651* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), xvii.

²³ Hobbes, *De cive*, Preface (English version, ed. H. Warrender [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983], 32; that the 1651 English version cited here was not Hobbes' translation, as it used to be believed, is of no consequence for my argument here); Skinner, »The State,« 90.

²⁴ *De cive* V,ix (English version, op. cit., 89); Skinner, »The State,« 118. Cf. István Hont, »The Permanent Crisis of a Divided Mankind: 'Contemporary Crisis of the Nation State'

personal and disembodied; its intended identity being lost as soon as any attempt was made to equate it with the actual individuals or corporate bodies that composed the *civitas*.«²⁵

Taking all this into account, and with Lefort's concept of democracy in mind, it may well be the invention of the state that marks the creation of an »empty place of power.« My point, here, is that a logic of constitution of power very similar to that which Lefort has described as specific for modern democracy was articulated in historical contexts apparently far away from the »democratic revolution.« Why are these articulations of power absent from Lefort's work? In a consistent thinker, such an absence must tell us something about the *travail* of his *oeuvre*.

Seeking to explain the emergence of impersonal power as characteristic of modern democracy, Lefort has focused on the demise of the figure of the king. Somewhat inexactly he has equated royal power with monarchy and argued that, in monarchy, power was incorporated in the person of the prince. Mediator between men and gods or between men and transcendental instances figuring as sovereign Justice and sovereign Reason, standing above law and subjected to law, the prince condensed in his body, mortal and immortal at the same time, the principle of the generation and ordering of the kingdom. His power pointed at an unconditional, extra-earthly pole, while as a person he simultaneously functioned as the guarantor and representative of the unity of the realm. The realm itself figured as a body, as a substantial unity, in such a manner that the hierarchy of its members, the distinctions of ranks and orders, appeared as resting on an unconditional foundation. Embodied in the prince, power »gave body« to society.²⁶ It follows, from such a view of the predemocratic regime, that the elimination of the king's body dissolved the social body as well and opened the way to the institution of democratic society as a »bodyless society.«²⁷ It also appears that the elimination of the king's body created that »empty place« that counts as the key characteristic of democratic power.

The institution of democratic power, however, cannot be reduced to the elimination of royal power. If the representation of power as an empty place is the central characteristic of democratic power, if the impersonality of power

in Historical Perspective,« in *Contemporary Crisis of the Nation State?*, ed. J. Dunn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 184: »The origins of the modern notion of the 'state' can be found in the process whereby the *status* of the *civitas* as a whole, understood as a *respublica* or commonwealth, became privileged over the status of any of its parts (including the *people*).«

²⁵ Hont, »The Permanent Crisis,« 186.

²⁶ *Essais*, 26-7.

²⁷ »[...] société sans corps« (ibid., 28); »désincorporation de la société (*L'invention*, 65); »la corporéité du social se dissout« (ibid., 179).

is characteristic of power represented as an empty place, and if the impersonal character of power implies a disembodiment of power, then the disembodiment of power characteristic of modern politics and power involved more than the elimination of the king's body. In fact, as I will argue, the elimination of the king's body was not even a necessary prerequisite of establishing the impersonality of modern public authority.

As I said above, Lefort discussed the birth of democracy against the historical background of kingly power and its demise. Both Strayer's memorable studies of the sacralization of French kingship and kingdom under Philip IV and Kantorowicz's learned study of medieval political theology provided Lefort with rich material for his analysis of the nature of kingly power.²⁸ But does a philosophy of royal power like the one we encounter in Lefort do justice to those who, as participants in historical events, argued for royal power? Is the sense such a philosophy makes of those participants' arguments something they themselves thought they were doing when arguing in support of kingly power? I am doubtful whether the study of historical royalist political discourses allows us to construct a coherent body of ideas, symbols, and images that then had to be discarded to open the way to the institution of democracy. I suggest that we look instead at how some paths to democracy (even democracy as conceptualized by Lefort) were paved from within royalist political discourses. Keeping in mind Lefort's insistence on the impersonality of power as characteristic of modern democracy, it might be surprising to find in royalist arguments the articulation of the difference between the royal person and royal office. This distinction, as Lefort himself reminds us,²⁹ has been with us from Greek political philosophy onwards, but it was also cultivated by royalist writers.

More importantly, when we look at »foyers« of democratism other than the French, to which Lefort has dedicated most of his attention (or even to those late eighteenth-century currents of French political and constitutional thought which have remained at the margin of Lefort's interest),³⁰ we find other surprises. The English, for example, incorporated the king into what is conventionally seen as democratic ideas and constitution. The king was even a prominent figure in American revolutionary pamphlets, often as the good king against the bad parliament. With the American presidency, the »Found-

²⁸ See especially *ibid.*, 293 ff. Cf. n. 14. For a different context in which the cited works can be read, and their subject matter studied, see Tomaž Mastnak, *Crusading Peace: Christendom, the Muslim World, and Western Political Order* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California University Press, forthcoming), chap. 5.

²⁹ *Essais*, 266.

³⁰ For an excellent discussion of different models of popular sovereignty during the French revolution, see Hont, »The Permanent Crisis,« 188 ff.

ers were instituting a monarchical office among the institutions of their republic,« so that the norms of early-modern monarchy reasserted themselves »at the heart of the modern democracy which has grown out of the early-modern republic that thought it had eliminated them.«³¹ Most important of all is a simple point. Everywhere in the west, the modern form of public authority – the state – »was, or was a work of, a monarchy.«³² All this leads me to the following. The invention of the state was a *conditio sine qua non* of the invention of modern democracy (as conceived of by Lefort). But in order to understand the invention of the state and, consequently, the invention of modern democracy, analysing and interpreting royalist political discourses does not suffice.

I agree with Lefort that the modern democratic revolution dissociated power from »a body.« »[T]here is no power linked to a body,« he stated.³³ But this rule needs to be thought through more seriously. The »body« in question is not only the king's body. Crucial in creating conditions for the institution of modern democracy was also the dissociation of power from the body politic as imagined from within republican politics. In order to trace out the disembodiment of power and articulation of public authority as impersonal in character, we therefore have to turn to political language of republicanism.

2. *The Crisis of Republicanism and the Disembodiment of Power*

Making possible a comprehensive conceptualization of impersonal public authority – a conceptualization, that is, that went beyond the articulation of the distinction between public office and the person(s) holding it – was not the republican political argument or spirit as such. Rather, it was the crisis of republicanism that made this new conceptualization of public authority possible. The first crucial moment in this process was the »Machiavellian moment«: grasping with the republic's »confronting its own temporal finitude« and attempting to »remain morally and politically stable in a stream of irrational events conceived as essentially destructive of all systems of secular stability.«³⁴ Machiavelli's own role in the »moment« named after him has been,

³¹ J. G. A. Pocock, »States, Republics, and Empires: The American Founding in Early Modern Perspective,« in *Conceptual Change and the Constitution*, ed. T. Ball and J. G. A. Pocock (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 74.

³² Mansfield, »On the Impersonality,« 855.

³³ *L'invention*, 180.

³⁴ J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), viii.

and will continue to be, a subject of some controversy among historians and political philosophers. The specific question here is whether he played a part in the invention of the state.

As the author of *The Prince*, Machiavelli has been singled out as the writer of advice-books who showed »the most consistent willingness to distinguish the institutions of *lo stato* from those who have charge of them.« As such, his work contains »the strongest hints« of the transition, at the end of the *quattrocento*, »from the idea of the ruler 'maintaining his state' to the more abstract idea that there is an independent political apparatus, that of the State, which the ruler may be said to have a duty to maintain.« This transition, in turn, was an important moment in the process of acquiring the main elements of a »recognisably modern concept of the state.«³⁵ But it has also been argued that whatever Machiavelli meant to denote by *lo stato*, he coupled this term »as object or passive subject with verbs of exploitative tonality.« If *lo stato*, that which the prince had to keep his grip on (*mantenere*), was something to be used (»exploited«) by the ruler, the conclusion follows that Machiavelli's *lo stato* was »radically at variance with the modern conception of the state.«³⁶

Machiavelli was a political writer who contrived to keep alive the republican ideal of political man. He gave an innovative and problematic account of the dilemmas of republican politics, but did not dismiss the republican idea of politics.³⁷ As a republican, however, he could not articulate the concept of the state. For reasons I will come to in a moment, »[t]his concept came not from within republicanism, but from an attitude of neutrality toward republics in the old sense of partisan regimes, which required a trans-

³⁵ See Skinner, *Foundations*, 1: ix-x; 2: 353-4; idem, »The State,« 102. For a detailed semantic analysis of the use of *lo stato* and its synonyms in Machiavelli's *Principe* and *Discorsi*, cf. Susanne Hauser, *Untersuchungen zum semantischen Feld der Staatsbegriffe von der Zeit Dantes bis zu Machiavelli* (Zurich: P. G. Keller, 1967), 83-95.

³⁶ J. H. Hexter, *The Vision of Politics on the Eve of Reformation: More, Machiavelli, and Seyssel* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 171, 175. For Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 176, this interpretation »seems to be borne out.« Lefort seems not to have been interested in *lo stato* as Machiavelli's possible conceptual innovation and to have used *l'État* in the context of his reading of the Florentine political thinker as a self-evident term. Moreover, by arguing, for example, that Machiavelli in the *Principe* wanted to »détacher son lecteur d'une image traditionnelle de l'État,« Lefort presupposed »the state« as existing even before Machiavelli. *Le travail de l'oeuvre*, 349. This is, of course, not the place to enter Lefort's interpretation of Machiavelli.

³⁷ Cf. Maurizio Viroli, »Machiavelli and the republican idea of politics,« in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, ed. G. Bock, Q. Skinner, and M. Viroli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 152; idem, *From Politics to Reason of State: The acquisition and transformation of the language of politics, 1250-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 177.

formation of the republican spirit.«³⁸ By advancing the view that states were to be judged by their *verità effettuale*, by their »effectual truth« in acquiring glory and maintaining security, by directing the attention of both republics and principalities toward worldly gain, and by giving impartial advice to all parties and persons to acquire what they could, Machiavelli made his contribution to a »transformation of the republican spirit.« The universality of his advice to the prince – to be partial to oneself – implied a neutral attitude toward the republic. While Machiavelli's *lo stato* remained a personal power, his neutrality toward the republic (subsumed under the notion of the »acquisitive personal state«) was a crucial moment in the process of articulating the state as impersonal public authority.³⁹ But articulation of the concept of the state required more than just »a transformation of the republican spirit.« It required the very disintegration of the republican idea of politics.

Central to the republican idea of politics was the notion of *vita activa* or *vivere politico*. This notion implied the idea of self-government⁴⁰ and, as such, excluded the separation between government and the governed and, ultimately, between government and society. In order that the liberty of the entire community be preserved, all of the citizens had to take part in virtuous public service, to the effect that the political body coincided with community. Not surprisingly, republican political writers took the metaphor of the body politic »as seriously as possible.«⁴¹ Citizenship itself was socially determined. What qualified a person as a member of the body politic was property, gender, and age (given that a person meeting these criteria was not an alien or of the wrong confession). Citizens were adult propertied men. How inclusive or exclusive were these criteria does not matter here. What does matter is that the notion of citizenship implied »social substance.« While being an adult man, not a woman or a child, supposed the capacity of making rational decisions, a certain degree of wealth was not only a guarantee of freedom in a general sense of the word. More specifically, it gave the free man free time for public service. Landed property was a prerequisite for his independence, conceived of as immunity from the corrupting influences of patronage and money. As civic virtue incarnate, the patriot citizen was a soldier, for the defence of liberty of the community depended ultimately on the ability to take up arms.

³⁸ Mansfield, »On the Impersonality,« 855.

³⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 854-5. For Lefort's interpretation of the *verità effettuale*, see »Machiavel et la *verità effettuale*,« in Lefort, *Écrire*.

⁴⁰ Cf. Quentin Skinner, »The republican ideal of political liberty,« in: *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, 306.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 301.

If this political universe experienced its first fundamental crisis in the »Machiavellian moment,« then it was shattered to its foundations with the emergence of commercial society. The effects of the financial revolution, public credit and public debt, and a standing army on the republican political ideas and ideals have been well studied by historians of English and British political thought.⁴² Unaware of equivalent analyses of the developments on the Continent, I will now turn to what is called the »Atlantic republican tradition« in order to take the next step in my own argument about the disembodiment of power.

Public credit was introduced to provide new financial resources to wage wars for the »balance of power« in Europe and for the extension of empire. But the new kind of warfare it made possible, with government relying on mercenary armies, destroyed the citizen-soldier nexus at the heart of the republican idea of politics. The new nexus between government, commerce, and finance changed the nature of power. This change was perceived in dramatic terms by public-spirited contemporaries. They were alarmed by the rise of mobile property – new »imaginary wealth« that brought in its wake luxury, effemination, and corruption of civic virtues. This new form of wealth was linked with the pursuit of private interests and the neglect of common good. It gave government creditors, moreover, a say in government itself. *Nouveaux riches* were able to buy seats in Parliament or the »Country Gentlemen« who sat in those seats.

Such an accusation against the »Stock-Jobbers« was made, for example, by Daniel Defoe, who left us vivid descriptions of the new situation. He called this »Parliament-Jobbing« not only a »new Trade« that the free-holders should

⁴² See especially Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman: Studies in the Transmission, Development and Circumstance of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959); Lois G. Schwoerer, »No Standing Armies!«: *The Antiarmy Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974); J. G. A. Pocock, *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), chap. 3, 4; idem, *The Machiavellian Moment*, chap. 12-4; idem, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), especially chap. 1, 2, 6, 11; *The Varieties of British Political Thought, 1500-1800*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock, G. J. Schochet, and L. G. Schwoerer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pt. 3; István Hont, »Free trade and economic limits to national politics: neo-Machiavellian political economy reconsidered«, in *The economic limits to modern politics*, ed. J. Dunn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); idem, »The rhapsody of public debt: David Hume and voluntary state bankruptcy«, in *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, ed. N. Phillipson and Q. Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); idem, »Commercial Society and Political Theory in the Eighteenth Century: The Problem of Authority in David Hume and Adam Smith«, in *Main Trends in Cultural History*, ed. W. Melching and W. Velema (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994).

prevent, but a new civil war, »carried on with worse Weapons than Swords and Musquets,« by »a sort of impenetrable Artifice, like poison that works at a distance,« by »the strange and unheard of Engines, of *Interests, Discounts, Transfers, Tallies, Debentures, Shares, Projects*, and the *Devil and all of Figures and hard Names*.«⁴³ Republican ideals were dissolving together with reality itself. Credit was a »being« that had existence »only in the minds of men,« it hung »upon opinion,« depended on »our passions of hope and fear,« and was beyond men's control.⁴⁴ »*Like the Soul in the Body*, it acts all Substance, yet is it self Immaterial; it gives Motion, yet it self cannot be said to Exist; it creates *Forms*, yet has itself *no Form*; it is neither Quantity or Quality; it has no *Whereness*, or *Whenness*, *Scite* or *Habit*. If I should say it is the essential Shadow of something that is Not; should I not Puzzle the thing rather than Explain it [?]«⁴⁵ Never »chain'd to *Mens Names*, [...] not to Families, Clans, or Collections of Men; no, not to Nations,«⁴⁶ this formidable »being« came to hold government in its grip.

Government now seemed to be maintained by the investor's imagination, with its stability linked to the self-perpetuation of individuals' speculation concerning the future. Government and politics were placed, as it seemed, at the mercy of passion, fantasy, and appetite (forces known to feed on themselves and to be without moral limits). They were placed, as it appeared, at the mercy of »Convulsion Fits, hysterical Disorders, and most unaccountable Emotions.« Contemporaries thus saw rising on the horizon the despotism of speculative fantasy.⁴⁷ If we take the disappearance of the sign-posts of certainty to be an essential characteristic of democratic society,⁴⁸ then the so-called financial revolution in England of the 1690s, with its effects on the representation of power, politics, and society, was something of a »democratic revolution« indeed.

While undermining republican ideas of power and politics, the introduction and rise of public credit also contributed to the growing impersonality of public power. Contemporary accounts of the rise of public credit, both pessi-

⁴³ *The Free-Holders Plea against Stock-Jobbing Elections of Parliament Men* (London, 1701), 9; *The Villany of Stock-Jobbers Detected, and the Causes of the Late Run upon the Bank and Bankers Discovered and Considered* (London, 1701), 13.

⁴⁴ Davenant, *Discourses on the Public Revenues, and on the Trade of England*, pt. I [1698], in *The Political and Commercial Works of that Celebrated Writer Charles D'Avenant, LL. D.*; ed. Ch. Whitworth (London, 1771), 1: 151.

⁴⁵ Defoe, *An Essay upon Publick Credit*, etc. (London, 1710), 6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁷ See Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, 112-3. The quotation is from Defoe's *Review*, cited in Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 454. Like Fortune for Machiavelli, Credit and Trade for Defoe were female figures.

⁴⁸ Cf. Lefort, *Essais*, 29, 47.

mistic and optimistic, all noted the growing independence of government.⁴⁹ If government was dependent on the creditor, then the creditor was in the clutches of uncontrollable credit. The »Power of Money« was, ultimately, impersonal. Once the need to finance war had led government to resort to public credit, this triggered a dynamic that could not be stopped: »As the Affairs of the Government have made *Loans* necessary, and they can not go on without Borrowing,« this involved so many men, »that it is impossible for any particular Sett of Men to put a stop to it« and to get the government under their influence.⁵⁰ Bolstered by public credit, government escaped dependence on any particular social group. In the world that had been lost (and which was mourned by republican ideologists), proper social status had been a qualification for entering political life. Now public authority was itself becoming a source of social status. The »financial revolution« accelerated a process already underway. »In the reign of Charles II it was already understood that there existed a class of parliamentary managers and magnates – moving steadily into the hereditary peerage but never identical with it – whose strength consisted in their closeness to executive authority and in [...] their command of political patronage, influence, and what its enemies termed corruption.«⁵¹

With these developments, the center of political life shifted from the »old palace-centered political world of courtiers and councillors« to the »new Court« that was »attendant upon Parliament as much as upon the King.«⁵² The king's body, which had been beheaded by the revolutionary saints, was now back on the political scene. Neither the real nor the symbolic center of the nation (at best, one of the centers), the king was no obstacle to emptying the place of power. The body that was irremediably destroyed with the growing impersonality of power, and that had to be destroyed in order to institute impersonal power, was rather the republican body politic. A discussion of how the republicans – be they commonwealthmen or Country ideologists – responded to the challenge of commercial society and to the emergence of the state, and of different attempts (not always ineffective) to patch up the body politic, would take me away from the subject at hand. My point, here, is that the dissolution of the body politic, the discarding of the very idea of the body politic, was a necessary condition and a result of the invention of the state as well as of the institution of democracy as defined by Lefort. The problem

⁴⁹ For an optimistic view, cf. Davenant, *An Essay upon the National Credit of England*, etc. (London, 1710), 26.

⁵⁰ Defoe, *An Essay upon Loans*, etc. (London, 1710), 13-4.

⁵¹ See Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, 76.

⁵² *Ibid.*

with Lefort's discussion of democracy – to my mind the central weakness of his argument – is that he has defined democracy as republican. The conclusion of his discussion of republicanism is that republicanism found a new life in democracy: »[T]he republic has become democratic; there is no other possible definition of the republic, and democracy itself is republican or it ceases to designate a political society.«⁵³

I would argue in turn that the dissolution of the body politic – an idea or image most firmly rooted in the republican politics – was of key importance in creating the conditions for the institution of modern democracy. Modern democracy thus presupposes the decline and fall of republicanism, not its revival. In what follows, I want to illustrate my point in more detail by turning to one central aspect of the dissolution of the body politic: the emergence of political parties.

3. *The Emergence of Political Parties and the Formation of Political Space*

The absence of political parties from Lefort's discussion of democracy is, in fact, indicative of an overall weakness in his concept of democracy. This absence can be explained by his understanding of democracy as republican, but also by his refusal (not inconsistent with the republican spirit) to consider democracy as a system of institutions. In a critique of discussions of democracy in political science,⁵⁴ such a refusal is justifiable. But to discuss politics as symbolic in nature and to argue that modern democracy is embedded in »a discourse« (I would prefer »discourses«) that enables a distinctive articulation of power, institutions must be taken into consideration. Institutions are not merely a context in which alone one can understand political discourses. More than that, institutions are, in a sense, internal to political discourses, while political discourses materialize in institutions and work for the formation, preservation, change, or downfall of institutions.

Lefort has, in fact, discussed the *dispositif institutionnel* of modern democracy, even if not at great length. His analysis of general elections, for example, is a good and impressive case in point. But while he has repeatedly pointed to how indispensable for modern democracy is political competition (or, better still, the institutionalization of political conflict), he has remained

⁵³ »Foyers du républicanisme,« in *Écrire*, 208. Complexities of the history of republicanism during the French revolution, left aside in my argument here, are discussed in Hont, »The Permanent Crisis.«

⁵⁴ Cf. *Essais*, 254 ff. Lefort's critique of political science, however, applies also to strong currents in political philosophy. Cf. James Tully, *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 320-3.

surprisingly unspecific about the agents of that competition and conflict or, to be more precise, about the political forms in which competition and conflict are carried out. I do not see this lack of specificity as an homage to »democratic openness.« I have the impression that Lefort has consciously avoided the use of the term party, as if he wanted to reserve it, as »the Party,« for his critique of communist totalitarianism. Where he might have spoken of political parties, he chooses to speak instead, for example, of »political formations.«⁵⁵ But why does this matter?

I certainly do not want to make the point that Lefort has »forgotten« to mention a detail of the democratic institutional setting. Nor do I want to cite against him the multiparty system as an article of the faith to which countries must subscribe to join the »democratic world« or to qualify as recipients of »democratic aid.« I see Lefort's omission to discuss, even to name, political parties as a weakness of not only his historical explanation of the »birth of democracy« but of his very concept of democracy. The emergence of political parties entailed the demise of the idea of body politic (both the body politic with the king as its head and the republican self-governing community).⁵⁶ And it was the dissolution of the idea of body politic that made possible the formation of political space. I see the decline of the republican idea of politics (even more than the decline of the king-centred political theology), as a precondition for the institution of modern democracy: the democratic representation of power as an empty place presupposes the idea of political space. In the absence of political space, power cannot be »placed.« One cannot speak, that is, of the place of power.

Lefort does not address the question of the formation of political space. In one of the rare occasions when he uses the term at all, it is to speak of the effects of democratic power on political space, which he takes as given. Democratic power, he argues, lets us conceive of the division between political space and social space and of divisions within political space.⁵⁷ But without those divisions within the body politic, irreversibly articulated with the emergence of political parties, there was no political space as such. Those divisions in the body politic created political space, which was thus internally divided from the very beginning. And the creation of political space opened the way to the institution of modern democratic power.

⁵⁵ *L'invention*, 153. For exceptions, see *ibid.*, 158; *Essais*, 267.

⁵⁶ It is interesting to note that the development of organicist images of political community was in their origin, in Ancient Greece, a response to »bitter party strife.« See Tilman Struve, *Die Entwicklung der organologischen Staatsauffassung im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1978), 10.

⁵⁷ *L'invention*, 159.

The acceptance of political parties in England (seen, in this regard, by contemporaries elsewhere in Europe as a model country) coincided with the reign of George III.⁵⁸ The first clear definition of party was given by Edmund Burke in 1770, who called party »a body of men united, for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed,«⁵⁹ while some thirty years earlier David Hume grudgingly recognized the »parties from principle« as, »perhaps, the most extraordinary and unaccountable *phaenomenon*, that has yet appeared in human affairs« and, as such, »known only to modern times.«⁶⁰ With Hume and Burke, one could say, the history of the modern concept of party begins.⁶¹ But even more important for my argument here than this history, is the pre-history of party: the century before Hume and Burke, with its perceptions of the emerging new political reality or, to put it differently, with a »series of shifts in political perceptions« engendered by the transformation of political life.⁶² The emergence of political parties was both an expression of this transformation and its driving force, and a brief look at perceptions of parties as not only a new form of political organization and a new technique of political action,⁶³ but also as a new »art of govern-

⁵⁸ Good general surveys are Caroline Robbins, »'Discordant Parties': A Study of the Acceptance of Party by Englishmen,« in *Absolute Liberty: A Selection from the Articles and Papers of Caroline Robbins*, ed. B. Taft (Hamden, Conn.: Published for the Conference on British Studies and Wittenberg University by Archon Books, 1982); Klaus von Beyme, »Partei, Faktion,« in vol. 4 of *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon juristisch-sozialen Sprachen in Deutschland*, ed. O. Brunner, W. Conze, and R. Koselleck (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1978); Terence Ball, »Party,« in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*; a selection from contemporary sources: J. A. W. Gunn, *Factions No More: Attitudes to Party in Government and Opposition in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Frank Cass, 1971); relevant monographs I have consulted are Kurt Kluxen, *Das Problem der politischen Opposition: Entwicklung und Wesen der englischen Zweiparteienpolitik im 18. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg and Munich: Karl Alber, 1956); Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., *Statenmanship and Party Government: A Study of Burke and Bolingbroke* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965); Wolfgang Jäger, *Politische Partei und parlamentarische Opposition: Eine Studie zum politischen Denken von Lord Bolingbroke und David Hume* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1971); John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); and, for American developments, Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1840* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969).

⁵⁹ *Thoughts on the Cause of Present Discontents*, in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (London: Bohn, 1854-56), 1: 375.

⁶⁰ »Of Parties in General,« in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. E. F. Miller, revised ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985), 60.

⁶¹ Ball, »Party,« 174.

⁶² Cf. *ibid.*, 155-6.

⁶³ Cf. Kluxen, *Das Problem der politischen Opposition*, 42-3.

ing,⁶⁴ will give us an impression of how deeply was shattered the then existing political universe.

The emerging parties were not met with acclamation. Few wrote in support of them, even to give qualified support. The detractors were many. Contemporaries regarded parties with great uneasiness and animosity. Some aspects of their critique⁶⁵ have direct bearing on Lefort's conceptualization of modern democracy. According to the critics, parties were a device of division of political community. John Toland called his *Art of Governing by Partys* »an account of how the Nation was divided in their Politics.« While one should neither expect nor wish for people's agreement in all matters, Toland argued, party was »the most wicked master-piece of Tyranny purposely to divide the sentiments, affections, and interests of a People that after they have mutually spent their Force against one another, they may more easily become a common prey to Arbitrary Power.« The introduction of »all those pernicious Divisions, names and distinction, Parties, Factions, Clubs and Cabals,« was the work of a tyrannical king (Charles II, in Toland's eyes) who »cou'd not hope to persuade or force a compliance from a free Nation« and, therefore, had by »secret fraud« »torn« it apart.⁶⁶

When not fraud and tricks,⁶⁷ parties were a disease decomposing the body politic. Davenant, for example, used medical metaphors so extensively that an opponent called him a »State-Doctor.«⁶⁸ For Davenant, speaking of men »intangled in old or new partialities,« the »contagion of civil discord« had raged in England for too long. Distemper was radical and epidemical, »ill humours« had »floated in the body politick« since the reign of James I. Factions were a »frenzy,« those involved in them did not strive to »heal breaches,« but let »the wounds widen and fester« and »intestine ruptures«

⁶⁴ John Toland, *The Art of Governing by Partys: Particularly, in Religion, in Politics, in Parliament, on the Bench, and in the Ministry; with the ill Effects of Partys on the People in general, the King in particular, and all our foren Affairs; as well as on our Credit and Trade, in Peace or War, & c.* (London, 1701). With whigs firmly in power, Toland later took a much more favourable view of parties. See his *The State Anatomy of Great Britain: Containing a Particular account of its Several Interests and Parties, their bent and genius*, etc. (London, 1717), especially ii-iii, 18.

⁶⁵ In what follows, I disregard the distinction between »parties« and »factions.« While »faction« was definitively a negative term, in contrast to »party« that may have called for a qualified recognition, the distinction most often imploded with the writers who used it. For a general overview, cf. von Beyme, »Partei, Faktion.«

⁶⁶ Toland, *The Art of Governing by Partys*, 7, 9, 55.

⁶⁷ In »Plain English,« governing by parties is »governing by Tricks.« Ibid., 44.

⁶⁸ *Animadversions on a late Factious Book, Entitled Essays Upon, I. The Ballance of Power; II. The Right of making War, Peace, and Alliances; III. Universal Monarchy. With a Letter Containing a Censure upon the said Book* (London, 1701). Davenant looked at himself as a »State-physician.« *Works*, 5: 303.

grow.⁶⁹ For Toland, »[o]f all the Plagues which have infested this Nation since the death of Queen *Elisabeth*, none has spread the Contagion wider, or brought us nearer to utter ruin, than the implacable animosity of contending Parties.«⁷⁰

Torn apart by the »so many unnnatural Divisions«⁷¹ generated by parties was »nation,« »people,« »commonwealth,« »country.« In short, an imagined unitary body politic was being torn asunder. In the place of an ordered body politic, there grew with parties a »many-headed monster.«⁷² The »entire Union« was being destroyed by interests, passions, envy, ambitions, and prejudices of »private men.« More specifically, parties were making »an Inroad upon the Government.«⁷³ They were a viper in its vitals.⁷⁴ Unable to offer a »solid foundations« to the government,⁷⁵ they corrupted it from the inside and threw it into insecurity. More specifically still, they undermined the position of the king. Even Toland, a republican himself and a critic of Filmer's *Patriarcha*, argued that »[d]ivisions ought carefully to be avoided in all good Governments,« and that »a king can never lessen himself more than by heading of a Party; for thereby he becomes only the King of a Faction, and ceases to be the common Father of his People.«⁷⁶ The insecurity and uncertainty caused by parties was not confined to government alone: They spread over society at large. For parties were only names, flags, and masks. Worse still, they were names without substance,

⁶⁹ Davenant, *Essays upon Peace at Home and War Abroad* [1704], in *Works*, 4: 276-7, 309-10, 364-7.

⁷⁰ Toland, *The Art of Governing by Partys*, 7.

⁷¹ Addison in *The Spectator*, no. 81, June 2, 1711 (*The Spectator*, ed. H. Morley [London: George Routledge, 1891], 1: 305).

⁷² *The Danger of Faction to a Free People* (London, 1732), 7.

⁷³ Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* 158 (ed. P. Laslett, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 374).

⁷⁴ »Faction is a viper that preys on the Vitals of the very Government that warms, and protects it, and will infallibly destroy what it seeds upon.« *The Danger of Faction*, 7.

⁷⁵ Cf. *Party No Dependance: Containing An Historical Account of the Rise and Fall of Parties, in the Reigns of King Charles II, King James the IId, and King William IIIId* (London 1713), 34.

⁷⁶ Toland, *The Art of Governing by Partys*, 41. The anonymous writer of *A Essay Towards the History of the Last Ministry and Parliament: Containing Seasonable Reflections on: I Favourites, II Ministers, III Parties*, etc. (1710), argued that a sovereign's »Favour should shine on the whole Body of his People,« and that the queen scorned »to be Queen of no more than half Her People.« (In Gunn, *Factions No More*, 48-9.) Cf. Davenant, *Essays Upon, I. The Ballance of Power. II. The Right of making War, Peace, and Alliances. III. Universal Monarchy*, etc. (London 1701), 99, urging »all good English Men to lay aside the Name of Parties, and to join in due obedience to the King.« An anonymous author argued that, as a result of the strategy of parties, sowing discontents among people and pointing out »the Government as the Cause of this imaginary Evil,« the king is finally »robb'd of the Hearts of his People.« *The Danger of Faction*, 9-12.

»ill Names misapplied«;⁷⁷ they were false flags, for »Parties in a State generally, like *Freebooters*, hang out *False Colours*«;⁷⁸ and since a party could »borrow whatever Mask will best suit her Purpose,«⁷⁹ the nation was misled, and »best Men of the Nation [were] abus'd,« by »false Characters.«⁸⁰ Parties took up *Opinion* capriciously, as they thought fit.⁸¹ Truth and virtue were undermined,⁸² became devoid of meaning, and invoking them was now no more than »a Figure of Speech.«⁸³

The symbolic nature of politics appears to have been well understood here. Political life was perceived as a stage. To say that a conflict of »collective wills« now came to take place on the »political scene,«⁸⁴ however, fails to capture the nature of political innovation and conceptual change underway, which cannot be reduced to setting up a political stage. Parties, »full of new schemes in Politicks and Divinity« (for they disliked both religious and civil »old Establishment«), worked, as it were, from behind the stage. It was the success of a party's endeavours resulting in »Change in a Government« that »produced« that »Set of Upstarts« called »the Heads of a *Faction*« »upon the Stage.«⁸⁵ What was seen on the stage was the effect of political work in the space created by the tearing apart, or »slicing,«⁸⁶ of the body politic. Once

⁷⁷ *The Political Sow-Gelder, or the Castration of Whig and Tory* (1715), cited in Gunn, *Factions No More*, 35.

⁷⁸ Marquis of Halifax, *Maxims of State* (in Gunn, op. cit., 43).

⁷⁹ *The Danger of Faction*, 8.

⁸⁰ *The Political Sow-Gelder*, l. c. For Locke, »the enthusiasm of parties confuse and mislead our feeble minds.« *Second Tract on Government* (c. 1662), in: John Locke, *Political Essays*, ed. M. Goldie (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997), 75. Swift wrote, in connection with parties, of »many grievous Misrepresentations of Persons and Things.« *The Examiner*, no. 15, Nov. 16, 1710 (in *The Prose Writings of Jonathan Swift*, ed. H. Davis, [Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1957], 3: 13).

⁸¹ Cf. Swift, *The Examiner*, no. 31, March 8, 1710 (op. cit., 103).

⁸² Faction was »Enemy to both.« *The Danger of Faction*, 7. Addison spoke of the »Practice of Party-lying.« *The Spectator*, no. 507, Oct. 11, 1712 (op. cit., 3: 283 ff.).

⁸³ »The Word Country, like a great many others [...] became to signify a Collection of Ideas very different from its original Meaning. With some Writers, it implies *Party*, with others *private Opinion*, and with most *Interest*.« [George Sewell,] *The Resigners Vindicated: or, The Defection Re-consider'd. In which the Designs of All Parties are Set in a True Light*, 2nd ed. (London 1718), 4. Fidelity to king and country became »a Figure of Speech.« idem, *The Resigners Vindicated. Part II. and Last* (London 1718), 10. Already Halifax complained that party »turneth all Thought into talking instead of doing.« *Political Thoughts and Reflections* (in Gunn, *Factions No More*, 44).

⁸⁴ Lefort, *L'invention*, 157-8, 180; *Essais*, 28, 267.

⁸⁵ Swift, *The Examiner*, no. 31 (op. cit., 104). Note that Swift placed *Schematists*, along with *Projectors*, into the *Anti-chambers* of false Merit. *The Examiner*, no. 30, March 1, 1710 (op. cit., 99).

⁸⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 101-2.

the body politic had disintegrated (or, rather, begun to disintegrate), what was left was not »the flesh of the social.«⁸⁷ Rather, beginning to emerge was a new, non-organic, perception of the space in which political life took place.

In the transformation of the political vocabulary in which the idea of party was gradually articulated, the shift from organic or bodily imagery to contractual notions was particularly important.⁸⁸ Contractual theories tended to reject ideas of natural political agency⁸⁹ and gave new impetus to thinking about the techniques and mechanics of constituting and maintaining power.⁹⁰ While this was nothing new in itself (given the prominence of »Machiavellism,« sometimes fertilized by what was then the new science), the emergence of parties, with their emphasis on the means rather than the end of politics (about which they apparently agreed),⁹¹ intensified this debate on the techniques and mechanics of politics and shifted the debate to the terrain of organized political conflict as a permanent feature of political life, to the question of the collective pursuit of political interests, with formally organized political wills in competition with each other and (breaking away from the more or less conventional resistance doctrines) in opposition to the (party in) government. In this »new typicality of political action,«⁹² politics were made in a space increasingly described in physical, not corporal, terms. That space was opened by the rise of parties.

As the »Extreams,« parties marked the margins of political space within which »distances« were measured, a »Middle« was sought, and »sides« were taken. In that space, numbers counted: parties, or their »leading Men,« fell into disrepute for influencing »great Numbers« and using »Methods« aimed at obtaining »an *artificial* Majority.«⁹³ Parties moved in a world in which some

⁸⁷ Lefort used the term »chair du social,« borrowed from Merleau-Ponty, in his commentary on Tocqueville's *De la démocratie en Amérique*, in conjunction with »le tissu social« as explored by Tocqueville. *Écrire*, 71. On the importance of the image of »chair du social« for Lefort's conceptualization of democracy, see Šumič-Riha, Postscript to Lefort, *Prigode demokracije*, 259, 264 ff.

⁸⁸ Ball, »Party,« 156.

⁸⁹ Cf. Deborah Baumgold, *Hobbes' Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 41 ff.; for a more comprehensive analysis, discussing Hobbes' views in different stages of his writing, see Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, chap. 7.

⁹⁰ This aspect figures prominently, even if somewhat schematically, in Kluxen, *Das Problem der politischen Opposition*, 11 ff.

⁹¹ English parties, maintaining that they work for the public good, »do not differ in the End, but the Means of obtaining that publick Good.« Sewell, *The Resigners Vindicated*, pt. 1, 12.

⁹² Kluxen, *Das Problem der politischen Opposition*, 30.

⁹³ Cf. Swift, *The Sentiments of a Church-of-England Man, with Respect to Religion and Government* (in *The Prose Writings*, 2: 2, 24); *A Discourse of the Contests and Dissentions between the Nobles and Commons in Athens and Rome* (in *The Prose Writings*, 1: 232).

advanced minds believed that politics itself could be understood »in Terms of *Number, Weight, or Measure*.«⁹⁴ To such minds, parties may have appeared as a disturbance,⁹⁵ but the strength of parties was weighed and, sometimes, »equilibrium« sought to be established between them.

Once that space was opened, it engulfed and politicized the entire society. But since politics now meant division, and the national interest could only be promoted by joint endeavors of bodies of men united upon some particular principle,⁹⁶ this politicization of society did not resurrect any unitary political community. What emerged was, rather, political society *stricto sensu*, divided in itself. Party divisions ran throughout society. There was »scarce a Man, or a Woman, which [was] not of one, or t'other« party.⁹⁷ Parties may have been accused of descending »to flatter the *Vulgar*« they despised,⁹⁸ but as a matter of fact, they pulled the »great Numbers,« the people that is, who used to be excluded from political life, into politics.

They also drew women into politics, so that public-spirited men felt compelled to advise them to »distinguish themselves as tender Mothers, and faithful Wives, rather than as furious Partizans.« To press home the argument that »Female Virtues are of a Domestick Turn« and that »family is the proper Province for Private Women to shine in,« they held out the example of the ancient Greeks who »thought it so improper for Women to interest themselves in Competitions and Contentions, that for this Reason, among others, they forbade them, under Pain of Death, to be present at the *Olympick Games*.«⁹⁹ Now, however, they not only came out to public plays but came out demonstrating their party affiliation »in a kind of Battle-Array one against another.«¹⁰⁰ »Women among us have got the distinguishing Marks of Party in their Muffs, their Fans, and their Furbelows,« the »*Whig Ladies* put on their Patches in a different Manner from the *Tories*,« and they »made *Schisms* in the *Play-House*, and each have their particular Sides at the *Opera*.«¹⁰¹ As »Followers in a Party,« men and women were seen as »Instruments of mixing it in every Condition,

⁹⁴ Cf. William Petty, *Political Arithmetick*, etc. (London 1690), Preface. Cf. dedicatory words in the *Political Arithmetick*: »Glory of the Prince, and the happiness and greatness of the People, are by the Ordinary Rules of Arithmetick, brought into a sort of Demonstration.«

⁹⁵ Cf. Petty, *Another Essay in Political Arithmetick, concerning the Growth of the City of London; with the Measures, Periods, Causes and Consequences thereof* (London 1683), where he argued for »preventing the Intestine Commotions of Parties and Factions.«

⁹⁶ Cf. n. 59.

⁹⁷ [Matthew Tindal,] *The Defection Consider'd, and the Designs of those, who divided the Friends of the Government, set in a True Light*, 5th ed. (London, 1717), 10.

⁹⁸ *The danger of Faction*, 7.

⁹⁹ Addison, *The Spectator*, no. 81, June 2, 1711 (op. cit., 1: 305).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 303.

¹⁰¹ Swift, *The Examiner*, no. 31, March 8, 1710 (*The Prose Writings*, 3: 102).

and Circumstance of Life.« Party »intruded into all Companies at the most unseasonable Times; mixt at Balls, Assemblies, and other Parties of Pleasure; haunted every Coffee-house and Bookseller's Shop; and by her perpetual Talking filled all Places with Disturbance and Confusion. She buzzed about the Merchant in the Exchange, the Divine in his Pulpit, and the Shopkeeper behind his Counter. Above all, she frequented Publick Assemblies, where she sate in the Shape of an obscene, ominous Bird, ready to prompt her Friends as they spoke.«¹⁰² With the emergence of parties, public places and spaces were politicized, giving birth to »public opinion.«

Without taking these developments into consideration, our understanding of the »birth« and growth of modern democracy would be impaired. Political parties are, therefore, a subject that any serious conceptualization of democracy cannot neglect. Stating this, I have in mind not only the need to rethink the historical formation of democracy but also the need to improve our understanding of what is going on in the world we live in. The changing nature and role of political parties and the deconstruction of the state are among most consequential – and worrying – features of contemporary political life that bear on democracy. If political parties and the state are not given greater attention than they were in Lefort's conceptualization of democracy, our discourses on democracy may become an empty place of political theory. If we are not intent on enthroning »post-theory,« such a prospect is disquieting.

¹⁰² Ibid., 102-3. Addison complained of coarse diet and hard lodging proffered to him by his host, during a trip in the country, because the friend would only take him to inns owned by his party's friends. *The Spectator*, no. 126, July 25, 1711 (op. cit., 1: 445-6).