Wrong: Politics and Police

The brilliant deduction of the political animal's ends from the properties of the logical animal patches over a tear. Between the useful and the just lies the incommensurability of wrong, which alone establishes the body politic as antagonism between parts of the community that are not real parts of the social body. But in turn the false continuity between the useful and the just points up the falseness of evidence of any decisive opposition between human beings endowed with the logos and animals restricted to sole use of the organ of the voice (phônê). The voice, Aristotle tells us, is an organ designed for a limited purpose. It serves animals in general to indicate or show (σταματείν) sensations of pain or pleasure. Pleasure and pain exist outside the distribution that reserves for human beings and the body politic a sense of the profitable and the injurious, and so the placing in common of the just and the unjust. But, in distributing so clearly the ordinary functions of the voice and the privileges of speech, surely Aristotle has not forgotten the furious accusations leveled by his master, Plato, at that "large and powerful animal," the people? Book VI of the Republic actually takes pleasure in showing us the large and powerful animal responding to words that
soothe it with a roar of cheers and to those that annoy it with a disapproving racket. The "science" of those animal tamers in charge of it who show themselves within the walls of its pen consists entirely in knowing what vocal effects make the great animal growl and those that make it nice and gentle. Just as the demos usurps entitlement to community, democracy is the regime — the way of life — in which the voice, which not only expresses but also procures the illusory feelings of pleasure and pain, usurps the privileges of the logos, which allows the just to be recognized and organizes this realization in terms of community proportion. The metaphor of the large and powerful animal is no simple metaphor: it serves to rigorously reject as animals those speaking beings with no position who introduce trouble into the logos and into its political realization as analogia of the parts of the community.

So the simple opposition between logical animals and phonic animals is in no way the given on which politics is then based. It is, on the contrary, one of the stakes of the very dispute that institutes politics. At the heart of politics lies a double wrong, a fundamental conflict, never conducted as such, over the relationship between the capacity of the speaking being who is without qualification and political capacity. For Plato, the mob of anonymous speaking beings who call themselves the people does wrong to any organized distribution of bodies in community. But conversely, "the people" is the name, the form of subjectification, of this immemorial and perennial wrong through which the social order is symbolized by dooming the majority of speaking beings to the night of silence or to the animal noise of voices expressing pleasure or pain. For before the debts that place people who are of no account in a relationship of dependence on the oligarchs, there is the symbolic distribution of bodies that divides them into two categories: those that one sees and those that one does not see, those who have a logos — memorial speech, an account to be kept up — and those who have no logos, those who really speak and those whose voice merely mimics the articulate voice to express pleasure and pain. Politics exists because the logos is never simply speech, because it is always indissolubly the account that

is made of this speech: the account by which a sonorous emission is understood as speech, capable of enunciating what is just, whereas some other emission is merely perceived as a noise signaling pleasure or pain, consent or revolt.

This is what a nineteenth-century French thinker tells us in his rewriting of the tale told by Livy of the secession of the Roman plebeians on Aventine Hill. From 1829, in the Revue de Paris, Pierre-Simon Ballanche published a series of articles under the heading "Formule générale de l'histoire de tous les peuples appliquée à l'histoire du peuple romain" (General formula of the history of all peoples applied to the history of the Roman people). In his own way Ballanche thereby makes the connection between the politics of the "Ancients" and that of the "Moderns." Livy's tale links up the end of the war with the Volscians, the retreat of the plebs over Aventine Hill, the ambassadorship of Menenius Agrippa, his famous fable [of the revolt of the body's members, in which the body is a metaphor of the social body], and the return of the plebs to order. Ballanche reproaches the Latin historian for being unable to think of the event as anything other than a revolt, an uprising caused by poverty and anger and sparking a power play devoid of all meaning. Livy is incapable of supplying the meaning of the conflict because he is incapable of locating Menenius Agrippa's fable in its real context: that of a quarrel over the issue of speech itself. By centering his story-apologia on the discussions of the senators and the speech acts of the plebs, Ballanche performs a restaging of the conflict in which the entire issue at stake involves finding out whether there exists a common stage where plebeians and patricians can debate anything.

The position of the intransigent patricians is straightforward: there is no place for discussion with the plebs for the simple reason that plebs do not speak. They do not speak because they are beings without a name, deprived of logos — meaning, of symbolic enrollment in the city. Plebs live a purely individual life that passes on nothing to posterity except for life itself, reduced to its reproductive function. Whoever is nameless cannot speak. Consul Menenius made a fatal mistake in imag-
inishing that words were issuing from the mouths of the plebs when logically the only thing that could issue forth was noise.

“They have speech like us, they dared tell Menenius! Was it a god that shut Menenius’s mouth, that dazzled his eyes, that made his ears ring? Did some holy daze take hold of him? ... He was somehow unable to respond that they had only transitory speech, a speech that is a fugitive sound, a sort of lowing, a sign of want and not an expression of intelligence. They were deprived of the eternal word which was in the past and would be in the future.”

This discourse that Ballanche attributes to Appius Claudius sets out perfectly the terms of the quarrel. Between the language of those who have a name and the lowing of nameless beings, no situation of linguistic exchange can possibly be set up, no rules or code of discussion. This verdict does not simply reflect the obstinacy of the dominant or their ideological blindness; it strictly expresses the sensory order that organizes their domination, which is that domination itself. Before becoming a class traitor, the consul Menenius, who imagines he has heard the plebs speak, is a victim of sensory illusion. The order that structures patrician domination recognizes no logos capable of being articulated by beings deprived of logos, no speech capable of being proffered by nameless beings, beings of no account.

Faced with this, what do the plebs gathered on the Aventine do? They do not set up a fortified camp in the manner of the Scythian slaves. They do what would have been unthinkable for the latter: they establish another order, another partition of the perceptible, by constituting themselves not as warriors equal to other warriors but as speaking beings sharing the same properties as those who deny them these. They thereby execute a series of speech acts that mimic those of the patricians: they pronounce imprecations and apotheoses; they delegate one of their number to go and consult their oracles; they give themselves representatives by rebaptizing them. In a word, they conduct themselves like beings with names. Through transgression, they find that they too, just like speaking beings, are endowed with speech that does not simply express want, suffering, or rage, but intelligence. They write, Ballanche tells us, “a name in the sky”: a place in the symbolic order of the community of speaking beings, in a community that does not yet have any effective power in the city of Rome.

The story presents us with these two scenes and shows us the two observers and emissaries moving about between them—in only one direction, of course. These are atypical patricians who have come to see and hear what is going on in this staging of a nonexistent right. And they observe this incredible phenomenon: the plebeians have actually violated the order of the city. They have given themselves names. They have carried out a series of speech acts linking the life of their bodies to words and word use. In short, in Ballanche’s terms, from being “mortals,” they have become “men,” that is, beings engaging in a collective destiny through words. They have become beings who may very well make promises and draw up contracts. The result is that, when Menenius delivers his apologia, they listen politely and thank him but only so they can then ask him for a treaty. He can cry out and say such a thing is impossible; unfortunately, Ballanche tells us, his apologia had, in a single day, “aged a whole cycle.” It is easy to formulate the position: from the moment the plebs could understand Menenius’s apologia—the apologia of the necessary inequality between the vital patrician principle and the plebeian members carrying it out—they were already, just as necessarily, equals. The apologia implies an egalitarian partition of the perceptible. The sense necessary to understand this division presupposes an egalitarian division that puts paid to the former, but only the deployment of a specific scene of revelation gives this equality any effectiveness. Only such a mechanism can gauge the distance between the logos and itself or make this measurement effective in organizing a sensory space where plebeians happen to speak like patricians and the latter’s domination has no basis other than the sheer contingency of any social order.

The Roman Senate of Ballanche’s tale is animated by a secret council of wise old men. They know that when a cycle is over, it is over, whether you like it or not, and they conclude that, since the plebs have become
creatures of speech, there is nothing left to do but to talk to them. This conclusion is in keeping with the philosophy that Ballanche derives from Vico: passing from one age of speech to another is not a matter of a rebellion that can be put down; it is a question of some kind of progressive revelation that can be recognized by its own signs and against which there is no point fighting.

What matters to us here, though, more than this determined philosophy, is the manner in which the apologia homes in on the relationship between the privilege of the logos and the litigious play that sets up the political stage. Before the gauging of interests and entitlements to this or that share, the dispute concerns the existence of parties as parties and the existence of a relationship that constitutes them as such. The double sense of logos, as speech and as account, is the space where this conflict is played out. The Aventine apologia allows us to reformulate Aristotle’s pronouncement about the political function of the human logos and the significance of the wrong it makes manifest. The speech that causes politics to exist is the same that gauges the very gap between speech and the account of it. And the aisthēsis that shows itself in this speech is the very quarrel over the constitution of the aisthēsis, over this partition of the perceptible through which bodies find themselves in community. This division should be understood here in the double sense of the term: as community and as separation. It is the relationship between these that defines a division of the perceptible, and it is this relationship that is at play in the “double sense” of the apologia: the sense it implies and the sense required to understand it. To find out if plebs can speak is to find out if there is anything “between” the parties. For the patricians, there is no political stage because there are no parties. There are no parties because the plebeians, having no logos, are not. “Your misfortune is not to be,” a patrician tells the plebs, “and this misfortune is inescapable.” This is the decisive point obscurely indicated by Aristotelian definition or Platonic polemics, but plainly eclipsed, on the other hand, by all the political community’s notions of trade, contracts, and communication. Politics is primarily conflict over the existence of a common stage and over the existence and status of those present on it. It must first be established that the stage exists for the use of an interlocutor who can’t see it and who can’t see it for good reason because it doesn’t exist. Parties do not exist prior to the conflict they name and in which they are counted as parties. The “discussion” of wrong is not an exchange—not even a violent one—between constituent partners. It concerns the speech situation itself and its performers. Politics does not exist because men, through the privilege of speech, place their interests in common. Politics exists because those who have no right to be counted as speaking beings make themselves of some account, setting up a community by the fact of placing in common a wrong that is nothing more than this very confrontation, the contradiction of two worlds in a single world: the world where they are and the world where they are not, the world where there is something “between” them and those who do not acknowledge them as speaking beings who count and the world where there is nothing.

The contingent, factitious nature of Athenian freedom and the exceptional nature of the “Secession of the Plebs” thus stage a fundamental conflict that is at once marked and missed by the slave war of Scythia. This conflict separates two modes of human being-together, two types of partition of the perceptible that are opposed in principle and yet bound up together in the impossible counts of proportion, as well as in the violence of conflict. There is the mode of being-together that puts bodies in their place and their role according to their “properties,” according to their name or their lack of a name, the “logical” or “phonetic” nature of the sounds that come out of their mouths. The principle of this kind of being-together is simple: it gives to each the part that is his due according to the evidence of what he is. Ways of being, ways of doing, and ways of saying—or not saying—precisely reflect each person’s due. The Scythians, in putting out the eyes of those who need only their hands to carry out the task the Scythians demand they perform, offer the most primitive example. Patricians who can’t understand the speech of those who can’t possibly have any offer the classic case. The “politics” of communications and the opinion poll, which offer each of us, day and night, the endless spectacle of a world that has become
indifferent and an exact count of what each age bracket or each socio-
professional category thinks of the "political future" of this or that min-
ister, could well be an exemplary modern form of the same thing. On
the one hand, there is the logic that simply counts the lots of the parties,
that distributes bodies within the space of their visibility or their invis-
ibility and aligns ways of being, ways of doing, and ways of saying ap-
propriate to each. And there is the other logic, the logic that disrupts
this harmony through the mere fact of achieving the contingency of
the equality, neither arithmetical nor geometric, of any speaking beings
whatever.

In the initial conflict that produces a dispute about the deduction of
the community of the just and the unjust from the capacity of any speak-
ing being whatsoever, two logics of human being-together must there-
fore be discerned. These are generally confused with politics whereas
political activity is none other than the activity that parcels them out.
Politics is generally seen as the set of procedures whereby the aggrega-
tion and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organization of powers,
the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for legitimizing
this distribution. I propose to give this system of distribution and legiti-
mitization another name. I propose to call it the police.

This term no doubt poses a few problems. The word police normally
evokes what is known as the petty police, the truncheon blows of the
forces of law and order and the inquisitions of the secret police. But
this narrow definition may be deemed contingent. Michel Foucault has
shown that, as a mode of government, the police described by writers
of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries covered everything relating
to "man" and his "happiness." The petty police is just a particular form
of a more general order that arranges that tangible reality in which bodies
are distributed in community. It is the weakness and not the strength
of this order in certain states that inflates the petty police to the point
of putting it in charge of the whole set of police functions. The evolu-
tion of Western societies reveals a contrario that the policeman is one
element in a social mechanism linking medicine, welfare, and culture.
The policeman is destined to play the role of consultant and organizer

as much as agent of public law and order, and no doubt the name itself
will one day change, caught up as it will be in the process of euphemiza-
tion through which our societies try to promote the image, at least, of all
traditionally despised functions.

So from now on I will use the word police or policing as noun and
adjective in this broader sense that is also "neutral," nonpejorative. I
do not, however, identify the police with what is termed the "state appara-
tur." The notion of a state apparatus is in fact bound up with the
presupposition of an opposition between State and society in which
the state is portrayed as a machine, a "cold monster" imposing its rigid
order on the life of society. This representation already presupposes a
certain "political philosophy," that is, a certain confusion of politics and
the police. The distribution of places and roles that defines a police
regime stems as much from the assumed spontaneity of social relations
as from the rigidity of state functions. The police is, essentially, the law,
generally implicit, that defines a party's share or lack of it. But to define
this, you first must define the configuration of the perceptible in which
one or the other is inscribed. The police is thus first an order of bodies
that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of
saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular
place and task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees
that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech
is understood as discourse and another as noise. It is police law, for ex-
ample, that traditionally turns the workplace into a private space not
regulated by the ways of seeing and saying proper to what is called the
public domain, where the worker's having a part is strictly defined by
the remuneration of his work. Policing is not so much the "disciplining"
of bodies as a rule governing their appearing, a configuration of occu-
pations and the properties of the spaces where these occupations are
distributed.

I now propose to reserve the term politics for an extremely deter-
mined activity antagonistic to policing: whatever breaks with the tan-
gible configuration whereby parties and parts or lack of them are defined
by a presupposition that, by definition, has no place in that configura-
tion— that of the part of those who have no part. This break is manifest in a series of actions that reconfigure the space where parties, parts, or lack of parts have been defined. Political activity is whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place’s destination. It makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise; it makes understood as discourse what was once only heard as noise. It might be the activity of Ballanche’s plebeians who make use of a faculty for speech they do not “possess.” It might be the activity of those nineteenth-century workers who established a collective basis for work relations that were solely the product of an infinite number of relationships between private individuals. Or again, the activity of demonstrators and those manning the barricades that literally turned urban communications paths into “public space.” Spectacular or otherwise, political activity is always a mode of expression that undoes the perceptible divisions of the police order by implementing a basically heterogenous assumption, that of a part of those who have no part, an assumption that, at the end of the day, itself demonstrates the sheer contingency of the order, the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being. Politics occurs when there is a place and a way for two heterogenous processes to meet. The first is the police process in the sense we have tried to define. The second is the process of equality. For the moment let’s agree that this term means the open set of practices driven by the assumption of equality between any and every speaking being and by the concern to test this equality.

The formulation of this opposition obliges us to make a few further points and entails certain corollaries. First and foremost, the police order thus defined cannot be turned into that dim leveler in which everything looks the same, everything is equivalent (“at night all cows are grey”). The Scythians’ practice of gouging out their slaves’ eyes and the practices of modern information and communications strategies, which, conversely, put everything endlessly up for grabs, are both forms of police procedure. Which is not to say that we can draw from this the nihilistic conclusion that the one example is the same as the other. Our situation is in every way preferable to that of the Scythian slaves. There is a worse and a better police—the better one, incidentally, not being the one that adheres to the supposedly natural order of society or the science of legislators, but the one that all the breaking and entering perpetrated by egalitarian logic has most often jolted out of its “natural” logic. The police can procure all sorts of good, and one kind of police may be infinitely preferable to another. This does not change the nature of the police, which is what we are exclusively dealing with here. The regime of public opinion as gauged by the poll and of the unending exhibition of the real is today the normal form the police in Western societies takes. Whether the police is sweet and kind does not make it any less the opposite of politics.

It might be useful to set down what belongs to each sphere. For instance, lots of questions traditionally enlisted as concerning the relationship between morality and politics are really only concerned with the relationship between morality and the police. To decide whether any means are acceptable to ensure the tranquility of the population and the security of the state is an issue that does not arise from political thought—which is not to say it can’t provide the space for politics to sneak in sideways. Also, most of the measures that our clubs and political “think tanks” relentlessly come up with in a bid to change or revitalize politics by bringing the citizen closer to the state or the state closer to the citizen indeed offer the simplest alternative to politics: the simple police. For it is a representation of the community proper to the police that identifies citizenship as a property of individuals definable within a relationship of greater or lesser proximity between the place they occupy and that of public power. Politics, on the other hand, does not recognize relationships between citizens and the state. It only recognizes the mechanisms and singular manifestations by which a certain citizenship occurs but never belongs to individuals as such.

We should not forget either that if politics implements a logic entirely heterogenous to that of the police, it is always bound up with the latter. The reason for this is simple: politics has no objects or issues of its own. Its sole principle, equality, is not peculiar to it and is in no way in itself political. All equality does is lend politics reality in the form of
specific cases to inscribe, in the form of litigation, confirmation of the equality at the heart of the police order. What makes an action political is not its object or the place where it is carried out, but solely its form, the form in which confirmation of equality is inscribed in the setting up of a dispute, of a community existing solely through being divided. Politics runs up against the police everywhere. We need to think of this encounter as a meeting of the heterogenous. To be able to do this we have to let go of certain concepts that assert in advance a smooth connection between them. The concept of power is the main such concept. This concept once allowed a certain well-meaning militancy to contend that “everything is political” since power relationships are everywhere. From that moment the somber vision of a power present everywhere and at every moment can be settled on, the heroic vision of politics as resistance or the dreamy vision of spaces of affirmative action opened up by those who turn their backs on politics and its power games. The concept of power allows one to retort with an “everything is policing” to an “everything is political,” but this is pretty poor as a logical conclusion. If everything is political, then nothing is. So while it is important to show, as Michel Foucault has done magnificently, that the police order extends well beyond its specialized institutions and techniques, it is equally important to say that nothing is political in itself merely because power relationships are at work in it. For a thing to be political, it must give rise to a meeting of police logic and egalitarian logic that is never set up in advance.

So nothing is political in itself. But anything may become political if it gives rise to a meeting of these two logics. The same thing—an election, a strike, a demonstration—can give rise to politics or not give rise to politics. A strike is not political when it calls for reforms rather than a better deal or when it attacks the relationships of authority rather than the inadequacy of wages. It is political when it reconfigures the relationships that determine the workplace in its relation to the community. The domestic household has been turned into a political space not through the simple fact that power relationships are at work in it but because it was the subject of argument in a dispute over the capacity of women in the community. The same concept—opinion or law, for example—may define a structure of political action or a structure of the police order. Accordingly the same word “opinion” can define two opposing processes: the reproduction of governmental legitimizations in the form of the “feelings” of the governed or the setting up of a scene of conflict between this play of legitimizations and feelings; choosing from among responses proposed or the invention of a question that no one was asking themselves until then. But it should be added that such terms may also, and mostly do, designate the very entanglement of both logics. Politics acts on the police. It acts in the places and with the words that are common to both, even if it means reshaping those places and changing the status of those words. What is usually posited as the space of politics, meaning the set of state institutions, is precisely not a homogenous place. Its configuration is determined by the state of relations between political logic and police logic. But it is also, of course, the privileged space where their difference is dissimulated within the assumption of a direct link between the arkhē of the community and the distribution of the institutions, the arkhē that effect its basis.

Nothing is political in itself for the political only happens by means of a principle that does not belong to it: equality. The status of this “principle” needs to be specified. Equality is not a given that politics then presses into service, an essence embodied in the law or a goal politics sets itself the task of attaining. It is a mere assumption that needs to be discerned within the practices implementing it. In the Aventine apologia, this assumption of equality is to be discerned even within a discourse proclaiming the fatal fact of inequality. Menenius Agrippa explains to the plebs that they are only the stupid members of a city whose soul is its patricians. But to teach the plebs their place this way he must assume they understand what he is saying. He must presume the equality of speaking beings, which contradicts the police distribution of bodies who are put in their place and assigned their role.

Let’s grant one thing at the outset to those jaded spirits for whom equality rhymes with utopia while inequality evokes the healthy robust-
ness of "the way it is": such an assumption is just as hollow as they reckon it is. In itself it has no particular effect, no political consistency. It may even be doubtful whether it could ever have such an effect or consistency. Moreover, those who have taken such doubt to its extreme are the greatest champions of equality. For politics to occur, there must be a meeting point between police logic and egalitarian logic. The consistency of this empty equality can itself only be an empty property, as is the freedom of the Athenians. The possibility or impossibility of politics is played out here, and this is where jaded spirits lose their bearings: for them, the empty notions of equality and liberty prevent politics. Now, the problem is strictly the reverse: for there to be politics, the apolitical structural vacuum of equality between anyone and everyone must produce the structural vacuum of a political property like the freedom of the demos of Athens.

This is a supposition that can be rejected. I have elsewhere analyzed the pure form of such a rejection in Joseph Jacotot, the theorist of the equality of intelligence and of intellectual emancipation. Jacotot radically opposes the logic of the egalitarian assumption to the logic of the aggregation of social bodies. For Jacotot, it is always possible to make a show of this equality without which no inequality is thinkable, but on the strict condition that such an act is always a one-off performance, that it is every time the reproduction of the pure trace of its confirmation. This always one-off act of equality cannot consist in any form of social bond whatsoever. Equality turns into the opposite the moment it aspires to a place in the social or state organization. Intellectual emancipation accordingly cannot be institutionalized without becoming instruction of the people, in other words, a way of organizing the eternal minority. The two processes must remain absolutely alien to each other, constituting two radically different communities even if composed of the same individuals, the community of equal minds and that of social bodies lumped together by the fiction of inequality. They can never form a nexus except by transforming equality into the opposite. The equality of intelligence, the absolute condition of all communication and any social order, cannot have an impact in such an order by means of the empty freedom of some collective subject. Every individual in a society can be emancipated. But this emancipation — which is the modern term for the effect of equality — will never produce the vacuum of a freedom belonging to any demos or to any other subject of the kind. In the social order, there can be no vacuum. There is only ever the full, weights and counterweights. Politics is thus the name of nothing. It cannot be anything other than policing, that is, the denial of equality. The paradox of intellectual emancipation allows us to think the essential nexus of logos and wrong, the constitutive function of wrong in transforming egalitarian logic into political logic. Either equality has no effect on the social order or it has an effect in the specific form of wrong. The empty "freedom" that makes the poor of Athens the political subject, demos, is nothing more than the meeting of these two logics. It is nothing more than the wrong that institutes the community as a community based on conflict. Politics is the practice whereby the logic of the characteristic of equality takes the form of the processing of a wrong, in which politics becomes the argument of a basic wrong that ties in with some established dispute in the distribution of jobs, roles, and places. Politics occurs through specific subjects or mechanisms of subjectification. These measure the incommensurables, the logic of the mark of equality or that of the police order. They do this by uniting in the name of whatever social group the pure empty quality of equality between anyone and everyone, and by superimposing over the police order that structures the community another community that only exists through and for the conflict, a community based on the conflict over the very existence of something in common between those who have a part and those who have none.

Politics is a matter of subjects or, rather, modes of subjectification. By subjectification I mean the production through a series of actions of a body and a capacity for enunciation not previously identifiable within a given field of experience, whose identification is thus part of the reconfiguration of the field of experience. Descartes's ego sum, ego existo is the prototype of such indissoluble subjects of a series of operations implying the production of a new field of experience. Any political
subjectification holds to this formula. It is a *nos sumus, nos existimus*, which means the subject it causes to exist has neither more nor less than the consistency of such a set of operations and such a field of experience. Political subjectification produces a multiple that was not given in the police constitution of the community, a multiple whose count poses itself as contradictory in terms of police logic. The commons, the people, are the first of these multiples that split up the community, the first inscription of a subject and a sphere where that subject appears as a backdrop for other modes of subjectification to inscribe other “existing bodies,” other subjects of political conflict. A mode of subjectification does not create subjects ex nihilo; it creates them by transforming identities defined in the natural order of the allocation of functions and places into instances of experience of a dispute. “Workers” or “women” are identities that apparently hold no mystery. Anyone can tell who is meant. But political subjectification forces them out of such obviousness by questioning the relationship between a who and a what in the apparent redundancy of the positing of an existence. In politics “woman” is the subject of experience — the denatured, defeminized subject — that measures the gap between an acknowledged part (that of sexual complementarity) and a having no part. “Worker” or better still “proletarian” is similarly the subject that measures the gap between the part of work as social function and the having no part of those who carry it out within the definition of the common of the community. All political subjectification is the manifestation of a gap of this kind. The familiar police logic that decides that militant proletarians are not workers but déclassés, and that militant feminists are strangers to their sex, is, all in all, justified. Any subjectification is a disidentification, removal from the naturalness of a place, the opening up of a subject space where anyone can be counted since it is the space where those of no account are counted, where a connection is made between having a part and having no part. “Proletarian” political subjectification, as I have tried to show elsewhere, is in no way a form of “culture,” of some collective ethos capable of finding a voice. It presupposes, on the contrary, a multiplicity of fractures separating worker bodies from their ethos and from the voice that is supposed to express the soul of this ethos: a multiplicity of speech events — that is, of one-off experiences of conflict over speech and voice, over the partition of the perceptible. “Speaking out” is not awareness and expression of a self asserting what belongs to it. It is the occupation of space in which the logos defines a nature other than the *phônê*. This occupation presumes that the fates of “workers” are somehow turned around by an experience of the power of *logoi* in which resurrection of ancient political inscriptions can combine with the revealed secret of the Alexandrine. The modern political animal is first a literary animal, caught in the circuit of a literariness that undoes the relationships between the order of words and the order of bodies that determine the place of each. A political subjectification is the product of these multiple fractures lines by which individuals and networks of individuals subjectify the gap between their condition as animals endowed with a voice and the violent encounter with the equality of the logos.²

The difference that political disorder inscribes in the police order can thus, at first glance, be expressed as the difference between subjectification and identification. It inscribes a subject name as being different from any identified part of the community. This point may be illustrated by a historic episode, a speech scene that is one of the first political occurrences of the modern proletarian subject. It concerns an exemplary dialogue occasioned by the trial of the revolutionary Auguste Blanqui in 1832. Asked by the magistrate to give his profession, Blanqui simply replies: “proletarian.” The magistrate immediately objects to this response: “That is not a profession,” thereby setting himself up for coping the accused’s immediate response: “It is the profession of thirty million Frenchmen who live off their labor and who are deprived of political rights.”² The judge then agrees to have the court clerk list proletarian as a new “profession.” Blanqui’s two replies summarize the entire conflict between politics and the police: everything turns on the double acceptance of a single word, *profession*. For the prosecutor, embodying police logic, *profession* means job, trade: the activity that puts a body in its place and function. It is clear that proletarian does not designate any occupation whatever, at most the vaguely defined state of the poverty-
stricken manual laborer, which, in any case, is not appropriate to the accused. But, within revolutionary politics, Blanqui gives the same word a different meaning: a profession is a profession of faith, a declaration of membership of a collective. Only, this collective is of a particular kind. The proletarian class in which Blanqui professes to line himself up is in no way identifiable with a social group. The proletariat are neither manual workers nor the labor classes. They are the class of the uncounted that only exists in the very declaration in which they are counted as those of no account. The name proletarian defines neither a set of properties (manual labor, industrial labor, destitution, etc.) that would be shared equally by a multitude of individuals nor a collective body, embodying a principle, of which those individuals would be members. It is part of a process of subjectification identical to the process of expounding a wrong. “Proletarian” subjectification defines a subject of wrong — by superimposition in relation to the multitude of workers. What is subjectified is neither work nor destitution, but the simple counting of the uncounted, the difference between an egalitarian distribution of social bodies and the equality of speaking beings.

This is also why the wrong exposed by the name proletarian is in no way identical to the historically dated figure of the “universal victim” and its specific pathos. The wrong exposed by the suffering proletariat of the 1830s has the same logical structure as the blaberon implied in the unprincipled freedom of the Athenian demos, which had the audacity to identify itself with the whole of the community. It is just that in the case of Athenian democracy, this logical structure functions in its elementary form in the immediate unity of the demos as both part and whole. The proletarian declaration of membership, on the other hand, makes the gap between two peoples explicit: between the declared political community and the community that defines itself as being excluded from this community. “Demos” is the subject of the identity of the part and the whole. “Proletarian” on the contrary subjectifies the part of those who have no part that makes the whole different from itself. Plato railed against that demos that is the count of the uncountable. Blanqui, in the name of proletarians, inscribes the uncounted in a space where they are countable as uncounted. Politics in general is made up of such miscouns; it is the work of classes that are not classes that, in the particular name of a specific part or of the whole of the community (the poor, the proletariat, the people), inscribe the wrong that separates and reunites two heterogenous logics of the community. The concept of wrong is thus not linked to any theater of “victimization.” It belongs to the original structure of all politics. Wrong is simply the mode of subjectification in which the assertion of equality takes its political shape. Politics occurs by reason of a single universal that takes the specific shape of wrong. Wrong institutes a singular universal, a polemical universal, by tying the presentation of equality, as the part of those who have no part, to the conflict between parts of society.

The founding wrong of politics is thus of a specific kind, and we should distinguish it from the figures with which it is usually assimilated, causing it to disappear in law, religion, or war. It is distinct first from the lawsuit, objectifiable as the relationship between specific parties that can be adjusted through appropriate legal procedures. Quite simply, parties do not exist prior to the declaration of wrong. Before the wrong that its name exposes, the proletariat has no existence as a real part of society. What is more, the wrong it exposes cannot be regulated by way of some accord between the parties. It cannot be regulated since the subjects a political wrong sets in motion are not entities to whom such and such has happened by accident, but subjects whose very existence is the mode of manifestation of the wrong. The persistence of the wrong is infinite because verification of equality is infinite and the resistance of any police order to such verification is a matter of principle. But though the wrong cannot be regulated, this does not mean that it cannot be processed. It is not the same as inexcusable war or irredeemable debt. Political wrong cannot be settled — through the objectivity of the lawsuit as a compromise between the parties. But it can be processed — through the mechanisms of subjectification that give it substance as an alterable relationship between the parties, indeed as a shift in the playing field.

The incommensurables of the equality of speaking beings and the distribution of social bodies are gauged in relation to each other, and
this gauge has an effect on the distribution itself. Between legal settlement and inexorable debt, the political dispute reveals an incompatibility that can nonetheless be processed. To simplify, this processing goes beyond any dialogue concerning respective interests as well as any reciprocity of rights and duties. It passes through the constitution of specific subjects that take the wrong upon themselves, give it shape, invent new forms and names for it, and conduct its processing in a specific montage of proofs: "logical" arguments that are at the same time a way of reshaping the relationship between speech and its account as well as the perceptible configuration that demarcates the domains and powers of the logos and the phonē, the spaces of the visible and the invisible, and articulates these to the allocation of parties and parts. Political subjectification redefines the field of experience that gave to each their identity with their lot. It decomposes and recomposes the relationships between the ways of doing, of being, and of saying that define the perceptible organization of the community, the relationships between the places where one does one thing and those where one does something else, the capacities associated with this particular doing and those required for another. It asks if labor or maternity, for example, is a private or a social matter, if this social function is a public function or not, if this public function implies a political capacity. A political subject is not a group that "becomes aware" of itself, finds its voice, imposes its weight on society. It is an operator that connects and disconnects different areas, regions, identities, functions, and capacities existing in the configuration of a given experience — that is, in the nexus of distributions of the police order and whatever equality is already inscribed there, however fragile and fleeting such inscriptions may be. A workers' strike, for example, in its classic form, may bring together two things that have "nothing to do" with one another: the equality proclaimed by the Declaration of the Rights of Man and some obscure question concerning hours of work or workshop regulation. The political act of going out on strike then consists in building a relationship between these things that have none, in causing the relationship and the nonrelation to be seen together as the object of dispute. This construc-

tion implies a whole series of shifts in the order that defines the "part" of work: it presupposes that a number of relationships between one individual (the employer) and another individual (each of the employees) be posited as a collective relationship, that the private place of work be posited as belonging to the domain of public visibility, that the very status of the relationship between noise (machines, shouting, or suffering) and argumentative speech, configuring the place and part of work as a private relationship, be reconfigured. Political subjectification is an ability to produce these polemical scenes, these paradoxical scenes, that bring out the contradiction between two logics, by positing existences that are at the same time nonexistences — or nonexistences that are at the same time existences. Jeanne Deroin does this in exemplary fashion when, in 1849, she presents herself as a candidate for a legislative election in which she cannot run. In other words, she demonstrates the contradiction within a universal suffrage that excludes her sex from any such universality. She reveals herself and she reveals the subject "women" as necessarily included in the sovereign French people enjoying universal suffrage and the equality of all before the law yet being at the same time radically excluded. This demonstration is not a simple denunciation of an inconsistency or a lie regarding the universal. It is also the staging of the very contradiction between police logic and political logic which is at the heart of the republican definition of community. Jeanne Deroin's demonstration is not political in the sense in which she would say the home and housework are "political." The home and housework are no more political in themselves than the street, the factory, or government. Deroin's demonstration is political because it makes obvious the extraordinary imbroglio marking the republican relationship between the part of women and the very definition of the common of the community. The republic is both a regime founded on a declaration of equality that does not recognize any difference between the sexes and the idea of a complementarity in laws and morals. According to this complementarity, the part of women is that of morals and that education through which the minds and hearts of citizens are formed. Woman is mother and educator, not only of those future citizens who
are her children but also, more important for the poor woman, of her husband. Domestic space is thus at once that private space, separated from the space of citizenship, and a space included in the complementarity of laws and morals that defines the accomplishment of citizenship. The unseemly appearance of a woman on the electoral stage transforms into a mode of exposure of a wrong, in the logical sense, this republican topos of laws and morals that binds police logic up in the definition of politics. By constructing the singular, polemical universality of a demonstration, it brings out the universal of the republic as a particularized universal, distorted in its very definition by the police logic of roles and parts. This means, conversely, that it transforms into arguments for the feminine nos sumus, nos existimus, all these functions, “privileges,” and capacities that police logic, thus politicized, attributes to women who are mothers, educators, carers, and civilizers of the class of lawmaker citizens.

In this way the bringing into relationship of two unconnected things becomes the measure of what is incommensurable between two orders: between the order of the inequalitarian distribution of social bodies in a partition of the perceptible and the order of the equal capacity of speaking beings in general. It is indeed a question of incommensurables. But these incommensurables are well gauged in regard to each other, and this gauge reconfigures the relationships of parts and parties, of objects likely to give rise to dispute, of subjects able to articulate it. It produces both new inscriptions of equality within liberty and a fresh sphere of visibility for further demonstrations. Politics is not made up of power relationships; it is made up of relationships between worlds.

Chapter 3

The Rationality of Disagreement

The incommensurable on which politics is based is not identifiable with any “irrationality.” It is, rather, the very measure of the relationship between a logos and the alogia it defines — alogia in the double sense of the Greek of Plato and of Aristotle, signifying not only the animality of the creature simply doomed to the noise of pleasure and pain, but also the incommensurability that distinguishes the geometric order of good from the simple arithmetic of exchanges and allocations. Politics does indeed have a logic, but this logic is inevitably based on the very duality of the logos as speech and account of speech, and pinned down to the specific role of that logic: to make manifest (deloun) an aisthēsis that, as Ballanche’s apologia has shown, was the space of distribution, of community, and of division. To lose sight of the double specificity of political “dialogue” is to lock oneself into false alternatives requiring a choice between the enlightenment of rational communication and the murkiness of inherent violence or irreducible difference. Political rationality is only thinkable precisely on condition that it be freed from the alternative in which a certain rationalism would like to keep it reined in, either as exchange between partners putting their interests or standards up for discussion, or else the violence of the irrational.
NOTES


2. Wrong


NOTES


3. The Rationality of Disagreement

1. Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 1254 b 5–26, p. 68 (also commented on in chapter 1).
5. “Réponse au manifeste des maîtres tailleurs.”
6. Habermas, *Le Discours philosophique de la modernité*, p. 241 and following. This section is specifically devoted to a critique of Derridean deconstruction.

4. From Archipolitics to Metapolitics