



ELSEVIER

Political Geography 24 (2005) 373–387

Political
Geography

www.elsevier.com/locate/polgeo

Engaging, being, political

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I am grateful to the editors for organizing the ‘Author Meets Critics’ session at the Association of American Geographers 2003 Annual Meeting and then following it up with this forum debating *Being Political*. Linda Peake and Lisa Drummond came up with the idea, organized the session and edited this special forum. I am also grateful to Ed Soja, who participated in the AAG session, as well as to Michael Brown, Ann Godlewska, Lynn Staeheli, Gearóid Ó Tuathail who also participated, and to Stuart Elden, who did not participate in the AAG session but who kindly accepted an invitation to join this forum. Writing for me is a social pursuit and the kind of engagement that both the AAG session and this forum provided are indeed privileges. To respond to their generous yet critical readings of *Being Political* is indeed a challenge, which I hope to measure up to.

I am, of course, gratified at the overall assessment that emerges from their discussions. *Being Political* is, I want to think, an original, challenging and unorthodox book. Writing such a book entails certain responsibilities and liabilities. Such liabilities may also lead to misunderstandings that may arise from not being able to position the book (its arguments as well as its styles) within an accepted and recognizable grid of intelligibility. I understand Godlewska’s honest and frank confession as a declaration to that effect. But is it really a question of not understanding? She provides quite an accurate and impressive outline of its arguments. Rather, is it not a question of what does one do with it? Knowing what to do with a book and its arguments often means being able to locate it somewhere in a recognized grid of intelligibility and *Being Political*, given its acknowledged originality by my critics, lacks such an immediately recognizable grid. While I acknowledge the difficulties to which this gives rise, I also hope that readers can derive a measure of pleasure from it. For, amongst the many

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doi:10.1016/j.polgeo.2004.07.002

reasons for which I wrote this book the most important one was an exercise of critically distancing myself from the stale categories of perception that have come to dominate the social sciences in the last few decades. I cannot elaborate upon this any further here but suffice to say that *Being Political* was written both as a possible historical account of citizenship as well as a possible way of giving an account of an object. This double function has made it a difficult book not only to read but also to write because of this exercise of critical distancing.

Responding to the many issues raised by the critics of *Being Political* is impossible not only for the lack of space this forum offers but also for two other reasons. The first arises from the fundamental structure of any given book. For a book, unlike its unified and singular appearance as a physical object, is a multiplicity. It gives rise to and evokes multiple meanings, images, and disseminates multiple signs and messages. In case this is misunderstood as an argument that a book can be interpreted in as many ways as its readers, what I suggest here is that it is the sheer multiplicity, but not necessarily the equal legitimacy of its interpretations and readings, that mobilizes a book. When that's the case, I think the only response to some issues raised is simply to say: "Sure, that's fine, go ahead and use its arguments along those directions. I am glad that the book was able to push your thoughts in those paths". Second, certainly while some issues addressed in the book need clarification, it is impossible to elaborate upon them substantially but I can perhaps give pointers to provide such clarifications. In this reply, I address issues both common and singular to the critics. The common issues concern the definition of the city, the difference between politics and the political and beings and being, the meaning of genealogy and the difference between transitive and intransitive forms of otherness. But before I get on with these issues, I shall provide a brief overview of the book.

Being Political is part of a larger body of work that suggests a way of investigating citizenship historically as a generalized problem of otherness (Isin, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c). Appropriating various strands of thought that range from legal, social and political thought to psychoanalysis, social psychology and human geography, I have argued that it is possible to rethink occidental citizenship from the perspective of an analysis of the formation of groups as a generalized question of otherness, and of the ways of being political without any appeal to an ontological difference between the occident and the orient. However, such an analysis requires critically transforming some of the fundamental categories of occidental social and political thought. Briefly, this analysis regards the formations of groups as fundamental but dynamic processes through which beings orient toward and take *positions*. Through *orientations*, *strategies* and *technologies* as forms of being political, beings develop *solidaristic*, *agonistic* and *alienating* relationships. I maintain that these *forms* and *modes* constitute ontological ways of being political in the sense that being implicated in them is not *necessarily* intentional but purposive (Isin, 2002c: 13). It is through these forms and modes that beings are constituted as *citizens*, *strangers*, *outsiders* and *aliens* as possible ways of being (positions) rather than as identities or differences. It is therefore impossible to investigate 'citizenship' as that name that citizens — as distinguished from strangers, outsiders and aliens — have given themselves, without investigating the specific figuration of orientations, strategies

and technologies that are available for deployment in producing solidaristic, agonistic and alienating multiplicities. I have outlined these in Table 1 and given a concrete map of it in Table 2 as it was worked out in *Being Political*.

I maintain that each figuration should be understood as not merely temporal but spatio-temporal ways of being political. Each figuration is constituted as a consequence of analysis and does not exist as such but only through that analysis. Each figuration crystallizes itself as that space which is called the city. The city is not just simply a place or space but a figuration. I called this figuration a difference machine. I have argued that the city should not be imagined as merely a material or physical place but as a force field that operates as a difference machine. The city is a difference machine because beings are not formed outside the machine and then encounter each other within the city, but the city assembles (groups), generates, distributes, and differentiates differences, incorporates them within strategies and technologies, and elicits, interpellates, adjures, and incites them. “The city is not a container where differences encounter each other; the city generates differences and assembles identities. The city is a difference machine insofar as it is understood as that space which is constituted by the dialogical encounter of groups formed and generated immanently in the process of taking up positions, orienting themselves for and against each other, inventing and assembling strategies and technologies, mobilizing various forms of capital, and making claims to that space that is objectified as ‘the city’. The city is a crucial condition of citizenship in the sense that being a citizen is inextricably associated with being *of* the city” (Isin, 2002a: 283). Therefore I maintain that “The city is neither a background to these struggles *against which* groups wager, nor is it a foreground *for which* groups struggle for hegemony. Rather, the city is the battleground *through which* groups define their identity, stake their claims, wage their battles, and articulate citizenship rights, obligations, and principles” (Isin, 2002a: 283–284). In the discussion that follows I shall attempt to respond to issues raised about these conceptual matters.

Cities/citizenship

This is amongst the most difficult issues raised: how to define the city? As Brown notes, there is some reluctance on my part to give ironclad definitions to concepts in order to maintain their pliability and flexibility. This is not so much a philosophical standpoint as a practical one and it comes from undertaking historical investigations: concepts are used in pliable and flexible ways in everyday struggles for recognition and we do some symbolic violence by forcing on them an analytical vigour that they lack in everyday usage. This should not be understood as a license to the irresponsible use of concepts but to be cautious and circumscribed in understanding the ways in which concepts mobilize certain forces and coerce others. Both the city and citizenship are battlefields. No ironclad definition given will be of much use. Instead, my aim was to show the ways in which the city has been used to mobilize ideas, ideals, and imaginaries of certain groups who claim their rights to ‘it’. It is never an always already defined entity but it crystallizes during such battles. That is why I used the concept ‘battleground’ to define the city rather than giving it

either a foreground or background status. The city becomes definable only through its problematizations. That is, at any given moment, the object of analysis or the question should never be ‘what is the city?’ But rather, ‘under what conditions is the city being defined?’ What forces and groups are staking their claims through its definition? Similarly, the relationship between the city and its countryside is not an immediately definable issue — and such a relation should not be considered as a relation of two distinctly constituted entities.

Just as I argue about the relationship between citizens and non-citizens (strangers, outsiders, aliens), this relationship is also immanent: the city cannot be defined without invoking and producing that which exists outside it. That outside becomes its defining anchor without which it could not exist as such. Brown asks if the way in which I conceptualize the political can have anything to do with rural citizenship. If the city cannot become an object of a claim (‘the right to the city’) without bringing its outside into existence, I would suggest that my conception of the political as being *of* the city cannot be reduced to being *in* the city. The Greek *chora* and Italian *contado* were, for example, such ‘countryside’ spaces that were immanently defined through the city and were inseparable from it in their relationships whether involving taxes or war. While both are translated into English as ‘countryside’, they were much more integral to the city than what that modern word implies. Moreover, it can be debated whether the modern ‘countryside’ was as separate from the city as it has been assumed in the 20th century. With the development of transportation and telecommunication technologies, it is probably much more appropriate to think of the modern countryside as spaces orbiting about cities rather than of two isolated and distinct spheres or styles of life despite their apparent differences.

Elden notes that I run the risk of reducing the classical conception of polis (defined by the presence of its citizens rather than a place) to the city. He says the polis is definitely not just a place but also an association that includes ‘rural’ areas. What Elden overlooks is that I use the city precisely in that sense. Rather than reducing the polis to the city I elevate the city to a generalized polis. If we are to free ourselves from spatial fetishism and historical reductionism we must rescue the city from its modern and contemporary usage as a place. So when I make what Elden calls an extraordinary claim, “being political means being of the city”, I do not have in mind the modern notion of the city as a container but an ontologically distinct entity that is simultaneously both the concentration and diffusion of acts that are political. I will elaborate more upon this later when I discuss some of Tuathail’s criticisms.

Godlewska worries that I have not defined the city or cities. But what is the city as a difference machine if not a definition? I would even go as far as to say that *Being Political* is about creating a new image of the city. I will return to this image of the city as a difference machine in the context of both Godlewska’s and Staeheli’s critical comments about agency.

Beings/Being

Throughout the book, and as Elden notes in a piece that I called its companion, I deploy a difference between beings and Being. This difference is, to say the least, both

Utopolis	Nobles Courtiers	Rulership	Oligarchization Pragmatic	Corporation Marriage	Conversion	Systemic violence Sumptuary regulation	Spectacles Processions	Elimination	Outcasting Quartering	Incarceration Persecution
	Professions Vagabonds		Professionalization Matrimonialism	Concubinage Abstraction		Criminalization Transplantation Christianization	Perspective Missions Township			Torture
Metropolis	Bourgeois Workers Bureaucrats	Moralism	Disciplinary Professionalization Racialization	Discipline Knowledge Association	Correction	Stigmatization Massification Symbolic violence	Strike Policing Surveying	Classification Dispossession	Exclusion	Deportation Imprisonment Denaturalization
	Sansculottes Flâneurs Intellectuals Immigrants Africans		Unionization Secularization Routinization	Redistribution Moralization Surveillance Nationalization		Licensing				
Cosmopolis	Professionals Entrepreneurs Youth Refugees Flex timers	Activism	Entrepreneurial Professionalization Recognition Mediatization	Expertise Conference Networking	Participation	Pluralization Resistance Individuation Modulation Symbolic violence	Demonstration Protest Technologizing	Pacification Divestment	Isolation Terror	Fear
	Cyborgs Squeegeeers Hooligans		Regulation Globalization							

Source: [Isin \(2002c\)](#): 13.

historically and politically, quite complicated. The obvious source of inspiration here is Heidegger whose insistence on the significance of this distinction continued throughout his life in one form or another. As Elden notes, the difference between ontic and ontological is also based upon this difference that Heidegger maintained. (Briefly, ontic indicates contingent everyday facts and ontological indicates necessary existential conditions.) Again, I do not wish to defend my usage of this difference between Being and beings as a philosophical choice but rather as a genealogical way of bringing a cluster of problems to light and investigating them. As Heidegger insisted, the importance of the difference is that the properties of the latter cannot be reduced to the properties of Being. As Heidegger also insisted, Being should not be interpreted as though it is a 'higher' being but that which presents or reveals itself in and through the acts and properties of beings. In a nutshell, I interpret categories such as citizens, strangers, outsiders, and aliens not as beings with observable acts and qualities but as *positions* toward which beings orient. In other words, I interpret these *positions* as something irreducible to and different from the attributes of singular beings.

The development, articulation and the way in which beings orient themselves toward these positions is the appropriate subject of ontological investigations, as I understand them. This is a different usage than standard philosophical usage but I believe that was precisely Heidegger's point: to rescue ontology from its standard metaphysical usage. Whether he succeeded in the judgment of his philosophical peers is a matter of debate. I am certainly not qualified to render a judgment on that. But I obviously did find his enterprise useful for my purposes and understand positions such as citizens, strangers, outsiders and aliens in the way he thought about the difference between beings and Being as irreducible differences. Moreover, this ontological difference also constitutes the foundation upon which the differences between politics and the political and cities and the city are maintained (Isin, 2002c, 2003b).

Both Godlewska and Staeheli suggest that *Being Political* detaches citizenship and agency from people as embodied subjects. I acknowledge that the ontological difference I have worked with can give rise to such impressions. To develop an account of the acts in which beings are implicated not as intentional but purposive beings has been a controversial issue in the social sciences for at least the last three decades (Butler, 1987; Cruikshank, 1999; Žižek, 1999). Especially coupled with the way I insist on describing the city as a difference machine it can be interpreted that the beings I investigate are somehow caught in the machine as automatons. But the city as a difference machine is not a metaphor. What I wish to convey by insisting on interpreting the city as a difference machine should be distanced from the 19th century idea of the machine as a mechanical and algorithmic entity. Rather, the machine is an assemblage of assemblages (groups) with interlocking components whose principles of operation and interlocking mechanisms are only partially visible to those beings invested in it, and whose principles and mechanisms are an object of intervention by those beings that are implicated in its workings. As such, beings are invested as purposive agents whose acts are irreducible to the accounts they may provide and present as their intentions. Those who are caught in the machine and its

assemblages (groups) are not automatons hopelessly struggling but are active producers of the machine and derive pleasure and suffer pain from doing so as they invest themselves in its operations. As investigators, what we do, or at least what I think we should do, is to document the conditions under which beings invest themselves in the machine and by doing so articulate themselves with *modes*, *forms* and *positions* of being political. I have given expression to the *forms* (orientations, strategies and technologies) and *modes* (solidaristic, agonistic and alienating) through which beings become political in the sense that *positions* them as citizens, strangers, outsiders, and aliens vis-à-vis each other as becoming assemblages (groups) in the city as a difference machine. By so doing I imagined myself to be providing the means by which to get a deeper grasp of the machine. In other words, beings are not only *active* and *purposive* but also *transformative* but only insofar as they get a deeper grasp of the machine in which they are implicated. So while the genealogies I provide might be without ‘people’ as we understand them and the machine without operators, there is a penetrating analysis of the machine in *Being Political* though at a different register (ontological not *merely* ontic) than that which we are most familiar with.

Staheli is concerned that this might lead us to abandon inclusion as an ideal of politics. But I would say that *Being Political* does not urge abandoning the ideal of inclusion: it problematizes it. By providing the kind of account that the city as a difference machine enables, *Being Political* illustrates how relentlessly the idea of inclusion produces exclusion. That it demonstrates this should not be interpreted as an urge to abandon inclusion but perhaps a dire warning to those who are investing in that ideal. The ideals of universal human rights or other rights have proved much more pliable in instituting different forms of inequality, oppression and exploitation and *Being Political* moves with skepticism toward such narratives.

Politics/political

Both Brown and Elden point out the difference I deploy between politics and the political. The difference is not merely a methodological issue but something that sustains itself throughout the book. Elden, however, is not convinced that much of the book indeed sustains the distinction. Rather, he thinks that much of my analysis is about politics. I briefly alluded to the philosophical aspects of this distinction earlier when I discussed the difference between beings and Being (ontic and ontological). I shall focus here on whether the empirical analyses I provide can be simply considered as being about politics. The difference between politics and the political is not a simple issue of definition. It is a way of interpreting the kinds of activities in which beings engage and in which they invest themselves so as to avoid reducing their everyday activities to either intentional or calculative acts while still interpreting them as purposive and oriented acts. I have briefly discussed above how I have developed a way of studying citizenship as a generalized form of otherness. I have especially emphasized *forms* (orientations, strategies and technologies) and

modes (solidaristic, agonistic and alienating) through which beings become political in the sense that *positions* them as citizens, strangers, outsiders, and aliens vis-à-vis each other. I call these *forms, modes* and *positions* together as ways of being political. Undertaking investigations of the *political*, I argued, must mean investigating these *ways* as expressed in everyday activities that are ordinarily called *politics*. In other words, the political is irreducibly different from politics but cannot be investigated and delineated without investigating politics. How to proceed from investigating politics to the political is illustrated in [Table 1](#), which exemplifies how everyday politics can be mapped onto the acts of the political and interpreted as ways of being political. Of course, how I have developed these ways of interpreting the political and the ways in which I have incorporated various strands of thought are highly idiosyncratic, incomplete and fragmented and I do not wish to defend it as a system. I developed this framing in the context of writing genealogies of citizenship to overcome the fundamental difference between occidental and oriental approaches imposed on me as a scholar (Isin, 2002b, 2003a, 2004). The upshot is that the political constitutes relatively enduring and routinized ways of being that can only be investigated through politics but is irreducible to it.

As Brown notes, however, this general definition is given a concrete grounding throughout the book where an act is interpreted as political only when it constitutes the subject as a claimant of justice. As Brown also notes, being a claimant of justice takes many different forms: dissent, affirmation, resistance, withdrawal, etc. These become political when claimants are constituted by what they claim as subjects of justice. Being constituted as a subject of justice means making a claim (solidaristic, agonistic, alienating), articulating it (orientations, strategies and technologies) and making and articulating it from a position (citizens, stranger, outsider, alien). Being political means being constituted as a subject of justice. Becoming political is that moment when a being constitutes itself as a subject of justice. Being political is being of the city as that space through which beings claim and seek justice.

Genealogies/history

There are two questions raised about the ways in which genealogy is deployed as a historical method. The first concerns how the way I claim to write genealogies relates to the way in which it was used first by Nietzsche and appropriated by Heidegger, Deleuze and Foucault. As Elden notes, Nietzsche is critical of those historians whom he calls genealogists precisely because they write history by tracing objects to their original states. By contrast, Nietzsche does not believe that there is such an original state but rather that objects are fluid. Yet, as Elden also notes, Nietzsche leaves open the possibility of a more critical, nuanced and subtle version that may become possible in the future. In other words, Nietzsche leaves open the possibility of a style of historical thought that will be against searching for origins, tracing continuities, glorifying entities, and valorizing itself for having searched, traced and glorified. Obviously, I am indebted to that critical version elaborated

upon in different ways by Heidegger, Deleuze, Derrida and Foucault, who preferred calling that style of historical thought ‘genealogical’. By naming such a style of historical thought ‘genealogical’, the distinction being made is not one of between two fields or disciplines but a style of thought that can be found in many disciplines and fields today in humanities and social sciences. Appending these four names already signals the fact that that style of thought does not have an original state either and that it is itself in flux and contested. Nonetheless, certain principles and sensibilities have emerged that set out genealogical investigations from other styles of historical thought. I cannot judge as to what extent *Being Political* is a contribution to the development of this style of historical thought but it is certainly influenced and inspired by these thinkers. But there have been other lesser-known practitioners of this style of historical thought and Geuss (2001) has done an excellent job of articulating some of its principles judiciously.

The second concerns whether secondary literature can be mobilized for genealogical investigations when these were intended for ‘other’ uses. Both Godlewska and Elden point out the difficulties of incorporating secondary literature into genealogical investigations. While I admit the difficulties of such appropriation, there are three mitigating factors that are worth mentioning. First, I do not necessarily think that genealogical investigations are as different in their principles and sensibilities from many modern social and cultural historical writings. While many social and cultural historians may not explicitly endorse or even be aware of genealogical principles and sensibilities, it does not mean that they do not practice at least some of them themselves. As such, it is easy to incorporate their findings and narratives into different types of investigations and this happens regularly in these fields. Second, while I deploy secondary literatures in the service of my investigations, I do so by also problematizing them. So what is happening is more than the mere appropriation and borrowing of facts and stories. Whether I am working my way through the debate over the hoplite armies in Archaic Greece or the role of sansculottes during the French Revolution, there is a critical engagement with and a more than subtle displacement of the literature that I discuss. As regards the hoplites, for example, I do note that too much emphasis has been placed on the means of warfare and too little on practices of virtue. Similarly, as regards the sansculottes, I think that social historians have either too easily dismissed them for their idiosyncratic ways of being political or praised them too much. I never imagined myself as making contributions to these specialized literatures but I certainly considered myself more than an appropriator and hoped that at least some specialist historians will find my interventions of use. Third, throughout the book, I work my way through the foundations of Western social and political thought and include more than a passing discussion of not only its prominent figures such as Aristotle, Plato, Thucydides, Herodotus, Cicero, Dante but also many other poets and philosophers. Moreover, I also discuss laws and policies that are based upon my own original work published elsewhere and undertaken for the book. As a result, I do not consider *Being Political* as the mere appropriation of secondary literature for other ends. Otherwise, its originality, which has been acknowledged by all my critics, would not have been as striking.

Spaces/times

Brown suggests that the structure of the book is chronological rather than chorological. As a result, it privileges time rather than space and ends up working against its own argument that space is a condition of the political. I admit that the structure of the book can be interpreted that way but offer two arguments against doing so.

First, I think the archeological metaphor I provide at the end of the first chapter should be taken seriously. There I call my analyses of polis, civitas, Christianopolis, eutopolis, metropolis, and cosmopolis as group configurations. I warn that these are “neither sequential nor ideal, nor unified types, displacing or replacing each other in the order of time”. Rather, I suggest that these should be likened to the way archeologists classify different moments of a city by designations such as Troy I, Troy IV etc., which stand for how that moment (both as space and time) was like a sediment. If anything, I can be accused of privileging space rather than time in this usage. At any rate, the moments I investigated are meant as illustrations and not as comprehensive histories and accounts. They are fragmented and incomplete and they bleed into each other rather than being isolated moments of the city. In that sense, I have provided an ontology of the city as such rather than of any given city. As I demonstrate, the city manifests itself in these fragments that I have obviously seen as significant. That the order of chapters appears chronological is partly a reflection of the way we collectively understand history and the way we have interpreted that history. I could have organized the book as ‘plateaus’ but it would have distracted from the fact that I am also investigating configurations that are more complex than being either times or spaces.

Second, I do not think that in our collective imagination we recognize that ‘occidental’, polis, civitas, or Christianopolis are simply different times. They are also profound spaces that still exist and at times still live. That is why I have emphasized throughout the book that as much as I am investigating these moments, I am really investigating their constitution in our collective imagination and taking issue with it.

Ó Tuathail raises two significant issues: the distinction between immanent and transitive forms of otherness and, related to it, the neglect of being geopolitical. I defined these two forms of otherness to differentiate between those others that beings orient toward as related such as citizens, strangers and outsiders and as fundamentally different such as aliens. I am, of course, both sympathetic and grateful to the close reading he provided and his proposal to extend the analysis in *Being Political*. The use he makes of the theoretical framework I developed is undoubtedly innovative and I would like to think together with him. However, I would like Ó Tuathail to reconsider whether he thinks it is a slippage in my distinction between immanent and transitive forms of otherness that leads me to neglect being geopolitical or is it really a slippage or a difference in perspective from which we interpret space?

Ó Tuathail argues that because I focus on immanent rather than transitive forms of otherness, I neglect the importance of the effect of constituting distant others as objects of political action and thus this leads me to entirely neglect ways of being

geopolitical. He observes that this focus is also against not only the grain of the quote from Cavafy but also my own analyses throughout the book. But Cavafy's poetry captures the tension-filled relationship between the two forms of otherness rather brilliantly. It evokes how the transitive and the immanent others produce each other. I recently learned that this poem was one of Edward Said's favourites (Al-Barghouti, 2003). The mention of Said here is not accidental or frivolous but it helps me emphasize that perhaps the most significant aspect of *Being Political* is that it wants to overcome orientalism in theorizing citizenship. What is orientalism, if not a geopolitical construct? I acknowledge that I may not have expressed this as strongly and clearly as I perhaps should have in *Being Political* but it was orientalism as a perspective that drew a sharp ontological difference between the occident and the orient as its intransitive other. That I made a distinction between immanent and transitive forms of otherness points to the fact that rather than seeing this relationship as an expression of the logic of exclusion, I did indeed attempt to develop an analysis of occidental citizenship as being related to the orient rather than passing over or affecting the occident, and being marked by an absence. The questions became then, what if we abandon this absence–presence relationship between the orient and the occident, and develop an immanent analysis not understood as a non-relation but as a relation that is not marked by inferiority or superiority? In a sense, rather than neglecting the geopolitical, *Being Political* moves through a fundamental geopolitical problematic.

That this is not recognized as such and readily may have to do with our modern categories of perception as to what counts as geopolitical, which are, put bluntly, statist. That which is called geopolitical inevitably evokes a relationship constituted amongst and between states as always already constituted polities. Being geopolitical therefore means being *of* the state, or rather, being *of* a system of contiguous states. For Ó Tuathail “Territorial state sovereignty and not the city is the difference machine, the spatiality of ‘being geopolitical’”. I disagree with Ó Tuathail that something that might be called “territorial state sovereignty” is the difference machine. I would suggest that the territoriality of the state and its sovereignty are enacted through the city and that no state can come into being without articulating itself through the city via various symbolic and material practices. The state is performed and invented through the city, again not understood as an isolated entity but as a machine that concentrates and diffuses relations. In fact, all other entities that have been hypostatized, fetishized and ontologized such as states, empires, republics, and leagues are not real entities as such but are performances that are enacted through the city. (That is why maintaining their boundaries requires various strategies and technologies ranging from nationalism to armies. If these boundaries had a natural solidity, which is the way modern thought understands them, then there would not have been any need for all these regularized routines and practices to enact them.) But modern thought has created highly hypostatized and fetishized ways of understanding these performances as entities so much so that arguing, as I would, that they have never existed *as such* might be considered scandalous. Yet, to argue that they don't exist *as such* does not mean that they don't exist at all but highlights the fact that such entities are held and strung together, assembled,

administered, managed, produced, idealized, imagined, legitimated, and defended through those activities and practices that can only be organized through cities. We find in world history plenty of examples of cities existing without empires, leagues, states, republics and other such entities but, to my knowledge, there is no polity in world history without cities organizing, arranging, assembling and holding it together, and always tenuously and precariously.

In fact, notwithstanding this disagreement, I think all the examples Ó Tuathail gives illustrate that the transitive forms of otherness are organized through the city and not through an ostensible entity such as the state or empire. (For states and empires are effects of the city, which is as an assemblage, a concentration and diffusion of intensities, it makes them and the political possible. That is why being political is being *of* the city.)

Moreover, his conclusion that “the process is not necessarily urban at all but is formulated and modified in encounters between the spaces produced by sovereign power structures” is indeed the polarizing distinction he asks me to avoid. To juxtapose something called “urban” against “territorial” is itself too polarizing and hypostatizing. What he calls territorial spaces such as places, capitols, headquarters, academies, universities, roads, borders are exactly the kind of arrangements that I talk about as being *of* the city. These arrangements are enacted, imagined, activated, articulated, administered, managed, defined, and organized *through* the city. The city is not a container. It is a difference machine that intensifies and diffuses relations across distances. A territorial border that will be recognized as a state border can never come into existence without *there being a city*, or a web of cities, that organizes, assembles and produces it. It just simply cannot be there. Ó Tuathail suggests that “the transitive other is now immanent, the alien is already here”. I suggest that ‘there’ *has always* been defined through ‘here’ and that aliens have always been here, not just now.

It is because Ó Tuathail juxtaposes the city against the state that he thinks I confine the political only to those encounters *in* the city. I have attempted to reiterate above that what I aimed to capture by the concept the ‘city as a difference machine’ is that the city is neither a container nor a contained space but a field of force that simultaneously concentrates and diffuses relationships. These relations themselves can be over very long distances and the city as a difference machine concentrates and intensifies them. The formation of immanent groups also can occur across long or short distances and concentrate and intensify their relations through the city. The image of the city implied by the phrase ‘groups encounter each other in the city’ should not be interpreted as though the city is an isolated and discrete spatial entity but as a difference machine. So then there is altogether a different image of the geopolitical at work in *Being Political* that is not immediately and readily recognizable.

Admittedly, my responses to all these criticisms are inadequate. As much as these inadequacies arise from lack of space, they also reflect my limits of expression. It would certainly be different if I were a poet. In fact, this is the central theme of *Being Political* that my critics regrettably did not comment upon. As I worked on these genealogical investigations, I have come to realize that throughout centuries and

across cultures poetic expressions were much more able to penetrate the essence of the political than other forms of expression. There is something about poetic articulation that captures the essence of the political while other forms of expression get tangled up with politics. I feel we have only glimpsed the deep affinities between poetics, polis and the political.

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