

The Cosmopolitical Proposal

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How can we present a proposal intended not to say what is, or what ought to be, but to provoke thought, a proposal that requires no other verification than the way in which it is able to "slow down" reasoning and create an opportunity to arouse a slightly different awareness of the problems and situations mobilizing us? How can this proposal be distinguished from issues of authority and generality currently articulated to the notion of "theory"? This question is particularly important since the "cosmopolitical" proposal, as I intend to characterize it, is not designed primarily for "generalists"; it has meaning only in concrete situations where practitioners operate. It furthermore requires practitioners who (and this is a political problem, not a cosmopolitical one) have learned to shrug their shoulders at the claims of generalizing theoreticians that define them as subordinates charged with the task of "applying" a theory or that capture their practice as an illustration of a theory.

This difficulty introduces one of the themes of this article: the distinction and inseparable nature of political and cosmopolitical proposals. I try to show that when proposals corresponding to what can be called "political ecology" (the politicization of "positive" knowledge-related issues or practices concerning "things") become relevant, the cosmopolitical proposal can become so as well. In other words, this proposal has strictly no meaning in most concrete situations today, but it can be useful to those who have already effected the "political shift" associated with political ecology and thus learned to laugh not at theories but at the authority associated with them. Another theme in this article, related to the first, is the question of the vulnerability of this type of proposal, exposed to all possible misinterpretations and above all to their very predictable theoretical harnessing.

I'm very likely to be told that, in that case, I shouldn't have taken a Kantian term. Was it not Kant who renewed the ancient theme of cosmopolitanism aimed at a project of a political kind, in this case that of a "perpetual peace" in which everyone might envisage themselves as members in their own right of the worldwide civil society, in accordance with citizens' rights? In this respect I have to plead guilty. I was unaware of Kantian usage while working on the first volume of what was to become a series of seven *Cosmopolitiques*¹ in 1996; this term imposed itself on me, so to speak. I therefore wish to emphasize that the cosmopolitical proposal, as presented here, explicitly denies any relationship with Kant or with the ancient cosmopolitanism. The cosmos, as I hope to explain it, bears little relation either to the world in which citizens of antiquity asserted themselves everywhere on their home ground or to an Earth finally united, in which everyone is a citizen. On the other hand, the cosmopolitical proposal may well have affinities with a conceptual character that philosopher Gilles Deleuze allowed to exist with a force that struck me: the idiot.

In the ancient Greek sense, an idiot was someone who did not speak the Greek language and was therefore cut off from the civilized community. The same meaning is found in the word "idiom," a semi-private language that excludes from a form of communication characterized by an ideal of transparency and anonymity (interchangeability of the speakers). But Deleuze's idiot, borrowed from Dostoevsky and turned into a conceptual character, is the one who always slows the others down, who resists the consensual way in which the situation is presented and in which emergencies mobilize thought or action. This is not because the presentation would be false or because emergencies are believed to be lies, but because "there is something more important".

1. The seven volumes were published by La Découverte/Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, Paris, 1996-1997, and republished in two volumes by La Découverte, 2003.

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Don't ask him why; the idiot will neither reply nor discuss the issue. The idiot is a presence or, as Whitehead would have put it, produces an interest. There is no point in asking him, "What is more important?" for *he does not know*. But his role is not to produce abysmal perplexity, not to create the famous Hegelian night, when every cow is black. We know, knowledge there is, but the idiot demands that we slow down, that we don't consider ourselves authorized to believe we possess the meaning of what we know.

The word cosmopolitical came to me in a moment when, gripped by worry, I needed to slow down. I was facing the possibility that, in all good faith, I was in danger of reproducing that which I'd learned was one of the weaknesses of the tradition to which I belong: transforming a type of practice of which we are particularly proud into a universal neutral key, valid for all. I had already devoted many pages to "putting science into politics". The so-called modern sciences appeared to be a way of answering the political question par excellence: Who can talk of what, be the spokesperson of what, represent what? But there was a risk of my forgetting that the political category with which I was working was part of our tradition and drew on the inventive resources peculiar to that tradition.

One could say that it would have been tempting to look for a "really neutral" anthropological category. Unfortunately, anthropology is also us, as well as the ambition of defining-discovering "what is human in humans". I therefore chose to retain the term "political," which affirms that the cosmopolitical proposal is a "signed" proposal, and to articulate it to the enigmatic term "cosmos". This is where the proposal is open to misunderstanding, liable to the Kantian temptation of inferring that politics should aim at allowing a "cosmos," a "good common world" to exist – while the idea is precisely to slow down the construction of this common world, to create a space for hesitation regarding what it means to say "good". When it is a matter of the world, of the issues, threats and problems whose repercussions appear to be global, it is "our" knowledge, the facts produced by "our" technical equipment but also the judgments associated with "our" practices that are primarily in charge. Good will and

"respect for others" are not enough to remove this difference, and denying it in the name of an "equal before the law" of all people of the earth will not prevent subsequent condemnation of the fanatic blindness or selfishness of those who refuse to acknowledge that they cannot escape "planetary issues". The cosmopolitical proposal is incapable of giving a "good" definition of the procedures that allow us to achieve the "good" definition of a "good" common world. It is "idiotic" in so far as it is intended for those who think in this climate of emergency, without denying it in any way but nonetheless murmuring that there is perhaps something more important.

The cosmos must therefore be distinguished here from any particular cosmos, or world, as a particular tradition may conceive of it. It does not refer to a project designed to encompass them all, for it is always a bad idea to designate something to encompass those that refuse to be encompassed by something else. In the term cosmopolitical, cosmos refers to the unknown constituted by these multiple, divergent worlds and to the articulations of which they could eventually be capable. This is opposed to the temptation of a peace intended to be final, ecumenical: a transcendent peace with the power to ask anything that diverges to recognize itself as a purely individual expression of what constitutes the point of convergence of all. There is no representative of the cosmos as such; it demands nothing, allows no "and so...". And its question is therefore intended primarily for those who are masters of the "and so...", we who with our heavy doses of "and so..." may well, in all good will, identify ourselves with the representatives of problems that concern everyone, whether we like it or not.

We could say that the cosmos is an operator of *mise en égalité*, equalization, provided that we strictly separate *mise en égalité* and *mise en équivalence*, for equivalence implies a common measure and thus an interchangeability of positions. The equality in question here produces no "and so..."; on the contrary, it causes it to be suspended. Here operating means creating, infusing the political

See Isabelle Stengers, *Penser avec Whitehead*, Le Seuil, Paris, 2002.

See Isabelle Stengers, *L'invention des sciences modernes*, La Découverte, Paris, 1993, new edition Champs, Flammarion, Paris, 1995. (*The Invention of Modern Science*, trans. Daniel W. Smith, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2000.) Needless to say, this proposal was constructed in close dialogue with Bruno Latour's work.

voices with a concern that is not a reflexive or a self-indicting one but a positive one, to be added to and not to undermine the way they discuss a situation. It is a matter of imbuing political voices with the feeling that they do not master the situation they discuss, that the political arena is peopled with shadows of that which does not have a political voice, cannot have or does not want to have one. This is a feeling that political good will can so easily obliterate when no answer is given to the demand: "Express yourself, express your objections, your proposals, your contribution to the common world that we're building."

The cosmopolitical proposal therefore has nothing to do with a program and far more to do with a passing fright that scares self-assurance, however justified. It is this fright that one can hear in Cromwell's cry: "My Brethren, by the bowels of Christ I beseech you, bethink that you may be mistaken!" Citing Cromwell, that brutal politician, torturer of Ireland, addressing his Puritan brothers filled with a self-assured and vengeful truth, is a way of emphasizing that the passing of this kind of fright is not deserved, reflects no particular largeness of soul, but happens. And it happens in the mode of indeterminacy, that is, of the event from which nothing follows, no "and so..." but that confronts everyone with the question of how they will inherit from it. To be sure, Cromwell was talking to his brothers as Christians, and his address, if successful, was to cause the presence of Christ to exist among them. But here Christ has no particular message; his role is that of a presence without interaction, causing no transaction, no negotiation on the way in which that presence is to be taken into account.

To attach the cosmopolitan proposal to the event of this fright, "What are we busy doing?" making an interstice in the soil of the good reasons we have to do so, does not mean that fright is sufficient. Interstices close rapidly. Worse still, silencing the fright often results in confirming our many reasons with an additional baseness that does away with the hesitation. This is the point of the famous short story by Herman Melville, as told by a lawyer confronted with his scrivener Bartleby's "I would prefer not to". The character Bartleby is a testing abstraction, a frightening enigma imposed on his employer: We will never understand the

meaning of an indifference that eventually leads him to death (thrown into jail for vagrancy, he prefers not to eat). On the other hand, we can well understand the lawyer's reaction to this enigma. He struggles with it, is confused, profoundly disturbed, unable not to feel guilty; he is prepared to do anything to have Bartleby accept some return to normalcy, but he cannot defy the rules of the social game that Bartleby disrupts. He can imagine no solution other than Bartleby's return to the common world. When clients are offended by the refusal of this idle scribe who prefers not to do what they request, he does not consider sharing his "idiocy" with them, and this is probably what condemns him to baseness: He moves away from his office (which Bartleby prefers not to leave) in order to wash his hands of the fate of this irresponsible man, knowing that others will solve the matter for him.

One has to be wary of individual good will. Adding a cosmopolitical dimension to the problems that we consider from a political angle does not lead to answers everyone should finally accept. It raises the question of the way in which the cry of fright or the murmur of the idiot can be heard "collectively," in the assemblage created around a political issue. Neither the idiot, nor the suddenly frightened Cromwell, nor the lawyer obsessed by Bartleby knows how to proceed, how to give a place to the insistent question entrancing them. Giving this insistence a name, *cosmos*, inventing the way in which "politics," our signature, could proceed, construct its legitimate reasons "in the presence of" that which remains deaf to this legitimacy: That is the cosmopolitical proposal.

I would like to cite a concrete example that may signify this "in the presence of". It concerns the now-politicized issue of animal experimentation. Apart from the multiple cases about which we could say that "there is abuse," futile or blind cruelty or systematic reduction of farm animals to the status of meat on legs, what interests me are the "difficult" cases where the refusal of experimentation and a legitimate cause – the struggle against an epidemic, for instance – are "balanced against each other". Some have tried to create value scales for "measuring" both human interests and the suffering inflicted on each type of animal

(the suffering of a chimpanzee "counts" more than that of a mouse). But this utilitarian *mise en équivalence* leads to all sorts of baseness, for it encourages everyone to manipulate the scales in the interest that each feels to be most legitimate, leaving the consequences to some sort of collective market decision. Others, and this is what interested me, have chosen to try and trust an affordance specific to the situation. We know that in laboratories in which experiments are performed on animals, all sorts of rites and ways of talking and referring to those animals exist, attesting to the researchers' need to protect themselves. The grand tales about the advancement of knowledge, rationality defined against sentimentality and the necessities of method are part of such rites, filling up the interstices through which the "What am I busy doing?" insistently nags.¹ The correlate of the necessity of "deciding" on the legitimacy of an experiment would then be the invention of constraints directed against these protective maneuvers, forcing the researchers concerned to expose themselves, to decide "in the presence of" those that may turn out to be the victims of their decision. The proposal thus corresponds to a form of self-regulation but has the advantage of presenting the "self" as an issue, of giving its full significance to the unknown element of the question: What would the researcher decide "on his/her own" if that "his/herself" were actively shed of the kinds of protection current decisions seem to need?

This type of question corresponds to a perspective that I call "etho-ecological," affirming the inseparability of *ethos*, the way of behaving peculiar to a being, and *oikos*, the habitat of that being and the way in which that habitat satisfies or opposes the demands associated with the *ethos* or affords opportunities for an original *ethos* to risk itself. Inseparability does not necessarily mean dependence. An *ethos* is not contingent on its environment, its *oikos*; it will always belong to the being that proves capable of it. It cannot be transformed in any predictable way by transforming the environment. But no *ethos*, in itself, contains its own meaning or masters its own reasons. We never know what a being is capable of or can become capable of. We could say that the environment proposes but that the being disposes, gives

or refuses to give that proposal an ethological signification. We don't know what a researcher who today affirms the legitimacy or even the necessity of experiments on animals is capable of becoming in an *oikos* that demands that he or she think "in the presence of" the victims of his or her decision. Of importance is the fact that an eventual becoming will be the researcher's own becoming; it is in that respect that it will be an event and that what I call *cosmos* can be named. Locally, if the ecological demand results in an ethological transformation, an articulation will have been created between what seemed to be contradictory: the necessities of research and their consequences for its victims. A "cosmic" event.

This example may indicate why I emphasize that the idiot does not deny articulated knowledge, does not denounce it as lies, is not the hidden source of knowledge that transcends them. The constraints proposed are idiotic in the following sense: They refer to no arbitrator capable of judging the validity of the urgencies that the experimenters claim to exist. Rather they take seriously on a hypothetical basis (it could fail), the fact that these experimenters' *ethos*, defined as a problem by the opponents of animal experiments, seems to need an "aseptic" environment. They refuse them the right to such an environment: We may agree with your arguments, but we have to make sure that you are fully exposed to their consequences.

It would be interesting to extend this example to other cases in which anesthetics seem to be part and parcel of a situation. For instance, we are fed on discourse that requires us to agree that the closure of production plants and the retrenchment of thousands of workers are harsh but inevitable consequences of the economic war. If our industries cannot make "the sacrifices" that competitiveness

¹ In *De l'angoisse à la méthode dans les sciences du comportement*, Flammarion, Paris, 1980, Georges Devereux links the importance of method in the "behavioral sciences" – the sciences that address subjects, that is, beings that themselves address a world – to the necessity to protect themselves from an anxiety unknown to the physicist or chemist ("What am I busy doing 'to him/her'?). That is why, in these sciences, method always amounts to belittling the subject observed, in one way or another (p. 80), and to "making moronic" the researcher who is presented as subjected to the method, deriving glory from the economies of thinking and sensitivity that it demands.

² On this subject see the wonderful book by Vinciane Despret, *Quand le loup habitera avec l'agneau*, Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, Paris, 2002.

demands, we are told, they will be defeated and we will all lose out. So be it, but in that case the jobless ought to be considered and collectively honored as war victims, those whose sacrifice enables us to survive: Ceremonies are their due, medals, annual processions, commemorative plaques, all the manifestations of national recognition of a debt that no financial advantage can ever offset. But imagine the repercussions if all the suffering and mutilations imposed by the economic war were thus "celebrated," commemorated, actively protected from falling into oblivion and indifference, and not anesthetized by the themes of necessary flexibility and the ardent mobilization of all for a "society of knowledge" in which everyone has to accept the rapid obsolescence of what they know and to take responsibility for their constant self-recycling. The fact that we are caught in a war with no conceivable prospect of peace might become intolerable. It is an "idiotic" proposal since it does not concern a program for another world, a confrontation between reasons, but a diagnosis of our "etho-ecological" stable acceptance of economic war as framing our common fate.

I would now like to deploy the cosmopolitical proposal in relation to the political ecology theme. Political ecology, per se, already constitutes an eco-ethological gamble. It implies, for instance, a transformation of the state's role, which means disentangling the public servant's ethos from any already formulated definition of the general interest and associating it with the active refusal of anything transcending the issue in its concrete environment. To serve the public then means to promote an *oikos* that spurns any generality seen to be evading or predetermining the issue. And this demands no blind confidence (as if we lived in a world in which proclaimed good intentions could be considered reliable) but the building up of an active memory of the way solutions that we might have considered promising turn out to be failures, deformations or perversions.

In order to participate in such political ecology assemblages, the concerned researchers' ethos would also have to be transformed: They would be required to construct and present what they know in a mode that makes them "politically active," engaged in the experimentation of the dif-

ference that what they know can make in the formulation of the issue and its envisaged solutions. Memory or experience can never be built up if the concern for relevance does not predominate. This does not mean rejecting the methodological neutrality of science. There would never have been experimental science if laboratory researchers had not been passionately interested in what works, what makes a relevant difference, and had been dealing with observations that were methodologically impeccable but unlikely to be of any consequence.

But the etho-ecological gamble associated with political ecology also implies the possibility of the emergence of an agreement that does not need an external arbitrator responsible for ensuring that the general interest prevails. This gamble therefore implies the possibility of a process in which the problematical situations that draw together the "experts," those with the means to object and to propose, have the power to induce such an event. That is why, from the outset, I posited that nothing that I put forward has the slightest meaning if those I am addressing have not already learned to shrug their shoulders at the power of theories that define them as subordinates. For the power of a theory is to define an issue simply as a case that, as such, is unable to challenge it. That power prevents the representatives of the theory from giving the issue the power to oblige them to think. The etho-ecological gamble therefore implies that the ethos associated with a researcher incapable of giving up the position of spokesperson of a theory or method supposed to make of him or her a scientist, is by no means a serious and insurmountable problem. It is not a matter of "either that or I stop being a scientist," but rather one of the milieu (*oikos*) that favored such a position. Hence, political ecology is situated in the perspective of what could be called a "utopia". But there are all sorts of utopias: Some make it possible to do without this world, in the name of promises that transcend it; others (and this is the case here, I would hope) prompt us to consider this world with other questions, to disregard the watchwords that present it as "approximately normal". In this case the utopia does not allow us to denounce this world in the name of an ideal; it proposes an interpretation that indicates how a transformation could take place

that leaves no one unaffected; in other words, it calls into question all the "one-would-just-need-to" statements that denote the over-simplistic victory of good over evil.

The cosmopolitical proposal takes this type of utopia even further, weighted by the memory that we live with in a dangerous world, where nothing stands to reason, where any proposition may be falsified, where we who "invented politics" also produced the means to reduce it to a largely empty game, leaving outside what was at work, producing, or destroying, our worlds.

One aspect of the cosmopolitical proposal is thus to accentuate our own rather frightening particularity among the people of the world with whom we have to compromise. Understanding this particularity was already Joseph Needham's intention at the time of World War II, when he wondered why, in Europe, technical inventions that China had absorbed could be considered to be at the origin of the great upheaval that is called the "industrial revolution".⁶ Many say that it was physics that made the difference, the great discovery of the fecundity of mathematics for describing the world. Needham did not stop there. As an embryologist he knew just how limited that fecundity was. The work of Galileo or Newton explained nothing; it was the very fact that they were "events," that they were associated with a "new age" that needed to be explained. The explanation that Needham chose is the one that highlights the freedom of European entrepreneurs at the time. They actively constructed increasingly wide networks, regardless of any ontological stability, fearlessly linking human interests with increasingly numerous and disparate non-humans. Galileo was in fact a builder of networks. His knowledge concerned above all the way in which smooth balls roll along a tilted surface; such knowledge, together with his telescopic observations, enabled him to add arguments to support the Copernican astronomical hypothesis. But he put all that in direct relation to the great question of authority, of the rights of enterprising knowledge with regard to faith, to the role of facts as being able to destroy philosophical and theological traditions. Finally, his condemnation put a stop to nothing in a Europe fragmented into rival states, while in the unified Empire of China he

would probably have been prevented from undertaking anything.

The stakeholders, those who have interests in a new enterprise binding them together, should not be limited by anything external. The common world must be free to emerge from the multiplicity of their disparate links, and the only reason for that emergence is the spokes that they constitute in one another's wheels. The connection has often been highlighted between mechanics and this conception of free emergence, without transcendence. Entrepreneurs (and a consumer is also an entrepreneur) "compose," like mechanical forces, by addition, and emergence is nothing other than the consequences of the factual obstacles that they constitute for one another. Each entrepreneur is thus motivated by his or her clearly defined interests. To be sure, they may be open to whatever makes them advance but only in so far as it makes them advance. They are persons of "opportunity," deaf and blind to the question of the world that their efforts contribute towards constructing. It is precisely this disconnection of scales (those of individuals and the one that, together, they cause to emerge) that allows the "market" as an automatic composition to be put into mathematical terms, maximizing a function that economists will choose to compare with the collective good. Any intrusion in the name of another principle of composition but also any understanding, any break from deafness, can then be put into the same bag: They will be condemned not described, for all have the effect of reducing what the free market maximizes, (the power of the mathematical theorem).

This is what Greenpeace clearly understood when it contrasted stakeholders with what it called "shareholders," a somewhat inappropriate term since having market shares means having a clearly-defined interest but nonetheless one that has the merit of being a contrast. The idea is to give a voice to those who wish to take part, to participate, but in the name of that which emerges, the consequences, the repercussions, everything of which the stakeholders' interests make up the economy. In short, it is a matter of contrasting entrepreneurs (defined by their interests, by what concerns them) with those who "stick their noses into what should be nobody's business," what

⁶ Joseph Needham, *Grand Titration: Science and Society in East and West*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1969.

should not interfere in making up the free emergence of the whole.

The question is political, of course, and in this respect the right to undertake remains the first political word. Hence, today there is no place for the question of shareholders – In what kind of world do we want to live? – only for the possibility of a defensive position. In our dangerous world, the first meaning of the cosmopolitical proposal is thus to “complete,” that is, explicitly to complicate the idea of political ecology in such a way that the stakeholders are (possibly) no longer able to assimilate and falsify it, no longer have the means to “recognize” it or to bully it into their frame – either the free composition of interests or the unwelcome intrusion of a transcendence, state, plan, in the name of a knowledge that should belong to no one (the market “knows best”).

I highlighted the mechanical nature of the emergence of interests through composition. I will pursue this track in order to see whether the natural sciences give us other models of emergence without transcendence. The first one we find is of course the biological model: Democratic life could be likened to the harmonious participation of each member in a single body... an old and very appealing idea, which nevertheless needs to be rejected since this body, in the service of which everyone is supposed to find his or her truth and fulfillment, appears as a bad, anti-political mix of naturalism and religion.

There is, by the way, no certainty at all that a living body functions in this harmonic mode.⁷ But, irrespective of controversies among biologists, it is not a political model. What must be understood when a body is concerned is a relative stratification on which its survival depends. In case of illness, it often becomes far more difficult to describe a body because this stratification, the uncoupling of scales that permits us to describe it in terms of functions, disappears. In contrast, one way or another, the scales existing in human societies are correlated: the individual thinks his or her society. Every time that the biological reference prevails, thinking becomes the enemy, the poison for a sane society, for it scrambles the scales.

The ideal of a harmonic composition could be characterized as “the other” of the spirit of enterprise, a dream (that is not how traditional societies

function) that becomes a nightmare when it seeks its own realization since it insists on inverting the poles of the mechanical model in relation to an invariant. What does not vary is the fact that the composition needs no political thinking, doubt or imaginings regarding the consequences. The body “knows best,” it is the cosmos, an accomplished cosmos, not the nagging in the murmurings of the idiot, of the one who doubts. And, predictably, intuition, instinct and immediate senses will be celebrated, as opposed to the artifices of thought.

While the cosmos, meaning a “cosmic order,” can protect us from an “entrepreneurial” version of politics, giving voice only to the clearly-defined interests that have the means to mutually counterbalance one another, we now see that politics can protect us from a misanthropic cosmos, one that directly communicates with an “honest” or “sane” reality, as opposed to artifices, hesitations, divergences, excessiveness, conflicts, all associated with human disorders. The model of biological harmony is far too overwhelming. Thinking about the emergence of a political ecology means withstanding both the mechanical composition of indifferent forces and the harmonic composition of what finds its truth only in playing its part in the making of a body. But there is yet another model of emergence that relates neither to physics (the science of laws that verify the slogan: “Obey nature to be able to control it”) nor to biology (the science of the manners of holding together on which the life or death of the body depends). This model stems from the art of chemists, who understand the multiplicity of what I would call the chemical “actants” that they are dealing with in terms of the means to manipulate and get them to do what they may be able to do.

Talking of the chemist’s art means turning not toward contemporary chemistry, often conceived of as a type of applied physics, but toward the old eighteenth-century chemistry. Using the term actant is a way to take over from Enlightenment thinkers (especially Diderot, or later Goethe) who contrasted it with the mechanical model, refusing its submission to the ideal of a theoretical definition of chemical associations from which the possibilities of reaction were supposed to be inferred. (This “ideal” is far from being attained by contemporary chemistry.)

⁷ Jean-Jacques Kupiec, Pierre Sonigo, *Ni Dieu ni gène*, Le Seuil – Collection Science ouverte, Paris, 2000.

If you read François Jullien's wonderful book, *The Propensity of Things*,³ you'll discover an art of emergency that is fairly close to that of the chemist. Jullien describes the way in which the Chinese honor what we despise: manipulation, the art of the disposition that makes it possible to take advantage of the propensity of things, to fold them in such a way that they spontaneously accomplish what the artist, the man of war or the politician want. All this aside from any opposition between submission and freedom: a thought focused on efficacy.

One may say that it's a strange model for politics, but this feeling of strangeness reflects our idea that "good" politics has to embody a form of universal emancipation: Remove the alienation said to separate humans from their liberty, and you'll get something resembling a democracy. The idea of a political art or "technique" is then anathema, an artifact separating humans from their truth. Referring to the chemist's art is affirming that the political assemblage has nothing spontaneous about it. What we call democracy is either the least bad way of managing the human flock or a gamble focused on the question not of what humans are but what they might be capable of. It's the question that John Dewey put at the center of his life: how to favor democratic habits. How, by which artifacts, which procedures, can we slow down political ecology, bestow efficacy on the murmurings of the idiot, the "there is something more important" that is so easy to forget because it cannot be "taken into account," because the idiot neither objects nor proposes anything that "counts".

We thus come to the junction between the first and the second aspect of the cosmopolitical proposal. In order to protect the emergence of the kind of agreement on which political ecology gambles from its mechanistic reduction or its biological sublimation, we may use the model proposed by the etho-ecological art of the manipulative chemists. Politics is then disentangled from any reference to some universal human truth it would make manifest. In particular, it is not a matter of individual or collective good will, one which could then be required of the idiot or of Bartleby: "If you want to exist for us, come and explain yourself, become a shareholder with us." Politics is

an art, and an art has no ground to demand compliance from what it deals with. It has to create the manners that will enable it to become able to deal with what it has to deal with.

Such manners may be found in other traditions, other arts of emerging agreement. I am thinking mainly of what I learned from the "palaver" system and the way in which it involves what I would call, in short, the world order. Of particular interest is the fact that this ritual assemblage, which seems to assume the existence of a transcendent world order that will provide a fair solution to a problematical issue, confers no authority on that order. If there is palaver, it is because those who gather together, who are recognized as knowing something about that order, do not agree, in this case, on how it applies. If they are gathered together, it is because of an issue in relation to which none of their knowledge is sufficient. The world order is therefore not an argument; it is what confers on the participants a role that "depsychologizes" them, that causes them to appear not as "owners" of their opinions but as authorized to attest to the fact that the world has an order. That is why no one refutes what another one says, nor challenges the person. The palaver proceeds "in presence of" the world order and what emerges is recognized as its unfolding.

From the point of view of the old chemists' art, the fact that the palaver requires the protagonists not to decide but to determine how the world order applies here, gives that order a role comparable to the acid solution (the "menstrue") that dissolves and enables the chemical actants to enter into proximity, or to the fire that activates them. In short, it can be characterized in terms of efficacy: It compels everyone to produce, to "artificialize" themselves, in a mode that gives the issue around which they are all gathered the power to activate thinking, a thinking that belongs to no one, in which no one is right.

As a second example, I would take the art of magic, as practiced not by surviving "genuine" witches, but by contemporary US activists, the "neo-pagan witches". Can we take magic seriously? We certainly carry on talking about magic in various domains. We talk about the black magic of Nazi rituals but also of the magic of a moment, a book, a gaze, everything that enables us to think

³ François Jullien, *The Propensity of Things, Toward a History of Efficacy in China*, Zone Books, Cambridge, MA, 1995.

and to feel differently. While this is a word we use without thinking, for contemporary witches, the facts of calling themselves witches and defining their art with the word magic are already "magical" acts, acts that create an unsettling experience for all those who live in a world in which the page is supposed to have been definitively turned. Witches and witchery have been eradicated, the art of magic has been disqualified, scorned and destroyed at the time when the idea of public rationality, of a man ideally master of his reason has triumphed (a triumph soon attended by the triviality of so-called scientific psychology with its claims to triumphantly identify that to which human reason is submitted). Daring to name magic the art of triggering events where a "becoming able to" is at stake means agreeing to allow a cry to resound within ourselves that is reminiscent of Cromwell's: What have we done, what do we carry on doing when we use words that make us the heirs of those who have eradicated witches?

The magic that US activist witches have cultivated in the political domain is an experimental art whose touchstone is again an emergence, giving a very concrete meaning to Gilles Deleuze's motto that to think is to resist. This art stems from what could be called convocation, as the ritual appeals to a presence. But that which is convoked (what the witches call Goddess) does not say (any more than does Cromwell's Christ) what ought to be done, gives no answer as to the decision to take, offers no "prophetic" revelation. Its efficacy is rather to catalyze a regime of thought and feeling that bestows the power on that around which there is gathering⁹ to become a cause for thinking. The efficacy of the ritual is therefore not the manifestation of a Goddess who might inspire the answer but that of a presence that transforms each protagonist's relations with his or her own knowledge, hopes, fears and memories, and allows the whole to generate what each one would have been unable to produce separately.

Politics "as usual" is besieged by dramatic either/or alternatives that slice up our imaginations. On the one hand are either "naked citizens," each of them armed with his or her own supposedly disinterested good will, and all faced with the question of the general interest, and on the other, the triumph of corporatist interests indifferent to

that general interest. This alternative seems to be unavoidable as long as generality prevails, as long as the general interest is the only thing that can legitimately compel (selfish) interests to bow down. Such an alternative is lethal in the political ecology perspective, when that which brings together is certainly not a generality (What are your "values"?) but an issue that not only does not allow itself to be dissociated in fact-value terms, but also needs to be given the power to activate thinking among those who have relevant knowledge about it.

Political ecology affirms that there is no knowledge that is both relevant and detached. It is not an objective definition of a virus or of a flood that we need, a detached definition everybody should accept, but the active participation of all those whose practice is engaged in multiple modes with the virus or with the river. As for the cosmopolitical perspective, its question is twofold. How to design the political scene in a way that actively protects it from the fiction that "humans of good will decide in the name of the general interest"? How to turn the virus or the river into a cause for thinking? But also how to design it in such a way that collective thinking has to proceed "in the presence of" those who would otherwise be likely to be disqualified as having idiotically nothing to propose, hindering the emergent "common account"?

Designing a scene is an art of staging. It is not naked citizens who are participating, each defending an opinion; it is a matter of distributing roles, of artfully taking a part in the staging of the issue. It is important here to avoid thinking in terms of stereotypical roles, since in political ecological terms they have to be determined around each issue. I suggest first distinguishing the figure of the expert and that of the diplomat. Experts are the ones whose practice is not threatened by the issue under discussion since what they know is accepted as relevant. Their role will require them to present themselves and to present what they know, in a mode that does not foresee the way in which that knowledge will be taken into account. By contrast, diplomats are there to provide a voice for those whose practice, whose mode of existence and whose identity are threatened by a decision. "If you decide that, you'll destroy us." Diplo-

diplomats' role is therefore above all to remove the anesthesia produced by the reference to progress or the general interest, to give a voice to those who define themselves as threatened, in a way likely to cause the experts to have second thoughts and to force them to think about the possibility that their favorite course of action may be an act of war.

It takes two to make peace. For diplomacy to be possible, those represented by the diplomats have to agree on the possibility of peace and thus define themselves as capable of participating in its invention. This is a stringent condition, for it implies a capacity for consultation, when the diplomats come back toward those they represented, an ability to envisage, in relation to the proposal they bring back, the difference between that which can be accepted (that could force certain habits to change but will not destroy whatever "keeps things in place," "attaches" or "obliges") and that which cannot (the diplomats' betrayal). I chose the term consultation because it can apply both in the political domain and in places where "invisibles" need to be convoked and consulted; these invisibles are insensitive to compromises and do not share human reasons but signify that humans are not the holders of what makes their identity. Whether a nation is solemnly consulted in terms that question its identity, or whether an invisible is consulted, in both cases the *oikos* of the consultation suspends the habits that make us believe that we know what we know and who we are, that we hold the meaning of what makes us exist.

Depending on the issue, a concerned party may send diplomats or experts. But what about the "weak" parties, the idiots or the Bartlebys who prefer to be left alone, to avoid participating in a decision even if that decision directly threatens their world? The danger here is the temptation to enforce participation, to demand the untold reasons (there must be some reason) or to try to seduce, as Bartleby's lawyer did. I would suggest calling them "victims," as victims need witnesses. It is the witnesses' role to make them "present," not arguing in their names but conveying what it may feel like to be threatened by an issue that one has nothing to contribute to.

The presence of the victims is obviously no

guarantee of anything, no more than is the diplomatic *mise-en-scène*. The cosmopolitical proposal has nothing to do with the miracle of decisions that "put everyone into agreement". What is important here is the prohibition of forgetting or, worse still, of humiliating, especially that produced by the shameful idea that financial compensation ought to suffice – the obscene attempt to divide the victims, to isolate the rebels by first addressing those who, for reason, will submit more easily. Everything may end with money but not "by" money, for money does not balance the account. Those who meet have to know that nothing can erase the debt binding their decision to its victims.

At the beginning of this chapter I presented the cosmos as an operator of "putting into equality," in opposition to any notion of equivalence. The roles that I have just characterized briefly correspond to that idea of an operation producing protagonists who can in no way be defined as interchangeable, as if a common measure allowed the interests and arguments to be weighed up between them. Equality does not mean that they all have the same say in the matter but that they all have to be present in the mode that makes the decision as difficult as possible, that precludes any shortcut or simplification, any differentiation *a priori* between that which counts and that which does not.

As for the cosmos, as it features in the cosmopolitical proposal, it has no representative, no one talks in its name, and it can therefore be at stake in no particular consultative procedure. Its mode of existence is reflected in all the artificial manners to be created, whose efficacy is to expose those who have to decide, to force them to feel that fright that I associated with Cromwell's cry.

In short, it means opening the possibility of the idiot's murmuring being answered not by the definition of "what is most important" but by the slowing down without which there can be no creation. We must dare to say that the cosmic idiot's murmur is indifferent to the argument of urgency, as to any other. It does not deny it; it has only suspended the "and so..." that we – so full of good will, so enterprising, always ready to talk on everyone's behalf – master.

Translated from the French by Liz Carey-Libbrecht