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### As if we could trust: fiction and aesthetics of the political

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**DOI**

[10.4472/9783037342176.0005](https://doi.org/10.4472/9783037342176.0005)

**Publication date**

2013

**Document Version**

Final published version

**Published in**

Thinking - resisting - reading the political

[Link to publication](#)

**Citation for published version (APA):**

Früchtl, J. (2013). As if we could trust: fiction and aesthetics of the political. In A. Esch-van Kan, S. Packard, & P. Schulte (Eds.), *Thinking - resisting - reading the political* (pp. 53-63). (Thinking resistances; No. 2). Diaphanes. <https://doi.org/10.4472/9783037342176.0005>

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Josef Früchtl

As If We Could Trust  
Fiction and Aesthetics of the Political

Fiction: A Short Story

I would like to begin with a short story. And in doing so, I draw upon an experienced German story-teller and philosopher (who, by the way, is very well known in Giessen). It is a short story, but a fundamental one – as is the tradition with philosophy –, and it goes like this:<sup>1</sup>

For a long time, philosophy needed fiction, roughly speaking, only when figments of the imagination were called for. Sometimes this would be for arbitrarily combined characteristics (such as those which make up the creatures found in fables, like centaurs or unicorns), and sometimes for a self-contradictory non-entity (like a square circle or a wooden iron). For Immanuel Kant, a non-entity (*nihil negativum*, *Unding*) was located right at the bottom of the “scale of nothing,” meaning as it did a term which cancels itself out, a term in opposition not only to reality, but also to possibility. In contrast, a thought-entity (*ens rationis*, *Gedankending*) may also be a “mere invention” or “fiction,” as Kant stated, but at least one which is possible. The opposite concept to fiction was thus initially that of reality. A fiction is not real but possible. As the concept of reality gradually merged with the one of truth (something is true if it really complies in a certain manner), especially under the omnipotent influence of Christianity, the concept of fiction, secondly, assumed a mantle of negativity, of deceit and delusion. According to this view, fictions were deceptive in a formal sense, in that they veiled their status of fabrication. When Christian religion had to relinquish its power over science and philosophy at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, however, one reaction to this development was the crystallisation of an additional, a third interpretation of fiction, believing it to be beyond the alternative between true and false, able to stand up in its own right. Evidence of this interpretation can be found in science and art equally. In the former, fiction achieved validity as a hypothesis, as a statement principally capable of being true, but

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Odo Marquard, “Kunst als Antifiktion – Versuch über den Weg der Wirklichkeit ins Fiktive,” *Aesthetica und Anaesthetica. Philosophische Überlegungen* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1989), p. 82–99; Karlheinz Stierle, “Fiktion,” *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe*, vol. 2, ed. Karlheinz Barck et al. (Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler, 2001), p. 380–428; on Kant, compare Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 348–9.

not (yet) proven true. In the latter, fiction – that world created in literature, drama, paintings and opera – was viewed as facilitating an area of truth, as expansively presenting metaphors and images which were potential candidates for the truth. A fourth interpretation of the concept of fiction which emerged was that of self-reference. Here fiction refers to itself, in other words it does not attempt to conceal the fact that it is imaginary, fabricated, created. In so doing, it can itself stake a certain claim to truth (and not just facilitate a potential truth). This can also be found as a rudimentary concept in the work of Kant, before it was tackled explicitly by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.<sup>2</sup> The following generation, led by Friedrich Nietzsche, was to witness the unfolding of the last chapter in the history of fiction, at least for the time being: its “fundamentalisation.” What for millennia had been known as the truth now became a “lie in an extramoral sense,” a kind of self-delusion without which the human species could not survive. Truth had now become a necessary and fruitful fiction. The explicit link to Kant led on to a *Philosophy of As If*<sup>3</sup>. Hans Vaihinger, its author, emphasised the productive, heuristic function of fiction in the sciences. A final and prominent place within this short story is awarded to Jürgen Habermas’ discourse theory. Its counterfactual assumptions and idealising suppositions were once again to lend a validity to the concept of necessary fiction in terms of truth theory.

So ends the short story. If one asks oneself why the European history of the arts should have led to such a fundamentalisation of the fictitious, then, bearing in mind Hans Blumenberg’s *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age (Die Legitimität der Neuzeit)*, one might venture the following major theory: “The eschatological destruction of the world is the trauma *post Christum natum et mortuum* that the here and now is seeking to counteract by living, and that philosophy is seeking to counteract by thinking.” Ultimately, fiction helps. Fiction

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2 On Hegel, compare G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art, vol I*, trans. T. M. Knox (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 9: The “pure appearance of art has the advantage that it points through and beyond itself,” that it “does not present itself as deceptive.” On Kant, compare Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, § 51: In contrast to the orator, “the poet promises little and announces a mere play with Ideas.”

3 Vaihinger’s *Die Philosophie des Als Ob. System der theoretischen, praktischen und religiösen Fiktionen der Menschheit auf Grund eines idealistischen Positivismus. Mit einem Anhang über Kant und Nietzsche* was written in the years 1876–1878 and published only in 1911. There is a new edition by Esther von Krosigk (Saarbrücken: VDM, 2007).

permits a “counter-eschatological reinstatement” of the world in an *as if* mode.<sup>4</sup>

As implied, this is a very daring theory. There is, after all, a broad philosophical consensus that a major destruction of the world, a destruction of trust in the world, has been with us at least since the subject-based philosophy of Modernity. This loss of trust is the result of a radical epistemological and ontological dualism. If the connection between thought and spatially extended things, between the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa*, can only be guaranteed through the metaphysical-religious authority of God, then without God’s help the subject can be certain of itself, but not of the world.

This is, then, our starting position: an ontological loss of trust, coupled with a fundamental, possibly complementary function of the fictitious in the sense of *as if*. I would now like to relocate the position of Jacques Rancière. This not only immediately lends our theme a political aspect, but also and ultimately leads us to a concept which has stood in relaxed opposition to the familiar habit of suspicion, mistrust and demasking for two hundred years: the concept of trust. Before we go any further, we need to rehabilitate the concept of consensus and communitisation. Kant’s analysis of aesthetic judgement in its *as if* structure provides us with the necessary framework. Accordingly, the political becomes a sphere in which a (utopian-anticipatory) demeanour is feigned. In addition, however, the *as if* structure is characteristic of the further context of the action itself. The *as if* structure, as a description of fiction, is thus in an aesthetic, political and everyday context at the same time a description of trust: it is simultaneously uncertain and fundamental.

### The Consensual and the Dissensual

Just how fundamental the status of fiction for contemporary philosophy actually is, can, as I inferred earlier, be ascertained prominently for the theory of truth linked to the name of Habermas and to the concept of consensus, a concept which – from the standpoint of recent demasking theorists – has become severely discredited. It should be noted that, while Habermas introduces the concept of consensus within the framework of a theory of truth, to a certain extent it is also socially and politically relevant, for to Habermas, as a successor of Kant and Hegel, Modernity appears to be characterised, amongst other things, by

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<sup>4</sup> Marquard, “Kunst als Antifiktion,” p. 87.

the inevitable pressure of the discursive, of justified utterances to the effect of yes or no, in other words: of the exchange of arguments and changing points of view. But such an exchange would make no sense were it not to take place on common ground, on shared convictions, and were it not to lead to a result shared by all participants. In a real case, such a result can of course be dissent. There then exists (at the meta-level) a consensus concerning the fact that (at the factual level) there is no consensus.

In contrast, for more than half a century now the philosophy of dissent has untiringly stressed that at the very root not only of politics, but also of language itself as we use it, a conflict is present which cannot be appropriately resolved. A rule of judgement which could be applied to both sides of the conflict, to two different ways of thinking, is missing. In the style of Kant's analysis of the sublime, Jean-François Lyotard coined the term *différend*. It soon becomes obvious that Lyotard himself requires a contrasting term, or rather a contrasting image, namely that of an archipelago, a cluster of islands, in which each island stands for a heterogeneous method of discourse. They can be connected by a ship-owner or an admiral, in other words the capacity for judgement. This connection should consist in nothing other than a continual repetition of the statement that the methods of discourse are heterogeneous and cannot be connected. And yet, the way to refute this is glaringly obvious: the statement itself presupposes that the person uttering it has always already made the connection. Thus a differend cannot occur until the two conflicting parties, for Kant they are imagination and reason, acknowledge their conflicting claims, in other words comprehend each other. According to Lyotard, "it is patently necessary that the parties 'understand' one another for their differend."<sup>5</sup>

This short reminder seems necessary to me because, like so many other theorists in the French-language field of discourse, Rancière joins in enthusiastically with the philosophy of dissent and difference, immune to the formal and fictitious sense of the concept of consensus. He does point out that the concept of the differend must not be confused with that of "political disagreement" (*mésentente*), and to me that seems justified insofar as Lyotard's focus on language stands in opposition to

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5 Jean-François Lyotard, *Die Analytik des Erhabenen. Kant-Lektionen* (Munich: Fink, 1994), p. 142; see also Jean-François Lyotard, *Le Différend* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1983), p. 9, pp. 189–191; Manfred Frank, *Die Grenzen der Verständigung* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1988), pp. 77–79; Wolfgang Welsch, *Vernunft. Die zeitgenössische Vernunftkritik und das Konzept der transversalen Vernunft* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1995), pp. 328–330.

Rancière's focus on perception theory, aesthetics, history, and sociology. "Disagreement is less concerned with arguing than with what can be argued," it concerns the "tangible presentation" of the object of the dispute.<sup>6</sup> But even for Rancière, "consensus democracy" means that "idyllic" state in which the "dispute" and thus politics has disappeared behind the "regime of opinion" and "right". Rancière also calls this "postdemocracy"<sup>7</sup>. However, it is important to be clear about the fact that an essential part, even half, of this postdemocratic consensus is based on feeling. According to Rancière, consensus democracy is the bringing together of "the *one* of the law and the *one* of feeling," the bringing together of the "power to agree and to enter into contracts" with the "power to consent."<sup>8</sup> It thus at the same time somehow brings together two "great figures" of political philosophy: so-called "archipolitics" for which Plato provided the model (the republic as the community of the *ethos*); and the modern, contractualistic variant of "parapolitics". The bad reputation held by the concept of consensus is thus due not to the semantics of the Habermas-Frankfurt School, which includes it in the concept of discourse, i.e. the argumentative, mutual problematisation of claims to truth, but rather to a combination of the Modern principle of power and contract assigned to Thomas Hobbes and the Ancient principle of *ethos* assigned to Plato. Consensus is bad because it makes the law of cohabitation a matter of contractual exchange as well as a matter of feeling.

### Aesthetic Community and As If

For Rancière, however, the matter is not dismissed this simply. For he refers at a crucial point in his own concept of politics to the idea of an *aesthetic* community. Moreover, he does so within the framework not only of his concept of politics, but also of his concept of aesthetics. In the Modern age, the so-called "aesthetic regime," art for him is a "visualisation which communitises the ideas." He believes that spreading ideas "to the common people" in this way is the "oldest

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6 Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement. Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. xii; see also p. 50.

7 Rancière, *Disagreement*, pp. 95, 101–102. – In contrast, the concept of post-democracy is constructed politologically in Colin Crouch's *Post-Democracy* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2004). He refers to the constellation of civil apathy, PR orchestration, and back room politics.

8 Rancière, *Disagreement*, pp. 120–121; on "archi-" and "para-politics" see also pp. 61–64.

programme of aesthetics,” which is, of course, a reference to the so-called *Oldest Systematic Programme of German Idealism*, in which, in the mid-1790s, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, Friedrich Hölderlin, and Hegel presumably wrote down their Kantian thoughts impetuously and thus in a very non-Kantian manner.<sup>9</sup> Kant also provides some key words for Rancière. Even though, on the one hand, the latter holds fast to the idealistic-romantic project of the aesthetic generalisation of ideas, in other words to the project of the New Mythology, as it is called in the *Systematic Programme*, on the other hand he states that truly “democratic politics” is based on a “practice of the *as if*,” one “that opens up an aesthetic community, in Kantian fashion, a community that demands the consent of the very person who does not acknowledge it.”<sup>10</sup>

Kant actually does analyse the argumentative logics of aesthetic judgement as a logic of the *as if*.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, one “must believe that one has reason to expect a similar delight from everyone.” In other words, one “believes” oneself to have a “universal voice.” An aesthetic judgement is an “imputation” or a “request” (in German: *Ansinnen*) to everybody to “agree” (and maybe the English words “to consent” and “to acclaim” are closer to the German word *zustimmen*, in which you can hear the noun *Stimme*, meaning “voice”). This agreement takes place not on the basis of concepts, but plainly and simply through the agreement itself, through confirmation by others. On the one hand, an aesthetic judgement is accordingly based on hypothetical agreement because, like the political judgement, it is formulated *as if* consensus were (in principle) possible. But, on the other hand, it is also based on actual agreement for, according to Kant’s conviction, there are no concepts, no soundness of reasons which one can resort to,<sup>12</sup> leaving

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9 Jacques Rancière, “Die Geschichtlichkeit des Films,” *Die Gegenwart der Vergangenheit. Dokumentarfilm, Fernsehen und Geschichte*, eds. Eva Hohenberger and Judith Keilbach (Berlin: Vorwerk 8, 2003): p. 230–246, p. 240; on the *Oldest Systematic Programme*, compare Walter Jaeschke, *Hegel-Handbuch. Leben-Werk-Wirkung* (Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler, 2003), pp. 76–80.

10 Rancière, *Disagreement*, p. 90. – One should not forget that Deleuze, as well, speaks of the “emancipation of dissonance, the discordant accord” as “the great discovery” of the *Critique of Judgment*, including the aesthetics of the Beautiful and the Sublime. Compare Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. D. W. Smith and M. A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 35.

11 Compare on the following citations paragraphs 6, 7, 8, as well as 19 & 20 from Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*.

12 Compare Cristina Lafont, “Law, Normativity and Legitimacy: Can Kantian Constructivism be Fruitful for Legal Theory?,” *New Essays on the Normativity of Law*, eds. Stefano Bertea and George Pavlakos (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2011),

only the option of saying that an object is beautiful and awaiting the agreement or disagreement of one's conversational partner. Neither partner can provide sound reasons. If the two fail to agree in their judgements, each must then examine his or her judgement to see whether it might not be based on subjective preferences after all. In this sense, Kant's statement is also interpreted as "soliciting" agreement. This solicitation cannot be verbose, but only deictic, indicative, and inviting, along the lines of: look or listen again! Can't you see, can't you hear what I mean: that the object is beautiful? And Kant ultimately calls the general voice a "common sense" based on "feeling" which is the "effect" of the "free play" of our cognitive and imaginative "power".

On the basis of this play of oppositional powers – and it is impossible to stress too often that they are strictly oppositional, for the one does precisely what the other does not want – it is possible to speak of the aesthetic *as if* it were a conceptually "substantiated fact." In an aesthetic judgement we maintain something which we cannot prove, but do so as if we could prove it. That's the point of an aesthetic judgement. For what we maintain has a felt concomitant claim to general validity "accrued from" the endless interaction between understanding and imagination.

Following Friedrich Schiller's interpretation, Rancière declares this aesthetic act to be the leading example of a political utopia, while to a certain extent remaining loyal to its Kantian origins. In political terms, one demands a right aesthetically by acting as if this right were already a reality, in other words by proclaiming its fictitious status to be that of reality. A prominent example of this are women's rights in the context of the French Revolution. According to Rancière, women could "demonstrate," or prove through public actions, two things: firstly, "that the rights owing to them by virtue of the Declaration of Human Rights were denied them," and, secondly, "that they possessed

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p. 229–245. Hypothetical agreement is central to the Kantianism of Rawls, Habermas, and Scanlon. The connection could be a Kantian statement such as that in "On the common saying: this may be true in theory, but it does not apply in practice." The "original contract" which political philosophy has been drawing upon since Hobbes, is accordingly "a *mere idea* of reason, but one which undoubtedly has a (practical) reality," namely to oblige the legislator to formulate and implement laws in such a way that they "*could have* originated" from the overall will of the people, and to see each citizen "*as if*" he had agreed to that will. Immanuel Kant, *Werkausgabe*, vol. X, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1977), p. 153. In contrast, Lafont argues in favour of separating democratic agreement from hypothetical agreement.



the rights which the Constitution omitted to grant them.”<sup>13</sup> Following on from Rancière, we may observe that, provided it does not merely accept whatever is given at the time, whatever is perceived and said, politics is dependent on the *as if* mode of acting, on feigning something as real which is not (yet) real, on maintaining that something is proven when it is not proven and may even be unprovable. To this extent, politics shares an essential element with aesthetics, namely the aesthetics which were the provenance of Kant. To be sure, politics has one essential element which is far removed from aesthetics: the element of equality. Indeed, according to Rancière, politics “only” exists through the principle of equality.<sup>14</sup> At this juncture one would be justified, as Oliver Marchart does, in criticising the “emancipatory apriorism” which Rancière shares with Alain Badiou. “Politics is a politics of equality, *ergo* emancipatory – or it is not politics.” This is so unconvincing in empirical terms that Rancière can only state it “axiomatically.”<sup>15</sup> Generally speaking, an axiom is a principle which is neither capable of nor requires proof. In this context, however, or so one would like to think, it definitely would require proof. Whether or not it would also be capable of being proven, is another question. And precisely because it is located in the grey area of an assertion which cannot be proven, yet appears as if it could be proven, the principle of equality is, in my eyes, itself a fiction in the sense stated. Only when these two principles come together, the principle of the aesthetically acquired *as if* and that of equality (which in turn is based on an *as if* structure), in other words only when one comprehends it as Kantian fiction, does politics follow the formula, in the normative sense, of acting in a certain practical situation *as if* those who did not count in this situation were already accounted for.

In a certain respect, aesthetic communitisation acquires an anti-romantic accent here. I am convinced that prominent, fairly recent, French-language philosophy pursues the romantic metaphysics of a primacy of the unutterable and the non-identical, and that, in political terms, especially for that tradition which started in the late 1970s with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s and Jean-Luc Nancy’s *L’Absolu littéraire*<sup>16</sup>, one needs to speak not of a “Left Heideggerianism,” but of

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13 Jacques Rancière, “Who Is the Subject of the Rights of Man?,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 103, Nr. 2/3 (2004): p. 297–310, p. 304.

14 Rancière, *Disagreement*, p. 33.

15 Oliver Marchart, *Die politische Differenz. Zum Denken des Politischen bei Nancy, Lefort, Badiou, Laclau und Agamben* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010), p. 183.

16 Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *L’Absolu littéraire*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1978.

a Left *Romanticism*, albeit with the pertinent familiar danger of an essentialisation of the political.<sup>17</sup> And yet I am also convinced that for Rancière the issue is far more tense, and thus conceived of in a more balanced way. Accordingly, art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and especially film, is not a harmonising sensualisation of ideas to serve the people, but the sensualisation and thus communitisation of a “confrontation,” of a “contradiction of two worlds.” The consensus consists in the dissensual; the disparity is the link. New protagonists are forcing their way, more or less violently, onto the “common stage” of politics. The only thing the protagonists have in common – why “only”? – is then that fundamental quarrel about whether or not they have anything in common, whether there is anything “between” them which links them, apart from the quarrel.<sup>18</sup>

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17 Compare Josef Früchtel, “Auf ein Neues. – Ästhetik und Politik. Und dazwischen das Spiel. Angestoßen durch Jacques Rancière,” *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, Year 55 (2007): p. 209–219; critically, Drehli Robnik, *Film ohne Grund. Filmtheorie, Postpolitik und Dissens bei Jacques Rancière* (Vienna/Berlin: Turia + Kant, 2010), pp. 75–76; on political philosophy in France since the 1980s, compare Thomas Bedorf, “Das Politische und die Politik. Konturen einer Differenz,” *Das Politische und die Politik*, ed. Thomas Bedorf and Kurt Röttgers, (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010): p. 13–37, pp. 13–15; on the concept of Left Heideggerianism compare Marchart, *Die politische Differenz*, pp. 59–60; the harsh criticism from Micha Brumlik (“voluntarism,” “decisionism,” “irrationalism,” ultimately fascistic “in core and structure”) applies far more to Badiou and Žižek than to Rancière, compare Micha Brumlik, “Neoleninismus in der Postdemokratie,” *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, 55.8 (2010): p. 105–116, p. 115.

18 Rancière, *Disagreement*, pp. 26–27. – Robnik believes, in contrast, in a need to turn Rancière against Rancière, since the latter, in his emphasis on the communitising power of art, especially film, seems to leave out the dissensual dimension of politics which he develops in another context (compare Robnik, *Film ohne Grund*, pp. 21–22.). I can only mention here that my theoretical beliefs follow the line Hannah Arendt has developed with her political reading of Kant’s aesthetics; compare Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982); compare as well Seyla Benhabib, “Models of public space: Hannah Arendt, the liberal tradition, and Jürgen Habermas,” *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), p. 73–98; Susan Bickford, *The dissonance of democracy. Listening, conflict and citizenship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); Kennan Ferguson, *The Politics of Judgment. Aesthetics, Identity, and Political Theory* (Lanham/Maryland: Lexington Books, 1999). From a different, namely Heideggerian angle, Nancy’s emphasis on “co-existence” and “co-appearance” can be added; compare Jean-Luc Nancy, *Etre singulier pluriel* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1996).

## Two Statements

I would like to conclude my short deliberations on the link between fiction, aesthetics and politics with two statements.

(1) In Rancière's case, the political is a sphere in which the fictitious is proclaimed to be reality, namely the sphere in which one acts as if certain rights, certain normative characteristics, were real. Translated into the language of Kant, it is a sphere in which one asserts something one cannot prove *as if* one could prove it. In the case of politics, the object of that assertion is a right. This distinguishes politics from aesthetics. But what links the two is that the assertion is characterised in general by an *as if* structure and in particular by a structure of community, bringing together unity and separation, the consensual and the dissensual.

However, the *as if* structure is not only a feature of aesthetic and political judgement and action (in each case requiring a separate further differentiation). In a specific sense, it can also presumably be demonstrated for moral action.<sup>19</sup> In a peculiar way, it is also characteristic of action itself. All actions have an inherent fictitious element. Because it is never totally calculable, because uncertainties will always remain, an action initially has to feign success in order, then, to become reality. All actors have to act as if their actions were calculable; otherwise they would not act at all. And in the context of politics and aesthetics, a specific term is interesting here, namely that of "parasocial interaction," in which one person first feigns a social relationship to another person in order, then, to form it: a fiction with real consequences. A prime example is our dealings with stars on the TV or cinema screen or our dealings with strangers, in other words people who appear on our life stage without really belonging to it (in space/time, thus ontologically, or socially).<sup>20</sup>

(2) Thus in a *general* fashion, the *as if* structure characterises the fictitious element in everyday, political or aesthetic judgements and actions. For the *aesthetic* sphere against a Kantian background,

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19 Kant's postulates of pure practical reason thus also seem to be fictions conducive to action. We then have to act as if God existed; otherwise we cannot be sure that, through the morally imperative action, a good outcome will ensue (compare Marquard, "Kunst als Antifikation," p. 85).

20 Compare Harald Wenzel, *Die Abenteuer der Kommunikation. Echtzeit-massenmedien und der Handlungsraum der Hochmoderne* (Weilerswist: Velbrück, 2001), pp. 11, 19–20; Josef Früchtel, "George Clooney, Brad Pitt und ich, oder die schöne Illusion des Vertrauens," *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, 54. 2 (2009): p. 273–282.

however, something else is characteristic, namely an element of hope and trust. Without making this connection explicitly, and without speaking of trust explicitly, Kant in my opinion does refer to it when he says: “Beautiful things announce that human beings fit into the world” (“Die schönen Dinge zeigen an, dass der Mensch in die Welt passé.”)<sup>21</sup> They announce in the sense that an advertisement or a short newspaper article announces something, or that a symptom announces the onset of a disease. They tell us something briefly, point out something that will happen or has already happened, but leave space for different interpretations and concretions. In the Kantian context, they announce that we fit into the world ontologically-epistemologically and ethically-politically. This means that the “gulf” existing, firstly, between our capacity for knowledge and the things around us and, secondly, between the realm of nature and freedom, the realm of causal determination and action, is not unbridgeable, that, in brief, our knowledge and actions make sense. An aesthetic experience can give us back our hope and trust in the world because, in its playful structure, its exciting balance of images and concepts, it awakens a feeling of agreement/correspondence/consonance/consensus which invites one also to conclude such an agreement between the self and the world. The idea of hope and trust, then, is nothing more, but also nothing less than an attitude of *as if*.

Summing up, I would like to maintain that rethinking politics, i.e. acting collectively under normative ideas, requires the acknowledgment of *consensus*, above all if we wish to rethink politics in a Kantian context, as is also the case for Rancière. At the same time, it requires taking the *as if* structure as a central structure of political action and community. Since the structure of *as if* is not specific to the political alone, it is required to work out the *specificity* of diverse *as if* structures. And the specificity of the *aesthetic* structure of *as if* lies, among other things, in the fact that it permits ethical hope and ontological trust.

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21 Reflexion 1820a, cited in Birgit Recki, *Ästhetik der Sitten. Die Affinität von ästhetischem Gefühl und praktischer Vernunft bei Kant* (Frankfurt/M.: Klostermann, 2001), p. 135. Recki argues in favour of the theory that Kant’s famous third philosophical question: “What may I hope?” (besides the questions: “What can I know?” and “What should I do?”) also finds an answer in the *Critique of Judgement*; see also Odo Marquard, “Kant und die Wende zur Ästhetik,” *Aesthetica und Anaesthetica*, pp. 28–30.