Antipolitics: Closing or Colonizing the Public Sphere

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We live in antipolitical times. Many symptoms point in this direction: the reemergence of right-wing populism in western Europe, the antistate rhetoric of the new Republican Right in the United States, the recurrent success of antipolitical establishment candidates in Latin America, the ethnic recoding of politics in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the widespread evidence of popular disenchantment with politics in old as well as new democracies, the tangible presence of antipolitical motives in media discourse, and the emigration of sovereignty out of politics and into societal systems of global scale. This multitude of dispersed indicators naturally falls together into a colourful mosaic of generalized antipolitics. 'We live in antipolitical times'. Indeed this phrase is marvellous – the ideal opening of any book on antipolitics. It formulates a bold hypothesis, proclaims a new era, irradiates the air of grand theory and suggests an extraordinary capacity on the part of the author to capture the signs of our time. Let us therefore read it cautiously, with reservation. Or better, let us reformulate it.

Antipolitical discourses are nothing new in Western political history but today, in the late twentieth century, they have gained renewed prominence. They now form an important, at times even hegemonic element of the ideological universe. And in all probability they have still not reached the peak of their global career. After the presumptive end of ideology, antipolitics may even evolve into a post-ideological core ideology. So, after all, we may indeed be heading towards 'an antipolitical age'.¹ But we cannot be sure. To begin with, we do not even quite know what antipolitics actually is.

This introductory chapter aims at constructing the notion of antipolitics in a broader, more systematic, explicit and
abstract way than previous authors, who employed the term in more or less casual manners. To do so, we distinguish, metaphorically speaking, two forms of antipolitical thought — pretensions to dethrone and banish politics as opposed to pretensions to conquer and colonize politics. In the first case, politics becomes unemployed and the public sphere is virtually vacated and left uninhabited; in the second case, politics becomes alienated and the public sphere subjected to ‘foreign’ rule.

These conceptual prolegomena will set the stage for the subsequent analyses. Some of them reconstruct antipolitical traditions in Western political thought which continue to nurture contemporary antipolitics (Barry Hindess, Gershon Weller and Erwin Jaffe). Others focus on antipolitical discourses and behaviour present-day actors engage in (Charles Fairbanks and Gwen Brown). And still others describe what we could call structural antipolitics, the erosion of politics by objective societal trends (as well as by the corresponding antipolitical interpretations), such as its loss of territory vis-à-vis the transnational economic system (Louis Pauly and Norbert Lechner).

All authors share a willingness to take antipolitical discourses seriously, to study them in their own right. In the field of political science it has become commonplace to affirm that we live in times of political crisis. The rhetoric of crisis abounds: crisis of governability, crisis of the nation state, crisis of democracy, crisis of representation, crisis of political parties, crisis of ideology, crisis of confidence and of course, crisis of politics. The temptation is great to view antipolitics as a mere response to these critical developments, as an ideological superstructure derived from contradictions which have arisen in the foundations of politics. In contrast the contributors that make up this volume do not treat antipolitical discourses as simple dependent variables caused by political failure and crisis. Instead they comprehend them as variables of their own logic and weight.

REMOVING POLITICS

It is quite evident that if we want to speak about antipolitics in other than loose and stylish ways we cannot remain silent on the subject of politics. Before we know what the negative notion of antipolitics can possibly mean we have to explain how we conceive of its positive mirror image. So, let us begin with a concise (functional) definition of politics. In our view politics embraces three things: the definition of societal problems and conflicts, the elaboration of binding decisions and the establishment of its own rules. Politics delineates the realm of common affairs. It manages these collective affairs in an authoritative way. And it determines the rules and metarules which govern these operations.

This concept of politics is functional insofar as it defines politics according to the societal tasks it is supposed to fulfil. It is formal insofar as it does not postulate any preestablished material content of politics, such as security or survival. It is ahistorical insofar as it applies to all forms of society, to early ‘tribal’ societies as well as to modern complex societies. And it is amoral insofar as it does allow for states of dysfunctionality; yet it does not equate politics with all the niceties we associate with liberal-democratic politics, such as freedom, equality, compromise or conciliation.

In this introductory chapter we will argue that politics as defined above presupposes the existence of a community whose members are aware of their mutual interdependence as well as of their internal differences, who are able to act in concert and who are willing to accept authoritative decisions. We will argue as well that ideologies which declare politics to be harmful or at least redundant and thus propose to throw it overboard, that such antipolitical ideologies usually reject one of these four basic premises of politics. Instead of collective problems they see a self-regulating order; instead of plurality they perceive uniformity; instead of contingency they state necessity; and instead of political power they proclaim individual liberty. We will briefly outline these four guiding distinctions.

Public Action versus Self-regulation

Most definitions of politics underline its responsibility for both delimiting and managing, in a purposeful way, the realm of public affairs. Niklas Luhmann is wrong. It is neither the hierarchical polarity of power (top versus bottom) nor the
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The antagonistic structure of conflict (government versus opposition), but the binary opposition between the private and the public which represents the primary code of politics. By sorting communicative acts according to their political (public) or non-political (private) quality, this scheme decides, so to speak, at first instance whether they belong to the political sphere or not.

Of course the concrete dividing lines between the public and the private are not preestablished external givens. Politics is a self-defining, self-constituting activity which delineates its spheres of competence on its own. In the political game, people also discuss and decide what may legitimately be discussed and decided by politics. As a consequence the boundaries which separate the public from the private are not fixed but shift over time. They are moving targets. Far from being uncontroversial, they are objects of continual struggle. And they are not always clear-cut but often look blurred and indeterminate.

Yet the distinction itself between public and private affairs enters the world the very moment politics emerges. Both are of the same origin and they evolve together. Even in stateless societies where politics presents itself as an intermittent, barely differentiated activity still embedded in social life, even there this act of classification, the authoritative statement about which activities, motives and conflicts count as collective (as opposed to individual) constitutes a central part of the political process. It is only in two cases that the dividing line between the public and the private objectively disappears: in totalitarian societies and on Robinson Crusoe’s island (before the advent of Friday). While in the former case everything is political, in the latter everything is personal.

Yet antipolitical ideologies may still postulate that certain groups of families or individuals, though living in physical proximity, do not face any need at all for collective action. These people, the argument runs, do not form a community of interdependent members. They live in complete autarky, and they neither come into conflict with their neighbours nor feel the expediency of engaging in common projects. Collective problems requiring joint action do not exist, nor do conflicts arise which could not be settled spontaneously by the involved parties themselves. I do not need anybody, people say, and nobody bothers me. In this world that ignores all public goods other than self-generated ones and all public evils other than self-healing ones, in this self-regulating world politics appears to be a useless enterprise, or worse, a harmful one. It offers solutions for problems that do not exist. Its main functions, the management of conflict and the coordination of action, have become orphans. Resented as an improper interference in private affairs, it turns into a strange object of generalized contempt.

Such antipolitical utopias which represent the public space as a barren and deserted land and thus depict the place of politics as being vacant, appear in different settings. Sometimes they borrow their metaphorical core from biology. This applies, for example, to the populist idea of an organic, prepolitical community menaced, contaminated and subverted by politics. And it applies as well to the system-theoretical concept of societal ‘autopoiesis’ (self-generation) modelled on the structure of the human brain. Yet, in modern times, the idea of a self-regulating order has found its paradigmatic embodiment in the suggestive metaphor of the market, the invisible hand. Classic liberalism contains an antipolitical core. We may discern its antipolitical punchline, for example, in the proposal to establish a market society, that is, a society integrated by decentralized networks of exchange. But antipolitical motives are tangible in other liberal proposals as well, for instance, in the call to put basic rights out of political disposition, to keep politics out of most spheres of social life and to reduce the state to its minimal expression. The conception of society as a self-propelled and self-sustaining machine driven (and held together) by market competition has found its conclusive expression in the neoliberal conviction that politics tout court is nothing other than a parasitic, rent-seeking activity.

Plurality versus Uniformity

Politics presupposes difference – different values, different interests and different priorities, different conceptions of common goods and evils, different measures of efficiency and different assessments of trade-offs, different strategic calculations and different instrumental choices, different time
preferences, different assumptions about the future and different degrees of risk aversion. \textit{Et cetera.} Politics is called upon to recognize, protect and reconcile these differences, to diffuse them and at the same time to assure their coexistence. \textit{E pluribus unum.}

In the same way that politics presupposes plurality, homogeneity precludes politics. Communities without conflict have no need for political action. Where conflictual diversity has given way to harmonious uniformity, politics has become redundant. Where people share preestablished world views, where everybody knows what to do (and what to want), it is pointless to go through the trouble of forming, aggregating and integrating political preferences. Where collective interests are unique, given and evident, political actors fall victim to structural unemployment. Even worse, they arouse suspicions of introducing artificial conflicts and divisions into an originally harmonious community.

In the real world, homogeneous societies do not exist. In the world of political thought, however, various ideologies have indeed bred antipolitical fantasies of consensual, conflict-free, reconciled communities. They have conceived society as a single, unified actor, as a pre-Freudian megasubject liberated from the burden of politics, acting ‘as one man’ pushed ahead by nonambiguous and nonconflicting volitions. Think, for example, of the people in populism, the nation in nationalism, the revolutionary class in Marxism or the herd of faithful sheep in religious fundamentalism. Incidentally it is well known that such antipolitical theories tend to bear unpleasant political consequences. They contain the temptation to suppress the differences they ignore, to manufacture with violent means the societal unity they assume.

\textbf{Contingency versus Necessity}

Politics is the denial of fate. It rests on the assumption that things could be different and that we can do something about them. In the realm of necessity, under the grip of hard constraints, politics atrophies. Whether we associate it with collective action, power or decision-making, politics always presupposes contingency – margins of freedom, the availability of choice, openness, control of the future, the presence of alternative options, minimum degrees of sovereignty. Politics after all is the art of the possible, not the science of the impossible.\textsuperscript{8} This is even true for ‘tribal’ or ‘segmentary’ societies which perceive themselves as firmly embedded in tradition, nature and transcendence. Even they have a certain demand for collective decisions. Applying and adapting ancestral rules, reading and manipulating nature, soothing the gods and bargaining with them, represent exemplary instances of political decision making. Performed either by specialists or by the collective as a whole, they transform uncertainty and indeterminacy into patterns of understanding and courses of action.\textsuperscript{9}

Yet since its very origins, politics has always had to assert itself against external constraints. Earlier it had to defend its nascent latitude against the irresistible force of nature, God’s authoritative arbitrariness and the immutable rules of tradition. In modern times it has had to impose itself, above all, against the nearly overwhelming dynamic of the market economy.

Since the ‘long’ sixteenth century the capitalist world-system and the system of nation states have evolved together in close interdependence. The existing asymmetry between a single economy of global reach and a multiplicity of territorially bound political systems is nothing new. It has been a constitutive feature of the modern age from its very beginning.\textsuperscript{10} Yet it seems that the tension between transnational markets and national politics has augmented considerably since the early 1970s. Today, after Keynesianism, it has become commonplace to ascertain that democratic politics, tied to its national territory, has hopelessly fallen behind the global expansion of capitalism, technology and culture. Apparently the capacity to act has migrated out of the political system into other societal subsystems, and both have entered an unprecedented state of disjunction.

The nation-state’s loss of control and sovereignty has found expression in countless diagnoses which speak of progressive ‘ungovernability’. As mentioned, many of them are cast in the dramatic language of crisis. In most cases this semantics of crisis denotes a concern for politics, the wish to come to its rescue, to rethink or even reinvent it.\textsuperscript{11} In contrast with such propolitical ambitions to transform and revive politics, other authors welcome the new constraints politics is forced to
recognize. They applaud the disempowerment of politics and celebrate its impending disappearance. And they readily extend the benediction of inevitability to these processes. This is true, for example, of neoliberal technocrats who impose harsh programs of market reform on their developing societies and who tend to perceive (and to justify) their policies as the mere passive execution of inexorable economic laws.\footnote{12}

**Authority versus Anything Goes**

In the same way that a political community, in order to exist, needs to be free from external constraints, at least to a minimal degree, it must be able to impose internal constraints on its members. Politics implies the making of binding decisions. It defines rules and sets restrictions—consensual rules and self-restrictions perhaps, but rules and restrictions nevertheless. It is impossible to speak of politics and remain silent on power or authority. Most concepts of politics accordingly take this aspect to be its essential, defining quality. This applies to ‘the authoritative allocation of values’ as well as ‘the production of collectively binding decisions’, to cite just two of the most prominent system-theoretical definitions of politics.\footnote{13}

Historically, the sources and resources of political power, the means politics sets in motion in order to get its decisions socially accepted, have varied. In ‘tribal’ societies, political decisions acquired their binding force through ritual or the invocation of transcendent sanctions and rewards. In modern societies, legal violence, administered by its monopoly holder, the state, has developed into the ultimate backing of political power. In this Weber was right: the state represents the institutional core of modern politics and violence its distinctive means (even if today the tortuous ‘diabolic’ grip of politics tends to be more tangible in international than in domestic—domesticated—relations).\footnote{14}

The conceptual privilege Weber grants to violence follows from his equation of power and coercion. His ‘vertical’ notion of power, however, contrasts with an alternative, consensual approach which defines power as the capacity for cooperative action based on ‘horizontal’ obligations. More than anybody else, it is Hannah Arendt who is associated with this ‘positive’ idea of power that substitutes mutual promise for threat and fear.\footnote{15}

As with all other component parts of politics, the claims society makes on the resources of its members are open to principled ‘antipolitical’ criticism. Antipolitical individualism celebrates unrestricted subjectivity, antipolitical tribalism unrestricted collectivity (on a subcommunal level). Both versions of anti-authoritarian revolt follow the same anarchical impulse: anything goes. Why abide by the rules of the game? I do what I want. Hobbes’s ‘natural’ state of civil war describes the limitational horizon such antipolitical notions of freedom disclose. Life before politics (as well as after it), life in the prisoners’ dilemma: ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short’.\footnote{16}

**COLONIZING POLITICS**

The family of antipolitical ideologies discussed above qualifies politics as a redundant (as well as pernicious) activity. All these discourses question the validity of politics’ fundamental preconditions. They share the conviction that the core function politics fulfills—the management of public affairs—is good for nothing. In essence they all claim that problems of collective action do not exist. We have outlined four lines of thinking. First, politics is unnecessary because society does not exist; there are no public goods or evils politics could possibly take care of. Second, politics is unnecessary because individuals do not exist and neither do social subgroups. The community therefore ignores conflicts as well as problems of coordination. Third, politics is impossible because there is nothing it can do about the issues and cleavages we are facing; the course of history is set, and politics has no choice other than to wait and close its eyes. Fourth, politics is undesirable because society is not entitled to extract any resources from its members or to lay any restrictions on them.

All these antipolitical ideologies aim at abolishing politics, at getting rid of it, or at least they fight to roll it back, to cut it down, to reduce it to its minimal expression. We now turn our attention to another version of antipolitics, namely to efforts at ‘colonizing’ the political realm. This colonial variety of antipolitics concedes the functional value of politics but
denies that it ought to be conducted according to its own laws and logic.

**Politics and Language**

In modern times politics has become an autonomous sphere of action, a societal subsystem driven by its own logic and dynamics. Yet the evolution of modern politics, its societal disembedding, differentiation and emancipation, has been anything but a smooth process. Nor has it formed, once achieved, a self-sustaining, self-reproducing equilibrium. The external boundaries of politics have not been drawn by unwavering and unstoppable evolutionary processes but have emerged as contingent outcomes of conflicts. Systemic boundaries are battlefields and the autonomy of politics is a fragile creature. Unable even to pacify its historical front line against religion, modern politics faces periodic threats of invasion from numerous other societal subsystems which try to replace it by its own operating principles. It has to defend its frontiers against pretensions to import or to impose, for example, the logic of money and markets, science and technology, entertainment and advertisement or family and intimacy.

This image of politics as colonized by non-political modes of action leads to a tricky question. What is so special about politics? In other words, what difference is there between political and non-political modes of communication? What distinguishes the political topography from the landscapes we find in non-political territories? What difference does it make if politics does or does not fall under ‘colonial rule’?

Up to now, from a normative point of view, we have relied on a ‘lean’ notion of politics. Of course our functional definition of politics admits the possibility of dysfunctionality or policy failure. Yet in contrast with approaches like Hannah Arendt’s that by definition place a high positive value on political action, we have avoided endowing politics with attributes of moral goodness. Above all, we have been cautious not to conflate politics *per se* with liberal democratic politics. Both our concept of politics and its four fundamental premises are fully compatible with illiberal and authoritarian forms of politics. Dictators do not deny the existence of public affairs (even if they try to monopolize them) and they accept societal diversity (even if they try to suppress it). They also hold political discretion in high esteem and, of course, the same can be said about the enforcement of political decisions. If we decided to recognize only liberal democratic politics as ‘true’ politics (as did Hannah Arendt, who equated politics with equality, freedom, and deliberation), we would be compelled to confer the title of ‘antipolitics’ on all non-democratic regimes and political styles. In our view, however, this would stretch the notion beyond its breaking point.

Therefore we will try to answer our question on the specific nature of politics by narrowing down our perspective to democratic politics. Thus our question now becomes: what is special about democratic politics? What distinguishes democratic forms of political action from non-political modes of communication? To find an answer we have to give up our moral abstinence in order to introduce stronger and more explicit normative assumptions. The assumption we would like to make is the following. In its everyday working liberal democratic politics relies on various media of communication, for instance on power, law or television. It cannot be reduced to just one of them. Its distinctive medium of communication, however, is language (or deliberation).

The point of distinguishing language as the primary medium of political decision making may be condensed into three main arguments. First, the ideal of open deliberation among free participants is based on the same constitutive principles as democracy: the principles of autonomy and equality. Second, processing dissent through discussion holds the promise of rationality. Dialogue, as distinguished from monologic decision making, promises to reduce the probability of error. Third, language represents the classical opposite to violence, to external and internal state violence (war and repression) as well as to violence directed against the state (insurgency and terrorism). The word stands against the sword, the logic of arguments against the logic of power and war.

Basing politics on ‘the forceless force’ of the better argument (Habermas) is not exactly a brand-new proposal. Its genealogy goes back to Aristotle and includes both Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas. Furthermore it has made a remarkable career in the last few years. A good number of
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Authors have formulated similar projects of 'communicative', 'deliberative' or 'discursive' democracy. Yet, in our view, the norm of deliberation potentially conflicts with competing norms of democratic representation. Above all it may violate the assumption that democratic elections, in order to be both meaningful and consequential, confer policy mandates to the winning parties. The consensual norm of deliberation may run counter to the majoritarian norm of electoral accountability. Yet the growing attractiveness of the former may be due to the decreasing relevance of the latter. Perhaps the conflict between the two is empirically subsiding.

Today, in the late twentieth century the historical cleavages which laid the foundations for West European party systems have lost their salience, and the party systems once inert and frozen have begun to thaw. In addition the fall of surreal socialism has deprived liberal democracies of their enemy, their systemic competitor, which adds to the new openness and fluidity of the situation. It is in this 'post-ideological', 'post-historical' or 'post-modern' context that a shift of emphasis from electoral mandates to deliberative policy making becomes both plausible and appealing. In this sense our claim that language represents democracy's distinguishing medium of coordination reveals itself as a relative, time-bound norm (which, however, does not diminish its validity).

Partial Rationalities

If we accept language and deliberation to be the hallmarks of democratic decision making, we can read antipolitical invasions of the political arena as efforts to subvert the communicative rationality of politics and to replace it with other, one-sided forms of rationality. Antipolitical colonizers try to reshape politics according to their own image, try to impose their own, partial rationality on it. We will illustrate this hypothesis relying on the Habermasian triangle of strategic-instrumental, normative and expressive rationality (which we will reformulate as a square).

First, instrumental antipolitics aims at placing technocratic experts on the throne of politics. Treating the social world analogously to the natural world as a set of dependent variables, politics gets reduced to the calculus of adequate means. Political resistance is seen to originate either from ignorance or from irrationality, and political discussion is dismissed as a waste of time which opens politics to corruption and inefficiency.

Second, amoral antipolitics comprehends politics as a strategic power game, a marketplace where utility-maximizing participants endowed with fixed and exogenous preferences engage in quasicommercial exchanges of goods and favours. This standard rational-choice conception of politics clearly deserves to be qualified as antipolitical. It denies that any boundary exists between private and public action, and floods the political realm with private motives. If taken seriously the microeconomic approach to politics breeds simple and predictable results: political corruption veiled, embellished and justified through a language of rationality.

Third, moral antipolitics shuts down the arena of political debate by invoking material (as opposed to procedural) normative givens. Parting from fundamentalist convictions this variety of antipolitics strives to monopolize the definition and defense of goals it takes for immutable. It abhors dissent as amoral, opposes compromises as treason, disdains the pursuit of private happiness, rejects consequentialist ways of ethical reasoning and ignores the existence of moral dilemmas. Yet we should not overlook the fact that most moral codes contain certain antipolitical elements, that is, first principles which are set as absolute, unchangeable, inviolable, beyond the reach of political discussion. Think, for example, of the place equality and human rights occupy in liberal theory.

Fourth, aesthetic antipolitics subverts the power of words through the power of images. It downgrades political deliberation and decision making to mere acts of backstage performance and as a countermove pushes theatrical forms of action to the centre stage of politics. With aesthetic antipolitics the political sphere suffers from intrusion and foreign occupation by the logic of theatre and drama, rock and roll, sports and entertainment, design and advertising, the fine arts, television, religious confession, psychotherapy and intimacy. With aesthetic antipolitics the facade prevails over the face, beauty over truth, the symbolic act over verbal communication, the magic trick over the real measure, the virtual over the actual, the comforting ritual over the disturbing experience of learning,
character and the display of virtue over programs and the
evidence of success, the movie script over the speech manu-
script, the stuntman over the legislator, the symbols of family
life over the insignia of public life, the expressive codes of
short-distance relations over the moral codes of the public
sphere, the credible expression of emotions over the plausible
lining up of arguments, the excitement of the extraordinary
over the greyness of everyday life.

Our four varieties of colonial antipolitics represent mirror
images of Habermas's well-known colonization thesis. While
Habermas analyzed the political system colonizing the life-
world (jointly with the economic system) we have been
talking about the life-world colonizing the political system.
Instead of looking at the imperialism of systemic mechanisms,
we have directed our attention to the imperialism of partial
rationalities generated in the life-world. In this sense the
forms of antipolitics we have analyzed may be regarded as
cases of 'inverted colonialism'.

EXPLORATIVE EXPEDITIONS

Let us recapitulate. We have sketched two families of anti-
politics; or better, two tribes of antipolitics. One, denying that
politics can or should fulfill its function of societal coordina-
tion, aims at removing, replacing, abolishing, eliminating poli-
tics. The other one, undermining political deliberation in
favour of 'halved rationalities' (Habermas) imported from
other spheres of action, aims at colonizing, conquering, occu-
pying, dominating, distorting politics. While the former would
be happy to lock up the public sphere and throw away the key,
the latter is more modest in its aspirations: it would be
satisfied to ease the deliberative burden which rests on the
shoulders of democratic politics.

The following explorative expeditions into antipolitics
address both ways of 'subverting' the public sphere. They
analyze pretensions of 'removing' politics as well as efforts at
'colonizing' politics. The borders are not always clear, and
sometimes both fields of antipolitics overlap. All in all,
however, the contributions follow clear priorities. Barry
Hindess, Gershon Weiler and Gwen Brown deal with actors
and discourses that threaten to invade politics. Erwin Jaffe,
Charles Fairbanks, Louis Pauly and Norbert Lechner deal with
processes and ideologies that threaten to remove politics. It
would neither be honest nor credible to sell these analyses as a
seamless whole, as a balanced and comprehensive, coherent
and homogeneous piece of work. They resemble more a
collage than a mosaic. Yet each chapter makes a distinctively
original (and often surprising) contribution to the topic as a
whole.

As we have outlined above, antipolitical colonialism
provokes border conflicts. Any attempt to invade the political
territory in order to impose 'foreign rule' cannot but put into
question the established boundaries of the political. In his
political–philosophical contribution Barry Hindess argues that
such conflicts over the proper boundaries of the political are
endemic to modern societies. The evolution of the modern
state, this complex, remote and powerful set of institutions
that monopolizes the elaboration of mandatory decisions, has
given birth to a polar opposition, real as well as analytical,
between state and society. As a consequence 'antipolitical'
conflicts regularly arise along the borders between 'the state'
and 'the society' (or 'the political community'). Both sides
tend to perceive each other as contaminated fields of action
and they either try to purify the other or protect their own
innocence against perceived threats of invasion, conta-
mination or corruption.

Language is the distinctive medium of democratic politics,
we maintained above. Gershon Weiler's contribution can be
read as a commentary on this quasi-Aristotelian (or Arendtian
or Habermasian) assertion. Sharing this explicit 'logocentric'
notion of politics, Weiler identifies Thomas Hobbes as a con-
scious opponent of Aristotle and as such, the father of modern
antipolitics. In his perspective, Hobbes substitutes (in opposi-
tion to Aristotle) power for language, oppression for freedom,
obedience for deliberation, uniformity for pluralism, subjects
for citizens, market transactions for free speech, utilitarianism
for public virtue, and the Sovereign's exclusive knowledge of
the common good for politics.

The subsequent chapter illustrates how relative all talk
about 'antipolitics' is, how dependent on prior notions of poli-
tics. In his extensive introductory remarks Erwin Jaffe speaks
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up for rehabilitating Thomas Hobbes, against Weiler, as an eminently ‘propolitical’ writer. Hobbes, he says, understood that life without politics, in self-regulated, stateless societies, is very likely to take an uncomfortable course, ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short’. And he continues arguing that in the United States undercurrents of antipolitical thought have been strong and pervasive since the nation’s origins. The New World’s foundational egalitarianism and individualism as well as other factors, such as the availability of empty space (which implied the possibility to solve conflicts by simply moving on) have, according to Jaffe, conspired to create a political culture of contempt for politics. People imagine that society constitutes a self-sufficient, self-regulated, market-like order of free individuals, and they regard politics as an unnecessary evil, as mere ‘politicking’, that is, a particularistic, businesslike exchange of favours among the political elite.

Charles Fairbanks undertakes a different journey than the preceding authors. He travels east, namely to the successor states of the former Soviet Union. The dark picture he paints reads as another commentary on Hobbes, though without mentioning him. The world he describes, which is a world not so much of warring individuals than of warring tribes, resembles a communitarian version, an ethnopolitical update of Hobbes’s state of nature. Natio nationi lupus est. Where politics once was omnipresent as well as oppressive, people now tend to reject it as such. In this post-Leviathan realization of Hobbes’s pre-Leviathan negative utopia it is not just the state but politics itself that is withering away. Public spaces, public roles, public ethics, public obligations, public goals, all that crumbles under the destructive dynamics of unleashed, unbound individualism.

In her contribution Gwen Brown proceeds to analyze one prominent antipolitical-establishment actor: H. Ross Perot. After giving a brief chronological review of the 1992 US presidential campaign, she delivers an in-depth analysis of the former (and perhaps future) presidential candidate’s antipolitical discourse. Analysing both written and spoken texts (television appearances, talk shows and televised debates) she describes three basic topoi. First, Ross Perot identifies federal public officials as the United States’ ‘problem number one’. He describes ‘the people in Washington’ as being arrogant and corrupt, incompetent and inefficient. Second, he portrays himself as an untainted outsider and radiant saviour. Third, he steps into politics as an ‘action hero’ who urges that something has to be done and done quickly. He demands less talk and more action. We know what we have to do, he claims, suggesting, as Gwen Brown puts it, that ‘deliberation has already occurred’. In this respect her fears run parallel to Gershon Weiler’s. She worries about the prospect of Ross Perot emerging, so to speak, as a postmodern Leviathan who replaces democratic deliberation with common sense plus technocratic enlightenment, with discretionary, solitary decisions and with managerial styles of action. She concludes by advancing the hypothesis that, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the ‘antipolitical’ construction of enemies appears to succeed, as a functional equivalent, to the invocation of the former communist enemy. In the new antipolitical rhetoric, the ‘empire of evil’ has moved its headquarters from Moscow to Washington.

Louis Pauly, the political economist, turns his attention to the relationship between politics and economics in an era of economic globalization. He concentrates on one crucial aspect, the spectacular growth in the international mobility of capital which has taken place especially since the late 1970s. From a neoliberal perspective, this process of capital market liberalization fulfills a rare condition of harmony. It combines the necessary with the desirable. Pauly puts this double assertion into question. On the one hand he rejects the ‘language of inevitability’ which treats the globalization of capital as an economic law of nature. He reminds us that capital decontrol, now masquerading as the evolutionary outcome of inescapable systemic forces, has been established through deliberate policy choices. It was politics itself which pursued and reinforced the primacy of the economic. On the other hand Pauly hints at the distressing political consequences the globalization of capital and the erosion of political control it provokes may produce. In spite of economic transnationalization, people continue to hold their national governments accountable for national economic performance. As Pauly argues, this gap between sovereignty and responsibility, this mismatch between power and attribution, creates problems of democratic legitimation, which may very well provoke ‘anti-
political responses. Pauly suggests that such reactions may be of two opposite types. Offensive, pro-market, depoliticizing, antistate, and non-nationalist movements (such as the Canadian Reform Party or the Italian Lega Nord) welcome economic transnationalization, while defensive, protectionist, repoliticizing, statist and nationalist actors (such as Ross Perot or European right-wing populists) combat it.

Norbert Lechner’s ‘cartographic’ reflections on ‘the changing cognitive maps of politics’ are inspired by, but by no means restricted to, Latin American experiences. The familiar maps of modern politics, he states, are becoming anachronistic. Both its spatial and temporal boundaries are moving, blurring, vanishing. In the first, in the spatial dimension, the acceleration and deepening of economic transnationalization have led to a situation in which the capitalist economy escapes the reach of national politics to an unprecedented extent. At the same time, economic criteria of market exchange and profit maximization have migrated into politics, subverting its standards of public concern. Thus, with economics evading its national logic and invading its public logic, the space of politics shrinks twice. In the temporal dimension, a similar contraction seems to be taking place. Politics’ temporal horizon tends to shorten. Losing its creative capacity, its presumptive hold on the future, politics tends to become stuck in the present, in the myopic administration of the here and now. According to Lechner the cumulative impact of these structural changes amounts to a true epistemological crisis of politics.

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Notes

4. See, for example, P. Bourdieu, Sozialer Sinn: Kritik der theoretischen Vernunft (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1987), p. 201.
5. See, for example, N. Luhmann, Soziale Systeme, op. cit.
Antipolitics sometimes takes the form of a rejection of the world of public affairs in favor of philosophy, religion, the contemplation of nature or some other field of activity. But there is also a more directly political antipolitics in which ‘politics’ as a means of conducting public affairs is condemned and some alternative way of conducting those affairs is proposed in its place. In these cases, a range of activities and institutions known as ‘politics’ is rejected in favor of what seems to be another kind of politics.

Far from representing a rejection of Western political culture, political antipolitics is one of its most familiar expressions. The combination of a negative perception of one kind of politics with a positive perception of another kind of politics has been a widespread feature of Western political discourse throughout the modern period. Madison’s discussion in The Federalist Papers no. 10 clearly aims to protect the work of government from the politics of faction—in other words from the ‘dangerous vice’ that has since come to predominate in the USA and other Western democracies—but it is equally clearly committed to the defense of what he thinks of as popular government. Populist antipolitics, to take a rather different example, is also opposed to the politics of faction but, unlike the American Federalists who identify faction as ‘number of citizens’,¹ its animus is directed primarily against the factionalism of politicians and of parties. However even the most explicit populist contempt for politics is generally far from expressing a hostility to government as such. Rather its animus is directed against what it sees as the corruption of the proper conduct of government by ‘politics’.