Crisis, Depoliticisation and Emerging Forms of (Re-)Politicisation
Rethinking (De)Politicization(s) in Liberalism: Politics and Resistance as Power

Introduction
Seeing the effects of continuing privatization and re-regulation of the economic environment, we get the eerie feeling that public spaces are being depoliticized and blurred into the domain of the private. The interweaving of the public and private has become so intricate over the last decade that it is increasingly difficult to launch an offensive for the protection of public goods and services - who to address, who is responsible, through what channels and by occupying what spaces/grounds? Is capitalism really just a monolith dominating established politics or is it a more heterogenous network composed of both capitalist, for profit, mechanisms and non-capitalist, more hybrid economic processes? Within the capitalist rationality, politics is recognized as an unpredictable and, potentially, an antithetical force which needs to be tamed in order to be made predictable, stabilized and neutralized. This explains the establishment of the technical infrastructure which transformed the previously (and directly) state-managed public services into a devolved and fragmented network of private contractors for the provision and delivery of goods. Parallel and congruent to this, there is a process of "socialization" of population through biopolitical mechanisms of control and supervision. Although depoliticizing in nature, it represents the extension of the state governance, contradicting the general view of the diminishing and limited state. I will address this paradox of depoliticizing tendencies through Michel Foucault's analysis of the liberal governmentality, who also identified contradictory processes at the interstices of the market and the state. By turning to Foucault, I will demonstrate that the seemingly depoliticizing processes at work are in fact bolstered by political mechanisms within the framework of the market logic. The critical interrogation of the self-limiting principle of liberalism will expose the paradox of these depoliticizing tendencies that shows itself in the parallel biopolitical extension of state control.

On the other hand, recent (re)politicizations characterized by popular uprisings will be conceptually rethought by discussing Foucault's 'counter-conduct" through Hannah Arendt, Max Weber and Jacques Derrida. In this light, the conventional binary between politics and resistance will be displaced and reconfigured so as to expose the common ontology of politics and resistance through the concept of power. While Arendt's account of power will bring to the fore some of the concept's positive dimensions, Weber's understanding of charisma and Derrida's notion of the force of law will illustrate the cyclical nature of this ontology. Power has too often been simplistically portrayed as negative, leaving behind a feeling of impotence in the face of it. Power is also regularly conflated with terms such as influence, strength, authority and coercion – Arendt's recognition of this disciplinary confusion and subsequent conceptual distinguishing of terminology will be helpful in this regard. The paper will propose a more nuanced conception of power which incorporates both politics and its rebellious sister, resistance. An alternative understanding of power will hopefully contribute to a better understanding of the dynamic of depoliticizing and politicizing processes at both the state and societal level.

In the third part, the paper will take a psychoanalytical twist by turning to a Lacanian reading of the hegemony theory by Yannis Stavrakakis. As it has already been stated by one of the key theorists of hegemony, Ernesto Laclau, and I agree fully with him on this
point, psychoanalysis is “the only valid road to explain the drives behind construction” and “the only fruitful approach to the understanding of human reality” (Laclau 2004, 326).

Diagnosing the depoliticizing tendencies of today

I place my analytical diagnosis of the depoliticizing tendencies at work in contemporary society within the framework of what Michel Foucault proposed to be the dominating governmental rationality of ‘our age’, that is liberalism. In his 1979 lectures, Foucault (2008, 2) set out to establish an alternative reading of government – as opposed to providing another theory of the state – which he saw was best described by the phrase “art of government”. This was his methodological attempt to escape the falling into the ontological fallacy of “all those universals employed by sociological analysis, historical analysis, and political philosophy”, such as the people, the state, sovereignty and civil society. The art of government is accompanied by a particular rationality, Foucault contends, that pertains to a specific mode of governing or exercising power. It appears to be all-encompassing, directing our thinking and practice, which makes it similar to another familiar concept, the Marxist notion of ideology, however Foucault explicitly counters this assumption (Foucault 2009, 215‒16). Nevertheless, the very point of coming up with this whole new concept in political theory is to show that the exercise of power, or politics, is not just in domain of certain individuals, but it represents the very plural condition of all co-existing thinking beings (ibid., 282). Politics or the actualization of power manifests itself exactly when “the interplay of these different arts of government with their different reference points” (Foucault 2008, 313) unravels.

What, then, is the rationality that has guided the art of government in Foucault’s times and still does today? Foucault identifies it in broad terms as that which we call “liberalism”. Foucault understands this term in broad terms, going beyond its conventional usage in mainstream politics, and which also encompasses neoliberalism. From the 18th century onwards, “this new type of calculation [that] consists in saying and telling government: I accept, wish, plan, and calculate that all this should be left alone” (ibid., 20). This paradoxical principle of liberal rationality has been popularized as “laissez-[nous] faire” and can also be understood as self-limiting of government. Parallel to this, Foucault (ibid., 17-18) observes the emergence of “political economy” from the middle of the 18th century which marks the gradual establishment of “a reasoned, reflected coherence” between practices that were once conceived as “the exercise of sovereign rights, or feudal rights”, such as tax levies, manufacture regulations or regulations of grain prices, and were now managed by “intelligible mechanisms which link together these different practices and their effects, and which consequently allow[s] one to judge all these practices as good or bad” according to a new regime of truth (ibid., 18). But what exactly is the new regime of truth that decides between right and wrong, true and false that Foucault was suggesting in relation to the emergence of political economy? The point in which the liberal art of government, according to Foucault, distinguishes itself from the previous is that “its mechanisms, its effects, and its principle” (ibid., 28) are becoming more intensified and refined around the regulative idea of frugality (which gained a whole new dimension of significance in the last few years of austerity!). And this idea of frugality dominating the art of government has not come out of “the heads of economists” (ibid., 29), but the market, Foucault says. The “natural mechanisms” of the market constitute “a standard of truth which enables us to discern which governmental practices are correct and which are erroneous” (ibid., 32). The general direction and guidance of the government is thus no longer functioning “according to justice”, but according to “the truth” of the market (ibid.). This blending of
the new liberal governmentality and the market interests results in the market dictating and prescribing “the jurisdictional mechanisms” (ibid.) that regulate the milieu of market needs.

Hannah Arendt offers a similar observation with regards to the emergence of political economy, which gains more significance in her critique of the blending between the public and, what she saw as, the realm of the private sphere. She remarks that according to ancient thought, the very notion of “political economy” is a contradiction in terms, as economy or ‘the affairs of the household’ is an inherently non-political, and thus private, activity, as opposed to the political (Arendt 1958, 29). With the “rise of ‘the household’ (oikia) or of economic activities to the public realm”, “the two realms indeed constantly flow into each other like waves in the never-resting stream of the life process itself” (ibid., 33). The theoretical emphasis on zoe and the life process in Arendt’s The Human Condition does make us think whether she was also describing the same phenomenon that Foucault termed “biopolitics”, one of the pivots of the (neo)liberal governmentality: “with the emergence of mass society, the realm of the social has finally, after several centuries of development, reached the point where it embraces and controls all members of a given community equally and with equal strength” (Arendt 1958, 41). In a similar fashion, Foucault identified this biopolitical development as “the doubling” of members of a given politico-legal community which appears as “a population that a government must manage” (Foucault 2008, 22), and alongside the emergence of political economy and the self-limiting principle of government as “part of something much larger, which [is] this new governmental reason” (ibid.), namely liberalism. Arendt saw the biopolitical life process as the epitome of ‘the modern age’, consuming the public sphere and replacing its political character with “the social”.

Compared to the ancient Greek striving for bios, fulfilled political life, the modern emphasis on citizenship (as membership in a ‘mass of bodies’) inscribes bare life into the public sphere which continuously renegotiates the once strict separation between political and non-political life. The “socialization” of even the private spheres of life is done by political processes that depoliticize the public sphere and trivialize it to the extent that it loses its originary political character. Arendt (1958, 45) described this phenomena as the “devouring” of the public spaces by the rise of the consumerist society, without which we cannot fully understand the depoliticizing tendencies of the “socialization” process. The loss of the politicity of public spaces becomes more apparent when members of society fail or refuse to follow the prescribed ways of conducting themselves duly. It is then that the depoliticizing processes of biopolitics demonstrate the coercive side of society and from those who are managing it. An example of this can be seen in the response that a recent student protest, against the closure of the University of London Union (ULU), provoked from the authorities. Throughout their year at the university, students hear a lot about improving and accommodating their “student experience” through different surveys, events, workshops and the like. However, when students did something other than fulfilling their duties as good consumers – this image has been accentuated even more after the tripling of the tuition fees in England and Wales as a result of the Conservative government’s frugal approach to governing – the forces of “peace and order” were swiftly called to the site to tame the unruly students back into assigned patterns of appropriate conduct. This shows the fine cooperation, or rather alignment of interests, between the state institutions and the commercial corporate bodies.

At this point of the debate, we can see a paradox emerging in our conceptualization of the liberal governmentality, of the way politics is done and economic concerns becoming
ever more significant in public life. On the one hand, we speak of the frugality of (neo)liberalism, and on the other, the rise of mass society is extending the biopolitical control of the state. The predominance of the “household mentality” and the overtaking of the governmentality by the economistic rationality marks significant depoliticizing tendencies in the modern society. The ‘socialization’ of the public sphere, however, expands the biopolitical control of “citizens” and “members of society” which are appropriately counted, classified and grouped inside the whole that we call the ‘population’. Foucault (2008, 28) notes these contradictory developments and says it is:

not without a number of paradoxes, since during this period of frugal government, which was inaugurated in the eighteenth century and is no doubt still not behind us, we see both the intensive and extensive development of governmental practice, along with the negative effects, with the resistances and revolts which we know are directed precisely against the invasive intrusions of a government which nevertheless claims to be and is supposed to be frugal.

Against this contextual mapping of the liberal rationality, we can understand how seemingly depoliticizing processes are executed and functioning in congruence with contemporary reconfiguring of the logic of what politics is and is able to do. Depoliticization is being supported and sanctioned by decisions that are very much political - being carried out by representatives who are elected at periodic elections to act in the interest of ‘the general public’. At least that is the idea of how a liberal democracy is supposed to run. However, the dominant governmental rationality of today, as Foucault instructs us, displaces the once self-evident categories of democratic politics and directs its followers towards one specific mode of conduct. With this also comes the rearrangement and shifting of distinctions between the private and public, state and non-state, capitalist and autonomous ways of production. Such radical changes to the structuring of the state and society does not come without backlash from its members, however. A disparity between the lived experience of this new socio-political reality and the aspirations (or expectations) of people provokes a dissatisfaction which is bound to challenge the seemingly “normal” conduct of politics. New ideas of doing politics emerge and so the subjectivity of the challengers enters a phase of (re)politicization.

(Re)politicization and power

In order to be able to make sense of this shift(ing) between depoliticization and (re)politicization I will use the concept of power as the analytical prism, without which I think we cannot get a proper glimpse into the ontology of politics. Through the study of this concept by Foucault, and authors who study Foucault’s work, I think it has become clear that power is inherently inter-relational: quoting Foucault (2008, 186), “The term itself, power, does no more than designate a [domain] of relations which are entirely still to be analyzed, and what I have proposed to call governmentality, that is to say, the way in which one conducts the conduct of men, is no more than a proposed analytical grid for these relations of power”. I will leave at rest the second part of the quote where Foucault designates governmentality as the analytical framework for studying the relations of power. So, power is inter-relational, but its modality attains a higher level of ontological obscurity when it is interpreted as something all-pervasive in society, something that can be possessed, something that evades our cognitive capabilities or something that is necessarily negative and undesirable. It is at this point that I decide to turn to Arendt.
Arendt was rather saddened at the state of political science at the time when she realized that academic literature did not distinguish among “such key words as ‘power,’ ‘strength,’ ‘force,’ ‘authority,’ and, finally, ‘violence’” (Arendt 1969, 142). Behind what she saw as “the apparent confusion”, she believed there was “a firm conviction” that these distinctions are insignificant in light of the seemingly “most crucial political issue”, that is, “Who rules Whom?” (ibid., 142–3):

Power, strength, force, authority, violence – these are but words to indicate the means by which man rules over man; they are held to be synonyms because they have the same function. It is only after one ceases to reduce public affairs to the business of dominion that the original data in the realm of human affairs will appear, or rather, reappear, in their authentic diversity.

In her book The Human Condition, Arendt challenges the traditional understanding of power when she argues that “power cannot be stored up and kept in reserve for emergencies” (1958, 200), but only exists in its exercise, its “actualization” (ibid.). In this reconceptualization, the notion of power acquires a kind of ‘performative twist’: power “is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company” (ibid.). Power is always a potentiality to something, but because this potentiality depends on the contingency of human relations, it is not “an unchangeable, measurable, and reliable entity” (ibid.). Power “springs up between men when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse” and like all potentialities it “can only be actualized but never fully materialized” (ibid.). What is material in the constitution of power, though, is the presence and being together of bodies. Where such power becomes political then, is precisely at the moment when it draws the outline of the gap that separates it from another power or authority, when it draws a distance between itself and the opponent.

Arendt also makes the distinction between collective power, power in concert, and individual power, for which she uses a different word, “strength”, an inherent property that “unequivocally designates something in the singular, an individual entity” (Arendt 1969, 143). It is thus that we can perhaps understand the nature of Foucault’s notion of ‘counter-conduct’, a practice carried out by an unruly, counter-conduct individual, or in a group against an established authority. Although Foucault (2008, 195–96) maintains that for him counter-conduct is ontologically distinct from “political revolts against power exercised by a form of sovereignty” and from “economic revolts against power” in its form and objective, he does acknowledge that resistances of conduct are “non-autonomous” in the sense that they are not “separate or isolated from each other”, but are “always, or almost always, linked to other conflicts and problems”. Another way of putting these actualizations of power or counter-conducts would be in the language of (re)politicizations. The key element to these ephemeral processes is the elusive concept of power. Only through actualizing the potentiality of power, new political subjectivities are formed that challenge the dominant ways of conduct.

I will now turn to the question that Foucault raises at the beginning of his lecture on (counter-)conduct where he formulates revolts of conduct as conducting and later try to address the close relationship of variable and contingent forms of counter-conduct with conducting power. Quoting Foucault, “Just as there have been forms of resistance to power as the exercise of political sovereignty and just as there have been other equally intentional [voulues, that is, ‘willed’] forms of resistance or refusal that were directed at power in the form of economic exploitation, have there not been forms of resistance to power as conducting?” (ibid.: 195). In the following passage, I will attempt to demonstrate that all forms of resistances to power/authority are conducting, potentially
conducive towards some future anterior yet unknown, but to come. Depoliticizing tendencies can be seen as the stratified manifestations and workings of the dominant liberal conduct in contemporary societies, whereas repoliticizations more often than not offer alternative (counter)conducts, which, when they gain prominence, step into the register of conduct and thus reveal its conducting character. How then are we to think the relationship between counter-conduct and conducting power, depoliticization and repoliticization?

Before I consider Jacques Derrida’s essay on the force of law, I would like to highlight another thinker who has also ventured into exploring the modality of resistances. Max Weber is most known for his work on rationalisation and the bureaucratic form of social organization, but in certain passages, notably in his essay “The Nature of Charismatic Domination”, he, amongst other things, attempted to understand the actions of individuals who go against the mainstream and dominant current of affairs. Weber named this power “charisma”. Strangely enough, like Foucault, Weber (1978, 226–29) also analyzed charismatic power in relation to religious practices and movements. As opposed to bureaucratic forms of conduct, Weber (ibid., 227) notes that charismatic power:

Rather, charisma recognises only those stipulations and limitations which come from within itself. The bearer of charisma assumes the tasks appropriate to him and requires obedience and a following in virtue of his mission. His success depends on whether he finds them. If those to whom he feels himself sent do not recognise his mission, then his claims collapse. If they do recognise him, then he remains their master for as long as he is able to retain their recognition by giving ‘proofs.

Immediately, what strikes me when juxtaposing Weber’s description of charisma to Foucault’s conception of counter-conduct is the presence and recognition of others that are required for the charismatic power to be(come) effective. This is very much in line with the Arendtian conception of power, which is actualized only in bodies coming together in the sphere of appearance and lasting only so long as the people persist together. This distinguishes Weber’s charisma from the more individualistic portrayal of counter-conduct in Foucault.

Like counter-conduct, charismatic power, according to Weber, also has transgressive effects. Whereas the bureaucratic form of social organization is there only to replace “the belief in the holiness of what has always been”, it is charisma that is powerful enough to completely dismantle “the bonds of rules and tradition” and “overturn[s] all ideas of the sacred”. Weber sees this power of charisma as “divine” in its significance; it is “the characteristically ‘creative’ revolutionary force in history” that redirects social and political life from “the pious following of time-hallowed custom” (ibid., 232). Now, if we read Weber through Andreas Kalyvas’ reading of Weber’s concept of charisma, we can note a moment of inherent splitting in Weber’s understanding of politics. On the one hand we have the bureaucratization of society or its rationalization, which denotes the politics of the ordinary (normal politics), whereas with the introduction of charisma, we are exposed to the other aspect of politics that is able to produce “a fundamental change of heart” (or as Weber (1978, 232) describes it, ‘metanoia’), which Kalyvas (2008, 41) calls the politics of the extraordinary. This opposition between different forms of politics or conduct, bureaucratic conduct and charismatic power, bring us back to the question I posed earlier, namely, what the relationship between conduct and counter-conduct,
between depoliticization and repoliticization, is, and Weber does say a few things on this as well.

In order to give more theoretical clarity to Weber’s notion of charisma and its relationship with the ordinary conduct of things, it is interesting how he contraposes the revolutionizing force of ‘reason’ from the outside and the revolutionizing power of charisma from within. This distinction might be understood as a result of his conception of charisma as some pre-rationalist/rudimentary form of force in communal life, involving “a subjective or internal reorientation born out of suffering, conflicts or enthusiasm” (Weber 1970, 234). Rationalization or bureaucratization operates as some transcendent force, through intellectualizing the individual, which has its basis in “reason”, whereas the revolutionary force of charisma functions immanently, from something that is hard to define or is even ungraspable. Weber uses words such as “change of heart”, something “that has never before existed”, “unique” and “divine” (Weber 1978, 232) or “subjective”, “internal”, “suffering”, “conflict” and “enthusiasm” (Weber 1970, 234) to characterize that what he calls charisma. This brings to mind the notion of ‘the affect’, ‘the emotive’, but also ‘the irrational’/non-rational and ‘the negative/brutal/violent. In psychoanalysis, these would be the characteristics attached to the notion of the real defying the totalizing grasp of the symbolic order - but I will say more about this conceptual overlapping at the end of the paper.

Due to the ephemerality, contingency and instability of charismatic power, Weber foresaw that at one point charisma has to undergo the process of a ‘routinization’ which can go either in the way of being traditonalized, rationalized or a combination of both (ibid.). For pure material, existential reasons, such as maintaining “normal family relationships” and “ordinary worldly connections”, the revolutionary force of charisma eventually and inevitably reaches a certain point of provisional closure, reflected in its routinization. The ephemerality of charismatic power and the inevitability of its rationalization reframe or provide a different approach to understanding the relationship between conduct and counter-conduct, but the two, charisma and the routinely conduct of things, still seem to be ontologically separated in Weber’s words, what I am trying to dispute in this paper. What if charisma and the ordinary routine that follows it, or in other words, counter-conduct and conducting power are part of the same structure, the same ontology that is actualized in different forms? What if depoliticization is the inevitable consequence of successful and over-time stratified repoliticization(s)?

Derrida’s essay will be of great help here in which he ponders upon the mystical foundation and the violence of law. The work, which was in part presented at the colloquium on “Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice” in 1989, notably draws upon the work of another thinker, Walter Benjamin and his “Critique of Violence”. Derrida’s deconstructive analysis, through Benjamin, sheds light on the very relationship in question, between counter-conduct and conducting power. Derrida maintains that law (or politics for that matter) has a double nature of violence. He brings up the conventional phrase in English, “to enforce law” (Derrida 1992, 5), which alludes to the force that accompanies the law. This force of law, or “mythic violence” (ibid., 31), as Derrida also calls it, takes two forms: (1) one is that which is more evident and discussed in Foucauldian literature on biopolitics and power and can be observed in its maintaining, reiterating, confirming, reinstating itself, the force or violence that attempts to conserve the order of the things; (2) the other captures the moment or period during which law originates, founds and inaugurates itself in “performative and therefore interpretative violence” (ibid., 13). What is remarkable in this observation is the transition which is not actually a transition, or at least not a marked and discernible crossing from one stage to
another, from counter-conduct to conduct, but it seems there is “a more intrinsic structure” (*ibid.*) at play. In the performativity of counter-conduct there is also conducting power and within conducting power a performative potentiality for counter-conduct. This antagonism between the two modalities of the same structure, seemingly juxtaposed against each other, but still one and the same, can be understood by looking at the almost lyrical words by Derrida (*ibid.*, 14) in the following passage on the performative ontology of language and what he calls “the mystical”:

Here a silence is walled up in the violent structure of the founding act. Walled up, walled in because silence is not exterior to language. It is in this sense that I would be tempted to interpret, beyond simple commentary, what Montaigne and Pascal call the mystical foundation of authority. One can always turn what I am doing or saying here back onto – or against – the very thing that I am saying is happening thus at the origin of every institution.

The aporetic structure of conducting power/revolts of conduct is thus “mystical”. There is something about it that evades our interpretative, rationalizing capabilities, in its very performative power. Its force is at times “uninterpretable or indecipherable”, but it is “certainly legible, indeed intelligible since it is not alien to law” (*ibid.*, 36). I’m going to allow myself to read here another quote from Derrida that attempts to grasp the aporia of power/resistance:

But it is, in *droit*, what suspends *droit*. It interrupts the established *droit* to found another. This moment of suspense, this *épokhè*, this founding or revolutionary moment of law is, in law, an instance of non-law. But it is also the whole history of law. *This moment always takes place and never takes place in a presence*. It is the moment in which the foundation of law remains suspended in the void or over the abyss, suspended by a pure performative act that would not have to answer to or before anyone. The supposed subject of this pure performative would no longer be before the law, or rather he would be before a law not yet determined, before the law as before a law not yet existing, a law yet to come, *encore devant et devant venir*.

It is in this sense that we can understand the structuredness of (counter-)conduct which tells us that there is no need for ontologically separating the two as they both share the same dynamic performative force, once to conserve, once to interrupt and found anew. In *The History of Sexuality*, as pinpointed by the editor of the lectures notes at the Collège de France, Foucault utters the famous words “Where there is power, there is resistance” and continues: “and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (Foucault 1978, 95). Resistances are not only “passive” or reactionary, neither they are simply “a promise that is of necessity betrayed”; rather, they “are the odd term in relations of power; they are inscribed in the latter as an irreducible opposite” (*ibid.*, 96). To further accentuate the ontological relatedness of politics and resistance/conduct and counter-conduct, one should read Foucault’s words from his manuscript pages, cited in one of the footnotes in the chapter on counter-conduct: “The analysis of governmentality /.../ implies that “everything is political.” /.../ Politics is nothing more and nothing less than that which is born with resistance to governmentality, the first revolt, the first confrontation” (Foucault 1978/9, 217).
Up until now, we have looked at different ways of conceptualizing the aporetic relationship between conducting power and revolts of conduct, highlighting “the active sense of the word ‘conduct’” (ibid., 201) in counter-conducting individuals or groups, acting “in the very general field of politics or in the very general field of power relations” (ibid., 202). In the next part of my paper, I would like to turn our attention to a quote by Foucault which puzzled me for a while. At the beginning of his 1 March lecture, he said (ibid., 195–6):

> There is also the theme of the nullification of the world of the law, to destroy which one must first destroy the law, that is to say, break every law. One must respond to every law established by the world, or by the powers of the world, by violating it, systematically breaking the law and, in effect, overthrowing the reign of the one who created the world. /.../ The Western and Eastern Christian pastorate developed against everything that, retrospectively, might be called disorder. So we can say that there was an immediate and founding correlation between conduct and counter-conduct.

What seems compelling in the above quotation is the profoundly negative and destructive form that counter-conduct can take. Counter-conduct needs not to be conducive in a “rational” manner towards some positive alternative and order of things, to some “better” way of conduct. Yet it might also show how something destructive can turn out to be positive and more structured, outlaying a new conducting framework. Foucault’s words, “sinning to infinity” and “nullifying the world of the law”, bring me back to Derrida when he talks about the “the annihilating violence of destructive law” or the “divine” violence (Derrida 1992, 31), as opposed to the human law-making violence. It seems that the divine violence is actualized as if it struck out of the blue — it is “revolutionary, historical, anti-state, anti-juridical” (ibid., 55). Moreover, this divine violence “does not lend itself to any human determination, to any knowledge or decidable ‘certainty’ on our part. It is never known in itself, ‘as such,’ but only in its ‘effects’ and its effects are ‘incomparable,’ they do not lend themselves to any conceptual generalization” (ibid., 56). Both the mythic, human law-making violence and divine violence contain an element of “the undecidable”, “the violent condition of knowledge or action”, but which are “always dissociated” (ibid., 56). And this is exactly what puzzled me in the Foucault’s quotation above: this undecidability, contingency and radical openness of performative action, either with decidable knowledge and certainty or without it.

In his narration of counter-conduct, Foucault put significant emphasis on conceptualizing it “in the form of strategies and tactics” (Foucault 1978/9, 216) which implies calculation and rationalization, belonging to the realm of law and politics, but to me it also seemed important to expose the other, less gracious side of counter-conduct, which is often seen as ruthless and unforeseen. The divine violence that Derrida and Benjamin talk about is what Arendt would probably term “force”. Arendt pinpoints we often use “force” in everyday speech “as a synonym for violence, especially if violence serves as a means of coercion” (Arendt 1969, 143). However, she thinks the term should be reserved for the “forces of nature” or the “force of circumstances” to denote “the energy released by physical or social movements” (ibid., 143–4).

This force of counter-conduct movements can be better understood by what Arendt describes as the unpredictability and uncertainty of the course that action takes. Arendt speaks here of the double incapacity: one is the incapacity “to undo what has been done” which is “matched by an almost equally complete incapacity to foretell the consequences
of any deed or even to have reliable knowledge of its motives” (Arendt 1958, 233) – maybe this is what Derrida meant with “the undecidable” being the violent condition of knowledge and action, but which are always dissociated. This sequence of actions is a process which is “never exhausted in a single deed, but on the contrary can grow while its consequences multiply” (ibid.). From this we can see that “action has no end” (ibid.), hence our inability to predict with certainty the outcome of our actions. In light of this insight, we can demystify the “mystical” or “divine” character of destructive violence of law, the law of revolutions and so on. Our inability to rationalize the unforeseen, and thus the un-rationalizable, accounts for the seemingly “out-of-the-blue” and unexpected qualities of divine violence. For this reason, Arendt proclaims that “men” are unable to bear “the burden of irreversibility and unpredictability, from which the action process draws its very strength”, and they have always known that (ibid., 233):

They have known that he who acts never quite knows what he is doing, that he always becomes “guilty” of consequences he never intended or even foresaw, that no matter how disastrous and unexpected the consequences of his deed he can never undo it, that the process he starts is never consummated unequivocally in one single deed or event, and that its very meaning never discloses itself to the actor but only to the backward glance of the historian who himself does not act.

To remedy the irreversibility and unpredictability of the action process is not to turn to “another and possibly higher faculty”, Arendt contends; the remedy is actually “one of the potentialities of action itself” (ibid., 236–7):

The possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility /.../ is the faculty of forgiving. The remedy for unpredictability, for the chaotic uncertainty of the future, is contained in the faculty to make and keep promises. The two faculties belong together in so far as one of them, forgiving, serves to undo the deeds of the past, whose “sins” hang like Damocles’ sword over every new generation; and the other, binding oneself through promises, serves to set up in the ocean of uncertainty, which the future is by definition, islands of security without which not even continuity, let alone durability of any kind, would be possible in the relationships between men.

This brings us back to the “conducting” dimension in the modality of counter-conduct. At one point or another, the circumstances of a situation require, or even demand, the “binding oneself through promises”, the routinization and institutionalization of charismatic power and its spirit, ever more slightly falling, yet again, into the destined trap of decay (Benjamin 1996, 251). It is in this sense that Benjamin diagnoses the “decay of parliaments” (Derrida 1992, 48). In the passage from revolutionary and charismatic presence to transcendental representation, these institutions forget the originary violence from which they were born: “When the consciousness of the latent presence of violence in a legal institution disappears, the institution falls into decay” (Benjamin 1996, 244). In this sense, we can also understand the decay of the pastorate that Foucault talks about, brought about by its “extremely rigorous and dense institutionalization” and “extreme complication of pastoral techniques and procedures” (Foucault 1978/79, 202–3). Moreover, the “amnesic denegation” (Derrida 1992, 47) of the decaying institutions is not due to “a psychological weakness”, says Derrida, but it pertains to their “statut” and “structure”. In other words, the cycle of lawmaking violence and counter-violence, of conducts and counter-conducts – revolutionary violence going through the institutionalization/routinization process until it reaches the point of amnesia
and declines into decay in face of a counter-violence – keeps revolving until it is interrupted and suspended by the force (or divine violence) of what Benjamin (ibid., 252) calls “a new historical epoch”.

(Re)politicization: the play between the real and the symbolic

It would seem that the end to this perpetual and ruthless oscillation between conduct and revolts of conduct, depoliticization and (re)politicizations, can only come “if the existence of violence outside the law, as pure immediate violence, is assured” (ibid.); a Messiah of some kind or sort that would deliver “the sign and seal /…/ of sacred dispatch” (ibid.). For Benjamin, this force is unequivocally of divine character; in actuality it is “revolutionary violence, the highest manifestation of unalloyed violence by man” (ibid.). Whether this divinity of the revolutionary force is truly transcendent or just a mystical cover for intensified resistances of conduct, it is “neither equally possible nor equally urgent for man to decide when pure violence was effected in a determined case” (Benjamin in Derrida 1992, 55) since it cannot be “recognizable as such with certainty, unless it be in incomparable effects” (Benjamin 1996, 252).

Benjamin’s conception of divine violence comes close to what Arendt is saying on the unpredictability and irreversibility of action, or what in psychoanalysis would be known as the real. This element of the undecidable that evades man’s rationalizing capacity was also the dilemma that Yannis Stavrakakis tackled with in his discussion of Lacanian psychoanalysis (Stavrakakis 2007) and the “post-hegemony” debate (Stavrakakis 2013). On the one hand we have the symbolic order with totalizing structuration tendencies, and on the other the real, which is not only manifested in “negative” outbursts and interventions into the symbolic order, but also in more positive forms, as Stavrakakis (2007, 71) notes, underpinning the structuredness of social construction. Although, he may not have used the same terms or elaborated the concepts to depth, Foucault nonetheless recognized the structural and hegemonic capacities of counter-conducts, something that opposes dominating conducts, yet shares the same ontology with conducting power. In similar vein, Derrida and Benjamin talked about two opposing violences of law: one that is law-making and the other that is law-maintaining. The fact that they were talking of two different modalities of the violence of law demonstrates that they differentiated between the two. Yet they realized, again, that they pertain to the same ontology, a kind of a dialectically relational couplet between the negative/positive real and the symbolic order. Whereas Weber conceptualized charismatic power as a negative force (the real) that intervenes and challenges the established order (the symbolic) and enters the phase of the routinization of charismatic politics (structuring the symbolic), Arendt mostly focused on the immanent qualities of power and politics, or in psychoanalytical terms, the positive aspects of the real.

It is important to stress here the nuanced manifestation of the real, its affective and negative modalities, but also its relation to the symbolic order. Stavrakakis (2007, 96) describes them as “two distinct but interpenetrating fields”. Their mutual constitution becomes more apparent when we acknowledge that “affect and jouissance are not experienced merely as intrusions but also as investments which infuse signification, fortifying meaning and discourse” (ibid.). With regards to the political implications that this understanding of the real and the symbolic might have, taking “into account form and force, symbolic structuration and jouissance” enables us to “examine how hegemonies are sustained, how identifications stick and political discourses get sedimented - obstructing or enabling social change” (ibid., 102).
How can we then understand depoliticizing and (re)politicizing processes in light of the above? Depoliticization is the *symptom* of the overly stratified political sphere, which, like the totalizing symbolic order, stifles any emerging alternatives that may pose a challenge to the status quo. Through the prism of psychoanalysis, the symptom gets a deeper meaning which is relevant for our question at hand:

The symptom clearly satisfies something in the subject: ‘the subject would not be riveted to this symptom if it were not a mode of *jouissance* for him. To speak of *jouissance* of the symptom is a paradox since it presents itself under the genre of displeasure...’

What is the socio-political relevance of this clinical insight? There is no doubt that in social and political life we also experience constraining and disabling attachments and dependencies from which it is very difficult if not impossible to distance ourselves... Indeed, we even encounter cases in which subjects fully acknowledge the contingency of their situation and see how things could be otherwise, how an even minor change (in behaviour, attitude and so on) would lead to a different life, visited less by suffering. Yet they cannot help themselves, they cannot stop repeating the same pattern. (*ibid.*, 79)

I believe it is crucial to recognize this element of pleasure in displeasure, what *jouissance* as symptom basically characterizes, since without it it seems as if the depoliticizing processes are being arbitrarily imposed on society without any form of consent (Antonio Gramsci ingeniously stated the same paradox when he conceptualized hegemonic dominance). Moreover, there needs to be some “positive” consequences coming out of the depoliticization of politics, even if only phantasmatic/ideological in nature, otherwise we would have seen greater and more intense perturbations of the real ((re)politicizations) taking place. At this point, I would like to stress that we should not overlook the positive character that repoliticizations have. A very obvious example of this is the gathering of bodies in public places when dissatisfied groups and individuals put forward urgent (and emerging) demands. There is something intensely affective happening in those public gatherings, although ephemeral in nature.

In his discussion of the affective turn in conceptualizing hegemony, Stavrakakis (2013, 19) emphasizes “the constitutive interpenetration between hegemony and so-called post-hegemony, the symbolic and the real, representation and its beyond”. Post-hegemony is used here to group together various political theorists of immanence who have criticized Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe for putting too much theoretical emphasis on discursive structurations of hegemony and falling into the trap of hegemonic practices of domination by trying to construct counter-hegemonies. The theorists of post-hegemony pay particular attention to non-representational autonomous resistances and counter-conduct practices which go beyond the dominating machinations of power. In its ontology, the kernel of post-hegemony theorizations is what Weber called charisma: going against the stratified structures of established power, against law, coming from within, affective and material. In other wording, the real disturbing and infatuating the symbolic order. Stavrakakis’ response to the post-hegemony theorists is that “we need to be very skeptical against ... [the] strategy of introducing such hierarchical dualisms”, e.g. “a set of dichotomies which are largely conceptualized in binary, mutually exclusive and oppositional terms: inside/outside, before/after, hegemony/post-hegemony, representation/real, meaning/being,
horizontality/verticality, discourse/affect” (*ibid.*, 18). He agrees that these categories need to be conceptually distinguished, but we need to realize at the same time that these dimensions “can simultaneously function within a historical dialectics of *mutual engagement* and *co-constitution*”.

This is how I propose to theorize politicizations and repolicitizations, the political and politics. We should not focus exclusively just on one and forget about the second. When theorizing fervent repolicitizations, we also need to ask ourselves what comes after, what follows. An affective resistance needs not “to transition” from its “pre-hegemonic” phase into a stage of hegemonization/routinization/institutionalization (*ibid.*, 17). But if it does not, it risks failing to produce an infrastructure of stability and permanence which preserves the affective presence of the movement through a medium of representation. Arendt (1958, 236–7), to repeat her words, talks about making of (binding) promises which in the sea of unpredictability of action(s) creates “islands of security without which not even continuity, let alone durability of any kind, would be possible in the relationships between men”.

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In this paper, I wanted to reflect more on the close relationship between conducting power and revolts of conduct, (de)politicization and repolicitizations, their ontologies and actualizations and how they operate in the grid of power relations. For this end, we needed to, again, think about the concept of power and how it is related to (counter-)conduct. Referring to thinkers, such as Foucault, Derrida, Arendt and Weber, we can get a more multi-faceted analysis of power and resistance, of conduct and counter-conduct, of governing and revolution. Having situated contemporary depoliticizations within the (neo)liberal governmental rationality, conceptualized by Foucault, exposed the paradox of the self-limiting principle in liberalism: on the one hand the state is seen as retracting from controlling and managing the provision of public goods and services, but on the other extending its biopolitical reach in the blurring of boundaries between the public and the private. By challenging and relocating the binary division between power and resistance, conduct and counter-conduct, depoliticization and (re)politicization, I attempted to demonstrate the more complex dynamics that are behind these discursive/affective processes.

** My PhD at Queen Mary, UL is funded by the Slovene Human Resources Development and Scholarship Fund ([http://www.sklad-kadri.si/en](http://www.sklad-kadri.si/en)).
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