Among the questions that have been raised about my work, it is possible to single out three main issues. First, how should we understand equality and its “lessons”? Second, why did I set up the relationship between politics and aesthetics through the concept of a “distribution of the sensible”? Third, how should my way of writing and arguing be characterized? I think that it is possible to epitomize at once the object, the stake, and the method of my research by focusing on an example. I shall borrow it from one of the little narratives which played a strategic role in my book *The Nights of Labor*. Those little narratives and my way of dealing with them can allow us to understand how “aesthetics” is involved in matters of equality and what a method of equality means, as regards the practice of writing.

The text on which I shall focus was written by a nineteenth-century joiner, Gabriel Gauny, who left us the archives of his intellectual life. From the 1830s to the 1880s he wrote an impressive number of texts which remained unpublished. But this essay, which relates the workday
of a floor layer who works as a jobber, is an exception. It was published in one of the numerous and ephemeral newspapers that blossomed during the French revolution of 1848. It came out in that newspaper as a contribution to a collective political affirmation. But before taking on this collective meaning in a revolutionary context, it was the product of both the joiner’s individual experience and his personal appropriation of the power of writing. Therefore, the close reading of this extract can help us understand the way in which I set out to tie up matters of writing and matters of equality.

This man is made tranquil by the ownership of his arms, which he appreciates better than the day-laborer because no look of a master precipitates their movements. He believes that his powers are his own when no will but his own activates them. He also knows that the entrepreneur is hardly upset by the time he spends at his work, provided that the execution is irreproachable. He is less aware of exploitation than the day-laborer. He believes he is obeying only the necessity of things, so much does his emancipation delude him. But the old society is there to treacherously sink its horrible scorpion claws into his being and ruin him before his time, deluding him about the excitement of the courage that he uses for the benefit of his enemy.

But this worker draws secret pleasure from the very uncertainty of his occupation.∞

Why focus on such descriptions of a worker’s experience and give them a role in the elaboration of a philosophical question? Because what is at stake in the “description” is the whole idea of the way in which the facts of equality and inequality are involved in matters of perception and belief. What is at stake is a new understanding of what Marxist theory had put under the concept of ideology. I assumed that those narratives were much more than descriptions of everyday experience. They reinvented the everyday. This text proposes, in fact, a reframing of one’s individual experience. In our text, this operation of reframing can be evinced by the relation between two conjunctions, two buts. The joiner believes that he is free, that he is only obeying the necessity of the work he is doing, but the old society is there and makes him pay for his illusion. The old society makes him pay for his illusion, but he draws secret pleasure out of the freedom that this illusion gives to him. The text tells us about the efficacy of a “delusion,” an efficacy that is mediated through two feelings: belief and pleasure. I contended that the descrip-
tion of that “delusion” encapsulated both a tiny shift and a decisive upheaval in the understanding of the relationship between exploitation and delusion. According to the traditional view of “ideology,” people are exploited and oppressed because they don’t know the law of their exploitation or oppression. They have wrong representations of what they are and why they are so. And they have those wrong representations of their place because the place where they are confined hinders them from seeing the structure that allots them that place. In short, the argument on the mechanism of ideology reads: they are where they are because they don’t know why they are where they are. And they don’t know why they are where they are because they are where they are. The positive conclusion had it that they could step out of that place only if they were given a true scientific knowledge and right artistic representations of the reasons for their being there.

The tiny shift that I perceived in the little narrative of the joiner, and that I decided to develop as a large theoretical and political shift, consists in stripping the argument, in order to set forth its core. The schema of knowledge and ignorance, reality and illusion, actually covers up a mere tautology: people are where they are because they are where they are, because they are incapable of being elsewhere. This matter of *incapacity* must be stripped of its “scientific” disguise. People are not *unable* because they ignore the reason for their being there. They are *unable* because being *unable* means the same as being *there*. The point is that those who have the *occupation* of workers are supposed to be equipped for that occupation and for the activities that are related to it. They are supposed to be equipped for working, not for peripheral activities such as looking around and investigating how society at large works.

This is what a distribution of the sensible means: a relation between occupations and equipment, between being in a specific space and time, performing specific activities, and being endowed with capacities of seeing, saying, and doing that “fit” those activities. A distribution of the sensible is a matrix that defines a set of relations between sense and sense: that is, between a form of sensory experience and an interpretation which makes sense of it. It ties an occupation to a presupposition. As Plato put it once and for all, in a way that made every future theory of ideology an academic joke, there are two reasons why workers must stay in their place. The first reason is that they have no time to go elsewhere, because work does not wait, which is an empirical fact. The second
is that God mixed iron in their makeup while he mixed gold in the makeup of those who are destined to deal with the common good. This second reason is not an empirical fact. It gives the reason or the logos which sustains the empirical state of things by identifying the place where work does not wait with the place where universal thinking is not expected to stay, the place of the particular. In order that social functioning be identified with the working out of inequality, it has to rest on an inequality in terms of nature. This is what the logos provides. But it provides it in the guise of a muthos, a myth or a lie about what “fitting” means: the story of the deity who mixes gold, silver, or iron in the souls.

This is the dialectic of the distribution of the sensible, which is more tricky than the dialectic of ideology. One splits up into two. The empirical given—the lack of time—is doubled by its logos. The logos is a muthos. The argument is a story, and the story an argument. The social distribution rests on that circle of the empirical and the prescriptive. This means that it rests on a form of legitimization which delegitimizes it at the same time. The reason for inequality has to be given in the guise of a story. But the story is the most egalitarian form of discourse. It makes of the philosopher the brother of the children who enjoy stories and of the old women or the old slaves who tell them stories.

The logos must be presented as a story. And the story, Plato says, has to be believed. In order to understand what is at the stake in the “belief” of our joiner, we have to define what it means to believe. Obviously, Plato does not demand that the workers have the inner conviction that a deity truly mixed iron in their soul and gold in the soul of the rulers. It is enough that they sense it: that is, that they use their arms, their eyes, and their minds as if it were true. And they do so even more so as this lie about “fitting” actually fits the reality of their condition. The ordering of social “occupations” works out in the mode of this as if, which ties it to a “belief.” Inequality works out to the extent that one “believes” it. But that “belief” can be conveyed only in the egalitarian mode of the story. Inequality has to be performed by those who endure it as their life, as what they feel, what they are aware of.

We can now understand what is at stake in my little narrative and in my way of reading it: it is the subversion of that performance of inequality. In the construction and the writing of his sensory experience, the joiner implements a different as if that overturns the whole logic which allotted him his place. But this overturning is far from the canonical
idea of the freeing power of awareness. The jobber frees himself by becoming less aware of exploitation and pushing aside, thereby, its sensory grip. He frees himself by nurturing a power of self-delusion. That power makes him work still more for the benefit of his enemy, against his own employment and the conservation of his health. But this counter effect, which results from his way of reframing the space and the time of exercise of his force of labor, is the source of a new pleasure, the pleasure of a new freedom.

Such is the performance of equality that is meant by the word “emancipation.” It is a subversion of a given distribution of the sensible. What is overturned is the relationship between what is done by one’s arms, what is looked at by one’s eyes, what is felt as a sensory pleasure, and what is thought of as an intellectual concern. It is the relationship between an occupation, the space-time where it is fulfilled, and the sensory equipment for doing it. This subversion implies the reframing of a common sense. A common sense does not mean a consensus but, on the contrary, a polemical place, a confrontation between opposite common senses or opposite ways of framing what is common.

In a first approach, this is what the relationship between aesthetics and politics means. Politics is a polemical form of reframing of common sense. In that sense, it is an aesthetic affair. Now, this reframing does not come out of the blue. The political “workers’ voice” implemented by this newspaper of 1848 stems from a multiplicity of micro-experiences of repartitioning the sensible, a multiplicity of operations that have reframed the place of the worker, the time of his work and his life, the exercise of his gaze, the way he speaks, and so on. It is not a question of knowing what was ignored. Knowledge is always the other side of ignorance. The emancipated worker’s new “awareness” of his situation means the “ignorance” of the logic of inequality. The balance of knowledge and ignorance is what our joiner calls a passion. This is how he demonstrates to one of his fellow companions the necessity of new passions: “Plunge into terrible readings. That will awaken passions in your wretched existence, and the labourer needs them to stand tall in the face of that which is ready to devour him. So, from the Imitation to Lelia, explore the enigma of the mysterious and formidable chagrin at work in those with sublime conceptions.”

As is well known since Plato, a passion is a certain balance of pleasure and pain, which results from a certain balance of ignorance and
knowledge. When our joiner says that the proletarian needs passions, he means that he has to tip over from a given balance to another, that he needs an imbalance or an excess with respect to an empirical balance of time and work, resting on a symbolic distribution of iron and gold. He needs to steal a certain sort of gold, a sort of gold which is at once more and less precious than the gold which is supposed to be mixed in the soul of the rulers, which is both sublime and up for grabs. The joiner teaches his fellow the way to steal it, which is *reading*. Reading is not only an activity bringing about knowledge or pleasure. It is the achievement of a redistribution of the sensible that is involved in writing. Plato has also taught that writing is not merely a means of transcribing the signs of language. It is also a status of language that defines an excess, an imbalance in the relationship between signs, things, and bodies. As he conceived it, writing meant the wrong circuit on which words are launched as orphans, available to anybody, without being guided by the voice of the master who knows how they have to be related to things and also who is entitled or not entitled to make an appropriate use of them. In my terms, writing—and its other side, reading—is a redistribution of the sensible. Writing frees words from a given relation between signs and bodies. By so doing it blurs the distinction between gold and iron and it makes this mix-up available to anybody.

What are made available by writing and reading are not messages or representations, but *passions*. What the proletarian has to steal from literature is the secret of a “mysterious and formidable chagrin.” It is the sort of pain that he lacks, the misfortune that he ignores by definition: the misfortune of having no occupation, of not being fit or equipped for any specific place in society, which was embodied at the time of romanticism by literary characters such as Werther, René, or Oberman. What literature endows the workers with is not the awareness of their condition. It is the passion that can make them break their condition, because it is the passion that their condition forbade.

Literature does not “do” politics by providing messages or framing representations. It “does” it by triggering passions, which means new forms of balance (or imbalance) between an occupation and the sensory “equipment” fitting it. This politics is not the politics of the writers. Goethe, Chateaubriand, or Senancour, who invented those characters, were certainly not concerned with the aim of arousing such “passions” among the laborers. It is the politics of literature—that is, the politics of
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that art of writing—which has broken the rules that made definite forms of feeling and expression fit definite characters or subject matters. It is through this upheaval of the poetic hierarchy that literature contributed to the constitution of a new form of sensory experience, the aesthetic experience, where the emblems of power, the decorations of the palaces, and the icons of faith lost their function and destination and were relocated in new locations—new material and symbolical forms of distribution of the sensible—called museums or art histories. In these new locations, they became available for the free pleasure of visitors who would know less and less what those emblems or icons were fit for, whom they represented, and what story they told. This new form of experience opened a new field of verification of equality, interacting with the field of verification of equality opened by the modern constitutions and declarations of rights. For sure, it was not the same equality. It was a strange new form of equality which had among its properties that of disconnecting looking and working. The aesthetic appreciation of the form of a palace has nothing to do with any consideration of the finalities for which it has been designed and built, nor with the labor of the builders, as Kant explained in the *Critique of Judgment*. This is the disjunction between the work of the hands and the pleasure of the eyes that our joiner emphasizes as he relates his workday: “Believing himself at home, he loves the arrangement of a room, so long as he has not finished laying the floor. If the window opens out on a garden or commands a view of a picturesque horizon, he stops his arms and glides in imagination toward the spacious view to enjoy it better than the possessors of the neighboring residences.”

It is possible to move from the spectacle opened by that window—that written window—to another spectacle, the spectacle proposed by the face of the *Juno Ludovisi* which, fifty years earlier, in his *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, Schiller had read the promise of a new form of equality, a true sensory equality instead of a mere legal one. The deity promised that equality because she was idle. She did nothing; she did not work. She did not command anything, nor did she obey anybody. But we can reach back still earlier in the history of the aesthetic disjunction. Let us remember the description of the *Torso* of the Belvedere made by Winckelmann thirty years before Schiller’s *Letters*. He supposed that the *Torso* represented Hercules, the hero of the Twelve Labors. But it represented an idle Hercules, a Hercules having
finished his labors and sitting among the idle gods. He decided that that headless statue, deprived of arms and legs, was the masterwork of Greek art and therefore the full implementation of Greek liberty. This beheaded statue stood up as the emblem of an aesthetic revolution that would both parallel and oppose the revolution emblematized by the beheading of the French king. Between that crippled emblem of Beauty and Liberty and the inhibited arms and the emancipated look of our joiner we can draw a line, even if it is not a straight line.

I am aware that my assumptions rouse a strong suspicion. The objection has it that, whatever our joiner may believe as he looks through the window, the room remains the possession of its owner and his force of labor the possession of his boss. The equal and disinterested pleasure of the gaze is just as delusive as the promises of equality written in the Declaration of Rights. Both are expressions of false equality that delude him and block the way that leads to true equality.

I answer that the claim of “true” equality dismisses the reality of the operations of the verification of equality. It dismisses it at the same time that it grasps the struggle over the as if in the pincers of appearance and reality. Appearance and reality are not opposed. A reality always goes along with an appearance. For sure, the joiner remains in the world of domination and exploitation. But he is able to split up the tautology of the being-there. He is able to locate his ownership in the ownership of the master and the owner. He actually builds up a new sensible world in the given one. A verification of equality is an operation which grabs hold of the knot that ties equality to inequality. It handles the knot so as to tip the balance, to enforce the presupposition of equality tied up with the presupposition of inequality and increase its power. For instance, the perspective gaze, that has been long associated with mastery and majesty, can be assumed and verified as a power of equality. That verification contributes, thus, to the framing of a new fabric of common experience or a new common sense, upon which new forms of political subjectivization can be implemented.

This is a lesson of equality. Such lessons can be found everywhere. It is possible to find everywhere new examples of the disjunctive junction between a being-there and the reason for that being-there. It is possible to disentangle in every case the as if which is involved in the “that’s the way it is.” From this point on, it is also possible to imagine a method of equality specifically aimed at detecting and highlighting the operations
of equality that may occur everywhere at every time. This method can be given various names. Joseph Jacotot, the thinker of intellectual emancipation, called it “panecastic philosophy,” because it was a method for finding in every (ekaston) peculiar manifestation of intelligence the whole (pan) of its power: that is, of the power of equality. I once called it a “poetics of knowledge”: a poetics that extricates the fictional construction of the as if and its political enactment from the descriptions of objects and the declarations of method that are at work in the human and social sciences. This is how I extracted my little narratives from the fabric of social history, where they had the status of expressions of a certain “workers’ culture” in order to make them appear as statements on and shifts in the distribution of the sensible. I showed that those descriptions were muthoi, enacting the disjunctive junction of story and argument, legitimization and delegitimization, equality and inequality. Those who wrote them were writers—no matter whether good or bad. They used the same kind of poetical inventions as Michelet did when he described the revolutionary festivals, the same kind as Plato when he said in Phaedrus that he would speak truly about Truth. In order to tell the truth about the Truth, Plato used a story, the story of the journey and the fall of the souls.

By doing so, he shattered in advance the pious discourse which presents Philosophy as the discipline that gives its epistemological ground or its ontological foundations to the methods of positive sciences. He suggested a quite different view of what Philosophy does. Instead of giving foundations or legitimacy to the social and human sciences, Philosophy would be the discourse that sends them back to their nature as stories about the being-there and the reason for the being-there. History, sociology, political science, literary theory, art history, and so on contend that they have their objects and the methods fitting them. Philosophy instead would say: your objects belong to everybody; your methods belong to anybody. They are stories that anybody can understand and tell in turn. I tell stories; you tell stories. And the reason we have to tell stories is that we are at war. The so-called division of labor between disciplines is, in reality, a war. It is a war over fixing boundaries. No positive boundary severs the field of sociology from the field of philosophy, or the field of history from the field of literature. No positive boundary separates the texts that make up the discourse of science from those which are merely the objects of science. Ultimately, no posi-
inclusive boundary separates those who are fit for thinking from those who are not fit for thinking. This is why boundaries are continuously traced and retraced. The human and social sciences always try to force the fundamental aporia of the equivalence of logos and muthos, legitimization and delegitimization. The method of equality—or the politics of knowledge—returns descriptions and methods to their status as weapons in a war between discourses.

The warriors may be knowledgeable and well-minded. They may go to war for the sake of the common good and equality. For instance, history and sociology have their democracy, and they fight for it. Philosophy has its equality and fights for it. This is the point: democracy is the struggle about democracy, equality is the dissensus about equality. Equality never goes alone. Nor does inequality. This is why there are lessons of equality—lessons of the dissensus about equality, of the conflictual knot of equality and inequality—everywhere. This is also why the method of equality is a method of untimeliness. Kristin Ross has opposed my practice of historicization to the spatializing trend which characterized sociology and history in the 1980s. It is not merely a matter of stressing time over space. Disciplinary thinking uses time itself as a principle of spatialization. It makes time a place that encloses and defines those who are in it. It replays, as a methodological principle, the Platonic assertion that “work does not wait,” which amounts to locking up workers in the space of their absence of time. And the experience of emancipation consists in locating another time in that time, another space in that space.

This is why the method of equality must implement, at the same time, a principle of historicization and a principle of untimeliness, a principle of contextualization and a principle of de-contextualization. You must make words resound in their concrete place and time of enunciation, instead of the generalizations of historical discourse. But you must also draw the line of escape, the line of universalization on which the poor romantic floor-layer meets the aristocratic philosopher of antiquity and verifies that they have something in common, that they speak about the same thing: the capacities or incapacities involved in the fact of having or not having time. The untimely method of equality implies another way of thinking the Universal. The Universal is not the law ruling over the multiple and the particular. It is the principle at work in the operation which calls into question the distribution of the sensible separating
universal matters from particular matters. Accordingly, untimeliness is a way of thinking the event in terms of multitemporality, in terms of intertwining plots. This way of thinking the event is opposed to the conception of the transcendence of the Event or the stroke of the Real or the Thing that has been shared by many contemporary thinkers, from Derrida and Lyotard to Badiou and Žižek.

There are lessons of equality that occur anywhere in various forms. This is why those lessons cannot be easily encapsulated within programmatic schemas or drill orders such as “politicized” art for instance. Gabriel Rockhill pointed out a possible contradiction between my concept of the distribution of the sensible, which ties together art and politics, and my desire to maintain a separation between them, which sustains my denunciation of ethical confusion and my suspicion regarding the notion of a committed or politicized art. In addressing this issue, there are different levels that need to be distinguished. Indeed, politics is an “aesthetic” affair, since it is about what is seen and what can be said about it, about what is felt as common or private, and about experiences of time and space. And Art—as it shapes common spaces or singular times, as it changes the coordinates of the visible or the ways of making sense of it, as it changes the relationships of the part and the whole or the singular and the anonymous—produces a politics of its own. But this means that there cannot be a plain relationship between art and politics as two realities existing per se. Politics and art exist only through definite regimes of identification. It is not “art” that frames, on its own, the “disinterested” look that is borrowed by the floor-layer. The politics that endows him with a new gaze is not the outcome of the commitments of artists and writers. It is the aesthetic regime of art that defines a new distribution of the spaces of experience and of the sensory equipment that fits the topography of those spaces. If the joiner can borrow this gaze, it is not due to revolutionary painting, whether it be revolutionary in the sense of David or in the sense of Delacroix. What enables him to appropriate this aesthetic look is not so much a revolution in the subjects or procedures of painting as it is the new kind of equality—or indifference—which makes them available to anybody and offers to the same look and the same pleasure the Roman heroes of liberty, the dishes of Dutch kitchens, or the characters of the Old Testament. And if he can rephrase his experience with phrases borrowed from Hugo or Chateaubriand, it is because those phrases belong to the
open circulation of literature, notwithstanding the peculiar aims pursued by those writers and the versatility of their political stances.

In short, the idea of “politicized art” covers the complexity of the relationship between the politics of aesthetics and the aesthetics of politics. The aesthetics of politics is fostered by the shifts in individual and collective perceptions, by the reconfigurations of the visible and the symbolic, and the redistributions of pleasure and pain that I described earlier. Nonetheless, politics has its own aesthetics, which implies specific concerns and specific procedures. It not only shapes specific forms of community; it also shapes the general forms in which the common of the community is empowered and emblematized. Politics is about the very existence of a common sphere, the rules of functioning of that sphere, the count of the objects that belong to it and of the subjects who are able to deal with it. Politics is about the configuration of the space of politics, the redistribution of matters into private or public matters, the redistribution of places between private and public spaces. It implements a specific activity consisting in recounting the parts of the community. A process of political subjectivization creates forms of enunciation and manifestation of the supplementary part which comes in addition to any consensual calculation of the parts of the population: the part of those who have no part. This miscount is staged in a specific way: the construction of a we. There is political agency when there is the construction of a we that splits up the community and the invention of names for that we. I said that the démos—or the people—was the generic name of those invented subjects which divide the community as they supplement it. This means that politics builds the stage of a conflict between alternative figures of the people.

Literature is not concerned with the setting up of a we. For sure, it is concerned with matters of counting and miscounting. It works on the whole and the parts in its own way. But it is not concerned with singling out the part of those who have no part in the form of a we. In other terms, its population is not a démos. It is much more concerned with dismissing the difference between the first and the third person and overcoming it by the invention of new forms of individuation. Literature works, as politics does, in order to undo the consensual forms of gathering and counting. But it does it in a different way. It invents its own democracy and its own equality. The democratic uprising that Zola relates as an epic is not the Paris Commune. It is the rush of the women
pouncing on clothes in *Au bonheur des dames.* It is the insurrection of consumption that turns fashionable Parisian women into modern Bacchantes. Zola implements a politics of literature that sees the action of the political subjects constructing such and such case of equality as a superficial agitation. From that point of view, the politics of the political subjects is an old rhetorical performance through which one must break in order to reach true equality, or rather, to dismiss equality in favor of the sympathy or fraternity of the subterranean drives or impersonal rhythms and intensities of collective life. True equality or true fraternity, thus, is supposed to exist only at the molecular level of preindividual states of things or haecceities—as Deleuze says—where nobody holds democratic flags or shouts out egalitarian mottos.

In short, aesthetics has its own politics, just as politics has its own aesthetics. But this politics cannot be enclosed in a simple cause/effect relation. I said that we can draw a line from the paradigm of the crippled hero and the idle deity to the disjunction between the arms of the worker and his eyes. But you can draw from that disjunction very different interpretations of what the politics of aesthetics is. You can contend that the disjunction must lead to a new conjunction. The idle deity and the pause in the activity of the worker open on the future of a new world where labor and art will no longer be separated from each other, where they will merge into one and the same activity. In this view, art and politics have to suppress themselves as separate activities in order to construct a new sensory community, where art and labor, production and public life, will be one single process of shaping forms of life. But you can also draw an opposite conclusion, contending that the promise of equality is enclosed in the idleness, which means in the self-containment, of the statue. If this is so, it means that it is the suspension of the will of the statue, the suspension of the activity of Hercules and of the worker, which holds the power of emancipation. Art must not merge into life. On the contrary, it must stay in its solitude as both the visibility of the separation between art and labor and the promise of reconcilement.

In several essays I tentatively spelled out the logic of those two emplotments of the aesthetic promise. I also emphasized that they intertwined in various ways. The Deleuzian interpretation of art and literature is a telling case of intertwinement, an attempt to identify the power of subversion of the artwork as both a break with the mainstream
economy of sensation and the constitution of a new sensory fabric of individual and collective life. From that point of view, the disjunction between the arms and the eyes of the worker can hold as a break with the sensori-motor schema. The window through which his look glides makes the outside inside. It dismisses the grammatical fabric of subjects and predicates and the physical fabric of subjects and objects in favor of a linguistic world of verbs and adverbs and a physical world of becoming and haecceities. In this world, the productions of art are no longer works standing in front of us. Nor must art suppress itself in the framing of new forms of collective life. The productions of art are blocks of percepts and affects torn away from the sensori-motor schema. They are manifestations of the productivity of Life, of the relentless process of disruption which is the ontological constitution of the multiplicity. As such, they are already political, they are already a “people to come.” One could say that the tension between the opposite politics of aesthetics is settled in this “people to come.” But the tension soon reappears. The politics of literature, which was supposed to consist in blocks of collective enunciation, is embodied for Deleuze by heroic characters such as Bartleby. Bartleby, the character who “prefers not to,” is identified by him as a new Christ or “a brother to us all.” His nonpreference is the “idleness” of the Juno Ludovisi turned into the passion of a new Christ, releasing Humanity from the chains of activism. This activism of non-activism bears witness to the inner contradiction of the politicization of ontology—or ontologization of politics—which is at the heart of Deleuze’s aesthetic thinking. But this contradiction keeps in line with the whole politics—or meta-politics—of aesthetics. Before being a brother to us all, Bartleby, the activist of nonactivism, is the brother of the Marxist revolutionary leader who at the same time lets the productive forces break, by their own dynamism, the chains of the old world and decides the right moment when the sleight of hand of an uprising minority performs the task of the break with the new world. This brotherhood comes as no surprise, since the political performance of the literary character, as Deleuze conceives of it, and the revolutionary performance in Marxist theory spring from the same source. The Marxist idea of Revolution and the Deleuzian view of Art are both rooted in the meta-politics of the aesthetic revolution. This is why Deleuzian thought could recently foster a revival of Marxism. This is also what makes the enormous amount of Marxist political interpretation of art and litera-
ture so often futile. It most often forgets that the contradictions that it ferrets out so vividly in its objects are, first of all, the contradictions of the meta-politics on which it is itself predicated.

The development of this point, which I cannot carry out here, could bring out some elements for answering one of the questions raised by my work. I have insisted on the historicity of the regimes of art, while my discussion of politics often tended to skip over centuries and societies, from Plato to the last social movements or the last statements on the return or the end of politics. This does not mean that I take politics to be a kind of ahistorical essence. I tried to challenge mainstream views that linked emancipation or democracy to a certain historical sequence, by making democracy the outcome of a “murder of the king” amounting to a murder of the father, or by linking emancipation to a messianic faith in History. But this does not mean that I dismiss the existence of historical forms of politics, as Bruno Bosteels suspects. Politics is always emplotted in historical configurations. There is a history of the political, which is a history of the forms of confrontation—and also the forms of confusion—between politics and the police. Politics does not come out of the blue. It is articulated with a certain form of the police order, which means a certain balance of the possibilities and impossibilities that this order defines. Nor does politics ever go alone. A historical form of politics is always more or less entangled with forms of archi-politics, para-politics, or meta-politics, as I defined them in Disagreement. The modern politics of emancipation has been entangled from the beginning with the meta-politics of the aesthetic revolution. But this does not mean that it has to be identified with that meta-politics.

The matter of confusion regarding these distinctions will serve as my conclusion. The categories by means of which I tried to think politics, art, and their relationships are not ontological determinations. If I thought it necessary to establish distinctions and oppositions by distinguishing several regimes of identification of art, opposing the police and politics, or separating politics from meta-politics, it is precisely in order to allow for an intelligibility of their entanglements. If a distinction of regimes of identification of art can be useful, it is because we are confronted with mixed forms that are intelligible to the extent that we identify the different logics that they bring together. If the distinction between politics and the police can be useful, it is not to allow us to say:
politics is on this side, police is on the opposite side. It is to allow us to understand the form of their intertwinement. We rarely, if ever, face a situation where we can say: this is politics in its purity. But we ceaselessly face situations where we have to discern how politics encroaches on matters of the police and the police on matters of politics. As I conceive of them, concepts are neither Platonic ideas nor mere empirical designations. They are tools with which we can draw a new topography in order to account for what happens to us and with which we can try to weave a mode of investigation and action equally distant from the consent to things as they are and from the hyperboles of imaginary radicalism.