

**POLITICS AS A DRAMATIC ACTION SITUATION**



## POLITICS AS A DRAMATIC ACTION SITUATION

*Kari Palonen*

### TOWARDS A »CRITIQUE OF PURE POLITICS«

How can someone understand his activity as »politics« or »political«? Politics is obviously something which cannot be »touched« as the phenomena of the external world, it cannot be »seen« as the phenomena of sense experience. It can, however, be approached either in an objectivistic fashion from the direction of the »world« or in a subject-oriented way via the reflection of the human experience of »politics« or »the political«.

This essay follows the latter alternative: How does politics »look like« as an experience for its subjects? How can I understand what is specific in my own experience of »making« politics? What are the essential and distinctive aspects of an experience which make it »political«?

Questions like these are seldom posed either in the classical political theory or in the modern academic political science, for both are dominated by the objectivistic tradition. But in modern philosophy the subject-oriented approach has been an important line of thought from Descartes and Kant to Husserl and other phenomenologists. Even in this intellectual tradition the thinkers have seldom reflected upon the experience of the political – maybe because they have had enough difficulties in reflecting on even »simpler« forms of experience.

Some outstanding but sketchy works have, however, been written of politics even within the subject-oriented tradition. For instance Régis Debray has recently published an important book with the ambitious title »Critique de la raison politique« (Debray 1981). It is primarily an epistemological tract on the conditions and limits of the political experience (cf. p. 31). I will in this paper paraphrase the title of Kant's famous work into another direction: towards a »critique of pure politics«; that is, towards the ontology of the political experience (cf. Jean-Paul Sartre's »L'être et le néant«, its subtitle »Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique«, Sartre 1977).

As I refer to the »purity» of politics this is to be understood in the Kantian sense, as politics *a priori*, which is independent of the realization of any specific experience (cf. Kant 1970, esp. 51, 81, 120). The essay will consequently deal with the philosophy of politics, it is not concerned with the empirical analyses of the political experiences.

In my approach to »pure politics» I shall, however, not remain within the confines of the Kantian tradition. I will actually use more certain central ideas of the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. The essence or — in Husserl's terms — the »eidos» of the political experience will be searched for through »phenomenological reduction» (for this concept see e.g. Husserl 1980, 48–56, 108–119).

The phenomenological reduction insists that if one wishes to understand the specific *eidos* of politics, one must »bracket» both the existence of the external world as such and the existence of »politics-in-the-world» in particular, that is, leave them out of consideration. Consequently I will not say anything about the non-political aspects of the world. Neither shall I say anything about the role or importance of »politics-in-the-world». I will reflect on the »political» as such. Needless to say that this type of formal phenomenological discussion also brackets the content of policies and the value of politics as well.

According to this phenomenological analysis the politics »appears» as »noetic» experiences in the consciousness of the subject of the experience. Politics in itself is not, however, the sum of these experiences but an »intentional correlate» of them. It is a specific aspect of that »something», of Husserl's »noema», of which the consciousness is »of». Politics »appears» thus only in the »noeses» of the experience, but these noeses are experienced as »political» only through the intentional »noema», »the politics in itself». The very task of a comprehensive phenomenology of politics should be an exact description of what is specific in the noetic-noematic relation of political experience. (For the terms see Husserl 1980, 179–201).

I will not aim here at a general phenomenology of politics, I shall limit myself to elucidating one special dimension of the political experience. Also, I will not use systematically Husserl's terminology but remain somewhat nearer the established ways of speaking about politics.

#### ACTION AND SITUATION

Even if we use phenomenological reduction, we need a general concept which politics can be related to. I propose that this concept be that of »action».

*Politics will be understood as an aspect (a moment) of human action.* Consequently the identification of the experience of politics as an aspect of action requires some reflections concerning the concept of action in general.

The phenomenological subject-orientation implies an extensive concept of action: even an act of perception is understood as an act. While speaking about politics as an experience, a more limited connotation of the concept of action is, however, implied. It is assumed that politics is experienced as something »to be done«, something which still has a relation to the »world«.

What is specific in the phenomenological view on human action can be found in the conception of intentionality of human experience. This intentionality has a double reference: it is both intentionality *for* a subject and intentionality *of* something (that is, it is also directed towards some noema or object). In this sense intentionality can be understood as a kind of link between the two aspects of action, that is, those of the subject's and the object's (cf. Husserl 1980, 64–67).

But human action also takes place somewhere and sometimes, that is, in a given context. »Man is thrown into the world«, as the famous dictum of Martin Heidegger goes. In order to understand his own action, man has to take his »being-in-the-world« as his point of departure. The context of action is for the subject its condition, its »facticity«, given not as an inevitable external circumstance but rather as a contingency from which the action has to depart. The intentional, freedom-related dimension of an action is thus given a contrast by its facticity, but it is not really limited by it (cf. Sartre 1977, 538–546).

Action is not, however, a mere combination of its intentional and contextual dimensions. It cannot be understood by any technological model where certain intentions are assumed to exist in order to overthrow contextual obstacles. This model does not leave any room for the autonomy of the action itself in shaping its own constituent dimensions; it leaves no possibility of a genuine action *as a change*.

The action in itself is, in a sense, a link between its own intentional and contextual dimensions; it is this link as an action »in situation«. This concept of situation has been developed by such »existential philosophers« as Karl Jaspers (1931, esp. 19–24) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1977, esp. 606–612).

The concept of situation must be carefully distinguished both from those of circumstance and of context. A situation »is« not simply there, given for the agent, but the latter *is always »in situation«*. There is no agent without situation but conversely there is no situation without a subject »in it«. The situation is a kind of totality which contributes in the constitution of both the intentional and the contextual aspects of action. Intentions are not general

principles valid for the agent in any given situation but they are formed by him in concrete situations for concrete purposes. They are susceptible to change whenever the concrete situation changes. Furthermore, we must also speak of the facticity as a concrete facticity for an agent »in situation»: the spatial and temporal conditions of action appear only in a perspective of an intention transcending the given circumstances.

What is constitutive for any given situation is its *openness*. The situation is always something oriented towards future through action. The facticity is to be understood only in relation to an intentional horizon of action, and even constituents of the situation like time and space are not mere moments of facticity but contain also an intentional aspect: a time perspective and a space arena link the concrete intention of the agent with the concrete facticity in time and space.

The »being in situation» has a double connotation. The agent is in general both »situational» or »situation-bound» in his action and he also acts in a specific concrete situation. Furthermore, a curious dialectics can also be found in the latter connotation: the agent »is» never in a stable situation, he is always moving from one situation to another. Therefore any concrete situation faced by the actor is *new*, transcending the earlier situation in the very action itself.

The openness and the novelty of the situation for the agent are conditions for the autonomy of the action. Every situation is for the subject an opportunity for change. Even if the horizon of action is becoming narrower than earlier, the agent can use this as an opportunity in a critical and creative way: he can do that by revolting against the factual limits of the horizon, finding further »open» possibilities or adapting himself to the narrow horizon in a manner which does not exclude the opportunity to revolt as soon as possible. The sheer emergence of an opportunity modifies the action, even when it is not »used». After the emergence of the opportunity the meanings of the intention and context of the course of action are no longer the same.

#### POLITICS AS AN »ACTION AGAINST»-SITUATION

How does one experience the difference between politics and other aspects of human action? In order to answer this question we must explicate some additional features of the situation. This explication offers the constitutive dimension for answering the question and it provides the key for defining the concept of pure politics.

A kind of typology of the situation is proposed by Sartre in »L'être et le

néant». According to Sartre the situation is explicated in the subject's relation to his past, his environment, his fellowmen and his death (Sartre 1977, 546–606). For understanding what is specific for a political situation (or rather: understanding the political aspect of a situation), the subject's relation to the others is, no doubt, a constitutive moment. The aspects of openness and novelty discussed above emphasize the subject's relation to his past, which relation is a condition for the formation and realization of a new policy. It is well thinkable that also the other two moments contribute original features to a political situation (compared with other aspects of action) but I shall limit myself to discussing the subject's action in relation to that of the others as well as to his own earlier action.

While considering the relation of the subject of politics to the action of the others I bracket the problems concerning its form and intensity. Both form and intensity concern more the »substance» of politics than the constitution of politics. In this respect the *direction* of the subject's relations to others appears most fundamental. Is politics the subject's »action-with-others» or his »action-against-others»? Both aspects are present in the »political reality», but in the analysis of what constitutes politics the asymmetry of their respective roles becomes clear.

One can reasonably argue – as I try to do – that if the action-against-others would disappear and men were united into a harmonious unity of a mankind, the politics would also disappear. Action-with-others, in a group (in the Sartrean sense, cf. Sartre 1974) is surely something which »belongs to politics». But even action-with-others is directed against the policy of some opponent – even if this opponent is expressed in terms of some anonymous processes. (Cf. Sartre's analyses on the constitution of a group against the serial structures in »Critique . . . », 1974, 377–432 as well as his interpretation of the role of the »manipulating groups» in the defence of the serial structures, *op.cit.*, 608–631).

In this sense the acting against-relation is constitutive for politics. Thus, what is specific in the experience of politics is constituted by *the actor's experience of being in the situation of »acting against»*. Politics can, in short, be found in the »conflict aspect» of human action. It seems reasonable to hold all human conflicts, on the one hand, at least potentially political, but, on the other hand, the general criteria of action sketched above set some further requirements for conflicts before they can be considered actually political.

The duality of the intention in action is especially reflected in the »against» element of the action. If politics is constituted by an action (a policy) of someone for changing something, it is also both an action against somebody

else and action against something opposed to the »for« of the action. In other words, politics as »action against« -relation and »action against« -situation for a given subject needs both another subject as an *adversary* and another policy *resisting* intentionally the policy of the first subject.

This double conflict which constitutes the political situation has certain important corollaries. First, the conflicts between policy alternatives of a given subject of action are *per se* not political, or at least not wholly political, as far as the action of the adversary is not considered. (We can simplify the situation by speaking only of one adversary). Correspondingly, the relation of a given subject to his adversary is not (wholly) political, if no conflict is present between the policies of the two. If both are striving for the same goals, we can speak of a reduced form of politics.

This latter corollary also implies that conflicts between adversaries are political only if they are intentional (although not necessarily actually intended). The intentional resistance is to be distinguished from a pure passive »reaction« opposed to some policy aiming at change. A Darwinian »struggle for life« (the paradigm of politics both for old social Darwinists and for modern sociobiologists) is not politics and even no action at all, according to the above definition of action. The idea of intentionality also excludes from politics a strict defence of the status quo. This is recognized even by Edmund Burke in his famous phrase, »to reform in order to conserve«.

Thus, no politics without adversary and resistance. But this crystallization of the idea of an »action against« -situation does not necessarily imply that adversary and resistance should be actually present. The potentiality of a conflict is sufficient for the subject. He cannot ever be sure that his own action would not awake resistance and adversaries. In this sense even the resistance against persisting structures, defended by nobody but resulting from the »counter-finality« of political actions (for the term see Sartre, 1974, esp. 102–103), is wholly political. What constitutes a situation as politics for an actor is the necessity to reflect on the »action against« -experience, even when he does not see anybody or anything as »acting against« him.

If we compare the experience of »action-against« with other types of situations, we find a curious dialectics between freedom and lack of freedom. If the resistance of an adversary is constitutive for the very formation of the measures by the subject, this will result in a situation where the subject can even less often than the other actors realize completely »his« measures. The very idea of acting according to the intentions preceeding the acting is based upon an artisan model, which is alien to politics. (Cf. Arendt 1981, esp. 124–163.) Only an enlightened despot could »realize his measures«, but the very idea of the situation in politics as »acting against« constitutes definite



limits both for despotism and enlightenment. The »lack of freedom« appears, however, in another sense as freedom. In politics there cannot be, in a strict sense, anything which is absolutely »given«: no policy without conceivable alternatives, no subject as an authority without adversaries.

This ambiguous openness of action is more radical as regards politics than as regards other aspects of action. In politics the duality of an action situation, i.e. the possibility for change and the contingency of the actual consequences of action, becomes most obvious. The openness characterizes also the relation of the subject to his action. The challenge of an adversary may lead a subject of politics to resort to measures which he could not conceive before the actual action situation.

#### A PARADIGMATIC SITUATION OF THE SUBJECT OF »PURE POLITICS«

The against-relation as regards the action of the others is, in a sense, the basis for the radicalization of the openness which is constitutive for the action situation in politics. On the other hand, politics contains also a kind of radicalization of the novelty which constitutes the situation. When every action is a change, this experience of a change is more radical in politics, where just the action against -situation gives a basis for a radical break with the continuity.

In order to understand this radical novelty as a constitutive moment of the political aspect of human action, let us reconstruct a situation where the political action is dominated by this radical novelty in the situation. Although this reconstruction is, of course, based on a phenomenological bracketing of the other aspects of action, it shows certain likeness with some »real« situations, where the political aspect — both in its purity and in its totality — appears in its most naked form, without any possibility of being tamed by morals, science etc. In this sense I shall call this situation as the paradigmatic situation of the »pure politics«.

In order to emphasize the radical novelty in the core of the pure politics, let us, for heuristic reasons, introduce some elements of permanence for the description of experiencing this situation. Firstly, following Sartre, I assume that only individuals are constitutive subjects of politics and the experience of acting as a subject in politics belongs to the individual — whether he is a member of a group or not and without limiting the experience of being a subject of politics to »leaders« but assuming this experience in principle possible for everybody (cf. Sartre 1974, e.g. 103–111, 154–156). Secondly, I will take it as an axiom that a subject of politics will, at any cost, remain in

the position of a subject, that means, he cannot accept any reasons to submit himself at the mercy of the adversary. Even a »bad« self-made policy is better than a submission to a »good« policy made by the others. And let us simplify the situation further by assuming that any re-arrangements of the subject's relation to group actions are ruled out. He has to face the novelty himself and alone.

Let us, lastly, assume that our individual subject of politics has for a period continued to pursue a stable policy of his own. The paradigmatic situation of pure politics appears, when *the subject experiences a necessity to leave his policy and replace it with a new*. For whatever reasons, validly or invalidly (according to an ex post reconstruction by an outsider), the subject suddenly understands that a further continuation of his »old« policy is impossible, it is ruled out from the horizon of real possibilities for his action. The novelty of the situation is experienced as a necessity to change one's own policy.

The point is that the very experience of necessity of changing the policy says nothing about the new policy itself. And neither do the characteristics of the novel situation give any basis for a new policy. Even the subject's clear insight into it cannot point the direction where and how long one should »go«, how much one should alter the previous policy. Thus, how to act?

If the situation is properly constructed, any analysis and discussion pertaining to it cannot give for the agent any advices for his choice, at most they can clarify his situation. The core of the situation is: the subject *cannot have any sufficient reason* for acting in a definite way. All arguments are insufficient, not only for the selection of »the best« alternative but also for the »relatively best« course of action. The subject has no means of setting his conceivable alternatives in a one-dimensional order, partly because of his dependence on the policy of the adversary, which he cannot know a priori, partly because of the very novelty of the situation. The novelty may put in question not only the earlier judgments concerning the strengths and weaknesses of the alternatives: it may also put in question the basic criteria of these judgments and also the judgments what alternatives are available at all.

The radicalization of the openness of the situation via the introduction of the conflict aspect and the novelty aspect does not lead, however, to a complete relativism, that is, to a situation where any alternative policy is just as good or bad as any other. Even if the analyses and discussions do not give sufficient grounds for the final choice, they obviously have a certain value in ruling out certain possibilities as inadequate for the situation. At the level of the a priori judgment this means first the exclusion of all alternatives

which are not »political« in the sense that they do not correspond with the general requirements of the acting against -situation. A decision not to give up the search for sufficient reasons is one example of the illusory alternatives, a kind of »mauvaise foi« in politics (for the concept see Sartre 1977, 82–107).

Similarly there is no use in resorting to »myths« or other solutions which are known to be invalid in principle although often thought to be »effective« in practice. All in all, the situation is not, at the level of a priori judgment, the one where the arguments make all alternatives impossible but rather the one where the »power« of the arguments is limited. They leave room for several opposing alternatives equally legitimate on the basis of the arguments.

The requirement to remain a subject of politics may also clarify the situation and exclude illusory alternatives. It still gives no help for deciding between the remaining ones. It is important to note that our above criteria of politics are able to rule out the possibility of non-action. If politics is constituted by the action against -situation, non-action means a voluntary surrender to the adversary. (One should add that it is not assumed that also the adversary might face a necessity to change his policy). Thus if I do not act, I remain at the mercy of the action of the adversary. A suspension of action *ad infinitum* becomes also naturally identical with the non-action.

An interesting marginal case is also the resort to chance, that is, letting the action be decided by lot or other chance procedures. The novelty of the situation implies certain contingencies in action, but this does not by any means legitimate the resort to the chance. This can, rather, be interpreted as another type of »action by the others«, even if the »other« is not a concrete adversary but an anonymous one, like Heidegger's »das Man« (cf. Heidegger 1979, 126–130). No doubt the resort to chance may be a legitimate alternative for action, but also the choice of this type of action is made by the subject. Action by chance is legitimate as a mere instrument, but the surrender to the action of others is obvious, when chance action is »rationalized« as the most legitimate. The absence of sufficient reasons to take any alternative does not render rationality to chance.

The concept of the situation should not be understood as instantaneous but as one having an inner time perspective of its own. This leads to the problem of *timing* the action. I have already indicated that an unlimited suspension of action — as the neglect of the »inner time« of the situation — turns into action by the others. The other extreme, the instantaneous action, turns out to be practically identical with the chance action, because it is not able to understand or to utilize the inner time perspective. The above exclusion of the extreme cases only elucidates the question, *when* to act, but gives by no means any justification for any specific types of action.

Analogous logic holds in the choice of the arena of the action. The novelty of the situation rules out both »too near» and »too distant» arenas but says nothing about where between these extremes the subject should act.

#### TOWARDS A STRUCTURATION OF THE PURE POLITICAL SITUATION

The result of my discussion is clear: a phenomenology of political action cannot give any definite a priori answer to the question how to act in a pure political situation. In other words, *there cannot be any »right policy»*.

This does not mean that the task of reflecting on the experience in a pure political situation should be given up. It is not necessary to perceive the situation as an extremely chaotic one. We can try to structure and conceptualize the way it can be experienced. The rest of this paper consists of an attempt to conceptualize the pure political situation. I do not intend to build any comprehensive schema but I rather try to illustrate the major problems confronting the phenomenology of politics.

If we take the specific situation of an agent in a pure political situation as our point of departure, we can see that despite the individual features of his earlier policy and the policy of the adversary, despite the novelty of the situation and so on, there still exist some general or at least common problems for the agent to be elucidated. Therefore we can try to detect a certain dimension of »intersubjectivity» in an agent's attempts to face the situation.

The idea of intersubjectivity in politics can be conceptualized into a view which, while denying the idea of an objectively right policy, still considers the intersubjectivity, the subjective universality, as a kind of criterion for general »rightness» in politics. This idea of the Kantian aesthetics in the »Kritik der Urteilskraft» (Kant 1976) is recently applied to or transferred into politics by Ernst Vollrath in his interesting book »Die Rekonstruktion der politischen Urteilskraft» (1977). Because I consider the »action against» as constitutive for politics, I must also consider this transfer untenable: there cannot exist in politics anything which could be experienced as valid on the basis of an universal intersubjective judgment, for basically anybody may question the validity of any policy.

Thus the meaning of intersubjectivity in politics refers to problems facing the agent. If we discuss the pure political situation, we can (and we should), of course, question any specific claims for defining the common problems. This does not, however, make the *idea* of these problems invalid. I base my approach to the analysis of common problems on the explication of the concepts of openness and novelty.

In a sense, the conceptualization and structuration of the situation need not end at the level of problems only. Although there is no right or even intersubjectively valid policy for an actor in the paradigmatic situation for pure politics, still the alternatives available to him can be structured. We may be able to develop a kind of »logic of alternatives«. This logic can be based on the idea that among the alternatives for any situation there are only a limited number of pure ideal types in the Weberian sense (see e.g. Weber 1973, esp. 191).

For an actor in a situation there are a practically unlimited number of potentially available alternatives, which can, however, be conceived as variants of a relative small number of distinct »pure types«, consciously one-sided in their emphasis on some specific aspects or dimensions. For a real action these ideal type alternatives are, of course, no »better« than their variants but the latter can be defined only in relation to these ideal types. The task of the reflection is, first, to try to find all conceivable ideal types; and then to discuss their qualities without suggesting how to choose between them. The concrete task should be left for a real agent in his concrete situation.

These ideal types of action are present only in the experience of the acting subject in a pure political situation. They are not »ideologies« or »philosophies« of the actor existing prior to the situation. They are neither »decision making strategies« for »possible corresponding situations«. We have no reason to assume any continuity for a person from one situation to another »similar« situation. All types can, instead, be used by any actor according to the expediency; they form his »repertoire«. Within this repertoire he may favor some types but he is still able to use all or most of them, like an artist in his work.

The initial problem for the construction of a logic alternatives is how to find the common problems for an actor in a pure political situation? The problem is that the alternatives for the question »what to change« in his situation are even at the level of the ideal types practically unlimited. His earlier policy, which should be changed, is a complex whole which can be probed at various levels and in several dimensions. But structuring those levels and dimensions means already a transition from the »what to change« to the »where to change«.

The problems of this type of structuring have, in fact, already been discussed in this paper. We can easily identify such questions as those of changing the intentional or the contextual aspects, changing timing and spacing as well as changing the orientation to the action of an adversary (e.g. shall I act first or rather wait for his action). My claim is, however, that even these problems of the dimensions of changing are not, yet, deep enough for a structuring

of the pure political situation. They remain too substantial while the real problems can be found on a more analytical level.

A key for reaching this further level could be giving up the reflection of the alternatives as regards the policy and focussing on the alternatives due to the characteristics of the situation. Among the latter the openness of the situation is closely linked with the core problems of decision itself. The structuring as regards the openness could e.g. be based on the alternatives for »closing» the situation by the decision, or for finding alternative ways of choosing between the alternatives. But perhaps a still more fundamental reflection can be reached via the analysis of the »opening» of the new situation, that is, in the analysis of the forms of experiencing the novelty and the break with the old policy.

The typological alternatives at these different analytical levels are no longer ideal types for the specific action alternatives but rather metatypes with constitutive and regulative importance for simpler typologies. By stressing the form of acting rather than its content I shall call them *styles of political action*.

#### HOW TO CHOOSE?

The dialectics between creating and suppressing the openness is constitutive for all human action and especially for politics. In action one of the real possibilities is changed into a »realized reality» while the other ones are turned into unrealized possibilities (at least for time being). The action also implies at the same time shifting the horizon of the possibilities. A major constitutive problem in this process of changing reality is: how to select the possibility to be realized. In politics, as an action against -relation, this selection is not intentionally made by anybody but is formed in the confrontation of the adversaries.

Our problem, however, is not the change of reality but the experience of political action, with the change of policy as the paradigm case. Every subject is bound to face the problem of selecting a new policy for the confrontation with the adversary. My discussion above excludes the ideas of a »right» or even a relatively best policies. My claim is, however, that this does not lead to wilfulness, but leaves room for a kind of pre-reflection on the decision situation.

The concepts of decision and choice have themselves a double connotation. They both mean either a process of reaching a selection among the available alternatives or the very result of this process. Both aspects of the choice situation can be reflected within the »logic of alternatives». Important is that

both aspects can be further divided into sub-problems which structure the situation.

The first question is, thus, how to approach the very process of decision. An obvious sub-question here concerns *timing* the act of decision: shall the decision be taken rapidly or suspended as long as possible? Another aspect of the decision process concerns the *way* of reaching decisions: are resolute decisions better than hesitating ones? Both of these questions are also related to that of *conditions*: are the decisions to be taken independent of what else happens or are they, on the contrary, made dependent on the fulfillment of certain condition, e.g. on a *ceteris paribus* clause?

The above alternatives contain hardly more than dichotomies of pure types. In principle, there is no necessary correlation between these different aspects of the decision process, but if the similarity of these dichotomies are consciously elucidated and compared, we can develop different types of *styles* for the decisional process. A rapid, resolute and unconditional way of deciding could perhaps be called a *hard* style of decision-making, while a suspending, hesitating and conditional way corresponds to a *soft* style.

An analogous approach can be used in reflecting upon the conceivable results of a policy. Without claiming for completeness or for correspondence to the previous examples let us even here distinguish three sub-problems with a dichotomic range of pure alternatives. The first question concerns the *revisability* of the chosen alternatives, the second their *degree of interpretation* (ex post) and the third the *precision* of the solution required.

In the first case we can speak of the dichotomy of irrevocable and revocable decisions, in the second case of that between definite and ambiguous choices and in the last case of the dichotomy between distinct and diffuse decisions. An analogy to the previous examples of hard and soft orientation towards the decision to be taken can be seen, although there is no necessary connection between the styles on the process level and on the result level of decision-making. A consistently hard attitude towards the decision at both levels could, however, be called *decisiveness* which contrasts with *reservedness*.

These pure cases, of course, leave room both for *in-between* types at both levels and for *mixed* styles, combining hard alternatives at one level with the soft one at the other. Combining a systematic stylistic difference between the process aspect and the result aspect gives a special case of a mixed decision style.

As in the previous analyses of this paper, these »decisions concerning decisions« are purely strategic ones, matters of expediency. Thus a reserved attitude has no negative connotation, and »decisiveness« has no a priori positive value as such. In this respect my position has nothing to do with a program-

matic »decisionistic« view on politics, advocated especially by Carl Schmitt (see e.g. Schmitt 1979 a b).

These decision types and styles have been developed until now without considering the nature of politics as action against -situation. I shall next briefly discuss the pure styles of deciding as regards the constitutive demands of politics, that is in relation to certain a priori visible »dangers« for »mauvaise foi«.

A hard style of decision strategy is characterized by the danger of too strong an existential commitment. This tends to lead, firstly, towards a fictitious decisionist fundamentalism. A strong commitment to a decision tends to favour an experience which forgets the wilful basis of deciding or tends to consider the strength of the decision as regards commitment an indirect sign of a »sufficient reason« for the decision. A strong existential commitment may, secondly, lead to a direct identification of the subject with his policy, without leaving the strategic distance needed for answering the policy of the adversary.

Correspondingly, the soft style of decision strategy is confronted by the obvious converse dangers which are contrary to the requirements of the pure political situation. The reserved attitude tends to lead to the opposite direction from the decisionist fundamentalism, that is towards a criticistic excuse for suspension of action *ad infinitum* and acceptance of being left at the mercy of the adversary. A weak commitment to one's own policy is liable to lead to an attitude of treating it as a mere object of experimentation, as a scientific hypothesis, and to avoiding any personal, existential commitment which is constitutive for the decisional moment of political action.

As political alternatives both of the above pure decisional styles have a common but converse weakness. Both are all too planned in advance, and correspondingly, all too predictable for the adversary: they do not contain any autonomous »tactical« elements without which a genuine autonomy in action is not possible. In this sense, I propose that the use of mixed decision strategies is a condition for understanding the constitutive ambiguity in the openness of a political action situation. The exclusion of extreme pure styles do not, by any means, diminish the subject's burden of decision but, on the contrary, it actualizes the personal decision on every single level of all the decisional aspect of political action.

#### HOW TO ASSESS THE NOVELTY?

The final decision to act is naturally in a certain way dependent on the



assessment of the horizon of available alternatives. The novelty aspect of the situation concerns just this assessment: what is new in the horizon of action? In this sense the perhaps most fundamental alternatives for action concern the very styles in the interpretation of the new situation.

In a pure political situation the assessment of the novelty is linked with the constitutive experience of a break with the old policy of the subject. The problem is, what kind of a break is present for the subject? In a real situation the concrete facticities facilitate the interpretation, but in my construction of a pure political situation all the discussed components alone or together are insufficient to lead to a decision between pure styles in the interpretation of the situation. In other words, we have, in an a priori judgment, no sufficient reasons to choose between alternative styles of the situation assessment. The task of the reflection is to explicate the alternatives and their mutual relations as concurrent styles of political action available to a subject in a pure political situation.

The construction of the pure situation for political action excludes already the possibility that the novelty of the situation is only apparent or illusory. The experience of the break with the old policy and the need for changing it is so convincing that the presence of the »new« will no doubt be accepted. Similarly the direction of the novelty in the situation, that is, move towards the narrowing or the widening of the horizon of possibilities, is also experienced as irrelevant to judging the policy change.

In the pure case, the break with the old policy is experienced as necessary, sudden and radical. In other words, the novelty of the situation is experienced as a *dramatic* one. Or seen from another direction still: the dramatic is seen as a constitutive characteristic of a pure political situation. All modes of de-dramaticization of a situation are also modes of its de-politicization.

But the real problem for political understanding does not stop here. After we acknowledge the dramatics in the situation, we are confronted with the question *which kind of drama* is present. The styles of political action are, in the final instance, styles of the dramatic interpretation of situation.

The dramatic experience of a break in policy means a shift in the perspective, whereupon the concrete alternatives available and the facticities of the situation appear in a new light. For a phenomenological discussion the »reasons« for this shift are uninteresting, the description of the pure styles and their qualities suffice.

A first possibility for assessing the dramatic novelty inherent in a situation is its interpretation as *exceptional*. The agent assumes that the novelty is something which will soon disappear, that the situation constitutes a sort of curiosity which is being followed by a »return to normalcy«. But even if the

exceptional situation is considered relatively unimportant in the long run, it is strikingly important at present — and here we see the radical difference when compared with the conception of the novelty as only an apparent property.

The experience of a new political situation as an exception means ruling out possibilities of change from the longer term perspective, giving thus apparent legitimacy to a «curiosities shall not be counted»-attitude. But by a closer inspection this attitude appears situation-inadequate, because it is unable to distinguish radically enough between the apparent and the exceptional, to understand the dramatic character of this exceptional. A situation-adequate experience as regards the policy is rather: «now if ever». The question is to «seize the time» for change, to understand an occasion for acting which will hardly come back. But this occasion is present only for a single political act, it is not a beginning of a new cumulative development.

Another type of the dramatic experience is the one where the break in policy is interpreted as a *turning point* in the development, as a sudden transition from one line of continuity to another. Even in this case the novelty is momentary, but there will not be a change back to the old normalcy. The turn itself will constitute a new normalcy. The turning point is experienced like an introduction of a new calendar which begins a new era and divides the time into the «before» and the «after» of the dramatic experience.

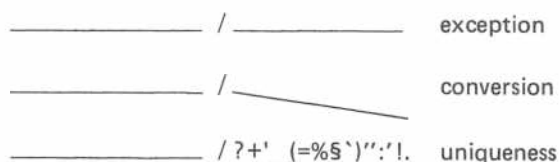
The turning point as a dramatic situation contains a sudden insight that the old policy has been fundamentally «wrong» combined with an urgent need for a definite new policy avoiding this wrongness. In this experience the doubts about the rightness of the new policy are suspended by the very need to adopt a new line as soon as possible. The experience of a turning point is by no means used for a careful reflection of alternatives but rather seen as a burdening situation, a situation of seeking for a new policy, which could be constantly followed in the future. In this sense this experience can also be called that of *conversion*.

The experience of a turning point and of a conversion still contain the idea of a stable policy in the future. A third pure style in the assessment of the new can be found by questioning this very requirement. The novelty can be experienced as a turning point without a need for a continuous new policy. The break with the old policy can be experienced as a beginning of a new era where every situation is experienced as *unique*. On a still deeper level, however, even in this case a continuity remains, a continuity in discontinuity. All situations are experienced so different that they are the same in their difference.

An appropriate orientation to experiencing all situations after the turning

point as unique questions the idea of a personal continuity in policy. In a sense, this corresponds to an »opportunistic« attitude, not necessarily in a pejorative sense but rather in a literal sense, which understands every new situation as a unique opportunity. This kind of attitude stresses the autonomy of action even at the cost of the autonomy of the person, but on the other hand it liberates the person from the captivity of »ideologies« and similar constraints and makes him a personal subject of his decisions.

Let us summarize the pure dramatic styles in the interpretation of a new political situation by a following graphic description:



These different styles of the situational assessment contain also a kind of typology of the different types of action as a paradigm for politics. The exception-interpretation corresponds to a perspective where the single *act* is seen as the core of all political action. The interpretation of the dramatic situation as an opportunity for conversion understands politics as a *process* with few turning points between periods of continuity. The assessment of every situation unique makes politics a *drama* with unlimited number of situational acts, in the theatrical sense of the word.

As regards the action of the adversary, the dramatic experience of the agent in the pure political situation means first of all an opportunity to take the initiative. If the successful action of the adversary is to be conceived as the main reason behind the experienced necessity of policy change, the experience of the drama is an occasion for turning the tables, that is, for a new counter-attack by the agent.

Are the above pure stylistic alternatives of managing the dramatic situation adequate in describing politics as an action-against situation? In the literal sense this is hardly the case. Each of the paradigms for political styles (perceived as correlates for the styles of the dramatic interpretation) covers clearly one fundamental dimension of political action. None of them comprehends all the dimensions. Because of this one-sidedness the pure styles are scarcely good in choosing real alternatives. They are only valuable as correlates which real course of action can be infused with in such a way as recognizes the constitutive role of the adversary.

## POLITICS AND DRAMA

The dramatic has surfaced above as the constitutive feature for experiencing politics. This leads to some final reflections on the relation between politics and theatre. This analogy has, of course, been historically present since the Greek tragedies. In a sense, the play is perhaps often a better means for understanding the conflict relations which constitute politics than a prose style. For instance, the Sartrean programme of »theatre of situations» is reflected in most of his plays which deal with marginal situations, that is, situations where the political aspect is more or less explicitly present.

But is there an actual conceptual link between the »dramatic» of the politics and that of the theatre? How can we discern politics from a play in the theatre?

In a theatrical context the concept of »dramatic» is used in several senses. One of them refers merely to the »theatre» or the »play», without any specifications as to the type and quality of the action. Another is the Brechtian contrast between the epic and the dramatic theatre. None of these meanings is related with my above use of the concept »dramatic». The concept of dramatic has here obviously a qualitative connotation, meaning rather a style of writing than the genre of literature. The concept in this meaning is also used by some theoreticians of literature, e.g. by Emil Steiger in his »Grundbegriffe der Poetik» (1946, 155–218). For him »Spannung» is the core of the dramatic style. Within this style he further discerns between the sub-styles of the pathetic and the problematic. His description of the latter sub-style has some features which can be compared with my interpretation of the dramatic situation in politics ( see op.cit, esp. 170–186)..

My interpretation of the three pure dramatic styles in politics could also be developed into a typology of political dramas. We could perhaps speak of a *drama of occasion*, a *drama of conversion* and a *drama of metamorphosis*. The first of these three can be conceived to center around a single, more or less »heroic» act of politics taking place in the grey everyday life. A drama of conversion deals either with the conversion of an individual from one political stand to another or with individuals experiencing such great turning points of history as revolutions. The drama of metamorphosis is dramatic at two levels. There is a primary drama around the turning point of action and a secondary drama – not necessarily inferior in its dramatic quality – in each act, the primary drama being an introduction of politics, the secondary dramas a continuation or perhaps even acceleration of politics.

The correspondence between politics and a theatre play can be found in their internal »worlds» of action, in the similarity of dramatic text and the

»reality» as »political worlds» for human experience. The difference appears at the level of the performance of a play at the stage. A play is an »artifact» where the dramatic of the situation presents itself more to the spectators than to the actors. The actors are rehearsed in advance and follow the design of the director and the text of the author.

Pure politics is thus a kind of play without a pre-written manuscript, without a director, without fixed roles for the actors, who also contest with each other as regards the style of the play. A badly rehearsed play may sometimes degenerate down to the level of politics, while all too well rehearsed and planned types of politics may appear as a play.

#### REFERENCES

- Arendt, Hannah *Vita activa*, München 1981 (1958).  
 Debray, Régis *Critique de la raison politique*, Paris 1981.  
 Heidegger, Martin *Sein und Zeit*, Tübingen 1979 (1927).  
 Husserl, Edmund *Ideen zur einen reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*, Tübingen 1980 (1913).  
 Jaspers, Karl *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*, Berlin 1931.  
 Kant, Immanuel *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Reclam edition, Stuttgart 1976 (1790).  
*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Reclam edition, Stuttgart 1970 (1781).  
 Sartre, Jean-Paul *L'être et le néant*, Paris 1977 (1943).  
 Sartre, Jean-Paul *Critique de la raison dialectique*, Paris 1974 (1960).  
 Schmitt, Carl *Politische Theologie*, Berlin 1979a (1922).  
*Der Begriff des Politischen*, Berlin 1979b (1932).  
 Steiger, Emil *Grundbegriffe der Poetik*, Zürich 1946.  
 Weber, Max *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, Tübingen 1973 (1922).  
 Vollrath, Ernst *Die Rekonstruktion der politischen Urteilskraft*, Stuttgart 1977.