Article

Testimonial Image Practices as a Politics of Aesthetics after Levinas

Johannes Bennke

Media Anthropology Center of Excellence, Bauhaus-University Weimar, 99423 Weimar, Germany;
johannes.bennke@uni-weimar.de

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Abstract: The transition from ethics to politics still lacks a proper understanding. I propose thinking of this transition in terms of a politics of aesthetics. However, thinking about a politics of aesthetics means also thinking about images and their prohibition. The prohibition of images has a long history, dating back to the Bible and Plato; its implications are crucial for image theory. Since Levinas did not systematically develop a political theory, aesthetics, or image theory, it is necessary to collect and systematize his distributed statements. Having image theory as a starting point for a politics of aesthetics, I choose a media philosophical approach to identify the mediality of the image after Levinas. Key elements for a Levinasian image theory are the temporal aspect of its transient appearance, its involving affective power, and its negativity. I propose to think of this image theory as an image-pragmatics that testifies and responds not only to the Other but also to the mediality of the image. With Levinas it becomes possible to turn the prohibition of images into a commandment to remember. I call this a testimonial image practice that becomes a regulatory idea for a politics of aesthetics.

1. Introduction

To speak of a politics of aesthetics invokes the power of images. Interest in images can be traced back to the Bible and Plato. Specifically, I am referring to the prohibition of images mentioned in Exodus, 20.4 and the rejection of illusions by Plato expressed in *The Republic* (Plato 1968, II. 376c ff, X. 595a ff).

The prohibition of images, as one of the strongest of the ten commandments, is tightly connected to monotheism. In theological debates, as far as I survey them, it is not about the image and its prohibition in general, but about the specific handling of the representation of God; it is about whether representations of God are legitimate or whether they may be considered a fetishization of the divine. Such debates have been written from the perspective of social and cultural history with its associated constraints. A philosophical perspective asks what implications such a rejection has for the image. To what extent does the long history of the prohibition of images inform the concept of the image as such?

For Plato, images are first and foremost mere shadows, delusions or just representations (eikon) of an original image (paradeigma), which itself references a general idea (eidos). Since the representation partakes (methexis) of the original image, there is an original relation of the iconic to the mimetic. This Platonic thinking has been highly influential for image theories of likeness. Images in this sense are seen as degraded imitations of truth and therefore deceiving. Plato's allegory of the cave (Plato 1968, VII. 514a) accentuates this understanding of the image, differentiating between images that serve the virtue of the state and those that do not. In the second book of *The Republic*, Plato leaves no doubt

that the founders of a state are the ones who "know the models according to which the poets must tell their tales. If what the poets produce goes counter to these models, founders must not give way; [. . .]" (Plato 1968, II. 379a). Aesthetics and politics here serve a higher good: the virtue of the citizens; the cost is a renunciation of the autonomy of art. The allegory of the cave distinguishes between the 'real' object and its shadow or referent; it rejects the reality of art and images and also calls the value of the senses into question, seeing them as a debased form of knowledge. The central purpose of the allegory is to expose images as inaccurate reflections of reality and to emphasize the need for self-tutelage, employing a disciplinary measure against the affective qualities of the body that need directing by the enlightening *logos*. Image theories of likeness therefore imply a depreciation of sensuous qualities.

In recent years, there has been a new appreciation of the senses, especially regarding the politics of aesthetics, as seen in the work of French philosopher Jacques Rancière. His understanding of politics is based on a fundamental disagreement, between those who can and are allowed to speak and be listened to and those whose articulations are nonexistent or not being heard. This scene of disagreement, or dissensus, is the place where a distribution of the sensible takes place. Politics for Rancière is a fundamental struggle, an antagonistic moment between those subjects who take part in negotiations, decision making processes and discussions and those who do not.

> The quarrel has nothing to do with more or less transparent or opaque linguistic contents; it has to do with consideration of speaking beings as such (Rancière 1999, p. 50)

> The disagreement consists not in the content but in the places and subjects of a community that participate in such processes. For Rancière, the scene of disagreement has an immanent aesthetic to it. The whole conflict lies in what he calls a distribution of the sensible *(le partage du sensible).* (Rancière 2004, p. 12)

Taking part in a collective praxis, for Rancière, is decided by the social and aesthetic constitution of a sensual perception. The realm of the senses, perception, is conceptualized in relation to places which subjects occupy and allocate to social functions, visibility and forms of articulation. Public places or institutions (such as the cinema, theatre or the street) become keys for repressed, unarticulated or unheard subjects who are commonly excluded. The realm of art becomes the haven of a utopian potential for a democratic community. Platonism is turned upside down: *Art before politics.*

For Rancière, the image has a key function in modern aesthetics, referring to Platonic images with their regulatory and educational functions (Rancière 2004, p. 21). By taking Platonism as a reference point, Rancière follows a methodological interest: He makes Plato a straw man for his understanding of the political. Plato's "politics before art" is precisely the opposite of the notion of freedom, equality and unification that Rancière conceptualizes in his politics of aesthetics. Rancière sees in Plato—and in the whole debate on the prohibition of images—an educational impulse that not only prevents an autonomy of art but also an equality of people. However, Rancière loses something important with this stance; he becomes interested in the political function of images to serve a new distribution of the senses regarding a civic community and in doing so neglects the image itself. The main emphasis for Rancière is on the discursive framing of images, their circulation, distribution and their critical discourse accompanying it.

> What might then properly be called the fate of the image is the fate of this logical, paradoxical intertwining between the operations of art, the modes of circulation of imagery, and the critical discourse [. . .]. (Rancière 2007, p. 17f)

In short, the political dimension of the image lies in the social, institutional and cultural framing of historical testimony, thus rearranging the distribution and circulation of images. The purpose of a politics of the image is to testify for those existences that do not take part. A politics of aesthetics for Rancière is a 'rare' occasion. Here the image serves as a kind of role model for a politics of aesthetics. However, there are certain problems that come with this position, one being the disregard of the image as medium.

Here, I argue for a different reading of a politics of aesthetics. In this article, I ask for a politics of aesthetics along the lines of French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. For Levinas, a key element to understand his aesthetic thinking is through his concept of the image, using media philosophy. However, Levinas did not elaborate systematically on a political or on an aesthetic thinking. Media philosophy is a discourse strategy that identifies the media constitution of knowledge production. Media philosophy does not offer a specific method or start with a specific object. Rather, it focuses on media functions in a specific context and its concrete material appearances. There is at least a two-fold epistemic dimension to this approach. Firstly, it distinguishes a genuine way of thinking for each medium, where a medium is understood as an agent being capable of acting and producing knowledge in its own right. It is a media theory of the medium itself:

> A media theory of the medium itself would be an investigation of the interspace between—thorough, conceptual-exemplary—theory as a way of thinking and medium as a condition of the possibility of this way of thinking. It would not be articulated in fixed theoretical terms, but (still) always be involved in the operations and ways of functions of the medium itself. (Engell 2014, p. 207f; translation by the author)

There is no thinking outside of media. Therefore, media determine the structure of thinking as they are determined by it. To recognize this precarious relationship between media and thinking means to turn to the performative doing, which is generated and made possibly by the medium. It is not about generating stable objects, instead it is about knowledge production in the usage of the medium, in its practice.

A second epistemic dimension lies in the inner logic of the medium, its mediality and materiality. The key question here is, how can the mediality of a medium be identified when the very mediality and materiality of the medium disappears during the process of transmission? The carrier of the transmission cannot be mediated itself. It eludes the transmission. It is, therefore, necessary to look for reflexive strategies that make visible the very material condition and the inner logic of the medium. I will come back to this problem when discussing Levinasian aesthetics.

Reflexivity in media philosophy refers not only to reflexive media practices but also to reflexivity in theory itself. In the analysis of Levinasian aesthetics we need to look for reflexive elements in his methodology. A media philosophical approach primarily recognizes each medium as a knowledge production in its own right through emphasizing its material condition and mediality.

In the following, the medium of the image will play a key role in identifying a Levinasian politics of aesthetics. Both image theory and media philosophy highlight the material condition and the mediality of the image, but they differ when it comes to other media such as sound or language and their related concepts. In this sense, image theory is a special case of media philosophy. Image theory after the *iconic turn* provided key insights into field of knowledge outside the realm of language. The *iconic turn* as a turn to the image has epistemological implications: there is an iconic logic with a consistent meaning production independent of language (Boehm 2004, p. 28). In this respect, the *iconic turn* also has fundamental consequences for other disciplines such as epistemology and the history of science (Daston and Galison 2007).

Following Levinas, examining the relation of aesthetics to politics, means acknowledging the role of ethics. The debate concerning justice within Levinas studies asks the question: How can the transition from ethics to politics be understood? A politics of aesthetics after Levinas still needs to be written and I would like to outline here some necessary approaches that imply image theory on the one hand and the transition from ethics to politics on the other. After broadly introducing the prohibition of images, I examine Levinas's understanding of politics. I turn to the image as one of the key concepts of his aesthetics, before bringing together politics and aesthetics. This detour allows for a different understanding of a politics of aesthetics, especially as Rancière is now an important reference in this area. While Levinas is not himself a political thinker, and even lacks a developed sense of the political, explicating this politics of aesthetics alerts us to a more political reception of his work.

2. The Prohibition of Images and the Politics of Aesthetics

To come back to my earlier question: To what extent does the prohibition of images inform the image as such? Within the history of the study of image, the pictorial turn introduced by W.J.T. Mitchell in the 1990s (Mitchell 1994), looked to image usage in cultural studies interested in mass media, popular culture and social political questions. However, the German art historian Gottfried Boehm asked more fundamental ontological questions: What is an image? And how does it affect us? (Boehm 1995). In seeking the logic and effects of images in both arts and sciences, Gottfried Boehm reads the interdiction of images as a fundamental element of an iconic logic, interpreting the narrative of the Bible as a source of image history and image theory. He is not primarily concerned with the theological, cultural-historical, and political iconoclasms of the Byzantine Reformation era, or in the political and fundamental-religious iconoclasms of the 20th and 21st century. Rather, his question is: What do the Old Testament passages contribute to a genuine iconic thinking?

As is well known, in Exodus 20.4, Moses is handed the Ten Commandments by God, who speaks and is heard but whose presence is shrouded in a cloud, and pronounces the prohibition on representation of himself. In addition, yet Genesis 1.26 and 27, speak of the divine likeness of man (εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ). Boehm's two central insights focus on this. Firstly, the ban of images expresses a contradiction, which consists in both a prohibition and an encouragement to represent. While the monotheistic commandment is a prohibition, it also preserves an alterity. The prohibition is a radical negation, a non-representation. In addition, yet, God shows himself in the image of man. According to Boehm, this foundational narrative *is both a ban on visibility and an urge to represent*.

The second insight concerns the power of the image. In the prohibition as well as in the advocacy of the image, the ability of the image to visualize the absent, to make the distant present and to keep it present, and thus to embody the unrepresented, is expressed. In addition, indeed, the iconoclastic position becomes understandable only under the assumption that it also fundamentally assigns the image a mediating function. In this respect, the brotherhood of Moses and Aaron can also be read symbolically as the inner conflict within the image: While Aaron sees in the golden calf the real presence represented by the image in the image, which reaches up to the desired ritual union with God, Moses stands for the iconoclastic position. What both have in common, however, is that they acknowledge an unrepresentability.

The narrative of the interdiction of images, following Boehm, thus expresses an inner conflict, whereby negativity is recognized as the basis of all iconic phenomena. In addition, yet, it also bestows power on the image. Both iconophiles and iconoclasts assume that the image validates something through sight. Boehm calls this inner tension of the image—making an unrepresentable visible—the *iconic contrast* or *iconic difference*. For now, this negativity of the image is key to understanding the argument that I will further develop with Levinas below.

The other foundational rejection of the image is in Plato's *The Republic*. The film scholar Gertrud Koch emphasized that Plato did not reject art in general and images especially (Koch 2013, p. 343). He rather separated art into two categories: art that has an educative purpose and therefore serves the interest of the state; and art that is not wanted, and does not serve the virtue of a true political and good minded people. Art therefore serves the good and is a virtue only when it instills the value of the state in its citizens. Koch writes:

> In Plato's definition of the aesthetic as political, art is granted a privileged position in the education of citizens, but it is teleologically subordinated through censorship to the more highly valued political goal of the ideal state. Plato's aesthetic state is an educative dictatorship (Koch 2013, p. 346)

Politics in this sense means to give art a privileged position as an exemplary function of the polis and understands art as a mere cultural symbol for its political and moral values. One can view some of the political aesthetics in the 20th century and up until today in this tradition. For example, the DEFA, an East German state-owned film production company and studio, had a specific interest

in depicting the Native Americans as goodhearted heroes living as a community in harmony with nature against the bad capitalist cowboys. In several of these so called "Eastern Westerns" or "Red Westerns", the indigenous people live in a social idyll disrupted by the capitalist ideology of the West (see i.e., the documentary film DDR/DDR by Siegel 2008). This tradition, following Plato, makes art the servant of politics. *Politics above art*.

The prohibition of images, with its moral implications, gives another perspective on the relation between art and politics. The moral imperative of the prohibition of images is an obligation to serve and turn to the one and only God. When Immanuel Kant relates to the Platonic prohibition of images, he sees in it a regulatory idea for a politics of aesthetics. In the following passage, he expresses a relationship between need to not represent God through the image and the cultivation of an inner morality:

> Perhaps the most sublime passage in the Jewish Law is the commandment: Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven or on earth, or under the earth, etc. [. . .]. The same holds also for our presentation of the moral law, and for the predisposition within us for morality. [. . .] For once the senses no longer see anything before them, while yet the unmistakable and indelible idea of morality remains, one would sooner need to temper the momentum of an unbounded imagination so as to keep it from rising to the level of enthusiasm, than to seek to support these ideas with images and childish devices for fear that they would otherwise be powerless. That is also why governments have gladly permitted religion to be amply furnished with such accessories [. . .]. (Kant 1987, p. 135)

Kant takes the prohibition of images as an analogy:

> [. . .] he presupposes that, much as the images distract from the inner bind with God and redirect one to an outward, comfortable support that transforms faith from an inward conviction to something that can be expressed, externalized and delegated to representations, the same applies to morality. (Koch 2013, p. 343)

The prohibition of images for Kant is expressing a capability of the human being to decide a moral judgement. The subjects should be free and able to decide for themselves for a moral judgement and shouldn't be constrained by manipulating rhetoric, images or other persuasive media. The interdiction also signals the risk taken when delegating an inner conviction to representations or—even worse—governments. The price paid for this entrustment is high: the subject, unburdened of the load of autonomy, becomes an object in a mediating process where the images serve as a means to ensure the power of the sender, that is, the government.

The prohibition of images after Kant becomes a kind of regulatory idea for a politics of aesthetics. At its beginning—in the Bible and likewise by Plato—it stands for the capability of images to effect acts (for good or bad), becoming idolatrous, serving the state, becoming revolutionary or resisting against the state of things. As a regulatory idea for a politics of aesthetics the ban of images can be reformulated as a commandment of freedom:

> [. . .] you should treat neither yourself nor others as simply instruments, nor should one's freedom become a dependence on magical practices, nor should one be allowed to make use of magical practices on others to enforce one's own freedom (Koch 2013, p. 344f)

This enlightened formulation implies freedom and autonomy of the subject to the mediating image practices as well. This leads to the modern aesthetic with its claim that it is not only the subject but art itself that must be free and act autonomously. However, what then is a politics of aesthetics after Kant, and how is it related to morality?

3. Levinas and the Political

Levinas is particularly known for his ethics, being concerned with the interpersonal face-to-face relation to the Other, and it has only been in more recent years that the importance of his thinking for political considerations has been recognized. Several studies have systematized his political thinking, connecting it to the political horrors of National Socialism, the Post-War era, and especially the state of Israel. According to Howard Caygill, "Levinas's political is haunted by an unassimilable past of political horror and an unforeseeable future of political promise" (Caygill 2002, p. 3). It is seen as a prophetic intimation of peace, a gesture toward the utopian. Levinas's political is also something that insists, it "returns disruptively" (ibid.), challenges the meaning of politics, disturbs existing practices or narratives and converses with them.

I want to highlight some aspects of the political in Levinas's writing. In an interview with a German scholar, Levinas gives his viewpoint on the political in a nutshell:

> In my thinking, there is a definite sense of the political. It consists in the fact that there are not two of us, but at least three of us. Immediately, in addition to the initial mercy—because the relationship with two is one of mercy—there is 'calculation' and comparison. In multiplicity every face counts, and all faces negate each other. Everyone was chosen as through God's Word, everyone has a right. In addition, every face means responsibility. However, as soon as there is a third, I must compare. The justice of comparison necessarily comes after mercy. It owes everything to mercy, but it constantly denies it. That is where the political lies. (Weber 1994, p. 112; translated by the author)

Thus, the political moment for Levinas comes with the figure of the third (Levinas 1969, p. 213). The third demands a justice of comparison and with it comes a decision that settles a political momentum. What becomes crucial in this transition from ethics to politics is the acknowledgement that any kind of decision is never enough. The demand is infinite, beyond a human capacity to realize a justice for all. In the multiplicity of faces requiring mercy, choices concerning priorities will have to be made. The comparison must at some point deny mercy to Others. However, how to preserve the ethical excessiveness with a mercy for all without letting selfishness introject into the decisions?

Besides the advent of the third and the problematic just decision-making process, there is another perspective that Levinas offers with his political thinking. The French philosopher Miguel Abensour described Levinas as an anti-Hobbesian, asking "Does the State emerge from a limitation of violence or a limitation of excessive generosity towards others?" (Abensour 2005, p. 46; translated by the author).[1] With the different limitations (of violence and of generosity) come different anthropological implications that have opposite meanings. Hobbes claims 'fear' as a fundamental (anthropological) emotion in relation to the Other. The anthropological assumption is that "man to man is an arrant wolf" (Hobbes 1949, pp. 1, 24).[2] If the Other is seen as a dangerous contemporary, violence seems evident. However, this has consequences for state building and its institutions whose task it is to limit physical and psychological violence and secure property. Instead of this, Levinas claims an infinite demand coming from the Other that needs to be answered. Not fear but responsibility becomes anthropologically relevant. A violent answer therefore has political and anthropological meaning. The way one answers the Other allows conclusions to be drawn about our self-image of humanity. Regarding the current misery of civil wars, isolationist nationalism, terminated alliances, neocolonial aspirations by ethnic racism, theological moralism by highly militarized nation states, Levinas's

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[1] Abensour's argument is supported by several assertions from Levinas where he differentiates between Hobbes and his own approach: "It is extremely important to know if society in the current sense of the term is the result of a limitation of the principle that men are predators of one another, or if to the contrary it results from the limitation of the principle that men are for one another" (Levinas 1997, p. 80).

[2] We must therefore resolve, that the original of all great and lasting societies consisted not in the mutual good will men had towards each other, but in the mutual fear they had of each other (Hobbes 1949, p. 24).

approach seems as a utopia and one can only guess what a state and its institutions would look like that restrict an excessive generosity towards other people, especially migrants. Building on this utopia, Abensour deduces criteria for a state of justice. With Levinas he claims that it is not war as the original act. Instead: "War presupposes peace, the antecedent and non-allergic presence of the Other; it does not represent the first event of the encounter" (Levinas 1969, p. 199).[3] However, unlike Abensour, I argue here—in terms of a politics of aesthetics—that it is necessary to turn to the affective and sensory qualities of such an encounter. Seeing Levinas as a sort of anti-Hobbesian allows not only for a conceptualization of a state of justice but for *another sensory relation to the Other that is not born out of fear but generosity*. Any preliminary decision therefore leads to a different sensory appropriation of the Other. The political here means the way the Other is sensorially captured and mediated. This is the first important aspect for a political aesthetics after Levinas.

However, before I come to the consequences for image theory, I want to highlight a second political aspect in Levinas. The political is essentially an unsettling moment. It has disruptive effects. Miguel Abensour and Simon Critchley have elaborated this aspect, building on the concepts of 'anarchy' and 'proximity' in Levinas. Anarchy does not refer to a sovereign principle like anarchists understand it, but to a disturbance of the state "making possible moments of negation without any affirmation. [. . .] Yet disorder has an irreducible meaning, as a refusal of synthesis" (Levinas 2011, p. 194). The anarchic moment is therefore introduced as a converting moment of meaning in politics itself. In this sense, the political is mainly a moment where politics—an existing political, social or cultural order—is being disturbed (Marchart 2007, pp. 35–38). We need to understand the difference between politics and the political or metapolitics (Abensour 2002). To shape a politics of aesthetics after Levinas it is worthwhile following Critchley's approach to the political as a "dissensual emancipatory praxis" (Critchley 2004, p. 183). At first sight, this does not seem much different from Jacques Rancière's understanding of politics, especially Critchley uses the terms 'dissensual' and 'emancipatory', crucial terms for Rancière's understanding of politics (having a civic community in mind). Rancière seizes on Enlightenment and German Idealism with its emancipatory notion of equality (of art and life) and freedom, restoring its implicit and original political dimension. Even though Critchley refuses Rancière's "defeatist position" that "politics is rare" (ibid.), he does not elaborate between Rancière's and Levinas's understanding of a politics of aesthetics.

For Critchley, and here he follows Derrida's reading of Levinas (Derrida 1999, p. 20), there is a hiatus between ethics and politics. There is no "plausible deduction from ethics to politics. [. . .] The claim is therefore that if no deduction occurs from ethics to politics, then this can be both ethically and politically welcome" (Critchley 2004, p. 178). Ethics then would be an "infinite responsibility of unconditional hospitality" and the political a decision led by other interests and without any "determinate transcendental guarantees" (ibid.). Having no transition but a fissure between ethics and politics allows for a primacy of an infinite ethical demand accompanied by a finite political decision as a singular response to a singular situation. According to Critchley:

> Politics itself can here be thought of as the *art of a response to the singular demand of the other*, a demand that arises in a particular context—although the infinite demand cannot simply be reduced to its context—and calls for political invention, for creation (ibid.)

What interests Critchley in this excessive "political invention" (Levinas 1994b, p. 194) is the formalization of the political in Levinas.[4] In this way, Critchley specifically refuses Levinas's republican politics and his orientation towards 'fraternity', famously mentioned in the national motto of France. Politics in this sense is not about the art of navigating a state, but about the relation between the infinite

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3   Throughout his œuvre, Levinas specifically criticizes Hobbes's political thinking based on the limitation of violence and not the limitation of charity (Levinas 1998, p. 105).
4   Critchley refuses "the specific political content that Levinasian ethics seems to entail, namely, the question of Levinas's Zionism, French republicanism, Eurocentrism [. . .]" (Critchley 2004, p. 181).

demand and its finite decision, the negotiation between the invisible and the visible. To recapitulate Critchley's approach, politics after Levinas has no guarantees of correct or even just decisions. It is essentially without fundament and it is not arbitrary but oriented towards the infinite demand of the existing situation which the subject cannot deny, in which the subject is passive. Taking the subject not as an autonomous entity—the subject as being part of a situation with an infinite demand—a Levinasian politics allows us to criticize the genealogy of political thinking based on foundation, sovereignty, power and the sovereign subject. What becomes apparent in commentaries on 'Levinas and the political' is that figures are being introduced that act, decide or need to be recognized. For Critchley, it is the 'demos' as irreducible plurality and key actor in a political situation. For others, it is the figure of the politician itself that should be respected and acknowledged (Stegmaier 2005). Building on Critchley's approach, I do not want to emphasize persons, groups or movements but rather develop a more radical reading of politics as a media aesthetic practice. By turning to practice, I take up what Critchley calls the "*art of a response to the singular demand of the other*", as mentioned above. In this sense, it is a person (or artist) who invents an answer in relation to the demand of the Other. Out of this relation derives a praxis of invention with political implications. From a media philosophical point of view *practice* addresses this encounter with the Other: it is a practice that goes beyond discourse not being necessarily bound to language. As a substitute, other media practices are considered relevant that fulfill this relation to the Other in the process of doing or making (Mersch 2015). Practice in this sense is neither reduced to a utilitarian usefulness, nor is it a *techne* as mode of revealing or bringing-forth, like Heidegger would have it (Heidegger 1977, p. 13). It is rather oriented towards an experimental research practice that is by no means to be confused with a postmodern leveling of belief in narratives (Feyerabend 1993, p. 118ff). Instead, such a practice is based on singular and situational decisions and oriented towards an irreducible context (therefore infinitely demanding with a continuously guilty conscience). The decision is therefore singular and universal at the same time.[5] I argue that the political needs to be understood in terms of its practices. To further elaborate such practices I turn to aesthetics, specifically to the image in the next section. What then are the aesthetic implications of the political understood as an ethical inventive practice and what are its consequences for image theory?

Taking the gap or hiatus between ethics and politics seriously, the same must be claimed for aesthetics. This is an important argument shifting the debate on justice to its finite expression, having aesthetics as a challenge to claim an infinite justice (or alternative forms of aesthetic justice). Aesthetics here is understood in terms of the image after Levinas. Other approaches to Levinas's aesthetics are possible. The image, I argue, is a recurring topic in Levinas's writing and can be positioned in the debate on the 'iconic turn' insofar as it is possible to identify in Levinas's writing a differentiation between an iconic logic and the logic of language. My thesis is that, despite the skepticism that Levinas has expressed towards art, and especially towards the image, one can read his writings on the image in an affirmative way for a proper image theory. His image theory implies a genuinely iconic way of thinking that bears testimonial traits.

4. Testimonial Image Practice and Aesthetics after Levinas

As there is no transition, but rather a fissure between ethics and politics, aesthetic practices find themselves right in the middle. However, what role does aesthetics play in a politics of aesthetics? And what are the consequences for image theory? Levinas is not well received for his writing on aesthetics and certainly not on media practices. Levinas remained throughout his life skeptical towards art and aesthetics (Chalier 2004). It is, therefore, by no means self-evident to describe the transition from ethics to politics via aesthetics and media philosophy.

5　Giorgio Agamben has called this coincidence of the singular and the exemplary a paradigm (Agamben 2009).

To explain the concept of the image, I refer to an early text by Levinas, which can also be regarded as one of the most important texts on his aesthetic thinking. This is the relatively short but dense text *Reality and its Shadow* from 1948, published in the journal *Les temps modernes* (Levinas 1987). The title refers to the imagery of Plato's cave, while the text itself stands in the context of an examination of the Jewish prohibition of images, and in contrast to Heidegger's *Being and Time*. I read the text as a systematic analysis of the problem of the image (see Bennke 2016 and de Vries 2004), and by no means as a fundamental rejection of the image or of art in general. There are several ways to approach this text: via major philosophical terms such as 'truth' (de Vries 2004) or 'beauty' (Gritz 2004) or by highlighting the role of art criticism and philosophy as criticism (Cohen 2016a). These approaches reveal crucial aspects in a Levinasian aesthetics, and I will come back to the role of critique. First, I will focus on the inner logic and tension of the image discussing it from an image and media philosophical perspective.

In this reading, the image consists of three essential elements: the self-shadowing of the image, its temporality and its power to affect. Levinas writes: "Reality would not be only what it is, what it is disclosed to be in truth, but would be also its double, its shadow, its image" (Levinas 1987, p. 6). Thus, according to Levinas, the origin of the image is a doubling of reality, an equally primal difference. Elsewhere in the text, Levinas sharpens this: "Being is not only itself, it escapes itself" (ibid.). There is an original difference, a negativity to the image that eludes in its own appearance. It is concealed in the visibility by the image and—according to Levinas—is thereby also forgotten. The image is covered by its own appearance. With this ontological drama of an original difference in appearance and its self-shadowing, we can apply Gottfried Boehm's inner contradiction of the image and see it as a paradox. The inner conflict of the image is not between the visible and the invisible but in an occlusion, concealment of the visible in its appearance (see Bennke 2019). To describe this inner tension, Levinas uses the metaphor of obscurity. "[Art] is the very event of obscuring, a descent of the night, an invasion of shadow" (Levinas 1987, p. 3). This is by no means a devaluation of art; instead, it touches a negativity of each mediating process: my thesis is that in terms of media philosophy we are dealing with its mediality:

> [. . .] "media" [. . .] obscure their mediality to the same extent as they produce mediating effects. "Media" forfeit their own appearance by making *something* appear. Their presence has the format of an absence (Mersch 2013a, p. 208)

One of the key arguments of a negative media theory is that no process of mediation can mediate its material and discursive conditions. There is therefore a blind spot in every process of mediation, its mediality is constantly obscured by the medium itself. However, there are ways to at least address or testify for this obscure negativity. It can show itself through media reflexive practices, such as distortions, excessive framings or other irritating effects. My thesis is that such practices which face the impossible and emphasize something that shows itself bring into play the relation to the Other. Describing the relation to the Other in terms of media philosophy allows the description of this relation via concrete media practices and asks for their specific structure, their mediality. This is not to say that there is an already existing structure of mediality as such. Rather, from a media philosophical point of view Levinas allows us to think mediality via his concept of the image. It is a mutual conceptual exchange: rereading Levinas in this way, means to look for the logics of mediality in the image. On the other hand, Levinas's writing also contributes to media philosophy: responsibility here turns towards the mediality of the medium. Levinas thinks the obscure and the shadow not in terms of an opposition of the visible and the invisible, instead he thinks appearance and concealment intertwined. The Levinasian image theory and media philosophy meet in the negativity of the medium. One of the main epistemological implications is that such a negativity eludes an objective analysis. On the other hand, it is the practice that allows us to address the inner logic of mediating processes and their appearances. Such practices contrast the art work not only to objects of scientific knowledge but also to the possibility of its irresponsibility (Levinas 1987, p. 12), its aestheticism (Cohen 2016a). One can

see this negotiation of the materialization of the inner iconic conflict as a political decision-making process that is inherently at work in every aesthetic process of making visible.

The second aspect of the iconic logic of Levinas lies in its temporality. In *Reality and its Shadow* Levinas describes the self-escape of being, and thus the original difference also, as a movement: "[. . .] on condition that we take resemblance not as the result of a comparison between an image and the original, but as the very movement that engenders the image" (Levinas 1987, p. 6). According to Levinas, the appearance of the image produces a movement that is not itself visible. Levinas formulates here a problem of time as ephemeral or transient. For him, the central temporal problem of the image consists in its stillness, its eternity, its undeadness, or its mummification. For Levinas, the momentary nature of the present, the mortal and the ephemeral is crucial: "The imminence of the future lasts before an instant stripped of the essential characteristic of the present, its evanescence" (Levinas 1987, p. 9). For Levinas, the image poses above all a problem of *temporality*. As soon as it loses its ephemeral quality, it becomes a mere idol. Therefore, idolatry starts with the forgetting of the passing of time. This is the (temporally turned) negative aspect of what Gottfried Boehm outlined in the iconic logic of the prohibition of images. However, how to show the passing of time without freezing it in representation or figurativeness?

From a methodological point of view, it is also important to recognize that Levinas acknowledges the image as an entity that does not comply to linguistic or phenomenological methods. The image evades these methods: "A concept is the object *grasped*, the intelligible object. [. . .] we grasp it, we conceive it. The image neutralizes this real relationship, this primary conceiving through action" (Levinas 1987, p. 3). Instead, he understands the image in terms of 'pathos', as a passive entity that touches, sensitizes and is affecting.

> An image is interesting, without the slightest sense of utility, interesting in the sense of *involving*, in the etymological sense—to be *among* things which should have had only the status of objects. [. . .] it constitutes the pathos of the imaginary world of dreams [. . .] (Levinas 1987, p. 4)

The image has an involving, affecting effect. In sum, image for Levinas is therefore an unrepresentable self-shadowing entity, that is of a transient temporal character, having the power to involve and affect us. An iconic thinking deals therefore with an unavailability, the ephemeral and the affect. This approach is quite different to Rancière who conceives the image as an intelligible object for the sake of a civic community. Here, Levinas is more subtle with his reflexive approach to the image, questioning the (phenomenological) methodology in the tradition of Heidegger.

Thus, Levinas's concept of the image is close to what Jean-François Lyotard calls the concept of testimony, which he defines as loyalty to the law of the other (Lyotard 1988), and what Georges Didi-Huberman has brought to the formula of "Images in Spite of All" (Didi-Huberman 2008) in order to form a resistance against the violence of historical conditions through the power of singular appearance.

Following these thoughts, what is the relationship between Levinas's concept of the image and the prohibition of images? My thesis is that the prohibition of images in this sense is *turned into a commandment against forgetting*, namely forgetting the mediality and temporality of the image. With Levinas we seem to be heading toward an image-pragmatics.

The argument for the conversion from prohibition to commandment, from fear to responsibility we can find in Levinas's writing itself. I have pointed out the methodological problems that come with a politics of aesthetics. Levinas takes the methodological difficulties that come with the analysis of the image into account, stressing its pathos and involving character. The affect therefore is not taken as a dependent surplus of the image (that affects us in the name of a non-image entity). Instead, Levinas radicalizes the emotional affect as an involving, ethical factor that we cannot avoid. The affective nature of the image is the crucial turning point for this negative dialectic. It turns the focus from the institutional, social and cultural conditions to the medium itself allowing the image to account for its

own effects. With Levinas, we can argue that this intricate involvement with and through the image leads to a changed meaning of the image itself: it is not an autonomous object to analyze; instead, it insists to be, appears and shows an involved responsibility. From this perspective, we can also sketch out a methodological criticism against Rancière's image theory: Rancière does not account for his methodological inconsistency when it comes to the image. He neglects the mediality of the image by misappropriating it for his subordination under the always-already existent distribution of the senses, whose regulatory idea is mimesis. I cannot develop this critique against Rancière's famous account of a politics of aesthetics systematically here, but want to highlight that neglecting the iconic logic with its mediality already leads to an occupation by other—namely political—means.

Counterintuitively, this commandment to represent goes in accordance with the prohibition of images. The ban of images did not address images as such, but certain image practices as explained above. A Levinasian image theory applied to an image-pragmatics bans those images which neglect the ephemeral temporality, and which therefore are affected by forgetting. The flip side of the ban is therefore a visibility of a negativity, be it the temporal aspect of the image (the passing of presence and its forgetting) or its mediality (the negativity or the inner contradiction as Boehm identified it). Having to do with this negativity, the prohibition becomes a commandment of memory. This negativity of the temporal and media aspect of the image also has a political implication in that, from an aesthetic point of view, to answer to the demand of the Other implies a practice of remembering the transitory momentariness of this encounter and of the presence of its mediality in its appearance. It is *the here and now* that is key for such a practice. Such an iconic thinking is in favor of an image practice of remembering that also problematizes its own appearance. I call this a *testimonial image practice*.

The ethical impulse of the image is thus essentially bound to the commandment of remembering the mediality and temporality of its appearances. The prohibition of images becomes readable not as an iconoclastic image negation, but as an affirmative impulse for the shaping of memory by image making processes. This testimonial trait is its power, its affecting nature. Therefore, the prohibition of images is a productive force for image production. In this sense, the essential media philosophical orientation is to the necessity to recall the forgetting of the medium in which a mediating process takes place. It means to address and remember the mediality of the medium and refer to its temporality of appearance—the here and now. Converting the prohibition into a commandment turns its meaning dialectically around. It is a typical methodology applied by Levinas. It often happens when reading Levinas, that under one's eyes, terms like the 'political', 'anarchy' or the 'image' change their meaning, taking on an ethical signification.

While Rancière sees the testimonial character of the image as an instrument to acknowledge the invisible, unheard and excluded subject or group, according to Levinas it is about the image and its inner conflicting process of self-shadowing. Levinas's image theory does not demand a necessity to address democratic processes of struggle and antagonism. Rather, it addresses remindingly the time and mediality of the medium.

In sum, Levinasian aesthetics includes an inventive answer to the condition of its mediation process: Rancière's work allows us to include the condition of production, distribution and circulation. Aesthetics in this sense does not serve the purpose—as Rancière claims—to account for someone excluded, unseen and unheard. Aesthetics according to Levinas does not serve democracy; it demands an infinite appearance of multiple and varied responses. As soon as those practices are conducted by preliminary ideological or moral judgements the mediality of the image, its aesthetic practice, is corrupted by other means. The ethical question here is not how to limit these exuberant and rampant aesthetic phenomena but how to allow for their existence and development. Coming from an original iconic logic and its manifestations in images (frames, forms, rhythms, contrasts and other iconic elements) and other medias, the variety seems infinite. In this sense, the political aspect of aesthetics is its freedom, its refusal of instrumental appropriation. Here, the role of art and philosophical criticism is fundamental. Such a criticism "detaches [the art] from its irresponsibility by envisaging its technique" (Levinas 1987, p. 12) and reminds the "obscuring of being in images, that stopping of being

in the meanwhile" (Levinas 1987, p. 13). Such a philosophical exegesis "is not extraneous to art but an essential component of it" (Cohen 2016a, p. 159). This means we need to identify the specificity, the singularity of an aesthetic practice, as well as to locate its role within a specific context, identify and remember its ethical engagement and to come up with concepts or a specific language to describe it.[6]

It is, therefore, helpful, for instance, to differentiate the image as icon from the idol. For Jean-Luc Marion idolatry "measures the divine according to the scope of a gaze that freezes" (Marion 1991, p. 24). It would be worthwhile comparing the theological with the media and image philosophical reading of the image after Levinas and articulate their differing terminology. Following an image philosophical reading, idolatry already starts with the oblivion of the mediality of the image. In this respect, a Levinasian aesthetics does not serve an aesthetic state or a community founded in an aesthetic experience, instead it is closer to Theodor W. Adorno's notion of aesthetics understood as a radical negation. It is only political insofar as it is radically unavailable. If it is appropriated, serving a special interest, it is simply an affirmation of other means. Having negation, a radical unavailability, as a foundation for aesthetics Levinas shares with Adorno the philosophy-of-time motive of a utopia, a messianic moment.[7]

A Levinasian aesthetics is a disruptive force or praxis that multiplies live forms and ways of expression, as well as sensitizes for strange and foreign world relations and brings them into proximity with one's sensory realms. It turns the autonomy of art into an involved and irreversible materialization of responsibility. Aesthetics in this sense changes its meaning and does not refer to a theory of perception or to a theory of a work of art. Instead, a Levinasian aesthetics correlates with at least two aesthetic traditions: Firstly, the obscure negativity of the image relates to the struggle against finitude in Jewish aesthetics that is discussed under the term "incompleteness" (Schwarzschild 1975, p. 35). In this tradition beauty as pure perfection is rejected, instead "images testify against idols" (Raphael 2016, p. 19). Secondly, a Levinasian aesthetics relates to a thinking of the Other pursued by Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Theodor Adorno and Jacques Derrida. Aesthetic thinking in this sense follows a thinking of 'difference', that manifests an unavailable 'residue', induces a 'reflexivity' and is characterized by a 'suddenness' (Mersch 2015, pp. 162–64). Such an aesthetic event does not culminate in an excess to deviate from a norm. Its purpose is not deviation and excess but to show and let appear an irritation *by* and *for* an Other. Richard Cohen rightly points out the insufficiency of an aesthetics that merely follows "the strange, the bizarre, the exceptional, the weird, the different" (Cohen 2016b, p. 183) as such, and which he identifies in Georges Bataille's "vision of pure splendor" (Cohen 2016b, p. 179). By contrasting Bataille's approach to anarchy with Levinas's, Cohen highlights the problem of differing understandings of aesthetics and their relation to ethics. It is, therefore, necessary to specify a Levinasian aesthetics in its conversed meaning. Levinas opposes aestheticism (Cohen 2016a) and challenges not only the traditional distinctions of 'form' and 'material', but also the institutional difference of art and science dating back to rationalism in the 18th century with its distinct formations of knowledge. What Levinas contributes to such an aesthetic thinking is *the evanescence of time*. For an image theory, the consequence is an image-pragmatism that is a practice of remembering. It relates to an Otherness, acknowledging its transient presence, its 'semelfactivité' (Jankélévitch 1980, p. 94). In this sense aesthetics is older than art and can also be understood as a critique of science, making visible its contingent and unfounded knowledge production by building on aesthetic processes that use other methodologies and show a sensory rather than logical argumentation. Aesthetics becomes an intricate epistemic practice.

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[6]   Levinas makes it quite clear that such a criticism stays within the medium of language, but from a media philosophical point of view the criticism is not necessarily bound to language. Images can relate critically to other images.

[7]   Their respective messianism differ in their account of a mediated or unmediated transcendental (see Holden 2010, p. 163). The different image practices that emerge from the messianisms of Adorno and Levinas would have to be clarified separately.

5. Politics of Aesthetics after Levinas

Before I come to a systematization of a politics of aesthetics after Levinas, I will briefly summarize the already identified political aspects in Levinas's writing. He introduces the figure of the third, opening up the utopia of an infinite justice, an infinite demand which inherently conflicts with a finite decision (politics of justice). He speaks of another sensory relation to the Other (politics of affects). He draws attention to a disruptive effect (politics of responding) as well as the inner conflict and negativity of the image (politics of image).[8]

As Levinas neither systematized his political nor his aesthetic thinking, the methodological difficulties in systematizing a Levinasian politics of aesthetics are apparent. My thesis is that *testimonial image practices are a regulatory idea for a politics of aesthetics*, so that the way of the testimonial practice is crucial for its effects and affects. I propose to think of such practices along the lines of a process of responding. Methodologically this means differentiating between different stages or aspects of this process and finding terms to describe them. First, I propose a three-step process of responding: responsiveness, passivity, exteriority.[9] Secondly, according to my approach I use media philosophical terminology (such as materiality, mediality, performativity, reflexivity and praxis) to describe its functionality.

This three-step process is not to be understood as a successive series of events, but rather stands for an intertwined process of responsibility that cannot be clearly separated. Nevertheless, the distinctions help to describe the relationality to the Other.

With *responsiveness*, I mean a responsibility *for the Other*, in the etymological sense where it means to answer "to another for something" (Hoad 1996), not in the sense of "in favor of". This includes being sensible to this Other (a very delicate problem that is discussed under the term 'passibility') and to appropriate it accordingly. From a media philosophical point of view, the appropriation pre-establishes the answer for the Other. This can be observed in an example: To use a contact microphone or a standard cardioid microphone changes the listening experience and decides the sonic focus. For Levinas, responsibility is not reduced to the material condition of its media technical appropriation, but founded in a very material dimension.

With *passivity*, I mean a responsibility *of oneself* that cannot be delegated. Therefore, its fundament is in a negativity that is not the subject "me". The me is always too late. Instead passivity refers to an anarchist prebeginning, to a past the self cannot remember. In media philosophy it is important to note that each delegation of responsibility to other media as vehicles or containers for a specific purpose is problematic and inherently carries a danger of misappropriation for other means.

With *exteriority*, I mean a responsibility *in front of* someone or something, i.e., the public or history. It means to act in exteriority, in a material, mediated sphere. There is not only the disturbing infinite demand of the Other, but also the response to it that manifests and situates itself materially.

To put it in a question: To what or whom does the self respond to, and to what or whom and how does it answer? The testimonial image practice after Levinas is essentially of a performative character. It is an act of passibility, being able to apprehend and being sensitive to something, that is foreign, disturbing or yet unperceived. With it comes an act of world making that situates and sets facts. Every performative act has an ineluctable ordinary violence. Every decision, every act, every scene of the performative is immanently violent (Mersch 2013b). There is therefore a violent aspect to every act. Performativity here is not to be understood as the discursive framing of the situation in which a political scene happens (like Jacques Rancière and Judith Butler understand it focusing on the discursive framing, the institutional and social setting); rather, performativity here means the

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8　　Summarizing these political aspects does not mean that political thinking in Levinas writing is reduced to these issues: Levinas discusses justice also in terms of fraternity and the distinction between earthly and heavenly Jerusalem (Levinas 1969, p. 214 and Levinas 1994a, pp. 34–52).

9　　The German philosopher Bernhard Waldenfels proposes to think Levinas's responsibility in terms of a responsivity in several steps, of which three I take in this context as structurally relevant (Waldenfels 1995).

material, medial and practical conditions of an unsettling moment that establishes and shows itself and challenges methods to describe it. J. L. Austin called it the 'perlocutionary act' of the performative: these are the consequences of "what we bring about or achieve *by* saying something" (Austin 1962, p. 108). The well-known distinction between *saying* and *said* in Levinas's writing can be further differentiated by a theory of performativity. Therefore, the unsettling act of the here and now is of interest. Above, I highlighted the specific temporality of the image, its evanescence. However, it is different to an 'unmediated immediacy' (Cohen 2016b, p. 179). It is not about isolating a present between past and future (and therefore fetishizing it), but about testifying for the evanescence of the present. Such a 'here and now' is disruptive and not excessive as Bataille would have it. Such practices are not unmediated but based on material appearances with obtrusive effects. From a media philosophical perspective performativity accompanies every practice, turning the focus from the action to the fact of the act, the setting and carrying out of an act. Since the process of mediation cannot mediate the condition of its own appearance, as explained above, practices must be found to relate to the evanescent moment of appearance. In this sense performativity addresses the moment when something happens. Media in this sense is not to be understood as the apparatus or dispositif; rather, media are set into appearance through their practical carrying out. In terms of a media philosophy mediality needs to be addressed. With Levinas we can understand the performativity as a responsibility to testify for mediality. Here, the encounter with the Other comes into play. It is the purpose of the work of art to accentuate this moment of withdrawal. Art sets us in relation to an Other. Being sensitive and receptive (in the sense of a passive relation) to such an act as an artist or art critic means to testify to its disturbance and respond accordingly. Such singular responding practices must be created—having an obtrusive effect themselves. Jean Atlan's abstract images for instance, to which Levinas relates, can be seen as having an effect of "an irruption in the pretentious sufficiency of being" and showing a tension "between despair and hope one experienced—as a struggle that is as dramatic as the unveiling of the True and the imperative exigency of the Good" (Levinas 1991, p. 509, translation by the author). Such art does not remain abstract, instead it integrates a human suffering, having a disturbing effect itself. Describing such an ethically founded aesthetic practice needs its own methodological and conceptual framework which I have outlined elsewhere along the lines of an iconic thinking (Bennke 2019).

Levinas, like Walter Benjamin, rejects aesthetics *in* politics (Benjamin 1969, p. 241): It deals with the affective and sensual capacities and its instrumentality by an interest of a party, government or other formations of power. An aesthetics in politics therefore is concerned with art and media techniques to control and guide outcomes in explicit directions. Instead, a Levinasian politics *of* aesthetics comprehends appropriations or delegations of responsibility of any kind, be it more general interests (such as ideological, political, social and cultural occupancies or self-regulations of the art or media market) or more specifically the usage of recording devices such as different cameras or microphones, forms of production, representations and media formats with their distribution and circulation. To insist on the usage of recording devices means to acknowledge their performative quality that is in danger of being forgotten. As shown above, the mediality of the medium tends to be overwritten. Therefore, we can argue with Levinas that with every process of mediation comes a responsibility to find ways to testify for the encounter with the Other and its problematic appropriation. The inescapable mediated way of the answer is by no means indifferent. A politics of aesthetics in this sense is highly sensitive towards ways of relating to, capturing of or appropriating reality and the responsibilities that come with it. It also focuses on delegations of inner convictions or obligations to representations or institutions and finally looks for the way answers are being made.

An image-pragmatics in this sense is first and foremost a testimonial practice, oriented towards a problematic mediation of an encounter, event or experience. This is a divergence from Rancière: these testimonial practices are neither subordinated under the higher goal of a civic community nor are they reduced to their social function or discursive framing in media circulation. Rather, it is a sensitivity to appropriations of the Other without neglecting a strangeness. This is a fundamental ethical understanding of a mediating process.

Having to do with the infinite demand (ethics) and its finite materialization (politics), the tendency of such an ethically founded politics of aesthetics is essentially excessive (aesthetics). The key political aspect is therefore *the negotiation between infinitude and finitude*. Its limiting factor is precisely a crucial question: To what do I respond, and how do I answer? It is neither limited to language nor is it restrained to certain locations or situations of hearings (as Rancière conceptualizes the political scene). In a seemingly oblique effort one could apply two dimensions of a politics of aesthetics: one, by Levinas, would be oriented towards the minimal and ordinary dimension of the everyday and another, by Rancière, would address the broader situation, its context and framing. Even if the micro and the macro dimension have their appeal—and are indeed helpful to roughly outline the scale of a situation—there is something that eludes this separation. Levinas makes this clear by arguing for modern technology and its ability to bring things far away close to us. Technology allows us "[. . .] to perceive men outside the situation in which they are placed, and let the human face shine in all its nudity" (Levinas 1990, p. 233). It is not the micro dimension of the ordinary, but its closeness, its *proximity*. Technology is able to testify for human suffering and bring it close to us, into a proximity.

Following this aspect, I want to suggest that a political aesthetics after Levinas allows us to think politics not as a practice that operates on a scale of a mass democracy, rather it addresses our senses in proximity, interrupting our ordinary and everyday experience. In a more radical notion, this includes not only a change of perspective but also other sensory realms, as we can see in cultural anthropology or approaches in sensory ethnography that address the order of the senses (still mostly those of the West) (Howes 2005). Arguing for such a political aesthetics does not reduce aesthetic expression in the arts. Arguing for an aesthetic justice is not the definite answer to problems of world politics. There can be "something wicked and egoist and cowardly in artistic enjoyment. There are times when one can be ashamed of it, as of feasting during a plague" (Levinas 1987, p. 12). If testimonial practices are not only located in the realm of arts but in the everyday, one should consider not the 'micro level' of the ordinary as such as a political potential, but its proximity. In addition, it is Rancière who is indifferent to these excessive perspectives, setting a schematic distribution of the senses as preliminary given.

A politics of aesthetics after Levinas is essentially a creative practice with an irritating effect answering to the singular demand of the Other. The poet Ilma Rakusa speaks of this as: "Being moved by a material, a thing—and responding to it" (Rakusa 2007, without page number; translated by author). The recently deceased Amos Oz described the necessity for storytelling in an afterword in a re-edition of a small volume entitled *Germany and Israel*. It is one of his last writings, dated April 2018: "True humanity, great culture, consists in memory, in conversation, in the inexorable combination of reason and an ethical attitude" (Oz 2018, p. 77; translation by the author). A Levinasian politics of aesthetics is by no means 'rare' like Rancière would have it but situated in every act, event, encounter and experience, which entails a hospitable and welcoming gesture for an inventive revisit.

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