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On Speech as the Political Faculty in the Anthropocene. The Sensualities of Voice and Taste Combined

Keywords: speech, voice, language, judgment, taste, the Anthropocene

Abstract

The paper revises the idea of speech as a fundamental political faculty in response to the challenges of the Anthropocene. First, it is argued that, rather than as a subsystem of language, speech should be conceptualized as the expression of the embodied capacity of voice (in this respect, the paper follows Adriana Cavarero's [2005] argument). Secondly, vocality is linked to the faculty of taste (understood as in Arendt's reading of Kant) to locate politics in the broader order of materiality (*physis*). It is argued that the combination of these two sensualities can help us develop the idea of politics as an activity that is both specifically human and located in the broader order of materiality (the Earth system).

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to shed new light on a fundamental *topos* of Western political philosophy: the idea of speech as a foundational political capacity. We find its lucid formulation in the opening paragraphs of Aristotle's *Politics*, where human beings are presented as political beings to the extent that, unlike other animals (including social animals), they are capable of speaking (*zoon logon echon*), as opposed to merely emitting voice

(Aristotle, ed. 1998b, 1253a7–17). Against this background, the question that this paper addresses is as follows: can this assumption be maintained in the time of the so-called Anthropocene?¹

Putting aside discussions about the concept of the “Anthropocene” itself, I will take it to convey the following insight: the destructive anthropogenic impact on the Earth system invalidates rigid distinctions between the human and the non-human worlds. This has at least two, apparently paradoxical, consequences for politics: on the one hand, it is no longer possible to define politics in separation from the natural world (which seems to be entailed by the Aristotelian *topos*); on the other, the very term “the Anthropocene” implies acknowledging responsibility for human influence on the non-human world and therefore requires us to defend the possibility of collectively coordinated human action, while also evoking the idea of the agency of nature (to the extent that our actions are interwoven with uncontrollable processes in nature).

Together, these two consequences entail that while politics should not be opposed to *physis*, it still ought to be distinguished from the latter. I would like to argue that this requires us to explain the specificity of human political capacity by locating it in the broader framework of the Earth system. Politics is not so much a privilege that allows humans to transcend nature as it is a form of collective organization characteristic of humans as natural beings. Hence, we should start from something that distinguishes us as natural beings and, at the same time, connects us to *physis*.

This approach has consequences for the politically foundational status of speech. Most immediately, it calls for a revision of the link between speech and language. On the one hand, speech can be defined as “the ability to talk, the activity of talking, *or a piece of spoken language* [italics mine – UL]”, or even “the language used when talking” (Cambridge Dictionary Online, accessed: 27 April 2021). On the other hand, language is “a system of conventional spoken, manual (signed), or written symbols” that human beings use to communicate with each other (Encyclopedia Britannica Online, accessed: 27 April 2021). Taken together, these two definitions yield

¹ By focusing on Western political philosophy, I do not mean to undermine the importance of conversations with non-Western traditions. To the contrary, such exchanges are vital, in themselves and in the context of the Anthropocene. However, this paper has the limited purpose of exploring certain internal possibilities of Western philosophy. It is hoped that these could be used in cross-cultural discussions.

a picture of speech as a subsystem of language, in which it is contextualized and to which it is subservient. Yet, if we accept this approach and combine it with the idea of speech as *the* political faculty, we base the idea of politics on something that separates human beings from the non-human world. For, although language can be understood as part of our evolutionary setting and some researchers argue that there is continuity, rather than rupture, between human language and non-human animal forms of communication (cf. Hauser, Chomsky, Fitch, 2002), language does seem to be a distinctively human faculty. Thus, if we define speech primarily as a subsystem of language, we build our idea of politics on something that separates us from the rest of the world and can only try to make our way back to it.²

Taking this into consideration, a political philosopher who recognizes the implications of the Anthropocene has two options: either she will reject the idea of speech as the foundational political faculty altogether, or she will refuse to treat it as a mere subsystem of language. In what follows, I will develop this second possibility and argue in the process that it is in fact crucial to defending the political relevance of speech. However, in addition to conceptualizing speech beyond its connection to language, I will also move beyond speech itself and towards the voice. This is because the voice is what human animals have in common with (some) non-human animals and what, therefore, represents the animal component of human speech (Agamben, 1998, pp. 7–8). Hence, if we want to locate human speech, as the political faculty, in the broader context of *physis*, it might be fruitful to explore its link to the voice. My first ally in this venture will be Adriana Cavarero who, in her book *For More than One Voice*, undertakes to reverse the voice-speech-language hierarchy. Her focus on vocality helps her capture the political role of speech in its capacity to create the political realm understood, Arendt-wise, as the space between individuals. Yet vocality itself does not explain how politics features in the broader order of *physis*. To fill

² It could also be argued that the search for linguistic – or quasi-linguistic – faculties in non-human animals is driven by the logic of identity, to the extent that the behavior of non-human animals is evaluated in terms of their similarity to humans (cf. Bednarek, 2007, pp. 13–22). Human development provides a teleological horizon for the interpretation of the faculties of non-human animals. The concept of the Anthropocene invalidates such implicit anthropocentrism: while it emphasizes the terrifying potential of human agency, it dispels the illusion that the non-human world can be explained by human standards (or: it captures the dreadful consequences of acting under this illusion).

this gap, I will introduce another sensual register and an Arendtian motif at the same time: the faculty of taste.³

Speech as the transcendence of voice

Aristotle's description of the emergence of the *polis* – or, more generally: the political organization of communal life – characteristically navigates between what is construed as natural⁴ and its transcendence. The historical account of the human forms of association begins with those that are believed to have been prompted by natural necessities: a household and a village (a group of households). Yet, when several villages morph into a *polis*, the change is not merely quantitative. Rather, human life takes on a new quality, whereby a natural life is transformed into “a good life”: “It [the *polis*] comes to be for the sake of living, but it remains in existence for the sake of living well” (Aristotle, ed. 1998b, 1252b28–29). As Giorgio Agamben famously observed, the Aristotelian narrative thus results in a curious knot of *zoe* – the life that human beings have in common with other living organisms – and *bios*, a specific form of life, which in the case of humans is supposed to develop in the *polis* (Agamben, 1998, pp. 1–12). While *zoe* drives *bios politikos*, prompting the very emergence of the *polis*, *bios politikos* ‘works on’ *zoe* to develop it into a uniquely human life.

It could be observed that the same ambiguity marks the relationship between the voice and speech (cf. Agamben, 1998, p. 8). As I have mentioned, Aristotle cites the speech-voice distinction to set human political association apart from the types of socialization of which other “gregarious” animals are

³ Another possibility would be the study of non-linguistic forms of sense-making to explore non-human types of speech. Contemporary biosemiotics takes this route: it starts from the idea of life as the exchange of information and analyzes different ways in which various living organisms interpret their environment, learning to make sense of what goes on around them. Combined with the assumption of the inherently political character of speech, this approach allows us to extend the realm of speaking entities well beyond human beings and conceptualize human language-oriented speech as just one of the many forms of speaking (cf. Bednarek, 2017, pp. 119–135, Wheeler, 2006). Yet this strategy has the disadvantage of completely erasing the difference between human and non-human communication, and therefore between politics and ‘the rest’. As such, it addresses only one horn of the dilemma posed by the Anthropocene identified above.

⁴ Cf. John Meyer's analysis of the dialectics of nature and politics in Aristotle (Meyer, 2001, pp. 89–118).

also capable or, to put it differently, which are fully determined by *zoe*. Yet in order to speak, human beings have to use their voices; in other words, the faculty of speech presupposes the voice, as Aristotle himself recognized when, in *Poetics*, he defined speech as *phone semantike*, i.e., signifying voice (or sound).⁵ Just as *bios politikos* is dependent on and at the same time transforms *zoe*, speech develops human vocal capacities to distinguish them from the animal community of voices (or sounds).

The question is: how should the relationships within these two knots of concepts (*zoe-bios*, voice/sound-speech) and between them be understood? The two clusters meet in the concept of *zoon logon echon*, with *logos* offering a variety of meanings: “speech”, “reason” (Cavarero, 2005, pp. 33–35), and even “language” (Cavarero, 2005, p. 9). For example, if we place emphasis on “reason” and “language”, we can understand the formula *zoon logon echon* as “an animal capable of rational speech”, where rationality refers to the universalizable, codified character of speech as determined by language. While the voice is an embodied, indexical expression of the ‘here and now’, for example of “what is pleasant or painful”, speech conveys general and sharable normative senses contained in the abstract symbols of language, for example, “what is beneficial or harmful (...), just or unjust” (Aristotle, ed. 1998b, 1253a14–15). Language-oriented speech enables human *bioi* to transcend their connections to *zoe* and rise above their particular, embodied attachments.

Regaining voice

However, in her book *For More than One Voice. Towards a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (originally published in 2003), Adriana Cavarero sets out to question the very hierarchy described above. Drawing on the feminisms of Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous and other post-structuralist criticisms of “logocentrism”, as well as the philosophy of dialogue and Jewish thought, Cavarero traces the long history of the banishment of the voice (or what she calls “the devocalization of *logos*”, Cavarero, 2005, pp. 33–41)

⁵ The ancient Greek language did not distinguish between voice and sound. Some translations of *Poetics* render *phone semantike* as “significant sound” (see, e.g., Aristotle, ed. 1998a, 1457a23–24). Cavarero opts, in turn, for “signifying voice” (Cavarero, 2005, p. 34). C.D. Reeve’s edition of *Politics* cited here also translates *phone* as “voice” (Aristotle, ed. 1998b, 1253a10–18). I refer to this ambiguity below (cf: footnote 7).

from the philosophical tradition defined by Greek metaphysics. Indeed, she construes her quest as a challenge to the entire metaphysical framework centred upon “an abstract and bodiless universality” (Cavarero, 2005, p. 8) that can be talked about in precise, sharable terms. On this account, the voice is a potentially dangerous phenomenon to the extent that it expresses the uniqueness of human beings: every human being has their own unmistakable voice, expressive of the bodily aspect of their particularity (Cavarero, 2005: 7). Interestingly, the metaphysicians’ reservations about the voice translate into a denigration of politics. The Platonic cave, one of the foundational myths of Western metaphysics, is based on the juxtaposition of the realm of metaphysical truths (ideas) that philosophers (or scientists) contemplate in the state of speechless and voiceless admiration, and politics, which is conceived as the area of endless palaver, where ordinary citizens express opinions (*doxai* or “what-appears-to-me”, Arendt, 1990, p. 80) about their messy, partisan affairs (Arendt, 1990; cf. Latour, 2004, pp. 10–18). This might suggest that, to the extent that both the voice and politics are linked to particularity, the revindication of the former could aid the latter.

I would like to begin showing how this could be done by recapitulating Cavarero’s revision of the voice-speech-language hierarchy. Cavarero connects the ambivalence of the term *logos* to the equivocation of the verb *legein* from which it stems, and which can mean “speaking”, but also “joining” (“binding”, “gathering”) (Cavarero, 2005, pp. 34–35). What Cavarero describes as logocentric metaphysics interprets the “joining” through the prism of language. On this account, *legein* is about connecting symbols, putting nouns and verbs in the right order, and as such it implies “the work of a code and the structure of the sign” (Cavarero, 2005, p. 182). *Legein* as speaking is subservient to the joining defined by language: we speak about the senses and according to the rules provided by language as a system of signs. Consequently, the voice, as the necessary component of speech, is a mere vehicle for expressing the meanings prescribed by language (Cavarero, 2005, p. 9).

From this it follows that logocentric metaphysics privileges objects of speech over speaking subjects: language predefines what can be talked about, thereby blocking the expression of particularity. According to Cavarero, the alternative to this repressive model can be found in what she calls “a vocal ontology of uniqueness” (Cavarero, 2005, p. 173), which construes the voice, rather than language, as the origin of meaning. The voice

is a material, physical quality, emitted by a particular throat and set of vocal cords. It always represents a unique subject (even if two subjects utter the same words, their voices still differ) in their embodiment (Cavarero, 2005, pp. 1–16). Moreover, unlike (logocentrically understood) language, which purports to contain senses irrespective of its users and the occasions of its use, the voice is always produced to be received by a particular pair – or pairs – of ears. As a consequence, the priority of the voice changes the character of speech as its destination. Rather than a subsystem of language, speech mediates between universal signs and idiosyncratic voices: when we speak, we employ recognisable symbols, but we do so to express ourselves as particular subjects and be received by fellow speakers (Cavarero, 2005, p. 198). As a result, the relationality of the voice changes the sense of speech as *legein*. From the perspective of the vocal ontology of uniqueness, “joining” is not so much about arranging signs as about establishing connections between speakers, thereby creating a specific interpersonal environment (Cavarero, 2005, p. 182).

This environment is what Cavarero sees as the site of politics, at this point following in Hannah Arendt’s footsteps. Indeed, in the Western politico-philosophical tradition, Arendt perhaps came closest to recognising the intimate connection between speech and voice. Construing the former as the necessary component of political action, Arendt argued that speech expresses a ‘who’ rather than a ‘what’ – a unique agent, a source of activity that transcends all possible objective descriptions of them (Cavarero, 2005, p. 189, Arendt, 1998, pp. 9–11, 175–181). Thus, using Cavarero’s terms, we could say that, for Arendt, speech channels the voice, rather than serving language. And it is the implicit link to the voice, Cavarero argues, that allows Arendt to convincingly conceptualize speech as the foundational political faculty. When speakers express their voices to each other, rather than articulating the implications of metaphysical truths conveyed by language, they create the in-between realm of appearance where, according to Arendt, politics happens. This “web of relationships” (Arendt, 1998, pp. 181–188) or “the world” “relates and separates” individuals (Arendt, 1998, p. 52), neither erasing their particularity nor being reducible to a mere sum of idiosyncratic points of view. Thus, through speech, human beings collectively engender politics as a realm of their creation (Cavarero, 2005, pp. 189–190).

Yet I have suggested that the Anthropocene should urge us to re-think what it means for politics to be just that: a separate environment,

subject to human co-ordination. The question is, then: what guidance does Cavarero's vocal ontology of uniqueness offer for politics in the time of the Anthropocene? It could be immediately replied that Cavarero's emphasis on the voice entails the celebration of embodiment: she explicitly counters "an abstract and bodiless universality" (Cavarero, 2005, p. 8) with a politics founded on the ontology of flesh-and-bone human beings. Still, these bodily individuals are not represented as members of the broader order of *physis*. To the contrary, embodiment functions primarily as the marker of the specifically human form of individualization: such that can be expressed in speech as the type of communication whose primary purpose is to reveal the 'who' of its subject to her fellow 'who-s' (Cavarero, 2005, pp. 177, 209–210). Thus, while Cavarero emphasizes that each human being, as a creature endowed with a voice, has a particular body, she does not seem to appreciate the community in which human beings partake with other material entities⁶ by virtue of their very materiality. For Cavarero, human beings as political actors are embodied, but they are not yet "earthbound", to use Bruno Latour's phrase (Latour, 2015, p. 2). Speech, as the exclusive

⁶ I have used the term "material entities" to hint at an acoustic phenomenon only briefly mentioned so far, namely sound. Unlike the ancient Greek language, many modern languages distinguish between sound and voice, with sound referring to the physical phenomenon not limited to the animal kingdom (the sound of leaves, of waves, of wind) and voice implying subjectivity and intentionality, even if only very nascent (Cavarero, 2005, p. 177). Thus, it could be argued that, by translating the Greek *phone* as "voice", rather than sound, Cavarero wants to eat a cake and have it too, so to speak. She at once emphasizes human embodiment and separates humans from other bodies. To avoid such a conclusion, I would like to uphold the ambiguity of the Greek *phone*. For, on the one hand, as Cavarero herself observes, "voice is always a sound" (Cavarero, 2005, p. 177), just as speech always requires the voice; sound constitutes the physical core of the voice. More generally, what I am calling *physis*, corresponds to the Earth system, as it is studied by the contemporary interdisciplinary research program under the name of 'Earth system science'. In this paradigm, life – including animal life – is interpreted as part of the system of mutually dependent organic and inorganic factors. Likewise, the voice, as a feature of a subspecies of life, should be contextualized within the broader framework of sound. On the other hand, I will argue below that politics in the time of the Anthropocene should extend the scope of the sounds that can be spoken about. That is: just as the Anthropocene blurs the boundaries between the human and the non-human world, on a more general level it challenges the distinction between the organic and the inorganic, and therefore between sound and voice.

destination of the human voice, not only distinguishes but also separates humans from other earthly creatures.

Yet I have started from the assumption that the Anthropocene requires us to strike a difficult balance between the specificity of human political agency (and speech as its constitutive part) and its connection to the larger order of *physis*. To put it differently: we need to think not only about the relationships between embodied agents within the political realm but also about the relationship between politics, as the association of embodied human beings, and the broader scope of materiality. Despite its anthropocentrism, Caverero's model does offer an insight that points in this direction. Namely, when discussing the exchange between the voice and speech, she describes the former as "an originary excess" of the latter (Cavarero, 2005, pp. 12–13). Speech never fully captures the potential of meaning conveyed by the voice; yet its "excess" is the origin of speech, an inexhaustible source on which it constantly draws. Given that the voice is what humans share with (at least some) non-human animals, the relationship between *zoe* and *bios* could also be described as "an originary excess" of the former over the latter. To elucidate this excess of voice/*zoe* over speech/*bios*, I propose to introduce one more conceptual pair. Namely, I would like to link the *zoe-bios* cluster to the categories of 'what is' and 'what ought to be'. This, in turn, will allow me to move on to the other sensuality mentioned in the introduction, i.e., taste.

Taste – a template for judgment

Inasmuch as *zoe* refers to life in general, common to all organisms and as such belonging to the broader order of *physis*, it represents our idea of 'what is': patterns perceived as spontaneous, obtaining beyond human conventions, with the latter only following such patterns but not controlling them. Contrary to that, *bios* denotes the type of life that we believe to be open to our normativization, thereby corresponding to the aspirational ideal of 'what is as it ought to be'. Speaking in a different context, in his book *The Force of the Example*, Alessandro Ferrara observed that what exists between these two domains is the realm of 'what is as it ought to be', i.e., of particulars that, due to their specific descriptive features, carry a universal prescriptive force. This type of validity is often referred to as exemplariness and has remained, Ferrara says, largely unnoticed in the history of Western philosophy. There was, however, one notable and influential exception, namely, Kant's theory of the

judgment of the beautiful, which Kant described as the judgment of taste (Ferrara, 2008, pp. ix–x, 1–3).

Ferrara argues for the political relevance of the judgments of exemplary validity in contemporary post-foundationalist philosophy. The authors that he discusses include Arendt, who strongly emphasized the political consequences of Kant's account of taste. Indeed, for Arendt the Kantian judgment of the beautiful defines the paradigm for judgment as a political faculty, in which capacity it is, in turn, a foundational factor. When inquiring how examples can establish a separate type of validity (i.e., how particulars can have a universal force *as particulars*), Kant settled upon the idea of representative thinking (or enlarged mentality), which Arendt interprets as "being and thinking in my own identity where actually I am not" (Arendt, 2006, p. 237; cf. Kant, ed. 1987, pp. 159–162). Grafted onto Arendt's political philosophy, this model translates into an account of political judgment that entails a transformation of one's own perspective, which, however, does not undermine its identity. When I formulate a judgment, I 'inflect' my position through other points of view that I think myself into. But I neither renounce my own stance nor fully embrace others; instead, thus transformed, my perspective becomes "worldly", with judgment functioning as a "world-building" faculty (Zerilli, 2016, pp. 262–281).

The "world", in turn, refers to Arendt's phenomenology-inspired understanding of objectivity (cf. Moran, 2013). Something is objective in this worldly sense if, on the one hand, it "stands against", challenges my subjectivity (Arendt, 1998, p. 137), and, on the other, it is perceived by other subjects, who object to my point of view through the perspectives of their own (Arendt, 1998, pp. 57–58). Thus, worldly objectivity is constituted by two types of objections, thereby combining the recalcitrance of something that is 'out there' with intersubjectivity. To say that judgment is a world-building faculty is to say that, by practicing enlarged mentality, it contributes to the creation of the world as the in-between network of individuals and things. And it does so by mediating between the realms of 'what is' and 'what ought to be'. On the one hand, judgment responds to things 'out there' that "stand against" our subjectivities by evaluating these objects from subjective points of view and determining how things that are 'out there' ought to appear. Hence its inherently discriminatory nature. "The activity of taste", says Arendt, "decides how this world (...) is to look and sound, what men [sic] will see and what they will hear in it" (Arendt 2006, p. 219). On the

other hand, the push of objects (and of other subjective perspectives that we take into account) affects our prescriptive responses to them. Not everything is allowed when we meet with the actual recalcitrance of things (and other points of view) ‘out there’.

This model of judgment has two interesting consequences. First, on this account, politics as the in-between realm is the network of individuals and things. Political agents appear to each other through, or in connection to, the objects of their judgments. In other words, there is some ‘stuff’ between individuals, a material medium of their appearances. Secondly, this suggests that our ideals of *bioi* – of how and in what kind of the world we want to live in – develop in response to the stimuli ‘out there’: to *zoe* or, more generally, *physis*. In this respect, *zoe* can be said to function as the “originary excess” of *bios*. However, to better justify this conclusion, one more step in the interpretation of the judgment of taste needs to be made.

Taste – a sensual register

Namely, I would like to treat taste not merely as a model for judgment but also as its sensual core. That is to say, I suggest that when we engage in judgment as a world-building faculty, we do so as beings endowed with the sensuality of taste. Taste as one of the senses is an ineliminable element of the practice of judgment.⁷

Arendt was aware that the choice of the sensual register of taste for the paradigm of judgment is remarkable, even if she did not fully capture why (Arendt, 1992, pp. 64–66). On the one hand, the discriminatory character of the judgment of taste is encoded in taste as a sensual experience: to have the perception of taste is to evaluate something as tasty or nasty (otherwise, we would say that the thing does not have any taste; cf. Arendt, 2020, p. 679). More fundamentally, it seems that the very exercise of taste is subject to choice in the way that other senses are not. Although, like with other senses, one can be forced to taste something against one’s will, one cannot have the experience of taste spontaneously, i.e., irrespective of one’s own (or another agent’s) intention. On the other hand, taste is, as Arendt said, “a private sense” in that it pertains not so much to an object itself but to

⁷ The account of taste as the sensual core of judgment draws on the argument presented in Lisowska, 2022.

how it affects the subject (Arendt, 1992, p. 64). Moreover, it does so through ingress across the perceiver's bodily boundaries. In the act of tasting, we let ourselves be intruded upon by an external item, renouncing a cosy distinction from the object (cf. Arendt, 2020, p. 636).⁸

Thus, as a sensual experience, taste is a peculiar mixture of discrimination (combined with voluntariness) and vulnerability. Taking these two aspects into account, Cecilia Sjöholm, a recent interpreter of Arendt, argues that taste is "a constitutive moment of corporeal subjectivity", through which we "choose what we want to integrate (...) as a part of ourselves, or not" (Sjöholm, 2015, pp. 79–80; cf. Arendt, 2020, p. 636). In other words, taste is the activity through which we position ourselves as bodies among and affected by other bodies (human and non-human). This means that if we treat taste as the sensual core of judgment, the latter can be described as the process of establishing one's own "corporeal subjectivity" by taking in(to account) other bodies. Here the "originary excess" of *zoe* over *bios* becomes relevant. I position myself as an individual *bios* by defining my relationships within the broader order of *zoe* (or, more generally, *physis*): the relationships that are porous and can constantly prompt me to redefine who I am as a particular *bios*.

Let me now combine the two roles of the judgment of taste that I have discussed: as a world-building faculty and as the practice of the self-constitution of embodied subjectivity. If we put these two together, we can argue that politics is the realm that extends between subjects, who take each other's positions into account, and objects judged from these various positions. The agents determine how these things 'out there' ought to "to look and sound". At the same time, they perceive themselves and each other as corporeal, subject to the rhythm of *zoe* (or, more generally, *physis*). *Zoe* is both the topic of their judgments and part of who they are as judging individuals.

Taste and speech

What remains to be shown is how the sensual register of taste fits with the sensuality of the voice from which I started. My suggestion is that speech

⁸ This marks the difference between taste and smell. While smell is also a "private sense", it does not involve the incorporation of an external object as such.

as the political faculty should be understood as operating on the basis of and expressing judgments of taste. Let me explain.

A good starting point is provided by Arendt's aforementioned observation that taste "decides how this world (...) is to look and sound, what men will see and what they will hear in it" (Arendt, 2006, p. 219). Admittedly, "looking" and "seeing" imply visuality, as does "appearance". But for Arendt, phenomena appear in the political realm only when they are heard, or: heard about.⁹ Thus, taste determines which voices enter politics or, to put it differently, which voices will count as speech, and, once again, which voices will be spoken about (and how they will be spoken about). The passive voice is important: I have argued that judgment contributes to the creation of the world by moving between what is 'out there' and what ought to be, by reacting to objects as given and deciding how they should be. As such, judgment is a response both to the voices that can speak – and decide how the world "is to look and sound" – and to the voices (or more generally: sounds) that can only be spoken about, while maintaining the distinction between the two.

To be more specific: first, the model that I am offering complies with the idea that speech and therefore politics are human affairs. When we make judgments, we speak to each other; and to let somebody's judgment be heard is to respect them as a subject whose voice can develop into speech. We can reconsider the role of language in this context, by arguing that human beings share the capacity for language as the medium of their speech. But the judgments that we utter are about something, potentially including entities that do not speak. To formulate such judgments or to recognize their legitimacy when they are uttered by others is to accept *that* and *how* the voices, sounds or even mute phenomena that they address can be spoken about and in this sense 'make a political appearance'. Secondly, judgment does not erase the difference between the speaker and who is spoken to or what is spoken about. In her development of the Arendtian version of enlarged mentality, Iris Marion Young emphasized that speakers are never capable of fully reversing each other's perspectives (Young, 2001). Caution

⁹ "Hearing" means that, as a political faculty, speech is inseparably linked to listening (cf. Dobson, 2010). It has already been argued that politics in the Anthropocene requires reemphasizing the role of listening (Dryzek and Pickering, 2019). Thus, while a study of the relationship between speaking and listening, and between this conceptual pair and taste would require a separate paper, there is reason to believe that the results would provide further support for the argument presented here.

is, then, required even between speakers, who, after all, can challenge each other. We owe even more humility to those that we only speak about: the voices, sounds or mute phenomena that cannot speak back. In this case, we are directly confronted with the excess of *zoe* that cannot develop into the human forms of speaking *bioi*. Therefore, interpreted in this way, the judgment of taste offers good guidance for political agents in the time of the Anthropocene: it allows us to ‘invite’ non-human factors into the *polis*, while respecting their transcendence over the human world.

Yet to this it could be objected that only fellow speakers are obliged to reciprocity. Since it is difficult to expect a non-human animal (let alone a plant or a sea!) to mind us, humans, the way we can be required to mind each other, it might seem that, rather than increased humility, the distinction between speakers, who speak *to* each other, and those only spoken *about* implies a difference of commitment. However, at this point the idea of taste as the sensual core of judgment is helpful. I have argued that taste is the activity through which we constitute ourselves as bodies affected by other bodies (human and non-human). The phenomenology of taste involves the assimilation of an external body; at the same time, we only taste this foreign element as long as we perceive it as different, and so assimilation does not imply the annihilation of its specificity. Whatever we taste is both part of and something strange to us. At this level, the difference between speakers and non-speakers is not yet decisive. It begins to operate when we use our voice to speak about our position and address our judgment to fellow speakers. As a result, the literal interpretation of ‘taste’ in the judgment of taste helps us revise the understanding of political agents. While we can still maintain that political actors as speakers are human beings, we can also allow that they understand their humanity as being co-constituted by non-human factors.

Conclusion

If we now see the political faculty of speech as expressing judgment in both of its capacities, as a world-building faculty and the practice of the self-constitution of embodied subjectivity, we can conclude that it addresses *physei*, the natural things ‘out there’, in two ways. They are spoken *about*, while also being part of who we – the speakers – are. For example, the impeding anthropogenic flooding of small Pacific islands can become a topic of political speech, while being – and perhaps: to the extent that it is

– included into the self-understanding of the inhabitants of those islands. To recognize the voices of such islanders as political speech is to respect their embodied particularity.

These conclusions are facilitated by the refusal to see the political faculty of speech as a mere subsystem of language. Instead, I followed Cavarero in focusing on its link to the voice as an embodied faculty. However, unlike on Cavarero's account, in my interpretation individualized embodiment does not separate human beings from other beings. To the contrary, I combined vocality with the sensuality of taste to present human embodiment as co-constituted by relationships with other bodies, including non-human ones.

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