

**INTRODUCTION:  
FROM POP TO CANON  
THE CONTRAPPOSTO POSE**

von  
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**polyglot** (adj.)

1650s, from Greek *polyglottos* "speaking many languages," literally "many-tongued," from *polys* "many" (from PIE root \*pele- (1) "to fill") + *glōtta*, Attic variant of *glōssa* "language," literally "tongue" (see gloss (n.2)). As a noun from 1640s.

**articulation** (n.)

early 15c., "a joint or joining; setting of bones," from Old French *articulation*, from Medieval Latin *articulationem* (nominative *articulatio*) "separation into joints," noun of action from past-participle stem of *articulare* "to separate (meat) into joints," also "to utter distinctly," from *articulus*, diminutive of *artus* "joint" (see *article*).

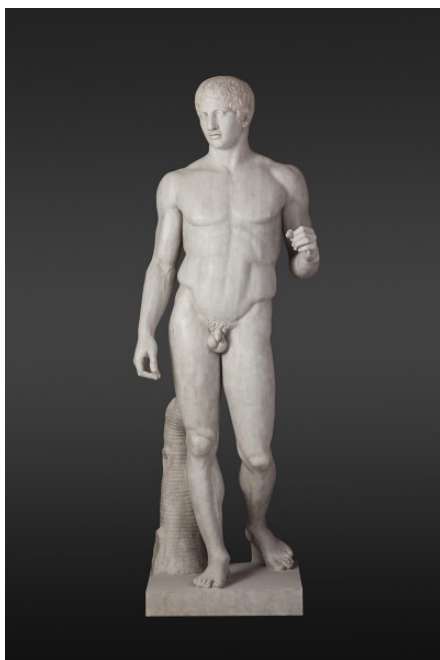
It is wild out there. And yet, *theory is back*. But in the voices of what personas, and in what languages does "it" speak? "Where" is theory "back", and how can we think about its articulations?

The understanding of theory with which we are still largely socialised today, is one that had "changed gears" from seeking orientation in Classical Canons to seeking them in Pop Culture. It is no longer authorial voices we listen to for making sense of our world. We no longer accept a classical ordering of time or space. Rather, so we liked to believe, we actively participate in the material crafting of time itself. Words that articulate this materiality are *gestural* words. They are words playing with desire, riffing on language, claiming words as well as generously offering ones. Like all gestures, gestural words too tend to either reproduce themselves or provoke their opposites: kindness triggers kindness or malignity, sadness triggers sadness or self-assured contempt, attentiveness triggers attentiveness or categorical ignorance. Our words no longer aim at bringing things to rest, at making lasting statements. Words "do" something. Pop culture celebrates how our actions and feelings and relationships can be comprehended in a sense capable of creating a novel commonality. Pop music creates senses of joy, sadness, desire, longing, suffering or solitude, that are strangely impersonal in the precise sense that their experiences are hardly locatable, except perhaps in the sonic materiality of music itself. Sonic materiality rings in our ears and taps our feet, and makes us experience what we have perhaps never, properly speaking, experienced ourselves. Likewise for photo, film, the tasting of food and drinks. The plots and topics of plays, novels, stories, brands.

The gestural words of Pop Culture don't argue, they perform. Arguments are being flooded away and watered out in a global digital storm. Many people long for authorial voices, expert orders, statements that give orientation. Has Pop then become absurd? Bottomless and absorbing, without rendering anything back that goes beyond the flickering moment of celebrating a momentum?

By all evidence, a simple law of inverse proportions seems to hold: the more popular one gets, the more one loses one's freedom of argumentation. This might be put too simply, but if today's desires are heading towards global popularity, empathy, understanding of or harmony with any thing, then the freedom of speech tends towards zero. There is much that indicates how today, arguments are being sacrificed in global and cultic resonances of same with same: 'Trump' or 'Greta', are they not two sides of the same coin?

We have undergone a deep transformation in the experience of time. Time has always been what makes all beings equal, because it brings death and finitude. All things existing by nature are subjected to a time that is given. Modern times have brought us an abundance of time given through artifice, so to speak, regarding our health, literacy, material wealth and comfort. Franz Kafka spoke of "empty abundances", and meant thereby experiences that are facilitated by modern science, especially electricity. We are actively participating in the performative articulation—and hence fabrication—of our own experience of time. Many have mourned this, many are "jubilating" about it. The latter call for transhumanisms where human "essence" would have no need for natural embodiment anymore. Our inclination is different: we like to think that we are in the process of engendering *impersonal bodies* not



only of sensing, but also *of thinking*—based on experiences that might or might not be, biographically, our owns. Our thinking has become gestural, just like our mediated words have. The materiality which such gestures of thinking articulate with presents itself much like the weather: tempered, mixed, forged by the passing circuits of generic elements.

The impersonal bodies of thinking are sculpted. They are of proportion, and they are metrical. Yet their metricity does not speak one and the same tongue. Such metricity speaks in polyglott articulations. Those bodies witness death and they celebrate life, but without the assurance of knowing how to. This is how form originates in death, thus Michel Serres. Impersonal

experiences are experiences whose meanings, as James Joyce had put it, are "hopefully" bathing in "an odour of corruption" that "floats over the stories". Nature and death persist in the Anthropocene. Impersonal experiences are spoken about through glossing in polyglot articulations, through speaking in many tongues.

Theory is back. How do these impersonal bodies of thinking live, what do their chambers look like, and how to talk about their experiences? *Nobody knows what a body is capable of*, as Baruch de Spinoza famously pointed out. Such impersonal bodies of thinking need to be acquired much like our own physical and intimate bodies can be acquired, that is by exercising ourselves (largely unconsciously) in something similar to what sculpture had captured in the formula of the *contrapposto* pose. This formula refers to a sculptural scheme, originated by the ancient Greeks, in which the standing human figure is poised such that the weight rests on one leg (called the engaged leg), freeing the other leg, which is bent at the knee. With the weight shift, the hips, shoulders, and head tilt, suggesting relaxation with the subtle internal organic movement that denotes life. It was invented in the early 5th century BC as an alternative to the stiffly static pose—in which the weight is distributed equally on both legs—that had dominated Greek figure sculpture in earlier periods. There is a rhythmic ease of the *contrapposto* pose which vastly enlarged the expressive possibilities of figure sculpture. It is where the term "canon" was first used theoretically. The Greek term meant a measuring rod, an objective ruler. But what module could it be drawn from, what reference magnitude could it be resting in? It needs to be of numerical relations, harmonic and inexhaustible. But at the same time it facilitates metrical measure in geometry. Polykleitos, the Greek sculpture to whom the first *contrapposto* pose is attributed, called his Doryphoros sculpture *The Canon*. He wrote a theoretical treatise of its proportionality and metricity which served as a reference for Vitruvius, Leonardo, Alberti and beyond. It was a sculpted life sized human body, muscular and able to carry its own weight and control its own movements in delicate balances. Much has been written about how to express its proportions in numbers. But mathematics speaks of "canonics" for the artful translation between harmonics and geometry. Number and form cannot represent each other, they need to speak together in different tongues. Inspired by both, mathematical and sculptural canonics, ancient rhetorics has adapted the stance of the *contrapposto* for words and their performativity: "stasis", in rhetorics, is not a calculable stable state, a resting balance. It is a turbulent situation of mixed up forces, unordered like the incandescent agreement to disagree. It is a meteoric kind of place for different arguments to make "weather". It is a domain of manipulation, yes, but not of calculative control: "Stasis" is what all argumentation needs to set out from, as well as return to. The art of the rhetorician is to bring about a stasis capable of facilitating delicate balances. Rhetoricians are artists who engage people to win, collectively, time that is given to no thing in particular, through

nothing more than talking together instead of acting immediately. They aspire to help develop whatever "good" can be brought out of it.

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This reader of texts flirts with a return of theory that changes gears once more, from Pop to Canonics. It provides a spectrum of *impersonal gestures* of how to think affectively, but critically and clearly, in and through theory. We think that there should be places in our cities—*Chambers of Arguments*—which cultivate rhetorical states of stasis, such as to gain clear and crystalline articulations of arguments that matter. As an experiment the METEORA studio CHAMBERS OF ARGUMENTS wants to turn the Canon/Pop relation inside out: we want to push popularity towards zero in order to gain clear and crystalline articulations of arguments—which we can place, objectively, in distance to ourselves but within affective reach. Hence we are looking for stances throughout the centuries where some persons have, rather silently but nevertheless effectively, praised intellectuality in a way that might not be personally rewarding, but whose gesture is nevertheless genuinely *social*. We want to call this gesture one of *withholding*, a friction that is able to slow down the acceleration of things—amidst (and in no way in neglect to) the busting, tendentious, and also violently brutal "talkative activities" out there; the gestures we are looking for know well how necessary discourse is, in whatever speed, to the stability of our societies in and with their possibilities for change.

This Reader, hence, does not talk along the agitative lines we have gotten used to from most of our contemporary (oddly still so-called *postmodern*, or post truth, post fact, or post-whatever-one-might-call-it) abundance of theories, commentaries, explanations, evidence statements, or calls for urgent actions. We need change in many things, there is no doubt about that. But discourses are nervous today, and this is always two sided—nervousness triggers a highly acute sensitivity to certain things, and entirely dull-sensed perception (or even outright insensitivity) with respect to others. Hence we try to find examples of the gestures of thinking we are looking for not in our immediate present, but in our cultural heritage throughout the centuries. Our gamble thereby is this: *if* Pop has indeed turned absurd, *then* pop is dangerous; because Pop gains momentum from linking the force of polarisation with that of moving masses. After a critical point, it annihilates the milieu where differences can coexist. These concerns are neither entirely new nor singular to our time, even though they might well be so with respect to the largeness of the scale in which we are dealing with them today. Can we learn to interiorise Pop and to maintain stances by articulating *delicate* balances? We need to learn how to *canonise* Pop—how to make statues of our own epistemological points of view. We need to give faces to arguments, tell their

stories, to sculpt their bodies. Place them in space and time. Endow them with apparent liveliness. We need to make them personas in our articulations, we need to give their power a face. This is in order *not* to fetishise them: one needs to explicitly deal with metrics, measure, method. Algorithms, Big Data, the Copious Plenty of the digitised world provide us explicit materials and techniques. This understanding is at the heart of digital architectonics.

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The divers gestures which we gathered here contain: A student's work from the last semester at ATTP TU Vienna, who has compiled a *Book of Common Notions* from ancient rhetorics for contemporary interests. This booklet is devised according to his own sensibility. Then we include two current newspaper articles from the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, which draw attention to current forms of violence that manifest in and through speech, and the diffuse and dangerous longing for an inhuman regime of political correctness. Furthermore we include Marshall McLuhan, one of the first truly pop-theoreticians, who captured so aptly the so-called media revolution and could never decide whether he wants to be its apologist or its critic. We also include a short text by Hermann Hesse, the German writer from the early twentieth century, who voiced the desire of his own time for the solidity of a world picture, with the imaginative account of it being, what he perceptively calls, a "*coiled desire*". Immanuel Kant, who asked *What is Enlightenment* not as a historical epoch, but as an idea that has a proper strength to unfold, cannot be missed from this collection. He connected the force of Enlightenment as an idea with a notion of "coming of age" (German: *Mündigkeit*). Michel Foucault picked up Kant's gesture more recently, and responded to the same issues in the altered conditions of the late twentieth century, in the midst of the so-called post-disciplinary and biopolitical societies. We also include an excerpt from Leon Battista Alberti, the Renaissance architect who wrote a play entitled *Philodoxos, Commedia Latina*, where he treats of the love for wisdom (philosophy) in its then current form of affection to the empowerment of vernacular languages (and hence polyglott glossing)—the love for wisdom thereby turns into a love for glory. And yet, the dramatic and allegoric persona to whom this happens in Alberti's play is rather comical, presented in delicate balances that make him appear neither as a model to imitate nor as an entirely unlikable figure. With a similar sensitivity, Pico della Mirandola, a contemporary to Alberti, composed a forceful oration by means of the syncretistic method: a method that accepts no particular doctrine, religion, or canon as superior authority, and derives a notion of human dignity from bearing with the trouble that rises from such confusion. Then there is Theodor Adorno, arguing with his own sense of distinctiveness against the role lyric poetry might play in modern societies, with respect to educating a public taste. Another remarkable

contribution is by Roland Barthes, who in the high-time of structuralism, and with his book entitled *A Lover's Discourse*, reconnected academic discourse with desire and erotics, beyond moral and pedagogical questions of education-politics. Three more contributions include Gertrude Stein, the modernist poet in the early twentieth century, who composed a lecture on how explanation works best through bringing things into objective constellations (rather than seeking to legitimate itself on the basis of a "foundation"); Hans Jörg Sandkühler, who reminds us in his introduction to the *Enzyklopädie Philosophie* (2010) of the old and intimate relation between the intellectual gesture of organising knowledge in an Encyclopedia, societal and cultural pluralism, and political democracy. Last but not least, we have Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova, who in the intro to *The Posthuman Glossary* celebrate the forging of concepts and the reconnection of our rich wealth of glossing with the forceful return of theoretical thought.

*Humanitas et Universitas.*

*Contrapposto Pose in Meteora.*