

MATTERS OF FREEDOM

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In his book *The American Myth of Religious Freedom* Kenneth R. Craycraft Jr. points out that any religious association under liberalism can only view its political agency with a strong sense of irony. In other words, people who stake out their belief in any set of values as a group or community of believers will find that this belief is bracketed by another larger belief, that is, the right to the freedom to believe. It is this inalienable right that defines and supports the secularising power of liberal communities and ensures that any group or association that claims exclusivity or externality from the State can do so only ironically. This conclusion responds to James Madison's view that "a religious opinion that does not subscribe to the tolerant principle (that is, that man has an inalienable right to freedom of conscience) cannot have political standing, since it violates his own religious opinion, and the official religious opinion of the regime".¹ In this sense, under liberalism, it is quite clear that the right to believe in an equality of belief trumps *any other* belief. This overarching power of liberalism, based in declarations of religious tolerance is increasingly understood to be normative, pervasive and dogmatic; rather than guarantee our freedom it actually defines it. This is as much to say that 'the tolerant principle' cannot be put into question. Instead, it is embodied by those who are included in and make up that regime. Craycraft spells this out:

The myth that the liberal state is merely a procedure of protecting individual conceptions and pursuits of good (and the concomitant denial that that is a particular view of the good) is told so well that the liberal state soon loses its capacity to understand that the liberal myth is necessarily an exclusive view of the good, and thus loses its capacity to self-reflexively judge itself.²

This situation means that any claim over rights by groups or associations is seen as ironic simply because any group is always already implicated within the larger, unwritten principle that is the right to a freedom of conscience, so reducing all other views to relativity and privation. "To have belief one must first subscribe to the dogma of the regime".³ This is manifest in the determination of openness that we simply cannot say no to, laid down in Madison's work on the First Amendment that declares "all men are equally entitled to enjoy the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience". This overarching power of the principle of equality therefore reduces beliefs to conjecture and opinion as a means to; i) allow diverse and plural beliefs to exist; and, ii) guarantee that they do not win larger assent in the public sphere. In that sense, the principle of equality itself - this 'dogma of the regime' swings into full view as the only belief that is truly consensual whilst being at the same time the guarantor of our unfreedom.

Rather than see irony as a point of negativity, Craycraft uses it to re-engage a politics that destabilise this regime. He does this by identifying the First Amendment as a work of rhetorical irony. This allows him to understand this 'article of faith' as something that is pragmatic, textual and contingent with the aims of its authors and the desire of the masses. Here we see that for Craycraft, in the

original moment of writing the Bill of Rights, the authors provide that exclusive ability to self-reflexively judge themselves, to *understand their work* as an argument that must be won, *that it is rhetorical*. The authors have to convince others about their argument - they have to come up with the best way to invent an original concept of government rather than exercise faith in it. By appealing to this original moment of invention, Craycraft seeks to unsettle the faith-based practice that the First Amendment has become - a force that is based in more universal, natural beliefs.⁴ Already we can see two determinations of irony: irony is *attributed to* the faith-based beliefs of others (in as much as it is seen as ironic that others can believe in something that is understood from a distance as superficial and appearance based) but it is also sought out to be radically *asserted* as a self understood moment in the authoring of the Bill of Rights - which is essentially the requirement that we construct a distance from the beliefs that we use by declaring them as 'mere language'. In other words, the irony that Craycraft identifies as lacking in a good politics is a moment of self-analysis and self-awareness - a private realisation that one's beliefs are exclusive and non-neutral.⁵ This type of self understanding would face up to the universal standard of equality that has overcome and superseded the promise of openness and individuation that was actually set down in the original writing of the Bill of Rights; the ironic text *par excellence* in its separation of the representational atheism from the conditions of its self belief.

The aim of recuperating the 'original' irony of this articulation of freedom would for Craycraft serve to sustain a self-reflexive critique, a moment when we understand ourselves, and the claims we make as contingent and situated. If politics were ironic we could therefore protect ourselves from making faith-based claims that universalise (our subjective decisions as) the political. Here, believers are asked not to believe in themselves. To do this, one must take the belief out of rhetoric in as much as ironising beliefs controls belief, where equality is achieved when all beliefs have to be understood as always already ironic.

However, understanding the Bill of Rights as an article of rhetorical irony implies a division between the materialities of knowledge and contextual constraints and the faith situated description of religious associations or beliefs (whether this be the Bill of Rights of any other faith based organisation). To rehearse this just a little; Craycraft's two ironies are; i) the self-conscious 'deliberate' moment of recognising that power is rhetorical and circumstantial - *the private writing of irony*, and ii) *the attribution of irony*: "in the greatest of intellectual jeremiads against government establishment of any kind of official religion - in this great apology for this radical secular state, a particular and exclusive understanding of religion must necessarily be established as the official one".⁶ Here Craycraft interprets irony as *the political condition*, it is a form of organisation produced by the citizens of liberal equality where the protection from faith (ironically) ends up producing it. Its anti-establishment position produces the most established power of all, the power that will not hold itself in check - a power that cannot privatise its connection to irony. This reiterates the central tenet of our problem laid out above, rather than protect religious freedom, the faith-based understanding coupled with the officialism of the regime of the First Amendment leads rather to the protection of the structure of liberalism as a theology in itself.⁷

Looking more closely at this condition of irony - whether irony is a matter of interpretation or authorship - in both cases it does the same work. It serves to secure and protect, to secularise, privatise and localise in that it protects us from ourselves. Irony prevents any association or set of believers from having 'real' or absolute dominance because it delimits power by secularising it.⁸ This process in itself demands that we hook up with some knowledge of the limits of our belief in the context of a Big Other.

Quite clearly, Craycraft is looking for the possibility of public irony, this would be a form of irony that can surpass the ironic double bind that I've just described; where we see that the privatisation of belief exacted by the declaration of freedom fights the self privatisation of belief, as a point of a critical form of political irony. But it's clear that in doing so three key problems crop up: i) to achieve public irony he has to recuperate the moment of invention that lies within the dogma of equality, but the way he does this risks repeating what Madison's politics did for religion, that is, to reduce politics to 'mere opinion' and in so doing to suggest a formalist split between appearance and reality; ii) whilst we find it very easy to attribute irony to others – that their beliefs are mere opinion, it is not so easy to begin setting up this relation to ourselves since any gesture of self-limitation, self-negation or doubt is in fact a decision – it is chosen, determined and positive. (This difficulty describes the limits of scepticism, which will return to in more detail later.); and iii) the irony he sees as *original* to the First Amendment risks the basic assumption that because we know that we use language to win an argument or to convince others, language based practices are then free from the type of conviction we have when we speak in terms of faith and belief. These points lead us to question how the work of irony can untie itself from the normative conditions of the regime. If the kinds of fictions that emerge from this self-narration are ironic then we must decide if and how they are political – to what extent can these attitudes transform belief?

PUBLIC IRONY AND SELF-PRIVATISING CULTURES

These problems of faith/knowledge are just as current when we look at artistic practice where irony problematically sets up certain distances between subject and power, politics and culture, and believable and unbelievable languages. The issue here is that such distinctions, which establish the ground for irony, end up privatising these very public hopes. In terms of this, it is easy to see how the cultural mythology of the avant-garde adopts a theology of transcendence as implicit to political change and how this theory of agency as a critical force is set upon similar grounds that privilege individual freedom and is set against the establishment of an abstract/symbolic power.⁹ In this we can say that the desire to set up smaller coordinated factions of belief against a universal or monolithic power is endemic to the liberal regime. Upon these terms, the guiding principle of critical culture has been to associate against the very principle of the regime that guarantees its freedom. What this has meant is that a cultural practice has been equally unable to put its own beliefs into question as the State has, and

that the dogma of the avant-garde not only is a comfortable facet of political power, but, because it is only understood as symbolic, also supports it.

This line of thinking could lead to quite a typical view of how cultural practices are assimilated by ‘the ubiquitous tolerance of the state’. But, more to the point, it is quite clear that both the principle of tolerance in, say, First Amendment politics, and the principle of critique as it is situated here in avant-gardist politics, are not set in a strict hierarchy between an abstract state and a particular response to that power. Instead both remain in abstract form and share the same foundations.

This problem of defining self-consciousness as *the political moment* is most clear when we remember that culture has laboured this point for generations. It has sought to fragment, deautomatise, and desublimatise *itself* as its primary understanding of defining its political power.¹⁰ These ironic artistic strategies of critique privatise themselves. In fact, this mark of self-privatisation defines art’s political agency. What I want to draw out here is this: what Craycraft and these practices forget is that when we use language we also believe in it, therefore the requirement of disbelief and visible uncertainty that is necessary for irony is simply not available in politics, and when we see it in culture it is representationalist and realist, it forms a picture of what it claims is an already existing condition and therefore sets up an equivalence between itself and the politico-theological centre of a liberal human centrism that satellites the principles of knowledge, finitude and individuation.

This point can be extended further when we examine artistic processes that have made determinate steps away from irony. These are the ones that privilege an aesthetics of organisation as being key to a renewed politics of aesthetics. These ‘relational’ practices, detach themselves from the irony of self-delimitations, but still hope for art’s agency within the political. Such group-based practices create spaces for communities (often of artists) where interaction and conviviality are highly prized as actual moments of participation in the political. In these processional group-centred works, the refusal to identify (to be self-conscious) is central, manifest in ‘outward looking’ artworks, as events and projects that reach out to a concept of community, inclusivity and tolerance. Because these group works are seen as an extension of everyday politics, in that they identify themselves as directly participating in the political where they take on the same mundane activities of ‘everyday life’, they end up qualifying themselves as representative laboratory-style microcosmic environments separate from the everyday workings of social politics but guaranteed by them since the same principles are upheld.

The point here across both examples is that art practice is seen to consistently move towards and away from the core of the political, which ties together the principles of equality and freedom. This relation to the political, is underscored in art’s self misunderstanding - that it has understood itself as if it can construct a distance from itself, from the place of the neutral. It is here where art becomes the primary catalyst for a politics of the status quo. In short, art wrongly connects up a fantasy of its own neutrality, with the promise of a pluralistic equality – the degree zero of liberalism. It has, through

a theory of proximity and distance to this centre (ironically) secularised itself and with it has sustained the ethical regime of a schema of equality that is ordered through a strict hierarchy of knowledge. Both approaches to arts practice operate from the bedrock of faith where they either question their faith in themselves as having political affect, or we see practices that identify themselves as participating within that faith in arts politics. What is figured throughout, is a principle of equality in some form of pseudo-democracy and where artworks, like it or not, ironically withdraw from the public sphere, whether in manifestations of private irony, or in non-ironic Platonic practices that simply repeat the conditions of liberalism in naive secular theatres. Fundamentally, their struggle to produce different conditions of power refreshes and reaffirms power that already exists.

These approaches to arts practice mimic Craycraft's desire for politics to understand itself in some form. The assumption of these two moves (towards and away from a principle of equality) is that there must be some knowledge and understanding about *what equality is*. These distinctions serve to strengthen the mythology of the law itself because they can choose to enter into a relationship with it by privileging the artist as the liberal rationalist, as someone who rationalises her relationship to power, as a means to put it into question, to (over) identify with it, and to be free from its constraints. Therefore, the idea that we can choose to be outside of the law is a paradox in itself, but whether we examine post-Enlightenment subjectivity or post-Marxian attitudes to community, both entertain their own paradox by establishing a relation with this very point of the law. Ironically, the exact point of declaring that there is no outside to the conditions of law is the point at which the outside is articulated, but only at the point of recognising the limitations of the inside. In ironic practices, art replays this messy arrangement, in establishing a mythological relation with the limits of the law, and in relational practices, art establishes a relation with the absolute openness of the law. Both appeal to the dualisms of the infinite and finite as their primary fiction. How this fiction is understood as political is questionable, since this (ironically) serves to delimit the social hopes that instigate their politics and further establishes power as established.

If we take this problem back to Craycraft whilst we can see that he is careful to note that both separationists (the argument that the state is benign or neutral towards religion) and accommodationalists (those who argue for a narrower reading of the establishment clause that defines religious freedom) err in their appeal to some *original intent* of the First Amendment, the mistake Craycraft makes in attempting to narrow or give substance to that law, however, still appeals to the *original context* of its place as an argument, as a 'text'.¹¹ This is a conclusion that rests upon the separation between the act of knowing that our beliefs are circumstantial, exclusive and subjective from a larger ontological identification where we are asked to know that our beliefs are limited. However, because our beliefs are tied to language *all the way down*, it nevertheless becomes impossible to separate these two identifications, where as soon as we are asked to be aware that our beliefs are exclusive and subjective in public, they are transformed into universalising claims. In this sense, irony is possible only in private form, and in its privation, it reproduces the theologico-political - the exact beliefs and that it set out to challenge.

STATISM, REPRESENTATIONALISM AND POWER

According to Madison any religion is ‘outlawed’ or seen as a threat to the State when that association becomes more than the sum of its parts and it takes on symbolic power that can outlive its members and can transcend the norms of everyday practice. Political power is centred on the ability to self-represent. In other words any tension between religion and the State happens when that religion has a mythology of transcendence that is built into its politics and is then exercised in the political. This is the one freedom that Madisonian liberalism precludes.

This description of power as antagonistic is deeply relevant for the understanding of a politics of cultural practice now, where we can derive the following issues: i) whilst self-organisation is promoted by liberalism, self-representation is a form of freedom that liberalism denies; ii) that despite the paradox of self-representation, there continues to be tension between forms of belief that can be discerned between the ethical claims of equality set in liberal democracies and secular practices;¹² and, iii) the liberal claim that government guarantees an equality of belief is simply not true.¹³

For the State to keep power, recognising what exceeds its law is the one thing it cannot afford to do, since this would define its limitations as ‘real’. Instead, the State is to stay cool in the face of tension; “the way to silence religious disputes is to take no notice of them”.¹⁴ Craycraft comments on how Jefferson resists any identification of normative power by refusing a national religion, but managed this point of representation by seeking “a national recognition of what a proper religion looks like” where this example of religion for the people was only an example of religious freedom and not of any investment in a particular religion per se.¹⁵

However, this ‘tolerant’ work of the State is taken further in Giorgio Agamben’s *State of Exception* where the State no longer stays cool in the face of its enemies. Here “the great ambiguity of the First Amendment”¹⁶ has emerged in a Statist rationalisation of the civilis into a technocratic tyrannous, anti-humanitarian machine. It exceeds the coolness demanded by tolerance to exercise a deeply interested austerity in a monism of power where right and fact enter into a zone of irreducible indistinction. Just as the State subordinates religion to politics, any call to an outside is radically subordinated inside and by the system. The faith of liberalism is now realised as a singular power. This power that is sovereign suspends law altogether and instead of participating in the discursive processes of law, it simply decides when the law is in effect and when it’s not:

What is new about President Bush’s order is that it radically erases any legal status of the individual, thus producing a legally unnamable and unclassifiable being. Not only do the Taliban captured in Afghanistan not enjoy the status of POW’s as defined by the Geneva Convention, they do not even have the status of people charged with a crime according to American laws.¹⁷

This freedom from the law as the law not only declassifies and depersonalises individuals, it also materialises power in the form of the absolute – albeit a temporary but totalitarian terror. For

Agamben, the ‘state of exception’ completes the Foucauldian nightmare of a fully technologised society but leaves ‘bare life’ as the figured and yet unrepresented body of State oppression. This once marginal body is now “the decisive factor for the modern nation-state by breaking the nexus between human being and citizen”.¹⁸ It is this condition of political power as ‘the state of exception’ where Agamben conjures his logic of history, a post-September 11th drift towards totalitarianism that materializes the essence of democracy. This is a potential that is written through the politico-judicial structure of the West since the ancient Romans, a potential that resides at the centre of the liberal regime. In this we witness the logic of history as something that reveals the formalism of democracy – in determined correlations between power and absolute decision.

In *Means Without End* Agamben’s work recovers this rationalisation of history in a realist politics. He writes:

The becoming image of Capital is nothing more than the commodity’s last metamorphosis, in which exchange value had completely eclipsed use value and can now achieve the status of absolute and irresponsible sovereignty over life in its entirety, after having falsified the entire social production... The first duty the Situationists assigned themselves was to wake up from this nightmare.¹⁹

For Agamben, language is spectacle – the formation of language as a separate sphere of power that is divorced from and uproots people from their “vital dwelling in language”²⁰ Because this language is abstract, people do not experience language as content or true proposition, “but language itself as well as the very fact of speaking. Contemporary politics is precisely this devastating *experience linguae* that disarticulates and empties, all over the planet, traditions, beliefs, ideologies and religious identities and communities.”²¹

Calling upon the work of the Situationist International, Agamben retrieves a politics of truth in a status of *indifference*. Here the SI’s indifference to the categories of art and life and the task of reconciling the two zones is central to providing a concrete project that can also counteract the organisational techniques of capital. By focussing on a concept of gesture, Agamben carves out a zone of possibility through the recognition of indistinction – the recognition of potentiality. This is intersected between what he identifies as two more established zones of power, between the text and its execution; it is a process that can interrupt the condition of self-narration as abstract and alienated language. He locates such acts within the means without end of SI practices, activities that problematise the cause and effect relationship between text and execution, power and act. Here we can see the contradiction that is central to his politics – “Debord’s discourse begins precisely where satire becomes speechless”.²² This speechlessness found at the end of knowledge, like *Homer Sacer*, produces the figured and unrepresented body - the point of agency in itself: “It is a moment of life subtracted from the context of individual biography, as well as a moment of art subtracted from the neutrality of aesthetics: it is pure praxis”.²³

Therefore, as a means to problematise the means-end relationship embedded in spectacle, Agamben rescues the character of *means* itself – the purity of a concept of the gesture. Agamben links the activity of a critique that centres on figuring the *non-figural* as a point of resistance to normative

power and aesthetics itself, since for him, the production of this non-figural element needs constructing but not representing. Here we face the central problem; Agamben imagines he can separate the organisational from the representational in a refusal of identification. A concept of politics as *means without end*, therefore struggles to think through how ends are means in themselves. This makes the mythology that Agamben builds up, of gestures that emancipate themselves from any relation to an end - from any representationalism - incapable of admitting that as the defining characteristic of political agency that they constitute *another identification*.

On the face of it Agamben's theory does not concern itself with the standard values associated with avant-gardist politics, such as focussing on calling upon ironies whose distinctions between knowing and believing serve to construct further divisions between art and life. However, he redraws similar problems because he still insists on making clear connections or correlations between action and effect (the belief that refusing identification unsettles the condition of power and accesses real relationships between the subject and language). Whilst it is clear that a question of how to be political is a central challenge for us in the face of the effect of liberalism (its ability to problematise a sense of what it means to be communal and for what is understood as common to be taken seriously), it is equally significant that Agamben's desire to access a politics of truth is limited by a central contradiction. The political value of the refugee is political because politics *happens to this figure* whilst on the other hand this same politics is matched up and figured upon the *organisational, networked and tactical* cultural politics of the SI. The final paradox is that this act of figuration is denied outright in a predilection for emancipation from language that is grounded in the processes of *gesture, and pure means*.

WHILST SOME FICTIONS ARE POLITICAL OTHERS ARE NOT

Returning to Craycraft we can see that similar problems crop up around knowledge and identification. Looking back at his work on the First Amendment, we can say that just because we acknowledge the irony in politics - an irony that brings us to realise that this universal is *a text* - this does not mean that our self-interest in protecting our rights is counter to any notion of faith that the First Amendment produces. The problem therefore, in the most western-centric sense, is not a problem of *faith in equality* but how this faith takes place. Craycraft is right to say that the government's claim of religious equality is not true, but it is also clear that irony does not change the condition of political power.

Whilst both Craycraft and Agamben agree that the immaterial centre of democracy is materialised as totalising power (whether they fictionalise European philosophy or US politics) and that the key problem of the political is that it has lost its ability to engage with its own ontology, Craycraft's solution is not to forge an anti-aesthetic Agambenian tension between organisations and the Sovereignty of a (neo)liberalist regime as means to overcome it. Instead it is primarily centred on acting upon the knowledge that any notion of equality is deeply self-interested. However, as we have

seen, attempting to counter or surpass this self-belief through ironic modes of action that sets down personal limits, does not lead to an equalisation of difference in an equity of equality. By swapping faith for culture, Craycraft risks making the mistake of further establishing the two forms of expression as distinct. Both Agamben and Craycraft determine political agency as moments of revealing and revelation based on *discovering self* and *knowing self*, a task of knowledge - of waking up (Agamben) or of self-scrutiny (Craycraft). Here we can say that whilst Craycraft seeks the particular, Agamben seeks the inparticular. The strangest thing is, that when Capital reaches its logic of violence, the possibilities for these discoveries are jeopardized but are also called upon even more.

Although we may recognise that critiques that take up the parlance of materialist-rationalism only embed power as judicial, cultural and economic, we may be less comfortable when it comes to surpassing this recognition. Bearing this in mind, it becomes a challenge as to how we might speak of inequalities and how we might address the instability of politics in the face of all this stability we have just, and keep encountering. In Stanley Fish's essay '[Boutique Multiculturalism](#)', he discusses how the taking seriously of liberal principles, that are here central to multiculturalism (such as inclusivity, tolerance, openness, etc.) shows us the paradoxical nature of acting upon them, or indeed the perversity of taking them literally because as soon as we do we are reminded that we simply cannot defend ways of life that stand in opposition to our own: "[Confronted with a demand that it surrender its viewpoint or enlarge it to include the practice of its natural enemies – other religions, other races, other genders, other classes, - a beleaguered culture will fight back with everything from discriminatory legislation to violence.](#)"²⁴ At this point of pressure from an enemy, our mono-culturalism or singularity becomes really stark. In other words, Fish's political theory does not mark the limits of the political but instead the limits of representationalism itself. Here, acting on public loyalties and shared beliefs conditions the tensions that produce decision. As such, rather than withdraw from the political, the moment of decision is a moment of appearing and claiming political space.

In this sense a recognition of these connections between abstract language and particular action - the exact precondition for irony - is not an option here: we are not supplied with a stable image of power that acts as our cornerstone, whether this be a picture of us, or of our enemies. Duly, the focus of the materiality of language that is evidenced in Craycraft's connection between contingency and irony and Agamben's focus on the *immaterial* evidence their struggle to take into account the particular qualities of abstract language in itself. They fail to realize that language is made up of objects that move into and out of correspondence.

For artistic culture this means that understanding the ethical space of art – the ideal that art can revolutionise the political, due to its own ubiquitous power, is deeply problematic, because it is this correlation that marks art's withdrawal from the political – resulting in a very private game, or what I could simply term as producing weak art/poor politics. The limitations of both Craycraft's work on a politics of knowledge and contingency and Agamben's description of pure praxis lead us to rethink the

politics of aesthetics in terms of faith without truth. In light of this, we are left finally to consider the potential for and the qualities of new moments of inequality and what grounds, if any, we take for this.

¹ Kenneth R Craycraft Jr., *The American Myth of Religious Freedom*, Spence Publishing Company, Dallas, 1999, p.85.

Craycraft paraphrases James Madison's *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments* [1785].

² K. R. Craycraft Jr., *The American Myth of Religious Freedom*, Spence Publishing Company, Dallas, 1999, p.84.

³ K.R. Craycraft Jr., *The American Myth of Religious Freedom*, p.87.

⁴ This acknowledgment that the First Amendment is a law above all laws is regularly called upon in everyday court cases as much in fictions of them in Hollywood movies. This law is seen to transcend duty, obligation and criminal law.

⁵ Significantly, Craycraft explains that this irony is not a postmodern 'Rortyan' irony where one is aware of a 'bigger picture' of competing beliefs and therefore that there is a consciousness that one's beliefs are subjective, but he claims instead a post-classical irony. This irony is cited in the recognition that Madison still believes in his politics as 'true' but yet this has to be argued in public. Therefore, Craycraft's irony rests upon particular demarcations between theory and practice, where it is in the actualisation of theory that irony is discovered – when you don't get what you intended. How the distinctions between means and ends are available conjures up another question of reason.

⁶ K. R Craycraft Jr., *The American Myth of Religious Freedom*, p.95.

⁷ K. R. Craycraft Jr., *The American Myth of Religious Freedom*, p.91, Craycraft goes on to pick up on this notion of Unitarian utilitarianism, where he explains how this 'right' is self interested; it is organised moreover to protect the concept of the State itself, over any principle of 'peace' or 'wellbeing' for the masses. Notwithstanding that Madison and Jefferson alike thought that peace and well-being were not bad ideas, this Right is driven by self interest – self interest as the State that eventually struggles to put itself into question.

⁸ The notion that faith centred languages are able to surpass their quality as language itself – to achieve the status of ubiquitous abstraction - sets up some problems of hierarchies within language. This is namely that this transcendence of language by language suggests a rationalised science of language that orders value from the fantastical to the everyday and in degrees of ordinariness and believability. Craycraft argues that it unhelpful to think in terms of those structures and instead we have to think thorough the use of particular languages as contingent. However, to begin to even designate and think through the value of languages through 'use value' – the utilitarian assumption that languages in use have in categorical terms more value than those that are not, conjures up similar problems. Thus problematically, Craycraft tries to overcome the problem of abstract language, rather than think through how we live with abstractions as objects in themselves.

⁹ This is exacerbated in critiques of liberalism in theories of antagonism derived from Schmitt's *Concept of the Political* [University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1996], wherein the central target of Schmitt's hard politics is the invisible, ubiquitous and dominant power of liberalism's principle of tolerance. For Schmitt, the problem of power in liberal pluralism was that it was abstract and non-substantive. Significantly, for Schmitt, liberalism's ever widening tolerance of associations, groups and economic interests interferes with the more stable political organizations of the friend enemy groupings. This is most clear when he discusses the problems of going to war with and for abstract values, such as war in the name of peace. Such values are seen to produce the worst, most violent wars of all. As such, Schmitt does not identify pluralism's power as having absolute governmental power, as problematically, this lack of visibility weakens the potentially of the State as a central ruling and stable force. Instead, for Schmitt, the promise of politics in liberalism is centred on its potential for absolute unadulterated violence; a war of ethics rather than politics. Although Schmitt's pragmatism removes the fantasy of liberal domination as a sovereign representation of power, his theory preserves a concept of quantitative power; that abstract language equals more (physical) force. Giorgio Agamben takes up this problem in his theory of the 'state of exception'. I take this up later.

¹⁰ Irony as a self-scrutinising artistic practice is engrained within discourses/aesthetics of self-reflexivity, failure and tragedy. Here we can discern the irony that is situated by practices that declare the limits of art's political power, whilst at the same time see that this identification is a pointer to a larger and more general condition of humanity, the likes of which we see played out in Samuel Beckett, early Bruce Nauman works, or the 'philistinism' of mid 90's Britart culture. We read this work as ironic, since its self-denial is a means to some self-assertion. However, the problem arising from this 'failing' is not so much that it is counter intuitive, in that all declarations of failure are in fact positive, but that the shape that these failures come in internalises an unworkable paradox. This is the claim that its politics lies in its individuated quality on the one hand, whilst reinstating a humanism that universalises a condition of humanity on the other.

¹¹ K. R. Craycraft Jr., *The American Myth of Religious Freedom*, p. 73.

¹² K. R. Craycraft Jr., *The American Myth of Religious Freedom*, p. 13. Craycraft pays particular attention to relations between the Catholic Church and US Government, where 'any church that attempts to define how its members ought to believe or act violates the America myth of religious liberty'. This is also discussed in examples where Catholic priests take on political arguments such as abortion and the complexity of private belief is seen in the statement from Cardinal O'Connor in the New York Times; 'When you accept public office you're not a Catholic or a Jew, you're an American'.

¹³ This can be seen most clearly in US Government advocacy of Christianity over and above other spheres of belief, and where it is people who practice orthodox religious beliefs as opposed to those who practice secular religious beliefs do so with unequal freedoms.

¹⁴ K. R. Craycraft Jr., *The American Myth of Religious Freedom*, p. 95, quoting Thomas Jefferson, in Thomas Jefferson, *Writings*, Merrill D. Peterson, ed. New York Library of America, 1984, p. 286.

¹⁵ K. R. Craycraft Jr., *The American Myth of Religious Freedom*, 97. Craycraft also brings up this point in a reminder of this congenial theology where US bank notes are printed with the words 'In God We Trust'.

¹⁶ K. R. Craycraft Jr., *The American Myth of Religious Freedom*, p. 89.

¹⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, University of Chicago Press, 2005, p.3.

¹⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End, Notes on Politics*, Trans, Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino, *Theory Out of Bounds* Vol. 20, University of Minnesota Press, 2000, preface.

¹⁹ G. Agamben, *Means Without End*, p. 74.5.

²⁰ G. Agamben, *Means Without End*, p. 84.5.

²¹ G. Agamben, *Means Without End*, p. 84.5.

²² G. Agamben, *Means Without End*, p. 76.7.

²³ G. Agamben, *Means Without End*, p. 78.9.

²⁴ Stanley Fish, 'Boutique Multiculturalism' in *The Trouble with Principle*, Harvard University Press, 1999, p.61.