Introduction

Beyond Revolution: Reshaping Nationhood through Senses and Affects

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Abstract

Framing this special issue within a broader understanding of the concept of aesthetics as affective, sensory, and emotional entanglements, I start this introduction by grounding the present endeavour in the scholarship on revolution, senses, and affects. I then consider the ways in which this intertwining framework of multi-sensory and affective modalities proves to be particularly productive in exploring the idea of nationhood and politics after revolutions. Such a focus illuminates how specific dimensions of national narratives become only perceptible once one considers the aesthetical relationship between people's bodies and the body politic. As revolutions move back and forth from the nation to people's bodily sensorium, this collection uncovers the multiple facets of (post)revolutionary collective identities. This sustained attention to the perceptual, as a zone not only of 'cultural intimacy' but of national determinacy, I propose, also provides an occasion to reckon with politics *beyond revolution* itself.

Keywords: aesthetics, affects, nationhood, politics, (post)revolution, senses

'Social revolutions are always sensory revolutions' (Howes 2005: 11)

Revolution is one of the most defining political processes of the last two centuries. From Russia's Bolshevik revolution and Latin America's revolutionary wave that shook Mexico, Cuba, and Nicaragua to, more recently, the Arab Spring, new political configurations have emerged worldwide. Cataclysmic events of cosmological magnitude, revolutions reshape people's socio-political worlds. In the face of worldwide ongoing protests, their importance cannot be ignored. It is therefore extraordinary that, up until recently, anthropology has shied away from studying these political processes. To quote Orin Starn's (1991) famed title, anthropology had been 'missing the revolution'.¹

The issue thus remained for long one of representation within our discipline. Called for by Bjørn Thomassen (2012), the invitation to examine revolutionary processes anthropologically would be answered in earnest during the 2010s. The scholarship that emerged addressed, notably, how local experiences of revolutions intertwined with areas of social life as diverse as personhood (Holbraad 2014; 2017), gender (Malmström 2012; Winegar 2012), food (Mittermaier 2019), class (Winegar 2016), religion (Lancaster 1988; Varzi 2006), embodied conducts spurred by revolutionary rhetoric (McGovern 2017), socio-political change (Yurchak 2006; Shah 2014; Sprenkels 2018; Starn and La Serna 2019), and the embroilment of revolutionary hopes and disappointments (Greenberg 2014; Schielke 2015).² This anthropological foray into revolution was thus endorsed by two encyclopaedias' entries on 'Revolution' (Greenberg 2018; Wilson 2019), soon to be followed by a co-authored book, which, at last, deployed distinctively anthropological themes (e.g., ritual, personhood, cosmology, etc.) in exploring the local 'shapes' that revolutions adopt (Cherstich et al. 2020). In this special issue, adding to this growing field, we propose to look beyond revolution itself, as political uprisings that reshape nationhood, with a twist.

Indeed, our enquiry moves away from traditional anthropological topics to an often-overlooked dimension of political life, that of bodily perceptions as new national narratives emerge.³ The perceptual is here captured by the notion of aesthetics, a periscopic view of the modalities through which people make—quite literally—sense of their worlds. Focusing on the Greek original meaning of 'aesthesia'—not as a visual quality but as a multiperceptual dimension of political life—we posit aesthetics as conjuring a sliding of senses and affects into each other,⁴ contending an open-ended definition of affects that includes feelings, moods, and emotions.⁵ Far from being an exercise in phenomenology for its own sake (see Merleau-Ponty 1945; Bourdieu 1977; Jackson 1981; Csordas 1990), ours is a concern with the body as a site of multisensory, affective, and emotional slip-pages, a site of aesthetics entanglements that mediate revolutions 'from the inside out' (Buck-Morss 1992).⁶ In examining the sticky (almost symbiotic) relations between revolutions, bodies, and nations through the lens of aesthetics, our point is to understand how the whole sensorium becomes the very ground for national identities, beyond revolution itself. We find such an intertwining frame appropriate in addressing the elusiveness of revolutions as they shift back and forth from the body politic to personal bodies. Far from moving away from revolution's language and ideological demands, we acknowledge how revolutionary projects collide with people's perceptions of the political, thus inviting anthropologists to think about political uprisings otherwise, to look at the sensory and affective traces that revolutions leave in their wake.

By considering revolutions as Maussian (Mauss 1990) 'total social phenomena' where 'the micro and the macro levels critically fuse' (Thomassen 2012: 683), we attend to the unstable grounds of revolutionary uprisings as they linger and ripple through people's intimate and collective lives at a deeply perceptual level. To do so, we pay attention to the temporal dimension in which these aesthetics entangle-

ments unfold to uncover what remains once revolutionary upheavals recede, as new national understandings materialise. Indeed, if revolutions are sudden uprisings they also are highly aesthetic world-defining processes that endure well beyond their endpoint by inhabiting bodies, straddling temporalities, and transforming polities. Hence, our focus to situate revolutions as being constituted beyond themselves leads us to a nuanced understanding of the political as a conflation of sensorial and affective modes of experience unfolding across peculiar timelines.

Revolutionary times and aesthetic entanglements

Revolutions are ‘political mobilizations’ that provoke sudden social, political, and economic changes (Wilson 2019: 1). According to a preeminent modern idea in philosophy and political theory—which frames it primarily in terms of rupture and discontinuity (Dunn 1972; Badiou 2009)—a revolution ‘spells the definite end of an old order and brings about the birth of a new world’ (Arendt 1965: 32). Yet, the idea of event or rupture does not account for revolutions’ multiple timelines. The pre-Enlightenment idea of ‘recurring cyclical movement’—*Re-volution*, a movement similar to that of heavenly bodies, the reinstitution of a previous order which also contains eternal returns—captures a part of these overlapping temporalities. Indeed, revolution is an elusive thing straddling multiple temporalities with no clear-cut before and after (on its ‘afterlives,’ see Al-Khalili et al. forthcoming). Two cases in point of their dual nature are Cuba’s and Mexico’s institutionalised revolutions. These uprisings might well be over but live on in the institutionalisation of political regimes and the infrastructures of nations, placing them both as revolutionary and post-revolutionary.⁷ In this volume we thus focus on revolutionary aftermaths as periods of rupture, new beginnings, and continuity that transpire once we pay attention to people’s aesthetical worlds.

If we are not particularly attached to the idea of generating yet another definition of aesthetics (see Baumgarten 1750; Eagleton 1990), we consider senses and affects as constituted by (and constitutive of) politics. One task of this collection is thus to develop an anthropology that regards perception as a political fact. This is an idea also advanced by David Howes who argues that paying heed to the senses ‘highlights the multiple respects in which the perceptual *is* political’ (2006: 127, my emphasis). If people’s sensory dispositions are indeed mapped onto political worlds, our aim here is not to provide a horizon of the different sensory states through which revolutionary processes are being mediated (see, for instance, Darwish 2020 on smell during the revolution in Tunisia). This literature flourishes on the back of a large field of scholarships which mark the ‘sensory turn in anthropology’ (Serematakis 1996; Stoller 1997; Classen 1997; Goody 2002; Howes 2005, 2009; Blackman 2012; Laplantine 2015). Rather than focusing on the idea that senses are structurally and functionally separated, we argue for an ‘aesthetics of mixing the senses’ (Howes and Classen 2014: 154; see also Howes 2010).

Anthropology has challenged the classical classification of a five-sense sensorium (courtesy of either Aristotle or Democritus [Jütte 2005], versions differ) by

numbering the senses anywhere between 10 and 33 (Howes 2009: 22–25).⁸ Other senses include beauty, kinaesthesia, the sense of direction (see Classen 1993: 1–4; see also, Kivy 2003; Wade 2009) or, as we shall see, that of justice (Selejan *this issue*) and humour (Efthymiou and Lionis *this issue*). The latter poses the question of whether senses and affects are really to be distinguished; it also indicates how our intervention departs from previous scholarship. We experience humour (if successful) as sensory resonances, such as laughter. Humour can generate bodily sensations of wellbeing and positive affects or, on the contrary, anxiety and unease. Activating our ‘sense’ of humour triggers a multiplicity of perceptual experiences, a multimodal state of being. A growing literature in cognitive psychology indicates how sensory modalities encroach on affective reactions, hence the present proposal to attend to both senses and affects. Yet, the enduring distinction between sensory and affective dispositions in our discipline may be partly explained by our love for harnessing a specific field of scholarship to study social phenomena.

Emerging at the same time as the ‘sensory turn’, the ‘affective turn’ represents such compartmentalisation (Lutz and White 1986; Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990; Massumi 1995; Stewart 2007; Clough and Halley 2007; Mazzarella 2009; Navarro-Yashin 2012; Martin 2013; Beatty 2013). As if this division was not sufficient, another schism—inspired by Western philosophy (cf. Spinoza 1996; Deleuze 1997)—is to be found in the strand of affect theory which sets affects and emotions as pertaining to different orders (Martin 2013; Richard and Rudnyckij 2009). In this configuration, whereas emotions signal the self’s registration of already existing states held by the body, affects are ‘bodily and autonomic’ (Massumi 2002: 27–28). Affect is a contagion between bodies (Deleuze 1997: 41). Thus, an emotion captured by one’s body may *affect* another body. Moreover, affects also operate in conjunction with the senses (Massumi 1995: 96). Therefore, I do not argue for a ‘sensory-affective’ turn, nor do I find a distinction between affective and emotional states analytically useful. Instead, I propose that both foster a dialogue between the personal body and the body politic. Overcoming the ‘affect-emotion gap’ (ibid.: 6) by acknowledging the whole perceptual spectrum, a multimodal dimension of life which ‘carries a political valence’ (Massumi 2015: vii), is what is at stake in the present deployment of aesthetics. Affects, senses, and feelings are, indeed, ‘crucial to the delineation of the bodies of individual subjects and the body of the nation’ (Ahmed 2004: 117).

Political transitions provoke perceptual disposition, which can sometimes rewrite national characteristics. One such example is *saudade*, a Portuguese word indicating a deeply ambivalent (and hardly translatable) emotion of nostalgia, simultaneously evoking happiness and hurt. The term first appears in the work of poet António Nobre (1867–1900) to express, together with an obsessing personal feeling of longing, the destiny of the Portuguese nation. After the fall of the monarchy, it became central to the ideology of the nascent Republic (Leal 1999: 180–181). Political transitions do, indeed, reshuffle collective affective economies as Svašek (2008) has shown in post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe. Not always as specifically than the Portuguese example indicates, but if the state is also an affective

matter eliciting powerful emotions such as fear, hate, pride, or longing constituting the ‘substance of politics’ (see Laszczkowski and Reeves 2015: 2; see also Harvey 2005; Krupa and Nugent 2015) then, surely, the (post)revolutionary nationhood is itself a total perceptual experience.

‘A revolutionary uprising begins with battles in the streets....There follows the sober business of creating new institutions, councils, decision-making processes, and ultimately the reinvention of everyday life’ (Graeber 2011: 63). After the effervescence of revolutions, new understanding of national identity appears clearly through the ideological shift in the (post)revolutionary state official idiom. However, as Hannerz (2006: 278) argues about the study of communicative forms in the context of neo-nationalist spectacles, political anthropology also becomes an anthropology of the senses, of emotion, and of the body. Paying attention, as we do here, to the everyday and perceptual zones of ‘cultural intimacy’—that is, ‘the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality’ (Herzfeld 2016: 3)—is ‘an antidote to the formalism of cultural nationalism’ (ibid.: 19). In this sense, a focus on such intimate aesthetics can illuminate a subaltern view of official revolutionary or counterrevolutionary dogma. Providing an occasion to rethink ideas of revolutionary agency and subjectivity outside the resistance-dominance paradigm that continues to be influential in political anthropology, it is through a sustained focus on these intimate and intangible perceptions that the notion of nationhood crystallises.⁹

As awaking from revolutionary dreams and nightmares, nations move to whatever comes next, be it—in this special issue—after a perceived failure of the uprising (Malmström in Egypt), a coup d’état (McGovern in Guinea), through the straightjacketing of transition to democracy (Boutieri in Tunisia), in the (post)revolutionary socialist state (Holbraad in Cuba), or as more protests rage in recent years (Selejan in Nicaragua; Efthymiou and Lionis in Chile and Egypt), novel aesthetics of the polity arise. Concepts explored by the authors of this collection, such as humour and justice, the ‘democratic grotesque’ (Boutieri), ‘stuplimity’ (McGovern after Ngai 2005, *this issue*), or the affective and sensorial economies of state torture (Malmström) and care (Holbraad) theoretically upend the idea of ‘banal nationalism’ (the routine symbols and habits of languages that reinforce the nation—Billig 1995).

Thus, *Beyond Revolution* may potentially amount to the first systematic anthropological exploration of post-revolutionary national identity through the prism of the ‘perceptual’ in the widest sense of the term. Embracing the intricacies of perception at the level of the nation in the context of revolutionary changes, the authors gathered here—not all of whom engage with the anthropology of the senses or that of affects—offer, with great ethnographic sensibility, an exploration of the very sensorial and affective tones in which the idea of being Nicaraguan, Egyptian, Guinean, Chilean, and Cuban materialises. Spawning insights into what remains beyond revolutionary uprisings, the main questions thus addressed here are: What kind of ‘aesthetics’ of nationhood remains as political upheavals slowly fade into

the political structure of the state? What facets of revolutionary transformation become only evident when we focus on senses and affects? How do revolutions endure by moving back and forth between people's bodies and the body politic? And how do we trace these movements between citizens and nations? The anthropological insights gathered here constitute a promise for the study of the political as an 'aesthetical' experience. Not discarding the sense of sight, but considering how it participates in perceptual crossovers, before turning to the opening contributions of *Beyond Revolution*, let us briefly delve into the power of images in revolutionary politics.

Revolutionary temporalities in the dominion of images

Our McLuhanesque 'global village', interconnected 24/7 through an endless flow of images, propels the sense of sight as our prime instrument to mediate our experience of political events unfolding the world over. The advent of the Internet is a revolutionary moment that has unified our collective experience (at least on some level), while placing images, and our sense of sight, as crucial tools to interpret worldwide politics. Social media has brought about a deluge of textual and visual contents moving at the speed of light across multiple platforms, allowing us to experience multiple scales of temporalities and spatialities. While images pervade our intimate world and our perception of the political, revolutions—contrary to Gil Scott-Heron's famed song 'The Revolution Will Not Be Televised'—have been televised, digitalised, and archived on the World Wide Web. Confronted with this landslide of images, our whole sensorium participates in a global spectacle that, when not deprived of sight, is governed by vision. Anthropology has often been accused of ocularcentrism, privileging vision over other senses (Fabian 1983) while, paradoxically, being blamed for favouring writing over images (Pinney 2011). But if vision has always been an important part of our discipline—granted our method of predilection in the field being participant-observation—it is also one of the prime senses that help us apprehend politics. In the age of 'fake news', we can no longer underestimate the importance of sight in creating specific affects or moods.

Political revolutions are highly visual processes. Connecting fronts of protests, as diverse as those of Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring, newsreels and pictures of revolutions have taken social media by storm (Werbner et al. 2014; Westmoreland 2016). These images collapse multiple political temporalities while appealing to other senses, beyond that of sight. Indeed, the study of sensuously significant events—what Jacques Rancière (2004) calls the 'distribution of the sensible'—usually places visual aesthetics at the core of political experience. But, as scholars have noted, segregating the visual from the other senses would cut off a part of embodied experience (Pink 2006: 17). One such example has been explored by Kostantinos Kalantzis (2012: 9–10) during the "Indignant" Protests on Syntagma Square, in Athens. The author highlights the evocation of visual motifs of resistance and Cretan-ness (lyre-players and traditional tunes) as an aesthetic of exasperation against the political order (eliciting the idea of liberation from the

nation's traditional enemies—the nineteenth-century uprising against the Ottoman rule, Germany in WWII, etc.—that fitted both rightist and leftist aspirations). Said visual setup worked out particularly well as the police were throwing flash bombs thus emulating the sensorial world of the Cretan feast. These performances created a shared sense of corporeal complicity. Likewise, the contributors to this issue do not separate sight from other senses and affects. Giving us a prism with which to look at these questions, we start this conversation with the crossovers between the senses of sight and justice. As Ileana L. Selejan argues in the first article of *Beyond Revolution*, once visual representations amidst the multisensory atmosphere of protests, shifting national imaginaries start to surface.

Sensing the nation through screens and mirrors

Opening this collection, Selejan ponders on the Nicaraguan 2018 pacifist anti-governmental protests which were violently crushed by the authorities to explore how the acts of 'vandalism' on monuments, such as graffiti and the defacement of portraits of the presidential couple, became means to reclaim the country's revolutionary past and also to imagine potential political futures. Setting civil disobedience as a form of symbolic reparation, her piece brings to the fore the 'mirror effect' of social media. Far from simply considering visual interventions, it is in conjunction with the multisensoriality of protests—manifested through trace, gesture, and sound (cf. Kalantzis 2012)—that citizens engage with the political possibilities of images. As those who are not on the streets watch the events unfold on their screens, a dialogue between past and present protests transpires, not only with the Sandinista Revolution (1979–1990)—a ferocious insurrection led by FSLN (The Sandinista National Liberation Front) which put an end to the Somoza dictatorship—but also more recent anti-governmental upheavals such as the Arab Spring and the Velvet Revolution, as well as Chile, Venezuela, and Mexico. The idea of symbolic reparation recalls Arielle Azoulay's (2012) idea of 'civil dream'. Through their attacks on contested national symbols, being driven by a sense of justice as part of an economy of affect (Ahmed 2004), the protesters reclaim the freedom to reconfigure Nicaragua's revolutionary narrative.

As Nicaraguan protesters invoke revolutionary legacies to reclaim justice, it is to humour that the audience of the 2019 Venice Biennale, titled 'May You Live in Interesting Times', turns to apprehend the development of (post)revolutionary nations. Comparing the Chilean and Egyptian pavilions, Alkisti Efthymiou and Chrisoula Lionis (this issue) consider arts as 'unfolding events', a form of 'practical aesthetics' (Bennett 2012) while deploying an aesthetic quality enmeshed in complex geopolitics temporalities. Against the backdrop of global protests erupting around the world, notably in Santiago and Cairo, Chile's and Egypt's revolutionary histories are very much the proverbial 'elephant in the room'. Both pavilions negotiate different understandings of ongoing and suspended uprisings, provoking conflicting feelings and physical sensations in the audience. The dialectics of distance and proximity from revolutionary uprisings facilitates two very different

types of humour. As viewers roam the curatorial displays, the kitsch ‘Vegas’ flavour of the state-sponsored Egyptian pavilion, instead of a critical stance on recent political transformations, prompts the audience’s embarrassed amusement, begging the question: is it too soon to laugh with Egypt’s misfortune? Chile, meanwhile, represented by strong decolonial and subaltern themes, drags the well-off audience into humorous introspection by offering them to look at their own reflection. A crucial distinction is that viewers laugh *at* the Egyptian pavilion while they laugh *with* the Chilean one, a contrast which entangles the idea of remoteness and closeness between the audience and nations being represented, between the south and the global north, but also between past revolutions and present protests.

The idea of nationhood here hinges on multiple temporalities. Faithful to Marx’s statement that revolutions ‘conjure up the spirits of the past to their service’ (1991 [1852]: 15), these two examples crucially unpack the relationship between revolutions and national imaginings. Both time (or rather a temporal distance from) and geopolitics (spatial power dynamics) activate potential political futures through a sense of humour or justice. Heeding this issue’s call to attend to sensory and affective crossovers, this pair of articles considers the perceptual economies (sight, hearing, feeling) that mediate and recalibrate politics by showing that with images, there is always more than what meets the eye. Yet, to capture the complexities of this statement, we need not only to examine cultural productions but also to elucidate how these rearticulate processes of democratic transition.

Affective distortion: Grotesque democracy and *Stuplimity* in the nation-state

With Charis Boutieri’s piece, we zoom in on Tunisian procedural democratic consolidation conveyed by carnivalesque revelries. Tunisian high-school seniors celebrate the end of the first stage of their Baccalaureate exam (final-year state-sanctioned examination) with revelries (called the *daklha* (‘entry’)) characterised by the production of one to two-stories-high cloth banners that enter in competition between high schools. Studying reactions to these parodic and dark humoured banners (portraying characters such as ISIS soldiers, Hitler, and the Joker), Boutieri captures how Tunisian citizens negotiate the limitations and meaning of democracy through affects such as tension, resentment, and repugnance but also, pointed laughter (cf. Efthymiou and Lionis) provoked by these banners. The idea of democratic nationhood centred around *Tunisianité* (‘Tunisian-ness’) is intertwined with the affects that these representations elicit as they aggravate existing intergenerational disagreement on what democratic transition ought to be. The contrary emotions and antagonism that the banners activate—and the call here is to take ‘images as seriously as words’ (see Fogarty-Valenzuela 2020: 1)—become similar to liminal thresholds, in Turner’s sense (1974), of civic creativity. Putting forward that, conversely to liberal literature, democracy consists in generational dissensus rather than consensus (Rancière 2010), Boutieri advances the concept of the ‘democratic grotesque,’ a type of transgression that ‘recalibrate[s] earlier reper-

toires of nationhood' to demonstrate that the boundaries between revolution and the reconfiguration of Tunisian democracy are unstable.

Mike McGovern (this issue), in turn, examines the rhetoric of power through the distinctive aesthetics of 'The Dadis Show' that saw former president Dadis Camara mimic the political oratory mastery of Guinea's revolutionary leader Sékou Touré without ever achieving the latter's captivating effect. After an initial 'suspension of disbelief as Camara's junta promised to follow Touré's revolutionary ideals—a sense of 'stuplimity,' the affect described by Sianne Ngai (2005: 271) as combining shock, boredom, and astonishment—took the audience over. Stuplimity marked the end of Guineans' belief in Camara's ability to carry out the revolution. Delving into the transfer of affectively charged moods between orators and audiences (Brennan 2004), Mc Govern contrasts 'stuplimity' with the 'abject sublime' (Jafa 2003)—a mix of awe, fear, and delight—that Touré had been able to instil in his audiences. Instead of reacting passionately to Camara's discourses, Guinean audiences became increasingly tired of his repetitive revolutionary rhetoric that ultimately failed to recreate the fervour of Touré's days. The Dadis Show and Camara's short-lived popularity only offered a smokescreen for more political corruption and less revolutionary ideas. When a political persona tries and fails to channel the spirits of past revolutions to charm the audiences, whether or not the orator can transmit the right affects to his spectators determines its political destiny and another vision of the revolutionary nation.

Boutieri's and McGovern's explorations of two carnivalesque national spectacles elucidate the dissonance at the core of revolutions. In Tunisia and Guinea, democratic transitions exist on the volatile grounds on which revolutions' affective charges exist. They can provoke a rift between generations or discrete receptions of a revolutionary (or would-be revolutionary) leader. But, in fact, the significance of revolutionary symbols and rhetoric in the construction of a collective identity always depends on the transmission of the right affects to the right audiences. As revolutionary zones of intimacy shift their coordinates, the interpretation of what constitutes a national democratic starts changing. And once state structures become involved, as the next two authors show, the politics of life can become—or be intensified by—the politics of death.

Ghosts and spirits in the nation-state: Trapped in (post)revolutionary infrastructures of torture and care

Whether the infrastructures of the (post)revolutionary state can emerge from the perspective of emotional and sensorial entanglements is a question answered in the last articles of this collection. Maria Frederika Malmström's beautiful ethnography takes us into the cells of Cairene political prisoners where she uncovers the story of the 'failed' Egyptian revolution. Following an aesthetic analytical trajectory, which relates sonic infrastructures and affects, she brings revolutionary permanence in the body to the fore. In the wake of the 25 January revolution, these prisoners were tortured and the aural landscape of violence becomes ingrained in their bodies. The

sound of torture and the whispers of their companions used to be the only proofs that they were still alive. Negative emotions and feelings conflate with painful sensorial body memories and make these men wish not to have a body at all. Showing how sonic vibrations—important stimuli of everyday life, with a unique power to induce strong affective states—or lack of thereof, stimulate, disorient, transform, and control these men, Malmström addresses the politics of death. For these prisoners, the sonic landscape changes from being one of life—Cairo's urban hustle and the Islamic call to prayer—to dictating the condition of *living dead* in the isolation of detention. As their forced disappearance produce 'ghost bodies', they end up being isolated from their families, alienated from themselves and exiled from the new Egyptian national narrative.

In stark contrast with state torture in the prisons of Cairo, Martin Holbraad turns to the failure of the Cuban revolutionary state to provide true 'socialist' *care* to a man who ends up finding it in the caring realm of the spirits. Having gained great anthropological currency in recent years (Biehl 2013), care is, the author proposes, inherently 'aesthetics'. Through Lazaro's story, that of a man's struggle to rebuild his derelict home in Havana following its partial collapse through daily encounters with the state's housing authorities, we discover the negotiation of failed revolutionary promises (housing reform and a decent lodgement for Cuban citizens, a part of the institutional project of Fidel Castro's manifesto for the *Revolución*). The state is 'an object of emotional investment' (Laszczkowski and Reeves 2015: 3) and an affective modality. Care and lack thereof provoke emotions from cynicism to determination engendered by the hiatus between care promised and care delivered. Through his intimate relationships with the spirits (not dissimilar from Marx's revolutionary ones) that inhabit his rundown home and guide his daily bureaucratic manoeuvrings, Lazaro is convinced that the uncaring state structures will answer his needs. Holbraad's argument about care is amplified analytically by the modal distinction of 'ought' vs. 'is', parsing out the man's conviction that the state will provide as a fusing of the practice of socialism with the caring logic of spiritism. We also understand that, if citizens expect the care of the state, they also care deeply about the state's ability to deliver the promises of the revolution.

What appears strikingly in these two last ethnographies is that people live in very close proximity to the (in)visible infrastructures of the (post)revolutionary state. Said infrastructures operate in a mutually constitutive relationship with nationhood and reveal the 'cracks' at the heart of all national projects. The derelict housing infrastructures and the much too real (yet, out of sight) prison cells become a site where the spiritual and the secular spheres intertwine to manifest revolutionary hopes and despair. Proximity with the materiality of the political does not prevent people from interacting with the elusive realm of ghost and spirits.

As the politics of life (call to prayer in Cairo) and those of death (the spirit world in Cuba) come together, the potential of a perceptual approach of politics to tackle one of anthropology's most enduring bugbears, namely, the perceived divide between spiritual/religious and political lives, becomes apparent. And if there is a vast—still fledging—scholarship on the multisensory mediation of re-

ligious experiences (Plate 2005; Meyer 2006; Keane 2008), the study of politics in anthropology seems to have escaped both the sensory and the affective turns (see exceptions: Panagia 2009; Trnak 2012; Malmström 2019). As we contemplate, in Malmström's words, the disincarnated traces of these 'forgotten political bodies'—those of the prisoners, and that of Lazaro and his spirits—the infrastructures of torture (sound and lack of thereof), care, or negligence become part and parcel of revolutionary subjectivities. These aesthetics do not only change revolutionary subjects; they also reconfigure national identities and bring the spiritual and secular dimensions of political life together.

For an anthropology of perceptual politics

In weaving together the intricate ethnographic insights of shifting (post)revolutionary national landscapes, the authors of *Beyond Revolution* contribute to a broader understanding of *aesthetics* which foregrounds the idea that the body captures the very stuff of politics. In this collection, the anthropologists who have contributed their field experiences from a wide variety of sides converge on several key themes, such as civil disobedience, revolutionary temporality, and the failures of revolutions. The present perceptual/aesthetical framework sheds an uncanny light on revolutionary outcomes. In particular, it illuminates the collapsing temporalities existing at the heart of national projects as these mediate different understandings of what (post)revolutionary national politics ought to be versus how citizens perceive them. As it will become apparent to the reader of this volume, different strands of revolutionary time echo at different scales of people's lives. Whereas the youth embrace civil disobedience by looking back on revolutionary histories and sharing images of resistance on social media to generate new political futures, the elders hold onto the past and its official narratives (Nicaragua, Tunisia). As some people, who believed in the revolution, are brutally excluded from the new narrative (Egypt), no matter how hard they try to care about it, others have little to show to reconcile what was with what is (Cuba). Audiences, just watching from afar are amused with the comical interpretation of revolutionary narratives (Chile/Egypt), while citizens behold, in suspended disbelief, the failure of their leaders to re-enact a promising revolutionary past (Guinea).

To be sure, revolutionary failure is a theme that is strongly present in this collection; a failure to manifest a truly collective (post)revolutionary national redefinition through the dialectics between hope and despair. The hollow promise of the Cuban *Revolución* to provide shelter is tempered by the assurance of the (revolutionary?) spirits that the state may yield its promises (Holbraad). Elsewhere, the hopelessness of political prisoners to ever integrate the national Egyptian narrative (Malmström) resonates with the hope for justice that animate Nicaraguans as there seems to be no such hope in sight (Selejan), while in Guinea spectators suspend their revolutionary disbelief until they cannot do it anymore (McGovern). Similarly for international audiences, there is hope there that a certain national representation is indeed some kind of a joke (Efthymiou and Lionis), while in Tunisia the idiom

of generational dissension reveals the hope that a unified democratic transition may be achieved (Boutieri). In all these cases, hope verges on despair and cynicism as citizens contemplate the failure of revolutionary promises thus illuminating the relationship between nationhood and statehood or between people, national collective representations, and state structures. It is the particular framework of aesthetics and the perceptual that is used here that allows these themes to come to the fore.

As I proposed in this introduction, sensorial stimuli generate feelings and affects which in turn hijack the senses. As multisensory entanglements foster a mutual transmission of contradictory affects between (post)revolutionary states and their people (McGovern, Holbraad, Malmström), other aesthetical engagements provoke collective social dissonance (Boutieri, Selejan) for insiders and for outsiders alike (Efthymiou and Lionis). What is more, the examination of how spectacles—such as revelries, Biennale, and the sharing of visual contents on social media, all locations where the (post)revolutionary nation is being staged, thus ‘inviting the public gaze’ (Boutieri)—foregrounds the concern at the heart of this special issue to examine the manifold relations between people’s bodily perceptions and the nation. While the fantastically sensorial and affective explosions of revolutions linger in unexpected places and slowly transfigure national representations, new understandings of the polity emerge. A closer engagement with the perceptual lives of political bodies may help us understand the impact of political uprisings for revolutions are deeply aesthetics insofar as they often demand and/or provoke a wholehearted affective and physical commitment. Yet other political changes are equally perceptual.

Let us pause for a moment to consider that, as we put this volume together, the world is going through an event of the magnitude of a revolution. The COVID-19 pandemic has not only propelled our collective emotional and sensorial experience—often one of distress, vulnerability, and resistance (Pritzker 2020: 251)—to the centre stage but it has also made clear that it is through senses, emotions, and affects that we reorganise our new reality. While we are contemplating a profound shift in the way we relate to each other, we may ask ourselves what will become of domestic understandings of a national character, tied to very sensorial and affective behaviours (such as, in the Mediterranean, food sharing from communal plates, or affectionate greetings) as they start disappearing. How will people reformulate specific cultural idiosyncrasies when the very aesthetical modalities through which these are being expressed are potentially hazardous and thus appealed to disappear? The ways in which we relate to state infrastructures have also shifted dramatically as entire nations gather in front of their screens awaiting official announcements which promise more social (perceptual) restrictions while offering, once again, the idiom of a ‘caregiving’ state from which we are now, even more than before, biopolitically—in Foucault’s sense (2010)—dependent. And if this pandemic is indeed a revolutionary moment in the sense of generating a cosmological remaking, its economic and socio-political fallouts will reverberate for years to come, likely leading to more protests sparking the world around.

Hence, my suggestion for anthropologists interested in capturing the political *beyond revolution* and at the level of the body is to consider mutually constitu-

tive sensory and affective states—embracing a multimodal form of ethnographic research—to focus on the perceptual life of politics. Through shifting the focus of inquiry on the interconnections of sensory and affective pathways, we can illuminate how the political world is mapped out onto and merges with the biological body and its emotional states. Our task is then to identify said perceptual states and show how these encompass politics, in which ways they do so, and what lingers in the whole sensorium to manifest the political. Such an approach, in other words, would help us recognise that the source of politics also lies within people's aesthetic perceptions, not as discrete categories but as intricate aesthetic entanglements. By engaging empirically and analytically with how people feel (keeping in mind that all the senses participate in said feelings), we may be taking a small step toward going back to the heart of the lived experience of politics, revolutionary and otherwise.

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Notes

1. Clifford Geertz also famously omitted any reference to politics and massacres in Indonesia (White 2008). Yet, many anthropologists gave firsthand ethnographic accounts from countries where revolutions were unfolding (Bourgois 1982; Lan 1985; Hegland 2013; Armbrust 2019).
2. See Chertisch et al. (2020) for a complete overview of the anthropological scholarship on revolution.
3. The original idea for this collection comes from a panel that I organised and convened at University College London in 2019 for the conference 'After the Event. Prospects and Retrospects of Revolution' (together with my colleagues Narges Ansari, Charlotte Al-Khalili, and Kaya Uzel—whom I thank here for years of conversations on all things revolutionary). The panel 'Enduring Aesthetics. Memory and Sensual Perceptions of Past Revolutions' benefited from the contributions of Jessica Winegar, Rafael Sánchez, Yolanda Covington-Ward, and Ileana L. Selejan. I am immensely grateful to them for helping plant the seeds of my reflections on (post)revolutionary aesthetics. In this introduction, I draw on the comments offered by the panel's participants, the audience of 'After the Event', and on my work on aesthetics and intimacy with images.
4. The verb *αισθάνομαι* in Modern Greek (*aisthanomai*—I feel, I sense) still carries the connotation of a blending of sensorial modalities with affective states. Incidentally, the English term *feeling* indicates a similar overlap of senses and sensibilities, albeit chiefly through touch (D. Howes, personal communication, March 19, 2021). Same in Italian with the verb *sentire* (feeling/sensing) also meaning hearing (B. Thomassen, personal communication, April 15, 2021), and these examples no doubt exist in many languages. See for a similar conflation of touch and sight—*haptic visibility*—in the scholarship of Ahmed 2000: 49.
5. Since aesthetics is a much used (and abused) term, often understood as referring to the visual realm and the dominion of beauty, my choice—as the editor of this collection—was to leave the word out of the title to indicate, precisely, that we are here looking at the relations between senses and affects/emotions.
6. My conceptual intervention differs from that outlined by Winegar (2016) in revolutionary Egypt where a type of 'beautification', an 'aesthetics of ordering' (the sensory containment of waste in public spaces) prevails for the Cairene middle class. Likewise, the author's (2012, 2016) reflection on gendered affects (with an emphasis on space and class) is also in disconnect with my concern to bring forward an analytical framework that considers the multisensory experience of revolutions.
7. What is more, if for Cubans the revolution contains everything (Holbraad 2017), for some of my Mexican interlocutors, the *Robolución* (a portmanteau word between robbery and revolution and a class of political thieves) indicates a democratic process which ultimately crystallised into the seventy years of the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) uninterrupted reign, what Peruvian Nobel Prize Mario Vargas Llosa calls the 'perfect dictatorship'.
8. For a list of the senses, see <http://sixthsensereader.org/>.
9. Few scholars have paid attention to how the senses reshape national identities and citizenship (see Trnak et al. 2013). Fewer even have considered both the sensual and emotional dimensions of revolutions (see again the exception of Trnak 2012 on the Czechoslovak Velvet Revolution).

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