

# The Beauty of Feeling

## On the Affective Politics of Sensing Collectives

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### 1. DISENTANGLING AFFECTIVE POLITICS AND POLITICAL BEAUTY

In this chapter, I approach collectives, and a notion of collectivity that holds collectives together, via a lens of affective politics (Bargetz, 2014a; 2014b). Affective politics, loosely defined, underscore the always-already emotional and passionate elements engrained in the *doing* of politics. Put differently, I understand politics as existentially entangled in individual and collective practices of claims-making, dreaming, desiring, and forging for political collectivities that reflect one's own normative understanding of the good life, a just society, an equitably shared planet. With the objective to explore how notions of collectivity and affective politics intertwine, I study the performance *Re-Formation der Geschichte* (*Re-Formation of History*; 2009) of the Berlin-based artist collective *Zentrum für Politische Schönheit* (*Center for Political Beauty*; ZPS). In a public, unsolicited performance, the artist group delivered ten theses of political beauty to the doorstep of the German Bundestag via a ceremony-like, staged horseback ride (see Table 1 and Figure 1). Their gesture implicitly referenced Martin Luther's famous nailing of 95 theses onto a church door, which contested the religious hegemony at the time. Their "*Thesenanschlag*" (a wordplay to be elaborated below) was deployed by ZPS as a poetic means to disrupt the existing order of politics. By zooming in on specifically three of their theses, I critically discuss the artist group's understanding of collectivity.

*Figure 1: Staged horseback ride to deliver ten theses of political beauty.*



Source: ZPS 2009a, p. 25

In a previous analysis, I have systematically screened of all ten theses of political beauty (Landau, 2019; see Table 2).<sup>1</sup> In that exercise, I distilled three analytical vignettes which evoke ZPS's understanding of political beauty—captured in the codes of BEAUTY, VITALITY, and LONGING. The ten theses, considered together, request and invoke an intense longing for more aesthetic and affective ways of doing politics. The theses appeal to (re)activate a lost sense of poetry, passion, and beauty in politics. Via a framework of political difference (Marchart 2010; 2013), which differentiates (however not neatly, or definitively) between politics and the political, I captured the ways in which the theses leverage political feelings. While politics points to the more narrowly defined practices of routinized or institutionalized rules and procedures, the political addresses the more encompassing and irreducibly conflictual realm of political life. Along this continuum, I have discussed how political beauty can significantly (re)politicize the realm of politics towards a more affective, encompassing notion in the spirit of the political. While political beauty is suggested as desirable mindset and motivation, political beauty can however never be fully attained or realized. In this lingering dilemma between a universal call to action and individual

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1 Individual sentences of this chapter have been derived verbatim from my earlier account on the affective politics of political beauty (Landau, 2019). Instead of quoting these sentences directly, I am interweaving them here and take full responsibility for those few identical phrases an algorithm might be able to detect if my two pieces of writing were put into direct comparison.

agency to strive towards more politically beautiful futures, the theses do not specify where and how such political beauty can be attempted or practiced. In addition, it has not been studied *by whom* political beauty shall be advanced. In other words, while aspects of political beauty already indicate how affective and political concerns are multiply interrelated, what remains to be explored is the concrete connection between political beauty and collectivity. Hence, I develop my existing account further and add here a fourth analytical vignette—COLLECTIVITY—to study ZPS's implicit and explicit understanding of collectivity. In relation to their overall manifesto, I critically discuss how ZPS's advocated return to intense, poetic, and passionate politics, which are full of desire, greatness, and life, does indeed lead to more beautiful—or affective—politics, actualized by a politically beautiful collective.

To test and wrestle with this hypothesis, I scrutinize three selected theses from ZPS's performance with regards to the potential of political beauty to create new collective subjectivities, motivate collective political agency, or make politics more affective (again). Briefly, I scrutinize: (How) can political beauty help us to imagine political collectivity? What does a politically beautiful collective feel like? Does the concept tell us anything about the values, goals, or concrete shapes of beautiful collectives? Who exactly is this 'we' that strives for political beauty? And how do 'we' come to know and sense it? Can political beauty only be sensed collectively?

To approach these questions methodologically, I conduct what I call a spectral or hauntological reading of the ten theses. Borrowing from Derrida's (1994) hauntological approach, I assume temporality as constantly "out of joint," precarious and permeated by ghosts from the past. With this framework, I capture the fragmented and polyphonic dimensions of texts, data, and our responses to them. With regards to the concrete case of *Re-Formation of History*, the complicated connection between past and present is provocatively drawn out by ZPS; they conjure specters of the past, nail them to the doors of the Bundestag, thus haunting contemporary German politics. More specifically, I offer a poetic analysis as response to the theses of political beauty, and herewith aim to strengthen poetry in/as research approach (Allen, 2017; Faulkner, 2009). In relation to the theses of political beauty, I explore how affective politics can be mobilized and felt via words, texts, metaphors, images, appeals, warnings—however utopian or dystopian they might be.

Together with my own affective responses and reflections on the theses of political beauty, I build on the concept of affective politics by political theorist Brigitte Bargetz (2014b), and her proposition of a political grammar of feelings in particular. In addition, I draw on political theories of affect (Ahmed, 2014; Anderson, 2014; Bargetz, 2015), and radical democratic concepts of political difference by Oliver Marchart (2010, 2013). I put these notions in conceptual dialogue with Andreas Reckwitz's (2017) analytical account on the role of the senses in social practices. Extrapolating from Reckwitz's claim that "social orders always entail sensible orders" (2017, p. 60), I study the links and disconnects between feelings, or affects more broadly,

and orders of politics, the political, and beauty. In line with this volume's shared interest in understanding the trope of sensing collectives, I trace appeals to collective, and not-so-collective, sensible orders via the theses of political beauty. With this, I set out to understand how these affective forms may push political collectives to challenge, disrupt, establish, forget, govern, innovate, irritate, or stabilize collectively sensed social orders.

*Table 1: Ten theses of political beauty.*

#1	In every human being, there is a profound desire for the beautiful.
#2	Everything great is born from desire.
#3	People are not only moved by causes, but also by goals. Beauty, greatness, and perfection are goals.
#4	Beauty and ugliness are both poles between which life fundamentally takes place.
#5	"Everyone warms their heart in a different way." From this, the moderns have drawn the conclusion to not warm their hearts at all. Without the experience of beauty, human experiences are incomplete.
#6	"He [sic] treats beauty as entomologists treat butterflies. He catches the poor animal, he pins it down, and as its exquisite colors drop off, there it lies, a lifeless corpse under the pin. And what is what they call aesthetics." (Goethe)
#7	Hopes are not there to be abandoned.
#8	What we know depends on what we feel.
#9	A soul that has not experienced beauty commits emotional suicide.
#10	Souls without poetry are an undiscovered form of mental illness.

Source: own translation after ZPS 2009a, p. 26

## 2. THE CENTER FOR POLITICAL BEAUTY BETWEEN AGGRESSIVE HUMANISM AND CONTESTED COLLECTIVITY

The artist activist collective consists of a fluctuating number of up to 70 artists, intellectuals, scholars or "accomplices," as ZPS calls supporters and donors for individual actions. Since its foundation in 2009, and to this day, ZPS has engaged in a variety of performances and public actions which have problematized the political disenchantment, passivity, and assumed indifference of specifically German, and European citizens and politicians. For example, with regards to Europe's admittedly inhumane human rights and refugee politics, ZPS has staged creative protests such as *Mauerkreuze* (*Border Crosses*, 2014, Landau forthcoming), *Die Toten Kommen* (*The Dead*

*Are Coming*, 2015) or *Flüchtlinge Fressen* (*Devouring Refugees*, 2016), in which they address what they perceive as the German government's failure to commemorate past and ongoing death of refugees at European borders. With sometimes grim theatrical scenarios, the artist group has buried dead refugees in front of the German Bundestag, has arguably imported and exhibited the ashes of Auschwitz casualties in central Berlin and has drawn attention to genocides throughout Europe. The *Center for Political Beauty* has repeatedly condemned the insufficient acknowledgement and commemoration of the Holocaust in German politics and commemorative culture, which, according to ZPS, should constitute the backbone of any political action.

In 2009, as one of ZPS's first public actions, the horse-back ride of the ten theses of political beauty was originally planned to nail the theses on the doors of the Bundestag—in historical reference to Protestant reformer Martin Luther. The German term "*Thesenanschlag*" is a play on words on "*Anschlag*," which can point either to the physical process of installing the theses by hammering in a nail or allude to an attack, possibly on the lack of political beauty in dominant German politics. In relation to the hauntological framework of ghostly time, the installation/intervention/attack invokes these voices of the past. Typical for ZPS's interventionist actions, the *Re-Formation of History* assembled a temporary, serendipitous audience (or a however temporary collectivity)—visitors waiting to access the dome of the German Bundestag. However, there are also more structural assumptions about collectivities to be affected by ZPS's actions which I unpack in the following.

Spearheaded by Dr. Philipp Ruch, a philosopher by training, and the most commonly recognizable public face of the ever-morphing collectivity, ZPS continuously evokes controversial reactions in Berlin-based, German and international media. The creation of polyphonic, ambivalent media environments has been described as one of the goals of ZPS's interventionist practice (ZPS, 2019). While many of their actions hover between legal persecution (i.e., claiming that ZPS engages in criminal activity; MDR Thüringen, 2019) and the protected freedom of artistic expression, it is precisely in this ambivalence that affective and political practices are intertwined (ZPS, 2009b). The term "aggressive humanism" (Bayrischer Rundfunk, 2014) is often used either to describe the group's activities, used by group affiliates themselves to identify and describe their actions. The provocative interconnection—and tension—between 'aggressiveness' or 'aggression,' which evokes associations with violence or hostility, and the latter term of 'humanism,' which implies a concern for individual agency, rationality, progress, as well as responsibility, dignity, and care for all human beings, also shines through in the ten theses of political beauty. Aggressive humanism might invoke, on the one hand, a sense of verve and edginess to (self-)identify the group as a radical, critical or otherwise subversive art collective. On the other hand, the term might affectively mobilize a drive towards human flourishing, mutual care and accountability in the spirit of Humanism. In summary, and without further going into detail about the curious term of aggressive human-

ism, ZPS and its surrounding mediatized reception activate a variety of emotional responses that range, but are not exclusive to guilt, shame, regret, and hopelessness to its precise counterparts of hope, comfort, consolation, and potentially optimism for a better future—described by newspapers, social media comments, and also felt personally.

While it is not my goal here to classify or categorize the aesthetic practices of ZPS strictly as ‘art’ or ‘not art’ and I am concerned rather with their affective political impetus, it becomes apparent that public perceptions of ZPS’s activities, performances, and activism continue to be controversially debated with every new coup they stage. Yet, before I dive into a poetic analysis to reconstruct the specific constellation of collective subjectivity in the selected three theses that speak to “everybody” in the quest for political beauty, let me briefly situate my understanding of affect.

### 3. READING AFFECTIVE POLITICS THROUGH POETRY

My understanding of affect is informed by the so-called affective turn in social and cultural theory (Angerer et al. 2015; Gregg and Seigworth, 2011). The latter brings to the fore the crucial importance of feelings, emotions, passions or the trans-individual expression of affect in both analytical and empirical questions of collective subject formation.<sup>2</sup> Notably, feelings or emotions (and affects more generally) are never either just good or bad, appropriate or not, or at least not indisputably so (Cvetkovich, 2007, 2012). Negative feelings such as displeasing states of distress, including anxiety, depression, aggression, sadness, shame, fear, or guilt (Watson et al., 1988) do not feel or affect ‘everybody’ in the same way. Hence, instead of pathologizing or vilifying certain feelings or emotions as negative, the ways in which we are affected reveal themselves as always multiple, often unpredictable and always to some extent subjective. Accordingly, being affected by politics (or by ‘the political’ at large) is not automatically a good or beautiful thing. Notably, affective politics can also mobilize and create fear, anger, resentment (see Sommer, this volume). Especially in light of rising illiberal political movements, which notably often instrumentalize culture or cultural policies for nationalist or otherwise oppressive purposes

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2 Affect and emotion/feeling are interrelated yet different concepts or analytical approaches. Especially with regards to their respective (pre)cognitive and (trans)individual scope, scholars differently assess the similarity or distinctiveness of affects and emotions (Ahmed, 2014; Leys, 2011). Generally, affects can ignite politicizing and depoliticizing, emancipatory and reactionary, conservative and liberal political attitudes and actions (Berlant, 2011). Notably, Hemmings (2005) points out that precisely the relative or situated autonomy of affects illustrates the partial interdependency between affect and individual emotion or embodied experience. In my approach to antagonistic affective politics, this ambivalence is not resolved, but wriggles through my poetic analysis.

such as xenophobia, homo- and transphobia, or racism, connections between passions and politics are to be considered with caution (Bóren, 2020). However, besides divisive feelings such as (collective) anxiety vis-à-vis a more or less visible 'Other' or other forms of exclusion, affective politics might also bring about new forms of encounter, care, compassion, community or collectivity (Bargetz & Freudenschuss, 2012). In sum, affective politics paradoxically hover between dangerously affecting and diving collectivities of people, places, and things, and the potential to stimulate, invent, and invigorate new ways of feeling and being together (Cvetkovich, 2012; Hemmings, 2005).

Political theorist Chantal Mouffe (2006) has underscored that passions are important drivers in political mobilization and clout. Within an emerging scholarship on the affective implications of politics (Bens et al., 2019), or the governing of affect (e.g., Penz & Sauer, 2020), my investigation shall contribute to better grasping concretely felt and practiced connections between passions (or emotions and/or affects) and politics (encompassing both politics and the political, including political claims, rules, laws, institutions, but also political mo(ve)ments, actors, collectivities, and forms of political expression outside of the formalized realm of politics). Following Protevi (2009), I concur that political affects can leverage new forms and articulations of political belonging, agency, community or collectivity.

But how to grasp political affects, or affective politics? As briefly mentioned, I want to foreground the creative practice of poetry as/in research (Faulkner, 2009). While this experimental methodology might constitute a rather ephemeral approach, I consider this speculative, affective, poetic reading as a preliminary step to conduct further empirical analyses on the connections between politics and passions. The implications of this method of affective reading gives insight into one affective response to the theses of political beauty, which hopefully stimulates further discussion of the affective politics of collectivity, and collectives. Loosely following Faulkner's (2009) notion of poetry as method, which suggests using poetry not only in research settings but also as tools for data analysis and discussion, I hope to encounter the theses of political beauty anew as inspiration, instruction, inclination towards politically beautiful collectives.

Deploying a poetic analysis as a way to creatively (de)construct texts as data, I want to elevate the affective quality of texts. Certainly, reading text as affective text, or reading texts affectively, poses methodological challenges of validity, reliability, and generalizability. Yet, this approach assists in considering and analyzing text as much *more*, and significantly *other* than just a text. That is to say that I have read the theses as text, but also as affective matter beyond their textual form (including visual and video data, media reports on the performance etc.). Via the self-designed coding scheme of vignettes, I have sought to annotate or tag recurring analytical themes and references to conceptualize ZPS's specific sense of collectivity. As I have previously attempted such reading as spectral activity (Landau, 2019, pp. 6–7), I am

aware of the burden of such haunted reading, bearing the weight of multiple pasts, which also affect us in the present (Slaby, 2017).

#### 4. SENSING COLLECTIVES VIA A POLITICAL GRAMMAR OF FEELINGS

My exploration substantially draws on Brigitte Bargetz's (2014a) political grammar of feelings, which hovers between embodied, bodily practices of feeling politics (i.e., project towards feeling as a verb, a practice, an activity of doing) and politics of feelings (i.e., considering feeling more as a noun, an institution, a tool (or place) of power). Put differently, feeling politics revolve around the emotional, sensory, perceptual, affective dimensions of feeling whereas a politic of feelings points to the power-related dimensions of feelings as constructions or normalizations of affect in collective orders. Notably, these two conceptual nodes cannot be completely separated from each other, but constantly interpenetrate and inform each other. In that sense, the analytic of a political grammar of feeling is similar to political difference, in which politics and the political constantly influence each other, but work in notably different logics. Again, feeling politics mobilize the translation of "relations of power and exploitation into embodied ordinary practices" (Bargetz 2014b, p. 129, my translation). Feeling politics thus underscore the experience of affects as bodily or embodied practices, and inscribe feelings in everyday political practices both in the realm and rationale of politics and the political at large. With regards to the notion of political difference discussed above, which is engrained in the political grammar of feelings, feeling politics could conceptually align both with the ontic, everyday realm of politics as well as the always-changing apparitions of the political. In comparison, the politics of feelings could roughly resonate more with the ontic, construed realm of politics, trying to impose a specific notion or practice of hegemony (Landau, 2019, pp. 4–5). Both politics and the political might make us feel or sense the weight of political decisions that will affect our lives. For example, people get goosebumps during demonstrations (a mo(ve)ment of the political and 'feeling politics' on the streets?), others feel nauseous when they see xenophobic election posters (arguably a materialization of exclusive politics, and in opposition to constricting politics of feeling?), some feel excited and jumpy when seeing politicians giving speeches (again, gesturing towards the manifold forms the political can take). In short, affects can politicize social, sensible, and aesthetic orders for better or worse, depending on who you ask.

To advance an understanding of the politics of feeling as "motor and instrument of the political" (Bargetz, 2014b, p. 119, my translation), I have chosen the path of poetry in and as research practice to approximate the theses of political beauty with a specific focus on the notion of collectivity. With this, I am testing new ways of encountering the text *as* poetry, which has elicited my own responses or analysis also in the form of a poem. Inspired by the growing scholarship on affective methodologies

(Barad, 2003; Blanco & Peeren, 2013; Knudsen & Stage, 2015), I approach the theses as affective data, which can confront us with an afterlife of its own (see Blackman, 2015) and thus might escape us. Since affective data also elicits wonder that “resides and radiates in data” (MacLure, 2013, p. 228), let us finally dive into the nexus between political beauty and collectivity.

## 5. EXPLORING COLLECTIVITY IN POLITICAL BEAUTY

After reading, re-reading, wrestling with these theses, I came to this poetic reflection on what ZPS’ sense of collectivity felt like to me:

*collect-if  
 can you even stop collecti(vi)ng?  
 the gorge of possibilities  
 there is nobody outside of practice  
 yet we are not the horse they rode  
 I am actually allergic to horses, so how inclusive is that  
 whose is the collective who is the collective  
 and why are the butterflies dead  
 can beauty keep on living?  
 is it a sense of beauty or sensing beauty together, will we wellness?*

Did I just create affective data? Or was it just the brush of a ghostly text?

In addition, have a look at how my affective reading of the thesis flowed into a coding scheme that sought to highlight where and how the different vignettes of political beauty—BEAUTY, LONGING, COLLECTIVITY, and VITALITY—intersect and linger.

Table 2: A spectral coding of theses of political beauty.

	Thesis of Political Beauty	Vignette
#1	In <b>every human being</b> , there is a profound <b>desire</b> for the <b>beautiful</b> .	BEAUTY; LONGING; COLLECTIVITY
#2	Everything <b>great</b> is born from <b>desire</b> .	LONGING
#3	<b>Beings</b> are not only moved by causes, but also by goals. <b>Beauty, greatness and perfection</b> are goals.	BEAUTY; LONGING; COLLECTIVITY
#4	<b>Beauty</b> and <b>ugliness</b> are both poles between which <b>life</b> fundamentally takes place.	BEAUTY; VITALITY
#5	" <b>Everyone</b> warms their <b>heart</b> in a different way." From this, the moderns have drawn the conclusion to not warm their <b>hearts</b> at all. Without the experience of <b>beauty, human experiences are incomplete</b> .	VITALITY; BEAUTY; LONGING; COLLECTIVITY
#6	"He [sic] treats <b>beauty</b> as entomologists treat butterflies. He catches the poor animal, he pins it down, and as its exquisite colors drop off, there it lies, a <b>lifeless corpse</b> under the pin. And what is what they call <b>aesthetics</b> ." (Goethe)	BEAUTY; VITALITY
#7	<b>Hopes</b> are not there to be abandoned.	LONGING
#8	What <b>we</b> know depends on what <b>we</b> <b>feel</b> .	VITALITY; COLLECTIVITY
#9	A <b>soul</b> that has not experienced <b>beauty</b> commits <b>emotional suicide</b> .	BEAUTY; VITALITY
#10	<b>Souls</b> without <b>poetry</b> are an undiscovered <b>form of mental illness</b> .	BEAUTY; VITALITY

Source: own translation after ZPS 2009a, p. 26

Besides my poetic reaction to the theses, the analytical vignettes of VITALITY, BEAUTY, LONGING, and COLLECTIVITY assist in systematizing and analytically structuring the multiple functions, aspects, and directions of political beauty. As the first component of political beauty, I subsumed references to life, birth, death, vitality, and sickness, as well as references to what it is, what it means to be or feel human or alive or 'have' a soul in the vignette VITALITY. This is the most prominent category, mentioned in six out of ten theses. Notably, while affect theory widely draws on Deleuzian discourses on affect, multiplicity, vitality, and vitalism (e.g., Marks, 1998; Massumi, 2015; Uhlmann, 2020), my own reading here is explicitly situated in political theories of difference and antagonism (Landau, 2019). Certainly, a complementary Deleuzian reading of political beauty would provide further interesting insights.

The second trope of BEAUTY in political beauty touches on invocations to beauty, and ugliness as its analytical counterpoint, and also aesthetic experiences or artefacts such as poetry or literature. This appeal appears in seven out of ten theses, underlining how important it is to experience (political) beauty, which might simultaneously be aesthetically beautiful. Third, LONGING aims to capture the German term *Sehnsucht*, but can only partially reflect that. Longing is both more and other than just desiring, dreaming, hoping of arguably beautiful characteristics such as greatness and perfection. This stretch towards political beauty can be identified in five out of ten theses. Fourth, and crucially for this chapter, COLLECTIVITY is invoked via references to people, humans or the general addressee of 'we.' COLLEC-

TIVITY appears as both aspirational—calling sentient, exclusively human subjects to action—and relational, as some theses are written from a semi-authorial voice in which parts of ZPS appear as part of a collective ‘we’ that knows and feels. This appeal to collectivity or community is mentioned in four out of the ten theses, out of which I analyze three below (thesis #3 is not discussed in detail as it carries the same tag constellation as thesis #1).

Thesis #1: In every human being, there is a profound desire for the beautiful.

Thesis #1 opens the manifesto with the universalist address of “every human being,” without further specifying who or what a human being is or should be (or why the “profound desire for the beautiful” wouldn’t be a concern for non- or more-than-human actors). This first thesis can be tagged with the vignettes of BEAUTY, LONGING, and COLLECTIVITY as it grandly proclaims political beauty to be not only “desire” but “profound” and seemingly inevitable. From this desire, “greatness” is derived (thesis #2). However, neither desire nor greatness are specified with regards to their origin, location, temporal or historical context. While the first thesis appeals to every human being, the statement itself does rather little to activate or affect people. Rather, this thesis seems to be making an assumption or announcement about people. On the one hand, the profound desire and greatness appear as fairly disembodied, abstract notions, as fundamental yet intangible drivers of human existence without concrete (affective) content or direction. To some readers, this might be a discouraging opener—for example, those looking towards specific political practices, goals or collectives on the micro-scale. Bringing in Bargetz’s grammar of feelings, this would invoke feeling politics (or possibly a way to counteract the politics of feeling). On the other hand, this empty first thesis might unlock an affective politics of collectivity precisely in its suspense, openness, or absence of any concrete information or definition of what desire for political beauty is made of, who the everybody is, or what it feels like. With that wider-ranging appeal, at best, the first thesis can bring the political to the fore, nudging “everybody” to reflect on their respective affective interpretations and appropriations of their own profound desire. In other words, by starting to think, feel, see where and how every human being, including us, might find him-, her- or themselves in a profound desire for the beautiful, new constellations of collectivity could emerge. Amidst this claim of bottomless desire, ZPS founder Ruch (2012, p. 230) positions political beauty as desire, as “appetite or thirst” which “must be satisfied.” However, the sentient readers of the theses will nowhere throughout the document receive any concrete instruction or guidance on how to approach, attain or satisfy this thirst (let alone be informed that is not even possible in the first place). In conclusion, the affective reader is stimulated to think about desire, yet confronted, and potentially irritated, after this initial

universal communication to humans, addressed in a very vaguely contoured collectivity.

Thesis #5: “Everyone warms their heart in a different way.” From this, the moderns have drawn the conclusion to not warm their hearts at all. Without the experience of beauty, human experiences are incomplete.

Thesis #5 continues in the normative and universalizing tradition expressed in earlier theses, and uniquely interconnects all four vignettes of BEAUTY, VITALITY, LONGING, and COLLECTIVITY. Here, ZPS appeals again to “everyone” (see thesis #1). Briefly afterwards, the affective practice of heart-warming is qualified as subjective experience and practice. More precisely, ZPS first assumes that everyone warms their heart in notably *different* ways—highlighting and leaving room for individual affective experiences, practices, and encounters—but subsequently criticizes and dismisses the individualism of “the moderns.” Difference is not valued as possibility to live together (see Valentine, 2008), but rather dismissed as cold-hearted and thus problematic. With regards to the political grammar of feelings, the attitude of the moderns could be conceptualized as the looming of the politics of feeling (e.g., an institution or collectivity of power, a hegemonic seat of norms, sensible and social orders).

Rather one-sidedly, the practice of heart-warming is presented as in any case favorable to cold hearts, thus urging everybody into a practice of warm-hearting. This comes at the cost of excluding those who do not “warm their hearts at all.” This division into a heart-warming, or warm-hearted human population or collectivity (again, what about other species, some of which survive well as cold-blooded animals?), and the not-warm Other (i.e., those who do not warm their hearts) raises important questions about the conditions of possibility for politically beautiful collectives. What about the cold-hearted, excluded ones? Where do they go, are they gone for good? Does one warm the heart via belonging to a collective, or is this an entry criterion to be part of a collective? What can “everyone” do to support the heart-warming of others? What if heart-warming is based on problematic assumptions such as homo- and trans-phobia, racism, and meritocracy? What about those who do not want to, for whatever reasons, not warm their heart in ways ZPS finds politically beautiful? Ultimately, does a collective only emerge if everyone is warm-hearted or simply, does politically beautiful collectivity imply the collectivization of heart-warming?

While thesis #5 unambiguously speaks about “human experiences,” it avoids specifying what it takes to qualify as “human.” The question whether those who do *not* warm their hearts can still be considered human is left unanswered. Moreover, thesis #5 reveals the paradox between the universalist undertones straddling throughout the manifesto and the attempt at subjective, phenomenological, af-

fective, embodied experience (i.e., Bargetz's feeling politics). The last sentence unpacks another tension: It reveals the rift between the potentially divisive, but also potentially collectivizing consequences of political beauty—those who sense it, those who feel it with their warmed hearts, will be able to feel complete. The others, who do not have warm hearts, linger at the margins; as leftover, excess or abject of the warm-hearted collectivity which consists of (only?) humans. Summing up, the warm inside of politically beautiful people, politics or hearts is premised on this exclusion to create warmth and beauty *within*, offering an illusion of completion or arrival in political beauty (contracting, as a side note, thesis #1)—and at the expense of obviously leaving behind those with cold hearts, stranded in their own incompleteness.

Lastly, thesis #5 takes up the vitalist innuendo that lingers in other theses (see theses #9, #10). There is clear preference and non-ambivalent celebration of life and living over death, captured in the VITALITY vignette. Yet, is this little reflected, conservative-sounding, modernist humanism meant as affective provocation? More bluntly, is ZPS serious? Would the theses then propose a politics of feeling that would favor, and unilaterally equate (political) beauty with moral goodness, greatness, the sublime, life? Uncomfortably vetted in the pathologization of negative feelings or emotional states such as half-warmed heart, the lack of political beauty is almost equated with death (see #9 and #10 theses), this thesis might trigger cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011), prolonging an affective longing for a fully warmed heart that can never be attained.

If life without (political) beauty equals inner death or a cold heart, in return, beauty appears as necessary criterion for human collective experience and life. With this unhalted appeal against political and emotional indifference, ZPS not only mediates a sense of urgency, but also of affective discomfort if we don't collectivize—because, what happens if we don't succeed to warm our hearts?

Thesis #8: What we know depends on what we feel.

Thesis #8 addresses LONGING by establishing a direct, causal relation between affect and knowledge. It showcases ZPS's affective epistemology of political beauty, which makes knowledge possible only when 'we' feel. Briefly, thesis #8 introduces an account of experiential, affective knowledge. While neuro-psychology and social and cultural theoretical interpretations have been critiqued by feminist scholars for their problematic separation of cognition and feelings (Leys, 2011), thesis #8 establishes knowledge as inseparable from feeling and/or affecting, and being affected. Put differently, knowledge cannot be sensed without being affected or affecting; 'we' cannot know without feeling. Following feminist scholars' rejection to divorce ontology from epistemology (see Barad, 2003; Hemmings, 2005), thesis #8 offers a way

to (re)marry affect and knowledge instead of further perpetuating the problematic separation of emotion and rationality (Bargetz, 2014b).

Yet, what does affective knowledge do for the emergence or (im)possibility of collectives? When we know because we feel, will we only know/feel/learn when we are collectivized? To what extent is affective knowledge also knowledge full of desire or LONGING? And most pressingly: If some of us do not feel, will they also not know? The possibility of feeling seems to precede the capacity of knowing as the latter will flow from the former. While this formula might be a relief to some—to know that feeling facilitates learning, thus deconstructing deeply engrained rationalism that lingers in contemporary science and academia—but still, how do we know? I did not know, so ...

*knowing the feeling of beauty*

*knowing ourselves together*

*collective longing*

*longing (for) collectives*

*when we know together, will we feel together?*

*will we not be human just because we don't know?*

Thesis #8 squarely resonates with Bargetz's feeling politics, or politics as a verb and process. However, in contrast to Bargetz's emphasis on the bodily, embodied, sensuous, sensory or otherwise perceptual practice of feeling politics—or if I may extend her claim, feeling knowledge—ZPS only subtly imagines a politics of feeling knowledge. If not felt, knowledge remains barred, thus imposing a fairly restricted account of affective knowledge. In this thesis, the “we” appears again as universal—we know (or feel, for that matter) nothing more or other than what we feel. Thus, we are seemingly not able to transcend much of the invoked sensing, knowing, or feeling of collectivity. Drawing this excursus on affective knowledge to a close, thesis #8 uniquely addresses us as (collective) subject that feels knowledge, and political beauty in the larger sense. Yet, this thesis leaves us dangling in the air about the concrete, felt connections between the vague collectivity of us and knowledge.

## 6. SYNTHESIS: LONGING FOREVER - TOGETHER?

In summary, the discussed theses assume that the idea(l) of political beauty as innate to a fairly generalized humankind. The theses do not specify what, where, and by whom that political beauty can be attained, sensed, practiced within collective subjectivity, or how a specific collective can act to advance political beauty. While the human as subject and carrier of political beauty is not further specified, the latent understanding of agency and subjectivity developed throughout remains individu-

alistic, disembodied, abstract. Political beauty is affectively mobilized via LONGING and hope for a more beautiful (political) future, but it is unclear what kinds of people desire, and do or do not feel political beauty. Crucially, “we” do not gain insight into how we can find to each other in the unstillable longing for other politics. LONGING in that sense crystallizes both the possibility and impossibility of political beauty. As political beauty is continuously desired, and remains desirable precisely *because* this thirst for beauty can ultimately never be stilled, LONGING invokes a political and affective perpetuum mobile.

Departing from this, what are the implications of a never fulfillable longing for the emergence, dissolution or fragmentation of collective subjectivity? Could such unstillable political affects, or affective politics, maintain the political as radically open and contingent? Does this state of being unsettled produce different political collectivities in comparison to those trans-local collective movements that pursue a concrete and tangible goal (e.g., the end of a specific dictatorship, the shared opposition to a particular law, the request for a specific political goal to be realized)?

It is precisely in these entanglements with the concrete and abstract LONGING that contemporary and future generations might coalesce into more beautiful futures. Claire Colebrooke (2014, p. 116) describes longing as the “force from which social relations emerge; even if all social forms emerge from desire, desire also exceeds the systems that it has generated itself.” The first part of Colebrooke’s quotation resonates with theses #1 (and #2) and their appeal to radical desire and utter greatness. From this abyss of never-ending desire, social orders—and affective, sensible, and political ones, too—emerge from this excessive, intangible, universal desire. LONGING goes on; it remains besides and beyond our control. We will, in the worst case, forever be trapped in *not* achieving the lust our yearning has pushed us towards—the dangling carrot of political beauty. Affectively speaking, the urge to warm our hearts (see thesis #5) and appeal to hope (see thesis #7), ZPS might induce pressure, insecurity, impatience, anxiety, while, at the same time, offering the possibility for a different future—a future that will have been politically beautiful. And this however vague outlook is exactly what “we” as unsettled collectivity might need in dire times of political disenchantment. In conclusion, the committed drive towards LONGING while accepting that it can never be fully achieved, co-constitutes political beauty with a specific proposal for a collectivity that LONGS *despite* the impossibility (and failure) to stop desiring. Briefly, political beauty keeps time, place, politics, affect in motion.

## 7. OUTLOOK: TOWARDS POLITICALLY BEAUTIFUL COLLECTIVES

While the theses of political beauty variously invoke “everybody” and “us” as sensing agents, the individually and/or collectively attempted articulations of political

beauty remain vague, wooden, and overly anthropocentric. Also, the universalizing and glorifying of VITALITY complicates a notion of collectivity or collectives. Is there only a collective when “we” are all alive and warm-hearted? What about being in community with the dead (a communion ZPS has been concerned with recently, see Landau forthcoming) or the more-than human (see Larsen & Johnson 2017)? While life might be crucial to enact political beauty in the now to be able to care and sense together, it might not be the only way. Besides unconditional vitalism, LONGING for political beauty sparks an affective unrest and perhaps stimulates a sense of wonder(ing) about such desire for political change and new political subjectivities.

Furthermore, the affective politics of politically beautiful collectivity are mainly narrated without a concrete sense of agency. Instead, they are normatively entrenched sense of direction—towards hope and beauty and life (hence, against death and ugliness). Political beauty is recounted without a historically embedded sense of time, but romantically evokes both pasts and futures that were and will have been better or more beautiful. While political beauty appears as a collective concern, goal, necessity, desire, the operational approach to politically beautiful collectives remains opaque. Briefly, we still do not really know who the “we” that organizes towards political beauty is. The question whether collectivity is desirable after all is left untouched. We are addressed collectively, however impersonally, yet how do we know each other, and how do we organize in the spirit of politically beautiful collectivity? How do we spread it, sing it, fight for or against it?

With regards to the political grammar of feelings, the feeling politics of ZPS's theses become apparent in references to individual and collective appeals to action. Political beauty, on the one hand, unlocks feeling politics in micro-political and micro-perceptual states of affecting and being affected in everyday life and politics (e.g., striving for greatness, warming one's heart). The politics of feeling, on the other hand, criticize or capitalize on political apathy and the lack of political passion and imagination. These politics of feeling, however, might be closely aligned with feelings of irritation about ZPS's all-too-universal celebration of vivacity and moral beauty, leaving the emergence of collectives barred that are less beautiful, absolute, sublime. What about dirty collectives, transitory help, shared pain, vulnerability?

Despite the seemingly easy and uncontested claims for greatness, beauty, and poetry, political beauty remains structurally paradox. As both possibility and impossibility, fullness and absence, imagined and felt desire, political beauty projects the promise and risk to create new affective relations, found in proximity and distance to each other (Kemmer, 2019). Taking the appeal for political beauty, and for poetry, as potential course for political action might offer us a glimpse at possibilities to experience, feel part of, or simply *sense* collectives. These collectives will be driven by a LONGING for futures that will be, and have been more politically beautiful. Methodologically speaking, I hope that my poetic responses to affective data might provoke other research in/as poetry to analyze further texts about politics and beauty. In a

nutshell, we are left to imagine and get to work on our own ways of thinking, sensing, and making the (im)possible. In the quest of wanting to know and feel what “affect *does* politically” (Bargetz 2014a, p. 301), my own wondering about political beauty leaves me wanting to know—yet will I only know when I feel?—can political beauty exist even when we continue to struggle to work, act, long as a collective? I continue to hope, while I also am longing to find beauty in contingency, sometimes conflict, and care.

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