

Eidos volume 8
no. 1 (2024)

A JOURNAL FOR
PHILOSOPHY
OF CULTURE

DOI:10.14394/eidos.jpc.2024.0005

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Philosophical Mediation in Cultural Diplomacy

Abstract:

This paper explores two primary propositions: a) philosophical mediation is a vital component of cultural diplomacy, historically evolving from a practice based on cultural sensitivity, critical analysis, and public discourse; b) in the realm of diplomacy, philosophical mediation delineates the principles of cultural “adaptability,” addressing local social dynamics and epistemologies where the art of negotiation is applied. This approach does not seek to dismantle or expose prejudices, ideological and religious beliefs, pseudo-historical anticipations, and political narratives. Instead, philosophical mediation strives for a delicate equilibrium; supporting tolerance of accepted traditions alongside democratic and constructive criticism, and promoting enlightenment and progress.

Keywords:

critical theory, philosophical mediation, recognition, negotiation, diplomacy

Philosophical Mediation and Negotiation

Hegel was instrumental in bringing the philosophical concept of mediation to the fore in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, with further elaboration in the “Lesser Logic,” part of his *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. He proposed that the logic underpinning the evolution of the world spirit necessitates critical recognition at the conceptual level in order to grasp a being for oneself (*Für-sich-sein*),¹ and at the social and political level, it requires communicative mediation.² Hegel saw mediation (*die Vermittlung*) as integral to the development of self-consciousness, both in terms of individual self-awareness and in relation to others. According to Hegel, philosophical concepts, through their logical and historical development, serve as primary mediators in the development of the world spirit. Consciousness achieves self-knowledge through interaction and communication with others. Through reflective engagement with diversity, a sophisticated and cultured understanding of self-identity can be achieved. The deeper and more critical our engagement with diversity, the richer and more insightful our self-awareness and self-consciousness become. Logically, this process of mediation leads to philosophical recognition and then to cognition, (i.e. conscious and collective action). While the blind spontaneity of the will may bypass critical mediation and rely instead on self-assurance, conscious political and diplomatic endeavors require culturally sophisticated forms of mediation. Drawing on Hegel’s philosophical reflections, we can identify different types of mediators, including conceptual or communicative (such as poetic and mythical), visual and other symbolic forms in the realms of culture, politics, economics, military, and religion. Machiavelli’s diplomatic practices serve as a prime example, evolving into a form of high and critical cognition through the languages of *studia humanitatis* and *studia civitatis* in his literary works, diplomatic correspondences, and political treatises. Based on his extensive diplomatic experience, Machiavelli revised his views on the value of the spontaneous self-reliance of politicians based on will and belief in fate. He shifted his analytical approach from an almost religious perspective to a comparative-historical one, and applied these insights to contemporary challenges.

1) Hegel, *Encyclopaedia Logic*, 133.

2) Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, 207.

At first, he created a new, practical diplomatic language, which only later became the subject of theoretical reflection. However, in his discussions of Machiavelli's theoretical contributions and their practical implications, Hegel overlooked Machiavelli's extensive diplomatic experience, evidenced in hundreds of diplomatic letters, and omitted the history and practice behind the creation of this mediating language. Hegel believed that the language and concepts of political or philosophical mediation arose from the inner logic of the world spirit and regarded reflective communicative practice as merely incidental. This perspective led him to ignore the origins of diplomatic language and the importance of negotiation, interpreting mediation within a system of logical totality dominated by a linear progression of absolute reason, which he believed dictated the overall direction of development or historical process. For Hegel, mediation serves to break away from the limitations of abstract one-sidedness, necessitating the transcendence (or sublation – *Aufhebung*) of immediate constraints. This process of sublation unfolds according to the overarching will of the world spirit, yet not from acknowledging and valuing diversity, its interests, or through the negotiation politics typically associated with the art of diplomacy. I will not delve into Hegel's assertions regarding mediation's role in transcending subject-object relationships or in understanding nature. However, issues arise when considering social consciousness and the evolution of political negotiation forms. Hegel's stance on the primary direction of development of the mind rejects the incidental or micro-level nature of mediation, seeing its negation as a dialectical move, but he refrains from exploring the practical significance of mediation in diverse communication or from explaining the emergence of distinct cultural autonomies. In the absence of an account of engagement with historical and empirical diversity, the significance of philosophical mediation becomes purely speculative. This may explain why philosophy has often played a secondary role in the predominantly empirical and situational art of diplomacy. I believe that philosophical mediation and diplomacy can intersect and enrich each other at the empirical, historical, and situational levels, and potentially influence dialectical logic and the philosophy of symbolic thought.

Theodor Adorno, both following and challenging Hegel, revisited the problem of mediation. For Adorno, the development of mediation follows the arbitrary and independent interests of different groups and movements, not the hypothetical Absolute Spirit and its goals or the presumed direction of historical progression. Like Hegel,

Adorno maintains that mediation is objective rather than subjective, but the objects in question are sociologically identified rather than figments of a supreme will. Adorno highlights “the primacy (*Vorrang*), or preponderance, of the object”³ in mediating social relations, suggesting that every relational subject incorporates elements of objective relations into its arguments and claims. Here, objectivity includes social interests or the conventions of political dialogue, international customs and etiquette, and the dominant discourses that shape the subjective art of expression. In addition, Slavoj Žižek’s discussions of individual and collective psychological influences provide insight into the objective factors that influence our relationships and negotiations.

Philosophical mediation and diplomatic negotiation depend primarily not on the dominance of subjective will, but on objective factors. These may derive from economic dynamics or relations of production, from social and psychological human conditions, or from the actual state of affairs. The importance of objective rituals, practices, discursive forms, formalisms, and subjects can either support or disrupt objective mediation, fostering new practices as needed. In contrast to Hegel’s claim that the totality of mediation, or the complete mediation of the mind, is always guaranteed, Adorno claims that objectivity can exist independently of mediation. This suggests that objects, including subjects seen as objects, can stand outside the historical continuum of mediation. Many objects exist without conscious – ideal or symbolic – mediation, and do not require development. Progress, as a spiritual endeavor, is not inherent, but can be realized under certain conditions of civilization, and is also susceptible to destruction, as exemplified by the Holocaust. There are myriad symbolic configurations capable of mediating and advancing social goals, whether destructive or constructive. “The constellation is a force field, just as every intellectual structure is necessarily transformed into a force field under the gaze of the essay,” according to Adorno. Conceptual constellations solidify the expression of mediation into culturally relevant forms. However, like Hegel, Adorno does not explore philosophical mediation within the realm of diplomacy, especially cultural diplomacy, despite his critique of the culture industry.

The objective norms and rituals of political diplomacy and negotiation do not seek to assert metaphysical or theological truths, whatever the prejudices of the negoti-

3) Cook, *Adorno on Nature*, 9.

ating parties. Diplomacy navigates not toward the “sun of truth” and the Platonic cave, but by surviving in the shadows or folds, to echo the thoughts of Gottfried Leibniz and Gilles Deleuze. At first glance, philosophy and diplomacy may appear to be divergent pursuits until we recognize the link between philosophical mediation, which operates before and as a precondition for recognition; and diplomacy, which unfolds after recognition in the pursuit of deeper understanding. The perceived dichotomy between philosophy and diplomacy perpetuates the misconception that truth exists prior to public and political negotiation, in solitude, in meditation. This view, that silent meditation is the core of philosophy, alienates philosophy from political and cultural engagement and empirical diversity. Adorno’s critique of the culture industry, lacking open debate and negotiation of its destructive and constructive potentials, rendered his insights somewhat one-dimensional, despite their deep philosophical underpinnings and sophisticated subjective analysis.

The Evolution of the Philosophical Concept of Diplomacy

Since the time of Plato, philosophy has tended toward dialectical rather than diplomatic methods, favoring the struggle (*polemos*) for abstract truth over dialogue, and relegating the latter to the realm of opinion and sophistry. The courage associated with conflict was considered more noble than the achievements of prudent negotiation. The term “diplomacy” is derived from the Greek *Διπλόος*, meaning “double” or “twofold,” where *δίς* translates to “twice” and *πλόος* to “a fold.” Thus, *δίπλωμα* and *δίπλωματός* can be interpreted as a state of being doubled, folded, or clouded.

Hans Morgenthau, a renowned proponent of Realpolitik in diplomacy who advocated for the freedom of diplomatic thought and the right to deviate from moralizing politicians, emphasized the concept of a “clouded” existence:

From the anti-Machiavellian writers to our time, the diplomat has been held in low esteem, and while his professional competence and even his ordinary intelligence have frequently been questioned, his moral qualities have always been under a cloud.⁴

4) Morgenthau, “Diplomacy,” 1067.

Plato was critical of the great diversity of political and aesthetic views and argued for the unity of ideas. His famous allegory describes the plight of individuals trapped in a cave, contrasted with the image of the sun outside as the embodiment of goodness and truth. The Greeks linked the notion of mirrors, shadows, and folds to the concept of a trope, such as *πολύτροπος*, which signifies many folds that philosophy endeavors to disclose and navigate.

Diplomacy, on the other hand, is the art of navigating ambiguity, of reading between the lines, of communicating through metaphors, allegories, or tropes. As such, diplomacy represents a form of political action that rationally mediates and articulates interests, communicating through specialized, mutually recognized symbols, or engaging in a “language game” (in the vein of Wittgenstein). The autonomy of diplomats is a nuanced issue that needs to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. While I will not delve into a fictional history of diplomacy, it is crucial to note the parallels between dialectics and diplomacy in the late Middle Ages. During this period, scholasticism described dialectics not only as the art of identifying and critiquing inconsistencies and contradictions, as seen in the works of Abelard, but also as the practice of reconciling these contradictions. A notable example of the convergence of these two disciplines is the philosophical and diplomatic efforts of Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464), a cardinal of the Catholic Church (from 1448), who embodied the principles of negative dialectics. Cusanus not only mediated and represented the interests of the Popes of Rome, but also maintained his own distinct perspective, slightly divergent from papal ideas. His political visions, distinct from those of the Popes, were articulated in his early work *De concordantia catholica* (after 1432). Later, he was part of the papal delegation to Constantinople in 1437–1438, tasked with convincing the Byzantine Emperor and his representatives to participate in the Council of Florence, aiming to reunify the Eastern Orthodox Church with the Western Catholic Church. Nicholas of Cusa’s seminal work *De docta ignorantia* (1440), subtly addresses the nuanced distinctions between Catholic and Orthodox beliefs, adopting an apophatic or negative philosophical stance. His text *De pace fidei* (1453) further explores his dream of unifying the world’s major religions under a benevolent Catholic framework.⁵ This inquiry delves into the applicability of his core philosophical concepts:

5) McTighe, “Nicholas of Cusa,” 161–72.

learned ignorance (*de docta ignorantia*), the coincidence of opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*), and the unfolding (*implicatio*) and enfolding (*explicatio*) of all unity in God (*Possest*), alongside a mathematical, religious, and political interpretation of contradictions. The work *De docta ignorantia* epitomizes apophatic philosophy by asserting the unattainability of complete truth, yet acknowledges the discovery of partial truths through mathematical, political, and diplomatic reasoning. One of the Cardinal's pivotal theories is that God embodies the unity of opposites and contradictions, exemplified in the juxtaposition between a circle and a triangle, or between Catholicism and Islam.

God's infinite and absolute nature harbors no contradictions except for freedom and materiality. He spawns a universe filled with endless contradictions. Humans might not fully comprehend God's creations or His divine will, but they can grasp the Absolute's infiniteness (*infinitum et transfinitum*), the transcendent unity of God and His creations, and the boundless indeterminacy (*indeterminatum*) of an autonomous world through the practice of learned ignorance.⁶ This acknowledgment bears significance for political and diplomatic efforts aimed at the unification of world religions amidst diversity. Actual political and diplomatic endeavors underscore the challenge of reconciling the diverse manifestations of God's self-expression, hindered by the vested interests of the Papacy in Rome.

The positive aspects of dialectics are refined in Niccolò Machiavelli's analytical approach, which emphasizes the will of the subject and historical analysis as mediating arguments. Before the sixteenth century and Machiavelli, diplomats were seen primarily as couriers carrying confidential messages in sealed envelopes. In the Middle Ages (from the eleventh century), *ars dictaminis* (the art of writing letters) emerged as a crucial component of feudal and international diplomacy, which was revived during the Renaissance by a return to Cicero's epistolary style and republican political thought. *Ars dictaminis*, akin to the art of courtly love (*amour courtois*), involves not only rhetorical finesse but also a rich tapestry of complex symbols representing heroism, pride, love, and respect, as well as a covert diplomatic language that must be meticulously guarded or deciphered. The enigmatic nature of courtly love intersects with the realm of political diplomacy. The scholarly pursuit of the *ars dictaminis* and

6) von Kues, *Werke*, 232.

the art of courtship diverge from the theological and scientific search for truth. The secret negotiations, seductions, and threats were intended to remain hidden from public view, similar to the creation of new esoteric or occult knowledge articulated in the novel language of love and politics. The concept of sealing and unsealing documents became a philosophical metaphor that remained relevant for centuries before and after Machiavelli's political discourses. Machiavelli distinguished diplomatic activity from broader political engagement, recognizing it as a distinct enterprise that could navigate between allies and adversaries alike.

Toward the end of his life, before his imprisonment by the Roman Inquisition, philosopher Giordano Bruno engaged in a particularly unique form of diplomatic activity. While Nicholas of Cusa's ideas found further development in Bruno's writings, it is Bruno's political works, intertwined with his hermeticism and the art of memory (*ars memoriae*), that hold significant interest. His work *Sigillus sigillorum* (Seal of Seals) delves into the profoundest depths of hermetic knowledge, concealing it within the metaphorical shadows of ideas. King Henry III of France enlisted Giordano Bruno for a covert diplomatic mission to the court of Queen Elizabeth I, embodying the essence of a courteous exchange under the guise of secrecy.⁷ Bruno's *De umbris idearum* (1582) and *Sigillus sigillorum* (1583) were written not only for philosophical purposes but also for diplomatic ones:

Bruno opened his campaign in England with a volume, dedicated to the French ambassador, containing an Art of Memory which is a reprint from the one in the *Cantus Circaeus*, and two other works entitled *Explicatio Triginta Sigillorum* and *Sigillus Sigillorum*. The "thirty" grouping of the "seals" shows that he is still moving in the mystico-magical realms of the *De umbris idearum*, and, in fact, the whole volume is a further development of the exploration of memory as a major instrument in the formation of a Magus which he had begun in the two books published in Paris.⁸

7) Bossy, *Embassy Affair*, 23.

8) Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, 205.

The books inspired the emergence of the Rosicrucian and Freemason movements, according to Frances Yates.⁹ In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, at the same time as and before Gottfried Leibniz, diplomats were less concerned with revealing the sun or truth outside the cave (the palaces, the bidars), than with navigating the complex labyrinths (corridors, rooms, intrigues), and shadows within. In this respect, diplomats were more like political anthropologists than mere messengers, immersing themselves in local customs and conventions, mastering etiquette, ceremonial norms, palace theatre, and the language of symbols rather than seeking eternal truths.

The act of dwelling in the shadows of the cave, amidst the spectacle of the camera obscura or surrounded by mirrors, required constant negotiation. Diego Velázquez's painting "Las Meninas" captures the creature's predicament between doors and mirrors. Michel Foucault, interpreting the painting through the lens of Renaissance and Baroque notions of *diversità* (the myriad diversities of the world) and the enigma of appearances, suggested that the interplay of various similarities should be understood not in terms of unity, but according to inner magical principles. The heterogeneity of similarities or differences reveals the general face: a bridge between the microcosm and the macrocosm. By appreciating both the *diversità di natura* and the palace's complexity, one might discern God's intentions in orchestrating the microcosm and macrocosm's counterparts. In this context, diplomacy – particularly the introspective diplomacy associated with Freemasonry – aligns more closely with the conception of God than medieval metaphysics. The challenge lies in unveiling the concealed purposes shrouded by seven seals. Seals, as symbols of secrecy, translate into the metaphor of encryption. There are various institutions and intellectual or political movements that are deeply invested in either the culture of encoding or decoding, alongside the recognition that both the Church and the State thrive on this duality. Kabbalists, scientists and classical philosophers, including those of hermeneutics, Marxism and critical theory, strive to decipher esoteric symbols and expose the hidden machinations of power. Conversely, alchemists, masonic lodges, and guardians of state secrets seek to create hidden knowledge or mystical symbols to protect information. This dynamic often gives rise to rumors, conspiracy theories, and the proliferation of esoteric or espionage networks. The Rosicrucian and

9) Yates, *Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, 144.

Masonic movements, along with the symbolism of seals and the culture of ciphers, began to proliferate in the seventeenth century, shortly after Bruno's cruel assassination by the Pope of Rome.

Diplomats, whether they were bearers of overt or covert messages encapsulated in sealed letters – whether those messages were material or spiritual – focused on the mandates of cultural or religious symbolic organizations rather than seeking metaphysical truths beyond those organizations. Moreover, in the act of folding and transmitting these messages, the diplomat is forced to suspend and limit his own identity, effectively silencing his voice. In this respect, his actions stand in stark contrast to the philosophical quest: instead of elucidating, he obfuscates; instead of revealing truth, he presents mystery, enigma, and mysticism. It is for this reason that such enigmatic figures – diplomats and mystics alike – are often branded as charlatans, including individuals such as Cagliostro, Saint Germain and Casanova.

The intellectual legacy of Cusanus and Bruno was further refined in Leibniz's notion of the monad and the concept of folds, which he also applied in his diplomatic endeavors at the court of Frederick I in Hanover. Cassirer interprets Leibniz's idea of the fold, stating, "Only in this twofold intellectual movement can the concept of reason be fully characterized, namely, as a concept of agency, not of being."¹⁰ The universe houses an infinite number of monads, each evolving distinctly. Despite the "windowless monad" (1989)¹¹ – a metaphor for the mind or consciousness – lacking direct interaction with nature, it teems with folds or shadows reminiscent of the Platonic cave. These folds enact the drama of the camera obscura, conjuring an illusory societal fabric. To decipher the nature of these shadows is to master the languages of allegory, theatre, and dance, or the ceremonial protocols of courts. The household of Elector Ernst August of Hanover (1629–1698) and his daughter Charlotte of Pöllnitz, who later married Frederick I, the first King of Prussia, was intertwined with Leibniz's diplomatic efforts. Leibniz engaged in political machinations and imparted knowledge through the staging of various spectacles within the allegorical theatre he devised to demonstrate his Principle of Perfection: that perfection possesses greater reality and does not conform to the logical principle of non-contradiction. Writing to Christian Wolff, he said:

10) Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, 14.

11) See Leibniz, "The Monadology," 643.

The perfection about which you ask is the degree of positive reality, or what comes to the same thing, the degree of affirmative intelligibility, so that something more perfect is something in which more things worthy of observation [*notatu digna*] are found.¹²

Perfection is characterized by its spontaneity, uniqueness, and creativity, and the highest form of perfection transcends reason and imagination to embody pure intelligence. The politics and diplomacy associated with the notion of perfection diverge from those governed by pragmatic interests and convey a message more akin to Gnostic or artistic (stylized) expressions, and are thus encoded in nature. The concept of perfection is a cornerstone of Leibniz's philosophical work. He integrated the principle of perfection into his conceptualizations of theatre and diplomacy. However, Leibniz recognized a lack of perfection in tangible entities and those that were merely shadows in the cave, or illusions created by the camera obscura or the magic lantern – metaphors he explored in depth. His search for perfection led him to study theodicy.

While in Paris in 1675, Leibniz penned a brief essay titled *Drôle de Pensée, touchant une nouvelle sorte de représentations* (*A Curious Thought, on a New Kind of Representations*), wherein he elaborated on a vision of theatre as an interplay between nature and artistry, positioning it at the heart of his political musings on freedom and perfection. He argued that neither divine providence nor natural causality could guarantee the noble form of freedom that only the artistic and natural theatres could represent, a realm where constancy is absent and all meanings are subject to interpretation. Leibniz, an ardent lover of logical and mathematical puzzles, thus saw theatre, politics, and diplomacy as an amalgamation of art and nature, engaged in the encryption and decryption of perfection. Motivated by such reflections, he envisioned the creation of a "*Theatrum naturae et artis*" or an "Art Chamber," aiming to amalgamate machinery, art, and science within a singular palace theatre, alternatively named a "*Kunstkammer*" or "Academy of Games."¹³ He partially actualized these ideas through theatrical pedagogy initiatives with Charlotte von Pölnitz:

12) Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, 230.

13) Bredekamp, "Three Thought Loci," 269.

Charlotte von Pöllnitz (Fortunata) possessed, by all accounts, the acting talent and financial means to underwrite and participate regularly in costly pageants. Leibniz rose above their diverse impulses to stage a new work in a theatrical genre perfected over more than a century and comprised of diverse arts and sciences¹⁴.

Leibniz's contributions can be seen as early examples of cultural diplomacy, marking a departure from the more direct and forceful nature of classical political communication. His method was characterized by subtlety, gentleness, and mediation through the arts. In baroque palaces, diplomacy took on a theatrical form of self-expression and enlightenment, using allegorical narrative, etiquette, and philosophical dialogue. Leibniz described his art of diplomacy using the allegorical language of the palace theatre, where participants donned ceremonial masks to engage in a game. Within this framework, diplomatic and artistic truths are best preserved when veiled. Thus, the philosophical pursuit of truth reveals only one aspect and potentially distorts another.

Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945), a Neo-Kantian philosopher, offered insightful interpretations of the thoughts of Nicolaus Cusanus, Giordano Bruno, and Gottfried Leibniz. He largely steered clear of politics and diplomacy until World War II, culminating in his final work, "The Myth of the State" (1945, published posthumously in 1946). Cassirer was born and raised in Breslau (now Wrocław, Poland), a city with a history of political intrigue, similar to Danzig/Gdansk and Wilno/Vilnius, especially between the two world wars. His Jewish heritage became particularly significant in post-World War I Germany amidst the rise of Nazism, compelling him to emigrate to Britain, Sweden, and eventually the USA after 1933 due to political pressures. It was only later in life that he came to recognize and regret his detachment from his Jewish roots and its significance.¹⁵ Cassirer's long-standing disinterest in politics, diplomacy, or Zionism does not diminish the importance of his philosophy concerning the role of myth in human symbolic thought. He argued that our understanding is shaped by the rejection of mythical origins, and that our imagination is mediated and distorted by myth. In discussing the Nazis, he identified three central mythologies: the hero, the

14) Hawley, "Leibniz on Diplomacy and Art," 525.

15) Levine, *Dreamland of Humanists*, 253.

race, and the state, which together formed the ideological backdrop of Hitler's regime and influenced and distorted many Nazi policies. Recognition of the inescapability of myth underscores the need for specialized approaches to irrational knowledge that go beyond scientific refutation or artistic reimagining to include negotiation, a facet overlooked by Cassirer.

Gilles Deleuze departed from Ernst Cassirer's path and instead explored Leibniz's notion of folds and developed the interpretation of negotiation as a hermeneutic precondition for understanding. The crux of Leibniz's "monadology" lies in the capacity for self-recognition and cognition, or the decipherability of the mind's internal and external images. The monad encounters a camera obscura scenario, tasked with recognizing and understanding the shadows within the folds. Deleuze explores these issues in his work "The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque," where he discusses Leibniz's portrayal of existence amidst dual folds:

At other times, on the contrary, I undo the folds of consciousness that pass through every one of my thresholds, the "twenty-two folds" that surround me and separate me from the deep, in order to unveil in a single movement this unfathomable depth of tiny and moving folds that waft me along at excessive speeds in the operation of vertigo, like the "enraged charioteer's whiplash..." I am forever unfolding between two folds, and if to perceive means to unfold, then I am forever perceiving within the folds.¹⁶

Leibniz envisioned diplomacy through the prism of palace theatre and allegorical manners. To navigate life within the monad's or mind's folds is to embrace a theatrical state as an apt response to the conditions of the cave or camera obscura. Deleuze pays close attention to this theatrical state within the mind's folds, particularly within the Baroque context:

The visible and the legible, me outside and the inside, the facade and the chamber are, however, not two worlds, since the visible can be read (Mallarmé's journal), and the legible has its theater (both Leibniz's and

16) Deleuze, *The Fold Leibniz and the Baroque*, 93.

Mallarmé's theaters of reading). Combinations of the visible and the legible make up "emblems" or allegories dear to the Baroque sensibility.¹⁷

All arts are united in the "universal theatre. . . . The sum of the arts becomes the Socius, the public social space inhabited by Baroque dancers."¹⁸ The Leibniz-Deleuze theatre aligns with the mirror and door games of Velázquez-Foucault, mirroring the secretive maneuvers and diplomacy of palace life. The notion of existing between folds inspired Deleuze and Félix Guattari to formulate the rhizome concept, characterized by a similar indeterminate multiplicity.¹⁹

Diplomacy as an Ideological Act

Every era shapes its philosophy as a struggle for the recognition of its main political and existential concepts amidst different cultural and civilizational perspectives. The quest for recognition is a central goal of philosophy, and it involves diplomacy as an intrinsic mechanism of discourse and communication. Renaissance humanism celebrated and championed the revival of the great ideas and ideals of antiquity after the so-called dark age of scholasticism. The Baroque sought divine enlightenment in the infinite folds of palaces and the natural world. Enlightenment philosophy was heralded as *mathesis universalis* and the study of God's secondary creation. This philosophical approach to nature justified white colonialism during the Enlightenment. In the nineteenth century, philosophy evolved into ideological expressions and the pursuit of power. This included socialism, conservatism, liberalism, anarchism, and the new monarchism.

The political dimension of philosophy was articulated in the works of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Friedrich Nietzsche. The political teleology of these philosophies was outlined by Mikhail Bakunin and Carl Schmitt. Marxist-Leninist philosophy became an ideological tool, distinguishing allies from ideological enemies, and recognizing, alongside pragmatic philosophy, the philosophical underpinnings of diplomacy and the need for a philosophical critique of it. While it is common today to

17) Ibid., 31.

18) Ibid., 123.

19) Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 32.

dismiss Marxist-Leninist philosophy as harmful or deceptive, it would be a mistake to succumb to such simplistic stereotypes. It was and is Much more important to understand the shadows of the Kremlin's diplomacy.

Marxism-Leninism significantly influenced Soviet diplomacy by emphasizing the significance of the dialectics of historical materialism and, consequently, the role of philosophical mediation, albeit rooted in a different genealogy and interpretation of mediation than previously discussed. Notable in this context are Karl Marx's articles collected under the title *Revelations of the Diplomatic History of the 18th Century*, first published in 1856–1857 and later published in book form. These writings, which criticized English diplomatic political pamphlets relating to Russian interests, used irony and criticism to expose the nature of deceptive secrecy, intrigue, shadow diplomacy, and corruption in international relations at the time.

All these letters are “confidential,” “private,” “secret,” “most secret”; but in spite of secrecy, privacy, and confidence, the English statesmen converse among each other about Russia and her rulers in a tone of awful reserve, abject servility, and cynical submission, which would strike us even in the public despatches of Russian statesmen. To conceal intrigues against foreign nations secrecy is resorted to by Russian diplomatists. The same method is adopted by English diplomatists freely to express their devotion to a foreign Court. The secret despatches of Russian diplomatists are fumi-gated with some equivocal perfume. It is one part the fumée de fausseté, as the Duke of St. Simon has it, and the other part that coquettish display of one's own superiority and cunning which stamps upon the reports of the French Secret Police their indelible character.²⁰

During this period, secret diplomacy facilitated alliances aimed at dividing other nations – Sweden, Spain, Poland – or their colonies. Marx exposed the imperialist and capitalist motives behind such divisions, occupations, and annexations, but overlooked the potential benefits of mutual agreements. He condemned the liberal-imperial character of politics and diplomacy, which served the interests of the

20) Marx, *Secret Diplomatic History*, 22.

big trading companies and banks, without considering how political trust worked under such conditions.

The oligarchy which, after the “glorious revolution,” usurped wealth and power at the cost of the mass of the British people, was, of course, forced to look out for allies, not only abroad, but also at home. The latter they found in what the French would call *la haute bourgeoisie*, as represented by the Bank of England, the money-lenders, State creditors, East India and other trading corporations, the great manufacturers, etc. How tenderly they managed the material interests of that class may be learned from the whole of their domestic legislation – Bank Acts, Protectionist enactments, Poor Regulations, etc.²¹

Adhering to the ideals of the Enlightenment and progress, Marx criticized bourgeois and imperial diplomacy, asserting that beyond villainy, intrigue, secrecy, and greed lay the illumination of truth, reinterpreting the classical Platonic allegory through a materialist and proletarian utopian lens. He rejected the notion that human eccentricities and the myriad historical traumas, national prejudices, dreams, and futurological visions constituted an inevitable reality of diversity. Contemporary critical theory, by contrast, has reworked the simplistic ideology of truth into a confidence in diversity and an ethics rooted in dialogue and social inquiry. It has critiqued bourgeois diplomacy while reflecting on the principles of international proletarian solidarity, seeing diplomatic efforts as key components of reactionary European state policies directed against national liberation, democratic, and revolutionary movements.

Marx highlighted the ideological and practical role of the Holy Alliance and its suppression of the revolutions of 1848–1849. However, his exploration of diplomacy remained incomplete and lacked a comprehensive philosophical framework. His writings served as a preliminary critique of imperial secret diplomacy, integrally linked to his theories of class history and revolution. Subsequently, the Institute of Marxism-Leninism under the Central Committee of the CPSU heavily annotated the book, aligning diplomacy closely with propaganda and so-called Marxist-Leninist

21) *Ibid.*, 55.

science. Marxist-Leninist diplomacy, well versed in philosophical mediation, was conducted through such aggressive bodies as the International Socialists, Comintern, and Cominform, adhering to the Marxist-Leninist doctrine of perpetual conflict between two global social systems.

In criticizing Marxism-Leninism, it is important to recognize the existence of multiple forms of rationality, beyond a binary framework, with the aim of philosophical mediation not being to triumph in a dualistic struggle, but to understand the intricacies of cultural diversity. The significant goal of politics and diplomacy could be to promote trust and cooperation for the common good and the enrichment of choice and diversity.

Cultural Diplomacy as a Critical Philosophical Practice

Since Machiavelli, political and hence diplomatic negotiations have been seen as discussions about the resources and dynamics of values, interests, and dynamics. Nicolas Laos views cultural diplomacy primarily as a negotiation aimed at a deeper understanding of values – a perspective I find overly simplistic and incorrect – and the allocation of power:

When a statesman – such as Cardinal Richelieu (1585–1642) or Henry Kissinger – talks of a balance as an end in itself, he usually means a balance favourable to himself. Without any agreement on common values and institutions, the balance-of-power system means that all negotiation is carried on according to power calculations.²²

In contrast, Joseph Nye describes cultural diplomacy within the framework of soft power and as an aspect of *realpolitik*, likening it to propaganda. This interpretation, however, removes the essence of diplomacy as the cultivation and sharing of aesthetic or artistic experiences and sensibilities. A form of cultural diplomacy that fosters the growth of artistic movements without adhering to rigid political guidelines does not fit Laos's value-centered approach or Nye's *realpolitik* strategy. Moving from the concept

22) Laos, *Foundations of Cultural Diplomacy*, 118.

of neutral soft power to the ethically charged notion of smart power, as discussed by Paul Cammack, does not significantly alter this scenario. While smart power expands the possibilities for cultural industries and the dissemination of sensibilities, it still does not fully embrace artistic freedom and remains detached from it, albeit to a lesser extent compared to the politically instrumental nature of soft power.

We conceive of cultural diplomacy as the negotiation over the distribution of sensuality and aesthetic experiences within nations, among alliances, and globally. Jacques Rancière delves into the factories of the “sensible,” which he sees as generators of disagreement, dissensus, or what we term as folds and clouds. Rancière connects “the distribution of the sensible”²³ to the post-political era – an era marked by the blurring distinctions between political parties and their ideologies, where conflicts over style and taste predominate. This perspective, in my view, applies primarily to the most advanced nations and fails to address prevailing global challenges such as escalating power inequalities, refugee crises, climate change, and religious animosities, which go far beyond mere disputes over style and taste. Nevertheless, the growing influence and consolidation of the global creative industries and their “factories of meaning,” and the emergence of a post-political effect, are not diminished by my critique.

Thus, cultural diplomacy goes beyond the mere dissemination of information and knowledge about national heritage or the creative industries; it involves the sharing of emotions, affects or, broadly speaking, feelings that go beyond critical understanding. This heightened emotional engagement is characteristic of many works of art, including those with propagandistic intentions, and cannot be simplified into mere political resolutions. It requires negotiations on the dissemination of sensibilities, or cultural diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy is therefore not merely an extension of public diplomacy, which focuses on public participation in discussions, nor does it coincide with traditional political diplomacy, which is concerned with ideological agreements, alliances or enmities. Cultural diplomacy deals with complex aesthetics and is closely linked to emotions, drawing on psychology, psychoanalysis, art criticism and philosophy. Despite these complexities, the importance of cultural diplomacy is on the rise, driven by the growing influence of the creative industries and the advent of the post-political era.

23) Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*, 40.

In our time, characterized by the diversity of social and cultural formations, public philosophy is transformed into a form of diplomatic mediation, championing diversity rather than immutable truths. Public philosophical mediation acknowledges its role in the fluidity of society and the continuous flow of difference, in an age that accepts multifaceted processes. A diplomatic form of public philosophy navigates the ontological, political, and cultural statuses of identities, developing them and facilitating their recognition. Through this facilitation, philosophy fulfills its duty of critical mediation, a prerequisite for human progress. This approach revisits Hegel's concepts of mediation and recognition, but from a new perspective.

The study of modern diplomacy requires not only an understanding of international relations theory and diplomatic protocols, or a mere mastery of standard etiquette and language, but also a deep appreciation of cultural variations in thought and action, anthropological ethics, and emic perspectives. Philosophical mediation enhances interactions between nations, races, genders, subcultures, art movements, and lifestyles in the midst of change. Notable examples of such philosophical mediation include the research of the A. Warburg Institute and the phenomenological philosophies of Alphonso Lingis, Algis Mickunas and the circle around Jean Gebser. A key premise of Gebser's work is fostering cultural sensitivity by embracing local myths, literature, and cultural achievements²⁴.

These thinkers have cultivated a culturally attuned language, particularly open to local "lore" – including legends, myths, rituals, and ethical practices. Understanding local ways of life, acknowledging their differences, and identifying universal languages and forms of hospitality are crucial. However, they focus less on critiquing local forms of exploitation, segregation, and oppression, and lack emancipatory interventions or alternative models of modernization. They avoid advocating external solutions for alternative lifestyles, which must come from internal emancipation. A distinction is made here between intervention, which is typically associated with targeted ideological actions, and the invention of alternatives, which enriches diversity through the realization of new options. Sensitive diplomacy involves tolerating local practices and temporarily setting aside one's own ethical standards, as seen in attempts to recognize entities such as the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Indian caste system, Russia's authoritarian culture

24) Gebser, *The Ever-Present Origin*, 496.

of power, or corruption in Third World countries. While this approach preserves local ethics without dismantling traditions, it can hinder enlightened progress. In contrast, critical theory seeks to combat local prejudices and promote emancipation. The challenge is to strike an optimal balance between culturally sensitive politics and the critical generation of alternatives, bridging the gap between Warburgian/Gebserian perspectives and critical theory and practice. There is no universal method or practice for navigating these complexities; each situation demands a bespoke solution, illustrating the essence of diplomacy and political strategy.

Philosophical critiques of cultural diplomacy are concerned with the critique of philosophy as an ideological doctrine and challenge the notion of science as the exclusive guardian of truth. In contrast, philosophers engaged in cultural diplomacy can use iconological, semiotic, and hermeneutic methods to analyze the realms of imagination, shadow art, and the camera obscura, and are willing to assume the role of sensitive and critical mediators. They are able to navigate the delicate balance between local ethics and traditions on the one hand, and the critique of hegemonic forces and entrenched prejudices on the other, thus providing a platform for dialogue.

Where classical philosophy once sought to dictate truths – an approach that developed into ideological dogma in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – classical eighteenth-century diplomacy preserved the mysteries of hidden dynamics, unseen intrigues and “games of thrones.” The challenge is whether these divergent approaches can be reconciled within the framework of philosophical and aesthetic mediation, as part of a broader practice of communicative action and reason, in line with the theories of Jürgen Habermas? This synthesis would require a departure from the conventional authoritative stance of philosophy and a move toward a more inclusive, dialogical approach that respects cultural specificities while engaging in a critical examination of power structures. In this way, philosophical and aesthetic mediation could serve as a bridge, not only between different cultural perspectives, but also between the historical roles of philosophy and diplomacy, fostering a more nuanced understanding and cooperative global community.

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