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"The Personal is Political"? The Feminization of Truth and the Birth of the Impersonal

Dissertation's Abstract Submitted for the Degree of "Doctor of Philosophy"

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the feminist assertion "The Personal is Political" (hereafter: PIP) as a conceptual-problematic junction in Western political thought. Coined by Carol Hanisch in 1969, the phrase is treated here as a philosophical concept in the Deleuzian sense: a provisional resolution to a fundamental problem that is reconfigured at each historical threshold according to the prevailing conditions of knowledge, authority, and governmentality. PIP marks the event in which concrete experience becomes politicized—a site where regimes of truth determine what counts as valid knowledge and who is authorized to articulate it. Accordingly, the history of PIP is a history of the struggle over the conditions of political truth: at each historical juncture, a new configuration emerges between the personal and the political, in which the function of truth regulates the validity of experience and enables its politicization—always partially and temporarily.

The investigation follows a genealogical-constructivist methodology. Each chapter cuts through a specific historical truth regime and traces a diachronic line to the next threshold, while addressing three guiding questions: What problem gives rise to the emergence of PIP? What concepts respond to and redefine it? And what transformative potential remains unrealized? This method maps the historical conditions under which personal experience becomes a site of political truth and reveals the constitutive role played by a series of feminist concepts of experience in Western thought.

The dissertation argues that the history of the personal–political is also a history of the splitting of the female body—between body and soul, nature and culture, interior and exterior—a division that operates as a disavowed precondition for the constitution of the political subject. Truth functions as a differential element that connects and separates the personal from the political, legitimizing certain experiences while excluding others. In doing so, it generates hierarchies grounded in sexual difference and delineates the boundaries of experience and knowledge. The centrality of "woman" is not incidental but structurally necessary for understanding the foundational concepts of Western cultures: personal and political, private and public, body and soul, visibility and voice—all historically shaped around the positioning and significance attributed to women and femininity. Each historical period grappled with existential, political, and epistemological problems by reconstructing these concepts; the solutions chosen always relied, overtly or covertly, on the structured figuration of woman and the meanings ascribed to her body, capacities, and role in constituting the socio-political order.

Chapter 1 contextualizes the emergence of PIP in the 1960s "return of critique," reflecting both a political crisis of democracy and a theoretical crisis of representative narratives, questioning Enlightenment conceptions of the limits and possibilities of knowledge (Lianeri). It outlines the transformations PIP underwent through the 1980s, culminating in the rise of the "post-truth" discourse. The chapter critically revisits PIP's paradigmatic shift into "The Private is Political," arguing it contributed to the subtle depoliticization of personal experience.

By aligning feminist critique with liberal notions of privacy, property, and individual responsibility, the radical potential of PIP was absorbed into neoliberal epistemologies. Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical framework: truth is approached as a shifting relation between knowledge and power; sensory experience mediates political intelligibility through visibility and voice; and technologies of writing, seeing, and speaking operate as practices of governmentality. This framework sustains the genealogical reading of PIP across Western epistemological formations.

Chapter 3 explores classical Greece and Rome as the inaugural loci of this problematic. In Athens, *parrhesia* (truth-telling) was conditioned on the exclusion of women and the household, naturalizing a political ontology that equated citizenship with male speech and reason. In Rome, the juridico-moral concept of *persona* institutionalized a split between body and soul, voice and visibility, masking the political's dependence on the regulation of the feminine. Across both contexts, the female body appears as a disavowed condition of political subjectivity—governed, opaque, and epistemically suspect. Chapter 4 examines the early Christian internalization of truth through confession, the theological register of *person* in Trinitarian doctrine, and the emergence of a textual regime that binds interiority to femininity. The public disclosure of sin and the verbalization of thought—practiced as techniques of salvation—forge a unity between truth, speech, and self, laying the groundwork for modern subjectivity.

Chapter 5 presents the Renaissance as a regime of continuity. Linear perspective and the printing press unify space, time, and knowledge, forging a continuum between self-discipline, household management, and statecraft. These technologies respond to epistemic multiplicity by institutionalizing distinctions based on sexual difference and marginalizing embodied, oral, and feminized forms of knowledge. Witch-hunts, in this context, function as an epistemic strategy to delegitimize mêtis—an embodied, elusive, and feminine-coded intelligence. Chapter 6 focuses on the classical age (1650–1800), when privacy emerges as a boundary technology of both exposure and control. The personal is absorbed into the private, rendered legible through documentation and statistical quantification. Truth crystallizes as a function of administrative observation, while the female body continues to mediate the very distinction between personal, private, and political spheres.

Chapter 7 concludes with the digital present. The #MeToo movement marks a new variation on the truth problem: a shift from the personal to the impersonal. It introduces the concept of *the feminization of truth*—the intersection between the entrance of women into the field of truth and the simultaneous claim that truth has lost its value. Against narratives of the "death of truth," the dissertation proposes *the impersonal is political* as a new configuration in which collective experience—not individual authenticity—grounds political intelligibility. In the transition from disciplinary to control societies, where visibility is algorithmically modulated and truth is infrastructurally dispersed, this new grammar of collective enunciation resists epistemic subordination through shared speech, affect, and presence.

Throughout the genealogy, *mêtis* recurs as a central epistemic threat to political order. Its traits—opacity, adaptability, and resistance to capture—render it ungovernable by visual or juridical regimes. Like "the personal," it is rendered politically suspect through its partial invisibility. Across historical formations, the regulation, containment, and disqualification of feminized knowledge forms reveal the gendered logic through which both political authority and epistemic legitimacy are secured.

In retrospective view, the dissertation traces the personal–political couple as a thread linking epistemic formations: from Athenian parrhesia and the Roman persona, through Christian confession and codex, Renaissance perspective and print, modern privacy, and into the #MeToo protest within the society of control. At each historical threshold, a distinct configuration of knowledge, authority, and governmentality emerges, redefining the boundaries of experience and the legitimacy of truth-telling. Virtual and unrealized potentials continue to propel historical transformations. By reframing PIP as a philosophical concept, its history is revealed as a history of the struggle over the conditions under which experience is granted the status of political truth. Since antiquity, sensory experience and regimes of vision and voice have played a decisive role in determining what counts as truth, and they continue to structure the possibility of truth-telling in the digital age. The history of the personal–political is, therefore, also a history of sensory regimes: technologies of seeing and hearing—from parrhesia to perspective, from confession to algorithmic tags—define which experiences gain political legitimacy and embody, at every historical moment, the potential to rearticulate the relation between the personal and the political.

The contribution of this study is twofold: Theoretically, it establishes the personal–political as a philosophical concept and demonstrates that "woman" functions as a differential condition for the formation of foundational concepts (personal, political, private, public, truth, authority)—not as a sectorial field of thought but as the architectural ground for conceptual production. Methodologically, it develops an analytical grammar that intersects a genealogy of problems with a constructivist approach to concepts, in order to show how the figuration of femininity delineates the boundaries of legitimate experience under shifting regimes of seeing, speaking, and writing. In doing so, the study offers tools for understanding the conditions under which knowledge and experience are conjoined and under which truth acquires political validity—both historically and in the present.