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An Aesthetic Cartography of Fast: Gandhi and the Hunger Artists

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Introduction

“The cruelest poverty, the most extreme, is the one that robs you of the possibility of thinking about yourself differently. The one that leaves you without horizons, even without desires: condemned to the inevitable sameness.”¹ (Caparrós *El hambre* 12, my translation). With this cruelest form of poverty, Martín Caparrós portrays the most dramatic effect of structural hunger in his transnational journalistic research. In the chapter he dedicates to India, he not only indicates the uncomfortable correlation between the fact that the biggest democracy in the world is, simultaneously, the country with the largest number of starving people, but indicts religion as the dominating ideology that makes such a disturbing phenomenon possible². A paradox worth remarking upon is that in the same place one person reflected on his most basic corporal practices to the point of developing, staging and performing hunger in its most dramatic, social and visible fashion to reconfigure his political environment. Moreover, he did so within a religious discourse.

I aim to analyse M.K. Gandhi’s ‘greatest fasts’ from a specifically aesthetic perspective³. To do so, I will emphasize their dramatic qualities and how they, in their expressive repetition, patterning and stylization, produced a/effected heightened forms of emotions. To carry out this task, I will resort to the theater scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte’s book *Ästhetik des Performativen* (2004). The key concepts that will chart the coordinates of this aesthetic cartography of fast will be: performance (*Aufführung*) as an event, the presence of the performer, corporeality and embodiment, spatiality, temporality, self-referentiality, representation, autopoietic feedback loop, emergence, staging/mise en scène and aesthetic experience. Moreover, I will compare Gandhi’s fasts with those of his contemporary, a fasting and entertainment figure of Western culture: the hunger artist. I look forward to answering: How does it come to be that “a humble, naked old man, sitting on a praying-mat”

¹ “La pobreza más cruel, la más extrema, es la que te roba también la posibilidad de pensarte distinto. La que te deja sin horizontes, sin siquiera deseos: condenado a lo mismo inevitable”.

² “Das ist das Hauptzweck der Religionen: Wenn einer ein Scheißleben hat, weil am Hungertuch nagt, gerade mal so viel isst, dass er nicht stirbt, muss er daran glauben können, dass es eine höhere Ordnung gibt, etwas das die Situation erklärt oder rechtfertigt. Das erklärt, wieso ein paar wenige alles haben, über alles bestimmen, auch über Leben und Tod.” (Caparrós *Der Hunger*, 127).

³ I speak of aesthetics in terms of Jacques Rancière: “aesthetics refers to the distribution of the sensible that determines a mode of articulation between forms of action, production, perception, and thought. This general definition extends aesthetics beyond the strict realm of art to include the conceptual coordinates and modes of visibility operative in the political domain.” (Rockhill 82).

was able of “shaking empires by sheer spiritual power” (Orwell 459)? In other words, de-focalizing power relationships and focalizing — as the Colombian narrator of this text initially thought — Jacques Rancière’s most far-fetched metaphor for “intellectual emancipation”: How could an old man fasting perform an event — not only once but twice — that led to a “moment of civil war undone” (*The Ignorant... 97*)?

The object of this essay is to make more comprehensible why his actions appealed — and still do — to the popular imagination. To do so I will superimpose the frame of Gandhi’s political philosophy on different visual, cinematic, historical and literary sources.

1. An aesthetic cartography of active hunger

“[D]iese Wahrnehmung ist nicht nur rezeptiv. Sie schafft ein Kraftfeld und hat eine Wirkung nach außen.”

Bert Hellinger

The idea of charting a cartography⁴ of fast aims at an aesthetic understanding of it as a political event and a historical reconstruction of its traces. The concept of an “aesthetic-cartography” is derived from the philosopher Laura Quintana’s reading of Jacques Rancière. I opt for this methodology because it “is interested in considering moments of

⁴ In brief, I follow Guattari’s definition of cartography, which consists of outlining a map of the forms of production of subjectivity, having in mind that the different technologies of representation, information and communication not only transmit contents, but produce the subjectivity they pretend to describe (See Guattari 9-11). The advantages from a cartographical method in the tradition of Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* are: firstly, it gives a central role to mediality and spatiality, what they call the “double articulation”. It attributes the same origin to word or semiotic designations as well as to territorial space dominations or the “social machine”, which articulates the power techniques of space with gestures on a pragmatic level. Secondly, this linkage between gesture and word, as put by Jörg Dünne: “[in the recursive linkage of gesture and word — more specifically from pragmatics and semiotics — to operation chains, by which words and gestures are controlled and these inversely react, they can ‘articulate’ a concrete spatiality. One that does not take place, according to Deleuze/Guattari by the state’s opposition from territory and its symbolic representation.] Erst in der rekursiven Verknüpfung von Geste und Wort —beziehungsweise von Pragmatik und Semiotik — zu Operationsketten, bei denen Worte Gesten steuern und umgekehrt diese auf die Sprache rückwirken, kann sich eine konkrete Räumlichkeit ‚artikulieren‘, die nach Deleuze/Guattari nicht durch die statische Opposition von Territorium und dessen symbolischer Repräsentation” (21). This articulation of a concrete spatiality is then configured by a dynamic relationship between “deterritorialization” and “reterritorialization”. This aspect prevents a geodeterministic position that gives a prevalence to a territory for the configuration of symbolic operations and makes them equally relevant. This same feature approaches critically a traditional structuralist and social constructivist perspectives that reduce spatiality to semiotic structures between signifier and signified. Thirdly, this theory without disregarding mediality, it attributes an equal role to both parts of the double articulation (symbolizing and territorializing), without simplifying mediality to a monistic media theory, which reduces spatiality to the appropriation of a technical prostheses or to a technical a priori. Lastly, it is a theory open to historical descriptive differentiation, yet without amputating the feedback loop between spatiality — understood as a natural state — with an increasingly cultural use of technology. On the contrary, human space is regarded as always marked technically and symbolically.

incorporeal corporeality, and moments in which a lived experience becomes dis-adjusted” (Quintana “Jacques...”, 231, N. 18) and it helps in “considering social formations and practices as heterogeneous arrangements that can be dis-arranged in different ways, giving rise to other arrangements” (227). Moreover, the vantage point of this critical perspective is its focalization of the interrelationship between aesthetics and politics from an intellectual emancipatory perspective⁵ that goes further, and therefore distances itself from constructivist and phenomenological approaches to the body. Furthermore, it also dissociates from culturalist understandings of the body, which are close to what Quintana, following Eve Sedgwick, calls the danger of a *paranoid critical theory*. Namely, one that is set “in a constant state of alert, tracking the configuration of new power mechanisms that would somehow leave bodies trapped in the reiteration of their subjections, instead of inquiring into the affective territories that circulate among them, and the unexpected manners in which these could be transformed.” (214) To make the perceptual more present and tangible I will resort to Fischer-Lichte’s qualities of an aesthetic of the performative, — embedded in a phenomenological tradition. To describe in further detail the complex relationship between the aesthetic and the political, I will appeal to Rancière and Quintana in the final chapter.

The cartography will be framed with a chapter that will recount Gandhi’s discourse on fasting and its configuration with other meaningful concepts of his political philosophy, as well as a historical genealogy of the traditions which enabled his practice. It will also include a brief narration and typology of the practice of fasting during his life. Then, Fischer-Lichte’s features of an “aesthetics of the performative” serve as the coordinates to represent conceptually the historical phenomenon of Gandhi’s fasts and to orient the reader⁶. Therefore,

⁵ I follow Rancière’s understanding of intellectual emancipation in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. It is understood as taking equality as “a point of departure” not “an end to attain”, a “supposition” (138) that ““is neither given nor claimed, it is practiced, it is verified.”” (137). This aesthetic cartography aims at making perceptible “[t]he thing in common, placed between two minds” (32), “where equality is recognized. Not an equality decreed by law or force, not a passively received equality, but an equality in act, verified” (72) in the case of Gandhi’s fasts. The narrative voice is of the same quality in awareness of its ignorance of Hindi, Sanskrit, Gujarati, of being *rooted* in the West, while having made a *route* to the East and back, as moving on the threshold of the policed boundaries of the regimes of identification of the arts and more than one discipline.

⁶ I limit myself to the characteristics of the aesthetic of the performative that are relevant for this project and possible to reconstruct from different sources of Gandhi’s fasts. For the reader familiar with Fischer-Lichte’s work, it will be evident that from the four points of reference the following features are only referred tangentially or excluded, because of matters of archival limits and relevance to my object of study: from mediality: “touch”; from corporeality “animal bodies”, from spatiality “atmospheres”; from temporality, “rhythm”; from semioticity the interpretation of the fasts as “allegories” or “symbols” in the sense of Walter Benjamin. All these will be left aside, to give more weight and reformulate and expand politically her categories of “presence” and “representation”.

her brief summary of the main aesthetic criteria given will structure the charting of the historic reading and interpretation of Gandhi's fasts. The theater scholar gives four points of reference to her aesthetic of the performative: mediality, materiality, semioticity, and aestheticity. All of them are interwoven, and founded in the notion of performance⁷ (*Aufführung*), which helps to define the first pillar of the aesthetics of the performative, i.e. mediality. In this notion of performance, the "aesthetic, social, and political aspects are inextricably linked in performance [*Aufführung*]" and "the realms of art, social life, and politics cannot be clinically separated" (*The Transformative...* 44 and 51). Fischer-Lichte develops an alternative notion of aesthetics rather than a hermeneutic or semiotic one. The distinguishing criteria is that, in the latter, the principle of understanding — "[a] fixed and transferable artifact, i.e. the nature of the work of art as an object" (17) — is attributed in this case to an "event". Performance (*Aufführung*) is according to Fischer-Lichte, different from other aesthetic forms of expression, transforms the spectator into an actor⁸, in a bodily co-presence. This happens, to the extent that the spectators are put in a position in which they are coerced into making ethical decisions because of the strong emotions triggered by the performance. This process implies the formation of what Gianni Vattimo called "aesthetic communities", "short-lived transient theatrical communities of actors and spectators" (55) that build a temporary social reality. As Fischer-Lichte shows, there are communities that can be created on the condition of the collective performance of rituals and different strategies to stage different events. Third, the theater scholar distinguishes medially two forms of performance (*Aufführung*). That is, the "live performance constituted by the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators and mediatized performances which sever the co-existence of production and reception. Mediatized performance invalidates the feedback loop" (68). As the historical representation of Gandhi's fasts show, these concepts are thought provoking and to a certain extent useful for an analysis of the fasts. They will,

⁷ There are two notions of "performance" implicit in English that have made a long career, as noted by Fischer-Lichte: "Anders als die hier behandelten, die den Terminus 'Performance' im Sinne von 'Aufführung' verwenden, machen sie [die junge amerikanische Performancetheorien] ganz explizit die Doppelbedeutung des Wortes Performance, Aufführung und Ausführung/Leistung, zum Ausgangspunkt ihrer Überlegungen." (*Performativität* 52). In English this distinction could be made between the notion of "carrying out", "execution", or "realization" and "staging" or "mise en scène". I will speak of performance as the theater scholar of performance without the aid of the German word when both meanings coincide.

⁸ She distinguishes this feature from the futurist 'serate' and Dada 'soirées', on the grounds of their methods considering the avant-garde techniques turned into action by means of shocks (15) and seeking a clear effect, rather than the autopoietic feedback loop.

however, require a reformulation with the help of other thinkers in order to describe analytically the fasts.

The second coordinate is the materiality of the performance. The central concepts here are corporeality, spatiality and temporality. In terms of corporeality, the concept of embodiment is central, “regardless of whether they simultaneously bring forth a fictive character [...] or not” (90), because it captures the tensions between representation and presence. The aesthetics of the performative are an “aesthetics of presence [...] rather than of presence effects, and as the aesthetics of ‘appearing’ [...], rather than of appearance” (101). Fischer-Lichte understands the body phenomenologically. I will advance further with Quintana and Rancière where corporeality is understood as

a heterogeneous arrangement of discourses, gestures, images, routines, affects, forms of rationality, and spatializations, a heterogeneous arrangement that is experienced in its movements, in its forms of perception, but which can be re-experienced, producing disjunctions in the existing arrangements and, thereby, produce other arrangements. In this sense, it is an approach that accentuates the fact that, however subjected a corporeality may be to certain habits and routines that it has incorporated, it can both resist and dis-incorporate them, but also perforate them with holes and gaps that make de-subjecting reconfigurations possible, validating what has not taken place. (Quintana “Jacques...”, 225)

This understanding of corporeality will be central for interpreting Gandhi’s fasts, as well as the notions of spatiality and temporality, which frame and structure its contextual subjection. Fischer-Lichte names three main strategies to intensify the performativity and dramatic character of space, of which “the experimentation with given spaces usually fulfilling other purposes” (*The Transformative...* 110) is especially useful to interpret the fasts in conjunction with the bracketing time and spatial framing of the event.

The third dimension of this aesthetic cartography is semioticity. Namely, the configuration of meaning and its perception by means of different forms of presence and representation. There is a tendency to self-referentiality that implies that materiality, signifier and signified coincide (141). This means that what happens in the event renders its perception as meaningful. Relevant here is that the apprehension of something as either presence or representation is subject to a perceptive localization or subjection. This position, it will be shown, can become gradually distinct. The fourth and final coordinate, the most important

and transversal, is the one of aestheticity. Here the notion of emergence of the event is central. Meaning is not controlled but it becomes manifest by an “associative generation of meaning” (143). In other words, meaning emerges, and this emergence means “the spectators’ perception might gain a special quality which precludes the question of other possible meanings, functions, or usages, or also of other framing contexts” (141). Put differently, in the event, the agency of intentionality of the participant subjects is subtracted: “They [meanings] appear neither as a result of any sort of causal nexus nor of the concerned subject’s intentions. Their emergence is inexplicable and unmotivated. In this context, the associative generation of meaning strikingly differs from an intentional process of interpretation.” (143) Here it is relevant to return to the situation of actors and spectators, which she describes as one of “instability”, “crisis”, “liminality”, “border-crossing”, “perceptual multistability”, or shifts that produce breaks and discontinuities. As put by the German theoretician under the model of Marina Abramovic’s *Lips for Thomas* (1975): “Their actions triggered physiological, affective, volitional, energetic, and motor reactions that motivated further actions.” (17) She calls this feature the “powerful effect of the autopoietic feedback loop” (187), triggering constant role reversals between actors and spectators.

Here the notion of staging or *mise en scène* (*Inszenierung*)⁹ will be central, which today, as Fischer-Lichte notes, “does not just refer to the arts but also to non-artistic performances and all spheres that theatricalize and aestheticize daily life” (182). This is exactly the case in this aesthetic cartography. According to her definition,¹⁰ the central function of staging is to attract the attention of the audience and artist to generate a performance (*Aufführung*) between both. This is what is planned and decided in a given performance (*Aufführung*), appealing to a conventional notion of theater, that which repeats each night in the same way in a stage. It frames a situation that stimulates action, it aims to highlight and configure an act of perception that makes the ordinary worth of attention:

The process of staging is a trial by which to find the best way for generating materiality; decisions are made and frequently changed after performances. Staging is a planned process that employs various

⁹ I will follow Saskya Iris Jain’s translation, who uses them interchangeably to denote any staging process.

¹⁰ Later she defines it in the following way: “The definition of the term staging developed so far applies to all types of *mises en scène*, artistic and non-artistic. That is to say, it applies to the staging of theatre performances and performance art, exhibitions, installations, concerts, as well as the staging of rituals, festivals, spectacles, sports competitions, trials, and political gatherings. The term staging refers to the aesthetic dimension in all possible types of performance.” (190)

strategies from chance operations to self-organized rehearsal techniques in order to probe which elements are to be brought forth performatively. Staging decides what will appear or disappear at what place and time during the performance. The staging process circumscribes a strategy of creation, which performatively engenders presence in a certain temporal sequence and spatial constellation. (187)

Additionally it is worth articulating the difference between staging and performance (*Aufführung*). The latter presupposes the former and is constituted by the autopoietic feedback loop, as well as by the co-presence of actors and spectators (187). This means that the performance (*Aufführung*) plays “with the unplanned, the un-staged, and the unpredictable [...] even if some artistic and non-artistic mises en scène will attempt to minimize that experimental space as far as possible.” (187) Moreover, the performance in contrast to the staging happens only once and cannot be repeated, it is entrenched in the notion of event.

The choice of Fischer-Lichte’s notion of performance is specially productive for analysing phenomena that have not traditionally been considered part of the modern field or discipline of the “aesthetic regime of art”¹¹. The advantage of her “aesthetics of the performative” is that her framework is embedded in “the artistic tradition of theatre and performance art, instead of ranging broadly through other examples of social and cultural performance as an American theorist might do.” (Carlson 4) In other words, her theory is helpful to examine an artistic and theatrical sphere of phenomena that have not been traditionally interpreted in that light as is the case with Gandhi’s fasts, which are often limited to dualistic interpretations that linger hegemonically between religious convictions, identity and secularized politics. Using the concepts of Richard Schechner and Victor Turner, the objective is to turn the fasts as “social drama” inside out, to make visible what appears conventionally as the theatrical techniques and stagings with a hidden or virtual character as in the “aesthetic drama”¹². Or to reconfigure the title of one of Rancière’s most relevant essays for this cartography, to render an understanding of *politics as aesthetics*.

¹¹ See Rancière’s “Aesthetics as Politics” in *Aesthetics and its Discontents* (2009): “Although traces of this regime are already to be found in such authors as Vico and Cervantes, it has only come to play a dominant role in the last two centuries.” (Rockhill 81)

¹² See Schechner’s essay “Selective Inattention” in *Performance Theory*.

Moreover, a particular quality of this aesthetic theory is that it examines an *art of passage or border crossing art*. It “emphasizes moments of transgression and transition. The border turns into a frontier and a threshold, which does not separate but connects. In the place of unbridgeable oppositions we find gradual differences” (204). By way of explanation, it is the art of transforming borders into thresholds, and this applies to analysing only certain fields or disciplines under a given criteria. It is an *intersectional aesthetics*. Furthermore, the closeness of performance to *experience*

can be thought of both as life itself and as its model. It is life itself because it takes up the real time of the participants’ lives and offers them the possibility to constantly bring themselves forth anew. It is life’s model because these processes occur with a particular intensity and conspicuousness that focuses the participants’ attention. Our lives are given appearance in performance – they become present and past. (205)

In other words, performance puts its emphasis on the dramatic — understood in its Greek etymological connotation, simultaneously as action, deed, and play — decisive turning points of life in which all spheres somehow are conjugated. As will be shown, fasting often marked these points of inflection in Gandhi’s life, just as the theater scholar described the aesthetic performances of artists as “constructed as experiments that seek to offer answers” (40) to social issues. That was the case in Gandhi’s “experiments with the truth”, which ranged widely from social performative essays in education, writing, dressing, dietetics, religious experience, to sexuality and politics. As Faisal Devji puts it, regarding Gandhi’s relationship with science, which is the same with performance artists: “Indeed the only part of science that Gandhi claimed for himself was the experiment, which is to say nothing but its method and therefore its essence.” (*The Impossible...* 6) The contemporary gender theorist Paul B. Preciado offers a vocabulary for political action and representation that is adequate to describe Gandhi’s fasts as well as the work of performance artists, to the extent that it follows what s/he calls the “auto-guinea pig principle” of intentional self-experimentation. It “consist[s] of a positioned, responsible corporal political practice, so that anyone wishing to be a political subject will begin by being the labrat in her or his own laboratory.” (Preciado 228)

The emphasis on agency that made *performance* innovative as new art form during the 1960s in the Western world was already latent in religious rituals as well as fairground spectacles, cultural domains “in which people injure themselves or expose their bodies to serious harm not only ‘normal’ but even laudable and exemplary” (Fischer-Lichte 13). Another feature that makes performance theory especially relevant to the analysis of a political action is the usefulness of its devices for constructing a critical anatomy of *violence*. It is no wonder that theater and performance historians have dedicated complete books — for example — to the relationship between French Medieval martyrdom and the aesthetic performances in New York early in the 21st century.¹³ The focalization of the congenital violence implicit in action appears more naked than ever under the microscopic lens of performance theory.

2. Fasting in Gandhi's philosophy and history

2.1. Self-control, duty, brahmacharya, diet, satyagraha, ahimsa and fasting

“No one is given life to own, we all hold but a lease.”

Lucretius, *The Nature of Things*, Book III, v. 971

Before reading Gandhi’s fasts through the coordinates of the aesthetics of the performative, I will introduce briefly the complexity of his approach to fasting in the framework of his philosophy and its historical filiations. First, it is necessary to indicate the intricate interdependence of this practice with his diet, *brahmacharya* or vow of celibacy, *ahimsa* or nonviolence, and *satyagraha*, often referred to in English as passive resistance. The guiding principle that defines Gandhi’s anthropology is self-control. “The brute by nature knows no self-restraint. Man is man because he is capable of, and only in so far as he exercises, self-restraint” (*An Autobiography* 317). This notion of self-restraint is transversal to all concepts analysed in this section and is central because it gives place to duties that enable an idea of rights. With a strange torsion of neoliberal freedom (understood as the liberty of ownership), in the words of Faisal Devji ‘duty’ plays a major role in Gandhian discourse:

For unlike rights, which can only be guaranteed by states and are thus never truly in the possession of those who bear them, duties belong to individuals and cannot be stripped from them. They represent in

¹³ See Marla Carlson’s book *Performing Bodies in Pain* (2010), which is chapter per chapter structured on the basis of a variety of parallel suffering between both ages and forms of performance.

this sense the inalienable sovereignty of men and women, and therefore stand alone in their ability to create rights. Yet first among all duties, of course, is the disposal rather than preservation of life” (*The Impossible...* 191).

Essential for duty in Gandhian terms is the prevalence of death correlated by individuality, while rights correlate with life and collectivity. Expressed in Foucauldian jargon, biopolitically duties give the individual power over death, in a context where the right of life is hegemonized by the monopoly of violence by the state. The transversality of duty as of self-restraint will be evidenced in the power of celibacy to renounce reproduction and bodily pleasure, as of the abstention to eat something or shape a diet, as in renouncing to hurt the other and to eat. All of these served Gandhi to deal teleologically with his fourfold main preoccupations as put by Guha: “To deliver India from British rule [...] The forging of harmonious relations between India’s often disputatious religious communities [...] to end the pernicious practice of untouchability in his own Hindu faith [...] the impulse to develop economic self-reliance for India and moral self-reliance for Indians” (Guha GYCW xii).

Gandhi took the vow of *brahmacharya* during the summer of 1906 in South Africa and precedes in its adoption the coinage of *satyagraha*. This practice yet goes — ideally — far beyond bodily restraint: “A true brahmachari will not even dream of satisfying the fleshly appetite, and until he is in that condition, he has a great deal of ground to cover.” (ibid) This notion stemmed both from a Hindu and Jain¹⁴ tradition transferred to him by the Jain sage Raychandbhai (see *An Autobiography* 89). Moreover, as the biographer also evidences, this form of renunciation can be linked with filiation of the heroic mythical warrior Bhishma, from the *Mahabharata* who, rather than withdrawing of society, took the vow of celibacy for its service. With Gandhi’s words, his vow meant “that procreation and the consequent care

¹⁴ Jain influence is strong in Gandhi’s thoughts, as evidenced in his relationship with the sage Raychandbhai. As it will be shown, he not only influenced his approach to his body, but probably is the direct source of the basic principle of his anthropology, as a verse quoted by Gandhi clearly interconnects them: “Using this body solely for self-control, / [...] / Seeing nothing in the body to bring on a trace of the darkness of ignorance.” (Raychandbhai qtd. by Gandhi *The Essential...* 24)

of children were inconsistent with public service” (quoted. by Guha, 197).¹⁵ Both appear as models of social moral uprightness and commitment to dharma.¹⁶

The relationship between fasting, diet and *brahmacharya* is clearly portrayed in the micropolitical regulatory texts of “Draft Constitution of the Satyagraha Ashram” (1915) and its later revision “New constitution of the satyagraha Ashram” (1928). As stated in “IV. CONTROL OF THE PALATE The observance of *brahmacharya* has been found, from experience, to be extremely difficult so long as one has not acquired mastery over taste” (Gandhi *The Essential...*, 115). Central here is the intersection between both concepts, it aims to undermine pleasure as an end in itself, channel it exclusively to heterosexual reproduction, just as is the case with food to conserve life. “Eating is necessary only for sustaining the body and keeping it a fit instrument for service” (115). The first draft accentuates that without control over taste, “it is difficult to observe the foregoing vows [of truth and non-violence], more especially that of celibacy” (107). As put clearly by Joseph S. Alter, describing the diet and the political consequences of *brahmacharya*, “standard vegetarianism aside a moderate, unspiced, minimally cooked, and quickly prepared meal of simple, unprocessed, natural food is the dietary basis for brahmacharya ([...]) and probably the single most important variable in redefining the scope of public health” (20).

Both celibacy and a rigorous diet appear as the most basic corporeal indicators of a micropolitics in the subject’s body, which should be extended and projected to a larger macropolitical context — the scope appears to move in unidirectional way from the person to the family, to the ashram/village, to national identity (see Gandhi *The Essential...*, 325). As Gandhi expressed in a letter to Shankarlal Banker in 1918, emphasizing the bio-, micro- and macropolitical centrality of the body. “It is easier to conquer the entire world than to subdue

¹⁵ Gandhi’s appreciation of the body and his approach to celibacy is filliated in Raychandbhai’s male centered ideas, as put by Guha: “The pleasure from sexual intercourse was ‘only momentary and a cause of exhaustion and repeated excitements’. The organ used ‘for the enjoyment of conjugal bliss’, commented by the Jain sage, ‘when looked at through the piercing eyes of discrimination, does not stand fit even for a worthy receptacle for vomiting’.” (Raychandbhai qtd. by Guha, GBI 196) This appreciation of the human body appears to be entrenched in the “theory of sexual sublimation” of the physiology of Ayurveda, which sets binarily that either contention of semen “becomes a source of spiritual life” or “a cause of physical [and in Gandhi’s case, moral] decay” (Kakar 87). In Gandhi’s words: “Just as man dissipates his physical strength through ordinary incontinence, so he dissipates his mental strength through mental incontinence, and, as physical weakness affects the mind, so mental weakness affects the body. That is why I have defined *brahmacharya* in wide sense an described even idle thoughts as violation of it.” (Gandhi *The Essential...* 62)

¹⁶ The difficulty of translating this term is well known, for its complexity and semantic range from ‘duty’, ‘religion’, ‘justice’, ‘law’, ‘ethics’, ‘religious merit’, ‘principle’ to ‘right’ see Gevin Flood’s article.

the enemies in our body. And, therefore, for the man who succeeds in this conquest, the former will be easy enough. The self-government which you, I and all others have to attain is in fact this. Need I say more? The point of it all is that you can serve the country only with this body” (quoted by Alter 3). In other words, the body-politic of the nation appears in image and likeness to the body of the individual. As Alter puts it, the centrality of the body in Gandhi’s philosophy and political performance is, in a Foucauldian fashion, “at once, the subject, object, and medium of experience.” (Alter xv) Or — in the words of Preciado — a “biopolitical platform” (Preciado 227).

Gandhi adopted the notion of nonviolence or *ahimsa*¹⁷ from Jainism. As in the other ascetic Indian religious traditions (Hinduism and Buddhism) it is one of the cardinal principles and considered the highest *dharma*. Fundamental for understanding this concept is how it presupposes what the philosopher Byung-Chul Han has called *negative potency* or “the potency not to do [...] to say no. This negative potency is differentiated from bare impotence, from the incapacity to do something” (46, my translation). Potency¹⁸ in this context is understood as the power of making a substantial change of state. Gandhi uses this notion often synonymously with love, truth and God, and defines it as the “equal consideration for all life from the tiniest insect to the highest human” (*The Essential* 115). It is a formal statement of religious belief, an “all-pervasive [creed]” (Gandhi, *On Non-violence* 66).

Potency is what distinguishes what Gandhi calls non-violence of the “strong” from that of the “weak”. For the strong, the notion of “[n]on-violence presupposes [an] ability to strike” (50). Moreover, it implies bravery in the face of violence, understood as “recklessness

¹⁷ Gurcharan Das makes a useful genealogy of the term in the epic the *Mahabharata*, where the *Bhagavad Gita* or Gandhi’s “infallible guide to conduct” (*An Autobiography* 265) is embedded, as well as discussing the most adequate form of translating it into English: “The *Mahabharata* calls *ahimsa* the ‘heart of dharma’ [...] ‘*ahimsa* is the highest dharma’. [...] It is the opposite of the Sanskrit *himsa*, ‘harm’ or ‘violence’; hence, *ahimsa* is ‘not doing harm’. [...] *ahimsa* affects both the object (‘non-injury’) and the subject (‘non-injuriousness’). Hence, ‘harmlessness’ may be the most appropriate way to translate *ahimsa* into English because it suggests both ‘non-injury’ and ‘non-injuriousness’. I find, however, that ‘harmlessness’ is a weak word with negative connotations. I prefer to stick to the old-fashioned ‘non-violence’ of Mahatma Gandhi.” (Das 249)

¹⁸ The technical term that somehow better describes this phenomenon in the sanskrit literature is the notion of *tapas* often translated often as asceticism. Gandhi himself connected it to his fasts (see Desai *Day...* Vol. V, 344) It is understood as “heat, inner flame, creative power, spiritual energy; observance in the discipline” (Werner 103). In the literary tradition “one finds a widespread view that the rigorous practice of asceticism lead to paranormal powers for the practitioner. Ascetics are frequently depicted as receiving special boons from the gods as a reward for their practices. In later Vedic literature, ascetic practice takes on a role similar to that of Vedic sacrifice in its ability to evoke divine favors.” (Long 46)

about one's life and property" as well as disposing oneself to "suffering without retaliation" (60). All this suggests freedom from attachment of the body, where there is "no room for self-pitying" (61 and 80). In contrast, the weak notion implies cowardice, for example, "[o]ne who having retaliation in his breast submits to violence out of policy" (50). Specifically, "I cannot be nonviolent about one activity of mine and violent about others. That would be policy, not a life force." (60) This distinction is often marked in contemporary political science as the difference between "non violent resistance - where a movement makes a positive commitment to pursue a strategy of nonviolent action" and "unarmed resistance which is less a policy than a description, that the resisters are not using lethal weapons (although they might fight with stones or might even be suspected of having secret plans to take up arms in the future)" (Carter, Clark & Randle 15).

Gandhi does not understand violence naively as something that can be suppressed from social relationships. He states: "[i]n life it is impossible to eschew violence completely" (Gandhi *On...*, 55). "So long as he [humanity] continues to be a social being, he cannot but participate in the *himsa* [violence] that the very existence of society involves" (*An Autobiography* 349). He considers violence and self defense better than a weak notion of non-violence. "It is better to be violent, if there is violence in our hearts, than to put on the cloak of non-violence to cover impotence. Violence is any day preferable to impotence" (*On Non-Violence* 51). He adds, "[h]e who cannot protect himself or his nearest and dearest or their honor by non-violently facing death may and ought to do so by violently dealing with the oppressor. He who can neither of the two is a burden" (50). Nonviolence has a strong subjective character and "drawing the line cannot be the same for everyone" (55). Its power, as summed up by Gandhi's last secretary, "is in direct proportion to one's capacity to use violence if one wished to" (Pyarelal *The Last...* Vol. II, 736).

Satyagraha is the Gujarati synonym for "passive resistance,"¹⁹ and moves nonviolence to a macropolitical level. Gandhi distinguished it from the forms "practiced in the West" by, for example, the suffragettes or worker unions (Gandhi, *The Essential...* 326).

¹⁹ Other forms of referring to it are as "soul force" as a counterpart to "devilish force" or violence (see Roy 109). The word was developed in South Africa in January 1908 comparing the different suggestions for a Gujarati and Indian equivalent to "passive resistance", it moved from, "sadagraha, which roughly translated as 'firmness in a good cause'" to "'the force of truth in a good cause'." (Guha GBI, 264, see also Gandhi *An Autobiography* 319) It's often translated as "holding fast to truth" (Mishra) .

It is understood as “a weapon of the strong; it admits no violence under any circumstance whatever; and it ever insists upon truth”²⁰ (Ibid). What’s more, for the *satyagrahi* “[i]t is difficult to become a passive resister unless the body is trained” (322). Training the body means that it is a way of life “to observe perfect chastity, adopt poverty, follow truth, and cultivate fearlessness [of death]” (Ibid). Noteworthy here is the movement from the micropolitical to the macropolitical. *Satyagraha* is modelled on the most basic forms of community, i.e. “the relations between father and son, husband and wife, indeed our family relations” (324). The solution with which *satyagraha* — “truth-force”, “love-force” — pretends to approach macropolitical social conflicts is “the same principle that we follow in a domestic quarrel” or with those one loves (324-325). This means, in political terms, that the private or micro- corresponds fractally to the public or macropolitical. It implies a special relationship with the self and others. In Gandhi’s strongly religious language, “*satyagraha* means fighting oppression through voluntary suffering” (331) and “love does not burn others, it burns itself” (ibid). Therefore, “a *satyagrahi* [...] will joyfully suffer even unto death” (332). The substantial difference is not the cowardness of those “blowing others to pieces from behind a cannon,” but the courage of those, that “with a smiling face” approach “a cannon and [are] blown to pieces” (321). *Satyagraha* presupposes the so-called non-violence of the strong, truth, sense of duty, bodily discipline and love understood as self-sacrifice for others. In brief, it is “the art of dying without killing” (*On Non-violence* 63). Summed up, *satyagraha* is, to use William James’ expression, *a moral equivalent to war*. The suffering produced is, as Gandhi puts it on his first indefinite fast, a lesson in how to “*undergo intelligent suffering*” (Desai *Day-to-Day...* Vol. II, 29).

Fasting has powerful echoes, which Gandhi made sure to resound in his ecumenical and syncretic approach to religion.²¹ It has an undertone not only of the Jain and Hindu

²⁰ The notion of truth according to Gandhi to use Pankaj Mishra’s contemporary coinage is at home in the epistemological disagreements of the “post-truth age”. This has been signaled before both by the inventor of the physical theory of relativity that distinguished Gandhi’s “outward authority” not by “craft or mastery of technical devices” but by being “armed with resolve and inflexible consistency” (A. Einstein qtd. by Guha GTCW vi). Gandhi’s notion of Truth is two folded, on the one hand is a matter of experiential certainty, as keeping vows that constitute a truth bodily articulated, as a truth in act verified. Moreover, Truth in capital letter refers to his notion of God: “as eternal principle, supreme consciousness or intelligence, cosmic power, energy, spirit, or shakti. Later in life he preferred to speak of satya (ultimate reality or Truth), and regarded this as the ‘only correct and fully significant’ description of God.” (Parekh 35)

²¹ When I refer to religion according to Gandhi, I speak precisely of his approach, summed up by Guha in five main statements: “First, the claim that no religion is perfect, with all religions being a mixture of truth and error. Second, the assumption that all religions are in a process of evolving, of ridding themselves of error and groping

ascetic traditions, but also Buddhism, Christianity and Islam.²² To understand Gandhi's fasts, Jainism and Hinduism's long tradition of "fasting unto death" are of special significance. Fasting and *ahimsa* are both Jainism's most significant religious practices and principles, as well as two of its distinctive features (see Paniker 412-413). In Jainism, *sallekhana* is understood as "the act of facing death voluntarily through fasting" (Sundara). It is often named with other expressions like "death in meditation (*samadhi-marana*)" (Paniker 501, my translation). It is a supplementary vote to the code of conduct of both monks and laic practitioners. The function of this religious ritual is to reach the moment of death with pure consciousness. This means not breaking any religious vows involuntarily (for instance *ahimsa*) because of old age, an incurable disease or famine (see Paniker, 500; Sundara).²³ In other words, "[t]he practice in question permits a member of the community, under certain circumstances, to terminate his or her own life, or more accurately, to actively welcome impending death in a nonviolent manner" (Bilimoria 333). Jains distinguish it in the contemporary world strictly from suicide as a legal category. The difference lies in that it is not comprehended as a 'fool's death.' A 'fool's death' is understood as all types of self-destruction that imply violence to one's body by means of weapons, as well as self-inflicted violence resulting from fits of passion. This is in contrast to a calm mental condition, directed by a spiritual goal undertaken strictly when nearing death, and as a collective decision (Dundas, 179; Sundara).

Hinduism presents other forms of the practice of fasting unto death. In this context, it is called *praya*, *prayopavesa*, and/or *prayopavesana*. This is one of the many forms of historical ritual suicide²⁴ in this tradition, and the best-known version corresponds to the last

towards the truth. Third, the argument that it was through interfaith dialogue, by seeing one's faith in the mirror of another, that one could rid it of imperfections. Fourth, the conviction that a person of faith must not always trust priests or the so-called 'authorized' interpreters to give the correct interpretation. Fifth, the belief that when interpreting or judging a religion, one must trust its best practitioners rather than its most powerful." (Guha GYCW., 270)

²² For example referring to Mohammad see Guha GYCW, 270 and on Christ's and Buddha's fasts see Gandhi *The Essential...* 315.

²³ In the 9th century, three forms of death in meditation were recorded in the *Adi-Purana* composed by Jinasena: (i) "the person wishing to undertake the vow must select an isolated spot where he can lie on a bed of straw without moving his limbs and abstain from food as well as drink. He must endure all hardships that may befall him until his death." (Sundara). (ii) "[I]ntended for a well-controlled and instructed monk. According to this procedure the person should lie on bare ground and bear all pain. He can move his limbs, walk or sit or stand but must not consume any food. He must meet death calmly." And (iii) "is the most difficult as it requires the person to stand upright like a tree without food and drink until death." (Ibid)

²⁴ Only in this case I will name it "suicide", it is clearly distinguished from *sallekhana* in Jainism, which has a different legal status.

life stage of the high-caste man, that of the renouncer.²⁵ “Thenceforth, he should starve to death, drown himself, enter fire, undertake the path of the heroes (i.e. die in battle) or the Great Journey [walking in a northerly or northeasterly direction toward the Himalayan mountains without eating or drinking until death], or else go to a hermitage.” (*Kathasruti Upanisad* quoted by Olivelle “Ritual Suicide...,” 23). The two motives that are grounds for renunciation are: ‘[1] If he is indifferent toward promoting the welfare of the world by imparting the knowledge of the Truth etc. (...), or [2] if he has an affliction of the body etc. due to sickness and the like, having declared the *praisa* [technical term for ‘I have renounced’] and given the gift of safety to all creatures” (Vasudevasrama qtd.. by Olivelle 21).

But the Hindu tradition presents additional cases. A heroic one may also be present, which does not necessarily have to be related to the life stage of the renouncer. Examples of these are recorded in the sanskrit epics the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* (written between approx. 500 BCE and 400 CE), and in the chronicle *Rajatarangini* (12 century CE). As the sanskrit scholar Edward Washburn Hopkins evidenced at the beginning of the 20th century, there are at least seven functions of fasting unto death with their own motivations and intentions.²⁶ As the most conventional and relevant use of of *praya*, Hopkins considered “the legal aspect of suicide as a means of compelling payment [...] according to which the creditor sets out to starve himself to death to compel [such] payment” (Hopkins quoted by Nemeč, 45). The aim was repayment, not death. It was mostly practiced by the Brahmins, but not resorted to by kings, and “[t]he normal practice was to fast at the door of the debtor’s abode” (Nemeč 45). This practice later was also called *dhurna* and was exclusively used until 1860,

²⁵ The life stages are “the paradigm of how the high-caste man should live.” (Flood 62) They renouncer is the last stage presided by the celibate student, the householder, and the hermit or forest dweller.

²⁶ *Praya* is the vow dying by starvation undertaken: “(i) without intent to harm because of sorrow or despair”; “(ii) [...] because of disgrace inflicted”; “(iii) [...] as self-inflicted punishment by one conscious of having sinned. Remorse instigates the act, but there is an additional notion that death will be an expiation.”; “(iv) intent to compel another to do one’s will”; (v) “[...] taken by a suppliant, but it is accompanied with a threat to the effect that if the object of desire is not granted vengeance will be taken. The motive here is to excite pity, which failing, recourse is had to force”; (vi) “[...] undertaken by a suppliant, but is accompanied with the threat that if the object of desire be denied the one who rejects the suppliant will go to hell”; “(vii) [...] is undertaken at the door of the house, the suppliant sitting on sacred kuśa-grass, with intent to compel submission, as in the law-books. But no violence is used, and there is no suggestion that the one affected will suffer hereafter. It is expressly said that this recourse is fitting only for a priest, and the situation is likened to that caused by a ‘priest robbed of his money.’” (Hopkins quoted. by Nemeč N. 6, 45)

when it was “outlawed by the Indian Penal Code of 1869 because it was perceived as manipulative and coercive” (Pratt and Vernon 99).

In the last two decades, the indologists F. Baldissera and J. Nemeč have connected another function illustrated by the *Rajatarangini* with Gandhi. This function is central for understanding Gandhi’s macropolitical fasts, as it is one that aims “to redress the grievance of *another than oneself*” (Nemeč 44). What distinguishes this function of fasting according to Nemeč is that it does not necessarily seek to redress a financial grievance. It is aimed at the king for the greater good of the social order, “but with no immediately identifiable target of the fast whom they could threaten, excepting perhaps themselves” (49). Notable in this case is that it reveals to what extent fasting accomplishes the function of a call to action by a spiritual leader of a community to face *the negligence of a politician and/or religious leader or group in correspondence to his/her duties*. To finish, I will close this chapter distinguishing Gandhian fasts from its predecessors.

Before Nemeč, Pyarelal, Gandhi’s last secretary and one of his most ambitious hagiographers clearly identified the function of his practice of active hunger. “One may fast as vicarious atonement for the lapses of those whom one loves and cherishes, to chastise them and to bring them to repentance. It may also be used to resist injustice or to obtain redress for a wrong by an appeal to the conscience of the wrong-doer or of society” (Pyarelal *The Last...* Vol. II, 738). As remarked upon by Paniker, Gandhi transposed politically the brahmanical values of renouncement, non-violence, chastity and asceticism (289). Gandhi himself embedded his fasts in the Indian religious tradition and referred to gods like Parvati and Shiva, as well as Bharat in the *Ramayana* (see Desai *Day-to...* Vol. V, 344). As the indologists previously quoted have evidenced, fasting unto death was a practice exclusive to the Brahmin and warrior caste, and Gandhi, being from the Vaishya (traders) caste, redirects it. In Gandhi’s case, the affront to power is directed to different authorities (mostly religious/ethnic groups and leaders, etc.), rather than a king. The centrality of *ahimsa* is transferred from the Jain tradition. In the Brahmanic tradition, furthermore, instead of being a response to a corporal affliction, it is the corporal gesture and response to a social affliction. A social calamity that might be perceived as intolerable suffering with respect to the duties of a religious-political leader, who considers the social situation an impending corporal affliction of a person suffering from a terminal disease. As Gandhi put it with reference to his

last great fast, “It is obedience to peremptory call of conscience and duty. It comes out of felt agony” (Gandhi, CWMG Vol. XC, 439-440). He conceived of fasting as “the last weapon in the armoury of the votary of *ahimsa*” (*The Essential...* 341), or as “a last resort when all other avenues of redress have been explored and have failed.” (*On Non-violence* 86) This appeal to a metaphorology of warfare (“weapon”) has a long history in the ascetic tradition,²⁷ which defines what it aims to substitute — the satyagrahi with a “warrior” and *satyagraha* with the “sword.” This is a clear hint that the violence of *ahimsa* is not suppressed, but reconfigured to produce “the absolute efficiency of innocent suffering” (*The Essential...* 358) in the fashion of Jesus, who Gandhi considered the model of non-violent resistance (*On Non-violence* 55). The idea is systematically to produce a symbolic and social economy of guilt and an awakening of responsibility, as is the case with the deontic debts with the Brahmins, as with the Christian logic of “whoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn him the other also” (Matthew 5:39 quoted. by Gandhi *An Autobiography* 68). However, according to him, “‘You cannot fast against a tyrant,’ [...] ‘Fasting can only be resorted against a lover [by which Gandhi meant ‘one you love’], not to exort rights but to reform him, as when a son fasts for a parent who drinks” (Quoted. by Guha GYCW 213). This means that fasting should only be resorted to “against someone with whom one shares bonds, such as love or common ideals” (Haksar 171). To die was the most radical expression of teaching, as he put it in the frame of the 21 day fast in 1924 for the unity between Muslims and Hindus: “I can teach them [Hindus] the way to die by my own example” (Gandhi qtd. by Desai *Day-to...* Vol. IV, 195). Moreover, he states, “I am placing this terrible weapon in the hands of people. If it is abused, I must pay the price by laying down my life” (196).

2.2. A brief history and teleology of Gandhi’s political fasts

The objective of this chapter is to inform the following analysis of the instrumental use of Gandhi’s fasts in context. It aims to recall to the reader that each case was embedded in a given time and place, even if this cartography will simplify and aim at describing abstractly his practice of active hunger in an uneven and changing continuum along his life, as will be the case in the coming chapters.

²⁷ “Patrick Olivelle calls attention to the appropriation of royal vocabulary and symbols by ascetic movements in ancient India associated with war, conquest, violence, and royal authority with the intention of gaining power, prestige, influence, and religious authority (Olivelle 2006).” (Olson 3)

Central for the understanding of Gandhi's fasts from an historical perspective have been the documents left by Gandhi and his closest followers: Mahadev Desai and Pyarelal Nayar, his Indian secretaries. Desai was his official secretary from the 1920s until his death in 1942 and Pyarelal took his place until Gandhi's death in 1948. Pyarelal wrote some of the most detailed work on Gandhi's fasts in his unfinished multivolume hagiography, which has had such a canonical recognition and legitimation that many conversations he recorded are a constitutive part of the *Collected Works*. He also wrote the first monograph on the theme, *The Epic Fast* (1932), reporting on Gandhi's active hunger against untouchability and concerning the Hindu unity during that same year. Desai's and Pyarelal's²⁸ role as witnesses and their intimate relationship with Gandhi makes them indispensable for my work, yet their accounts are limited by their privileged perspective and their hagiographic approach to Gandhi. To add to this difficulty, as put by Guha, neither "were scholars (or indeed writers)" (*Gandhi the... xviii*), nor trained historians or archivists. Lastly, Guha's two-volume biography has been a contemporary complement and a revision of all the previous from a liberal academic perspective. These volumes, with their pluriperspectivistic approach, have been of great use. The important works of other writers and scholars that touch upon more specific themes will be evidenced later.

To understand specifically Gandhi's use and practice of active hunger, Pyarelal wrote a noteworthy essay closing the chapter of Gandhi's final fast in Delhi in 1948, wherein he explains the logic of his theological discourse and refers to Gandhi's writings on the subject. He refers to four main motives which often overlap. Firstly, fasting as self-purification or "as a penance for wrong done and felt as such" (Gandhi, CWMG Vol. XC, 408). This also meant "the attainment of spirit's supremacy over flesh" (Pyarelal *The Last... Vol. II, 738*). Secondly, which he usually mixes with the previous motive, "as a vicarious atonement for the lapses of those whom one loves and cherishes, to chastise them and to bring them to repentance." (738) Thirdly, "to resist injustice or obtain redress for wrong by an appeal to the conscience of the wrong-doer or of a society" (738). In Gandhi's words, it was "a fast which

²⁸ A more extensive project could aim to incorporate further other testimonies of a similar nature as the one's given by other members of Gandhi's entourage or associates such as: Dr. Sushila Nayar, Manu Gandhi, N.K. Bose, Brij Krishna Chandiwala, in between others. As well as revising the first rigorous account of Gandhi's life under the light of his writings by D.G. Tendulkar. However, for matters of both limits of time and space of this project I limit myself mostly to Desai, Pyarelal and Guha.

a votary of non-violence sometimes feels impelled to undertake by way of protest against some wrong done by society and this he does when he, as a votary of ahimsa, has no other remedy left” (CWMG Vol. XC, 408). This last motivation is the most relevant for this cartography, but presupposes the other ones. He summed it up with the logic of the formula of either/or: “do or die” (ibid) or as exacting “the minimum” that was “also the maximum” (Pyarelal *The Last...* Vol. II, 742). Additionally, worth noting is that Gandhi had clear rules for fasting.²⁹ Furthermore, Gandhi and his followers’ broadcasted theology and mysticism, considering God his “supreme and sole counselor” as well as an “Inner Voice” (CWMG Vol. XC, 409). For this same reason he often calls the fasts repeatedly *yajna*, often translated as “devotion” or “ritual sacrifice.” Complementary to Pyarelal’s typology in the fourth place, fasting as therapy can be added (see *Autobiography* 247, 330, 450).

To Pyarelal’s and Gandhi’s theological perspective, I aim to add a sociological approach that distinguishes between micro- and macropolitical fasts. The latter will have a central role because of their social meaning. I will also explore for each their aesthetic meaning, though the former will be left aside in this text. Yet, it is important to indicate briefly that the micropolitical fasts are significant because they are the source of the macropolitical. They were the first occasions when he practiced the social force of the ritual, as well as they were also the laboratory without which the sophisticated macropolitical ones could have never taken place. For example, Gandhi fasted as a means of redressing his son Manilal and a female member of his Ashram, who committed “sexual misconduct” in 1912 “(See Guha GBI, 459-460). He would continue to fast for this motive in the ashram, as he would practice later during the last week of November 1925 (see GYCW 275).

To fast was habitually present in Gandhi’s life. As he wrote in his *Autobiography*, it was common for Putlibai, his mother, “[t]o keep two or three consecutive fasts was nothing”

²⁹ These are a simplification of Gandhi’s ten rules for fasting as summed up by Pyarelal: (i) One fast only against someone one loves or one is “associated”. (ii) The faster presupposes “a claim upon the love and consideration of those to whom his fast is addressed.” (741) S/he should never fast against a tyrant or an enemy. (iii) One fasts not for one’s benefit but for the “good of others” (742) (iv) As “ultimate weapon” of Satyagraha, it should only be used as a “last resort”, “when all other avenues of redress have been explored and have failed.” (742); (v) To fast is a theological attitude and devotion to ahimsa, with “[i]nfinite patience, firm resolve, single-mindedness of purpose, perfect calm and no anger” (742), lead by an “inner voice” (743); (vi) The object of the fast must be clear, “definite, intelligible and feasible.” (Ibid); (vii) there shall be no room for bargaining, to the extent that “the minimum is also the maximum” (742). (viii) “The qualification for undertaking a fast as Satyagraha include knowledge of the rules for conserving one’s energy and physical and mental fitness. [see N. 80, 860, he gives nine more rules]” (743); (ix) “The terms of the fast can be varied according to the nature and physical condition of each individual, the object of the fast” (743). (x) It is a “prayerful search for the truth” (743).

(5). It was a practice he would start doing repeatedly as early as 1912 in South Africa. This aesthetic cartography will privilege and analyse two kinds of fasts, defined for their time-length and framing or “bracketing,” that reflect his social location as a political and religious leader. These are the so-called “fasts unto death” or, more precisely, *indeterminate*, and the 21-day fasts. The reason for this is the existential risk which they represented for a renowned political and religious leader, and the effect caused by the implications of such a decision in the field in which he performed — mostly in the colonial and later briefly independent Indian society.

Moreover, all these consequences require the archival possibility of carrying out this aesthetic cartography. The indefinite fasts did not take Gandhi physically to a limit or close to death as was the case for other fasts — the longest indefinite fast had a duration of five days, while he fasted for 21 days three times (in 1924, 1933 and 1943). With the exception of one, these fasts were all concentrated in the 1930s and 1940s, at the peak of Gandhi’s fame. He performed them in his old age, between his sixties and late seventies. Most of these fasts took place in British India, while the two of the most meaningful indefinite fasts took place in the few months he lived in independent India before his murder. These political fasts are almost a third of all of them — they were five indefinite ones, or eight, counting the 21 day fasts out of a total of 29.³⁰ The indefinite fasts were effective in political terms, i.e. the active role of calling to action a second and/or third party or group who arrived at the scene in order to interrupt them. It should be emphasized again, the extent to which Gandhi’s indeterminate fasts were highly successful in comparison with other people’s attempts to perform similar feats — a contemporary example is G. D. Agarwal, an ecological activist, who died in October 2018 after 111 days of not eating, aiming to exercise pressure against the unfulfilled promises of the Modi government to clean the Ganga River (see Chandra). An aim of this aesthetic cartography is to make this effectivity more comprehensible.

The first indeterminate fast took place in 1918³¹ in Ahmedabad, after some days of strike concerned with the issue of raising the wages of millworkers, he decided to fast when the mill workers stopped attending the morning meetings concerning the mutiny. They

³⁰ I follow the list done by the *Gandhi Heritage Portal* quoted in the bibliography, which is the most complete recount that I have found.

³¹ Guha does not give a more detailed time span than three days from 15th March until the 18th (see *Gandhi the... 57*).

criticized both Gandhi and Anasuyabehn (the sister of one of the mill-owners, who went against her own mill's distribution policy), claiming that they were protesting in comfort, while the mill workers were starving to death (see Desai *A Righteous Struggle* 25-26). Paternally, as usual, Gandhi wanted to prove and teach them that "a man is bound to keep to his oath at whatever cost" (ibid). He again interpreted this theologically. "The meaning of an oath is that we decide to do a particular thing with God in whom we believe as our witness" (CWMG Vol. XIV, 256). He believed that to abandon the strike was to go against themselves in unjust circumstances where duty should prevail.

The second fast occurred from the 20th to the 24th of September, 1932 (Guha GYCW, 432), and was concerned with the question of the entitlement and treatment of the Depressed Classes, or Dalits, as a separate electorate (as the Muslims and Sikhs) from part of the British government, an idea Gandhi opposed with his life. As he put it in a statement to the press, the fast was "intended to sting the Hindu conscience into right religious action" (CWMG Vol. LI, 40). He justified it as "purification and penance" (42) of the Hindus, because of the historical exploitation of the Dalits. Yet, R.B. Ambedkar, their political leader, wanted the separated electorates, arguing from a more liberal and secular position. The third fast took place in Rajkot in 1939,³² the intention being that "the Saheb of Rajkot would honour his promise to Vallabhbhai Patel, by ensuring peasant leaders majority representation in the arbitration committee." (Guha GYCW, 568) This was finally settled by the intervention by the viceroy. The fourth and the fifth fasts are usually called "the greatest fasts." The former started in September 1947,³³ briefly after independence in Calcutta. The clear objective of this fast was to pacify the violence between Hindus and Muslims. He stopped fasting four days later. The fifth and last one took place in Delhi, in a similar context, as a reaction to communal disturbances during five days.³⁴

The first 21 day fast took place in 1924³⁵ in Delhi. The motive was similar to his last two indefinite fasts. Namely, to create a common-ground relationship between Hindus and Muslims, though this one was specifically directed to the latter, for they had perpetrated

³² It began "on 3 March" 1939 and "[i]t was called off on the 7th after the viceroy personally intervened in the dispute." (Guha GYCW, 568)

³³ Specifically from the 1st of September 1947 "to 9.15 in the evening of 4th" (849).

³⁴ "The fast formally began at 11.15 a.m." (867) 13 January 1948 and "shortly after noon" (871) on the 18th it was broken.

³⁵ From 17 September 1924 until "12.30 p.m. on 9 October" (Guha GYCW, 223).

violence in Kohat (see Guha GYCW 220). Yet, it was multiply motivated, as he considered both a “penance” (Desai *Day-to...*, Vol. IV, 196) and for “self-purification” (202), to the extent that he himself felt responsible for the violence. “If I were practicing non-violence to perfection, I should not have seen the violence I see around me today. [...] I blame no one. I blame only myself” (196). The second fast took place in 1933³⁶ for “inner purity”, a call of his “Inner Voice.” It was directed against himself and performed for “purely religious” (CWMG Vol. LV, 75) motivations. Also — as will be discussed later in more detail — this one is especially interesting from a performative perspective because it started while Gandhi was held prisoner by the British government. They decided to set him free, which led to a change of stage or location. Moreover, all this implied equally the issue of “a statement announcing the temporary suspension of the civil disobedience movement for the duration of the fast” (Guha GYCW, 460) and an awareness that his religious practices couldn’t run away from their political shadow. His last three-week fast took place in 1943³⁷ in the Aga Khan Palace and was motivated by the accusation of the British government of the violence that followed the Quit India movement, in a booklet titled *Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances, 1942-3* (see 695). He again performed fasting as a purification and claimed it was “solely for service of God and His presence” (CWMG Vol. LXXVII, 69). It is the only fast in which the British colonial government appears, yet indirectly as a motivation.

3. An aesthetic cartography of the performative of Gandhi’s fasts

3. 1. Mediality: holding fast to the weapon of publicity

“Publicity is our best and perhaps the only weapon of defense” (Gandhi qtd. by Bhattacharya *Mahatma...* 3). This sentence — written to the editor of *The Times of India* in October 1896 reporting his South African campaign — evidences Gandhi’s recognition, very early in his career, of the essential significance of the newspaper as part of the armoury of his non-violent struggles in communicational-warfare. This subchapter will focus on understanding the platforms or interfaces and how they condition perception by their given frames, thus describing the field. Moreover, it will illustrate the precise cases in which Gandhi’s fasts were represented. It aims to expose the incidence of media in the fasts, as well as, from a historical point of view, show how they enable, as an archive, the possibility of restaging them

³⁶ 8 May 1933 at 12 noon until “noon on 29 May” (460).

³⁷ From February 10 to 1 March 1943 (696, 701).

discursively as this cartography does. The aspects of the relationship between actor and spectator in the event of Gandhi's fasts, the bodily co-presence and mediatized performance, as well as its ethical implications will be discussed in detail and illustrated later (see chapter 3.4. Aestheticity and the Conclusion), doubtlessly related to the mediality. The following mediums will be analysed in their aesthetic configuration: written press, images and film (newsreels and a documentary). I attempt to approach the fasts as events from multiple perspectives. The forms of discourse mediation will be analysed and their aesthetic expression prioritizing what can be understood as either contemporary documents of the event and/or what could have been reproduced massively and have an impact on it³⁸. For matters of extension, language, location, timely and research limits of my work, I rely mostly on the work of other scholars in English and German and of representative examples. The fasts have been only partially researched compared to other events of Gandhi's life, e.g. the Salt March's mediatic staging (see Driessen). Based on this evidence and thesis that do require more research, I will conjecture, from this partial academic mapping, a constructed cartography of the forms of subjection of the medial landscape in which Gandhi was produced and represented by others.

3.1.1. Press

One of the most significant testimonies of the important role the written medium played in Gandhi's life are almost one hundred volumes of his *Collected Works*, which compile thousands of letters, cables, telegrams, speeches, articles, editorials and interviews. Besides being a religious leader, a householder, a politician, and a lawyer, another calling he had was being an editor and writer³⁹. Bhattacharyya and Driessen have made a relevant chronological recount of his work as a journalist. The first text he published was during his stay between

³⁸ Radio will be marginalized both for lack of evidence of Gandhi's recordings during his fasts. It is apparently the medium in which he had less representation during his life. This has to do with the slow development of radio and the monopoly of the colonial authorities of this medium on a macropolitical scale (see Chatterji). Ambedkar, for instance, complained in 1943 for his, Gandhi's and Jina's lack of stage in this medium (see Guha GYCW, 657). Gandhi's voice was broadcasted during his life, is in the clandestine and underground *Congress Radio* in Bombay during its short three months of life in 1942. Apparently the one and only All India Radio (AIR) broadcast of Gandhi was on November 12, 1947. He used it to address refugees of the partition in Haryana during Divali (see Saxena). Many speeches at the prayer meeting, as for example of his final fast (published in CWMG Vol. XC, 417) refer AIR as a source, but without any notice of when it was broadcasted compared to the printed sources. There are voice recordings of discourses, which have been used in many posthumous radio programs. Some of them have been compiled and archived in www.gandhimedia.org.

³⁹ S. N. Bhattacharyya (1965), M.S Venkataramani and B.K. Shrivastava (1968), B. Jahn (1993), B. Driessen (2002), and T. Pratt and J. Vernon (2005) have published to my knowledge with the most relevant analyses on Gandhi's work and/or reception in the Indian and the Western journalistic field.

1888 to 1891 in the magazine *The Vegetarian*. Later in South Africa, he would publish the *Green Pamphlet*, where he documented the discrimination of the Indian immigrants from part of the British colonial authorities. From 1899-1900 he worked as a correspondent and freelance journalist for Indian newspapers in South Africa, which were also reproduced in European printed media on the struggles of Indian immigrants. Moreover, between 1903-1914 in the same country, he established, edited and financed the *Indian Opinion*, which published contents in Gujarati and English. This newspaper gave Gandhi the role of a “knowledge-broker and bridge builder” (Guha GBI, 158) and the chance to have a discursive written platform to speak on all subjects for his causes. Back in India in 1919, he became the editor of two weekly newspapers. Firstly, *Young India* became his English platform under similar lines as the *Indian Opinion* and which, for the rest of his life, except during his time in prison, carried his statements and speeches. Secondly, the magazine *Navajivan* became his Gujarati medium. He turned it from a monthly into a weekly. His *Autobiography* was, for instance, published as a serial publication for the first time. Moreover, in 1933 after a season in jail, *Young India* was discontinued and for this reason he founded *Harijan*, another weekly, which in its highest moment (1946) printed 125,000 copies in total in English, Hindi and Gujarati (GYCW 771). It is noteworthy that the Navijvan Publishing House was located in his ashram. Furthermore, he himself was not the only head of these platforms, but his son Devdas Gandhi was also the editor of the *Hindustan Times*.

In addition, Gandhi’s work as a newspaper publisher, editor and writer fundamentally transformed the Indian journalism field. As has been summarized by S. N. Bhattacharyya, he is responsible for three major contributions: “(1) coming of age of the vernacular press through his initiative; (2) encouraging publication of news and views on village and village life; and (3) opening the new vista of rural life for portrayal by contemporary authors in their novels” (“Mahatma...” 91). The written and printed medium has a protagonistic role for Gandhi’s fasts to the extent that, as indicated by the historians Pratt and Vernon in the case of Britain, they were “the major conduit through which competing understandings of Gandhi’s fast were promulgated and discussed” (93-94). This can be explained with the British censorship and state monopoly of other media, such as radio and newsreels. As will be shown, this offered as a source a one dimensional narrative made in the image and likeness of British colonial interests. Paradoxically, the discourse in this medium depended on the oral

mediation of the printed information, because during Gandhi's lifetime most of the population in India was illiterate.⁴⁰

Yet, the importance of the complex transference between the written and the oral in Gandhi's mythical construction has been researched in the historian Shahid Amin's essay "Gandhi as Mahatma." In brief, the words of one of his most intellectually bold and popular contemporary detractors, "describe how the combination of cleverly planted rumours by local Congress leaders, adulatory — and sometimes hallucinatory — newspaper reporting, a gullible people and Gandhi's extraordinary charisma built up mass hysteria which culminated in the deification of Mahatma Gandhi" (Roy 92). Fasting wasn't an exception in these stories,⁴¹ and to his deified ideal, it was one of the forms of worshiping him (see Amin 333). In the transference of his monumental *Collected Works*, the oral character is equally impressed in many forms during the fasts. This is reflected in the manuscripts of the discourses he performed in his ashram, his public speeches, for example, the one on his first macropolitical fast in 1918 to Ahmedabad mill workers, in his last fast in Delhi with a microphone or, on this same occasion, when it was delivered by Pyarelal and/or Sushila Nayar when he was too weak to speak (see Gandhi, CWMG Vol. XC, 426).

From a transnational perspective, the mythological stature Gandhi reached is clearly represented by Barbara Driessen's analysis of the Western reception of Gandhi's Salt March as a precedent of modern mediatic staging.⁴² This is evident both in the range of the coverage of the event as well as its ambivalent reception subject to the interests of the medium.⁴³ In the

⁴⁰ For example, "[i]n 1941, the overall literacy rate in India was 16.1 percent." (Neyazi N. 4, 29)

⁴¹ For instance, Amin reports the story of the wife of a Brahmin that refuses to give a blanket to a betel-leaf grower, he had after a darshan of Gandhi. During the morning the rumor was that she suffered a rain of shit, that only "[i]n the end, when she kept a fast, not even touching water for a day and night and did *aradhana* (ritual praying) of the Mahatma, did peace finally return to her." (Amin 319)

⁴² She characterizes the modern mediatic staging in the following way: [The episode-like character of the long planned 'events', the adequately photographic and cinematic scenes, the self-stylization from the main actor with a partly actoral mise en scène, his charisma in the media and his enduring role as a freedom fighter and saint in the private sphere - with all this, Gandhi was ahead of his time.] "Der episodenhafte Charakter des von langer Hand geplanten 'Events', die foto- und kinogerechten Szenen, die Selbststilisierung des Hauptakteurs mit teilweise durchaus schauspielerischem Einsatz, sein Mediencharisma und die bis ins Privatleben durchgehaltene Rolle des Volksbefreiers und Heiligen - mit all dem war Gandhi seiner Zeit voraus." (293-294)

⁴³ For example consider his reception and diffusion of Gandhi as a saint in Western newspapers: [For the *Time Magazine* he was henceforth only saint Gandhi. The *Washington Post* affirmed that people in the US compared him with Jesus Christ. The catholic *Tijd* from the Netherlands compared him with John the Baptist. And the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* described Gandhi as a man, who had reached a high level of perfection in his process to godly enlightenment. (...) The *Berliner Tageblatt* wrote about 'the last world crusade'. For it onwards, the Salt March was an 'historical crusade against England.'] "Für das Time Magazine war er fortan nur noch saint Gandhi. Die Washington Post stellte fest, dass sogar schon Leute in den USA ihn mit Jesus Christus

same line, and supportive of the action on a more political note, were, according to Driessen (292), most of the newspapers in the US and in Germany, which sided with the Indian independence from the British Empire. Equally visible was the action in the British and Anglo-Indian press detractors, as well as in the conservative newspapers from the Netherlands, who feared similar events in their colonies.⁴⁴

The press was useful also in his political-religious projects, to the extent that he could call for ostracism and excommunication. Some meaningful examples have been brought into consideration by the biographer R. Guha in *Indian Opinion* in South Africa. As an illustration, he calls on the case of H.O. Ally, a colleague of Gandhi who was “brought [...] to his knees” (GBI 244). Ally had betrayed him to the British authorities, intending to divide Hindu hawkers and Muslim merchants in Gandhi’s boycott campaign against Indians registering with the government. Gandhi’s newspaper “had printed the names of the renegades in Pretoria who had ‘applied for the title-deed of slavery’” (Ibid). Moreover, *Indian Opinion* was further implemented in this policy. “The tactics of Gandhi’s own newspaper certainly helped here, for it now published two lists each week, one of new to subscribers, the other Indian who had taken out permits — lists of loyalists and traitors respectively” (252). He would do this similarly at the end of the 1920s, when he published his mistakes and those of his associates before any other platform did so (the latter mistakes, which he considered his own). As was the case with his cousin Chhaganlal Gandhi, who robbed the Udyoga Mandir Ashram and his wife Kasturba, as well as keeping some hundred rupees and ignoring the vote of poverty she had taken as a member of the ashram.

I now return to hunger and fasting in the media. From a historical point of view, as put by J. Vernon in *Hunger: A Modern History* (2007), starving “became effective as a weapon of political protest only in the early twentieth century, after humanitarian considerations had established that starving to death was unnatural, immoral, and inhumane”

verglichen. Die katholische *Tijd* aus der Niederlanden verglich ihn mit Johannes dem Täufer. Und der *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* beschrieb Gandhi als einen Menschen, der einen hohen Grad von Vollkommenheit erreicht hat in seiner Entwicklung zu göttlicher Erleuchtung. [...] Das Berliner Tageblatt schrieb über das ‘letzte Ritterstück der Welt.’ Für den Vorwärts war der Salzmarsch ein ‘historischer Kreuzzug gegen England.’ (Driessen 290)

⁴⁴ For example, they [cursed Gandhi as Congress-dictator (Morning Post), as fanatic leader (Daily Mail) or pathetic looking creature (Times)] “beschimpften Gandhi als Kongress-Diktator (Morning Post), fanastischen Anführer (Daily Mail) oder mickrig aussehende Kreatur (Daily Mirror)” (291), even his struggle for independence as “terroristische Bewegung [(Times)]” (269).

(64). The development of narrative and journalistic techniques of aesthetic visualization of hunger were essential, as was the case of the “new journalism” at the end of the 19th century in Britain. Some of these were, for example, “eyewitness reports, carefully individuated stories, a focus on the suffering of women and children, reportage allowing the hungry to speak for themselves, photographs of starving bodies” (39). These new forms of mass communication gave the hunger strike and fasting an emotionally powerful transference system, starting with the Russian peasants, then extending to the suffragettes, the Irish hunger strikers and finally with Gandhi, which would reach a global audience for the first time. Important roles in the journalistic field were developed, such as the “special correspondent” who was in charge of “championing the underdog and bringing the techniques of the new journalism to the traditional organs of the liberal press” (24).

Another particular feature of Gandhi’s journalism and newspapers was its strictly propagandistic function. In order to ideologically align the *Indian Opinion*, he started excluding commercial advertising (see Bhattacharyya *Mahatma...*, 116-118). Room in the paper was left only for what he considered morally correct, like the *khadi* or inventions that he thought made the life of the people better. This policy would be strictly applied to *Young India* and *Navijan*. Yet, as indicated by Driessen, “[h]e considered decisive facts, which spoke for themselves: ‘Propaganda is obviously essential. But naked propaganda is equally so short-lived as a soap bubble. Actually the most efficient propaganda is purely constructive work’”⁴⁵ (Gandhi, “Propaganda v. Construction” in *Harijan* 01.04.1933 quoted. by Driessen, my translation). He not only published his perspectives, but he often published the statements of his detractors, for instance, his discussions with Ambedkar.

Newspapers and in general the printed medium, pamphlets and leaflets were central for reaching a wider audience during his macropolitical fasts. He wrote constantly, even in prison, a press statement where he declared the motives, as well as keeping an intense correspondence that often was quoted or read aloud. The practice of writing was constant during his fasts (see Desai *Day-to...*, Vol. IV, 221, Pyarelal *The Epic...* 47, *The Final...* Vol. II, 419), which only decreased subject to the fatigue of fasting, when his secretary had to “take the weight,” “appeal,” write and edit the articles or jot down his letters and thoughts he

⁴⁵ “Für entscheidend hielt er Taten, die für sich selbst sprachen: ‘Propaganda ist natürlich essentiell. Aber bloße Propaganda ist genauso kurzlebig wie eine Seifenblase. In Wirklichkeit liegt die effizienteste Propaganda in rein konstruktiver Arbeit.’”

dictated while lying in his “fiery bed” (Pyarelal *The Epic...*, 50). These texts informed his process during the fasts, as has been indicated in the previous chapter. Moreover, he often got journalists to interview him before, during, and after the fasts. Important here too was the communication of his decision by means of letters, cables and telegrams to his most powerful allies (for example: the tycoon G. D. Birla, the literature Nobel Prize laureates R. Rolland and R. Tagore, or other politicians like Nehru, etc.) to ensure his voice be broadcast as far as possible. As in the case of the 1932 fast for the “purification of Hinduism” with respect to the Depressed Classes, he stated “I will write as many as I can” (CWMG Vol 57, 62). That was, with Desai’s help and following the *Collected Works*, around 60 letters in two days. The mediatic staging of the fasts has been clearly portrayed by the historians Pratt and Vernon in the case of those of 1932 and 1943, as well as their wide and ambivalent reception in the British media. The first one was of major importance because it was after the Salt March, which made the rest of Gandhi’s and the colonial government’s life a mediatic struggle. As put by a biographer, Gandhi’s mediatic following and visibility were so problematic for the colonial authorities since the 1932 fast that they exercised a minucious control over the prison’s environment with regard to its reception.⁴⁶

3.1.2. Photography

One of the medial paradoxes of Gandhi was that, despite being one of the most photographed men of the twentieth century, he despised being photographed and renounced to keep any photograph of himself.⁴⁷ This is especially ambivalent considering the fact that people still often hang a photo of him in the *darshan* (sight of the deity or guru) tradition as a saint in their homes and that countless books have been and keep being published that bring together his photographs. Undoubtedly, this has to do with the instrumental character that photography played and the conflict of interests between Gandhi and the British newspapers. This fact is analysed by Pratt and Vernon in the case of the indefinite fast of 1932 and the 21 day fast of 1943, the “only two that were substantially reported in Britain” (Pratt and Vernon 97). With respect to the 1932 fast, “[g]reat attention was therefore paid by colonial officials to controlling his environment in prison and publicizing those conditions to the press” (97). Moreover, there was an “almost complete absence of photographic representations of his

⁴⁶ “In 1932 at Yeravda Gaol Gandhi was allowed exercise, his own diet (including luxury foodstuffs) [for his entourage?] and medics, correspondence and reading material, as well as facilities for spinning.” (Brown 62)

⁴⁷ See Trivedi 210 and Driessen 156-157.

emaciated body from the British press” (103), in spite of the structural trend of publishing photographs as part of the newspapers. The exceptions and the visual focalization of these images is worth noting. First, they are pictures not of the fast but rather of other public appearances of Gandhi, as in the *Daily Express* where he appeared “relaxing aboard the SS Rajputana during his passage to England for the Round Table Conference of 1931” (104). Furthermore, when he appeared, he did in framed headshots portrait images that excluded his emaciated body. This visual omission aimed to hide what, since the second half of the 19th century in the West, has been considered “the ultimate [journalistic] way to humanize hunger” (Vernon 33). Moreover, on the few occasions where he was visually represented, the forms used were “cartoons which rendered it [his emaciated body] ridiculous” (Pratt and Vernon 104). These forms of visual representation contrast harshly with the existing photographs of the fasts, where he appears lying, often in a bed (see figure 1 and 2⁴⁸), covered with a woolen blanket or shawl, or sitting. Some interesting notions of how Gandhi submitted to being photographed have been recorded by Peter R  he.⁴⁹ “Mahatma Gandhi agreed to be photographed by Kanu Gandhi [his grand nephew], on the condition that no flash would be used, he would not finance it and he would not pose” (R  he). He often appears as an agonizing starving old man, with a toothless smile (as during the 21 day fast in 1933, see figure 2), surrounded by a few of his adepts and other politicians, as a dying elder of a family. The distance of the perspective in which these photographs show him in terms of proxemics vary between “Personal--Far Phase” (Hall 120) and “Social Distance--Close Phase” (121). This means that these framings give him a public status (figure 1), as well as the closeness of a social environment, and in the closest ones even the proximity reserved for close acquaintances (see figure 2). What is more, the distance of these pictures makes his facial expression visible, as well as his body. Both these framings, as well as the homely, domestic stage, for instance of the Birla house, make the atmosphere intimate and familiar (as in both figures 1 and 2). This atmosphere captured in the perspective of the photographs, as will be

⁴⁸ For these and all the other images, see the illustrations after the bibliography.

⁴⁹ He leads the GandhiServe foundation in Germany, and who inherited from Kanu, the nephew of Gandhi and has made them accessible in the www.gandhimedia.org. He reports that Kanu was his personal photographer from 1936 until his death: “Kanu Gandhi was encouraged to take photographs of Mahatma Gandhi by Shivaji Bhawe (an associate of Mahatma Gandhi). Following this Ghanshyam Das Birla (an industrialist and associate of Mahatma Gandhi), gave Kanu one hundred rupees to buy his first camera and film [...] Kanu Gandhi covered his expenses by selling some images to the newspapers [...] With his camera Kanu Gandhi was the only one allowed to take Gandhi's photograph at any time.” (R  he)

explored in more detail in the following chapter, was not only limited to the Birla House but also took place in his fasts in prisons.

3.1.3. Newsreels

Interesting to note is Gandhi's visibility in foreign newsreels within and outside of India. The newsreel had a wider audience than the international press outside the country.⁵⁰ The newsreel combined "the power of the moving image with forceful music (from the cinema organ) and later off-voiced sonorous comments, the newsreels became a crucial source of information-cum-entertainment to the ever-growing cinema audiences, both in dedicated newsreel cinemas and as a starter before the main feature film in 'normal' cinemas" (Frasch 145). In the case of India, this medium gained visibility in 1941, when the British authorities reinforced war propaganda in the subcontinent. This was the result of the implementation of government mobile cinema vans, "independent mobile cinemas, cinemas provided by the Army, and in the princely states, the audience seeing the newsreels was far greater than just those in permanent cinemas" (Woods 96). As summed up by the same author, the effectiveness of these newsreels for communicating information to the citizens, forming a sense of national identity and unity was limited for the following reasons: First, they did not fit the Indian cinema programme; secondly, they didn't go well with the Indian audience for both their foreign themes and the language difficulties; thirdly, the English cinema "catered primarily for Britons and for the Indian educated elite" (94). Moreover, the colonial government preferred to rely on foreign established newsreel companies, instead of producing their own.⁵¹ There were topical films covering national events, but because of the censorship, "individual productions [...] could not be described as newsreels" (91). This fact made them short-lived and confined to particular areas. However, the field changed in September 1943 when the Act Rule 44-A was implemented. It required that every cinema of British India exhibit propaganda films approved by the government. For this purpose, the government took "full control of production and distribution of the newsreel from Twentieth

⁵⁰ The importance of this form has been emphasized by Tilman in the specific case of the Pathé company in Britain: "Newsreels were potentially influential sources of information and opinion-making as they combined the power of the image (and later sound) with an extremely wide outreach—even the smallest of the newsreel companies had a larger audience than Britain's biggest daily newspaper, the *Daily Mail*." (Frasch 156)

⁵¹ "The standard western newsreel companies had been established in India since before the First World War, and five of them exported newsreels to India at one time or another: British Movietone News, British Paramount News, Gaumont British News, Universal News and Pathe News. [...] they were seen as a useful adjunct of feature film programmes and a valuable means of keeping the company's name before the cinema audience." (Woods 91)

Century Fox Corporation and renamed it *Indian News Parade*” (Woods 101). This boosted the Indian newsreel production.

Gandhi was one of the rare exceptions of politically sensitive news presented in this medium. There are newsreels with interviews and reports of his arrival to London for the Round Table Conference in 1931 and the Salt March, which couldn't be dodged by the British authorities. Some of them are still accessible. But from the fasts, I had access to only one recording.⁵² That is, an episode of the *Pathé News* on his fast for the unity of Hinduism and his position against the separate electorates for the Dalits (Untouchables) represented by B.R. Ambedkar in 1932.⁵³ The newsreel is titled, “GANDHI FAST BRINGS NEW INDIA CRISIS!” (0:01-11). It is also accompanied by the following Editor's Note: “These pictures show the frail Hindu leader whose self-imposed hunger strike has stirred millions. Upon his actions hinges the peace of far-off India” (0:16-20). The pictures do not show Gandhi during the fast, but illustrate “how frail the little Hindu leader was when he began his fast” (0:23-0:27). Noteworthy is how the discourse of the British authorities portray him as “weak,” “frail,” and “little.” From a proxemics perspective, he is framed from a “public distance—far phase” (Hall 124). A framing distance used for shaping the perspective from which public figures and politicians are often gazed upon, a distance that implies unapproachability, to the extent that the details of facial expression and movement are lost. His posture changes from standing to sitting, but the cinematic portrayal avoids Gandhi's most emblematic posture during the fast. That is, lying in bed. The further meaning of this subtle posture will be illustrated in the following chapter. This is reinforced by the context too, in the open air. Moreover, he appears in one shot to be actively walking, in communal meetings speaking. His image is interchanged with shots of the masses, sometimes praying, sometimes in revolt. Instead of using images of his emaciated body, which could catalyze compassion (as the British newspapers actively abstained to do), in their rendering his scrawny body was visually contrasted with the masses and discursively fashioned as a weakling. Furthermore, he never speaks. His ideas and intentions are always transmitted by

⁵² I'm aware of the existence of two more, both from the *British Movietone News*, the no. 973 on the fast of 1948 and the other, the no. 954A, from the Calcutta fast of 1947. They are described textually in the *Colonial Film* webpage and the British Film Institute National Archive, but they lack the film material. Also regarding the fast of 1943 there might be some footage in the *Indian News Parade* No. 62 (19/5/1944), it reported Gandhi's release from the incarceration in Agha Khan's palace. A synopsis “based on commentary sheets” (*Colonial Film*) yet not seen reports it: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/6013> (accessed 03.04.2019)

⁵³ The newsreel can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKiC4nPNVqE> (accessed 03.05.2019)

the reported speech of the British narrator. Finally, after this visual and discursive fashioning during 45 seconds, the final half of the newsreel ends with the “British view” of Frederick Sykes, governor of Bombay. He states that “the real voice of the people is behind the [British colonial] government at present, established by law” (1:09-15). The music is another relevant element that corresponds to the visual and discursive legitimizing maneuver previously described. The two compositions appear as a prelude to the appearance of Gandhi and to the one of Sykes. A calm and comic tone is ascribed to the former, while a celebratory march to the appearance of the latter. The newsreel has all the characteristics of the British colonial propaganda.

3.1.4. Film documentary

Mahatma Gandhi: Twentieth Century Prophet is the oldest documentary on the so-called “Father of the [Indian] Nation.” It was first shot and produced by the Tamil writer and journalist A.K. Chettiar around 1940 and 1941,⁵⁴ but apparently was only screened in 1947 and later re-edited and extended in 1953 in the US (see Subramanian). It was not until 2005 that a copy was found at two universities in the US. It was recently digitized and is now accessible. I include it here, because it evidences how Gandhi was presented during his time from a different perspective, even if my knowledge of its reception is uncertain. The documentary attests that some scenes are completely missing. Specifically, “periods in jail, some of his fasts — missing partly because they could not be taken or were unavailable” (Part-1 (1/4)⁵⁵, 0:59). There is a small scene that is five seconds long (Part-1(2/3)⁵⁶, 0:06-14), in which the narrator is telling of how Gandhi was arrested in 1922 and wrote his *Autobiography*, “sending a message of peace, not of violence” (0:09-0:11). This discourse is superimposed onto the images of a reel that show Gandhi during his last fast in Delhi in 1948, which show that the scene was probably added to the 1953 cut, and was not part of the one of 1940-1941. This is manifest when comparing the scene with one of Henri Cartier-Bresson’s photographs, which has exactly the same framing and the same people in it (see Figure 1). Here, as in the photos, the propagandistic discursive tools of the British productions are put to the service, not to belittle Gandhi’s action but to develop a filmic hagiography. This scene

⁵⁴ There is not much reliable literature on the documentary, according to Subramanian’s quoted article is from 1940, according to another in 1941 (see *The Economic Times*).

⁵⁵ Part 1 (1/4): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nyxi6hePitQ> (accessed 03.05.2019)

⁵⁶ Part 1 (2/3): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPGbtn3sZC> (accessed 03.06.2019)

shows, on the one hand, the illustrative function of the visual. On the other, it displays an evident historical anachronism between the time of the narration and the visual image on which the discourse is superimposed.

The second fast in the documentary is reported with a newspaper title that states: “Gandhiji to fast at Rajkot” (Part-2 2/5⁵⁷, 7:59), referring to the fast of 1939. Here again the authority of the newspaper appears as a source and part of the documentary. Moreover, there is no footage, the event is transmitted orally and directly screens a discourse of Jawaharlal Nehru legitimizing the fast as a “success” (08:03-32). Nehru’s discourse is practically inaudible. After some seconds, the US-American narrator comes back in while intercalating Nehru’s and the crowd’s image, saying, “...and the crowd listening had come to understand Gandhi’s fast. What could a man offer more valuable than his life? Fasting was then the last resort, in the place of the sword, the sword breeds hate, self-suffering revitalizes the good in the wrong-doing, rather than evil. But always if used for good, never as blackmail” (8:29-56). In this case, what’s remarkable is the dialogic phenomenon that it implies. The religious narrator appears to be contesting the way British detractors spoke, and still speak, of Gandhi’s fasts in terms of “blackmail” (for the British press see Vernon and Pratt 110, for the viceroy see Guha GYCW, 696 and for a contemporary rehash of this discourse see Roy 125). The audiovisual testimony that the film offers is a scene from his final fast (Part-2 4/5⁵⁸, 6:17-29), first the corporeal gesture of lying in bed, then breaking the fast with a sip of juice. The documentary’s discourse is hagiographic narrating the path to martyrdom close to his murder, “save the Mahatma!” (6:30-31). This narrative actively omits others, as the ones enunciated by other actors in Delhi’s storming communal violence. For example, the Hindu nationalists of RSS volunteers who “shouted at the top of their voices, [...] ‘Let the old man die’” (Guha GYCW, 869). The reel shows him lying on a bed and then taking a sip of juice after fasting, surrounded by young women, and politicians in the homely and intimate atmosphere of the Birla house, again in a very similar framing to Cartier-Bresson’s photographs of the fast. Music, like in the Pathé Newsreel, does not make the stark contrasts between the comic and the martial, but rather makes the documentary more sentimental. with screeching violins.

⁵⁷ Part 2, (2/5): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fMxXOdjVehM> (accessed 06.05.2019)

⁵⁸ Part 2, 4/5: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NlsAppjFTdE> (accessed 06.05.2019)

To sum up, in the analysed images and words of newspapers, newsreels and documentary, two forms of subjectivity are textually, visually and cinematically canalized: an imperial British propaganda and a hagiographic narrative of the fast as martyrdom. Central to this are Gandhi's own publications, which served him as a medium to reach his audience and as a counterweight to British propaganda. Sympathizing newspapers in other parts of the world probably served this function, too. Photography taken from these worldviews use a similar ideologic language. Newsreels covering the fasts were tools of British interests, while the analysed documentary, and probably other self-produced and clandestine products in a micropolitical context, might have shown similar hagiographic stylization of Gandhi.

3.2. The materiality of Gandhi's fasts

3.2.1. Corporeality

3.2.1.1. Dressed with ideas

In the 2018 Colombian presidential elections, Gustavo Petro, the candidate of the left, was the protagonist of controversy in the media because of his shoes. The discussion circled around the fact that they were from the Italian Ferragamo brand and their price range oscillates between 600 and 1200 dollars (see Borda). Petro does bottom up politics, yet his dressing *habitus* shows that he might be willing to wear ties and suits, and die in debt, like Ambedkar did (see Roy 140). Gandhi's process was different: he did politics from the top down, which implied adopting different practices that created a lifestyle, which produced a different form of judgement and identification. Ambedkar was educated in London and the US, and he militated liberal ideas for the well-being of the oppressed Dalits and abolishing the caste system. In a similar fashion, Gandhi parted from a different vector, first as a British-educated lawyer, then in the tradition of the male *bhakti* saint — appropriating the words of an Indian poet and scholar, he renounced “pride, privilege, and wealth” and sought “dishonour and self-abasement, and [to] learn from the untouchable devotee” (Ramanujan 271). This would become evident in the uniform he adopted. As his ideas changed, so did his clothes.

Gandhi's *Autobiography* is filled with reflections on his dressing *habitus*. Like any Indian that travelled to be educated as a lawyer in London at the end of the 19th century,

there was a moment of his life when his ideas had an asymmetrical relationship with the way he dressed. During this process, he swung back and forth between feeling abhorrence and delight, as he used, for instance, a necktie and a short jacket. He felt ashamed of being the only person in white clothes as he arrived for the first time to London (see *An Autobiography* 41, 43). Since then, the “punctiliousness in dress persisted for years” (51), and, as demonstrated by the archive, for his whole life. Dress as a form of distinction is something he recalls during his arrival to Natal. “My dress marked me out from other Indians. I had a frock-coat and a turban, an imitation of the Bengal *pugree*” (105). This is most clearly captured in the motif of the turban in his book, which was often banned from different colonial institutions, such as the court. He also adopted a Parsi dress code for his family because they were “then regarded as the most progressive people in India” (Guha GBI, 107). He would soon submit his dress-code knowledge to the service of his macropolitical interests. In an article in the *Indian Opinion*, he encouraged his fellow Indians to dress well (see 230) as a strategy to deal with the prejudices of colonial authorities. His acute eye for the political, symbolic and strategic function of clothes impregnates his life, but the point of inflection was perhaps at the end of 1913, when he had already made the vow of *brahmacharya*. As part of his rite of passage, he would change his outfit again. As put by Guha, “In jail, Gandhi had shaved his head and chosen to wear white. His feet were bare, speaking to a crowd of 5,000 assembled at the Durban racecourse, Gandhi said he had changed his dress when he heard of the police firing on Indian strikers [...]. Henceforth, he would dress like an indentured labourer” (494).

It is also significant that this micropolitical gesture and habit would be elevated to a macropolitical or national scale. The historian B. S. Cohn has described Gandhi’s later use of the dress-code as an appropriation of the Bengal *swadeshi* (meaning “of and for one’s own land”) movement that aimed at “the development and use of indigenously produced goods through a boycott of European manufacturers” (Cohn 147). This would later become another vow for the satyagrahis and members of his ashram. It “requires the use of simple clothing made on simple handlooms and stitched in simple style, foreign button, cuts, etc., being avoided” (Gandhi *The Essential...* 108).

The literature scholar H. Trivedi has given a detailed historical description of Gandhi’s dress code, some time later:

After launching, in August 1921, a campaign for the boycott and burning of foreign cloth, Gandhi begins, on 21 September, to dress like one of the poor masses of India, with *the torso bare and a dhoti going down not to the ankles (as it normally does) but only to the knees*, and often he wears only a *langoti*, a loincloth –*the bare minimum* (if that’s the phrase) that one could wear in public. He never alters or compromises this dress beyond wrapping the upper half of his body in cold weather in a white woollen chadar or shawl. (Trivedi 211, my emphasis)

Many of the features indicated by Trivedi’s description correspond to the photographs of the fasts. Gandhi’s dress-code is relevant for the fasting, in the sense that, as Trivedi’s description clearly captures, it visibilizes his body (see my emphasis). His dhoti and loincloth are a *habitus*, which in Gandhi’s case makes it indiscernible from a way of life. This fact is emphasized by the medial representations or abstention of visual representation as I have indicated in the case of the (absence of) photographs.

Gandhi’s uniform not only confines itself to dress as the poor masses of India did, but, at the same time, it appeals to another imaginary. The philosopher G. Agamben’s characterization of the Christian monks’ *habitus* is transferable to Gandhi in broad terms. It is a way of dressing used as an indicator of a way of life subtracted from the force of law and a symbol of virtue (see *The Highest Poverty*). Moreover, his dress-code appeals at the same time to the archetype of the Brahmin renouncer. The few possessions of the renouncer correspond with Gandhi’s dress, with the exception of his glasses and sandals —as expressed in the mantras of the *Naradaparivrajaka*: “Waistband, the support of the loincloth, OM! / Loincloth, the cover of the private parts, OM! / Garment, the sole guardian of the body, protecting against cold wind, and heat OM!” (qtd. by Olivelle “Introduction”, 97)⁵⁹. Moreover, Gandhi’s age during his most radical fasts was over fifty, and extended to his eighties, another fact that corresponds approximately with the last of the Brahmin life stages, the renouncer (*asrama*).

3.2.1.2. Embodying ideas

Perhaps the most striking visual difference between Gandhi and other politicians of his time is his body, especially when considered in contrast to Mao, Stalin, de Gaulle, Mussolini, Hitler and the political opponent who undoubtedly hated him with the most passionate

⁵⁹ Even if not relevant in the case of the fasts, the iconic “staff” of the Salt March is an additional symbol of the Brahmin renouncer.

intensity, Winston Churchill. The *Morning Post* during the Round Table Conference and Gandhi's visit to London published a cartoon by J. Reynolds titled *Change of Garb* (see Figure 3), which illustrated this discrepancy with a thought provoking inversion. Gandhi appears in a suit, while Churchill only with a dhoti and an umbrella. The cartoon, however, does not do justice to Churchill's belly as captured in contemporary photos. It reveals a clear asymmetry between his dewlap and his protruding paunch, which makes it, as usual, not a faithful portrayal of Churchill's body, but rather reflective of the British cartoonist's ideological image of the naked torso of the politician, which uses a graeco-roman torso instead of the prominent belly.⁶⁰ In Gandhi's case, if it wasn't for the written text and one had only the image to go on, he would become unrecognizable to the popular eye.

If I have already referred to dress or props that somehow characterize Gandhi and his fasts, his body and how it was shaped by this particular practice is central for an aesthetic analysis. As Olson has put it, in reference to the sociological distinctive meaning of fasting in the Jain and Hindu ascetic body, it "enables them to create their own bodies in particular ways that distinguish them from ordinary members of society by means of practicing their regimen of discipline" (6). Three of these practices have been mentioned in more detail in chapter 2.1, i.e. celibacy (or *brahmacharya*), a rigorous diet in his own fashion and fasting as a regular practice.

These practices are incorporated vividly in certain visual stylizations that gain a symbolic social value and identity. One is Gandhi's use of hair, eliminating it and presenting himself as completely shaven, as he did as early as 1913, as indicated in the previous section. In the words of an indologist in the case of renouncers, their shaved heads, as in Gandhi's case, is often associated and operates as a symbol of recognition of "holy men and teachers" (Olivelle *Ascetics...*, 121). Moreover, the shaved head and face is a symbol of "universally accepted celibacy" (122). Different literary as well as visual portrayals previously shown (see Figure 2 and 4) of Gandhi emphasize other evident features of a body used to practice and

⁶⁰ It mirrors perfectly the discourse of another contemporary British newspaper: [When one compares a close-up shot of Gandhi with the portraits of the great politicians of the West, or with heroes from the antiquity like Julius Caesar or modern men like Cromer, Curzon or Mussolini, the difference is evident. It's obvious that Gandhi has a mingy appearance...] "Wenn man eine Nahaufnahme von Gandhi mit Porträts der großen Politiker der westlichen Welt vergleicht, etwa mit antiken Helden wie Julius Caesar oder modernen Männern wie Cromer, Curzon oder Mussolini, fällt einem ein bemerkenswerter Unterschied auf. Es wird deutlich, dass Gandhi eine mickrig aussehende Kreatur ist..." (*Daily Mirror* 10.04.1930 qtd. by Driessen 270, my translation)

train in fasting. For instance, calling him an “emaciated little man” (Huxley qtd. by Guha *Gandhi the...* 237); recalling “his thin child’s legs” (the Rome correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* qtd. by Guha GYCW, 416) or, as one of his close political associates crudely described him, “as a little, scrawny, half-starved, self-denying man” (Dwarkanadas qtd. by Devji 1). Finally, in the words of the doctor’s bulletin during the 1932 fast, he “has no reserve fat and he is living on muscle” (Pyarelal *The Epic...*, 76).

Another relevant aspect of Gandhi’s corporeality during the fasts is the position or posture of his body. First *sitting*, then, as time went on *lying down*, recumbent, became the most significant corporal posture of Gandhi’s fasts. This was a position he never deviated from, except on the occasions when he used the bathroom. Elias Canetti wrote a remarkable description of the symbolic meaning of these postures, which is helpful in analyzing Gandhi’s gestures of sitting and supine position, in terms of what we can call *silent* or *non-verbal communication*. Sitting on the ground, or on a bed, as Gandhi appears more often in the visual and narrative portrayals of the fasts, is characterized by Canetti in the following way, specifically in the oriental tradition, cross-legged or lotus position. He contrasts it with sitting on a chair, often with four legs, which recalls sitting on a fellow-creature. Both the beggar and the rich man sit crossed-legged. No matter what happens, it references an absence of worldly needs, and therefore is the archetypal posture of Eastern contemplation and meditation. It is the exertion of his body’s visible pressure reposed in himself, free from the world, burdening no-one, a symbol of autonomy and self-sufficiency. The posture of *lying down* is like sleeping, to the extent that it is its most lengthy practice, as it’s a defenceless, recurrent and prolonged state of rest. To lie on a surface means to be disarmed and it is the position of the sick, the injured and the wounded. It’s the least dramatic state, or better, the posture of the end of action or repose, where the body takes place extending itself at its full length, the body relies and supports distributing its weight in maximum contact with another material body that supports it — in comparison to other corporal gestures, such as standing or sitting.⁶¹

Gandhi appears mostly *lying* on a bed in the photographs of the fasts. This is evidenced not only in the photographs of 1939 and the final fast, as shown previously, but

⁶¹ See the chapter “Aspekte der Macht: Von Stellungen des Menschen: Was sie an Macht enthalten” in *Masse und Macht*.

also in the hagio- and biographical accounts. He fashioned himself in the bed as the locus of fasting, he called it his “appeal from this fiery bed” (Pyarelal *The Epic...* 50). As his first secretary’s diary repeats during the 1924 three week fast, as the days go by without food, “He finds it a little difficult even to sit up on his bed for the morning prayer” (Desai *Day...* Vol. IV, 202), “it has become impossible to sit upright for the prayers” (202). After two weeks, he kept “lying all the day” (203). The place where he spent most of the time was a bed, as often mentioned by biographical recounts.⁶² However, ‘lying’ as a gesture is exemplary of Gandhi’s paradoxical approach to power, which consists of making strengths out of weaknesses and the ability to de-subjectify the perception of common-place and ordinary gestures to resignify them. Perhaps the most radical body expression in his corporal posture during the fast is the move from standing up — following Canetti, the posture of confidence, self-sufficiency, or corporal hierarchy and verticality — to fainting — unconsciously falling or being enforced by another to fall — to the posture of lying down, being recumbent. As put by Pyarelal, “the other day he had fainted in my arms while getting out of his bathtub after dictating to me his statement ” (Pyarelal *The Final...* Vol. II, 728). This happened, even more dramatically in the middle of a speech during his final fast, as reported by the editors of the *Collected Works*: “Here Gandhiji broke down due to exhaustion” (Vol. XC, N. 2 445).

The gesture of the dissolution of Gandhi’s body in the collective is particularly well-illustrated by his entourage *doing for* Gandhi, as portrayed by the previous quotation, with Pyarelal holding Gandhi in his fall and *standing in for* his legs. Noteworthy is the exponentially decreasing movement and increasing caretaking and dependency on others for his ordinary activities. At the beginning, he can write and work with the spinning wheel. As time goes by, Pyarelal’s hands *write for* Gandhi’s and the latter is interrupted. Moreover, in some cases, as in the 1932 fast, musicians are brought to prison to *sing for* him. He has a barber shave him and receives a massage from his wife Kasturba as well from other friends (see Pyarelal *The Epic...* 45). During the second day of the fast “he walked from his bed to the bathroom everytime that he had to visit” (44). The following day, he was given the privilege “to have his own nurses” (44) and after that, “he had to take the support of the nurses” (44) to move and be washed by them. Again, the nurses *stand in for* his legs. Reporting the 21-day fast of 1924, Pyarelal records that he “needed constant nursing in the

⁶² See *The Epic Fast* 43, 44 and *The Last Phase* Vol. II, 422-423; CWMG Vol. XC, N.1 435.

night time, [...] he had to be helped everytime that he wanted even to turn his side” (45). Another illustrative example of when others become his corporal prosthesis during the fast is the case with his so-called “walking sticks” (see Mahurkahr), his nieces Manu and Abha Gandhi, who helped him by serving as his crutches to move during his last fast, as in one of the photos published in *The Daily Mail* (see Figure 5). The picture can be complemented by Pyarelal’s narrative, “He was too weak to walk to the prayer round in the evening” (*The Last... Vol. II, 715*). Further, his ability to write was subject to the help of his secretaries M. Desai, Pyarelal. Even in the case of his voice for use in the prayers or his speeches, as represented in the accounts of his final fast, Pyarelal and Sushila Nayyar had the need to become his mouth, *to speak for* him to the audience (see CWMG Vol. XC, N.1 445).

Gandhi’s body in pain during the fast enables a narrative of martyrdom *for the other*, and perhaps no narrative lays so much stress on this as his detailed “medical bulletins.” In 1932 he felt “excruciating aches” (Pyarelal *The Epic...43*) and he had a “feeling of nausea” (75). In 1943, “[h]e was extremely exhausted, and suffered from restlessness, headache, nausea and salivation.” Later, he was described as being “feeble and weak” (Sushila Nayyar qtd. by Guha GYCW 700), and “lay listless with closed eyes” (698). His discourse of self-restraint, self-control and self-government is never brought to more paradoxical and dramatic expression than during the fasts. At no other point in his life did the inversions between the discourse of the “spiritual” and the “flesh” appear as asymmetrically vertical as they did during his fasts. His spiritual self-control over his body lead to its functional unruliness. As put by his secretary in 1947, “The terrific mental strain had given him acute diarrhoea” (Pyarelal *The Last... Vol. II, 407*). “Acetone bodies have appeared in the urine,” and “the kidney was failing” (714). In 1932, he vomited (see 75 *The Epic...*). He fasted up to the point of delirium and was unable to control his urinary functions. “It seems he had been feeling very bad in the latter part of the evening, and had been asking in a delirium to be removed to his bed when he was in it already. The doctors were very worried over continued incontinence of urine” (*The Last... Vol. II, 728*).

3.2.1.3. A speech in whispers

The time-space relationship of Gandhi’s embodied emaciation is most acutely captured in the gesture of the modulation of his voice. The historical accounts of his active hunger emphasize repeatedly the pitch of his voice. For example, in Pyarelal’s narrative of the 1932 fast he

states, “[h]is voice during the outpouring scarcely rose above a whisper” (Pyarelal *The Epic...*, 71). In an interview with *The Bombay Chronicle* of the 21-day fast in 1943, he states, “he asked me in a whisper”, “he began speaking in whispers” (qtd. in CWMG Vol. LXXVII, 65) and “he was making a great effort to speak” (Ibid). The accounts of his followers in the same fast place the voice in the foreground: “Bapuji murmured...” (Mirabehn qtd. CWMG Vol. LLXXVII, N.3 69) or, “The voice sank to a whisper” (Nayar qtd. by Guha GYCW 698). In 1948, “Gandhiji was so weak that his voice was hardly audible” (CWMG Vol. XC, N.1 445). On the third day, it’s stated that “[t]he voice is feeble” (Pyarelal *The Last...* Vol. II, 714). The whisper or murmur described as the modality of Gandhi’s voice during the fasts seizes the character of spatial proximity and closeness, it implies the intimacy of confidentiality, the implicit trust that characterize his fasts. Moreover, it apprehends the indeterminate character of Gandhi’s presence as weak, gentle, yet insinuating, placed on the threshold between being and not being, his voice is in the inbetween of silence and speech.

Noticeable in the spatiality of Gandhi’s fasts is how the architectural space of the performance was extended mediatically and technologically. We have seen this not only in newspapers and written messages, but also in different forms of transmission and amplification of oral discourse. This feature is clearly portrayed in the way that he spoke to the audience by means of loudspeakers and a microphone. The microphone is something that is often emphasized in Pyarelal’s narration. Starting on the third evening, because of his weakness, “[a] microphone was consequently brought to him into his room and placed alongside his bed so that he could speak directly into it from where he was” (*The Last...* Vol. II, 715; he would continue to use this medium: see 720, 732). The amplification of the microphone and speakers extends the murmuring and modulates the voice in whispers, giving it a new aesthetic character comparable to what the film theoretician M. Chion has called the *visualized acousmetre*. It is the voice of a character in a film that has left the visual field, temporarily invisible but is still present as a voice. Furthermore, this voice is characterized as “more familiar and reassuring — even though in the dark regions of the acousmatic field, which surrounds the visible field, this kind can acquire by contagion some of the powers of the complete acousmetre” (21). Specifically in Gandhi’s case, these powers are ubiquity, omniscience — as previously shown medially — and omnipotence — as evidenced in his political effectivity. His voice as acousmetre is initially perceived through the use of a

microphone and its amplification of the soft, extinguishing voice. However, it can be extended metaphorically to understand the voice during the fasts in terms of the mediatic staging. This is especially true in the final fast, in which he prayed and gave speeches in front of a massive audience. As put by the editors of the *Collected Works*, “Over four thousand men and women” (Gandhi, CWMG Vol. XC, N.1 438) assembled. Gandhi’s discourse modulated in whispers should be understood as *to con-spire* — understood in its etymological sense, as *to breath with* —, the mode of intimacy, the confidentiality of private communication. The power of the paradox of his murmur, as the voice of his fast, can be identified in what A. LaBelle has called the invitation to closeness of whispering in his lexicon of the oral imaginary. This is, “in the logic of spirit contact, or in the desire for self-transformation” (149), the “erotic power of the intimate” (148); “a voicing that explicitly migrates away from semantics and toward [...] spirit communion [...] and enticement” (153).

3.2.2. Space and time

3.2.2.1. Temporality: Assisting the loved one in need or the endurance test

The psycho-affective pressure exercised by Gandhi’s indefinite fasts on the groups he addressed is comparable with the one felt by a family member who rushes to the hospital with a wounded or dying beloved patriarch. The fast subjected others to the dramatic — understood etymologically as action — time of having a loved one in physical agony, while having the agency to liberate him of his corporeal malady. It appeared to be a self-incorporated time bomb, subject to be dismantled by others who had to find their way in the intricate ways of social codifications and configurations. In the case of the 21-day fasts, perhaps the most accurate metaphor is an endurance test. From this temporal perspective, Gandhi shares common ground with artists and fairground attractions. As in Martin Seel’s definition of *mise en scène*. This is an intentionally effected process, performed by means of highly controlled acting skills. It is presented in front or made accessible medially to an audience. Further, it is a spatially visible or perceivable event, and has a given spatial and timely character, which defines its internal unity with a beginning and an ending. It is arbitrarily, complexly and conspicuously arranged. The time frame of the fasts, as has been evidenced in chapter 2.2., is fundamental for understanding the existential and dramatic tension they imply. Without their enduring temporal length or indetermination, the political meaning of the macropolitical fasts would be nullified.

3.2.2.2. Spatiality: At home in jail and as a prisoner in mansions

From a spatial point of view, Fischer-Lichte names three main strategies of aesthetic performance to intensify the performativity and dramatic character of space. One is of great significance for analysing Gandhi's fasts. That is, "the experimentation with given spaces usually fulfilling other purposes" (*The Transformative...* 110). The meaning of Gandhi's fasts and their mediatic exposure has been enriched by this semantic configuration of the fast with the given stage. When he had the opportunity, he chose carefully where to perform them. When he decided to fast, it corresponded meaningfully with the spaces where he was obligated to be by others, as will be shown here.

A recurrent topos, as well as the location of Gandhi's fasts is the jail — in 1922, 1932, 1933 and the special case of 1943. This is only one of the three institutional domains in which self-starvation achieves its most historically pronounced presence in the West (see Anderson 3). But the transfiguration this place undergoes alongside Gandhi's fasts is, as will be shown, exceptional. As we have seen, he fasted in 1932 indeterminately and in 1933 for 21 days in prison. I will focus on former fast in the Yeravada prison, for which there is more material available. Apparently, the first day of the fast was spent as an ordinary day for a prisoner in a cell. On the second morning, according to Pyarelal:

he was removed to a special segregated yard. There, under the thick shade of a low mango tree, on a white iron cot on which was spread a jail mattress and a jail bedsheet, he remained for the greater part of the day. [...] Around the cot were placed a number of chairs for visitors. Near the cot, on one side, was a stool on which was to be found a rum collection of odds and ends, books, papers, writing material, bottles of water, sodabcarb and salt. (*The Epic...* 43)

Many things are outstanding in this description, the first of which is the privileged segregation in a separate yard, the organization and disposition of the cot as a stage surrounded by chairs for visitors, as well as those granted access to these. In the second place, the mango tree, which evokes inter-visual and -textual cross reference to one of the most common representations in Buddhist iconography, the bodhi tree. the mango tree makes the suggestion more subtle. Moreover, the last sentence of the quoted description is what one could call, together with R. Campe, Gandhi's *Schreibszene* (scene of writing), as well as the only "food" he would allow himself during the fast, the sodabcarb and salt. However, it's

remarkable to note that this privileged stage, as evidenced by historical sources, was the result of the “[g]reat attention [...] paid by colonial officials to controlling his environment in prison and publicizing those conditions to the press (while also ensuring that no photographs of a fasting Gandhi were available)” (Pratt & Vernon 97). This punctilious attention to the stage would be fully squandered by the colonialist government later, in the case of the 21-day fast in the Aga Khan palace. Yet, equally significant is Gandhi and his party’s narrative and performative appropriation of these circumstances.

These spatial dispositions of Gandhi’s fasts are proof of his power, which becomes evident in comparison with the conditions of other hunger strikers more vulnerable to the brutality of the British authorities. Pyarelal’s account and description of the conditions of Gandhi’s fast contrast strikingly with the most brutal counterexamples in similar circumstances. For instance, the suffragettes two decades earlier, who were subject to the practice of force-feeding, or more accurately, as termed by one of its subjects, “oral rape.” In their case, this took place “handcuffed, thrown into dark, damp punishment cells, frog-marched, beaten and bruised” (Miller 49). While in the case of the suffragette, one gets a grim and nightmarish atmosphere and a naked use of violence. Pyarelal’s hagiographic portrayal of the prison-made-home that Gandhi’s family and friends could visit, on the contrary, resignifies the location. In Kasturba, his comforting wife was there to massage him, or other nurses also brought other prisons, like Mrs. Naidu who “constituted herself [as] his bodyguard. She mothered him throughout the fast and stood sentry over him from morning till evening, exercising a mother’s and nurse’s prescriptive right to ‘tyrannize’ over her ward and the entire household” (Pyarelal *The Epic...*, 43). Moreover, the stage gave place to a cosmic narrative in which Gandhi’s fast is comparable with the stage of meditative enlightenment of the Buddha. In the hagiographical words of Pyarelal, “At night, exhausted by the day’s strain he would retire to sleep under the canopy of heaven, contemplating the various burning stars and constellations” (48).

The most paradoxical fast in jail was in the Aga Khan palace. It was, as its names suggests, a palace made into a prison by the British. Here more than ever, the poet Sarojini Naidu’s statement is clearly embodied and staged in Gandhi: “He was determined to live his life as an ascetic [...] it cost the [colonial] nation a fortune to keep Gandhi living in poverty”

(qtd. paraphrased by Rushdie “Mohandas...”).⁶³ The British prepared years in advance a mediatic spectacle for the 21-day fast that took place in 1923, as documented by Pratt and Vernon:

as early as December 1940 it had been decided to detain Gandhi in the Aga Khan’s palace outside Poona rather than at Yeravda. A journalist and photographer had already been commissioned to compile a press release on Gandhi’s potential residence, for, as Tottenham foresaw, ‘it may be most desirable for us to be able to describe the comfortable conditions in which he is living, especially for propaganda in America and other places abroad.’ (106).

As documented by Guha (GYCW 675-676), the palace was obtained in 1941 for a rent of 12,000 rupees a year by the Bombay government and the Viceroy, complete with jailers, soldiers, a doctor and twelve gardeners. Moreover, the colonizers equipped the Agha Khan with a telephone and altered the building for Gandhi’s possible detention. It probably ended up being the most luxurious place where he lived, with nine bedrooms, a drawing room, and seventy acres of ground.

This was a state policy developed in reaction to the 21-day fast of 1933. In this case, his status as a convict was changed and he was released from Yerwada prison as the gesture of the British government washing their hands clean in case he died during the fast. He moved to the “Poona residence of Lady Thackersey, whose mansion, ‘Parnakuti’, was on a hill overlooking the Yerwada prison” (460). This fast, alongside the 21day one of 1924, were the first luxurious scenarios that functioned as stages provided by his wealthy friends, as sovereign stages under a liberal regime that he, in his own fashion acknowledged as legitimate.⁶⁴ The 1924 stage had an added value, as it conjugated his intention and its symbolic meaning with regards to the Hindu-Muslim tension in Kohat. While specifically addressing the Muslims, the main perpetrators of violence, he opted to perform it. As put by one his biographers, “[w]ith his usual talent for choosing the significant symbolic gesture, he

⁶³ Roy has reinforced a similar irony but referring to Gandhi’s *swadeshi*: “So the Mahatma who promoted homespun khadi and the wooden charkha was sponsored by a mill-owner. The man who raged against the machine was kept afloat by industrialists.” (89)

⁶⁴ Gandhi’s alliances with the powerful, even keeping his praise of poverty in mind should not be surprising. His ideas of “trusteeship” of the economically powerful is, as actualized to today’s entrepreneurial jargon by Roy, very close to the notion of “Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)” (90). What is more, as Devji has pointed out with respect to Gandhi’s relationship with the empire: “Indeed Gandhi’s celebrated loyalty to the empire should be taken seriously precisely because he saw in it the possibility of liberalism’s universality” (*The Impossible...* 76) and what I would say with him too, many passages of Guha’s biography manages to make him a “liberal icon” (“Gandhi 1914...”).

proposed that he should live with the Muslim Chief Minister [Mohammad Ali], whom Hindus held responsible for the continuing disturbances in the city” (Brown 378).

Along this very similar line was his 1947 indeterminate fast for religious unity and against communal violence in Calcutta. When he decided to fast, he openly chose to stay in Beliaghata, “a Muslim locality rather than a Hindu one” (Guha GYCW 838). According to the editors of the *Collected Works*, this was a “riot-affected area where, on arrival, [he] faced angry demonstration by Hindus” (CWMG LXXXIX, 528). But the Hydari Mansion, the abandoned home of a Muslim merchant, where he stayed, presented very different conditions than the other mansions where he fasted. The following describes this:

[It was] an indescribably filthy locality, had hastily been cleaned up for Gandhiji's residence. It was a ramshackle building open on all sides to the crowds. Before many days all the glass in the windows was smashed. There was only one latrine and it was used indiscriminately by hundreds of people, including the police on duty, the visitors and even the darshan-seeking crowd. Owing to the rains there was mud and slush. It stank. To drown the stink, bleaching powder was sprinkled liberally all over the place, which made one's head reel. (Pyarelal *The Last...* Vol. II, 365)⁶⁵

The mansion had a room for him, “[a]nother had been set apart for his luggage, the members of his party, and the guests. A third served as his office” (365).

The location and stage of his final fast in 1948 was the house of the magnate and associate G.D. Birla in Delhi, today a museum. Gandhi's choice when heading to Delhi was to stay in the Bhangi Colony, a Dalit locality. This came about differently, as he explains. “Instead of the Harijan colony, where it was a pleasure to stay, I was taken to the palatial Birla House. I was greatly pained to know the reason for this [...] because refugees have been accommodated in the Harijan colony” (CWMG Vol. XXXIX, 168). As described by Guha, “Birla's family moved to the upper storey, allowing Gandhi and his party the exclusive use of the ground floor” (GYCW 851). Similarly, however this time at a much larger scale, a stage was built: “Birla had erected a platform on the lawn for Gandhi to speak from, equipped with microphones and loudspeakers” (Ibid). The frontal, fourth-walled stage was designed, as reported by Pyarelal, “for his *darshan*. His cot was, therefore, taken out on the verandah from where he could be seen by people outside” (*The Last...* Vol. II, 715).

⁶⁵ Guha cites Manu Gandhi to describe this mansion, she gives a similar description with the emphasis on the shabiness. (see GYCW 837-838)

As has been shown, the material stylization of the fasts was perceived not only like dress-code as a sign of social distinction and uniform to Gandhi's ideas, but also as a body formed by practices. These were expressed most radically in the fast's paradoxical and productive nature, to the extent of its changing conditions. In this, self control, the negative potency and the will of abstaining to eat subjected the body to a horizontal posture, as well as to a decreased activity of his normal practices. Similarly, Gandhi's presence and actions take place by a prosthetic substitution by others in these practices (bathing himself, speaking, walking, etc.). Moreover, time subject to a process of bodily consumption is pushed from the lethargy of political bureaucracy to the rush of a most basic of need — this point will be further developed in chapter 3.4.1. Space, too, was re-signified by the fasts, in that what appeared initially as a jail is transformed into a home, and the space of material comfort and well-being of a castle or mansion acquired the character of corporal agony.

3.3. Semioticity

3.3.1. Gandhi's presence in representation

A *symbolon* in ancient Greece was understood as a sign of recognition, the complementary missing half of the whole of a social relation. At the departure of a friend, the host broke in two a small tablet, and each friend kept a piece as a representative sign of recognition, so that they or their descendants could identify the return of a presence that had been long absent (see Paulsen and Rehn N. 50, 88). As mapped in the previous subchapters, Gandhi's power staged itself by means of effective discursive communication, communal organization, a sophisticated network of representation and how he, his followers and opponents inscribed his "author function"⁶⁶ in a semiotic order. This semiotic inscription took multiple forms — textual, visual and cinematic representations — as charted in chapter 3.1. It showed Gandhi and his entourage's ability to reproduce strong forms of medial presence. These forms transform his fast in a space-building symbolic order that territorializes other spaces. To locate

⁶⁶ Foucault defined the function in the following way, but in Gandhi's case as seen in the visual representations, perhaps not only referring to him in a textual but also visual form would be necessary: "It performs a certain role with regard to narrative discourse, assuming a classificatory function. Such a name permits one to group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from and contrast them to others [...] the fact that several texts have been placed under the same name indicates that there has been established among them a relationship of homogeneity, filiation, authentication of some texts by the use of others, reciprocal explication or concomitant utilization. The author's name serves to characterize a certain mode of being of discourse." (Foucault "What is...", 210-211).

more clearly how these processes of (de-)territorialization happened, it will be necessary to see the complex way presence and representation are configured aesthetically in the archival traces of Gandhi's fasts.

To complement and widen the meaning of medial analysis presented in chapter 3.1., Fischer-Lichte offers two meaningful concepts that help in understanding the processes of perception: *presence* and *representation*. Each imply different forms of perception or aesthesis.⁶⁷ In terms of presence, she distinguishes three forms: Firstly, she refers the *weak concept of presence* as “the contemporary time [Gegenwärtigkeit] given by the sheer presence of the actors' phenomenal body” (94, altered trans.). Secondly, she confers a *strong concept of presence*, which is “the power emanating from the actor that forces them [the spectators] to focus their full attention on him without feeling overwhelmed and perceive it as a source of energy [...] the actor's ability of commanding space and holding attention” (96). In the third place is the *radical concept of presence*, which suppresses the dichotomy of body vs. mind, leading her to describe it as “embodied mind” (Fischer-Lichte *The Trans...*, 99), phenomenologically expressed. “Through the performer's presence, the spectator experiences the performer and himself as embodied mind in a constant process of becoming” (ibid). Fischer-Lichte relates *presence* and *representation* through perception.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Rancière speaks of *aisthesis* in terms of “a way of being which is affected by it [*poiesis*, a way of doing]” (*Aesthetics and...* 7), “a sensible nature” (7), “receptive faculty” (12).

⁶⁸ To distinguish between them, the theoretician refers to two “orders of perception”, one for each. On the one hand, the *order of presence* means, in theatrical terms, “[t]o perceive the actor's body in his bodily being-in-the-world” (148), or his phenomenal body and being on stage. Moreover, it is comprehended “as meanings that constitute reality [Wirklichkeit konstituierende Bedeutungen]” (149, my altered trans.) or as someone in the process of constitution of its meaning. This presupposes a chain of associative meanings not necessarily related to what is perceived and therefore, a high rate of unpredictability and unforeseeability. On the other hand, the *order of representation* apprehends an actor, a given body that “signifying a character establishes another” (148), in other words it denotes, reflects on and creates a character in “a fictive world or a symbolic sphere” (149) or order. In brief, a semiotic body. Furthermore, it implies an intentionality, a purpose, a selection and privileging of elements to give life to the character and the exclusion of the ones that aren't meaningful for its construction. The grey zone between both indicates an ambivalence: on the one hand a tendency — subject to her examples of aesthetic performances — to produce strong emotions, but on the other hand, she also indicates noteworthy historical exceptions. She recalls that the order of presence tends — following her example and historical time — to produce “meanings as sensations and emotions that are articulated physically and can be perceived by others as physiological, affective, energetic and motor reactions” (149). On the contrary, the tendency in the case of the order of representation inclines to “stimulate thoughts, ideas, and emotions which are articulated internally but hardly ever grow to a point at which they overwhelm expectators, allowing them to a certain distance to what they perceived” (149). A third case she refers to, is the one of a “perceptual multistability” or a condition of “betwixt and between” (148) which is typical of the aesthetic performance. This means that the “perceiving subject's attention focuses on the transitions themselves and notices the disruption of stability, the state of instability, and finally the establishment of a new stability.” (149) The attention is focalized on the shifts of the dynamics of the perceptual process itself, not privileging a given regime of perception but the awareness of its shifting orders.

To apply these notions of presence and representation and their mediation through perception to Gandhi's fasts, I consider it important to understand them not only in terms of the presence of the body — as Fischer Lichte does⁶⁹ —, but also the medial transference of this presence by means of artefacts and their political consequences. In Haraway's terms, to attempt such an analysis, the body must be understood as a “networking techno-organic-textual-mythic system” (Haraway 219). The theoretical challenge has to do with the way in which the medial complexity of Gandhi's fasts imply focalizing the threshold between what the theater scholar calls “live performance” and “mediatized performance” (Fischer-Lichte *The Transformative...*, 68). The former is “constituted by the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators,” the latter by the medial severance of the “co-existence of production and reception” (ibid), which cancels the feedback loop between actors and spectators. In Gandhi's case, the feedback loop was not interrupted. On the contrary, as will be shown in chapter 3.4.1., in the relationship between the religious-political leader (actor) and the masses, the mediated, attenuated forms of presence or representation triggered a feedback loop. The challenge of reading the feedback loop emerges again with respect to political representation, where a person substitutes and stands symbolically for a group or an imaginary collective, and not simply for a specific person or a character. Moreover, how this representation affects a given political status quo or state of exception. Here, the power of presence is subject to the sanctioned social conventions and legitimized medial platforms of communication.

To sharpen the theater scholar's categories and make them useful beyond the theater, the art gallery or a given aesthetic community and to translate them to a macropolitical event, they need a political reformulation. To attempt this reformulation of the notions of *presence* and *representation*, I find it meaningful to complement them with the work of three other thinkers. Firstly, I will synthesize them with Gayatri Spivak's interpretation of political *representation* in Marx.⁷⁰ Secondly, I will relate and invert them in terms of their shared

⁶⁹ She considers that technical and electronic media are “opposed to generating presence” (*The Trans...* 100) and reduces their effects to one of them, “aesthetic appearance”, “immaterializing performers' actual physicality and disembodying them” (ibid). Which is a possible, perhaps the tendency in our times, but not the only form of presence-transference carried out by media.

⁷⁰ Spivak indicates Marx's distinction in German between representation as *Vertretung* and *Darstellung* — often simplified ambiguously in the English translation as “representation”. The former is understood as “[r]epresentation as ‘speaking for,’ as in politics” (Spivak “Can the...”, 275), which implies being “a ‘bearer’ [... s]he who appears to work in another's interest” (276), it connotes “substitution” (ibid) of a political or social subject. While *Darstellung* means “representation as ‘re-representation’, as in art and philosophy” (275), in other words, as a tool of rhetoric, “as persuasion” (276). Furthermore, as implied in Spivak's analysis, *darstellen*

character as perceptual or aesthetic regimes, according to Jacques Rancière's *regimes of identification of art*.⁷¹ In brief, I seek to understand *politics as aesthetics*. To pursue this reformulation, I understand presence as a priori of re-presentation — as its etymology connotes. H. U. Gumbrecht has given a relevant definition of presence. He speaks of a “moment of intensity” (*Production of...* 98), in which there is a conjunction. It is an event of sudden focus and, following Bakhtin, “insularity” of a quantitative excess (intensity) and a temporal fragmentation (moment). Both presence and representation are part of the same semantic field. I will argue, following Fischer-Lichte's gradation of intensity, that they are differentiated by degrees. They are only distinguished in terms of their respective gradual shifts in perceptual intensity and their mediation, which is subject to material inscriptions and social sanctions that enable a given decodification. Formulated in literary jargon, a socially legitimized *suspension of disbelief* typically endorsed by certifications or entitlements ascribed by institutions. I will redefine the theater scholar's gradual distinction between *radical*, *strong* and *weak* forms of presence with Spivak's and Rancière's notions.⁷²

I will use these categories to refer to corporal and phenomenal *presence* as “radical.” This implies that the presence unmediated physically by another being, or any virtual or semiotic platform, and that a body-mind relationship is coupled, free from any space-time dislocation — as Fischer-Lichte puts it in terms of a perceived “embodied mind.” This is the characteristic feature of attending an aesthetic performance. As an event, its meaning is configured in a way such that materiality, signifier, and signified coincide (*The Trans...* 141). This means that what happens in the event allows it to be perceived as meaningful. To put it in a non Saussurean sense, but following Deleuze and Guatari's notion of “double articulation,” in the aesthetic performance, as in political action, words or semiotic designations are articulated with the materiality and spatiality on a pragmatic level (see note

has the power of dislocating the social subject and his consciousness or voice, whereas *vertreten*, if it can perform this dislocation, it carries the socio-political consequences of this form of representation.

⁷¹ For matters of space and complexity, I won't attempt a summary of Rancière's regimes, but refer to the sources I adapt and incorporate in my notions of presence and representation, his books: *The Politics of Aesthetics*, *Aesthetics and its Discontents* and Martinez Mateo's chapter “4.3 Rancière: Ästhetische Kritik der Repräsentation” of her *Politik der Repräsentation*.

⁷² A similar distinction and analysis has been made by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht in his books *Production of Presence* (2004) and *Präsenz* (2012). His notions of *presence*, *representation*, and *re-presentation* share similarities to Fischer-Lichte's gradation and to my revision and expansion — and take some features of his definition of the first. However, his emphasis is focalized in a Heideggerian history of Western metaphysics and the academic field of the humanities, moreover, the political component that I'm including does not have a protagonic role, which is essential for my analysis.

4). These actions produce a given perception, “which precludes the question of other possible meanings, functions, or usages, or also of other framing contexts for the phenomena’s emergence” (141). This, in brief, makes the event a phenomenon of self-referentiality in which both actors and spectators are caught in a feedback loop of a reality constituting the event.

What’s more, it has a high rate of unpredictability and unforeseeability subject to an ample diversity of associated meanings in real-time. Expressed in deconstructive terms, it’s a presence that suppresses the mediation of *différance*. Its political consequence is self-affirming and self-relying, and has material and social consequences. In terms of Rancière, it has the characteristic feature of the *ethical regime* to the extent that its presence is no perception of “art as such but instead [images expressions] that are judged in terms of their intrinsic truth and of their impact on the ways of being of individuals and of the collectivity” (*Aesthetics and...* 28). This radical presence is the primary source of the other two mediated forms of presence or representation. Nevertheless, it is always subject to and in tension with a given ethical regime. It challenges and transforms it repeatedly with emerging dilemmas and aporias. Following the Greek example at the beginning of this subchapter, it’s the event of being in affect and of affecting another, of you having met someone who has become your friend or an old friend you are meeting again. A friend that belongs to another world, and, considering you both are going your separate ways, you take a tablet and break it in two as a sign of common experience. Attesting the radical presence would mean to be back again with her, the moment after reuniting the two pieces of the tablet, or before taking and breaking one.

Gandhi’s radical or phenomenal body presence emerged in the here-and-now, in the *Jetztzeit* of his performance to the people around him, like his family, the jailers and all the people that made the pilgrimage to visit him either in one of the mansions-turned-jails or prisons-made-homes, as described in chapter 3.2.2. The main feature of this action as radical presence is body emaciation, understood in its etymological sense — as “cause to lose flesh.” As illustrated in 3.2.1.2, the gesture of this decorporealization is performed from very basic gestures, as in the movement from sitting to lying, or more abruptly moving, in certain occasions, from the verticality of standing to the horizontality of lying. This disembodiment takes place slowly in his practices (writing, giving a speech, etc.), to losing his control over his body, from his posture to his body fluids (vomit, urine). This control gradually loses

presence with the passage of time during the fasts, and, as in the final ones, moves inversely to Gandhi's political aims enacted by spectators made actors.

In the second place, "strong" presence as representation of a body understood as substitution (*Vertretung*) or delegation, one speaks *for* another, either corporally or by means of a semiotic or virtual platform. The strong presence radiates in the body of the delegate or the material platform or artifact of representation. This mediation implies a risk of body-mind *dis-sociation* and falsification of the speaker, yet this is a highly controlled risk because of its correspondence to socially and politically sanctioned policies and conventions. These policies define both a normative social *distribution of the sensible* in terms of forms of inclusion and exclusion, of parceling out the places and forms of participation, or "what can be said, thought, made, or done" (Rockhill 85). The platform or the subject that stands for another is socially and politically legitimized, therefore, tends to be perceived as reliable imitations of socially sanctioned truths. Appropriating and adapting Rancières terms, it relates to a *representative regime*, to the extent to which it creates clearly legitimized imitations that can exercise a notion of substitution or delegation following a mimetic logic.⁷³ They are safeguarded and policed by conventions that are awarded to certain positions, interests and forms of identity by a given collectivity. This substitution marks the paradox and dialectic nature of the division of the *represented political subject* that any form of representation implies.⁷⁴ They manage to get a new material status, be it a personal substitution by another person, a written or visual document that gives them a different social ontological status, subject to the sanctioned conventions of legitimated social fields dominated by institutions. Following the Greek metaphor, you would hand in your piece of the broken tablet, and tell the story of your friendship to your daughter, being carried by a tradition of the encounter in order to produce meaning. If you would inherit such a tablet from your father, the inert fragment of stone and this narrative would have the latent power to bridge two generations, two families acquainted with the story and with a material testimony. The strong presence of the tablet appears in this light as a sign that is much more than a broken fragment of a stone,

⁷³ "Ein Bild ist darin eine legitime und eigenständige Form der Wirklichkeit, insofern es etwas 'abbildet', das heißt ein Verhältnis zur Realität herstellt, das nach nachvollziehbaren Regeln der Nachahmung funktioniert." (Martínez Mateo 273)

⁷⁴ In the words of Martínez Mateo: "Das repräsentierte Subjekt muss mit Beginn des Repräsentationsverhältnisses einerseits vorausgesetzt, andererseits in seiner Eigenständigkeit negiert werden und kann nur als gespaltenes gedacht werden." (24)

it is the potential symbol that has the power — embedded in the right context — to make out of a foreigner, an old friend.

This strong presence or strong representation can effectively substitute another by embodying the ideas of the subject of representation as shown in chapter 3.2., by symbolic dress or a body formed and represented by its ascetic practices. It can also be perceived in semiotic reconfigurations in other material platforms, still framed in the time of the performance (*Aufführung*) — as in newspapers or the testimony of someone that could reach another to affect and transform it, or the material described in chapter 3.1. (texts, images, films), but perceived in its present time of production, not in a historical time by means of its traces — as is our case. As I have shown, the de-corporalization during the fast, by means of the strong presence, suffers a re-embodiment by different members of Gandhi's entourage. This is the case of Pyarelal and his nieces that help him stand, to his secretaries as his substitute editors of his weeklies, the journalists coming to interview him to write and publish his words, not only substituting as prostheses of his body, but also of his voice, his texts and his discourse. From the capacity to wash himself to be bathed and nursed by others, or even to be accommodated by others in his bed when trying to sleep. As examples of strong forms of presence or representation are Sushila and Pyarelal Nayar *speaking for Gandhi* during his speeches or his prayers. The strong presence takes place as they substituted his voice with their own, yet conserved his discourse. Likewise, a similar form of representation is performed by the witnesses that listened to his speeches and prayers, and later transmitted orally his discourse during the fasts. In medial forms, this strong presence emanates from his statements printed or broadcasted in sanctioned channels identified legitimate or truthful, such as the press, his letters, cables, telegrams or interviews that deployed the different documents attributed to his “author function” and his religious-political discourse, as presented in chapter 2.2.

Thirdly, a repeatedly semiotic or/and virtually mediated representation (*Darstellung*) is understood as a “weak” presence. It is considered such because its emerging appearance gives it the paradoxical status of autonomy, a status of re-representation of both past radical and symbolically strong presences of socially sanctioned representative conventions. Yet the weak presence is embedded and configured in a given social order. Fiction illustrates well the status of this presence or re-representation. Its weakness is its virtue and power, as, in Spivak's words on literature, it has the capacity to exercise a perceptual “ethical discontinuity

shaken up in a simulacrum” (“Ethics and...” 23). Expressed medially, the visibility of its socially ordained transference defines its status, to the point that it makes “Kunst ohne Repräsentation” [art without representation] (Rancière qtd. by Martínez Mateo n. 163, 281), that paradoxically is performed in the “Bühne des kollektiven Lebens” [stage of the collective life] (ibid). It is like the strong presence, to the extent it is embedded semiotically in a different material body, often a medial platform or a material artefact. However, social sanctions locate it differently and ascribe it an autonomous simulacra status or a state of “insularity.” Therefore, here more than in any of the previous examples is the body-mind *dissociation* more strongly perceived and socially sanctioned, there is a salient time-space dislocation between the object of representation, the enunciating, producing sociopolitical and material subject, and the virtual-semiotic materiality of her consciousness or intention.⁷⁵ All this connotes, like in the case of the radical presence, a tendency toward unpredictability and the unforeseeable. In the words of Spivak’s Aristotelian interpretation of literature, this field enables the reader “to produce the probable rather than account for what has been possible” (“Ethics...” 23). The paradoxical character of this weak presence and its tendency to aporias derive from the location that these institutions as labs perform thought and performative experiments.

These weak forms of presence or representation can be illustrated with the framing or focalization of their discourse now, with historical distance surrounding the texts, images and films, as well as the oral testimonies transmitted by people, as shown in section 3.1. Our perception is in a socially sanctioned historical time or in a fictional social location. Following the Greek metaphor, it’s half of a tablet enclosed in a glass case you look at in the Neues Museum of Berlin, that is itself embedded in the historical narrative given by the institution. It’s a foreign practice of a dead culture, which yet, with some thought, can still have a practical role, as the illustrative character it has come to play in this text. This aesthetic cartography has this status and, in relation to Gandhi, is located on the threshold, the common ground between history and fiction, on the ground where a given story appears far, insular, and foreign from the writing and reading of the subject’s own experience. The perception of the historical distance makes what once was perceived as radical, corporeal, phenomenal presence appear as the weak trace of something that once was perceived as self-evidently

⁷⁵ Rancière calls it “distance of representation” (*Aisthesis* 18) or “representative distance” (20); Gumbrecht refers to this aesthetic experience as “a situational and temporal insularity” (*The Production...* 126).

actual. To that point, the meaning of these traces appears in a curious state of distance to everyday life situations, randomness and mere chance and lack of self-evidence.

The three kinds of presence and representation are useful as an orientation, but not absolute. Their reach depends on the subjective condition of the beholder. As Fischer-Lichte and Rancière acknowledge, representation implies an affected form of presence and even the weakest presence has the power to effectuate material and corporal effects. This possibility derives from both an ethical and perceptual disjunctions that might enable and trigger what Quintana, following Rancière, calls *de-subjection*: “a moment of reconfiguration, of qualitative transformation” (234, N. 46):

routines here are not reiterated in order to be altered in the reiteration, but disassembled from the start. They are twisted and altered, suspending themselves rather than reiterating themselves, thus, giving rise to a discordance between the elements of routine activity: a non-concordance between gaze and arms, between activity and expected object, and between maximum effort and functional productivity. (226-227)

The process of de-subjection is different from other forms of political action, such as resistance, transgression and parodic reiteration (see 226). This form implies a crosshatch of the meaning of subjection in its aporetic nature, and not simply the sublimation of one of the notions indicated by Foucault, namely, “subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self knowledge [...] a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to” (“The Subject...” 331). It is neither resistance as the denial of a border, nor a transgression overstepping the limit of control, nor an appropriation and inversion of the subjecting code of conduct. It’s more complex, in fact. It means assuming the control and dependence related to another person or social order by means of the process of self-knowledge to conserve the tension of interrelationality and the dependency of the heteronomy of subjection, to experience a moment of paradoxical relationality. For example, being at home in a jail and a prisoner in a mansion, giving a speech in whispers, to lose control of one’s own body to give life and unity to an imagined body politic in the process of its self-destruction.

3.3.2 Gandhi’s body as a representation of the body-politic

“The loss of Mahatma Gandhi’s life would mean the loss of India’s soul, because he is the embodiment of India’s spiritual power” (Nehru qtd. by Pyarelal 715). As this quote evidences, the final fasts can be understood as an embodiment of the falling apart

body-politic of India. What is remarkable in this religious metaphor during the fasts is the extent to which the power of the metaphysical or “spiritual” discourse is performed materially by the slow self-consumption of flesh of a subject’s body that substitutes the imaginary body-politic of a country. Gandhi’s body takes the place of an imagined political collectivity, a country that is being dismembered by identitary religious collectives (Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs) and which configure themselves in the same logic. In other words, both the civil war and Gandhi’s fast show how different symbolic collectives by means of performative acts reach a material and existential realization and destruction.

Fischer-Lichte refers to G. Vattimo’s notion of “aesthetic communities” to describe the groups that emerge in a performance, i.e., “short-lived transient theatrical communities of actors and spectators” (Fischer-Lichte *The...* 55) that build a temporary social reality. To which extent a given event of an aesthetic community, which operates at a micropolitical level, can be elevated to a macropolitical scale, is shown in Gandhi’s final fasts, elevated symbolically to the body and identity of a nation. This will be shown medially by the intersection of what Fischer-Lichte calls “the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators” and “mediatized performances”(68) in the next chapter. In this rare case, the “mediatized performance,” rather than “sever the co-existence of production and reception” (68), triggered and validated the feedback loop, as will be shown beyond the micropolitic of the aesthetic community to the macropolitics of a city/nation.

Here the distinction between Gandhi’s fasts and aesthetic performance as such, with its crosshatched meanings as stagings (*Aufführung*) and realization or execution (*Ausführung*), are more aporetic. Fischer-Lichte describes the emergence of meaning as “inexplicable and unmotivated. In this context, the associative generation of meaning strikingly differs from an intentional process of interpretation”(143). As we have seen in the case of Gandhi’s fasts, this is a strongly distinctive fact, because of their teleologies, as presented in chapter 2.2. However, both the religious discourse as well as the conditions in which some fasts were performed — being a prisoner or performed during waves of communal violence, often in a strategic symbolic location in the city, yet where his life was in danger⁷⁶ — make the inexplicability and uncertainty of its effects as events that *produced*

⁷⁶ Consider for instance in Gandhi’s words reporting the fast of 1947 in Calcutta, before fasting and intending to stop violence in the street: “A brick aimed at me hurt a Muslim friend standing by. The two girls would not leave me and held on to me to the last. [...] the police had to use tear gas to disperse the crowd” (CWMG Vol. 89, 130).

the possible rather than accounting for what had been possible. To show this in more detail, the cartography will proceed to the last sphere of this mapping: aestheticity.

3.4. Aestheticity

3.4.1. The co-presence of the political-religious leader and the people

The states of exception, the moments of social and normative crisis in which the two final fasts took place and Gandhi's means of intentionally dealing with them, give them unprecedented quality of an event, making the 1947 fast in Calcutta the only strong precedent to the one in Delhi in 1948. Moreover, this nature as an event differentiates it clearly from a spectacle in which the imaginary limits of the fourth wall are traced, the will of the artist, the sanctioned receptive condition of the spectator and the representational role of the actor define the social legitimized aesthetic experience. This was displayed in the diversity and amount of people participating actively in the event, setting in movement the spiral of autopoietic feedback loop to reconfigure the physical and symbolic social orders of Calcutta and New Delhi in the midst of communal violence. This is evident in Pyarelal's narrative. While being focalized in Gandhi, it is forced to move away from his bodily presence in the Hydari Mansion and the Birla House to other locations and social epicentres that were triggered and moved by the fast. All of them were represented, mediated by reported speech by other people and documents, in the sense of the strong presence of a representation.

Equally relevant here are the ways the “nubs of the social-aesthetic drama”⁷⁷ — in the words of V. Turner — not only operate on a micrologic of the life of some individuals, Gandhi and his entourage, but at the same time are elevated to the macrologic of the order of two metropolises, the colonial and the postcolonial capitals of India, that replicate the idea of a nation. Of the utmost significance to understand this phenomenon is the appearance of people on and off stage from different social roles and positions. As has been shown in the different fasts, the character list is long, i.e. barbers, musicians, tycoons, nurses, family members, his assistants, journalists, politicians, doctors, writers, and more could be added, such as hooligans, terrorists, imams and a bishop. Worth adding is the agonistic character of Gandhi's fasts, considering both the challenge it was for himself and for the people around him. As he challenged the different groups he aimed the fasts at, he was simultaneously

⁷⁷ The scheme was first developed by V. Turner, often quoted and applied by R. Schechner, it echoes Aristotle's *Poetic*, the four phases are namely: breach, precipitating event, crisis, redressive action, reintegration (see Schechner 213).

opposed by people close to him, for instance, his family (his wife Kasturba or his children), members of his entourage, other intellectuals (as Tagore), to politicians and rivals, among others. As a rule, when Gandhi fasted, it was always a highly and ambivalent event — to the point that historically, as has been shown earlier, it could imply setting aside political campaigns or being a prisoner, to be released by the captors.

In the final two fasts, the doctors enacted a protagonic role. Their skills and words gave a particular sense of urgency to Gandhi's active-hunger, beyond what has been already shown in chapter 3.2.1.2. Their speech makes invisible dangers and signals perceptible, which are central both to the narratives of the fast as well as for the development of the event and the perception that he was entering into "the danger zone" (Pyarelal *The Epic...* 76). The doctors mention, firstly, the measurable weight loss, from which they inferred that "the system was getting water-logged, owing to the failing kidney function" (*The Last...* 722). They also offer information and details that are harder to decode for non-experts, for example, "Blood pressure is systolic 185 m.m., diastolic m.m. The disturbing features are that both the acetone and urea content in his urine have increased, the latter to 1.5 percent" (*The Epic...* 75, see also *The Last...* 722). But mostly, the authoritative voice of the experts was instrumentally used to generate pressure to accomplish Gandhi's conditions to break the fast. For instance, "the report added that once the margin of safety was passed, even if the fast was broken his life would still be in danger" (*The Epic...* 45). This intention is expressed directly, too, in the paratextual footnote of the *Collected Works* with reference to his last fast. "Drs. Jivraj Mehta and Sushila Nayyar issued a health bulletin that each day's fast increased both immediate and future danger to Gandhiji's life" (CWMG Vol. XC, N. 1 423). This tendency aimed to exercise pressure on the community. "In our opinion, it would be most undesirable to let the fast continue. Therefore it is our duty to tell the people . . . to take immediate steps to produce the requisite conditions for ending the fast without delay" (Pyarelal *The Last...*, 726).

The presence of the doctors, their practices, as well as their discourse played and gave Gandhian discourse a powerful social lever. This was especially to subordinate a scientific discourse under a theological one, where, in comparison, the former empowered the latter. This is put on view in Pyarelal's accounts and in Gandhi's discourse on the fast. For example, in the 1932 indefinite fast, if Gandhi survived, "it would not be so much because of the efficacy of the medical measures that might be adopted but because God willed it. It was

predominantly a spiritual wrestle in which the physical factors played only a second part” (Pyarelal, *The Epic...* 44). In a similar fashion, Gandhi stated during his final fast: “I have placed myself not in the hands of doctors but in the hands of God. I have no such attachment for life that I must live under any circumstances. Whether I live or die is wholly in the hands of God” (Gandhi, CWMG Vol. XC, 423).

The two final fasts have many interesting examples of how his performance led people to action in the face of the ethical dilemma of being prone to be responsible for Gandhi’s death. The parallel between being responsible for his death reflects the crime of murdering a Brahmin or a spiritual leader, as shown historically in chapter 2.1. Pyarelal reports how in Calcutta in 1947, since the second day of the fast, “[m]ixed processions [Hindus and Muslims], consisting of all communities, paraded through the affected parts of the city to restore communal harmony” (*The Last...* 419). The same is the case with the final fast and the conflicting parties in Delhi (727). At the same time, congress workers and leaders pilgrimed to the Hydari Mansion. Moreover, on the midday of the third day, “a party of twenty-seven people from central Calcutta came and saw Gandhiji. They were members of what had come to be known as ‘resistance groups’ that had sprung up as an answer to hooliganism during and after the Muslim League Direct Action in 1946. They were said to be in control of the turbulent elements in the city” (419). During his last fast, many opted to imitate him until peace was restored in the city: from refugees in camps, Muslim women (see 732) to an Australian journalist (731) practiced active hunger.

Additionally, the first group of repenting victimaries in the indefinite fast in Calcutta, “[a]dmitting they had taken part in the killing, they begged for forgiveness and requested him to give up the fast. Their faces wore a penitent look, not unmixed with shame. They gave an undertaking that they would immediately bring the trouble-makers under control” (419-420). They asked him to break the fast, but he resisted telling them that “[t]hey would have to assure him that there never would be a recrudescence of communal madness in the city [...] Muslims should be able to tell him that they now felt safe, and therefore, he need not to prolong his fast” (420). Then came a ringleader who took responsibility for the disturbances and promised to surrender the weapons to Gandhi as well as assure that his subordinates protect the Muslim shops.

Moreover, the hooligans submitted to a penalty given by the political and religious leader, namely to assure full protection of the persecuted Muslims. That evening, Pyarelal

records that as a symbol of repentance, “[a] truck load of hand-grenades and arms” (424) were relinquished to Gandhi; later another group doing the same, and “[t]he next day [...] still another dump of country made arms —guns, swords, daggers and cartridges— was similarly surrendered” (Ibid). In brief, as I have shown, an anomalous transformation took place in the turning of the feedback loop. The “hooligans-turned-into peacemakers” (Guha GYCW 849). Comparable — in terms of an anomaly — to the peacemaker-hooligans was the police, who, rather than doing their work of enforcing the law by means of violence, instead fasted in an unprecedented manner to accompany Gandhi and to stop the communal disturbances (see 848). Equally exceptional is the report that politicians made use of their privileges, of opening the doors of their houses to refugees. “Pandit Nehru and some ministers of the Central Cabinet threw open their official residences to all homeless refugees short of moving out themselves” (Pyarelal *The Last...*, 723).

Written agreements and strong forms of representation by means of written documents played a central role to put an end to both the communal violence and the two final fasts. In the case of Calcutta, a deputation of the citizens arrived, stating that order had been restored to all the affected parts of the city, holding themselves responsible for the future order of the city and asking him to break the fast. The whole redressing of the crisis reached a higher level with a written contract, in which Gandhi asked the social leaders and representatives to pledge to be held responsible for any future disorder. In his words: “Your assurance must be in writing. [...] It is the acid test of your sincerity and courage of conviction. If you sign it merely to keep me alive, you will really be compassing my certain death” (422). This led to the signature of a social contract for communal peace. “Just then an appeal signed by some 40 representatives of the Hindu and Muslim residents of [... the different] areas was brought in. The signatories pledged themselves that they would not allow any untoward incident to happen in those localities” (422). In a very similar fashion, during the Delhi indefinite fast of 1948, Gandhi issued seven conditions to break the fast, which implied a change of behaviour for the whole city. As summed up by Guha:

1. The annual fair (the Urs) at the Khwaja Bakhtiyar shrine at Mehrauli, due in nine days’ time, should take place peacefully.
2. The hundred-odd mosques in Delhi converted into homes and temples should be restored to their original users.
3. Muslims should be allowed to move freely around Old Delhi;
4. Non-Muslims should not object to Delhi Muslims returning to their homes from Pakistan;
5. Muslims should be allowed to travel without danger in trains;
6. There should be no economic boycott of

Muslims; 7. Accommodation of Hindu refugees in Muslim areas should be done with the consent of those already in the localities. (GYCW 870)

These conditions lead two hundred thousand people to sign a peace pledge, assuring the given conditions (see 871).

The exceptional state of communal violence portrays a dynamic autopoietic feedback loop of metropolitan society. But before moving into any conclusions, I will proceed to a comparative analysis of the relationship between the forms of visibilization of Gandhi's fasts and hunger artists.

3.4.2. Active-hunger on stage: Gandhi and the hunger artists

Gandhi's fasts summoned, as we have seen, thousands of people in New Delhi. Two decades earlier, in 1926, 'Jolly' the German performer did a similar feat. He summoned 350.000 people to Berlin restaurant "Krokodil," with the intention of setting a "world record of hunger" (see Payer 35). As emphasized in the introduction, event, experience, staging and performance (*Aufführung*) are intersectional notions of Fischer-Lichte's aesthetic of the performative, which, in all its dimensions, structures and transverses this cartography of Gandhi's fasts. In order to analyse them, as well as visibilize Gandhi's stylization and strategies, I will proceed to make a comparative analysis of Gandhi's with other forms *making active hunger socially visible*. As a point of comparison, I will analyse and compare Gandhi's performance with the hunger artists, who practiced like him fasting instrumentally. An alternative or a possible extension could have been to analyse hunger strikes also contemporary to Gandhi in Ireland, or those of the suffragettes — as was done tangentially in fragments of previous chapters. Nevertheless, this would be useful to emphasize the political sphere, while this chapter of the cartography gives prominence to the forms of subjection of perception or staging. By means of contrast, I aim to recount briefly some of the traces of the fasts from the previous chapters to characterize Gandhi's in contrast to other forms of active hunger that have been historically worthy of social attention. To correlate the hunger artists and Gandhi, I will compare the following similarities: medial or historical sources, instrumentality/teleology, discourse, the body, habits, ritual features, time and spatial frames and the actor-spectator relationship.

The sources and platforms that have helped historians follow the traces of the practices of the hunger artists are different and much more limited than those of Gandhi. However, they share the presence in newspapers of the time, in written words, photographs

and caricatures. To my knowledge, there is only an accessible biography of a hunger artist, namely the US American doctor Henry S. Tanner (see Gunn 1880). Kafka's 1922 short story is undoubtedly the most synthetic, lively and compressed narration on the theme. In the case of this cartography, from a historical perspective, Peter Payer's book *Hungerkünstler: Eine verschwundene Attraktion* (2002) offers the most detailed historical accounts of the stagings in the German speaking world, locating the "Schauhunger" in Vienna and Berlin from the end of the 19th century until the 1930s of the 20th century. Its main source is the *Illustriertes Wiener Extrablatt* (1872-1928), a newspaper that advocated for the hunger artists (Payer 95). As with Gandhi, there is a close relationship between their stagings and medicine. The performance of hunger was, to a great extent, recorded by doctors during the end of the 19th century (see Payer 26-27, 34). What is more, its traces are also found in the history of showmen in the context of popular entertainment fairs (see Lehmann 1952). In the 1990s, perhaps the most influential study was oriented to reconstruct a culturally a history of eating disorders from a medical and psychological perspective (see Vanderyecken's & van Deth's *From Fasting Saints to Anorexic Girls* 1993). Since the 1990s, the theme has been interpreted mostly in the academic field of the arts (see Ellmann 1993, Anderson 2010 and Kathan 2010). The motivations and the instrumental use of fasting by the hunger artists is, in broad terms, close to Gandhi's discourse. In this sense, similar institutions and discourses configured them, such as art, science, religion and economy. However, in comparison to the Indian religious and political leader, the function of entertainment played a central role. The other institutions and discourses reveal remarkable differences. In the case of art, they self-fashioned themselves and their fasts as free, creative acts of the wills (see 21-22). Nevertheless, artistic institutions did not recognize them as such, and considered them a lower popular art.⁷⁸ Gandhi, on the other hand, if yet being broadly represented in the arts (for example, see Trivedi 2011), has never been regarded as an artist. Up to this point, Gandhi's and the hunger artists' fasts appear to be close, as conspicuous events, intentionally effected processes, highly stylised forms of hunger performed by means of controlled performing skills and made a social, mediatic events. Nevertheless, as other institutions and discourses emerge, the difference becomes more visible. The advertising words of the hunger-spectacles

⁷⁸ " [Significantly, in Saltarino's artist lexicon, the most well-known of its time (Düsseldorf 1895), there are no entrances on hunger artists, because they did not correspond to the definition of artists as such.] Im bekannten Artisten-Lexikon von Saltarino (Düsseldorf 1895) finden sich bezeichnenderweise keine Eintragungen über Hungerkünstler, da sie nicht als Artisten im eigentlichen Sinne galten." (N.2 103)

as “hunger show [Schauhunger]”⁷⁹, “Hungertour”, “Hungeproduktion”, “Hungerexperiment” (21) give them a different connotation.

Science manifests itself in Gandhi’s fasts with the doctors measuring and surveilling his health. Or, as remarked by Devji, the only essential element of science in Gandhi’s practices and discourse is the method of experimentation (see ch. 1). In any case, both medicine and science are subordinated to his religious-political doctrine, as shown in the previous subchapter 3.4.1. Moreover, in the case of the hunger artists, the opposite is true. As recorded by Payer, these performers’ fasting practices were initially motivated by the search for new medical knowledge at the end of the 19th century (see Payer 12 and 34). The English physiologist Henry Tanner is a relevant example of this, as well as Giovanni Succi, who called himself “man of light” (47) in the Enlightenment humanist tradition. Another of them, Francisco Cetti, would argue that his “hunger experiments” were “of an extraordinary value to science” (26).

Nonetheless, the guiding discourse of Gandhi’s fasts was religion. For the hunger artists, it was economy, which surreptitiously conjugated and ordered the other discourses it relayed. In saying this, I don’t mean to ignore the fact that Gandhi had powerful or wealthy associates who played a significant and paradoxical role in the fasts, as we have seen in chapter 3.2.2.2., but to lay stress on this element never being a guiding principle. In the case of the hunger artists, the financial motivation is evident in the records of the amount of money produced, for instance, by Tanner, who won 137.640 dollars during his first performance in 1880 (15) or the 130.000 marks earned by the competence of the three hunger artists in Vienna in 1926 (35). As these performances were standardized at the beginning of the 20th century, they were no longer limited to an aristocratic circle, but to the masses, and everybody could attend them by paying the required entrance fee during day and night (Payer 65). Moreover, the presence not only of the artist but of an impresario or manager who had the pure intention of earning money and was in charge of the production of the performance, indicates the guiding economic orientation of the practice.

Equally revealing is the leading role of advertising in the hunger artists’ performances. For example, Succi only drank a secret and self-produced liquor during his

⁷⁹ All the following quotes from Payer’s book are translated by me.

fasts. In fact, he promoted it and sold it as a product.⁸⁰ Likewise, his name was used to advertise cravats (52). Moreover, he posed in photographs he signed and sent on request per mail. In similar fashion, the Sicilian painter Stefano Merlati appealed to fasting as a means to advertise his paintings. He became a hunger artist to “exploit the commercial possibilities” (Vandereycken and van Deth 85). The survival of these events is again recorded in the publicity in newspapers, that in advance promoted the spectacle. They advertised commodities, as we are in our times used to, as part of the performance. For example, Auguste Viktoria Schenk and Ricardo Sacco consumed ““first rate mineral water”” during their performance. This water, ““Krondorger Sauerbrunn’, [...] was certified as the ‘healing waters against the afflictions of the respiratory organs, the stomach and the urinary bladder”” (Payer 69).

In like manner, the post World War I European society was characterized by inflation and unemployment, a fertile ground for the hunger-attraction as a profession to earn relatively fast and easy money (34). Payer recalls how this period was named the “invasion of the hunger artists” (35). This normalized the condition of the hunger artists as part of the entertainment industry that implied, in the case of fraud, legal consequences. For instance, ‘Jolly’ and Harry Nelson were prosecuted, fined and sentenced to two years of prison for fraud in Germany in 1926 (see 39-40). Gandhi was equally suspected during his three-week fast in 1943. W. Churchill longed eagerly for discovering fraud in his fasts, and — probably used to a hunger artist culture — wired insistently the viceroy stating that it “[w]ould be most valuable [if] fraud could be exposed” (Churchill qtd. by Guha GYCW 703). Yet, in the end, the British PM would have to rant, “the old rascal” would “emerge all the better from his so-called fast” (Ibid).

Religion also played a role in the staging of hunger. Here again it was motivated and subordinated to their economic and material needs. The time frame of the hunger-spectacles was consciously set some weeks before Easter to correlate it with the time of fasting of the Christian tradition (Payer 22), as well as the standard timing of 40 days, which mimics Jesus’ fast in the desert as related in the Gospels of Mark and Luke. What’s more, to spiritualize the active hunger and refer to the practitioners of this spectacle, they were not always referred to

⁸⁰ The liquor was made of “einer Art laudanum, d.h. einer Mischung aus Morphinum mit Haschisch, Pfeffermiztinktur, Lakritzensaft und Chloroform”.(32)

as “hunger artists” but rather as “fasting artists” (ibid). Succi — the most talented advertiser of himself in the generation of hunger artists at the end of the 19th century — spoke of his performance as “a spiritual act of asceticism,” in which he came “in direct contact with the deity” (22). Perhaps the most remarkable example in this sense is the 1906 dual *mise en scène* of Auguste Viktoria Schenk and Ricardo Sacco in Vienna. Their staging was fashioned discursively following the passion of Christ as a model. Newspapers named their meal before beginning the fast “the last supper” (70). In a similar way, the day they were imprisoned in a glass cage, the immurement was verbally stylised as “the day of the entombment” (72). The enforced spiritualization of the show would be conserved until the breaking of the fast that would be recorded historically in the newspapers as “the day of the resurrection of the dead” (82).

Evidently, the effects of emaciation on the body of the hunger artists were similar to Gandhi’s. Sacco’s descriptions during a warm summer day are similar to Gandhi’s, “he spent almost the whole day in snooze, lying on the bed” (75). Payer’s description of the hunger artist Fred Ellern emphasises, like in Gandhi’s case, the body lying on a bed (see 100). The murmuring modulation of the voice we have seen with Gandhi had a similar quality: “Everything was said in a low voice, as if not to disturb the sleep of someone critically ill” (*Illustriertes Wiener Extrablatt* qtd. by Payer 80). A striking parallel between them is the medically detailed description of their bodies subject to hunger. For example, there is a correspondence in losing 10 pounds per week, both in the case of the Tanner and the record of the Bombay government in Gandhi’s 21 days fast of 1943.⁸¹

Their habits to a certain extent were similar. Both Gandhi and the hunger artists wrote letters and even read similar books. For instance, ‘Nicky’ read “besides newspapers, Rabindranath Tagore, as well as texts from theosophists” (92), which were two very familiar texts to Gandhi.⁸² There are, however, evident differences, such as the tendency to smoke, as in the case of Nicky, Fred Ellern and Max Michelly at the end of the 1920s (Payer 92-93). Gandhi strongly criticized this habit, and that, among other ascetic practices, gained him the

⁸¹ “Weight at commencement of fast 109 lbs[;] On 17/2 105 lbs[;] On 19/2 97 lbs[;] On 24/2 90 lbs[;] On 2/3 91 lbs” (weight table from the Bombay government qtd. by Guha GYCW 702) and “Loss of weight the second week, 10 pounds” (Gunn 59).

⁸² For Gandhi’s relationship with theosophy see his *Autobiography* 263-264, 267, 281, 306. For summary of Gandhi’s discussions on fasting with Tagore see Tridip Suvrud’s article “Truth Called Them Differently”.

reputation — in the words of a contemporary scholar — of an “anti-vice crusader” (see Fischer-Tiné).

Another factor of strong differentiation between the hunger artists and the Indian political leader is the latter’s practice of religious rituals, which are strictly excluded from the accounts of the former. There are similarities between both cases that can be called “rituals.”

⁸³ Katja Iken described the following ritualized procedure of hunger artists in Vienna at the beginning of the 20th century: “the artist took one generous last meal, then climbed in his strictly surveilled crystal box, which was equipped with his bed, sofa, books, reading lamp, sofa, and toilet [...]. At the end of the self-imposed fasting term, the artist would climb down his cell under a loud fuss, to taste in front of the audience a multi-course menu” (Iken, my trans.). In Gandhi’s case, the time was equally counted, marking a clear beginning and ending. Gandhi, also before starting the fast got his breakfast (Guha GYCW, 432, 867) and at the end of every fast had, instead of the multi-course menu with beer and wine (see Payer 51, 84) “a glass of orange juice” (Guha CYCW 460, 849, 871). This last act always had a special symbolic meaning, it was given by someone engaged in the fast, for example, Dr. Ansari who took care of him in 1924, his wife Kasturba in 1933, or Shaheed Suhraway of the Muslim League in 1947. Both the beginning and the end of the fasts were also celebrated with singing of suras, mantras and Christian prayers by the people around him. Perhaps the most exceptional was the Bengali hymn for Gitanjali that sang by Nobel Prize winner R. Tagore in the Poona jail in 1932 (see 440, 460-61, 849; Desai 215).

The time frame during the 21-day fasts is similar to the bracketing of the spectacle of the hunger artists. This similarity strikes to their character as a spectacle, understood as an event that “marked a sharp distinction between audience and performers” (Stephenson 114). The length in the case of the hunger artists was clearly longer, the tendency was 40 days, almost twice as long as Gandhi’s longest fasts. With the so-called “invasion of the hunger artists,” the whole spectacle moved closer to the sports event, as shown by their advertisements. They spoke of a competence, a “Hungerrekord” (Payer 35) that was

⁸³ I understand ritual as that what “begets a sense of permanence, consistency, reliability, certainty, sanctity, even truth, a general posture towards and experience of the world that cannot be obtained through other means.” (Stephenson 42) Moreover, “ritual, whether secular or sacred, binds groups together, ensuring their harmonious functioning by generating and maintaining orders of meaning, purpose and value.” (38) Following Rappaport, Stephenson remarks two essential features of ritual: firstly, a formal and invariant structure, in which its engagement imply assent and conformity of the participants. Secondly, the requirement of performance (see 42).

challenged and implied a “Hungertour” that would take the artists around Europe, visiting the main cities of the continent: Berlin, London, Paris, Budapest, among others (see 36-37). The so-called “hunger world record” was set by Mark Michelly in 1926 with 54 days without food. However, in the case of Gandhi’s indefinite fasts, they mark a strong difference with the hunger spectacles, to the extent that none of these “artists” were willing to face hunger without fear of death, with Kafka’s literary figure being perhaps the only exception. However, one of them, ‘Mass’, actually died involuntarily in the hospital after his performance (see 38).

In general, Gandhi’s fasts did not have a fourth wall frontal perspective or a vitrine-stage that characterized those of the hunger artists. These were often separated by a glass or the bars of a cage. This physically defining proscenium stage perception produced a picture framing, which generated a sense of frontality. This visual grammar was stressed in the hunger spectacles by the newspapers that spoke of a “‘vitrine’ or a ‘cage’” (77). These expressions both capture the commodity-like condition in suspended-animation of the ‘artist’ from the outside world in which the stage was embedded. Moreover, it was presented as a dis-localized space and time between actor and spectator. This is a staging typical not only of objects displayed in exhibitions of antiquaries and museums, but also department stores, as well as of zoos. The hunger spectacles in Europe and the US at the end of the 19th century took place initially in different places, which finally led to this particular visual regime. For instance, Francisco Cetti performed his 30-day fast in the Castans Panoptikum in Berlin in 1887 (17), Tanner in the Clarendon Hall in New York (Vanderyecken & van Deth 84) or others in the Royal Aquarium in London (Payer 18). At the beginning of the 20th century’s glass prisons, after scandals of fraudulent hunger artists that were allowed to move, the stages were fixed and this became the norm to enforce the authenticity of the performance. The glass cages were installed inside the event rooms of different coffee houses of the Viennese Prater, where most of the entertainment events (theater, variété, concerts, etc.) took place, and which were frequented mostly by the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie (Payer 64). The most relevant difference between the prisons and the mansions-made-prisons in which Gandhi fasted and the glass prisons or cages of the hunger artists is the regime of vision to which a given audience was subject. An objectifying gaze in the latter that stood curiously, passively estranged in front of hunger, as in front of a freakish being, brought from a foreign world that was dis-located in another time and space. While the latter shows the opposite, a spectator

that was moved by the perception of alien hunger made her own, to the state of being compelled to act and participate in a world foreign to her own condition. Moreover, the homely atmosphere of Gandhian fasts contrasts roughly with the one of a fair, zoo or museum of the glass prisons of the ‘artists.’

The hunger spectacles had, like Gandhi’s fasts, many people involved in them. There was, from the day of the self-imprisonment, a “surveillance committee” that inspected the glass prison, for the benefit of the credibility of the spectacle (73). The relationship between the spectators and the performers separated by the glass screen had diverse receptions. There were often spectators that sat to have a meal in tables in front of the starving artists (79-80). There were others that approached them with a “zoological gaze,” which led them to knock the glass barrier to animate the sleeping artist (78). Science and medicine had their part in the design of this visual regime, as doctors from the beginnings of the hunger spectacles were the first to supervise, establishing hygienic conditions and legitimize before the law these spectacles (see 13, 18). However, these spectacles would have never reached the masses, without another actor, the impresario. They changed the hunger spectacle by opening it up to the general public and not only directing to an elite audience (92). They would be in charge of the presentation, the production, advertising (with posters, photographs), and even presents to be given by the audience during spectacle to attract more attention (95). They would also encourage the audience to surveil the hunger artists (69). Again, in Gandhi’s fasts neither the so-called “zoological gaze” nor the figure of the impresario is present.

Beyond the normative and conventional curious, exotizing gaze, Payer reports some noteworthy exceptions in which the glass fourth wall was broken during the performance and led straight to its end. Firstly, we look to a case at the turn of the century in the Oktoberfest in Munich, where a group of people during the beer festival were enervated by a hunger artist. They stormed the glass prison, seized him, took him to a bakery where he was force-fed, or orally raped, stuffed by the gang with cakes (23). During the end of the 1920s, many physical and psychic breakdowns were reported. For instance, Wolly, Harry Leut and Georg Lindneck among others (see 38) broke their cells in fits of rage because of mocking and laughing audiences. Perhaps the most representative and detailed recount of blasting the glass prison is the case of Wilhem Fuhrmann with the artistic name ‘Nicky’ in 1926. He derived his art from an experience of World War I, during which he had to remain hungry in a basement for 35 days to escape being killed by Russian troops (89). The inflation and unemployment in

Germany would lead him to fast as a means of survival, just as he was forced to during the war. During the competition for the so-called “hunger world record”, one night his impresario informed him that he would not receive any profit due to the high expenses of *mise en scène* of the performance. This fact led him to break out of the glass prison and terminate the spectacle (95). These examples show to what extent the hunger shows could not trigger a feedback loop that could dynamize or de-subjectivize the given conditions to reconfigure a given society during the event.

Gandhi’s fasts and the hunger artists’ performances are similar in very broad terms in the use of active hunger for instrumental purposes, their corporeal effects, similar habits that imply being a prisoner or confined in a limited space and the platforms in which they were historically recorded. Nevertheless, the Gandhian fasts differentiate substantially from the hunger artists’ spectacles to the extent of their objectives and the way in which they related to religion, economy and medicine. In the former, a religious discourse organized and submitted the other two, while in the latter, given the case, this relationship was inverted. Moreover, religious ritual features and the homely atmosphere of the Gandhian fasts are absent in the fair and/or freak show of the hunger artist’s *mise en scènes*. The most relevant difference is the presence of an autopoietic feedback loop and an engaged audience transforming the social conditions in which Gandhi’s indeterminate fasts took place — particularly the final two ‘greatest fasts.’ A feedback loop and transformation is absent from the hunger spectacles. In other words, the relationship between the event of fasting in Gandhi and the context in which it was embedded was not normalizing and stabilizing, but rather — even if in a sense of reestablishing a previous given order — transformative of the state of exception in which it took place. While Gandhi’s fasts changed the conditions around him, the hunger artists’ practices conformed to their context.

Perhaps the most worthy of attention point of comparison between the forms of visibilization of hunger artists and Gandhi is the form and relationship with the social context in which they were performed. While the spectacles of the hunger artists took place in times of relative political stability, Gandhi, on the contrary, resorted to fast in times of crisis, specifically in the case of the ‘greatest fasts’, which took place in a time of communal violence. Contrary to what historical recounts evidence, while the hunger artists social attention and visibility diminished with the World Wars (see Payer 25), Gandhi’s fasts

acquired more socio-political relevance performed in the face of civil war and the waves of communal violence in the colonial capital of Calcutta and the postcolonial one of New-Delhi.

De-subjection as conclusion: A moment of civil war undone

“Man macht sich freylich seine gesellschaftlichen Pflichten ungemein leicht, wenn man dem w i r k l i c h e n M e n s c h e n, der unsre Hülfe auffordert, in Gedanken den I d e a l - M e n s c h e n unterschiebt, der sich wahrscheinlich selbst helfen könnte. Strenge gegen sich selbst mit Weichheit gegen andre verbunden, macht den wahrhaft vortrefflichen Charakter. ”

F. Schiller, *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Mensch*

Caparrós, writing in the jargon of a modern, liberal model of development, interestingly emphasises India’s place in a globalized world that is still very far from developing a more functional social and identitary structure than the nation state: “This is India, it is pure potency and likes to call itself the biggest democracy of the world — and they are. They don’t like to say they are the country in the world with the most malnourished people in the world — and they are”⁸⁴ (122, my translation). He adds later, along the same lines, “[i]n this country the most proficient sector that has grown in the last twenty years isn’t technology, nor software; it’s inequality, that has grown more than any other moment in history”⁸⁵ (222). Gandhi’s legacy, from his nationalism, sexual habits, to his views on religion, caste, to satyagraha, ahimsa and fasting as political instruments are — as every heritage from a foreign value system — the object of controversy and ‘problematic.’ This text has tried, to a limited extent, not to dodge complexity nor paradoxes, and yet foreground one feature of the fasts.

We have seen in the historical frame of the cartography how Gandhi’s fasts appropriated elements from various ascetic traditions, developed them in his instrumental religious-political philosophy and discourse, and was set in practice fractally from the micro- to the macropolitical. The cartography was developed in four dimensions, respective to its four subchapters, making a blueprint of the practice of fasting. Firstly, it mapped some medial platforms of representation (text, image, and film), in which the traces of Gandhi’s fasts were recorded during his time and the contesting discourses around their mediatic configuration. Secondly, I sketched the material traces and configurations of the aesthetic

⁸⁴ “Esto es India, y es pura potencia y les gusta llamarse la mayor democracia del mundo —y lo son. No les gusta decir que son el país con más desnutridos del mundo —y lo son. Que la mayor democracia tenga la mayor masa de hambrientos debería ser una causalidad incómoda.” (122)

⁸⁵ “En este país el sector que más creció en los últimos veinte años no es la tecnología, no es el software; es la desigualdad, que creció más que en ningún otro momento de la historia.” (222)

experience of Gandhi's fasts by analysing his dress-code, body gestures and postures, vocal modulation of his discourse, the spatial localization and the temporal framing of his practice. Thirdly, I reformulated different forms of subjection of the perception of presence to locate and structure signification, by means of the traces of gradual intensities of presence and representation illustrated with Gandhi's fasts. I aimed to show and emphasize the feedback loop of the double articulation of the performative action and its semiotic (de-)territorializations. The final subchapter of the aesthetic cartography pursued recollecting some of the main features of the precedent chapters and contrast them with the staging of the hunger artists contemporary to Gandhi. By means of this counterpoint, I showed, based on their teleologies, discourses and aesthetic experiences, how the two different kinds of events managed social attention during their times. To this point, the cartography has emphasised a phenomenological description in different spheres of Gandhi's fasts. To close, I will like to foreground Gandhi's fasts as a practice and ritual of de-subjectivation and intellectual emancipation.

Rancière speaks of intellectual emancipation — in his fable-like, non-prescriptive book on Joseph Jacotot — as the way the ignorant master can instruct the learned one as well as the ignorant one. It means, “verifying that he is always searching. Whoever looks always finds. He doesn't necessarily find what he was searching for, and even less what he was supposed to find. But he finds something new to relate to the *thing* that he already knows” (*The Ignorant...* 33). That was the story of Gandhi's fasts in a struggle for national independence, communal and moral self-reliance. A story that was — at least from the point of view of the Colombian writer of this cartography — worth trying to understand, research, rewrite again, translating it to a philosophical discourse very foreign to the one of its protagonist. My need was to understand the most radical and extreme practice of non-violence according to its most relevant theoretician and practitioner. This notion quickened with wonder my sensibility used to the narratives of violence of the longest civil war in Latin America. It refused to serve up well-worn truths that I knew beforehand and estranged me from their historically conditioned obviousness. Gandhi's fasts appealed to me, to understand them as a de-subjectifying practice in moments of rupture and discontinuity, rather than in Rancière's and Quintana's examples, which are located in more ordinary moments.

Fasting as a ritual de-subjectivation is recorded in a moment of inflection of Gandhi's life, where he opted to move this practice from a micro- to a macropolitical sphere in Ahmedabad in 1918. This happened in the following circumstances: In the face of the absence of the millworkers from the daily meeting concerning the strike, the religious-political leader sent one of his associates to request them to attend, to which he received the following confronting reply: "What is it to Anasuyabehn [one of the mill owners] and Gandhiji? They come and go in their car; they eat sumptuous food, but we are suffering death-agonies; attending meetings does not prevent starvation" (Desai *A Righteous Struggle* 25-26). Subsequently, Gandhi would recognize, "I do not feel angry at the criticism made by the residents of Jugaldas Chawl. Rather, I, and others as well who want to serve India, have much to learn from it" (CWMG Vol. XIV, 256). His learning and point of departure was then not the claim to represent alien hunger, but the capacity to feel it and to suffer it *with* and *for* the millworkers, in his own presence, in his own body and, simultaneously, by his social position to support and represent them. An action of affirmation of an equality neither decreed by law or force, but verified in the act of fasting. What challenged Gandhi initially in its reception turned towards the millworkers, by means of setting "a concrete example" (257). A verifiable common example between two and more equal minds, equal in enduring hunger, and in this sense fasting gave him a performative measure to be equally expressed physically and socially. What gave him the moral stature and recognition as someone who was entitled with and by others to *stand for*, *speak for* them, that is to adopt another's position by choice as if it was himself, to renounce one's comforts to be able to relate to others.

His thoughts on being a fellow speaker with someone in an asymmetric relationship of power, as well as an equal in pain or suffering, are noteworthy. As he would put it in a conversation during his 1924 fast, "How can I hope to be heard by those who have suffered? I would ask them to forgive those who have murdered their dearest ones. Who would listen to me?" (Desai *Day-to...*, Vol. IV 197). Moreover, the whole point of fasting was aimed at counterbalancing this asymmetry, as an equalizer in suffering, that attributed "the power to react on them" (ibid). This was only possible by means of performing something similar to the loss of the self as displacement from one's home, the death of someone dear, the sabotage of one's ownership or work by others. This action was disembodiment, deconstruction of the

flesh, an art of discarnation by restraining himself to eat, as a meditative willing step unto a meaningful death.

George Orwell wrote an edict as Gandhi's Western, humanist, secular *promotor fidei*. The former, very conscious of his own dogmas and of his own "aesthetic distaste" towards the latter, stated something that is applicable to our contemporary world, "regarded simply as a politician, and compared with the other leading political figures of our time, how clean a smell he has managed to leave behind!" (466) In Gandhi, one finds an affirmative model of a religious political leader, that appears on a substantially different light by being physically vulnerable and publicly accountable not only *for* but performatively *with* the subjects he represented. As someone that exposed himself to the power of being dependent on others, rather than withdrawing from this vulnerable condition by means of *immunitary affects*⁸⁶ and *politics*⁸⁷, the same that would murder him a couple of days after his final fast.

This, becoming an example by becoming an equal, was made by means of a practice, that in the way he presented it appealed to a leveling performative fact. Namely, hunger as a path unto death, understood as a time-consuming and felt disembodiment. This equalizer would appeal to the affects of a community as we have seen in detail in the case of Calcutta in 1947 and Delhi in 1948: "saving social action by exerting the totality of its own power, that of the recognized equality of intellectual beings" (Rancière *The Ignorant...*, 97). In other words, a very strange case of how a religious ritual managed and operated simultaneously at different levels, to reconfigure a social landscape. How a sovereign individual — in the most paradoxical sense of the expression and as far as possible from the one of today's hegemonic

⁸⁶ They are namely "[forms of feeling, reactions and attitudes that make the perception of the other as a threat to health, stability and in many cases for a supposed purity of a given society. Emotional dispositions that enclose people in themselves and in blaming the other for the harm she has suffered. Some forms of hate, from resentment, from fear and some promises of a future that are presented as terrifying have this effect. But also some forms of skepticism, disbelief in the capacity to change things, which proliferate in Colombia because of the distrust in institutions, displacement, that have had a long history] formas de sentir, reacciones y actitudes que hacen percibir al otro como amenaza para la salud, para la estabilidad y en muchos casos para una pretendida pureza de la sociedad. Disposiciones emotivas que encierran a las persona en sí mismas y en la culpabilización de un otro que se responsabiliza de daños sociales padecidos. Algunas formas de odio, el resentimiento, el miedo y ciertas promesas para un futuro que se presenta como aterrador, tienen este efecto. Pero también formas de escepticismo, descreimiento sobre la posibilidad de cambiar las cosas, que proliferan en Colombia por la desconfianza en las instituciones, las formas de despojo y corrupción que tienen una larga historia en el país." (Quintana "El problema...")

⁸⁷ They are "[politics that the whole time generate conditions of insecurity and risk, that make people feel constantly threatened (from losing their jobs, to live in conditions of poverty, to be subject to violence and displacement)] una política que todo el tiempo genera condiciones de inseguridad y riesgo, que hacen sentir a las personas constantemente amenazadas (de perder su empleo, de vivir [en] condiciones de pobreza, de ser violentadas y despojadas)." (Quintana "El problema...")

entrepreneurial jargon — fearless of the death of the self, in the process of his own disembodiment, made the problems of others his own and, by his decreation, gave both theoretically and practically prominence to a different imaginary of a body-politic that was falling apart. This is different to how our immemorial ways would have had it, i.e. the powerful robed in the attire of prestige, armed with the institutional weapons of asymmetrical relationships of power, often falling into the irresistible temptation of the exercising ordinary excesses of force. The case here, on the contrary, was not suppressing violence — what cannot be done —, but the exercise of a moderate use of force, of self-incorporation and canalization of violence, *ahimsa*, where the weak could exact what they needed and the powerful granted what they must. Noteworthy of Gandhi's practice of fast is, as he well theorized, the fact that it was useless against an enemy, a tyrant. Also, Gandhi's greatest feats were directed to people with whom he shared an ethos, inhabited a common ground, with whom society was not defined in relation to an external enmity, but an active decision to live together, in dissense, in conflict — or rather be willing to die defending such ideal of a community. Fasting under this light appears as active hunger, as de-subjection of determinism. The final, indefinite fasts show the rare possibility of relating to a state of exception by means of a self-imposed extreme and deadly deprivation, from part of whom has the affective power to challenge morally the actors willing to shatter society.

I've attempted to record the fasts as “moments in which a lived experience becomes dis-adjusted, moments of non-incarnation” (Quintana 231, N. 18); “as an experimental activity that unfolds from the heterogeneity of the social world, twisting, and not merely exceeding police mechanisms” (227). This is only possible in a paradoxical practice splitting the narrative of the self, disconnecting one of the most ordinary and habitual corporal practices, food consumption, what Quintana calls an “expropriating appropriation” (217) of food's fundamental role of allaying fear, to finally reach a new perception or subjectivity. This not only affects the self, but the whole social landscape.

The sense of showing the exceptional experience of Gandhi has been none other than having found in a religious-political leader the strange archive not of a saint, not of a cynical politician, but of a common person unleashing his ordinary potentials — of someone politically *producing the probable rather than accounting for what had been possible*. This is a radical opposite of what Caparrós named the “cruellest poverty”, yet, paradoxically by means of the same physical process of hunger, but an active hunger of thinking not only of

oneself differently, but society in the moment in which it was falling apart. I pursued to make perceptible how he in a given context inquired acutely power mechanisms, their affective territories and the unexpected manners in which these could be reconfigured. The exceptional character of Gandhi's fasts is the rarity of an instant of dignity in weakness, which was able to touch and awaken the marvelous indifference the strong feel toward the weak. Of hooligans who unlearned to admire force. Of perpetrators of identity violence, who, rather than hating the enemy, surrendered their weapons and vowed not to scorn the unfortunate, but to protect the people they had made miserable. Of magnates directing their political interests not to the gluttonous accumulation of capital but to have an active and engaged role in social problems. Of politicians who, rather than building walls to indifferently feel contempt for the vulnerable, opened the doors of their houses to refugees. Of someone engaged in restless negotiation with trouble and resisting constantly an an-aesthetics of comfort, of being a subject of rights that turns a blind eye to duties while enjoying the former leisurely.

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Illustrations



Figure 1 — Henri Cartier-Bresson, Gandhi during his last fast, Birla House, New Delhi, January 18, 1948.



Figure 2 — Gandhi during the 21-day fast at Parnakuti, Poona, May 20, 1933. Credit: U.M.D. Thackersy / GandhiServe:

http://www.gandhimedia.org/cgi-bin/gm/gm.cgi?action=view&link=Images/Photographs/Personalities/Mahatma_Gandhi/1933_-_1934&image=IMPHPEMG1933052020.jpg&img=90&search=Fast&cat=Images/Photographs&tt=&bool=and

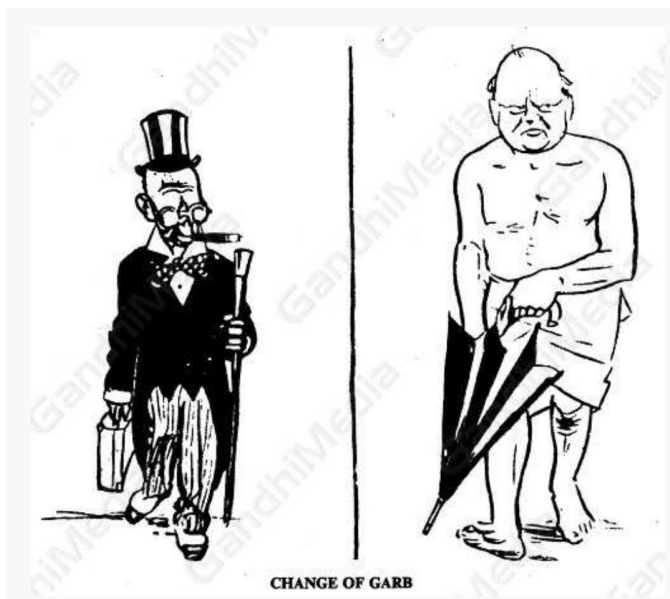


Figure 3 — J. Reynolds in *Morning Post*, London, England, 1931. <http://www.gandhimedia.org/cgi-bin/gm/gm.cgi?link=Images/Cartoons&image=IMCA1931505090.jpg>



Figure 4 — During his Rajkot fast, March 1939 :
https://www.mkgandhi.org/gphotgallery/1933-1948/index_2.htm

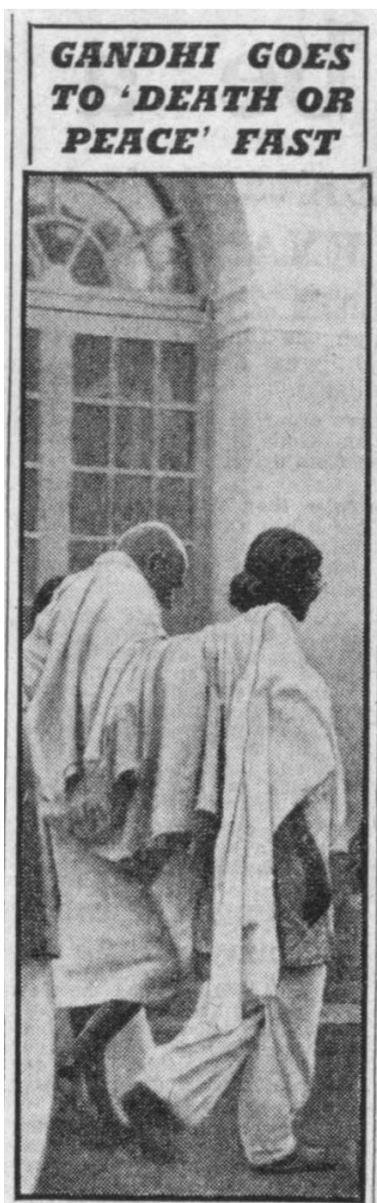


Figure — 5 “Gandhi goes to death or peace fast. *The Daily Mail* (17 January 1948). Reproduced from Vernon & Pratt pg. 114

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Eine ästhetische Kartographie des aktiven Hungers:
Gandhis Fasten und die Hungerkünstler*innen

Die Masterarbeit betrachtet M.K. Gandhis politische Ausübung des Fastens aus einer ästhetischen Perspektive. Im Fokus stehen dabei die dramatischen Eigenschaften dieser asketischen Praxis: Von besonderem Interesse sind expressive Wiederholungen, Gestaltungen und Stilisierungen, die Affekte auslösen. Die Analyse greift auf Begriffe und Theorien von Erika Fischer-Lichtes *Ästhetik des Performativen* (2004) zurück, um damit die ästhetische Dimension von Gandhis Fasten zu beleuchten. Eine historische und philosophische Kontextualisierung rahmt die ästhetische Kartographie ein. Die Analyse untergliedert sich in vier verschiedene Sphären: Medialität, Materialität, Semiotizität und Ästhetizität. Den Beginn macht eine Untersuchung von medialen Plattformen in den bereits historisierten Spuren der Ereignisse. Als historische Quellen dienen Zeitungsartikel, Fotos, die Wochenschau (*newsreel*) und ein Dokumentarfilm. Die Sphäre der Materialität wird im Anschluss durch die folgenden Kriterien analysiert: den körperlichen Zustand Gandhis, die Temporalität und die Räumlichkeit des Fastens. Zudem beschäftigt sich der Text mit der Konfiguration von Bedeutung durch eine theoretische Überarbeitung der von Fischer-Lichte geprägten Begriffe von „Präsenz“ und „Repräsentation“. Die Grundlage für diese Überarbeitung sind Texte von J. Rancière und G. C. Spivak. Die Überarbeitung soll mit Beispielen von Gandhis Fasten illustriert werden, um zu zeigen, wie ein individueller Mensch zur Verkörperung oder Repräsentation einer Nation werden kann. Zuletzt nimmt die Analyse der ästhetischen Sphäre die autopoietische Feedback-Schleife zwischen Gandhi und dem Volk in den Blick. Zudem vergleicht die Studie die Inszenierungsformen von Gandhis Fasten und die von den Hungerkünstlern*innen im Westen. Der Abschluss der Masterarbeit verbindet Gandhis Fasten als Ritual mit den von Jacques Rancière entwickelten Begriffen der *intellektuellen Emanzipation* und der *De-Subjektivierung*.

Selbstständigkeitserklärung

Hiermit erkläre ich, dass ich diese Arbeit selbständig verfasst und keine anderen als die von mir angegebenen Hilfsmittel genutzt habe.

Juan Camilo Brigard
13.08.2019