

Chapter 1

'Sovereignty': an Experience Book (An Introduction)

Dear reader,

These are the first words of my PhD thesis. You might be asking which ones exactly but I promise I will come back to the difficult question of the time of writing and how there is this constant delay involved in putting things into words and thinking them (on good days, in the reverse order), which I have been trying to negotiate in my work through the hardship of titanic struggles and the mind-blowing lightness of spontaneous realizations in the past four years. So for now, I will only say what I *can* say (hoping that I could say more and more of what I want and need to say as we go along). For instance, that I am the one writing this text and I have to admit that there are many, many things that *I do not know* (a lot more in fact than what I would ever, actually be able to know.) There is, at least, one thing that I know (almost) for sure though, and it happens to be very important for what I am trying to do here. And that relates to *you*, and as *we* shall see, it has powerful implications and consequences (literally) for me and my writing, but hopefully also for you too. As Judith Butler tells me, and also as I know it from my own experience, there is one simple truth (among the many) that surely cannot be ignored here, namely, that *you are there*, and not only when you are reading *this*, but also when I am writing this text; you are there in the text and in the whole process of my writing.

I am going to tell you in a minute what I mean exactly by all that, but if we could pause for a moment, like *now*, and if you wanted to choose, where would you like to be in this text? Where could you see yourself? Would you prefer to be somewhere, say, in-between the lines, or in the spaces between words, like here [], or maybe you would like to do something more active and fun in this text, perhaps climb up the B-s, swing from one T to the other (and if you are adventurous, from one I to the next), or perhaps you would just prefer resting somewhere, on the top of the o-s or d-s (or somewhere more comfortable), or you would like to sit in front of the screen perhaps (maybe a microscopic you), at a critical distance, watching how

these lines are unfolding on this page? The reason I am asking this is that I don't usually think or imagine things like that and probably neither do you. We are used to doing things in a certain way, there is a routine to what we do when we write, read, speak or just simply think in our academic lives. And in my experience at least, there is not very much play involved in that. As many have observed before me, the 'professional voice' that we develop in the practice of science is a very particular kind of voice, one that requires an 'objective, neutral style of writing' that does not leave too much room for spontaneity, randomness or ease.¹ There is not very much space for you or for me either, let alone for you *and* me. This particular style that we are required to adopt and follow in the practice of doing science, indeed, *does* many different things so that we appear (and more importantly, *disappear*) in certain ways in the text and in the course of writing. First of all, it asks me to pretend that I am not really, fully there; or more precisely, it asks me *to be as if* it was only the analytical functions of my brain that played a crucial role in trying to understand the world. The *person* must go so that universal logic can freely take its place and uncover how the world really works. Me as 'author' and 'knower' will have to position myself, in Naeem Inayatullah's description, "in a space beyond the world" and as such, to appear as "not somehow part of the world we study."² This 'fictive distancing' is what provides for the authority of the kind of knowledge produced in 'social inquiry': as Inayatullah remarks, the promise of the academic style of writing is that "with personal disengagement, with an apprehension of the world from a purported neutral and objective stance, we can remove our personal biases from our descriptions and theorizations."³ Authorship, mine and yours, in texts like this is supposed to ground its authority in a strange paradox: the 'omniscient social scientific prose'⁴ may know and set out to explore everything except for the place from where it speaks, that particular and idiosyncratic universe, the space of the person, that *then* makes space for the big and universal one by vanishing into the background.

¹Roxanne Lynn Doty, "Maladies of Our Souls: Identity and Voice in the Writing of Academic International Relations", *Cambridge Review of International Studies* 17 (2004): 378, 380.

²Naeem Inayatullah, "Falling and Flying: An Introduction," in *Autobiographic International Relations: I, IR*, ed. Naeem Inayatullah (London: Routledge, 2011), 5.

³Ibid.

⁴Oded Löwenheim, "The 'I' in IR: An Autoethnographic Account," *Review of International Studies* 36 (2010): 1024.

Less than a year ago I gave the following, somewhat bitter account of how I came to concern myself with the everyday practices of what Raluca Soreanu calls the ‘disciplinary life’ of International Relations, where the practice of writing, something I am performing *right now*, is one of the dominant experiences just like in any other field of the social sciences.⁵ This is how I described my experience of practicing science:

My project started as an attempt to rethink what we do when we act as scholars, the everyday, banal, usually unreflected practices of academic life such as thinking, writing, speaking, as well as the strange relationship of such a life to the life it writes, speaks and thinks. I was bothered by the queer disconnection between the sunny, sometimes gloomy days in the academic ivory tower and the so-called ‘out-there’ of ‘realities’ and ‘social phenomena’ that we ‘find’ in ‘society’. However, it was not only the impersonal distance separating the subject, object and observer that made me wonder about ‘the order of things and words’ in human sciences. It was also the distance *from myself*, the distance within re-enacting the distance without, in the person, in me, separating me in life from a scientific self in a passage from ‘I am’ to ‘I am something’, where ‘I’ also becomes ‘something’, something to be avoided and hidden, the inappropriate surplus of the self that gets in the way of scientific objectivity.⁶

As such, in a certain context and at a certain age (when I am grown-up and serious enough) I am required to create a bubble, a little island where my scientific persona grows, lives and works, quite afar from my ‘real’ life, or so she claims, yet that is how I feel, too. The ‘fictive distance’, in fact, feels very much real. And as a matter of fact, this is what my *real life* looks like: a life that entails something like a pseudo-life in it.

So when my scholarly subjectivity looks around in the world, what does she see? She may or may not be able to see you, for instance, depending on where the research question directs her gaze, and even then, what she can find are not more (and certainly not less) than ‘objects of inquiry’, things that carry useful information when looked at from the right methodological angle for the purpose of answering that question. If she was ever able to see you, you would have to fit into her ‘grid of intelligibility’. No wonder that she is a hard-core *Cartesian*, she sees and knows in a

⁵Raluca Soreanu, “Feminist Creativities and the Disciplinary Imagination of International Relations,” *International Political Sociology* 4 (2010): 381.

⁶Erzsébet Strausz, “Truth, critique and writing: Foucault, every-day”, *Critical Legal Thinking*, 19th December 2011, <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2011/12/19/truth-critique-and-writing-foucault-every-day/>.

distinctive style. And in many ways, she preceded me there. She was born out of a particular relationship to knowledge, to what we think it means to know in modernity, and of particular relationships of knowledge that perpetuate this logic in how we know the world and ourselves. Descartes' *cogito*, the famous maxim and ultimately, the state of mind of the 'I think, therefore, I am', as Edward McGushin explains, is "a mode of subjectivity that does not appear to be linked to any particular way of living".⁷ It is grounded in a particular way of thinking; it is grounded in the very activity of thinking itself. This is how my scholarly subjectivity can detach from both you and me so easily. That is, from how *we* might experience the world in its particularities, mysteries, that (sometimes even scary and daunting) aliveness and abundance that she understands in a relation of 'objectivity' which turns it into 'objects' and relations to be explained between them. She has never been part of these equations (or so she claims, and in a way, she is right: I took her out from there a long time before she could even have had a proper look around). But you know what; perhaps we had enough of this distancing game already. To distance my 'scholarly persona' and address it in third person is exactly what I might be accusing her of (and along with her, inevitably myself). It is perhaps the same logic, the same distancing, the same style of thinking that I might just be performing and re-enacting here. It simply feels wrong to create another object out of her. Or at least to do so without offering some genuine gesture of reconnection, reconciliation, reunion, or whatever may lessen the distance between us.

It is so incredibly hard though to escape the comfort of thinking *like that*, to move away from the routine of separating out subjects and objects, and positioning them vis-à-vis each other, where both function as objects to be known in a certain (fictive) distance from us. *Why is it so hard?* - I honestly wonder (while I keep slipping back into the usual routine). In the process of writing this, for instance, all I wanted to do is to somehow bring into the text the question of scholarly subjectivity and to show something about how it works in my own experience. Again, because of the problem that whatever I write is already in past tense, and most of the coherence in it has to be made out with hindsight, in my second, third or twenty-third attempts of rewriting the text, it is kind of difficult to show that I hadn't actually set this story up in a way and that I could then move to this point *where I am at now*. It only struck

⁷Edward McGushin, *Foucault's Askesis: An Introduction to the Philosophical Life* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 193.

me towards the end of what appears now to be a paragraph that the account I was giving of my scholarly self displayed a strangely similar (and all too familiar) logic to the one I was being so critical of. We could of course say that the description I provided was clearly a caricature, which it surely was, but I still can't help being amazed at how easy it was for me to choose a narrative style that, in one way or another, still demarcated a certain part of me and re-presented it as an object. And even more strikingly, I represented it as something I knew and was able to control – but then the question unavoidably arises, *which of us was giving that description?* How much sense does it actually make to construct, maintain and operate this separation between different selves?

In any case, I think it is time for a new paragraph.

One of the consequences of what I have just experienced and tried to put into words above is that we might have to wait a bit longer before I could really bring Judith Butler into the text and perhaps provide some explanation as to why I am writing in this manner and why I keep referring to *you* as 'you'. (Having said that, if I wanted to take some of Butler's words very seriously, I could say that, *just like you*, she has always-already been here, in this text, from the very beginning.) Turning back to the problem of how we come to repeat and reproduce certain patterns, logics, ways of doing and being unknowingly and inadvertently (and I suppose it must have been a lucky coincidence that I have picked up on this one), I do not actually think that this would be out of a lack of openness, sensitivity or care. I have always been ready (sometimes a bit too ready) to try to 'think outside of the box', to look for alternative ways of thinking, to say something that may not be that obvious (or at least not that obvious to me), to try to listen carefully to the silences, to dwell in the gaps between things said, or to challenge and resist certain ways of doing and being (even if sometimes only for the sake of challenging and resisting). The real problem, I suppose might just lie elsewhere, perhaps how a certain idea of openness, sensitivity and care might be present in how I think or more importantly, in how I no longer think about certain things that I still do, sometimes in the name of openness, sensitivity and care. My best guess would be, for now, that all this is due to a particular relationship we have to knowledge, something like an epistemic constellation of what it means to know and how it is that knowledge about something

can be produced in the name of what we might call Western modernity. And even more crucially, how strong this conditioning might be that it derives from this particular understanding and politics of knowledge, which is constantly reinforced and perpetuated in everyday acts such as those of thinking and writing. Something of which my scholarly subjectivity could be a saturated example of indeed, but something, nonetheless, that also conditions my ways of thinking otherwise, even when I am trying to ‘think outside of the box’, and from which I find generally hard to detach (if that may ever be possible at all).

To be clear, I have been as prepared as one can be to address and discuss the question of the epistemic conditions of knowledge. This has been indeed a pivotal aspect of my PhD research and in one way or another, I have been meaning to develop it in far greater detail. What I was not quite sure of, however, is how exactly this question would unfold in the process of writing and where it would leave its marks in the text; and perhaps what I had least expected is that it would in fact appear in relation to my own writing practice and in relation to those ‘unknowns’ that completely escape me while I am writing. My initial plan was to put together a brief diagnosis of modern knowledge and the Cartesian mindset inspired by Edward F. McGushin’s work on Michel Foucault in order to illuminate some points of contrast regarding modes of thinking and being in Greek and Roman antiquity. My aim was to emphasize the contingency of that essentially modern experience in that our very experience of living and the truth(s) of our being in the world – for instance that we are here, breathing, feeling, thinking and maybe (or maybe not) reflecting on some of that – is mediated through a relationship with knowledge. In McGushin’s words, in modernity “one becomes the object of knowledge, both of self-knowledge and of theoretical and scientific knowledge”.⁸ As such, we also become subjects of a specific kind of knowledge, we think in these terms, and instead of trying to experience the actual truth of what we do and how we live, what we acquire is knowledge, an “accumulation of true statements about reality” through ‘evidence’ and ‘method’.⁹ We might as well think that there is nothing wrong with that. Actually, we might even find it desirable: if there is no one single truth (or even ‘truth’ as such), the closest we can get to understand the world may well be through an assemblage of aspirations as ‘true statements’. However, for the sake of contrast,

⁸Ibid. xvii.

⁹Ibid. 193.

the Cartesian mode of thinking, or at least how it became institutionalized, neutralized and constantly re-enacted in our contemporary practices, has come a long way from the ways in which subjectivity was organized, experienced and problematized in antiquity. While for us “the problem is to try to produce an objective knowledge of the subject”, for antiquity, summarizes McGushin, “the problem is to develop practices of transformation through which the subject constitutes itself as the truth”.¹⁰ We seek to know the world and ourselves through trying to nail down and “objectify the subject in discourse”: this shows for instance in how I (or anyone writing science) may be required to develop a certain scholarly subjectivity that has to pretend that the rest of the person is not present in the scientific narrative and that in that narrative you (or anyone ‘other’), if you appear at all, will most likely be seen as an object of knowledge, as a source and conveyor of information. This is, however, only one way of doing and being; only one way of relating to thought, to knowledge, to life. In antiquity, according to McGushin, one aims to “produce discourse (knowledge) that has a transformative effect on the subject.”¹¹ In modernity, it seems the aim is to try to keep it fixed: neither you, nor I can move too much – let alone play – either in the explicit text or in-between its lines.

For now, however, what is most important is perhaps not the contrast, but that double sense of fixity that derives from the Cartesian mindset in seeking to nail down the truth about its objects of knowledge, which in effect reproduces and reinforces the scholar’s subjectivity as a ‘knower’. As McGushin illuminates, this is also reflected on as a certain passivity in our ways in which we relate to the world and to ourselves. As McGushin notes, “the *cogito*, as a form of subjectivity has access to the truth through the simple act of looking.”¹² In other words, there is not a lot we, ‘knowers’ have to do in order to gain access to ‘true statements’: we only need to *look* in the right place for them and find evidence of their existence. We do not have to do work on ourselves, we do not have to become *other* to be able to see something differently: the knower’s subjectivity as ‘knower’ is not required to change, only the objects of her knowledge and with that, the amount of things she may come to know.

¹⁰Ibid. 125.

¹¹Ibid. 125.

¹²Ibid. 271.

Our usual academic practices of knowledge production, in this sense, hardly ever engage with how is it that we come to know something, how we got to that point in the first place or how a need, a desire, a curiosity arose to find something out. Equally we do not engage with what it may mean to ‘know’ in a particular context, or how it may ever be possible to ‘unlearn’ something that confines our ideas to a specific position regarding what ‘knowledge’ can possibly be in the first place. The range of experience that pertains to the ‘unknown’ and especially how we relate to and negotiate our relationship to the ‘known’ in the light of all that, again, is usually not part of our Cartesian reflections. I started this Chapter by stating that there are many things that I do not know, and with that, I tried to move away from some of the self-confidence and conditioning that is usually assumed in order for (scientific) knowledge to emerge. But what is even more crucial to try to ask, test and experiment with is how to negotiate our relationship to what we actually (think we) know, knowing how little we might be aware of those established and usually unquestioned ways of thinking and being that keep exerting their powers on us. What I am suggesting here is certainly not a constant paranoia about all those forces, powers, and habits that we are not able to see or control but which might still be there in the knowledge we produce, arrive at or achieve; but rather, to step back a little and ponder, even wonder about how it is exactly that, as McGushin put it, “one becomes the object of knowledge”. That is, not only of “theoretical and scientific knowledge” but also, in the same vein and along the same problematic, that of “self-knowledge”.

My reflections on my scholarly subjectivity required a meta-narrative and a narrative voice in order to be able to mitigate the fictive distance, and in the first place, to be able to address that fictive distance at all that has been created through a particular, objectivizing mode of doing and being in everyday academic practices. This is how I came to choose the narrative style I am writing in, or more precisely perhaps, this is how this narrative style came to develop in my writing: it is impossible to reflect on the experience of science, to address the separation of selves in the very language of science. I wanted to bring the subjective components of this objectivity a bit closer - to myself, to you and to the world beyond the safeguards of objectivity and subjectivity. Yet what I did not manage to escape still was to reproduce the same logic of distancing. What I thought was already thinking and writing differently just turned out to be surprisingly embedded, still, in what I was

trying to detach myself from. In fact, and here might be the catch, perhaps the way I relate to my scholarly experience and what I learn about myself through that – such as discovering, separating out and mediating different selves - might already be the product of an equally objectivizing, Cartesian gaze. That logic that addressed my scholarly self in the third person might have been there and in place for much longer than what I might be able to realize just now. Maybe this is how things have been for me most of the time, even before entering university. And maybe all this blends into much bigger questions regarding how societies are managed and governed in the West, how subjectivities are produced and shaped in and through discourse, how government and self-government are crafted in our contemporary episteme, what subject positions are available to whom and how people subjectify themselves in relation to themselves and to the world.

One of the aims of this thesis, however, is not to end on such a (seemingly) low note.

Not only because this is really, only just the very beginning of the thesis. The aim is never to stop there, and in fact, to never really stop anywhere: the aim is to keep things in motion, to keep both ‘knowledge’ and ‘subjectivity’ in flow, *as* flow rather than fixity, to let them fold, unfold or in whatever ways they might move, in their own time, in their own space and pace. ‘Aim’ might even be the wrong word to describe all this; it is certainly not something to be achieved, reached, or accomplished but something to be cultivated, worked towards, crafted patiently through taking one small step at a time. This thesis is an attempt to make a few slow, tentative moves away from ways of doing and modes of being that constituted my entry into and *modus operandi* in the ‘disciplinary life’ of International Relations for a number of years.

My everyday practices of thinking, writing, speaking, just like everyone else’s within the *discipline*, in one way or another, but mostly without me having been very conscious of them, adjusted and conformed to a sense of normality and with that, normativity, of what appeared to be the regular *and* desirable ways of doing research. In each banal, unreflected, everyday move subjectivity and knowledge are always, already, mutually and heavily implicated. To be able to see this, to be able to address these aspects like this, is already a result and effect of a lot

of work and thinking I invested into finding out about how exactly that particular form of academic life is constituted that also became part of *my* life. And what made me want to engage with all that, you might be asking, especially in a fashion and at a depth that required me to turn my academic experience into the very focus of my work? One reason could be that I was missing the people from my original research proposal which felt way too conceptual and all the interactions it demanded were interactions almost entirely with books. More importantly though, I was also missing myself, my regular life in doing it. As my first public account of this experience showed, which I just could not help including in this thesis because I still *feel* the meaning of those words as I read them, there was something about the way in which my scientific routine was organized, something about the professional voice I was trying to develop and polish to perfection, and with all that, something about my relationship to myself and the world I wrote about that triggered a lot of frustration and even some anger at having to re-create day by day the same virtual, linear, straightforward reality through which ‘reality’ can finally be approached.

Although the intellectual stream, a broadly Foucaultian view on politics and society that I have been following thinks, speaks and writes a lot about subjectivity, knowledge and power as well as to their continuous and inescapable imbrications, somehow surprisingly little is usually said about what it means to know about these things and what it means for us, ‘knowers’, to become the knowing subjects of these objects known. There is very little engagement with how we have to transform ourselves to be able to produce ‘true statements’ and how in that state of mind we are already acting within particular power relations, re-enacting a Cartesian logic and with that, reinforcing all those social structures and institutions that build upon and make use of *that kind of thinking*. I became concerned with what all this means in practice, as *lived experience*, for our lives but also for the lives we write about. And what all this might mean for thinking, speaking, writing, not as means towards ends but as *expressions*.¹³

Where I am writing from now, in a way, is a liminal space, a kind of threshold, not one of those abstract ones in critical theory but a threshold *lived*. I have already taken many small steps to move away from the fixity and frustration

¹³My thinking regarding what the practice of thinking might ‘express’ has benefited greatly from Véronique Pin-Fat’s work and in particular from the paper “Cosmopolitanism and the End of Humanity: A Grammatical Reading of Posthumanism” that she presented at the meeting of the Department’s Critical and Cultural Politics Research Group on 29th May 2012.

surrounding particular understandings of knowledge and subjectivity to be able to reflect on them and write what I am writing here, now and probably it will still take many further small steps to cultivate some more detachment from them and to try to experiment with other, more creative, more free, more relaxed, and ultimately, *happier* ways of learning, relating to knowledge, relating to what knowledge relates to, including ourselves. Ironically, what this demands in the first place is to distance myself from that ‘fictive distance’, which, in its totalizing logic, leaves no room for engagement with how it actually comes about and what it really does and expresses. Once we are already in that ‘space beyond the world’ that Inayatullah so accurately describes when we write, think and speak as the detached observers of social inquiry, there is no space left to engage with how this self-constructed space emerges from that very self, from our-selves, that it excludes as ‘personal bias’. What I would like to cultivate and experiment with in this modest step that is my thesis, is not an idea but the *experience* of a distance that is non-exclusive, a distance that is open, embracing and lets everything and everyone *be*. This is one of the things that the thesis as *experience-book* sets out to explore, and in many ways, through this I have already been discovering many unforeseen and unexpected aspects of my own ways of thinking and writing. This is only page eleven and it is already hard to get my head around what I have been through so far in writing this, in a good way.

This space, indeed, is already a space in formation, the very space of my writing here, on these pages, which I am trying to affirm and nurture at every turn of thought, sometimes actively and productively and at other times slipping back into the habit of objectifying, fictive distancing, and wanting to nail things down. In this space, subjectivity and knowledge, also my subjectivity and how I think about and relate to what I think I know are seen and experienced as *a process*. From a very pragmatic point of view, to be able do this, or just to embark on a journey that would allow for a certain sense of fluidity and flux, I had to suspend the routine of ‘looking for an answer’ and let go of many fairly specific ideas about what I thought I wanted to find and what I believed I could potentially find. In the past four years, to ‘know’ has already meant many different things at different stages. And in all cases, it always had to do something with me, with how I related to what I was doing.

For many years I actually took comfort in trying to find evidence for what I suspected was already there, and using theory made this even easier and more straightforward: my concepts and theoretical framework told me where to look

already and in a way, also suggested what kinds of things I was likely to find there. At that point in time my frustrations mostly revolved around the goodness of the fit between what I drew out from theory and what I found in my textual analyses, even if by that time I had already been subscribing to a post-positivist view on international politics, using a Foucaultian ‘framework’ for the purpose of a ‘critical discourse analysis’. In those times my attention continuously oscillated between how the questions of sovereignty and power were addressed in American and European academic narratives on post-9/11 foreign policy, which constituted the core of my original research proposal, and how well my Foucaultian concepts were able to capture what was *really* going on in these scholarly accounts.

However, to ‘capture’, in my vocabulary back then, meant a perfect and absolutely seamless fit, something unashamedly total. With hindsight, I must have had a very particular relationship to theory. I saw theory and theoretical work as some kind of grand and hidden ‘truth’ about the world and human existence, and although I might be slightly exaggerating here, I did see it as an all-encompassing intellectual formula that completely absorbs all empiricity, and even more so, it exceeds and succeeds them by asserting a life of its own. What I was striving towards was to show that wherever I looked and whatever I looked at, there was an instance of my theoretical truth operating there, and my aim was to reveal, or more precisely, to unveil that truth, which would then speak for itself and shock its audience. My bizarre idea of doing a critique of this kind assumed that at the end of the day, we should all celebrate in awe. As I recall what it was like having been fully caught up in a particular mode of doing things, it strikes me how much I must have been under the spell of a particular image of world politics and a particular spirit of scholarly engagement with this world, which in some mysterious ways, so heavily impacted on both the actual direction of my research and my subjectivity as ‘knower’. Now as it comes back to me with greater and greater clarity, this image was the global, machine-like depiction of sovereign power in Hardt and Negri’s book *Empire*. I kept citing one particular passage from this book in nearly every assignment I wrote in my first year, even if at some point I had to drop *Empire* as, ironically, Foucault’s original concepts of biopolitics and governmentality just turned out to be more comprehensive and in many ways, a much better fit to how I thought the world *really* worked. It was the following passage that kept returning in my writing but perhaps, as my thoughts on theory and knowledge showed in the

beginning of my research, it must have even more forcefully been inscribed into my thinking and into what I never actually consciously *thought*, just did, when I was writing. As Hardt and Negri write:

The concept of Empire is characterized fundamentally by a lack of boundaries [...] First and foremost, then, the concept of Empire posits a regime that effectively encompasses the spatial totality, or really that rules over the entire “civilized” world. [...] Second, the concept of Empire presents itself not as a historical regime originating in conquest, but rather as an order that effectively suspends history and thereby fixes the existing state of affairs for eternity. [...] Third, the rule of Empire operates on all registers of the social order extending down to the depths of the social world. Empire not only manages a territory and a population but also creates the very world it inhabits. [...] Finally, although the practice of Empire is continually bathed in blood, the concept of Empire is always dedicated to peace – a perpetual and universal peace outside of history.¹⁴

As years passed by, many things have changed, however. I have changed too, and so did my scholarly subjectivity: the theory grip loosened, the gaze softened and bit by bit, a myriad of different things started to show themselves on the horizon, once I stopped wanting to make them conform to a second reference point, once there was a niche through which I could finally *see* them for what they were. Once I began to slowly migrate towards this threshold, from where I am writing now, here. What seems to have remained the same, however, is a certain fascination with sovereignty. Or at any rate, its continuing presence in my life and work.

Even this thesis has ‘sovereignty’ in its title.

When ‘sovereignty’ entered my conceptual universe, it was only one concept among many, competing with such popular concepts of the time in IR as ‘ultrapolitics’, ‘empire’, or ‘exceptionalism’. But somehow it managed to outweigh and dominate all my other attempts to think about world politics, and it did so in a way which not only became a way of thinking, but also a strange logic of the unthought. Sovereignty, in an *Empire*-inspired mechanistic and totalizing depiction, was no longer only something I thought about but also something that quietly organized how I thought about other things as well, including the kind of knowledge I was after and

¹⁴Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), xv.

the particular effects I attributed to what it meant to do critique. In the light of how the discipline of IR thinks about ‘sovereignty’, however, this may not even be too surprising. As Lawson and Shilliam note, “it is no exaggeration to say that sovereignty is the foundation both of International Relations (IR) as a field of enquiry and of international politics as an ‘actual existing’ field of practice”.¹⁵ As they emphasize, it is nothing less but the “archetypal IR101 topic”, something every student must learn and literally no-one can avoid. Yet thinking about sovereignty as the central research theme of IR only means scratching the surface of its significance, still: as Lawson and Shilliam add, “for IR – sovereignty is synonymous with the emergence of the modern state system and, as such, forms the *generative grammar* of IR as a distinct subject matter.”¹⁶ What this implies is that the language of IR and what IR can possibly say is already deeply imbued with the notion of ‘sovereignty’ and as such, “even when the norm of sovereignty is broken, it still appears as the central referent point of international politics.”¹⁷ The strength of the organizing function of sovereignty as a ‘conceptual marker, normative frame and political tool’ is already shown in the way the authors describe it in transcendental terms, invoking the authority of both Language and God: sovereignty, write Lawson and Shilliam, is “IR’s font and altar”.¹⁸

Jonathan Havercroft describes the discipline’s affectionate or perhaps simply slavish relationship to its organizing concept as us being ‘captives of sovereignty’. As he writes, “a picture holds us captive. It is a picture of politics organized into sovereign states. Inside, the state’s sovereign authority maintains order. Outside of the state the absence of sovereign authority produces anarchy.”¹⁹ Even if, as he says, ‘no political scientist would subscribe to this simplistic picture’, the real powers of thinking in terms of inside/outside lie with the fact that it continues to set the terms of political discourse, and whatever alternatives might have been proposed to organize political life differently, these “proposals are offered in opposition to this picture. So, even those who wish to think about political order in a different way continue to be held captive by this picture of politics”.²⁰ *Empire* in this sense is a

¹⁵George Lawson and Robbie Shilliam, “Beyond Hypocrisy? Debating the ‘Fact’ and ‘Value’ of Sovereignty in Contemporary World Politics,” *International Politics* 46 (2009): 658.

¹⁶Ibid. My emphasis.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Jonathan Havercroft, *Captives of Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 1.

²⁰Ibid.

case in point: it represents an attempt to go beyond this imagination by claiming that the spatial ontology of inside/outside has collapsed and been replaced by “a play of degrees and intensities, of hybridity and artificiality” in one, all-encompassing global plane in what Hardt and Negri call the passage from modernity to post-modernity.²¹ These new qualities of global rule, however, are only ever meaningful in relation to what the authors claim there was before; the line between present and past, even if it is only an emerging line, demarcates a state of affairs of inside/outside in modernity and a set of new conditions in which the outside collapses into the inside. What we end up having is an extended sense of the inside, which still keeps referring back to the inside/outside distinction.

As R.B.J Walker’s iconic *Inside/Outside* powerfully shows, IR’s attachment to this particular, historically specific spatial ontology of inside and outside also derives from what theories of international relations actually *do* as both manifestations and guardians of the modern political imagination, and what might be so seductive in this practice for theorists.²² Sovereignty’s powers in this sense not only reside in its centrality and ubiquity in the field, and as such, that in one way or another, nearly any attempt to address it will somehow also reinforce it, and not even only in its capacity to continue to set the terms or the grammar of the discourse. As Walker’s diagnosis suggests, there is a certain security and a certain aesthetic experience that we derive from thinking the inside/outside divide. And the two, in fact, go hand in hand. What Walker calls the Cartesian coordinates of sovereignty refers to that style of thinking and theorising that proceeds in terms of drawing straight lines. It is the drawing of a line that essentially demarcates the two dominant readings of state sovereignty, one from the inside and one from the outside, which, in Walker’s words,

seem to express the decisive demarcation between inside and outside, between self and other, identity and difference, community and anarchy that is constitutive of our modern understanding of political space. They affirm a clear sense of here and there. Here we are safe to work out the characteristic puzzles of modernity, about freedoms and determinations, the subjectivities and objectivities of a realm in which we might aspire to realise our peace and potential, our autonomy, our enlightenment, our progress, our virtù(e). There, we must beware. The outside is alien and

²¹Hard and Negri, *Empire*, 187-88.

²²R. B. J. Walker, *Inside/outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 6.

strange, mysterious or threatening, a realm in which to be brave against adversity or patient enough to tame those whose life is not only elsewhere but also back then. Knowing the other outside, it is possible to affirm identities inside. Knowing identities inside, it is possible to imagine the absences outside.²³

These routines in which ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ are thought and imagined, argues Walker, “affirm the codes of nationalism and patriotism, the play of sanctimony and projection, the implausibility of strangers in a world of friend and foe and the impossibility of any real choice between tradition and modernity.”²⁴ While these “nice straight – spatial - lines of demarcation” constitute and reinforce identities within and outside the state, they also constitute and reinforce the identities of their theorists, of their ‘knowers’, providing a sense of security in the practice of *theorizing*. Theories of international relations, seen as “expression[s] of processes they are claimed to explain”, as Walker shows, “demarcate and discipline the horizons beyond which it is dangerous to pursue any political action” and with that, they also mark out a realm within which it is sensible and rational to think about political questions.²⁵ This, however, is not only about the security of knowing, of where to look for the location of modern political life and how to understand its fundamental characteristics in a ready-made fashion. The ways in which our thinking processes are *disciplined* according to the imagination of straight lines and how they divide up ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, this particular *style of thinking* also constitutes an aesthetic experience. As Walker notes, the simplicity through which the principle of state sovereignty resolves all “puzzles of unity and diversity, presence and absence, and space and time” also “expresses a particular conception of elegance and a specific sense of style”.²⁶ As he adds, the “grand motif of straight lines retains a certain charm, and an enormously powerful grip on the contemporary political imagination”,²⁷ even when in the contemporary political condition

the Cartesian coordinates may be cracked, identities may be leaking, and the rituals of inclusion and exclusion sanctified by the dense textures of sovereign virtù(e) may have become more transparent. But if not state sovereignty, and if not the anachronistic ambition to perfect its spatial

²³Ibid. 174.

²⁴Ibid. 174.

²⁵Ibid. 169, 6.

²⁶Ibid. 178.

²⁷Ibid. 178.

autonomies in a condition of perpetual peace among nations, what *then*? It remains exceptionally difficult to renounce the security of Cartesian coordinates, not least because they still provide our most powerful sense of what it means to look over the horizon.²⁸

The Cartesian coordinates of state sovereignty, which are also the Cartesian coordinates of *thinking* state sovereignty, contribute to the continuous reinforcement and rehearsal of the Cartesian fixity of the subject. The straight lines, in their elegance and simplicity, not only project and produce a spatial imaginary and a scholarly subjectivity that can't see curves or dots, can't appreciate singularity, can't grasp flows, folds, or cycles by themselves, in their own right, without already interpreting them through the inside/outside binary, but also freeze both knowledge and subject into a specific form through the appeal we attribute to them. It is both nice *and* easy to think in terms of straight lines. And when we think about state sovereignty, we are already inside or still pretty much nearby that proverbial 'box', with straight sides and sharp edges, which has long been in place in IR, supported by a complex and subtle intellectual and emotional economy.

Characterizing practices of thinking and theorizing sovereignty in relation to a box made out of straight lines, while a fun exercise in creative visualization, is also handy to introduce another activity that anyone inside a real box can always choose to do: peek outside. While 'thinking outside the box' somehow expresses a desire to get rid of the box or to be free from its confines altogether, peeking outside the box assumes and even finds it desirable that the box is there. As Walker notes regarding the strength and permanence of the straight lines of Cartesian coordinates: they "still provide our most powerful sense of what it means to look over the horizon".²⁹ Martti Koskenniemi's thoughts on sovereignty's long and continuing conceptual journey in the social sciences also notice a certain 'peeking' aspect in scholarly practices, a certain desire to look over our self-made horizons. However, before turning to Koskenniemi's account of scholarly practices in relation to sovereignty, there is something else about his text that merits attention in relation to the 'box'. In fact, it is about how a certain passage, a one-liner in his chapter managed to absorb *my* attention and how it triggered a strong reaction, unlike many other statements before,

²⁸Ibid. 162.

²⁹Ibid. 162.

after or around it, especially in contrast to that neutral and overly technical feel that I am all too familiar with in reading scientific accounts of sovereignty.

Koskenniemi reminds us that “‘sovereignty’ is just a word”.³⁰

I cannot help my fascination with brief yet robust statements like this: there is something very powerful in this line, and there is something in me that wants to put a finger on this power; something that wants to nail down how it is *exactly* that a statement in such simplicity can diminish in one precisely crafted blow a whole range of other powers, literal and discursive, that we usually attribute to the name and an “‘actual existing’ field of practice’ of ‘sovereignty’”.³¹ If sovereignty is ‘just’ a word, then it is also a bit like ‘lush’, ‘thingy’ and ‘stuff’: words that I must have said a million times between the ages of 14 and 17, until my mother got so annoyed with the sloppiness of my communication that she asked me (then begged me, then ordered me) to stop. If sovereignty *really* is just a word, then perhaps it does not even matter *that* much.

Yet it still does: as the accounts discussed above clearly show, we are still very much attracted to this extremely elusive and versatile word, whose “meaning has appeared differently in different contexts of space and time and like any institutional word it can be used for good and for ill.”³² The elusiveness and the ever-changing meaning of ‘sovereignty’, interestingly, also underline its permanence and continuing significance: it has been with us for many hundreds of years, it is still with us and even more importantly, it lives with us (and we live with it) in our everyday lives in a fashion that we tend to *forget* that, before anything else, it is *just a word*. Otherwise there would be no need for a reminder like Koskenniemi’s and that sentence in particular might have just completely escaped me.

The fact that I took note of it nonetheless and that it made such a big impact on me (‘sovereignty is just a word!’) is something that also seems to be Koskenniemi’s concern, even if from a fairly different angle. As he notes, what many academic accounts of sovereignty seem to somehow ‘elude’ or ‘defer’ is addressing

³⁰Martti Koskenniemi, “Conclusion: Vocabularies of Sovereignty – Powers of a Paradox,” in *Sovereignty in Fragments: The Past, Present and Future of a Contested Concept*, eds. Hent Kalmo and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 241.

³¹Lawson and Shilliam, “Beyond Hypocrisy?,” 658.

³²Koskenniemi, “Conclusion”, 241.

the question of power in relation to the question of sovereignty. Power in this context means various things, and this is exactly the point and the gist of the problem of our *forgetting*. As he writes, “sovereignty was surely born out of a desire to understand and explain power, but also to claim, legitimize and challenge power, a tool of analysis and polemics simultaneously.”³³ This is what I am most interested in: the power of the ‘desire to understand and explain power’ which, among many other effects, carves out a particular (discursive) mode of being for ‘sovereignty’ in our contemporary Western episteme. Discourse and subjectivity, that is, academic and political discourses and our own (academic) subjectivities and (other) senses of self are mutually implicated in this: as Koskenniemi stresses, “there is no analysis of sovereignty that remains unaffected by the polemical intentions of its author”.³⁴

What this implies, first, is that while we speak about sovereignty we also *do* something other than ‘just speaking’. This accentuates the ‘subjective’ dimension of being in discourse even more forcefully. While Walker’s diagnosis gestured towards the attraction and power of those embedded forms of thinking which constitute the default mode of relating to sovereignty in IR, Koskenniemi directs our attention to the work of more active forces in us. As he suggests, in speaking about sovereignty, one way or another, we also negotiate our relationship to what we are trying to grasp as a scientific concept. Scientific understanding and political action, or with much simplification, relations of ‘knowledge’ and ‘power’ are deeply interwoven in any attempt to discuss, theorize, analyse, or critique ‘sovereignty’. So far, so good. What is most interesting here, however, is *the kind of doing* that is repetitively performed in such academic practices, one that inevitably brings ‘subjectivity’ into the picture. We may appear as both analysts and polemicists of sovereignty and as such, that of the constitutive political order in our involvement in the (discursive) politics of and around ‘sovereignty’, but this desire to ‘understand and explain power’ also harbours a desire to approach, grasp or touch a certain ‘fundament’ in (political) life. Sovereignty is traditionally thought as something ‘absolute and perpetual’, which, in Koskenniemi’s description, is

both present and absent (like God) at the same time, so large that we cannot see it as against the details of the world it has created. All we see is the routine of the *potestas ordinata* that manifests itself in the daily routine of

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid. 239.

our institutions – neither ‘absolute’ nor ‘perpetual’ in any meaningful sense. And yet, once those routines come under stress, we immediately begin the hesitant grapple towards some secular equivalent of the *potestas absoluta*, a justification or a theory that enables the re-founding of routine as the relative (and non-threatening) truth of what we do.³⁵

This is what Koskenniemi calls the “‘limit’ aspect” of the word ‘sovereignty’: there is a particular *form* to our inquiries, one that constantly circles around the limits of the ordinary, pointing across the boundaries of both everyday politics and the scientific discipline “into some ‘fundamental’ aspect of the world that we are vaguely aware of but is never quite captured by the normal vocabularies we use to address our political or legal experience”.³⁶ In Koskenniemi’s account, it is this sense of ‘transcendence’ that accounts for ‘sovereignty’s continued attraction’, its ‘seductive appeal’, be it an “origin or an objective, fact or a concept, a rule or a decision” that we might be after.³⁷ When we speak about sovereignty, we also turn our gaze to the outside, to a beyond. And we seem to struggle with those other words that capture this beyond, towards which this very special word gestures. We experience a certain ‘excess’ in our quest to approach that ‘fundament’ or ground that provides for ‘the non-threatening truth’ of everyday life and its practices: “it is as if there were some *excess* in sovereignty that resists being contained in any single technical vocabulary.”³⁸ We encounter the limits of the ‘institutional’ character of ‘sovereignty’ as it keeps slipping out of our hands: it cannot be contained and constrained within ‘definite limits’, which then necessitates the continuous trespassing of disciplinary boundaries. And trying to put a finger on the ‘fundament’ and the beyond where it is (supposedly) located sets off an “apparently endless epistemological regress”.³⁹ As Koskenniemi notes, in this cycle of disciplinary deferrals that compete for and at the same time, keep eluding the ‘truth’ of sovereignty,

the moves are well known: from law to politics: ‘the foundation of law resides in a *pouvoir constituant*’ – it is a ‘political question’; from politics to history: ‘all we need to know of politics we can read from Thucydides and Machiavelli’; from history to sociology: ‘genealogies are only

³⁵Ibid. 224.

³⁶Ibid. 222.

³⁷Ibid. 222.

³⁸Ibid. 224.

³⁹Ibid. 225.

synchronic arrangements of interlocking systems of the “social””; from sociology to psychology: ‘it is all in the way identities get formed and reformed’; from psychology to philosophy: ‘well, identities are a product of language’ and finally from philosophy back to law as Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida appeal to international law and the United Nations as an antidote for the world-transforming policies of the single superpower.⁴⁰

Our experience of the excess of ‘sovereignty’, and the ways in which we try to act upon this experience in our scholarly practices, such as the above description of moving in circles illustrates, ultimately, *expose the absent ground of the authority of discourse itself*. The limits of discourse’s authority, of what it can do, control, embrace or just make appear, are already made visible in the circle of deferrals. As Koskenniemi says, it is “not only a reflection of the existential insecurity of academic specializations (although it is that, too) but of the fact that the question of sovereignty, understood as a question of ‘absolute and perpetual power’, always raises the question of the power of discourse that cannot be treated within discourse itself.”⁴¹ And he continues, “lawyers, historians, political theorists, sociologists or philosophers”, at the end of the day, are “unable finally to establish their own authority to speak on it”.⁴² As he notes, “when the whole world is described as competing languages, each of the languages understood as an instrument of struggle, what then becomes of *that* language of description?”⁴³ In this sense, discourse (both scientific and political), while searching for the ‘absolute and perpetual’, reveals itself to be powerless in relation to addressing its own powers. Not only does it have no means to capture what it projects to be beyond itself (‘sovereignty’ as ‘fundament’), which makes it constantly refer and defer to other discourses, but it is also lacks the resources to reflect on, in a sense, to become aware of, what it *really* does when it speaks. It participates in relations of power. And as such, it does *even more*. The power(s) of ‘sovereignty’ might just encompass and do lots of other things as well which are beyond what *any* scientific understanding of ‘power’ can possibly capture.

Paradoxically enough, the ‘excess of sovereignty’, that constantly slips out of the grasp of any professional discourse makes us face *the excess of life over discourse*. If there was nothing more at stake but the internal dynamics of scientific

⁴⁰Ibid. 225.

⁴¹Ibid. 225.

⁴²Ibid. 225.

⁴³Ibid. 225.

discourse, why would circularity matter so much? We could easily treat it matter-of-factly by saying that this is how discourse, or a certain disciplinary discourse, works. It certainly isn't the circle of deferrals then, neither the fact that it reveals something important about the limits of scientific knowledge (for instance, that it can't possibly nail 'sovereignty' down). What the circularity of scientific languages and sovereignty's excess or slipperiness *expresses* is something that takes us back to the (human) desire, *our* desire to find that 'fundament', that *secure point of reference outside* (may it be a justification, a particular theory or something else) that re-stores normality by the "re-founding of routine as the relative (and non-threatening) truth of what we do".⁴⁴ And at this juncture, we are already rolling in the depths of subjectivity, of how we are being constituted as subjects in and through a sovereign order (which we simultaneously negotiate in our analysis or critique of sovereignty) and as selves who constitute themselves in and in relation to all these practices.

While each of these themes warrant their own narrative unfolding, what is important to mention at this point is that our experience of 'excess' is only meaningful in relation to a 'subjective' experience of doing science. When we speak about 'sovereignty' we not only 'claim, legitimize and challenge power' and with that, the sovereign order, but we also act upon a desire to be safe by means of the certainty of some version of truth in order to be able to do 'what we do' without having to constantly question it. While we might be 'claiming, legitimizing and challenging power' when we speak about sovereignty using the discourses and vocabularies of law, politics, history and so on, in that very process, we are also forming a particular relationship to ourselves. And this relationship assumes the presence of a beyond, an outside, which is also the 'fundament', the justification for what we do and how we do it in our everyday lives. If my experience of practicing scholarship resonates with what Koskenniemi described as the 'circle of deferral' and the excessive nature of 'sovereignty' as an object of study (and it surely does), then I am also forming myself, my scholarly subjectivity and my more private sense of self, of how I experience being 'I am', in relation to 'sovereignty', its attraction and seduction, as well as to the never-ending chase to find its transcendent ground, which we repetitively perform in the course of scientific inquiry.

⁴⁴Ibid. 224.

In this sense, “the question of the power of discourse that cannot be treated within discourse itself” is not only a crucial one because speaking about ‘sovereignty’ is also a form of negotiating the sovereign order, but also because discourse subjectivates us and we subjectify ourselves in and through discourse.⁴⁵ Discourse instantiates different modes of subjection through which we may take up and, to varying degrees, identify with such subject positions as the author, the scholar, the expert, the critic and so on. In these qualities we follow and perpetuate the disciplinary requirements of how to speak and write; we often internalize a certain economy of imaginative geographies, of boundaries, categories, divisions, where we should and should not go, and the logic of how lines are usually drawn; we learn how to think in particular thought-styles and how to express these thoughts according to the genres and usual vocabulary of ‘analysis’, ‘critique’, ‘theory’ or ‘research proposal’.

Being in discourse, however, we also subjectify ourselves in and through discourse.

We may become attached to certain modes of doing, to what we usually do when we look at ‘sovereignty’, what we tend (not) to see and notice, and how we feel about taking up ‘sovereignty’ as our object of inquiry and a particular subject position in relation to it. In our daily routines we might concentrate on defining and redefining concepts, mapping certain discursive formations, deconstructing and exposing others; in these activities we may see straight lines, we might think in terms of binaries, maybe in the form of studying exceptions or just concentrating on emerging new norms. We might feel that some parts of this are annoying, exciting, simple or indifferent. We might have our own ways of judging when the job is done (as the disciplinary discourse can never really provide us with such standards). We might enjoy cutting corners; we might try to control for all possible contingency and line of attack in our work. There is always a rise and a fall, time and again, which find no other possible expression but in what belongs to *the person*.

In one way or another, through learning the rules of the ‘sovereignty’ discourse, performing them routinely in our scholarly practices and living a life that

⁴⁵Ibid. 225.

in part (maybe large, maybe small) consist of these very practices, we also find ourselves becoming something like a *desiring subject of 'sovereignty'*. One that not only desires 'to understand and explain power' through thinking about 'sovereignty' but also to approach, grasp, or just be close to a mysterious, transcendent core or 'fundament', which is always to be found (if at all) somewhere in the outside. That is, we peek outside the box, not only because this is what appears as the regular practice in the discipline, but also because we have become subjects who want to find something in and through this very activity. It is not only a question of method; it is a question of subjectivity in whatever we may do in and around the sharp-edged 'sovereignty' box. As (conscious, unconscious, subconscious) subjects of *such* desire, we have to be open to a whole range of different implications and consequences. And some of these may just sound too banal to be mentioned, but perhaps that is exactly why they deserve some (more) attention. Simple as it may sound, we have to be fine with wanting to find a certain sense of security *elsewhere*, which is not only located in an 'outside' (no matter how close it may be) but also in a 'beyond', towards which our scholarly practices within the confines of a certain academic discipline can only ever *gesture*. Something that more likely than not, we will never be able to know, see, touch; something that is already coded in the imaginary location of the potential whereabouts of the 'absolute and perpetual'. And to be more precise, it is not only about being open to this particular kind of *looking*: it is about the attraction and appeal of a certain scholarly gaze, one that keeps holding us *there*, in which we are also deeply implicated as subjects and selves.

This is how, in a sense, the absent ground of the authority of any discourse on sovereignty and the inescapable excess of life over any kind of discourse constitutes a particular, historically specific mode and experience of subjectivity in our contemporary attempts to engage with the word, notion, concept of 'sovereignty'. As 'sovereignty' keeps slipping out of our hands at the level of discourse we are constructing ourselves as its desiring subjects who, in their search for sovereignty as the 'fundament' of the everyday, turn their gaze to a certain beyond. Koskenniemi's statement that 'sovereignty is just a word' and my reaction to it are no exceptions in this regard. What this statement opened up for me was exactly a new, shiny horizon outside the box, somewhere over the usual coordinates of engagement that made me wonder about the powers of what a linguistic view and analysis could bring into my reflections on scholarly practices in IR. I would never feel competent or confident

enough to discuss the implications of the *wordness* of ‘sovereignty’, of what it might mean to think about it as a linguistic phenomenon. There is a certain lure to trying to find something elsewhere; maybe in language, maybe in philosophy, or at least these have been my usual lines of flight from IR in the past four years. Even if my project is about trying to reflect on my involvement and implication in sovereignty discourses, and with that, to loosen their grip on me, it is still so easy to try and find distance from these scholarly practices with reference and in relation to those of other disciplines. A bit like the Cartesian pull towards objectification and fictive distancing, in discourses on sovereignty there is always the seduction of the untouchable beyond, which keeps our gaze captive and fixated on a ‘somewhere else’, which at the same time, provide for the security of what we do *here*.

As I am writing this I cannot help but notice a strange economy of spaces and distances that seem to unfold and take shape in my own discursive account. There is that ‘space beyond the world’ from which scientific discourse and its objective observer speaks. There is also that space beyond discourse towards which sovereignty discourses gesture. There is also that space and distance which I am trying to develop and cultivate from both of these discursive dynamics in the practice of writing. I have to admit that there is nothing too definite that I could say about this distance-and-space economy at this point. I would be jumping into conclusions too quickly, and with that I might be risking reproducing those very logics from which I am hoping to distance myself.

It is good to stop here though, for now.

Reflections of this kind require the slow and careful consideration (and reading) of how we experience our being in discourse, in the practice of doing social science and in relation to specific scholarly discourses, such as the ones on sovereignty. Discourse subjectivates us and we subjectify ourselves in and through discourse. The idea and requirements of an objective social science continue to shape and form particular scholarly subjectivities, ‘knowers’ of a particular, perhaps overly Cartesian type, through the everyday academic practices of reading, writing, speaking. Discourses on sovereignty affect us in even more specific and mysterious ways: their seductive powers operate at multiple registers, ranging from the elegance and simplicity of the default mode of thinking state sovereignty in terms of neat, straight

lines to the ways in which we might experience ourselves as its desiring subjects, constantly peeking over the disciplinary horizons. What makes any investigation of this sort extremely challenging is that it is nearly impossible to put a finger on either of the processes of subjection or subjectification, especially one that involves my own subjective experience of being in discourse and in particular in IR discourses on sovereignty. Just like the delay already inscribed into the process of thinking and writing, and specifically, the near impossibility of exposing thinking processes in the course of writing *in the same process of writing*, there is also a delay involved in the process of becoming a knower, a desiring subject or maybe someone at a certain distance from both and our abilities to give an account of subjectivity in-the-making, let alone our own. I am not even sure where I begin and where discourse begins, where the contours of my person, my self and my scholarly subjectivity lie and intersect, especially that both of them are in continuous movement and formation.

Again, the purpose is certainly not to try to pin any of these down. What this PhD thesis sets out to explore as an experience book is exactly this experience of being in discourse, while trying to avoid turning any of these aspects into definite objects of knowledge. Before anything else, this project is an account of self-formation in those everyday academic practices that we no longer reflect on, such as writing and thinking in this case. This is an account of self and scholarly subjectivity from a liminal space, from a threshold which I am living while writing this text. In fact, this narrative voice would not be possible at all without having already inserted some distance into my relationship to these practices, without having already manoeuvred myself towards this threshold, towards the limits of my scholarly constitution. It is also an imperfect and in many ways, necessarily inconclusive account: while there are many things that I do not know, there are perhaps even more things that I do not even know that might be escaping me. All I can do is to notice and document what I can actually see and think about my relationship to what, in this way, is exposed as *what there is*.

Yet the practice of writing, as I have already begun to show, can be appropriated and internalized as a particularly helpful asset to facilitate these processes and potentially, to cultivate alternative modes of doing science and being in discourse. After all, writing is probably the primary means through which we participate and position ourselves in scholarly discourses and in the scientific community. In this sense, it is not surprising at all how heavily disciplined the

practice of academic writing, its style, structure and content are. What I am trying to work towards is to transform the self, my scholarly subjectivity through the practice of writing in a fashion that challenges the fixity of the Cartesian knower. With that I am also working towards transforming the practice of writing, of what writing can possibly do if experienced differently, through allowing the transformation of that self that the academic genre customarily excludes to participate in its re-making. What is at stake here is an experimental and patient cultivation of a different experience of subjectivity, knowledge and writing.

We might be asking if there is perhaps a little more at stake here. What about the politics of all this? Why should IR scholars be interested in a project like that? Why should *we* care? These usual questions put to scientific work are good to be brought into this discussion. Not the least because questions like this, questions addressing the relevance and significance of my work for what we might know and identify as the actuality of international politics, creates another niche for bringing Judith Butler's thought into the text at last. In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler writes reading Foucault's work that "the 'I' has no story of its own that is not also the story of a relation – or a set of relations – to a set of norms."⁴⁶ In this sense there is "no making of oneself (*poiesis*) outside of a mode of subjectivation (*assujettissement*) and, hence, no self-making outside of the norms that orchestrate the possible forms that the subject may take."⁴⁷ Accordingly, whatever I am trying to achieve in this thesis and whatever experience of (a transformed) subjectivity might arise from this, it will always emerge from the ways in which the discipline of IR constitutes its 'knowers' and importantly, also from the ways in which subjectivity and subjecthood are produced in the broader epistemic structures of Western modernity. This aspect is crucial for any attempt to critique these structures, be they academic or other. As Butler notes in relation to Foucault's writings regarding the possibilities of critique in contemporary Western societies,

any relation to a regime of truth will at the same time be a relation to myself. An operation of critique cannot take place without this reflexive dimension. To call into question a regime of truth, where the regime of truth governs subjectivation, is to call into question the truth about myself

⁴⁶Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 8.

⁴⁷*Ibid.* 17.

and indeed, to question my ability to tell the truth about myself, to give an account of myself.⁴⁸

In this sense, one of the primary means through which we may gain access to contemporary forms of government and subjectivation is our own experience of subjectivity, our own constitution as subject of a particular regime of truth. Critique in this sense starts with self-questioning as an ethical relationship to those political structures within which we are formed.

Subjectivity is political and so is *our own*.

Since the objectifying gaze of academic discourses banishes the personal, it is easy to slip into forms of thinking that understand the subject as a concept, as abstraction even in critical accounts. Butler, however, suggests finding ‘a living place’ for the ‘I’, for the scholar as person in the operation of critique. Yet this is not only something she argues for, it is also something she *performs* in the process of writing. The living person, even if Butler’s life is not the explicit focus of her work, is present throughout the text. My favourite passage is when she discusses how we tell our stories of origin, of how we give an account for the history of our constitution as subjects. As she writes,

So to be more precise, I would have to say that I can tell the story of my origin and I can even tell it again and again, in several ways. But the story of my origin I tell is not one for which I am accountable, and it cannot establish my accountability. At least, let’s hope not, since over wine usually, I tell it in various ways, and the accounts are not always consistent with one another.⁴⁹

I am very fond of the reference to telling stories over wine. If we are reading this passage in a strong Cartesian mindset, this side comment may appear to be completely irrelevant and non-substantial. In my reading, this is an expression of the ‘living space’ of the ‘I’, not only through the extension of her living room (or kitchen) into the text, but also by means of embracing the (writing) self as it is, without forcing it into the fixity and authority of the knower or into the pretence of its absence in the text. I find this particularly encouraging since, as Butler notes, in

⁴⁸Ibid. 22-23.

⁴⁹Ibid. 38.

many ways there are even more constraints to giving an account of the self than what I have established and encountered in the process of writing this chapter so far. As she writes, “the very terms by which we give an account, by which we make ourselves intelligible to ourselves and to others, are not of our making.”⁵⁰ Language, grammar as well as their discursive uses and effects are social in character, constituting a ‘domain of unfreedom and substitutability’. As Butler writes, the “account of myself never fully expresses or carries this living self. My words are taken away as I give them, interrupted by the time of a discourse that is not the same time as mine.”⁵¹ The sociality of discourse exceeds us and entering discourse always already dispossesses us. In this sense:

the “I” can tell neither the story of its own emergence nor the conditions of its own possibility without bearing witness to a state of affairs to which one could not have been present, which are prior to one’s own emergence as subject who can know, and so constitute a set of origins that one can narrate only at the expense of authoritative knowledge.⁵²

Again, the mere condition of being in discourse already heavily constrains how much of our living self can be expressed. Nonetheless, as Butler’s own example shows, the presence of the living sense can be made *felt*. The sense of the living self in a way is as much of an excess to discourse as discourse’s sociality exceeds the self. In my reading, when it comes to critique, it comes to the question of how this very junction can be experienced and negotiated. If there is a way to experience our own constitution as subjects in and through political structures, to question these modes of formation, and to try to transform ourselves as a means of resistance to these structures, what needs to be explored and discovered are the intersections of our social and ‘living’ selves. Critique in this sense and for my thesis is the practice of cultivating alternative modes of being in discourse (a condition which we cannot escape anyway) through the affirmation and nurturing of a living space for the ‘I’, which I am trying to facilitate through the practice of writing. In a way, I am trying to write a *living text* and I am excited to see it unfold in this project, whatever turns it may take.

⁵⁰Ibid. 20-21.

⁵¹Ibid. 36.

⁵²Ibid. 36.

However, as Butler's statements already suggest, this is not only about me and can never be *only* about me. As she writes, "an account of oneself is always given to another, whether conjured or existing, and this other establishes the scene of address as a more primary ethical relation than a reflexive effort to give an account of oneself."⁵³ The sociality that embeds this project already contains *you*. As such, *you are there in the text and in the whole process of my writing*. One way of cultivating the living space of my 'I' is to make your presence felt and explicit, too. As Butler notes reading Cavarero, "one can tell an autobiography only to an other, and one can reference an 'I' only in relation to a 'you': without the 'you' my own story becomes impossible."⁵⁴ Of course, all I can make explicit and felt is that there is a space for you here; I can only try to cultivate *my* living space that contains *a* you, many different forms, volumes and intensities of 'you', actually. But maybe what you could try to see in the process of reading this is whether you could read yourself into this text; my writing is an invitation to explore the living spaces in the discursive framework of our shared academic sociality. This is probably nothing more than a gesture, but hopefully also an opening, for the both of us as selves, subjects, and 'knowers'.

[As the experience book will show, however, these gestures and openings in the intersubjective space between reader and writer are of crucial importance.]

I am writing these words with hindsight already, after having finished writing the entire experience book. As I can see this now, in the original draft of Chapter 1 the above passage is the last 'opening' for making a difference in our experiences as readers and writers; what followed afterwards were a few sketchy and fuzzy paragraphs born out of my previous attempts to come up with a clear structure and chapter outline there. Before turning to the significance of these 'openings' though, this very recognition allows me to say something important about the writing of this project on the occasion of what has been deleted from here.

Needless to say, it would have been impossible to know at the time of writing Chapter 1 what this project would eventually turn out to be. Yet this is not only the case because I only had a rough idea about what would go into each chapter but also

⁵³Ibid. 20-21.

⁵⁴Ibid. 32.

because of the nature of the project and its emphasis on *genuine writing* and the production of a 'living text'. Writing the experience book required a specific style of writing and a specific relationship to the actual process of writing, too. In fact, the thesis itself seeks to explore what an alternative practice of writing can do in relation to the aims and ambitions of the project *as a political action*, and as such, it is only after having written the whole text that I am now able to reflect on the actual structure of the experience book. It is important to note here though that *this* is the only part of the thesis that I have substantially revised by writing it anew. In the light of the purposes of the experience book it has been vital to let the writing wander sometimes and take me to places which I could not have possibly foreseen. It has been essential to keep some parts of the text exactly in the form as they hit the page for the first time and to try to let go of those impulses and reflexes which kept urging me to do what I would *normally* have done, had this been a conventional piece of academic writing. Some parts of this thesis will thus continue to read like a stream of consciousness, as a flow of reflections on uncertainties, unknowns, feelings and realizations as they appeared in the course of the writing process, in my endeavours to make sense of the material and my own involvement in the production of 'knowledge'. The seamless blending of section headings into the main text is an expression of that same ambition.

These parts, however, are not only meant to expose where I was at in my thinking process but also, *through the very force of writing*, to move me and my work forward in a fashion which did not require me to think everything through in advance and nail down what I was going to say *exactly* and why. The choice of this writing style reflects the purpose and politics of this project. The main focus of the thesis is subjectivity formation in the discipline of IR *as lived experience*. Here I engage with how we come to be constituted as subjects of particular experiences in everyday practices of social scientific inquiry through my own journey and formation as a PhD student in the disciplinary discourse and in relation to expert discourses on 'sovereignty' and American foreign policy. Yet the project doesn't stop at telling the stories of disciplinary formation and reflecting on what it might have meant for me to live them as such. The thesis as experience book seeks to *create* an experience for the both of us, for me as writer and you as reader which might enable us to detach from some of these disciplinary conditionings and assume more ownership over our modes of being and ways of doing in the 'disciplinary life' of IR. As such, it works

against the fixities of the mindset of the Cartesian ‘knower’ and the gaze of the ‘desiring subject of sovereignty’ that constantly searches the ‘beyond’ for that secure ‘fundament’ of everyday life that keeps escaping from it. It seeks to disrupt the comfort of those styles of thinking that we no longer reflect on in academic practice by drawing our attention back to the actuality of what we do when we write and read, *just like here, now*. For me the practice of the style of writing that I follow here is already an exercise in this effort: letting the words flow and the text unfold in its own logic occasionally gives me an opportunity to momentarily break away from the loop of thinking and be somewhere *else*, perhaps in feelings, intuitions or random impulses.

The intersubjective space that emerges in this text, the one that unfolds between us as I am writing these lines and you are reading them, is *strategic* in this regard: it is here that we may be *present* (or absent) as persons in the activity of reading and writing, as the *life* that, *in this moment*, exceeds the subjectivating pulls of discourse. And whenever we meet here, there is an opening to allow ourselves to be affected and displaced by the encounter as ‘knowers’ and academic subjects of particular kinds. This is where we can change, this is where we may choose to experiment with alternative modes of being in discourse. Unlike the conventional academic prose, the genre of narrative writing and the first person perspective provides me with the freedom to cultivate a ‘living space’ for the narrative ‘I’ and with that, a strengthening presence for myself as the person who writes. And while this narrative ‘I’ could not possibly be here without a ‘you’, your experience, of how you read these pages is yours only to have. The pop-up windows of Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 are meant to facilitate this experience of ‘choice’. Each window covers a brief ‘abstract’ for these chapters that summarizes their purpose, achievements and story line: you may choose to read them in advance or decide to go with the narrative flow (and maybe come back to them later.) The politics of the experience book of ‘sovereignty’ relates to the creation of such openings, literally, figuratively, materially. It works towards the transformation of (scholarly) subjectivity, *of our subjectivities*, through remaking the experience of everyday social scientific practice, such as how we read, write and think in the ‘disciplinary life’ of IR. In this way we might be able to develop a different relationship to ‘sovereignty’ and in that, we might even find a freer, happier place for it in our own lives.

Chapter 1, *this chapter*, is the beginning of this journey; a journey, nonetheless, that is also a journey of the slow discovery and exploration of its very own purposes, of what it can do and might do, together with many of the perplexing statements and realizations that I mentioned earlier. After various reflections on my experience of the operations (and quiet comfort) of the Cartesian mindset, of the mentality of the desiring subject of sovereignty and my eventual frustrations with the ‘omniscient social scientific prose’, gestures that already destabilize the scholar vs. person division, the narrative ‘I’ goes on to uncover further possibilities to detach from disciplinary conditioning and cultivate new modes of being in discourse. Writing from the ‘liminal space’ of the ‘lived threshold’, however, poses some great challenges regarding *where to go from here*. It is a place from where some of these disciplinary mechanisms, subjectivities and routines can already be recognized as such yet at the same time, there is no beaten track to follow. The best option appeared to be the most secure one: to go back to those sources of my discursive formation that enabled the emergence of the project of the experience book in the first place.

Undoubtedly, the most formative of all my academic experience has been my continuous and persevering engagement with the work of Michel Foucault in the past six years. Just like there seems to be no obvious reason *why* I started to research the subject matter of ‘sovereignty’, my encounter with Foucault’s writings has been equally incidental. I came into IR during the ‘exceptionalism’ fever around 2006 and I came across Foucault’s notions of ‘governmentality’ and ‘biopolitics’ as composite elements of the same discourse. After a couple of years of following the Foucaultian mainstream though, I started to slowly discover the enormous richness of Foucault’s writings on aesthetics, experience and epistemic orders as well as his late lectures on ethics that seemed to have been evading IR’s attention. Undeniably, this project grew out from the inspiration that I derived from Foucault’s practice of writing ‘experience books’, his tireless efforts to unmake constituted experience and enable new ones, and that critical ethos of ‘self-transformation’ through which he turned his scientific practice into a site of resistance to power.

Chapters 2 and 3 engage with the ever-changing character of Foucault’s presence and critical potential in this project, *for* this project. Chapter 2 explores the disciplinary journey through which I came to read Foucault the way I read him now. It tells the story of the transition from ‘Foucault’ as an ‘interpretative tool’ to the

appreciation of his writings as lived experience, which we can both share and take further in our own ways, in our own lives. This chapter provides a personal account of how I moved from IR's conventional reading of Foucault and its focus on the notions of 'governmentality', 'biopolitics' and 'security' as constituents of a critical toolbox to an understanding of Foucaultian philosophy as a practice of the care of the self that persistently works towards self-transformation and struggles against any fixity of identity, thinking or knowledge. Through recounting these transformations in my own relationship to texts and Foucault's writings Chapter 2 opens up a possibility for loosening the Cartesian grip on our practices of reading.

In Chapter 3 I re-read some of Foucault's most important writings on 'discourse' and 'authorship' from the perspective of this critical ethos. Here I endeavour to map some of the ways in which our experience of being in (disciplinary) discourse could be transformed in the light of Foucault's practice of writing 'in' and 'against' discourse. I concentrate on how Foucault negotiated his own 'insertion' into discourse and his presence in it as the person who writes and speaks. Among other texts, here I re-read Foucault's inaugural lecture "The Order of Discourse" and engage with the actual strategies through which he sought to ward off the subjectivating forces of discourse in his writing, something that I first noticed in terms of his staged dialogues as expressions of a certain 'anxiety'. It is in this context that I re-introduce the notion of the experience book in Foucault's oeuvre and for the purposes of this thesis.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 take us back to the 'disciplinary life' of IR, to the site of our disciplinary formation as 'knowers', writers, thinkers. Taking Foucault's critical ethos seriously, all three chapters work towards remaking disciplinary experience in different ways. Chapter 4 reviews some of the most important characteristics of Foucault's discursive life in 'Foucaultian IR' as an experience of community formation. It re-imagines the exercise of 'literature review' as an active engagement with the community of Foucaultian scholars, something that could perhaps bring our experience closer to Foucault's undefined 'we' of a 'community of action'. The chapter engages with the discursive formation of disciplinary identities through mapping some of those subjectivating pulls and openings for desubjectivation in 'Foucaultian IR' that have been framing my own journey there. Here I try to identify different discursive vistas for re-thinking (and perhaps also experiencing) what

Foucault's continuous efforts towards making himself 'strange' to himself could mean in practice and in the 'disciplinary life' of IR.

Chapter 5 turns Foucault's critical ethos back on my own disciplinary constitution, both in Foucaultian IR and through the very practice of narrative writing as I am practicing it in this experience book and in relation to some of my earlier writings. It traces the birth of the narrative 'I' through previous reflections on a 'limit-experience' I had about six months ago. This 'limit-experience' relates to an attempt to produce the best Foucaultian 'discourse analysis' of 'sovereignty' that a Foucaultian framework of 'governmentality' and 'sovereign power' enabled me to do, something that I constructed on the basis of what I identified as 'good scholarship' in 'Foucaultian IR'. In a (failed) effort to contribute to a special issue project, I applied this Foucaultian framework to the scholarly accounts of Anne-Marie Slaughter and Fernando R. Tesón, focusing on the ways in which these writings performed a redefinition of the notion of 'sovereignty' in the post-9/11 American foreign policy context. Albeit my analysis of Slaughter's writings turned out to be the more successful in terms of its 'Foucaultian' findings, it also made me realize something crucial about my own personal involvement in the production of academic knowledge. Chapter 5 engages with the 'liminal space' that arose with this recognition and the ways in which I sought to inhabit and explore this space at that time.

Chapter 6 turns Foucault's self-transformative ethos back on the whole project of the experience book, on its actual content, form and style as well as our involvement in it, on me as writer and you as reader. It adds an additional layer of reflection to the limit-experience discussed in Chapter 5 by refocusing on my discourse analysis of Tesón's writings. Although the analysis of Tesón's discourse remained only loosely connected to the Foucaultian framework, my reading of these texts, as I begin to see this more clearly in this Chapter, already gestured towards something vitally important regarding the practice of writing and its political implications. Re-embedding my explorations of 'writing' into the broader IR literature of alternative conceptualizations and practices of writing, I slowly begin to draw out the *politics* of my own practice of writing as the lived experience of an ethos of self-transformation and as a site of resistance to power. It is in this intersubjective space where I, 'I', you, 'you', we and 'we' all meet.