

Le mensonge

Le mensonge:
Multidisciplinary Perspectives
in French Studies

Edited by

Kate Averis and Matthew Moran

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

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INTRODUCTION

EXPLORING *LE MENSONGE*

KATE AVERIS AND MATTHEW MORAN

The articles collected in this volume proceed from an international, interdisciplinary conference jointly organised by King's College London and University College London in September 2008. The conference was organised around the theme of *le mensonge*, with the organisers' objective being to create an environment in which current research in French studies could be explored through the lens of a concept that opens up for scrutiny the workings of French culture, politics and society. The initial call for papers generated significant interest and the final programme saw researchers from some of the most prestigious institutions in the UK, Canada, France and Ireland meet to debate the conference theme in the context of a diverse range of research topics. Building on the success of the conference, this volume uses the idea of *le mensonge* as a vehicle to gain insight into the current state of French studies across a range of disciplines. The book illustrates the remarkable scope and vitality of work being undertaken across French studies, giving exposure to the diverse approaches and challenges posed by research in different subject areas.

At stake in the project is the promotion of the inherent interdisciplinarity of any field of area studies, which necessarily incorporates a range of fields and methodological approaches. In doing so, the editors of this volume find its principal contribution to be in reducing the distances between disciplines, and creating an atmosphere of dialogue with, and awareness of, current research being conducted beyond one's own field of French studies, and indeed, beyond French studies itself. One of the challenges that area studies faces is arguably the troubling delineation of an "area", as exemplified by the naming of university departments and degree courses. Debates around the naming of fields – "Francophone",

“post(-)colonial”, “American”, “women’s” studies – only emphasise the near impossibility of discrete categories.

In these difficult times for universities in general, and the Humanities in particular, it is of the utmost importance to highlight the ways in which collaborative, interdisciplinary research maintains these distinctions between disciplines, while at the same time ensuring that these frontiers remain porous and permeable. Interdisciplinary research allows scholars to enhance their work by drawing on the latest advances in other fields and in this sense, the benefits are clear. The presentation of this book, bringing a diverse range of articles together in one volume, seeks to explore and develop ways in which disciplines inform and complement each other, and creates a context in which readings of poetry and prose, and ideas about visual media are considered alongside political and historical analyses through a theme that is central to all: *le mensonge* in its various guises.

For it is indeed true that lies, or deception, permeate the overriding structures and mechanisms that regulate society, constituting a fundamental element of our social existence. For Derrida, the classical distinction between truth and lies is based on intentionality: “Quand je mens, je ne dis pas nécessairement le faux et je peux dire faux sans mentir”. Despite the nuances that challenge the clarity of such a conception, it is, he states, one that must be maintained for fear that we destroy the very foundation of society. The stark truth/lies binary continues to underpin not only the institutional structures that form our external world but our relationships with others and, perhaps, ourselves.

The book is divided into three sections, each contributing to the overall goal of considering the historical, political, literary and aesthetic roles played by *le mensonge* in French culture and society, past and present. It begins by exploring the political and social impact of interpretations of *le mensonge* in the context of French society and politics. Section One, ‘Political and Social Interpretations of *le Mensonge*’, poses the problem of the inevitability of deception in political and institutional life. If deception is not only implicit in the individual’s relationship with the world, but also underpins the political structures and mechanisms that operate in our society, how then can duplicity be considered in terms of a political strategy? Are proclamations of truth nothing more than veiled propaganda and if so to what extent is deception a political necessity?

In 1967, Hannah Arendt wrote: “Seen from the viewpoint of politics, truth has a despotic character. It is therefore hated by tyrants, who rightly fear the competition of a coercive force they cannot monopolize, and it enjoys a rather precarious status in the eyes of governments that rest on consent and abhor coercion”. The suggestion here is that the truth does not always serve the interests of the democratic process, making the lie a necessary evil. In his opening chapter, “The Politics of Mendacity”, Philippe Marlière explores the function and the place of the lie in contemporary French politics. Through a comparative study of the French and American political cultures, he examines the opposition between a normative and a functionalist approach to questions surrounding the place of the lie in the political sphere. Maura Stewart continues the exploration of *le mensonge* in the political context as she examines the representation of Europe in French presidential elections in the second chapter, “Enchantment and Reality: The Theme of Europe in the French Presidential Elections of 1988 and 1995”. Continuing on this analytical line that explores the function, and indeed necessity of the lie, in politics, Stewart offers an insightful analysis of the mismatch between political rhetoric and the reality of European integration. The argument here is particularly timely given that the recent global economic crisis has succeeded in pushing questions regarding France’s place in Europe to the top of the political agenda once again. Michel Kokoreff and Matthew Moran then close the section by linking politics and society with “Republic of Lies? Exploring the French Riots of 2005 and 2007”, that examines the relationship between *le mensonge* and the recent large-scale riots in the Parisian suburbs. In this chapter the authors explore the impact of the lie on the internal logic of the riot and, on a larger scale, on the relationship between the *banlieues* and mainstream society.

Of course deception is not limited to the social and political structures that underly contemporary society, but is also implicit in the individual’s relationship with the world. As such, Section Two, ‘Writing *le Mensonge /le Mensonge* in Writing’, explores lies and lying as methodology in literary cultural production. Is deceit inherent to any form of writing and if so does this challenge the claims to authenticity found in the genres of autobiography or memoir? Is the attempt to write or record the past intrinsically marred by our narrativisation and, thus, falsification of real events? Can writing ever be authentic? In the opening chapter of Section Two, Sylvie Lannegrant addresses the interplay between truth and deceit in the field of autobiographical writing in “La poursuite d’une représentation impossible: Ecriture autobiographique, mensonge et vérité chez Robbe-

Grillet”. The autobiographical genre is particularly receptive to the exploration of the truth/lies dichotomy, given the genre’s implicit suggestion of the author’s intention to faithfully represent the past, and the disruption of this claim by much autobiographical writing. In her chapter, Lannegrand explores the inherent dischord between the notion of personal reality and the discursive representation of that reality – in that writing necessarily involves mediation and modification of lived experience – through an analysis of Alain Robbe-Grillet’s self-conscious attempts to reconcile the contradictory elements of autobiographical writing in his trilogy, *Romanesques*.

Remaining within the genre of life-writing, or memoir, Christina Kkona’s chapter, “Le mensonge en tant qu’enfance de l’art: Le paradigme proustien”, explores the Proustian paradigm of the lie in the context of *A la recherche du temps perdu*. If storytelling leads its author to create that which was always there and waiting to be discovered, then the double signification of a word closely associated with storytelling, “invention” – meaning both creation and discovery – is revealed. Kkona develops the argument that the key to seeking the truth of art can be found in the double movement of creation and discovery, thus the Proustian paradigm of the loving lie in *A la recherche du temps perdu* becomes an illustration of the fiction in its early stages, and in this sense qualified as the “infancy of art”.

The following chapter takes Section Two’s exploration of the resonance of the dichotomy of truth and lies in literature to the realm of poetic discourse in “Le poète dit « tous les poètes sont menteurs » : le paradoxe du menteur dans la poétique française de l’après-guerre”. In this chapter, Nicholas Manning describes the historical failure to apply the paradox of the liar to the linguistic scepticism of French post-war poetry as attributable to the Aristotleian distinction between poetry and rhetoric, where poetry is not conferred the status of affirmation or statement, and thus cannot “lie”. Yet, as Manning manifestly demonstrates in examples taken from the poetry of Yves Bonnefoy, Philippe Jaccottet, Francis Ponge at René Char, poetry’s claim to its own status as a lie has clear ethical implications and in turn raises questions regarding the poetic voice. These are the considerations explored by Manning in the final chapter of Section Two, who offers the conclusion that such a device strengthens, rather than weakens, the axiological status of poetic discourse.

The third and final section of the book, ‘Visual Narratives: Lies that Reveal the Truth?’, considers notions such as whether sculptural or filmic

representations can ever reproduce pure indexical reality, and whether symbolic and iconic significations always invade and thus falsify the image. Picasso stated that the work of art is “a lie that makes us see the truth”. At the heart of this section lie questions such as: how does Picasso’s claim challenge the oppositional status of truth and lies? How do the visual arts overcome the double-bind of the inherent falseness of representation? Or is this indeed the key to art’s privileged access to truth?

Peter Dayan opens the analysis of the notion of *le mensonge* in relation to visual narratives with an exploration of the differing scientific and artistic notions of truth, using the works of Satie, Braque, Mallarmé and Derrida to illustrate his argument in “Pas de Vérité en Art? quelques pensées de Satie, Braque, Mallarmé et Derrida”. The assertion by these artists that art is not concerned with truth but is inherently deceitful, or untruthful, rests on a particular conception of truth. In his chapter, Dayan describes the creation of perspectives in which in art appears to be a (non-scientific) truth as well as a (scientific) lie, concluding that art, to be seen as truth, always depends on seeing one form of art in terms of another.

Eva-Maria Preissler then raises the question of the interpretation of visual representation as artistic lie or creative truth in “Rodin’s *Etude de Balzac Nu*: Artistic Lie or Creative Truth?”, which examines the way in which truth can be seen to be distorted in Rodin’s sculptural portrait of Balzac. Both Balzac and Rodin were dedicated to the notion of representation as drawn from an intense observation of life, and they thus shared the view that their problem was to create portraits that were faithful to both the visual aspect of their characters, or subjects, as well as to the powerful psychological and emotional forces that shape the inner self. Preissler examines how Rodin, working more than forty years after his subject’s death, and with only a cast made from Balzac’s right hand to work from, attempts to resolve sculptural representation’s problematic claim to truthful representation.

The closing chapter of Section Three turns to the relation between *le mensonge* and filmic representation, where Julie Piekarski demonstrates the fragility of historical testimony and its vulnerability to falsification, in “*Un héros très discret* de Jacques Audiard, ou le mensonge mis en abyme au cinéma”. Piekarski examines the way in which Audiard’s 1996 film, whilst claiming to be a biographical documentary reveals itself as a mock documentary, echoing the example of its main character who creates a mock past for himself, reinventing his own personal history as a war hero.

This chapter demonstrates how the generic hybridity of cinema is capable of destabilising the truth by drawing on a *mise en abyme* structure, as is the case of *Un héros très discret*, drawing comparisons with other films' use of this strategy.

Whilst not staking any claim to be an exhaustive overview of the current state of French studies, it is the editors' aim to present a cohesive analysis of French cultural and political life from an array of angles, departing from the provocative theme of *le mensonge*. By bringing together recent research from a diverse and intersecting range of disciplines within the field, this volume encourages dialogue between the various branches of French studies, elicits new links, and points towards new directions for further research. It is the editors' hope that examining the current state of French studies may lead to new and innovative lines of enquiry for the future of French studies.

SECTION ONE:

**POLITICAL AND SOCIAL INTERPRETATIONS
OF *LE MENSONGE***

CHAPTER ONE

THE POLITICS OF MENDACITY

PHILIPPE MARLIERE

“To tell the truth is revolutionary”: Ferdinand Lassalle’s motto appeared in 1921 on the first number of *L’Ordine Nuovo*, a Communist newspaper launched by Antonio Gramsci.¹ Lassalle’s comments shed light on the ambivalent and uneasy relationship between politics and truth. If the exercise of truth-telling can have such upsetting effects, then why should we expect politicians to tell us the truth, let alone why should we aspire to a transparent world of politics? Isn’t politics *par excellence* the realm of deceit, manipulation and spin? In short, isn’t politics essentially about mendacity? Aren’t all politicians – or a majority of them at least – reputed to be compulsive liars? Should we therefore accept that mendacity is consubstantial to politics?

In our societies, mendacity is hardly accepted as “fair” or “normal”. In order to foster trust between individuals – an essential feature to sustain social order – lies cannot be tolerated lightly. Furthermore, in a democratic system, politicians are the representatives of the people. Thus, they are accountable to those who have elected them to govern on their behalf.² To tell the people the truth here amounts to giving a fair report about the government’s activities.

The question of the relationship between politics and mendacity can be addressed, broadly speaking, from two different perspectives. Firstly, from a *normative perspective* (as a political philosopher or political theorist): for instance, should politicians always tell the truth? Is it good or bad if politicians lie? Or should we expect politicians to be more ethical than the rest of the population? One can also tackle the question from a *functional perspective* (as a political scientist): here, one acknowledges that lying in politics is a given and also bears in mind that truth may have indeed a

‘revolutionary’ effect. Although many of us might deplore it, we also readily accept that politicians sometimes lie and deceive. What is more, most of us are of the view that the art of politics relies largely on being – at the very least – quite economical with the truth.

In this chapter, I will not attempt to work out whether mendacity in politics is from a normative point of view a good or a bad thing. I will rather, from a functional perspective, address the following issue: how can one explain that in some cultures or political traditions, truth-telling in politics is considered a must or a necessity, whereas in other arenas, lying is accepted as something inevitable, even innocuous?

Truth and Transparency in Politics: Myth or Rational Objective?

Niccoló Machiavelli’s *The Prince* (1513) makes the case for duplicity and cynicism in the conduct of political affairs. For the Florentine philosopher, it is more important for the prince to look virtuous before his citizens than to be actually virtuous at all times:

And you have to understand this, that a prince, especially a new one, cannot observe all those things for which men are esteemed, being often forced, in order to maintain the state, to act contrary to fidelity, friendship, humanity and religion. Therefore, it is necessary to have a mind ready to turn itself accordingly as the winds and variations of fortune force it, yet, as I have said above, not to diverge from the good if he can avoid doing so, but if compelled, and then to know how to set about it.³

In classical antiquity, to act honourably and with restraint was essential even at times of war. To use force or cunning was to fall short of humane standards; in other words it was to behave like a bully or a liar. In *The Prince*, such high-minded principles are set aside. For Machiavelli, the prince may not always be able to behave like an honourable man. There are underlying political circumstances in which the prince should be ready to behave like a beast. It is no surprise that the adjective “Machiavellian” has acquired a negative connotation, with some mistaking his pragmatic conception of power with deeply unethical behaviour.⁴ More than any other countries in the Western World, the United States have vigorously rejected what is commonly perceived as “Machiavellian duplicity”. The new independent American society, as of 1776, presented two fundamental features: it was suspicious of ‘big central government’ and it insisted on interpersonal transparency. Any signs of sinful behaviour had to be rooted

out from public life and office. Notably, Abraham Lincoln's principled conduct left a mark on the political culture of the nation.⁵ All Americans know the tale of "Honest Abe". As a young man, Lincoln worked in a small store as a clerk. Once a person came to buy an item and Abraham Lincoln did not give him the correct amount in change. Lincoln subsequently walked a long distance to give this person the correct amount of change. After this incident, it is believed that people started to call him "Honest Abe".

Frank Capra's 1939 *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* immediately offers another striking example of the American's obsession with clean and honest politics. In this film, Jefferson Smith (played by James Stewart), is the unlikely, naive, but radically honest senator whose brave and principled actions undermine a Washington-based clique of corrupt and cynical politicians. This epic struggle for honesty and accountability struck a chord among the public as it encapsulated the ideal of transparency, openness and above all trustworthiness that are deeply valued in American public life. For the new nation, publicity and accountability rather than opacity were the dominant values of social and political life. This made the existence of a written constitution all the more important. Such a fundamental text would lay out explicitly and publicly the main norms and laws governing the nation. Until the 1980s, there seemed to be little tolerance for politicians who were publicly caught lying or in compromising situations. One remembers the story of presidential hopeful Gary Hart who twice was considered a frontrunner for the Democratic nomination. In 1984, shortly after he became the new frontrunner, it was revealed that Hart had changed his last name, had often mentioned 1937 instead of 1936 as his birth date, and had altered his signature several times. These revelations contributed greatly to unraveling a promising campaign. In 1988, he was forced to pull out of the race when the media reported that he was having an extramarital affair. This was probably one of the last high-profile cases of politicians who have had their political career seriously damaged because they have been economical with the truth. Over the past decades, it has become familiar to lament the loss of probity in American politics. Some even argue that in the "current American landscape, truth is not merely misrepresented or falsified; it is overtly mocked".⁶ Under the Bush presidency, some note that right-wing media "patriots" denounced as "un-American" anyone who questioned George W. Bush's decisions (some arguably deceitful).⁷

Since the 1960s, a number of dramatic events have made it virtually impossible for politicians to claim the moral high ground. In the United States, domestic audiences have had to endure a number of memorable lies and deceptions over the past five decades: the initial denial of the invasion of the Bay of Pigs in 1961, the Watergate scandal which led to the impeachment of Richard Nixon (1974), the Iran-Contra scandal of the Reagan presidency (1985-92), the Monika Lewinsky affair (1998) and, more recently, bogus claims about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (2003). For a long time associated with the political right and the standard-bearers of “family values”, the notions of “truth” and “probity” are now the preserve of the liberal left.⁸ In the run up to the 2008 presidential election, political commentators on the Democratic/Liberal side of the political spectrum denounced the “lies” of the McCain/Palin ticket. John McCain was even branded a “bigger liar than Bush”.⁹ Michael Tomasky, the American based correspondent for *The Guardian* newspaper, listed McCain’s “blatant lies”: the claim that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction; that his co-runner, Sarah Palin, had falsely claimed that she had opposed the construction of an infamous “bridge leading nowhere” in Alaska, the claim that Obama, if elected president, would raise taxes (the Democratic candidate had made it clear that he would not do so). McCain also wrongly accused Obama of supporting “sex education” for kindergarten students and of having referred to Palin as a “pig wearing lipstick”. The charges were unsettling enough to shift the discussion, forcing Obama off message and into a defensive posture. By the end of the week, Barack Obama had declared his intention to run a more aggressive campaign. Tomasky ironically remarks that when the Republican candidate was running for nomination against George W. Bush in 2000, he was smeared by outright lies charging, among other things, that he had fathered a black child out of wedlock. It turns out that McCain later on hired the very man who was responsible for the 2000 campaign against him. Tomasky thinks that the media is neither well equipped, nor willing to uncover and confront politicians’ lies:

People in the media like to flatter themselves as truth-tellers and the people’s watchdogs and all that, but the fact is that except in very rare circumstances, there is no such thing as ‘objective truth’ in the media, particularly the political media. There is just what one side says and what the other side says. This is especially so on cable television.¹⁰

Truths and Untruths: The Meaning of Political Language

As Hannah Arendt once argued in an essay entitled “Truth and Politics”:

Truthfulness has never been counted among the political virtues, and lies have always been regarded as justifiable tools in political dealings.¹¹

To put it as bluntly as Arendt and also in a nutshell: all governments lie and all politicians are virtual “Joe Isuzus”.¹² Martin Jay has a less holistic approach to the question. He notes that people tend to vacillate between moral outrage and amoral realism. Jay argues that each of these stands corresponds to a particular conception of the political field, which decisively shapes one’s own attitude toward political mendacity.¹³ One can further assert that there is often a thin line between truth and mendacity in politics. In some cases, the difference is all down to presentation and language. Political language matters in this instance. It helps give the appearance of trustworthiness. Political communication is indeed essentially about spin, being economical with the truth and, in the most extreme cases, duplicity.

Lies and untruths in politics come to the fore through language. Most of the time, politicians do not tell outright lies. François Mitterrand lied and deceived the French public when he assured them that he would keep them informed about the state of his health during his presidential terms. Mitterrand was diagnosed with prostate cancer as early as 1982, however he kept it secret until the early 1990s: 1992 to be precise.¹⁴ At that stage, he was already seriously ill. So politicians are essentially economical with the truth: the highly publicised relationship between Bill Clinton and Monika Lewinsky (a White House intern) also springs to mind. In 2003, Alastair Campbell, Tony Blair’s Director of Communications at Downing Street, was accused of “sexing up” a dossier alleging that Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction represented a “direct” and “imminent” threat to the United Kingdom. Under the Blair premiership, so-called “spin doctors” were accused of putting an excessively positive gloss on ministerial initiatives. Politicians may even admit that they did not mean what they said. During the Democratic primaries in 2008, Hillary Clinton famously said that she “misspoke” when she gave a dramatic description of her arrival in Bosnia in 1996, recounting a landing under sniper fire, which turned out to be totally fabricated.

Aware that most people see politics as a corrupt activity, some politicians feel compelled to praise accountability and transparency. There are well known examples of this current trend: the promotion of “participatory democracy” by Ségolène Royal during her 2007 presidential campaign, the plain and down-to-earth speaking (*Le parler vrai* – “true speak”) of Michel Rocard, a former French Prime minister in the 1980s-90s, or the “Irreproachable Republic” promised by Nicolas Sarkozy in the aftermath of his presidential election.¹⁵

There are lies that aim to conceal or distract from disturbing truths. They can be expressed in a subtle and soft manner. Let us recall the so-called “surgical strikes”, a deeply understated expression used by the military during the 1991 Gulf War, and popularised by the mainstream media. On one level, it is a euphemistic strategy to recast militaristic violence in medical terms. The notion of “surgery” suggests the idea of care and self-restraint on the part of the attacking forces. It also alludes to a “positive” action, one that will help eradicate a major threat or evil (Saddam Hussein, weapons of mass destruction, etc.). In reality, “surgical strikes” in Iraq have killed scores of civilians, young and old.

Political language can function like an anaesthetic or numbing device. It can also have a more brutal and paradoxical meaning. In the dystopian world of 1984, George Orwell’s Ministry of Truth produces lies and the Ministry of Love tortures people! This highly paradoxical use of the notions of truth and mendacity are reminiscent of Oscar Wilde’s *Decay of Lying* in which he argues that lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art. Both argue, in their own way, that there is a despotic character of truth, notably when it enters the political realm. For truth that is imposed becomes doxa, and doxa precludes debates and democratic exchanges.

Mainstream parties and the media (especially in the Anglo-American world) dismiss *altermondialistes* (i.e. people who support a less free-market orientated approach to globalisation), as “anti-globalists”. In so doing, they behave as the true ideological heirs of Margaret Thatcher’s TINA (There is No Alternative to free market policies and solutions).¹⁶ The “anti-globalist” tag is highly pejorative and ideologically driven as it suggests that those who object to the neoliberal path toward globalisation are, de facto, against all aspects of globalisation. In other words, they portray *altermondialistes* as “backward”, “inward-looking” and “xenophobic”. The politicians and journalists who use this contentious word cannot stand

to have their version of globalisation – hailed by them as the “true” and “only” one – challenged by opponents who do not share their neoliberal agenda. The same is true of the people in France and the Netherlands who rejected the Constitutional Treaty in 2005. They were dismissed by the media and mainstream parties as “anti-European”, whereas in fact most “No” voters (notably in the French context) promoted another type of European integration, one that is more social, democratic and more concerned with the needs of the people.¹⁷

Many buzzwords “lie” or, at the very least, distort the truth: think of “Asbo”, “asylum seekers”, “War on Terror”, “climate change”, “road map”, “collateral damage”, “ethnic cleansing”, etc. Think also about the expression of “disputed territories” commonly used by Fox News and CNN journalists while reporting on the occupation of Palestinian territories by the Israeli military or Israeli settlers.

Despite these numerous examples of lies, deceit and manipulation, it remains to be seen whether politics should be understood as an arena in which truth-telling is, in all circumstances, a superior proposition. Jay is of the view that “politics is not corrupted by rhetoric, image-making, surface appearances and public relations spin; rather, it is constituted by them”.¹⁸ He further suggests that the semantic play in political language is inevitable since there cannot be perfect congruence between words or concepts on the one hand, and the reality of political actions or facts on the other. Politics is based on conflictual and pluralistic viewpoints and not scientific and abstract truths. Political communication in its attempt to be accountable and transparent is therefore bound to betray political action or fail to describe it accurately.

The Political and Mendacity

Broadly speaking, there are two types of reactions to the enduring existence of mendacity in politics:

a) *The moral stand*: those who want to apply to politics the same high standards they insist should be followed in private affairs. They argue that public life must be purged as much as possible of mendacity.

b) *The realist stand*: those who argue, instead, that the world of politics represents a struggle which at times necessitates and even justifies duplicity.

At this stage of the discussion, the following question may be asked: if politics and mendacity are the two sides of the same coin, irrevocably linked and intertwined realities, does that makes politics a thoroughly depraved and unethical activity? Or rather, is it not what makes politics valuable and compelling? In political science, there is a long established distinction made between the substantive idea of “the political” as distinct from mere or “everyday politics”. French political science notably emphasises this distinction by using the notions of “le politique” (i.e. “the political”) and “la politique” (i.e. “everyday politics”).¹⁹

One can argue that there is a notion of “the political” that transcends the different institutional bodies and cultural practices. Here, “the political” refers to an autonomous realm, which displays and follows its own laws and has its own purposes. In other words, to speak of “the political” rather than of “everyday politics” is to refer to overarching concepts such as the state, constitutional rights, equality and social justice, citizenship. In short, it is to speak of all political things which are beyond the field of partisan passions and competition for political power – everyday policy decisions – but also day-to-day politicking in the political field or in the media.

A second underlying characteristic about the notion of “the political” must be underlined now: boundaries can be drawn between “the political” and various other social fields. It is therefore tempting to view “the political” as a homogenous and consistent realm from which any external interference must be avoided. The locus of “the political” is important. In the ancient Greek city-state, this locus was the agora.

Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of “field” seems to be helpful here. For Bourdieu, a “field” – a “political field” that is – is a kind of microcosm that is a small, closed social world which is relatively autonomous within the social world (society) at large.²⁰ By “autonomous”, Bourdieu means a place that has its own rules and norms, its own *nomos*. It is a universe which has its own criteria to assess situations and events. These rules and criteria are quite different from that of the outside world. Bourdieu says that entering the political career is like embracing priesthood. For to become a full-time politician, one has to transform oneself, to literally convert, even if this conversion to the rules, habits and customs of the political field is often implicit and unconscious. This microcosm is separated from the rest of the world. Bourdieu distinguishes between the “professionals” (of politics) and the “profanes”²¹ (i.e. the distinction

between the people who are in politics as a profession, and those who freely devote time to political activities, as described by Max Weber).²² Roberto Michels²³ and Gaetano Mosca,²⁴ after studying the German and Italian social democratic parties, concluded that there is an “iron law of oligarchy” in political parties. This means that even in the most democratically run parties, it is impossible to thwart the constitution of a small group of leaders who concentrate – and even confiscate – the power into their hands. This small group soon speaks and acts on behalf of the rest of group. An oligarchy is thereby formed and it becomes politically more knowledgeable and skilled than the rank-and-file activists. Their interests and concerns differ from those of the activists. The party oligarchs make decisions or promote policies that, at times, are even contrary to the interests of the activists.

According to Bourdieu, the rules and norms that are proper to the political field are responsible for the existing gap or distance between the “professionals” and the “profanes”. This explains why politicians do not often do what people want, request or aspire to, for they instead follow a different logic. Their action is guided by the specific rules of the field that so often can clash with the expectations of citizens in the outside world. Bourdieu argues that the more autonomous a field, the more it tends to function according to its inherent interests, and the more the gap between it and the rest of society grows. This point helps to shed light on the reasons as to why politicians are often perceived by the public as “aloof”, “cut off from people’s realities” and insensitive to their needs. It also explains why, in order to safeguard their own specific interests in the field, politicians are sometimes forced to be economical with the truth.

“The political” as opposed to the scene of “everyday politics” is therefore a space of conflicts of interest, of antagonistic and pluralistic points of view. It is not a place where “truths” and “consensus” can ever be reached with certainty. This conception of the political realm is proper to the Republican tradition, which we have already encountered with Machiavelli. According to that tradition, politicians are supposed to leave behind their petty interests (including their community or even family interests) and selflessly serve the whole nation.²⁵ This tradition supports a view of patriotic virtue that transcends narrow and private economic interests. It entails a notion of “the political” that is seeking a consensus about the public good or is primarily concerned about the common interest. It believes that common action is preferable to the cultivation of cultural particularisms. It opposes the selfish pursuit of individual interests

against that of the community as a whole. By contrast, in the liberal tradition, politicians earn the obedience of their citizens only so long as they carry out the mandate on which they were elected. As in the case of contractual arrangements in other social activities, the element of trustworthiness, the keeping of one's word, is paramount.

In the Republican tradition, political mendacity is not seen as a heretic or immoral act, but rather as the demonstration of dissent in a pluralistic debate and struggle. Republicans regard the truth in politics as an illusion, since the truth in general implies the quest for a single consensus. This type of search may make sense in scientific research, but seems inappropriate in a sphere of pluralist dissensus. The field of American politics seems to have some difficulty in coming to terms with this reality because it remains profoundly influenced by the liberal conception of the state and government. For liberals, the state and public servants should be the mere servants of private and personal interests. Therefore, it is expected that politicians adopt the same standards and values that are expected from friends and members of one's family. This is not to argue that republicans condone – let alone promote – lies and misrepresentations of the truth in politics. This simply suggests that republicans are reconciled with the idea – at least better reconciled than liberals – that the political field is a space of dissensus, in which trickeries and deceptions happen. In this context, lies and untruths are certainly seen as “immoral” or “unethical” expedients. However, in the republican tradition, lies do not represent “cardinal sins” as in the liberal tradition. Mendacity is – for most republicans – a regrettable but unavoidable by-product of politics.

Conclusion

Consequently, the quest for the perfect truth can be sought only at the peril of losing what makes politics an inherently antagonistic struggle. The search for “lie-free politics” is somehow an illusion, if not an aberration because it fails to acknowledge that the world of politics is made up of irreconcilable viewpoints and disputes. This highly moralistic conception of politics also neglects to take into account the diverging interests between professional politicians and the rest of the public. The liberal approach fails to some extent to grasp that at the heart of political life, there is an implicit tension between a common ideal of unity and the multitude of conflicting and contradictory viewpoints. This tension can never be overcome, even through totalitarian efforts.

Notes

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- ¹ These comments are often misattributed to Gramsci himself.
- ² Andrew Heywood, *Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 70.
- ³ Nicolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* (London: Everyman's Library, 1992), 81.
- ⁴ Dominic Baker-Smith, "Introduction", in Machiavelli, op. cit., xviii-xix.
- ⁵ Tonya Leslie and Tina Walski, *Abraham Lincoln: a Life of Honesty* (Minneapolis: Bellwether Media, 2007).
- ⁶ Henry A. Giroux, "The Politics of Lying and the Culture of Deceit in Obama's America: The Rule of Damaged Politics", *Truthout*, 21 September 2009, <http://www.truth-out.org/092109R> (accessed July 14, 2010).
- ⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸ Joe Conason, *Big Lies. The Right-Wing Propaganda Machine and How It Distorts the Truth* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003).
- ⁹ Michael Tomasky, "A bigger liar than Bush", *The Guardian*, 10 September 2008.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹ Hannah Arendt, "Lying in Politics", in *Crisis of the Republic* (New York: Harvest/HBJ Books, 1969), 4.
- ¹² Joe Isuzu was a fictional spokesman used in a series of television advertisements for Isuzu cars and trucks, aired on American television in 1986-90. Joe Isuzu was a pathological liar who made outrageous and over-inflated claims about Isuzu's cars.
- ¹³ Martin Jay, *The Virtues of Mendacity: On Lying in Politics* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010).
- ¹⁴ Claude Gubler and Michel Gonod, *Le Grand Secret* (Paris: Editions du Rocher, 2005).
- ¹⁵ Pierre Haski, "Sarkozy: l'ère du soupçon après la République irréprochable", *Rue89*, 6 July 2010, <http://www.rue89.com/2010/07/06/sarkozy-de-la-republique-irreprochable-a-lere-du-soupcon-157682?page=4> (accessed July 14, 2010).
- ¹⁶ Philippe Marlière, *La Social-Démocratie Domestiquée. La Voie Blairiste* (Brussels: Aden, 2008), 10-12.
- ¹⁷ Philippe Marlière, "Faltering Europeanism. The French Socialist Party and European Integration", in *European Social Democracy and European Integration*, ed. Dionyssi Dimitrakopoulos (London: Routledge, 2010).
- ¹⁸ Martin Jay, "Mendacious Flowers", *London Review of Books*, Vol. 21:15 (1999), 17.
- ¹⁹ Philippe Guillot, *Introduction à la Sociologie Politique* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1998), 18-19.
- ²⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Propos sur le Champ Politique* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2000), 51-69.
- ²¹ Pierre Bourdieu, "Political Representation. Elements for a Theory of the Political Field", in *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John Thompson (Oxford, Polity Press, 1994), 171-202.
- ²² M. Weber, "The Profession and Vocation of Politics", in *Weber: Political Writings*, eds. Peter Lassman and Ronald Speirs, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

²³ Robert Michels, *Political Parties. A Sociological Study of The Oligarchical Tendency of Modern Democracy* (New York: Free Press, 1966).

²⁴ Gaetano Mosca, *The Ruling Class* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980).

²⁵ Cécile Laborde, *Critical Republicanism. The Hijab Controversy and Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1-27.

CHAPTER TWO

ENCHANTMENT AND REALITY: THE THEME OF EUROPE IN THE FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS OF 1988 AND 1995

MAURA STEWART

Il faut être bien conscient que le monde change à une vitesse extraordinaire. Interdépendance croissante des économies, globalisation des problèmes, émergence de nouveaux compétiteurs [...] : voilà l'univers dans lequel nous vivons. Il faut donc se demander si la France, seule, protégée par je ne sais quelle ligne Maginot, pourrait se protéger des turbulences du monde. La réponse est évidemment "non". La construction européenne doit donc être l'instrument pour que chacun puisse s'adapter à cette nouvelle donne.

—Jacques Delors, ancien président de la Commission européenne.¹

This remark was made a few days before the second round of the 1995 presidential election. It could also be made before nearly all types of elections in France and elsewhere, even including European elections, where both candidates and the electorate tend to focus on national issues and forget that they are actually determined by the European and international contexts. Yet, what makes the 1995 presidential election so worthy of special attention is how the treatment of Europe had evolved from that of the 1988 election. In 1988, Europe occupied a central place in François Mitterrand's campaign, infused with a sense of enchanted and breathless urgency. By 1995, Europe was less visible and more mechanical; described by one of the candidates, Jacques Chirac, as "a necessary ambition".² If the level of enthusiasm or vision for Europe could indeed distinguish one presidential election from the other, imprecision was the common denominator. Although Mitterrand's 1988 campaign letter, of which the theme of Europe represented an important part,

received much commentary on its novelty and literary style, he was criticised by both the other candidates and the press for keeping his letter imprecise and short on detail. Pierre Juquin, a communist candidate, described it as “la politique de l’autruche”.³ Similarly in 1995, the main candidates were criticised for their lack of precision on institutional reform,⁴ and the televised debate between the two remaining contenders was noted for its “soft focus” and “dodging” on the subject of Europe.⁵

When one turns back to 1988 and 1995, and indeed to any political campaign, Margaret Thatcher’s phrase springs to mind: “you don’t tell deliberate lies, but sometimes you have to be evasive”. If such a phrase can readily summon the stereotypical image of politics as the domain par excellence for lying (and for lying about lying!), this chapter prefers to dwell on a more nuanced interpretation of “le mensonge” in terms of enchantment and avoiding the real. While the unknown possibilities of further European integration may have explained the lack of detail in the French presidential campaign of 1988, it was decidedly the reaction to the reality of increased European integration which determined its treatment seven years later. This chapter will first place Mitterrand’s campaign letter in the context of the Socialist U-turn of 1983 and the *cohabitation* period with the right. Next, it will observe that in spite of the “permissive consensus” in France on the subject of Europe and the notion of “enchantment” in the French political tradition, the two main candidates did attempt to introduce a note of caution in their texts/speeches. The paper will then explore the inter-presidential years, in particular the Single European Act and the Maastricht Treaty, in order to show how the reality of European integration, which eluded the 1988 election for the most part, impacted on the scope for European vision in the following election.

The theme of Europe was a major component of Mitterrand’s campaign letter, *Lettre à tous les Français*. In his 1981 election manifesto (*110 propositions pour la France*), Europe merited only five propositions. Yet, seven years later, *Le Monde* explained how Europe was central to the image of Mitterrand as president, how he had made Europe a major component of his calibre as statesman, and how he saw Europe as a sphere where France could still claim to play a leadership role beyond its borders.⁶ When Mitterrand asserts that “Prise aux mirages de la croissance de l’après-guerre et alourdie par des structures et des modes de penser d’une autre époque, la société française s’est réveillée trop tard”,⁷ one cannot help but think of 1983. That year symbolised the left’s major wake-up call to the reality of France’s impossibility of going it alone with