



Fig. 1—Nicolae Ceaușescu (b. 1918 Scornîșesti) and Elena Ceaușescu (b. 1916 Lenuța Petrești, Dâmbovița) hand-bound and led to their execution in Targoviste 1989. Note that Nicolae is allowed his hat (and was [buried with it](#)). Elena's head is bare. The two were charged with many crimes, of which the most important was genocide. The charge was they had been responsible for the deaths of 60,000 people. The firing squad was a group of paratroopers, specially selected the same morning by General Victor Stănculescu.

Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu were arrested December 22nd and executed the 24th 1989. Their last wish was to die together. Before they were led out of the improvised court-room to be shot, against a wall outside, their hands were *tied*. Upon seeing the rope/string with which they were to be tied Nicolae asked “What is this?”. The guard’s curt reply: “Nobody will help you now.” When it was Elena’s turn she expressed “Please don’t touch me”. As they both were led out, Elena gave up saying “We are powerless now...”. The tying of the hands here *coincide* with the loss of power.

There is nothing idiosyncratic about this. When we say “my hands are tied in this matter...” we are stating that we are powerless in doing something about it. The cogs and wheels of distribution, or retribution, have taken over. In counterpoint, the Ceaușescus were omnipotent with their hands untied. Nicolae was nicknamed the [King of Communism](#). His and Elena’s joint regime was one of the most extreme in the modern history of Eastern Europe. Hence the topic of this handout, based on the question: with our hands untied, when and why do we *stop*? What happens at such stops?

In sum: what did Elena and Nicolae Ceaușescus overlook? Or, what is the short-circuitry causing an obstacle and resistance against untied hands to command (or, *tie*) other hands? In other words, what do we find at the deep (psychological) end of democracy, or the cultural psycho-history of politics: what is radical democracy? Even, what is the place of *hands*—real and symbolic—in the history of suppression: for instance the widespread chopping off hands, as a punitive measure, in [Leopold’s Congo](#), and the production of chocolate hands in Antwerp by [Jos Hakker](#) at the time?

If hands, free or tied, is a difference that makes a difference—whether at the top or at the bottom of the food chain—what is there to learn about human hands? Evidently, hands do not merely make/



Fig. 2— top image: a sculpture featuring the urban hero [Silivius Brabo](#) of Antwerp tossing away the hand of a giant that was terrorising the city. [Jos Hakker](#) of the Antwerp Pastry Bakers Association, started the production of the hands in 1935. He was born in 1887, and was 21 when the Belgian government attempted to buy Congo from [King Leopold II](#), who held the land as his private colony. Given the origin of the cocoa crops what do we make of the chocolate hands in the context of colonialism?

produce work but also delegate. Is it at all possible to make/produce without *delegating* something? The problem of the hands: they operate and distribute in a *single* gesture; but are *never* up at the same time. By the time the operation is completed, a delegation has already been dispatched. Which paradoxically entails, as an operation is completed, the dispatch is unchecked.

Which means that the nature of what has been passed on to—and indeed demanded by—someone else, is basically unknown (and typically turns up in the aftermath). Mastery and hysteria are, in this sense, a couple. Searching into how certain prerogatives are conveyed through education, will lead us to a similar problem. Since by assuming that an operation requires mastery, it comes with the delegation that the one performs it should be fully present, in order to be responsible. Only to discover that s/he will be unable to respond to the dispatch of what is implicitly prescribed to someone else (and somewhere else). So, when we think that we have made our point, in the wake of

having completed our operation, we realise that we have failed to *analyse* what is handed over.

With our hands untied, with the fullness of our presence, we have not only completed an operation but also produced a dispatch, of which we are now unaware. And, what is more, to which we are unable to respond. We have tied someone else's hands unawares because we dedicated ourselves completely to the operation alone; and hence we were *not* responsible after all. This is not only confusing but intrinsically disqualifying (and undermining any aspiration we may have had to integrity). What we are considering here are the conundrums of what U. Eco called *closed texts*.

His favourite example is Eugène Sue's novel *Les mystères de Paris* (published serially in the *Journal de débats* in 90 parts from 1842 to 1843) aiming at a readership amongst the phil-anthropic bourgeoisie, and instead inspired the socialist revolution in 1848. Or, Jos Hakke's chocolate hands: they may have been manufactured to celebrate the founding legend of the city, when Silvius Brabo, *chopped the hand off* a punitive giant whose custom was to do just this—the *hands* of whoever could not pay his taxes—as *just this* was done in King Leopold II's Congo.

It may precisely *not* have been intended, but the cocoa was still dispatched with their share of Congolese hands. The operative intelligence of King Leopold II's militia in Congo was to hand-chop the local population for not meeting their quota (cocoa, rubber, gems etc.), or accounting for each bullet they had shot. The distributive intelligence of the chocolate-hands would be unwittingly be conveyed by the dispatch of cocoa from the same place. This relation is construed, indeed, but materialistically so. Dialectically the pride of Belgian chocolate is specifically *this* colonial history.

It does not matter whether we are aware of it/not. It is not a matter of interpretation. It is part of the material reality of the world we live in/partake of. The *distributive* intelligence dispatched with Belgian chocolate is accountable to the *operative* intelligence of its production. And the *operative* intelligence of the production of cocoa is responsible for the *distributive* intelligence it dispatches.

Today, this is a regulative idea. Yet, its application is full of glitches. We can make up for some of these by accepting that the dispatch from our operations, are *tasks* that we must take on in new rounds. And by doing so learning how our hands free, in one operation, may tie our hands in another (dispatched).

Here completeness determines a complex *transaction* from operations that start out as reciprocally opaque, by developing an emergent experience dedicated to the task: a work of reception which is complete when it brings us back to where we started: the work of the hands, and what they delegate, integrated. The question here is not so much whether art *has* a method, but whether *art* is a method. That is, whether art has a method to propose when applied to other areas of life: for instance, in working for a sustainable integration of *responsibility* and *accountability*. Especially, in the [contact-zone](#) between politics and macro-economics. Areas where the *lack* of conjoint responsibility and accountability has been persistently disastrous.

Potentially, it all boils down to how we work with contingencies: if we assume that (1) operative intelligence and (2) distributive intelligence are *contingent*—that is, alongside and touching from afar—the orders of resemblance ranging from (1) the *same* and the *similar* to (2) the *different* and the *other*, are contingent in that way. Alongside and touching from afar, like an unpredictable caress with the ability to affect its counterpart: dyeing with colours bleeding over by the touch (as unpredictable and uncomfortable as affect, in general). An instant shift of cadence asking when our hands should stop: *what* is a stop? *why* would we stop? *how* do we stop? Most important, *when*? To learn this.

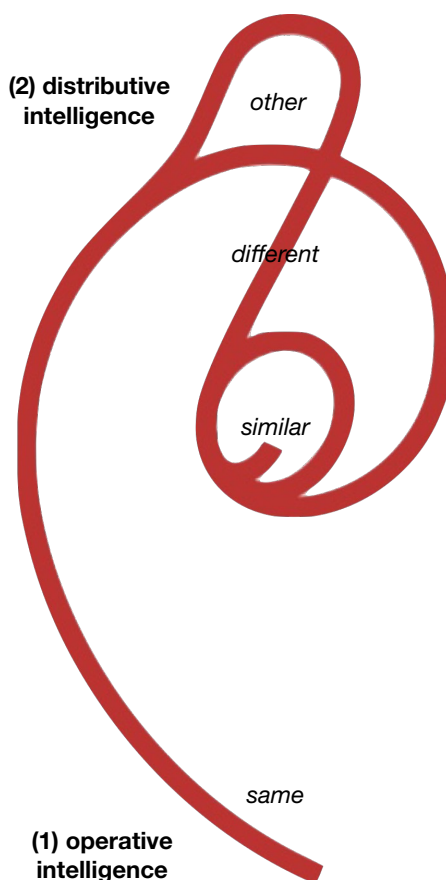


Fig. 3—operative intelligence (1) and distributive intelligence (2) modelled in relation of *contingency* [alongside and touching from afar]. In this model, the *same* and *similar* (1) are conceived as contingent to the *different* and *other* (2).