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## VISUALITY IN MODERN THOUGHT: MACHIAVELLI, ART AND POLITICS

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### Abstract

For many commentators, modernity is the triumph of the eye over the ear, of the visual over the auditory. In other words, modernity is, among many different components, the establishment of a new regime of seeing. This is one of the reasons why the beginnings of modernity are sought in the Renaissance. In the Renaissance period, two distinct themes explain the emergence of visuality in modern thought: Perspective art and Machiavellian thought. Both perspective and Machiavellian thought have been considered as the roots of modernity. Drawing on an interdisciplinary encounter between art theory and political theory, perspective and Machiavelli, this article examines the emergence of visuality in Machiavellian thought in terms of a dialogue with perspective, but underlines the differences between these two conceptions and argues that Machiavellian thought proposes a politics beyond perspective.

**Keywords:** Modernity, Machiavelli, perspective, Renaissance, modern political theory

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# MODERN DÜŞÜNCEDE GÖRSELLİK: MACHİAVELLİ, SANAT VE SİYASET

## Öz

Modernlik pek çok yorumcusuna göre, gözün kulak, görselliğin işitsellik karşısında zaferidir. Başka bir deyişle, modernlik diğer bileşenlerinin yanında yeni bir görme rejiminin kuruluşudur. Modernliğin başlangıçlarının Rönesans'ta aranmasının nedenlerinden biri de budur. Rönesans döneminde modern düşüncede görselliğin ortaya çıkışını anlatan birbirinden farklı iki konu vardır: Perspektif sanatı ve Machiavelli düşüncesi. Hem perspektif hem de Machiavelli düşüncesi modernliğin kökleri olarak görülmüştür. Bu makale, sanat kuramı ve siyaset kuramı, perspektifle Machiavelli arasında disiplinlerarası bir karşılaşmadan yola çıkarak, Machiavelli düşüncesinde görselliğin ortaya çıkışını perspektifle diyalog açısından ele alıyor fakat bu iki anlayışın birbirinden farklı yanlarının altını çizerek Machiavelli düşüncesinin perspektif ötesi bir siyaset önerdiğini savunuyor.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Modernlik, Machiavelli, perspektif kuramı, Rönesans, modern siyaset kuramı

## Introduction

It has often been argued that the senses of hearing and sight structure two distinct forms of mentality. Walter J. Ong, for example, suggested that this duality is related to the transition from oral to written culture and points to different mental structures (2005, p. 69-70). Vision is associated with clarity, distinctness, and separation, while hearing is characterized by harmony and unification. Therefore, according to Ong, the intensification of visual perception can be traced back to Descartes (1596-1650), one of the founding figures of modern philosophy, who emphasized clear, distinct, and precise knowledge. Analyzing a new regime of seeing that emerged with modernity, Martin Jay (1988) claims that the Cartesian understanding, which constitutes one of the main regimes of seeing of the modern period, is "abstract, mathematical, geometricized, cold-blooded and masculine." The modern regime of seeing establishes a "visual order" in which the spectator is separated from his or her object by a chasm, withdrawing from the body and from emotional participation in knowing the object (Sendyka, 2013, p. 104).

The historian of science and thought Alexandre Koyré traces the emergence of the modern visual regime to the Renaissance. According to Koyré, this transformation was realized by Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), who lived about two centuries before Descartes and Hobbes. According to him, with Leonardo da Vinci,

visuality took the first place and auditory became secondary. This process parallels the rise of painting to the top in the field of art. Leonardo da Vinci explains this by saying that painting is the art that can show objects as they are and is therefore closest to the truth (Koyré, 1994, p. 106; Baldasso, 2006, p. 69).

Koyré's view is useful for situating the issue specifically in the realm of the concept of perspective and opening it up for reflection alongside the sources of modern political thought. Having made this connection, a political thinker and a contemporary and fellow countryman, appears next to Leonardo da Vinci: Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527). Machiavelli's "founder of modern political science", which has become an established opinion about Machiavelli, overlaps at first glance with Leonardo da Vinci's search for and practice of an artistic perspective that can "show us things as they are." However, what can a more detailed analysis tell us about the relationship between the two "revolutions" (the revolutions of perspective and Machiavelli)? Is there a transparent and unproblematic overlap between modern political thought and perspective when Machiavelli's political thought is analyzed centrally? These questions are provocative for comparative thinking in art history, art theory, and political theory, and for looking through the eyes of modern politics. In this article, based on these questions, we will examine the problem of visuality in modern political theory in relation to Machiavellian thought, which is seen as the source of modern political theory.

## Portrait of a political thinker as an artist

The sources of modern visuality began to form in what historian Jacob Burckhardt called the "spirit of the Renaissance" in which Machiavelli lived. Burckhardt was one of the main Renaissance commentators who argued that the Italian Renaissance should be called the forerunner of the modern age. In his book *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, the cultural and art historian Burckhardt developed one of the first interpretations of the Renaissance as representing a new regime of seeing. The emergence of a new understanding of vision leads us to the Republic of Florence, which stands out among the Italian city-states for the originality of its socio-political development as well as for its development of perspective. It is at this point that we can recall the question at the outset, what the relevance of modern political thought might be to all this. How can Machiavelli, one of the pioneers of modern political thought, be related to the "revolution of perspective" that took place right next to him?

The chapter on "The State as a Work of Art" in *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* is a good starting point for seeking answers to these questions. The principle of distance (between the seeing subject and the object seen) on which the new understanding of visuality was based conditioned that the state, around which the political phenomenon was centered, should also be examined from a distanced observer's attitude, just as objects should be analyzed from a certain observer's distance (1990, p. 19-97). As the

observer's attitude became more and more predominant, the state would be seen and analyzed from a certain distance, and the concept of the state, which was first used in its modern meaning in Western languages, would emerge.

Most commentators agree on the role Machiavelli played in this new development. *The Prince*, a book by a political observer, opens with the terms sovereignty (*imperio*) and state (*stato*). In this book, the state is analyzed not in terms of ethical and teleological imperatives, but as a phenomenon seen on the political stage, constituting the collective political unity and the specific object of politics. This paves the way for the modern state to become anonymized and depersonalized - along with Bodin and Hobbes - on the road to the modern state.<sup>2</sup> The state henceforth refers to a phenomenon fundamentally different from *the polis*, *res publica*, *civitas* and *regnum* used by Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Augustine (D'Entreves, 1969, p 30).

Burckhardt argues that Italian states were conceived as elaborate "works of art." What is striking in Burckhardt's interpretation - seemingly irreconcilable with the claim of "the founding of modern political science" - is the notion of artistry. Burckhardt reminds us that Florence was the home of painters, sculptors, architects as well as "artists of statecraft" who were at the center of the Renaissance painting, and then, referring to Machiavelli's *History of Florence*, he positions the Renaissance state as a work of art and Machiavelli as an artist (1990, p. 9, 71).

## Machiavelli and the Renaissance

There must be a connection between the "sharp eyes" of the inhabitants of Florence, the central city of Renaissance Italy, and the sharp observation of Machiavelli, a citizen of this city (Burckhardt, 1990, p. 114). Referring to the great transformation suggested by Koyré, it can be inferred that *visus* began to take the first place. However, we should note that the issue of Machiavelli and the Renaissance is more complicated than it seems. Machiavelli's attitude does not completely coincide with the cultural-artistic reality of the Renaissance.

When we look at the dedicatory and prefatory sections of *The Prince* and *the Discourses*, it becomes clear that Machiavelli has an implicit critical attitude towards the worldview of his age. In the dedication of *The Prince*, Machiavelli compares the book with the dominant tendencies of the period and underlines the difference of its content and the seriousness of its subject matter. According to Machiavelli, what *The Prince* is based on is political knowledge derived from the acts of political history, based on the combination of historical experience with the observation of contemporary political events, not the frivolous decorative objects that those who wish to gain favor with a prince are accustomed to present. The dedication reveals

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<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the central importance of the figure of the person (the prince) remains in Machiavelli's thought.

that *the Prince's* difference in content and innovation is specifically political. The preface to *the Discourses* explains Machiavelli's position in the cultural-artistic climate of the Renaissance and the nature of the innovation he claims. Machiavelli argues that the contemporary admiration for antiquity does not have a political content, and that antiquity is not considered in terms of establishing and maintaining a state (1998, p. 5-6).

The two defining currents of the Renaissance were the "return to the classics" and the "return to nature" as defined by Petrarca (1304-1374), who lived about two centuries before Machiavelli. The revival of painting depended on a return to nature, while the return to the classics was confirmed in sculpture and architecture at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Erwin Panofsky, one of the pioneering Renaissance art historians and theorists, writes that the return to nature was about painting, the return to classical antiquity was linked to architecture, and it was sculpture that balanced between these two poles (1991, p. 27-72).

In this context, Machiavelli critically contrasts the Renaissance with political activity (*virtù*). *Virtù* is a central term in Machiavelli's political vocabulary.<sup>3</sup> Machiavelli's "revolution" in political thought is associated with *virtù*. Many commentators explain the obsession with the spirit of innovation in *The Prince* and *the Discourses* with Machiavelli's concept of *virtù*. Accordingly, Machiavelli constituted a major rupture when he questioned the link between the attainment of *virtù* and Christian and humanist notions of virtue (Skinner, 2002, p. 175-186). Moreover, Machiavelli puts forward a political *virtù* that is different from the established artistic *virtù* of the Renaissance. Machiavelli implies that artistic imitation of the ancients (or artistic *virtù*), a Renaissance pattern, discredits political *virtù*. The Machiavellian concept of *virtù* therefore resists the subordination of politics.

## Political Renaissance

Despite his dissonance within the cultural panorama of the Renaissance, Machiavelli is a thinker of his age and geography, where a transformation of perspective, especially with regard to the history of art, is taking place. In the works of the Florentine thinker, metaphors of vision, appearance and the eye from the Renaissance, and especially from the culture of his republic, appear frequently. It is important to emphasize that metaphors (such as "the eyes of the people") are always politicized. This politicized perspective first appears in *The Prince*. In the dedication at the beginning of the book, Machiavelli uses the example of a landscape painter: "If a man of low and humble condition dare to discuss and settle the concerns of princes; because, just as those who draw landscapes place themselves below in the plain to contemplate the nature of the mountains and of lofty places, and in order to contemplate the plains place themselves

<sup>3</sup> For this reason, whether Machiavelli's concept of *virtù* refers to a political virtue or a military virtue has often been debated in the literature. See (Mansfield, 1996; Strauss, 1978).

upon high mountains, even so to understand the nature of the people it needs to be a prince, and to understand that if princes it needs to be of the people” (Machiavelli, 2001, p. 14).

There was initially a close relationship between the landscape painting in *the Prince's* dedication and perspective. Machiavelli's contemporary, the painter Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), translated the word perspective from the ancient per-spicere (to perceive) as “seeing through”, in other words, “to look through the picture surface.” However, the Italian translation of the word adopted by the painters, ‘prospettiva’, still had the meaning of landscape or view, which we find in *the Prince's* dedication (Belting, 2011, p. 242).

The homeland of perspective was Florence, and it was Leonardo da Vinci who art theorists such as Florenski refer to as a “true perspectivist.” The Florentine artist Leonardo da Vinci was pioneering a new cult of the eye. This new “cult” treated vision as a “category of mental activity” (Belting, 2011, p. 216). Perspective was the new mathematical art according to its inventors. The enthusiastic claim in the preface to *the Discourses* to have discovered a new path in politics that “no one has yet stepped on” is very similar to the self-conscious attitude of the proponents of perspective that they had invented “a new mathematical art.”

The architect Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446), considered one of the inventors of perspective, is reported to have demonstrated the invention of perspective with his experiments in Florence's famous cathedral square and in front of the Palazzo dei Signori, where Machiavelli would later work as a government official. In the perspective practices of the period, a partnership was established between painting, architecture and theater, and the public spaces of Florence were filled with perspective practices. This must be why Machiavelli refers to the Florentines' sharp visual perception.

## Conflicted perspective

It seems evident that there is a relationship between Machiavelli's thought, the Renaissance, and the art of perspective. But what kind of relationship is there between Machiavelli as a political philosopher and the art of perspective, or what kind of perspective is Machiavelli's? The Italian historian of thought Carlo Ginzburg offers an answer to this question. In *Wooden Eyes*, Ginzburg describes the landscape painting in *The Prince* as a conflicted understanding of perspective. The Italian historian contrasts perspective with the ancient tradition, citing Augustine's comparison of the beauty of the process of human experience to “a melody based on a harmonious variety of sounds” and putting faith in the ability to hear. Moving from Augustinus to Machiavelli, we also move from listening to seeing, but this is not the only difference. Machiavelli's is also a perspective based on conflict (Ginzburg, 2001, p. 149-152).

The conflicted perspective Ginzburg points to emerges as part of Machiavelli's republicanism, which he describes with the visual image of the "eye of the people." The republican Machiavelli constantly contrasts the people and the prince, the perspective of the people and the perspective of the prince, the self-government of a free people and the rule of a prince.

Even if Machiavelli's republicanism matures in *the Discourses*, this conflicting perspective is still present in *The Prince*, which is said to be written by a "philosopher of power." The "civil principality" in *The Prince*, where an ordinary citizen can become a ruler, where the ruler can come to power with the support of his citizens rather than by means of infamy or in any other way that would damage his glory, and where the prince must be friends with the people can be considered in this context (2001, p. 43-46). The notion of becoming a prince from an ordinary citizen and examples of it are repeated in at least three chapters of the book. In a critical chapter of *The Prince*, Machiavelli reveals the social level of the conflicted perspective: The conflict created by the difference in perspective between the people and the aristocrats. According to Machiavelli, the people desire to be free from domination, while that of the nobles is domination (2001, p. 43). There is an irreconcilable conflict between these two social classes; more precisely, they are two irreconcilable perspectives: There is the eye of the people and the eye of the nobility. These have their own perspectives and principles of perspective. It is argued that the eye of God was replaced by the eye of man with the Renaissance and the use of perspective. In Machiavelli's thought, it is an internalization of conflict. The eye of God is replaced by the conflicting eyes of different classes.

## Political judgment of the eye

There are two interrelated dimensions of the problem: one political (people-prince or republic-prince) and the other social (people-nobles). Yet the nature of the political is one of the most fundamental aspects of the issue. In Chapter XVIII of *The Prince*, the faculty of judgment moves to the eye, and people make judgments with their eyes. Since there is no higher court to appeal to in the actions of princes, the result is judged (2011, p. 71). According to Machiavelli, politics is a field of activity that can only be judged by its own criteria, that can only be looked at and evaluated from the surface since there is no higher judicial authority, and where judgment becomes immanent and settles in the eye. Ordinary people always work with appearances, and there are only ordinary people in the world (2001, p. 71).

The intersection between the internalization of judgment and perspective, translated as "seeing through (the surface)", is completed by the similarity between the placement of judgment in the eye and the turning of the spectator's gaze towards the world in perspective. Machiavelli's legendary "political scientism", his "separation of politics from morality", his "granting the ruler freedom of action free from moral rules" and so on, in fact, stem from the construction of politics as a field of appearances and the internalization of

judgment. As is said at the beginning of *The Prince*, politics takes place in either a republic or a principality (2001, p. 15). This whole political framework is the field of appearances in relation to actions.

The transparency created by perspective in depicting the world from within finds its counterpart in Machiavelli's politics in the depiction of political phenomena from within the world in the absence of a higher court. When political actions without a higher court of appeal are judged solely on their consequences, they become transparent, as in perspective, as they do not reflect the assumed depth in the relationship between substance and appearance, ideal and reality. Art historian Hubert Damisch refers to this as the elimination of depth and the reduction of representation to the graphic dimensions of Euclidean geometry in terms of perspective construction (Damisch, 1994).

The nature of Machiavelli's innovation is a matter of ongoing debate, but commentators would probably agree on the distance with which he analyzes the political phenomenon. His advice to the prince to use force when necessary, imitating a lion, or to work through laws and persuasion, imitating a fox, and his assertion that a republic, when it focuses more on the republic, is based on a constitutive act of violence, as Romulus did, are all the result of this distanced analysis of the political phenomenon (2001, p. 69; 1998, p. 29-30). In one of the most important chapters of *The Prince*, Machiavelli takes up the argument for innovation, this time from a methodological point of view, and argues that he fundamentally departed from the old methods: "I shall depart from the methods of other people... It appears to me more appropriate to follow up the real truth of the matter than the imagination of it" (2001, p. 62).

This has been one of the most interesting passages for commentators. Machiavelli sharply diverges from the Platonic ideal *polis*, which can be seen through the eyes of reason or the soul, from the Ciceronian tradition, which lists the classical moral virtues that the prince must acquire, and from Christianity, which asserts the eye of God. The *virtù*, which Machiavelli defines differently from traditional moral virtue and the *virtus* of the republican tradition, is a political activity on which both the new principalities and the free peoples of the republics must rely; its weakening brings the destruction of both regimes.

Just as Leonardo da Vinci's attribution of the activity of seeing to the senses developed in opposition to Platonic and neo-Platonic philosophy, which saw the senses as dangerous and understood beauty as a metaphysical experience (Belting, 2011, p. 216), Machiavelli finds Platonic philosophical approaches to *virtù* harmful or at least useless (2001, p. 62). Politics in Machiavelli becomes not a by-product based on the ideal eye (the eye of reason, the eye of God, etc.) but an activity consisting of bodies and eyes. The concept of activity is put on a stage. In Machiavelli, politics is conceived as a field of appearances realized on a stage.

As a result, it can be concluded that Machiavelli's political thought was surrounded by perspective. Perspective, like the ideas of the urban humanists, was one of the theories Machiavelli found in front of him; more than a theory, it was the reality he began to live in. *The Prince*, *Discourses* and *The Art of War* are contemporaries of the lectures and treatises on perspective by artists such as Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528). The Florentine philosopher writes with the consciousness of depicting the “true nature of things” that the proponents of perspective asserted. While his contemporary Dürer speaks of the “secret science of perspective”, most commentators on Machiavelli emphasize that the thinker is referring to the secret science or laws of politics. The *virtù* on which Machiavelli's new conception of politics is based intersects with *virtù visiva*, the effective way of seeing in perspective. If *virtù visiva* as the new visual virtue makes the seeing subject sovereign, Machiavelli's understanding of *virtù* identifies the classical moral virtues that politicians from Cicero to St. Thomas are advised to observe with the weakening of the political subject's efficacy.

## Beyond perspective

A more detailed analysis of Machiavelli and perspective should bring to light the elements that escape perspective. Let us start with the term conflicted perspective: Indeed, although Ginzburg's term explains the content of Machiavelli's political thought, it is ambiguous in terms of perspective. In perspective, it is the center that matters, while conflict makes the idea of center and balance problematic. For example, Pavel Florenski, one of the first critics of the theory, identifies the main difference that emerges with the use of “reverse perspective” against perspective as the polycentricity of representations. In contrast to the centralizing perspective, the reverse perspective is characterized by polycentricity.

The perspective effect is based on the fixed point where, for example, the person drawing or observing the painting is located; the center of the world will be located in the eye of the (looking) subject or the “I of the observer”. What we should understand by “perspectival unity” is that everything is in the right proportion in the whole work, which must be organized around “one center point, one horizon line, one measure”. For example, in Leonardo da Vinci's “The Last Supper”, “our gaze, and with it our entire being, drifts into the perspective centered on the right eye of the central person” (Florenski, 2011: 89). By saying “our being” here, Florenski anticipates the criticism of the ontology of representation in perspective in the last century. Looking at the world from its own fixed position, this viewer transforms being in the world into looking at the world. It is an eye-centeredness in which the viewer confronts the world from a position of his or her choosing (Belting, 2011).

The sense that there is something out of perspective in Machiavelli's political thought begins to emerge in this question of the center point. What would Machiavelli think of Leonardo da Vinci's Man of Vitruvius

(1492) In Machiavelli's time, the *De Architectura* by Vitruvius, a Roman architect, was one of the favorite books of the humanists. Vitruvius was a particular inspiration for artists who claimed that the origins of perspective could be traced back to Antiquity, and his work, which became a classic of architecture, served as a model for the aesthetic categories of the Renaissance (Belting, 2011, p. 159-163). Moreover, according to Renaissance aestheticians, it constituted not only the pivotal point of the study of art, but also of philosophy, literature, and even the rules governing the record of "Renaissance *paideia*." Accordingly, while Vitruvius listed the six elements of a perfect building as *ordinatio* (arrangement), *dispositio* (planning), *symmetria* (symmetry), *eurythmia* (harmonious distribution of parts, harmony), *decor* (ornament, ornamentation), and *distributio* (distribution, distribution), Renaissance *paideia* was particularly evident in the concepts of proportion, measure and rule (Castelli, 2013, p. 35).

*The Vitruvian Man* shows a male figure surrounded by notes from Vitruvius' book and drawn inside a circle and square to show the ideal proportions of the human body. Here, both the idea that the proportions in classical architecture are based on the human figure and the belief that there is a relationship between the functioning of the organism and the functioning of the universe are dominant. Leonardo da Vinci, like Dürer, was a disciple of Alberti in terms of conformity to reality and mathematical rationalization. In the context of this new thinking, medieval architecture was accused of having no proportion at all, thus sharpening the self-consciousness of the Renaissance perspective to identify the age in which it lived as a new age (Panofsky, 2018: 1-41).

In contrast, Machiavelli does not have the idea of an idealized golden ratio of the political organism, reflecting the ideal dimensions of the human body; organic metaphors are almost non-existent. We should not be confused by the "diseases that arise in the state" in *The Prince* and the portrayal of the future savior of Italy as a physician who will "heal her wounds" (2001, p. 134). These are forms of explanation left over from classical political philosophies, which, although dysfunctional, continue to be used because images to explain the new situation cannot be created. Despite these seemingly organic images, Machiavelli's political thought displaces the organism of classical political philosophy, as well as classical humanism based on the Vitruvian conception of the harmonious body.

## **Fortuna or the presence of out-of-perspective space**

The historian Johan Huizinga had a memorable warning for historians comparing the Renaissance with modernity: "The spirit of the Renaissance is indeed much less modern than one is constantly inclined to believe" (1984, p. 271). The art theorist Florenski, who thinks that perspective is the seed of modernity, argues that the Renaissance spirit was not unified, and even resembled a divided spirit (2011, p. 87). The historian's warning and the art theorist's diagnosis provide a framework of understanding for Machiavelli's

political thought. The Florentine thinker is one of the figures of the period who perfectly represents the incomplete modernity of the Renaissance and the split in its spirit. We can examine this especially in the case of *the fortuna*.

Let us first look at the ontology of indeterminacy in which *fortuna* is situated in Machiavelli.<sup>4</sup> If perspective is the mathematical standardization and precision of the methods used to represent the world (Florenski, 2011: 124), it is pointless to look for perspective in Machiavelli's politics. In part IX of *The Prince*, "On the Civil Principality", the familiar spectacle of social-political conflict reappears. Which class should the Prince base himself on or win the favor of? There are two basic lines here: To be a prince with the support of the people and to be a prince with the support of the nobility despite the people. Machiavelli writes as follows: "The prince can win their affections in many ways, but as these vary according to the circumstances one cannot give fixed rules" (2001, p. 44-45). Machiavelli revisits the theme of uncertainty in chapter XXI of *The Prince*: "Never let any Government imagine that it can choose perfectly safe courses; rather let it expect to have to take very doubtful ones, because it is found in ordinary affairs that one never seeks to avoid one trouble without running into another; but prudence consists in knowing how to distinguish the character of troubles, and for choice to take the lesser evil" (2001, p. 88). We can compare this with the diagnosis of the nature of politics in *the Discourses*: "(The prince) cannot hold exactly to the middle way, for our nature does not consent to it" (1998, p. 263).

The return to nature, one of the two important pillars of the Renaissance along with the return to the classics, found its counterpart in perspective in the form of imitating nature. According to Vasari, the source of renewal returned to nature. The return to nature was identical to the return to the ancient Greco-Roman culture (classics), which was the first trajectory. Vasari identified the "imitation of nature as the basic principle of art" (Huizinga, 1984, p. 247). This was complemented by Leonardo da Vinci's approach to nature designs of the Renaissance, which began to "take nature's word seriously" and to see "its most insignificant word as worthy of attention and respect", against the Aristotelian tradition, which saw nature as a material imitation of an immaterial transcendental model and considered some things in nature to be accidental (Collingwood, 1949, p. 93-112).

Machiavelli's understanding of nature is much more complicated than the flattened nature of perspective. In his *History of Florence and Italy*, Machiavelli attributes the tendency of states to move from order to disorder and from disorder to order to a complex understanding of nature: "(F)or the nature of mundane affairs not allowing them (states) to continue in an even course, when they have arrived at their greatest perfection, they soon begin to decline" (2002, p. 101). In Machiavelli's political thought, the certainty to be derived from the state of natural equilibrium matches the search for an "eternal republic" - which he consciously rejects.

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<sup>4</sup> For the *virtù-fortuna* dualism and different meanings of *fortuna* in Machiavelli's thought, see (Özmkas, 2019).

Certainty would only be possible if politics, which is inherently mobile, reached a state of equilibrium: “Without doubt I believe that if the thing could be held balanced in this mode, it would be the true political way of life and the true quiet of a city. But since all things of man are in motion and cannot stay steady, they must either rise or fall” (1998, p. 23).

According to Machiavelli, since it is impossible to balance political affairs or to maintain the middle way perfectly, the wisest course of action is to procrastinate wisely. Due to the unstable nature of civilized phenomena, uncertainty is there as a nature that cannot be completely overcome, and politics is conceived as a sphere of activity concerned with the unintended consequences of designed actions. In Machiavellian thought, in addition to essence and appearance, the connection between intention and action is also broken, revealing disproportionality, disharmony and a lack of perspective that perspectivists would find difficult to accept: “(A)lthough his intention was not to aggrandize the Church, but the duke, nevertheless, what he did contributed to the greatness of the Church” (2001: p. 50). In politics, X may be intended, but Y may result. Therefore, the study of politics cannot aim for the certainty of a universalized concept of nature. Rather than perspectival certainty, this Machiavellian understanding is closer to “everything is possible” in the “magical ontology” that Koyré uses to explain the Renaissance.

The rift between perspective and Machiavelli's political thought is most visible in *fortuna*. *Fortuna*, as the principle of indeterminacy that plays a leading role in both of his major works, is powerful and influential enough to cast doubt on the arguments for Machiavelli's modernity and scientism. Machiavelli's political thought is ready to leave these labels to Hobbes, who, in both *De Cive* (1641) and *Leviathan* (1651), conceived one of the first theoretical forms of the state mechanism in which “chance is tamed” in its organization and functioning (Hobbes, 2018: 11; 2001: 17). Because Machiavelli's concept of *fortuna* assumes that luck cannot be tamed.<sup>5</sup>

*Fortuna* is first mentioned in *The Prince*. If we recall, the political virtue (*virtú*), which the prince must acquire, seemed to intersect at a certain point with the visual virtue (*virtù visiva*) of the perspectivists: To be able to see the true nature of (political) things. When we come to the other term in Machiavelli's political vocabulary, *fortuna*, things change completely. *Fortuna* announces its presence as the force that destroys the certainties of perspective.

In the first chapter of *The Prince*, it is emphasized that there are two ways of capturing the principality: *Virtù* or *fortuna*. The one who seizes a principality must rely either on his political efficiency (*virtù*) or on luck and fortune (*fortuna*). Chapter VII, this time, deals with “new principalities captured by fortune (*fortuna*)”. At this

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<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, Machiavellian thought, which holds the overcoming of uncertainty as a political goal, is a departure from the classical political philosophy that attributes the salvation of cities to coincidence: “Machiavelli's hope rests on his assumption that human prudence can conquer *Fortuna*” (Strauss, 1978, p. 173).

stage, a familiar dimension related to the ideological foundations of Machiavellian thought appears. Compared to the principalities conquered on the basis of *virtù*, which were analyzed in chapter VI, the fate of the principality won by fortune is more fragile: "(I)n entirely new principalities, where there is a new prince, more or less difficulty is found in keeping them, accordingly as there is more or less ability in him who has acquired the state. Now, as the fact of becoming a prince from a private station presupposes either ability or fortune, it is clear that one or other of these things will mitigate in some degree many difficulties. Nevertheless, he who has relied least on fortune is established the strongest. Further, it facilitates matters when the prince, having no other state, is compelled to reside there in person" (2001, p. 29). In these two chapters, on the one hand, the importance of principality based on *virtù* for the continuity of the state (*mantanere lo stato*) is underlined, and on the other hand, the contours of Machiavelli's republicanism take shape. What is at stake here is the position of those who become princes "while being an ordinary citizen." Alongside *virtù*, *fortuna* is a prerequisite for the lack of precise structuring of social hierarchies necessary for an ordinary citizen to become a prince.

In this case, *fortuna* becomes the social-political ontology of Machiavellian republicanism. Social structures, structured as if they were finalized, leave no room for *fortuna* and thus do not allow for the political circulation of the ordinary citizen. To use a term from twentieth-century political theory, there is a correlation between *fortuna* and "elite circulation." Indeed, there is a vein in Machiavellian thought that isolates fortune from its classical theological meaning and secularizes it in a social-political context. *Fortuna* provides the prince with an "opportunity" (*occasione*) by giving him "a substance that he can mold into whatever form he wishes." Without this worldly opportunity, *virtù* is wasted; without *virtù*, opportunity is wasted (2001, p. 30).

However, for the prince Machiavelli envisions for political unity, the fundamental problem is *virtù* rather than fortune. There are various ways to come to power, but *virtù* is the most reliable way to maintain it. When Machiavelli begins to discuss princedoms won through *fortuna*, he begins to cite examples of leaders in contemporary Italy (such as Francesco Sforza and Cesare Borgia), whereas when it comes to *virtù*, it is the ancient examples (such as Moses, Cyrus, Romulus and Thesus) that he brings (2001, p. 29). What Italy needs is *virtù*, which has been debilitated for obvious religio-cultural reasons.

Machiavelli uses fortune differently from the classical meaning of "God's providence." By reading history books, studying the actions of eminent men, and examining their behavior in battles and the causes of victories and defeats, the prince can to some extent guard against the corrupting effects of fortune. All this educational process develops "extraordinary abilities" (*virtù*). In contrast, it is not a question of the absolute subjugation of fortune, but of its taming, which can occur in rare cases. Rather than the prince with extraordinary *virtù*, the active force is the unambiguously inexplicable choice of fortune: "Fortune does this

well, since when it wishes to bring about great things it elects a man of so much spirit and so much virtue that he recognizes the opportunities that it proffers him" (1998, p. 198).

Machiavelli employs several images to express the indeterminate nature of fortune. The first of these is the feminization of *fortuna*, based on the masculine roots of *virtù*, to which it is opposed, related to *virtùs-virility*. The Florentine thinker addresses this sexist image at the end of chapter XXV of *The Prince*, where she still hopes to hold a position in the city-state government from which she was purged. *Fortuna* reflects an image that can be brought to its knees by a powerful *virtù*: *Fortuna* as a feminine figure who represents the masculine, who can be conquered by a virtuoso prince with political virtue-competence. *Fortuna* is seen to surrender itself to those who possess this competence (*virtù*) (2001, p. 97). In this image, even if *Fortuna* represents irrational forces against the "rationality" of *virtù*, she at least exhibits a character that can be transformed into a predictable state that is within her field of vision.

The other is the image of the "raging river." We know that Machiavelli's working friendship with Leonardo da Vinci may have been realized through a project to build a dam on the Arno River. Within the framework of this image, the Florentine thinker finds common ground with his fellow perspectivist artist and military engineer in regulating the ambiguities of fortune. In Chapter XXV, he writes that the power granted to fortune should not be such as to destroy our free will: "Nevertheless, not to extinguish our free will, I hold it to be true that Fortune is the arbiter of one-half of our actions, but that she still leaves us to direct the other half, or perhaps a little less. I compare her to one of those raging rivers, which when in flood overflows the plains, sweeping away trees and buildings, bearing away the soil from place to place; everything flies before it, all yield to its violence" (2001, p. 94-95).

*Fortuna* is a flood that will sweep away all productive objects, showing its power inexorably "where there is no organized power to resist it" or when no *virtù* dam is built (2001, p. 95-96). In its destructive effects, it resembles the chaos of the "state of nature" that Hobbes depicts in *Leviathan* as a "war of all against all", in which the achievements of civilization and civil life are wasted. According to the Machiavelli of *The Prince*, even if contemporary Italy is an object open to the rampage of the river fortune as a "land without bents or dikes", it is possible to overcome fortune, to transform the uncertainties of its existence into certainty and predictability. The book concludes with Petrarca's hopeful republican lines that *virtù* will revive in Italy and glorify the country (*patria nobilitata*) (2001, p. 100).

However, there are not a few moments when the author of *the Discourses* is more despondent about this than in *The Prince*. One of the images associated with fortune in *the Discourses* is that of the "weaver." In *Renaissance Culture in Italy*, Burckhardt explains the development of the individual in Florence through the development of the genre of biography. There is undoubtedly a connection between the development of the genre of biography and the conception of people's lives as texts to be woven (*teessere*). The development

of the individual or individualism, in this case, means the flourishing of a new entity that weaves the text of its own life against the deterministic social system of feudalism. It is a conception of the individual that parallels the perspective subject that matured in Florence, in which the representation of the world is centered in the gazing eye: The perspective of the individual. In Machiavelli, however, *fortuna* appears as the force that weaves people's lives, even though he speaks of extraordinary ancient founding individuals. When he returns to the subject in more detail in *the Discourses*, he now writes: "(A)ccording to what is seen through all the histories, that man can second fortune but not oppose it, that they can weave its warp but not break it" (1998, p. 199).

Another image of *fortuna* in *the Discourses* sharpens the situation: The blinding *fortuna* that has such a clear dominance that it paralyzes the judgmental faculties of the political subject. It is noteworthy that this situation, which leads to the weakening of political activity and even of the state and sovereignty mentioned in the first sentence of the book, is expressed with an image of vision. In a passage in which Machiavelli makes a direct reference to the Roman historian Titus Livius, the subject of *the Discourses*, *fortuna* as a blinding force occupies the field in all its power and consolidates its dominance, paralyzing the faculty of judgment that Machiavelli vaguely associates with freedom or agency: "So much does Fortune blind spirits where it does not wish its gathering strength checked" (1998, p. 198). Machiavellian thought begins to move away from the theory of perspective because of the predominance of fortune. Against the certainty of vision understood as *virtù visiva* in perspective, there is an irrational force in *fortuna* that distorts perspective.

In this context, we could return to the question of what kind of perspective Machiavelli had as a political philosopher. Pavel Florenski passionately criticized perspective, ending his book *Reverse Perspective* with a pious or mystical fatalism against perspectival certainties, referring to Seneca's letters: "Whether affirmed or denied, calm fate governs, drags in the opposite direction" (2011, p. 141). Machiavelli's conclusion on fortune differs from the "reverse perspective." Since we do not ultimately know the goals of fortune, we can continue to be hopeful: "They (men) should not give up for, since they do not know its end and it proceeds by oblique and unknown ways, they have always to hope and, since they hope, not to give up in whatever fortune in whatever travail they may find themselves" (1998, p. 199).

*Fortuna*, which destroys political efficacy (*virtù*) and blinds political subjects, can under certain conditions also constitute the ground for renewal. To use a final image, *fortuna* is a wind. The force for change can come from an unseen place, the "wind(s) of change" can come from outside, just as fortune caused the greatness of Rome. Thus, it is reaffirmed that perspectival certainties cannot provide a guide, that the indeterminate nature of the political precludes it: "Because one cannot give a certain remedy for such disorders that arise in republics, it follows that it is impossible to order a perpetual republic, because its ruin is caused through a thousand unexpected ways" (1998, p. 257).

## Conclusion

In the last book of *the Discourses*, Machiavelli displays his typical style: Thousands of unexpected paths, many factors that cannot be illuminated by the certainties that predict the future, stand in the way of the creation of the eternal republic. There could be no better expression of Machiavelli's political thought than that we are not in a modern "universe of certainties" but in a "world of approximations" (Koyré, 1994).

Modern political thought would step into the universe of certainties with Hobbes' much more transparent "optics." Machiavelli's political thought does not exactly coincide with perspective, even though he refers to images related to the eye and the visual. In Machiavelli, the eye of modern politics is not the eye of perspective, which emerges from its center and spreads to the periphery, claiming to consume the whole world around it. In other words, even if there is an eye, it is different from the "disembodied eye" (Belting, 2011) of perspective, and it is not an eye that can mass the outside world in an imperial way, but a squinting eye. *Fortuna's* moves may not enter his field of vision. In a way, *Fortuna* is the one who does not enter the field of vision. If perspective is the tendency to tame, as its critics emphasize, there is always something in Machiavellian thought that cannot be completely tamed due to the nature of politics.

The main motivation for the rediscovery of Machiavellian thought in the 20th century was the irreducibility of the political phenomenon to statistical laws, precise commands, determinations and other sciences. The politics of scientific perspective, derived from a sovereign eye that frames the whole objective world, cannot avoid becoming a form of abstract universalism in which the political phenomenon is reduced to another sphere. Against the disembodied eye of perspective, Machiavelli's political thought promises an understanding of politics in which the body is not canceled by the eye. Machiavelli's strange or double perspective even provides a reason for hope, with an interesting reverse effect: If even the sovereign (the prince) cannot determine all possibilities, there are always new possibilities that are not visible to the given order. At the same time, the political order stands as a substance ready to be reformed thanks to the lack of perspective of fortune. Gramsci's motto from *L'Ordine Nuovo* (The New Order), "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will", has its sources in Machiavelli. As he enthusiastically states about the "new order" in *The Prince*: "Such things when they are well founded and dignified will make him revered and admired, and in Italy there are not wanting opportunities to bring such into use in every form" (Machiavelli, 2001, p. 99).

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