La Paix

Esthétiques d'une éthique

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Embodying Autonomy: Gandhi's Fasts as a Form of Nonviolent Protest

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Eat the whole body, you crow!
Peck away at my flesh;
But pray consume not two eyes,
I still hope to see my beloved[1].

Between 1918 and 1948, Mohandas Gandhi undertook up to 18 major public fasts for various political causes. Through the figure of Gandhi in particular, the fast came to epitomize unarmed protest and the uncompromising commitment of individuals to nonviolence at the cost of self-injury. Using a close reading of Gandhi's writings about the fast and an analysis of the dramaturgy of this technique in his particular praxis, I would like to elaborate on my understanding of nonviolence as an active process rather than as a passive moral stance or finished ideology. I will also problematize Gandhi's theorization of the fast, its contradictions and ambiguities, which raise questions about the way the body is used as a weapon in conflict, and about the underlying dialectical relationship between violence and nonviolence.

In this paper, I use the term *aesthetics* specifically with reference to the *form* of non-violence, in contrast to its *ethics*, i.e. its issues, contents or political aims and implications. Theories of nonviolence have elaborately dealt with its ethics, which pertains to the critique of violence, the development of alternatives of engaging in conflict, or the conceptualisation of conflict, peace and justice[2]. However, by focusing on the question of the

1 Cited in Mohandas Gandhi, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, 100 Volumes, Revised CD-ROM edition (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2001, (hereafter *CWMG*), Vol. 11, 110: Letter to Maganlal Gandhi, 31 August 1910).

2 For an overview of theoretical approaches to nonviolence, compare Mahendra Kumar and Peter Low, eds, *Legacy and future of nonviolence* (New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1996) and the older classic by Gene Sharp, *The Politics of nonviolent action* (Boston: Extending Horizon Books, 1973).

aesthetic components of nonviolent action, I shall argue that form constitutes and influences the issues that nonviolent action addresses. In the example of Gandhi's use of the political fast, the aesthetics can be interpreted through his conceptualisation of the body in nonviolent action.

From self-cure to self-rule

The refusal to eat was not a new idea in political struggles. It was already widely in use in the form of the hunger strike by prisoners belonging to the Indian civil opposition, by British suffragettes to publicize their campaign as well as by various other unarmed anti-colonial resistance groups. I use the term fast and not hunger strike, since fasting as a political instrument is not only a way of pushing for the fulfilment of demands from the opponent, but is also perceived as an act of purifying the self. In Gandhi's case of the political fast in the anti-colonial struggle, the fast embodies self-control and autonomy, with reference to his own body as well as the body of the modern Indian nation, in the process of its birth. Ultimately, the notion of self-purification through the fast and through related practices of self-control served as the key mobilizing factor of the mass movement led by Gandhi.

Gandhi began his experiments with fasting while in South Africa in the first decade of the 20th century. He practiced fasting, both on his own, as well as with others on the Tolstoy Farm in Johannesburg, where he set up a commune. Here he eclectically combined elements of fasting as a religious practice common to Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Zoroastrianism with ideas on dietetics and health treatments in vogue at the time, predominantly influenced by German and British nature cure practitioners such as Father Sebastian Kneipp or Edward Bach, to name a few[3]. Group fasting was a way to test the effects of the technique in forging a sense of solidarity and common purpose. In his autobiography, Gandhi notes: "The result of these experiments was that all were convinced of the

3 See Joseph S. Alter, *Gandhi's body. Sex, diet and the politics of nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 55 ff.

value of fasting, and a splendid *esprit de corps* grew up among them[4]." As part of the training for nonviolent action, fasting and other forms of 'self-restraint', including the vow of celibacy, sleep control and a vegetarian diet were part of developing the ideal of complete self-rule or *purna swaraj*, a concept referring to both control over one's own body as it did to the body of the nation. The significance of the body in Gandhi's praxis and theorization of nonviolence cannot be underestimated. Gandhi's nonviolence feared and condemned the corporeal as a hindrance to soul control, repeatedly emphasising that "the body should not be dearer than the soul. He who knows the soul, and also knows that it is different from the body, will not try to protect his body by committing violence[5]." The body was irrational, agitated, chaotic and unruly in this framework. It demanded taming, needed to be bridled in order to allow what he saw as soul force or truth force *(Satyagraha)* to emerge. Importance was given to the body only in order to be able to control it, which ironically implied, however, that he was preoccupied with his body for much of his life.

> I also saw that, the body now being drained more effectively, the food yielded greater relish and the appetite grew keener. It dawned upon me that fasting could be made as powerful a weapon of indulgence as of restraint... I selected first one food and then another, and at the same time restricted the amount. But the relish was after me, as it were[6].

In this quote from Gandhi's autobiography the body is described as an entity, which is gaining control over and thus corrupting the spirit ("the relish was after me"). And by the logic of metonymy, control over food is seen as control over the body itself, which is then equated to freeing the spirit. Fasting in the Gandhian sense is not limited to giving up food alone: "Fasting relates not merely to the palate, but to all the senses and organs[7]." It is in this context that he develops the idea of mental fasting, which includes giving up 'evil thoughts' and 'passions':

4 *CWMG* Vol. 44, 338: *An Autobiography or The Story of my experiments with truth,* revised translation, 1940, Chapter 31: "Fasting".
5 *CWMG* Vol. 10, 99: Letter to Maganlal Gandhi, 17 September 1909.
6 *CWMG* Vol. 44, 329: *Autobiography,* Chapter 27: "More Experiments in dietetics".
7 *CWMG* Vol. 61, 221: Article in *Harijan,* "All about the fast", 8 July 1933.

> Fasting and similar discipline is, therefore, one of the means of the end of self-restraint, but it is not all, and if physical fasting is not accompanied by mental fasting, it is bound to end in hypocrisy and disaster[8].

Framing the fast in the context of self-restraint in fact implies that without the conscious act of restraint, there would be uncontrolled physical and mental activity, amounting to violence. The body, including the mind and the thoughts in it are the wild raw material, which the process of active nonviolence tames and civilises. It is very common to find metaphors of violence in Gandhi's writings to describe the praxis of nonviolence: "the mortification of the flesh through fasting[9]" or "that state [... which] can only be reached after continual and voluntary crucifixion of the flesh[10]."

The perception of the body as "an agitated irrationality, propelling individuals into the chaos of mob performance[11]" is common to several classic theories of political protest. Gandhi's fasting politics becomes complicated because he demonstrates the importance of physicality in unarmed protest on the one side, and simultaneously dismisses the body as opposed to the soul on the other. Nonviolence through fasting "postulates the conquest of the adversary by suffering in one's own person[12]", implying that the body is not just symbolically employed in the conflict, but as a fully articulate and intelligent signifying agent, thus allowing for a vast range of possibilities of action and reaction. On the other hand, the body is viewed in theological terms as separate from and intrinsically a hindrance to the soul, therefore creating a binary, which usually reads as a string of moral oppositions between body/soul, impure/pure or mortal/immortal. Undertaking a fast means that intervention in a conflict is performed through and with the body. Using the body to elicit a response instead of using arms is a gesture of nonviolent protest. At the same time, fasting is more than just the refusal of food, it is seen as voluntary physical suffering that has the effect of strengthening and 'self-purification', thus a means of making

8 *CWMG* Vol. 44, 339: *Autobiography*, Chapter 31: "Fasting".
9 *CWMG* Vol. 83, 367: Letter to Additional Secretary, Home Department, Government of India, Detention Camp New Delhi, 15 July 1943.
10 *CWMG* Vol. 61, 221: "All about the fast," Article in *Harijan*, 09 July 1933.
11 Susan Leigh Foster, "Choreographies of protest," *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (October 2003), 395.
12 *CWMG* Vol. 34, 97: *Satyagraha in South Africa*, first published 1924–25. Revised Third Edition, ed. and translated by Valji G. Desai (Ahmedabad: Navjivan Press, 1961), Chapter XIII: "Satyagraha vs. Passive Resistance".

the body itself less prominent and giving importance to its discipline, "when your passions threaten to get the better of you[13]." This approach reflects a severe mistrust of and anxiety towards the body. It is not a question of treating fasting as a kind of physical training that can facilitate, cultivate and channel body responses more consciously in a conflict situation. Rather the body-soul disparity assumes that the nature of the human is somehow innately violent and methods such as fasting can prevent and restrict what he terms as a curable disease. The metaphor of the diseased or poisoned body is very prominent in Gandhi's vocabulary[14]. It is used in reference to the effects of modern technology on the body of Indian civilisation, or to the influence of bodily pleasure and indulgence on health and longevity. Optimism towards the inherent potentials and use of the body in alleviating diseases in society is coupled with an anxiety towards the disease that the body by itself is perceived to be.

An analysis of the significance of the body in Gandhi's nonviolence cannot overlook his concept of *swaraj*. The notion of *swaraj* refers to both self-rule of the nation as well as control and mastery over one's own self via the body. The political paradigm of national sovereignty is interdependent and analogous to the paradigm of individual autonomy and is therefore linked to the idea of the soul controlling the body and not being controlled by the demands of the body. Herein lies the main thrust of Gandhi's argument in his 1910 text *Hind Swaraj*, that home-rule (via a self-sufficient, village-driven nation) and self-rule (via the disciplined body aiding and submitting to the soul) are deeply interconnected, and that they are not only ends but equally means, therefore the way in which *swaraj* is practiced is as important and indeed decides how *swaraj* is achieved[15]. Home-rule is embodied in the practices of the nation's citizens. An economy of an ascetic self-sufficiency is developed in terms of national and corporeal control. Sovereignty of the nation easily translates into sovereignty over the body. "Real home rule is self-rule or self-control[16]."

13 *CWMG* Vol. 38, 230: Leaflet "Self-restraint vs. Self-indulgence", reprinted in *Young India*, 24 March 1927.

14 See Parel's comments on the use of the metaphor of the "curable disease" in the introduction to Hind Swaraj in Anthony Parel, ed., *Gandhi, M.K.: Hind Swaraj and other writings* (New Delhi: Cambridge Texts in Modern Politics, Cambridge University Press, 1997), lvii.

15 *CWMG* Vol. 10, 245ff.: *Hind Swaraj*, 1910.

16 *CWMG* Vol. 10, 310: *Hind Swaraj*.

From controlling the palate to controlling the nation

Gandhi's model of self-control went hand in hand with his idea of disciplining the body of the nation. Historian Ranajit Guha works out the relations and dynamics between what he terms "crowd control" and "soul control" in Gandhian led mass mobilization[17]. Gandhi as a leader of the bourgeois nationalist movement felt that the struggle against British domination could not come about without disciplining the body of the Indian masses. There is a connection between self-control (which is synonymous to soul-control, since the term *atma* refers to both self and soul) and control of the masses (mobilization of the masses) that consistently runs through Gandhi's writings, constituting discipline as a key mediating function between the elite leadership and the subalterns in the Indian nationalist movement. Discipline pervasively defined Gandhi's approach to the body and to the division between the body and the soul. As Guha's analysis of Gandhian strategies of mass mobilization shows, "to understand [Gandhi's] obsession for crowd control, one must recognise that it had less to do with the body than with the soul. Indeed it was a foil to his concern for soul control[18]." Control and restraint of the body were related to abstinence: giving up meat, alcohol, sex, foreign cloth, urges to shout or make noises in demonstrations, anger, aggression, but also all kinds of "unruly behaviour," a phrase used in reference to peasant revolts and riots. Abstinence through rigour and discipline of the body in turn leads to purification of the soul. It is through this logic that Gandhi could argue that fasting and other practices of self-healing (such as nature cure therapy, strict vegetarianism, celibacy) could achieve a dual control of his own body as well as the body of the enslaved masses.

> Only you must put your body right even as an artisan's first duty is to keep his tools in order. God has given us this body as a tool to be used efficiently for His service neither for pampering nor for keeping in cotton wool but not even for abusing or spoiling it by neglect. This is a wretched sermon but much needed[19].

17 Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without hegemony. History and power in colonial India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 143ff.

18 Guha, *Dominance without hegemony,* 146.

19 *CWMG* Vol. 19, 361: Letter to Esther Faering, 29 January 1920.

Fasting is perceived as a way to train and discipline the body, "putting it in order," in order to facilitate its 'use' in a mass movement, not very different from the way a soldier in an army is trained: "Imagine the consequence of one untrained soldier finding his way into an army at war. He can disorganise it in a second[20]." The body of the masses comes across in this framework as something to be feared, as a dangerous "mobocracy" that needs taming. This is expressed in the same note, even while Gandhi speaks of his boundless faith in the people:

> My greatest anxiety about non-co-operation is not the slow response of the leaders [...] But the greatest obstacle is that we have not yet emerged from the mobocratic stage. But my consolation lies in the fact that nothing is so easy as to train mobs, for the simple reason that they have no mind, no premeditation. They act in a frenzy. They repent quickly[21].

The self-controlled fasting body of Gandhi placed in juxtaposition to the body of the uncontrollable mobs of people: these images seem to suggest that Gandhi's fasts served to harness the energies of the rioting masses, as if the act of starvation could mobilize or calm down the mob. The fast is used to discipline and regulate the crowds. This is very different from the disciplinary effect of the gun, but it nonetheless carries the view that the crowds were per se unreasonable and over-emotionalized and required disciplinary measures, albeit of a nonviolent sort. The above quote is from an article that was published shortly after riots around the police quarters of the village Chauri Chaura in February 1922, during which a scuffle took place amongst a few anti-British processionists, following which the police opened fire. After this, the police station was set on fire by the group of protestors and non-co-operation supporters and 22 policemen were burnt alive. Gandhi immediately called for the suspension of the civil disobedience movement and undertook a five-day fast 'in repentance' for the incident in Chauri Chaura. This is just one of several cases of the use of the fast by Gandhi to 'atone for the wrongdoing of the masses[22]'.

20 *CWMG* Vol. 21, 247: Article in *Young India*, "Democracy vs. Mobocracy," 08 September 1920.

21 *CWMG* Vol. 21, 248: "Democracy vs. Mobocracy"

22 See also the study on the Chauri Chaura incident by Shahid Amin, *Event, metaphor, memory. Chauri Chaura 1922–1992* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

The aesthetic of inner and outer restraint

Dress and clothing in Gandhi's public life emerged from the same philosophical line of thought as fasting. There are several studies on the significance of clothing in Gandhian politics, both as an economic issue, related to self-reliance and the promotion of cottage industries, as well as the strategic symbolism of dress in Gandhi's public appearance[23]. He propagated and experimented with the gradual reduction of clothing and the stylization of this near nakedness using similar arguments as with the reduction of food. As Emma Tarlo has pointed out, the Gandhian approach to dress was the outward equivalent to his politics of voluntary starvation[24]. Just as fasting was an act of self-suffering, wearing the loincloth – what Gandhi imagined to be the clothes of a 'standard' Indian peasant – was meant to be a sign of identification with their poverty and an expression of protest. Eating and clothing had a comparable moral worth, in that they were essentials for survival but could be expressions of lavishness, waste and exploitation. Gandhi was obsessed with both, literally incorporating these body practices into the mainstream of nationalist protests, making clothing and food into religious issues as well as political ones, and insisting on their 'transformative' qualities. Aesthetic components were thus incorporated into the means to achieve national autonomy and sovereignty. Just as fasting could lead to self-purification, so also wearing home-spun cloth *(khadi)* could transform the wearer into a more worthy person. This also implied that wearing foreign cloth was 'defiling', just as indulging in food caused physical corruption. Emma Tarlo rightly argues that this argument actually utilises the concept of untouchability, a practice he viciously opposed in other contexts[25]. The signification of the body with categories of purity and impurity goes hand in hand with the way Gandhi worked out the body's (and in particular his own body's) capacity to perform nonviolence.

23 See Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters. Dress and Identity in India* (New Delhi: Penguin 1996), in particular Chapter 3: "Gandhi and the Recreation of Indian Dress," 62–93 and article by Susan Bean, "Gandhi and Khadi. The Fabric of Indian Independence," in *Cloth and Human Experience.* Annette Weiner and Jane Schneider, eds, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 356–416.

24 Tarlo, *Clothing Matters,* 69.

25 Tarlo, *Clothing Matters,* 91.

Creating, signifying and using the body as a weapon in conflict is one of the core tenets of Gandhian nonviolence, though the body was not imbued with a positive agency in Gandhi's worldview. The body carries the dialectic of *Körper*/material body – *Leib*/spirited body to the extent that it is both a limitation to nonviolence as well as the potentiality to incorporate nonviolence. In its opposition to soul, it is posited as innately violent, as instinctive or brute, animal-like. At the same time, it is the way to releasing the powers of the soul, making it the tool of nonviolence:

> Steam becomes a mighty power only when it allows itself to be imprisoned [...] Even so have the youth of the country of their own will to allow their inexhaustible energy to be imprisoned, controlled and set free in strictly measured and required quantities[26].

Here the material body as potentially violent can be shaped into a tool in service of the spirited body through control and self-imposed restraint. This expresses the dialectical relationship between nonviolence and violence in Gandhi's understanding of the body. In rejecting violent behaviour there is always an implicit reference to it. Underneath the shining surface of pure nonviolence there lurks the brute animal instinct. The movement away from this 'natural', violent state is accompanied by a constant allusion to it. Even if this 'pure state' can be achieved by great self-discipline and practice, there remains an unspoken affinity, albeit a tense one, between these 'brute' and 'pure' states of being, between violence and nonviolence. Fasting demonstrates aesthetics of refusal or rejection using the body, which simultaneously highlights that which is being refused. Thus the act of voluntary starvation, leading to physical vulnerability is directly connected with the enhancement of 'soul force'; the body's weakness is re-articulated as the strength of the soul. Yet the soul is made tangible only through the staging of the starving body.

26 *CWMG* Vol. 47, 185: Article in *Young India*, "Youth on trial," October 03, 1929.

Staging the masculinity of the fast

The fast drew from a vast storehouse of cultural practices and crafted them into a tool of political action. Gandhi's practice of the fast sought to constantly evoke and establish continuity with 'age-old religious customs', eclectically drawing from Hindu, Christian and Islamic sources. Yet it gradually emerged as something novel, out of the ordinary, something only he and few else could perform. It sought to legitimize a different kind of authority for itself in political struggle. In re-inventing this device as a political tool, new meanings are endowed upon it, so that it represents a weapon in battle. Gandhi speaks of the fast as "his last resort in place of the sword – his own or other's[27]." The fast is fashioned as a substitute for the sword. If not doing something is an act, in the praxis of nonviolence it is often an act of substitution: doing something else, instead of 'taking to the sword'.

Gandhi and his followers worked at re-framing the fast as a political tool, and in doing so they worked at virilizing the act. Fasting, like spinning, traditionally has connotations of being feminine in Hindu tradition, with instances from religious texts calling upon women to fast in prayer for the well being of their husbands and children. In Gandhi's political praxis, the fast is fashioned into a manly weapon. "My impotence has been gnawing at me of late. It will go immediately the fast is undertaken[28]." By using the allusion to potency, a very clever turn in the representation of the body of the male takes place. It is framed as an act of bravery and an indication of gaining rather than losing strength, as a process of enhancing one's masculinity. Gandhi embodied so-called 'female' practices but repeatedly emphasised their transformation into sources of manliness and potency. Establishing the potency of fasting was argued along similar lines to establishing how the practice of celibacy for men increased their physical and mental strength and durability, which in turn were required for their participation in the national independence struggle. True control of the body, be it through celibacy or fasting, was a process of suffering that led to purification. In Gandhi's discourse, celibacy was just another (more

27 *CWMG* Vol. 98, 219: Speech at prayer meeting, New Delhi, 12 January 1948.
28 *CWMG* Vol. 98, 218: Speech at prayer meeting, New Delhi, 12 January 1948.

difficult) dimension of fasting, implying the control and restriction of the sexual appetite. "It is my experience that anyone who has not conquered the palate cannot conquer the sex impulse[29]." This is complicated by the gendered connotations that eating/starvation and sex/celibacy have in his thinking and praxis. So by a strange twist of argument, purportedly demonstrating the equality of the sexes, celibacy would allow for men to suffer and be productive, the way women suffered when they underwent labour pain: "A man striving for success in *brahmacharya* [the vow of celibacy] suffers pain as a woman does in labour[30]." Suffering, production, reproduction and renunciation are all woven together in this re-writing of birth giving as quintessentially female into a male practice, in favour of greater service to the national public. As Alter has pointed out: "Gandhi defined the problem of violence, and the goal of nonviolence, in terms at once global and intimate, imperial and personal, as well as biological and moral[31]." The fast and related body practices of celibacy and self-healing were presented as acts that achieved more through doing less: reduction, renunciation, restriction and control were promoted as leading to an increase of strength, potency, virility, energy. What appears at times to reformulate traditional understanding of masculinity in fact articulates the very same binaries ("male" equals "active", "female" equals "passive"), although packaged in a different way.

The process of constructing the body as a tool or weapon of nonviolent action had to necessarily be a process of gendering nonviolence. One of the well-known problems that nonviolent politics faced (and to an extent still continues to face) was the reputation of being passive, submissive and therefore negatively associated with the feminine. Connected to this is the legitimization of violent conflict, armed fighting and revenge and retaliation as a manly, i.e. positive response. Nonviolence denotes both the absence of violence as well as the rejection of violence, and it is in this correlation that the gendering of nonviolence assumes particular significance. Gandhi's theorization of fasting as a nonviolent practice moves in two

29 *CWMG* Vol. 28, 25: "Brahmacharya," Article in *Navajivan*, 25 May 1924.

30 Gandhi differentiates between *brahmacharya* in "comprehensive terms" as "control in thought, speech and action of all senses, at all places and at all times" and in its "conventional meaning" as "control of the sex impulse in thought, speech and action," in: *CWMG* Vol. 28, 22–6: "Brahmacharya".

31 Alter, *Gandhi's Body*, 27.

directions: firstly it engenders violent action in response to slavery and colonial rule as becoming unmanly, or being "rendered effeminate[32]". He characterizes the use of weapons as a weak gesture and not a gesture of strength, therefore as an unmanly act. The rejection of violence comes with a rejection of its association with manliness, as a critique of violence as lack of courage and fearlessness. "It is contrary to our manhood, if we obey laws repugnant to our conscience[33]." Simultaneously, the absence of violence comes with its substitution by other means, but the category of male strength and the understanding of strength as male remains unshattered. So if violence is "emasculated and cowardly[34]", then nonviolence as its absence and its other has to be gendered as masculine: "Believe me that a man devoid of courage and manhood can never be a *Satyagrahi*[35]." It is not surprising that Gandhi was unhappy with the term passive resistance and proposed the term *Satyagraha* (adherence to the truth; truth force) instead. In this he sought to not just free the pacifist ideology from the reputation of being passive, but also from its closeness to a certain essentialized notion of the female. Nonviolent action, however different it may be to violence, needed to be fashioned as heroic and manly, in as much as armed fighting was rejected as cowardly and unmanly. "Forgiveness is more manly than punishment[36]."

Aesthetics, ethics and embodiment

The body was at the core of Gandhi's theorization of nonviolence, although he himself viewed the body with great mistrust. Yet despite rejecting and condemning the body, and positing nonviolent action as a primarily *spiritual* effort, Gandhi's praxis in fact hypothesizes the body as a

32 *CWMG* Vol. 10, 266: *Hind Swaraj.*
33 *CWMG* Vol. 10, 293: *Hind Swaraj.*
34 *CWMG* Vol. 10, 266: *Hind Swaraj.*
35 *CWMG* Vol. 10, 295: *Hind Swaraj.*
36 Gandhi's own translation of the Sanskrit proverb "kshama veerasya bhushanam" in: *CWMG* Vol. 21, 133: "The Doctrine of the Sword," Article in *Young India*, 11 August 1920.

significant agent of political action, not only as an instrument of carrying out a particular act, but as a unit of conflict that in fact constitutes what the conflict and its outcome looks like. Embodiment is thus central to Gandhi's aesthetics of the fast.

The form of his nonviolent politics persistently returned to the body as an agent of its expression and realization. So the path to the ethical and political ideal was through bodily effort and the staging of the body. Ethics and esthetics were connected through the process of embodiment, a process that does not draw a border between body and soul and mind. Gandhi's particular mode of embodying nonviolence through the fast raises important questions on the connection between ethics and aesthetics; questions related to how the *form* of socio-political action relates to its *message*, how nonviolence relates to and positions itself to violence and how a theory of human agency can emerge from the aesthetics of restraint and rejection. Hagiographic narratives on Gandhi have unfortunately not been responsive enough to the fruitful paradoxes and contradictions that emerge from Gandhian nonviolent action. The paradoxes lie in the reference to violence in the moment of its dismissal; in the denial of the body as well as an engagement with corporeality; in the rejection of masculinity as well as its re-formulation, and in the spiritualization of political sovereignty through embodying a notion of autonomy.