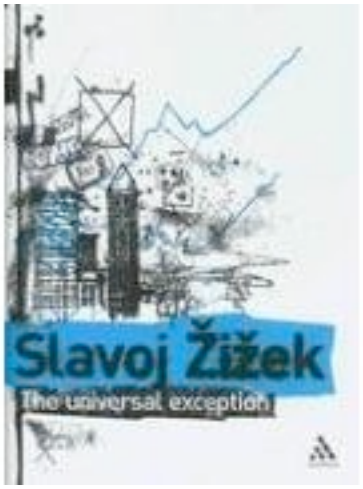

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Editors' introduction

Slavoj Žižek's 'third way'

Rex Butler and Scott Stephens

Let us begin here by noting an odd coincidence. After the terrorist strikes of 11 September 2001, both Slavoj Žižek and Jean Baudrillard leapt immediately into print. The two authors were, of course, already well known for their interventions in world political events, often writing responses in newspapers or on the internet mere days after momentous events or at the height of major public debates (the role of NATO in Yugoslavia, the attempted genocide in Rwanda, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the issues surrounding genetic cloning and manipulation). But, paradoxically, for all of their usual haste in making their views known and amid calls from both sides of politics for swift retaliation, they both urged a kind of caution or delay. Baudrillard, for his part, wrote in 'The Spirit of Terrorism':

> The whole play of history and power is disrupted by this event, but so, too, are the conditions of analysis. You have to take your time. While events were stagnating, you had to anticipate and move more quickly than they did. But when they speed up this much, you have to move more slowly – though without allowing yourself to be buried beneath a welter of words, or the gathering clouds of war, and preserving intact the unforgettable incandescence of the images.[1]

While Žižek, for his part, in the essay 'Welcome to the desert of the Real',[2] stated that any immediate reaction would be little more than an impotent *passage à l'acte*, whose sole purpose would be 'to *avoid* confronting the true dimension of what occurred on 11 September'.

To draw out what is going on here more precisely, it is crucial to realize that it is not simply a matter of these two highly 'engaged' thinkers suddenly losing their nerve in the face of an almost overwhelming disaster, as did so many others on the Left. Rather, what is astonishing is how quickly they formulated their responses and distributed them via the internet around the world. And yet, at the same time, what they advise is a form of inaction, a pause, time for reflection. This would, however, not be to do nothing, but to take the opportunity to *think*. It is through the minimal delay introduced by thinking that we might somehow avoid those hysterical calls for action that would merely reproduce the existing ideological coordinates (of which even the claim that everything is different following 11 September is only a variant, a 'hollow attempt to say something "deep" without really knowing what to say'). As Žižek writes in his essay 'The prospects of radical politics today',[3] in a surprising inversion of Marx's famous thesis 11 ('The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it'):

> The first task today is precisely *not* to succumb to the temptation to act, to intervene directly and change things (which then inevitably ends in a cul-de-sac of debilitating impossibility: 'What can one do against global Capital?'), but to question the hegemonic ideological coordinates.

Indeed, once identified, this stress on thinking – on thinking as such – can be seen to form the basis of all of Žižek's specific political commitments. We might just speak here of three instances that occur in this book. In his response to NATO's endorsement of some minimal standard of 'human rights' in Kosovo,[4] Žižek insists that the transparent evocation of non-political 'humanitarianism' is little more than a ruse to prevent us from thinking 'the shady world of international Capital and its strategic interests'. In the aftermath of the collapse of the WTC Towers, Žižek unexpectedly endorses the plea of Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban, that Americans should exercise their own judgement when responding to 11 September: 'Don't you have your own thinking?' And, finally, in the months following the United States' invasion of Iraq, Žižek,[5] while rejecting the combined French and German opposition as a kind of appeasement 'reminiscent of the impotence of the League of Nations against Germany in the 1930s', nevertheless asserts that the very awareness of their failure to provide a substantive alternative itself constitutes a positive sign.

But is there a logical form, a consistent structural principle, behind Žižek's various positions with regard to these events? Might they not be seen – like France and Germany whom he condemns – as merely the hysterical rejection of existing alternatives without being able to suggest anything of his own? In a split between form and content, might we not say that on the level of *form* Žižek wants to see himself as an 'engaged' intellectual, but on the level of *content* he is struck by a kind of paralysis, unable to propose any meaningful action? In fact, this exact criticism, often coming from the perspective of a pseudo-ethical, pragmatic *Realpolitik*, has frequently been made against Žižek. It has been put forward by the English deconstructionist Simon Critchley,[6] and by Žižek himself (which shows that he is not entirely unaware of its pertinence);[7] but undoubtedly the exemplary instance is that of Žižek's early ally and critic of postmodern 'identity' politics Ernesto Laclau. As Laclau writes in the exchange between him, Žižek and Judith Butler, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*:

> In his previous essay ['Class struggle or postmodernism? Yes, please!'], Žižek had told us that he wanted to overthrow capitalism; now we are served notice that he also wants to do away with liberal democratic regimes – to be replaced, it is true, by a thoroughly different régime about which he does not have the courtesy of letting us know anything ... Žižek *does* actually know a third type of sociopolitical arrangement: the Communist bureaucratic régimes of Eastern Europe under which he lived. Is that what he has in mind? ... And if what he has in mind is something entirely different, he has the elementary intellectual and political duty to let us know what it is ... Only if that explanation is made available will we be able to start talking politics, and abandon the theological terrain. Before that, I cannot even know what Žižek is talking about – and the more this exchange progresses, the more suspicious I become that Žižek himself does not know either.[8]

Ironically, with surprising clarity, Laclau here identifies what actually *is* at stake in Žižek's work, the fundamental wager on which his various interventions depend: the possibility of some 'third type' of sociopolitical organization not covered by either the existing liberal democratic régimes or their socialist alternatives. Again, let us pursue this idea through those three representative examples discussed above. With regard to the NATO intervention in Kosovo, Žižek seeks to avoid what he calls the 'double blackmail' of having to choose between sides, the argument that, 'if you are against the NATO bombings, you are

for Milošević's proto-fascist régime of ethnic cleansing; if you are against Milošević, you support the global capitalist New World Order'. Instead, his point is that 'phenomena like Milošević's régime are not the opposite of the New World Order, but rather its *symptom*, the place from which the hidden *truth* of the New World Order emerges'. With regard to the terrorist attacks on the WTC, Žižek rejects the argument that would have it that, 'if one simply, only and unconditionally condemns the attacks, one cannot but appear to endorse the blatantly ideological position of American innocence under threat from Third World Evil; if one draws attention to the deeper socio-political causes of Arab extremism, one cannot but appear to blame the victims who ultimately got what they deserved'. Instead, the 'only solution is to reject this very opposition and to adopt both positions simultaneously, which can be done only if one resorts to the dialectical category of *totality*'. And, finally, with regard to the American invasion of Iraq, Žižek refuses both proposed alternatives, arguing both for and against military intervention: 'Abstract pacifism is intellectually stupid and morally wrong – one must oppose a threat. Of course the fall of Saddam's régime would have been a relief to a large majority of the Iraqi people. Of course militant Islam is a horrifying ideology.' Nevertheless, although 'there is something hypocritical about objections to the war ... there is something terribly wrong with *this* war'.

Now, in a conventional political discourse, the elaboration of wrong alternatives would merely be a preliminary to the eventual laying out of the correct one. Or, in some pseudo-Hegelian manner, it would be a matter of somehow finding a compromise between them, picking out the best elements of both. But this is not what Žižek means by 'third type of socio-political arrangement': it is not any balance or negotiation that he is interested in. Rather, if Žižek seeks to make a choice at all between these two alternatives, it is precisely to *maintain the choice*. If there is a solution to the problem he sets out, it is not to be found by deciding between alternatives or proposing some middle-path between them, but by thinking both together. Or if, within the current political situation, Žižek is forced to choose between them, he nevertheless wants to think what precedes that choice, what both choices exclude and stand in for. In a manner consistent with his analysis of how a subject is formed within the symbolic order by means of a certain 'forced choice' as to whether to enter society or not – which, although it appears free, is in fact forced because the only alternative to it is psychosis – so in his

political pronouncements Žižek wants to think a situation before what we might call our political 'forced choice', as though we did not have to make it.[9]

However, Žižek does not stop there, which would again indicate a certain paralysis of thinking before the event. Instead, what he seeks to render through the identification of those two false choices we are confronted with is their *speculative identity*. Upon what is this identity founded? Why are all choices within our given ideological coordinates fundamentally the same choice? As Hegel would have it, the speculative identity of opposites is founded on the 'dark, shapeless abyss' of abstract universality, which like the Lacanian Real is 'always in the same place'. And Žižek will translate this in his work as the undifferentiated domain of global Capital. That is to say, for Žižek, as for Hegel, thinking is the withholding of the forced choice in thinking the totality that precedes and conditions it. But, in thinking this totality, in immersing it in the medium of representational thinking (*Vorstellung*), Žižek, following Hegel, also introduces a kind of delay into it, makes it pass from Substance to Subject.[10] In so doing – this is Marx's point that the only alternative to Capital is Capital itself – Žižek shows that Capital is 're-marked' from somewhere else, is only possible because from the beginning it stands in for its own opposite. To the very extent that it can be *thought* – this is Hegel's point about immersing abstract universality in the medium of representational thinking – it is not a true universality, it is not abstract enough. It is only its own exception. Or, to put it another way, it is revealed as exception by a still greater universality, which is Žižek's point concerning universality: it is nothing else but what makes every particular particular.

But to go back to that passage from Substance to Subject, which is the power of dialectical thinking, we might say that – in a literal way – all Žižek does here is to 'humanize' Capital (but then, from this perspective, what is the 'human'?). And this cannot but remind us of that 'Third Way' alternative Žižek so vehemently rejects throughout his work. However, are the reasons for this rejection – and let us even suggest, as he does with regard to Blair and Haider,[11] a certain clinching of Žižek and Blair – not to be explained as arising out of Žižek's own uncomfortable proximity to Blair, as indeed is hinted at by Laclau's suggestion that what is implicit in Žižek is some kind of impossible 'third way'?[12] But let us be more exact here. At stake in Žižek's 'third way' is a necessary distinction between form and content. With regard to content,

he is absolutely in agreement with the Third Way and its desire to institute progressive social programmes in the face of conservative opposition. There is simply no alternative to capitalism (at this moment). But with regard to form, Žižek absolutely rejects the Third Way's concession to this fact in advance. For Žižek, the conclusion that there is no alternative to capitalism can only be reached via the thinking of the alternative that, precisely through its exclusion (this again is Hegel's point concerning the distinction between concrete and abstract universalities), ensures that there is only capitalism. In other words, as opposed to the Third Way in which we always *begin* with capitalism, for Žižek capitalism is only the *result* of a more abstract universality (capitalism and its other).

And this allows us to account for Žižek's much-criticized political practice in the former Yugoslavia in terms consistent with his current political theory. His actions then, from the perspective of what is now assumed to be his radical leftism, are usually represented as a liberal compromise, something he would wish to leave behind. (Žižek ran as a pro-reform candidate for the presidency in the first free elections in Slovenia.) However, our point would be that, far from having to be disavowed in the light of his later political theory, these early actions only make sense in light of it. For what Žižek can be seen to be doing at that time is – while acknowledging the necessity of having to make a choice within the newly 'liberated' (i.e., capitalist) Yugoslavia – attempting to maintain the fundamental choice, to avoid foreclosing the possibility of some utopian social transformation. (And it is crucial to note that at no point in his work has Žižek ever repudiated the implicit utopian dimension of democracy or a shared civic space, just that platform on which he ran in the election: this may even have analogies to his support for the 'inner greatness' of Stalinist bureaucracy.) It is for this reason – and the comparison is intended – that Žižek will call those transitional social movements in the newly ex-Communist countries, such as East Germany's *Neues Forum*, a 'third way'. Once more, with regard to their content, these movements were probably no different from those Third Way movements that subsequently broke out in the West. (Were they in fact their inspiration?) But, with regard to their form, they were absolutely different. While on the surface appearing to adapt to the new capitalist exigencies, they did, for a brief moment, embody a true alternative to both capitalism and Communism (exactly what Laclau demands of Žižek).

But perhaps this last statement – that is was only for 'a brief moment' that those new movements of ex-Communism opened up an alternative – is a little too 'pathetic'. By this we mean that absolutely – and we insist on this point – Žižek approves of someone like Blair's instrumentalization of the 'progressive' policies of the Third Way, his willingness to 'get his hands dirty' as Žižek says approvingly of all 'conservatives'.[13] What he in fact admires about the 'third way' alternative at the breaking down of Communism was not so much its momentary utopianism as its readiness to embody a new liberal bureaucratic state, in short, its desire *not to fail*, unlike so much typical leftism, including even *Neues Forum* itself, whose tragic character was that it came to embrace its own inevitable failure. (This is also the tragedy of a figure like Václav Havel: that he was not always a pathetic, liberal 'fool', who knew very well his own impotence, but for a moment was a conservative 'knave', who was prepared to do what it took to seize and maintain power.) We might say here that, in the exact sense that Žižek gives to an authentic conservatism, the Third Way is *conservative*: a way of 'maintaining the Old' (that is, maintaining the excluded alternative to capitalism) within the new conditions of multinational capitalism. This is for Žižek the most radical gesture of all – and it might apply even to Žižek himself. His new, seemingly extreme radical Leftism might ultimately only be a way of maintaining his original liberal 'conservatism' within the new conditions of the Left's theoretical perversion and decline.

At this point, we return for the last time to those three examples of Žižek's specific political commitments with which we began. With regard to their content, we would say that Žižek's actual position does not much differ from our contemporary 'Really Existing' Third Way. But as to their form, there is an absolute difference. And what we mean by this is that the 'third way' alternative – this is the very 'speculative identity' with its opposite that makes it possible – can only be arrived at by considering its opposite, or more exactly by comparing its own rule to itself. To put this more simply, Žižek by and large agrees with the actions of democratic liberalism in each of those situations, but each time – and this is the very time of thinking – suggests not merely that they have to apply their own standards to themselves, but that they are only possible because they have *already* applied their own standard to themselves, are already in a speculative relationship with their opposite. We can only arrive at these decisions in the first place because they stand in for, take the place of, that 'dark, shapeless abyss' they imply from the beginning.

It is this abstract universality – which in effect makes these decisions always exceptions – that pushes these decisions into realization, precipitates them, makes them pass over from Substance to Subject, a subject that is nothing else but that decision or action within a determined situation. (And, not coincidentally, it is just this kind of Hegelian speculative identity of opposites, of actions not only leading to but only being possible because of their opposites, that Baudrillard means by the 'symbolic exchange' between the West and its other in his analysis of 11 September.)

In each of these examples, therefore, there is a certain 'infinite justice' implied, which we might define here simply as the Third Way being taken more seriously than it does itself, the Third Way applying its own ruthless pragmatism and lack of excuses first of all to itself. Again, it would not at all be an apology for inaction or indicate any moral equivocation, but on the contrary point to the necessity of always *doing more*, of always acting *on time*. Thus, with regard to Yugoslavia, Žižek (in a statement significantly elided from the 'official' version of the text published in the *New Left Review*) suggests as a 'solution' to the problem of NATO intervention: 'Precisely as a Leftist, my answer to the dilemma, "Bomb or not?", is: "*Not yet enough* bombs and they are already *too late*".' With regard to 11 September, Žižek speaks of the way that, to the extent that the 'coalition' forces seek their enemy outside of themselves, they would always miss their target; that they would obtain 'infinite justice' only insofar as they also struck *at themselves*: 'The justice exerted must be truly infinite in the strict Hegelian sense, i.e., that, in relating to others, it has to relate to itself – in short, that it has to ask the question of how we ourselves, who enforce justice, are involved in what we are fighting against.' Finally, with regard to the American invasion of Iraq, Žižek is not opposed to it – those reasons he put forward earlier against its pacifist condemnation still hold – but he objects to *who* does it, for what *reasons* it is done: 'It is *who does it* that makes it wrong. The reproach should thus be: *who are you to do this*?' And this is why, in an essay published after this collection was put together, Žižek argues for the 'justice' of Bush's re-election: not for the typical Leftist reason that his excesses will somehow hasten the collapse of capitalism, but in order to ensure that he will be held accountable for his actions. As he writes: 'If Kerry had won, it would have forced the liberals to face the consequences of the Iraq War, allowing Bush to blame the Democrats for the results of his own catastrophic actions.'[14]

It is, in conclusion, worthwhile noting that, for all of the abstraction of which Žižek might be accused, the essays in this volume are full of the details of specific leaders' names, particular events, concrete and nuanced political opinions. Again, we would simply say two things about this. First, we mustn't think of these details and the abstract form of Žižek's argument as opposed. As we have tried to make clear, Žižek's invariable method is to think the excluded 'third' option in any political situation, which can never be grasped as such but only as its own exception. However, the details of Žižek's writing – *contra* Laclau – only come to light because of this abstraction, are only this exception. Secondly, these details – considered political opinions, the smallest accuracies of fact (Žižek is fond of quoting Lenin's aphorism that the 'fate of the entire working-class movement for long years can be decided by a word or two in the Party programme') – are precisely themselves a way of *maintaining the fundamental choice*. The patient, meticulous elaboration of the facts is the very time of thinking itself, the refusal to act in such a way that merely confirms the existing ideological coordinates. And yet, of course, these facts are never neutral: they can only be seen from a particular symbolic perspective. The details in Žižek are always only an exception, one of two sides, and thus miss what they are aiming at. Indeed, Žižek's entire work – even his so-called theoretical arguments – is merely a series of details understood in this way. It both attempts to think the forced choice (and thus seeks to overcome it) and only repeats it, misses it yet again. It at once is the thinking of the exception and merely itself another exception. And it is in this complicated sense that we might conceive of that split in appearance that is the exception: a split not simply between the world and some transcendental realm for which it stands in, but between the world and what allows it to be re-marked as detail – the world itself as exception. True thinking is based not on something outside the world, producing a split between the *ought* and the *is*, but only on the world itself, producing a split between the *is* and the *is*. It is a split that is the very time and place of thought itself.

And this perhaps is the point at which to rehabilitate Hegel's critique of Spinoza, now infamously characterized by Žižek as 'the ideologue of late capitalism'[15] who was unable to contemplate this 'Capital-Substance':

> On the side of content, the defect of Spinoza's philosophy consists precisely in the fact that the form is not known to be immanent to that content, and

for that reason it supervenes upon it only as an external, subjective form. Substance, as it is apprehended immediately by Spinoza without preceding dialectical mediation – being the universal might of negation – is only the dark, shapeless abyss, so to speak, in which all determinate content is swallowed up as radically null and void, and which produces nothing out of itself that has a positive subsistence of it own.[16]

Notes

1 Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, trans. Chris Turner, London and New York, Verso, 2002, p. 4.

2 Žižek's paper, 'Welcome to the desert of the Real' (reprinted as Chapter 15 of this volume), was first circulated on the internet from 7 October 2001. An abbreviated version appeared in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, 2002, pp. 385–9, until it reached its final, book-length version, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, London and New York, Verso, 2002.

3 Slavoj Žižek, 'The prospects of radical politics today', in *Democracy Unrealized: Documenta 11 – Platform 1*, ed. Okwui Enwezor *et al.*, Kassel, Documenta, 2002, pp. 67–85 (reprinted as Chapter 13 of this volume).

4 Slavoj Žižek, 'Against the double blackmail', *New Left Review* 234, 1999, pp. 76–82 (reprinted as Chapter 14 of this volume).

5 Žižek's paper, 'The Iraq War – where is the true danger?' (reprinted as Chapter 16 of this volume), was first circulated on the internet from 23 April 2003, and then was published in an expanded form as *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle*, London and New York, Verso, 2004.

6 Simon Critchley, 'The problem of hegemony', a paper presented at the 2004 *Albert Schweitzer Series on Ethics and Politics*, at New York University, p. 5 [www.politicaltheory.info/essays/critchley.html].

7 See, for example, Žižek's comments that his recent book on Iraq represents little more than 'a *bric-à-brac* of the author's immediate impressions and reactions to the unfolding story of the US attack on Iraq' (*Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle*, p. 7).

8 Ernesto Laclau, 'Constructing universality', in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, London and New York, Verso, 2000, p. 289.

9 For Žižek's analysis of the 'forced choice', see 'Why is every act a repetition?', in *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan In Hollywood and Out*, London and New York, Routledge, 1992, pp. 69–105.

10 We might also compare this to the 'choice' proposed by Jacques Lacan between 'Being (the subject)' and 'Meaning (for the other)' in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York and London, W.W. Norton, 1977, pp. 210–13.

11 Slavoj Žižek, 'Why we all love to hate Haider', *New Left Review* 2, 2000, p. 45 (reprinted as Chapter 2 of this volume).

12 In fact, we would argue that, in the same way that the conciliatory tone of Hegel's claim that his critique of Schelling in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, directed not at Schelling himself, but rather at the 'shallowness' of those Schellingians who 'make so much mischief with your forms in particular and degrade your science into a bare formalism' (Letter to Schelling, 1 May 1807, in *Hegel: The Letters*, trans. Clark Butler and Christiane Seiler, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984, p. 80), revealed how grave the philosophical rift between the two of them was, so Žižek's admission that he is 'not actually arguing against [Laclau's or Butler's] position but against a watered-down popular version they would also oppose' (*Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, p. 91) functions as an internal reflection of the irreducible difference between Žižek and Butler and Laclau, the 'invisible frontier' that forever separates them. By contrast, we would say that Žižek's most publicly declared antipathies often mask an undeclared affinity. This, we would suggest, is the case with Blair and the Third Way. Indeed, could we not even propose that Žižek sees in Blair something of that great 'critique' of bureaucracy he also finds in Stalin, the idea that a revolution without its corresponding form of bureaucracy is ultimately a revolution without a revolution? Or, more exactly, do not events regarding the agreed handing-over of power after the recent election in Britain lead us to think that Blair is like Lenin, who understood he was to be thrown away after his usefulness was over, while his deputy, Gordon Brown, the Chancellor the Exchequer, is more like Stalin? That Blair's true greatness – for all of the accusations of the lack of ideals of the Third Way – will ultimately lie in his sacrificing himself for the Cause? To this extent, we would contrast the profound, 'inhuman' self-instrumentalization of Blair with the 'objective beauty' of someone like Havel, who remains 'human, all too human'.

13 Hence the long list of 'conservatives' that Žižek has gone on the record as praising: not just the well-known likes of Pascal, Chesterton, C. S. Lewis and W. B. Yeats, but also Pope John Paul II, Christopher Hitchens, Stalin, Hegel, even Lacan himself ...

14 Slavoj Žižek, 'Hooray for Bush!', *London Review of Books* 26, 2 December 2004.

15 Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1993, pp. 216–19.

16 G. W. F. Hegel, *The Encyclopedia Logic: Part 1 of the Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences (with the Zusätze)*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting and H. S. Harris, Indianapolis, Hackett, 1991, p. 227.

SECTION I

The absent 'second way'

1

Eastern European liberalism and its discontents

In good old deconstructionist manner, I would like to begin by calling into question the hidden implications behind the request made of me to give a report on recent ethnic conflicts in the exotic place I come from, Slovenia. In an article for *New Left Review*,[1] I endeavoured to describe why, a year or two ago, the West was so fascinated by events in Eastern Europe: the true object of fascination was the supposed gaze of the East, fascinated by Western democracy, still naïvely believing in it, a kind of 'subject supposed to believe' – in the East, the West found a sucker that still has faith in its values. The leftist demand to give a report on what is 'really going on' in Eastern Europe functions as a kind of mirror-image and reversal of this demand: we are expected to confirm suspicions, to say that people are already disappointed in 'bourgeois' democracy, that they are slowly perceiving, not only what they have gained, but also what they have lost (social security, etc.). In my article, I consciously walked into this trap and gave the Left what it wanted: a vengeful vision of the way that now things are even worse, how the effective result of democratic enthusiasm is nationalist corporatism – in short, it serves us right for betraying socialism! Yet, in accordance with the great guiding principle of socialism – that self-criticism is the impetus of progress – this criticism of the demand, as I perceive it, is actually a criticism of myself as a member of the Slovenian liberal-democratic party and its candidate in the recent elections. Let me take as my starting point the liberal-democratic vision according to which, after the breakdown of 'Really Existing Socialism', we would have a flourishing market economy and pluralist democracy in Eastern Europe, if it were not for

two stains that mar the picture: on the one hand, the remainders of old totalitarian forces that, although losing the battle, continue their underground machinations; and, on the other hand, national corporatism, the obsession with national unity and some imagined 'threat to the nation'.

If, in the recent disintegration of 'Really Existing Socialism' in Slovenia, there was a political agent whose rule fully deserved the designation 'tragic', it was the Slovenian Communists who lived up to their promise to make possible the peaceful, non-violent transition to pluralist democracy. From the very beginning they were caught in the Freudian paradox of the superego: the more they gave way to the demands of the (then) opposition and accepted the democratic rules of the game, the more violent were the opposition's accusations of their 'totalitarianism', the more they were suspected of accepting democracy 'in word' only, while actually engaged in demonic plots against it. The paradox of this accusation emerged in its purest form when, finally, after a long period of accusations that their democratic commitments were not to be taken seriously, it became clear that they 'meant it': far from being perplexed, the opposition simply altered its charge and accused the Communists of 'unprincipled behaviour' – how can you trust someone who shamelessly betrays his old revolutionary past and accepts democratic reform?

The demand of the opposition that can be detected through this paradox is an ironic repetition of the Stalinist demand at work in the political monster trials, where the accused were forced to admit their guilt and claim supreme punishment for themselves: for the anti-Communist opposition, the only good Communist would be the one who first organized free multi-party elections, and then voluntarily assumed the role of scapegoat within them, a representative of totalitarian horrors who must be beaten. In short, Communists were expected to assume the impossible position of pure metalanguage, saying, 'We confess, we are totalitarian, we deserve to lose the election!' – just like the victims of the Stalinist trials. The shift in public perception of Slovenian democratic Communists was truly enigmatic: up to the 'point of no return' on the way to democracy, the public trembled on account of them, counting on them to endure the pressure of the truly anti-democratic forces (the Yugoslav army, Serbian populism, old hard-liners) and to organize free elections; yet, once it became clear that free elections would in fact take place, they suddenly became the enemy.

The logic of this shift from the 'open' condition before elections to its closure afterwards is illuminated by Jameson's concept of the

'vanishing mediator'.[2] A system reaches its equilibrium, that is, establishes itself as a synchronous totality, when – in Hegelese – it 'posits' its external presuppositions as its own inherent moments and thus obliterates the traces of its traumatic origins. What we have here is the tension between the open situation when a new social pact is generated and its subsequent closure – in Kierkegaard's terms, the tension between possibility and necessity: the circle is closed when the new social pact establishes itself in its necessity and renders invisible its 'possibility', the open, undecided process that engendered it.[3] In between, when the socialist régime was already in a state of disintegration, but before the new régime had stabilized itself, we witnessed a kind of opening; things that were for a moment visible immediately became invisible. To put it bluntly, those who triggered the process of democratization and fought the greatest battles are not those who today enjoy its fruits, not because of a simple usurpation and deception on the part of the present winners, but because of a deeper structural logic. Once the process of democratization reached its peak, it buried its catalysts.

Who effectively triggered this process? New social movements, punk, the New Left – after the victory of democracy, all these impulses suddenly and enigmatically lost ground and more or less disappeared from the scene. Culture itself, the set of cultural preferences, changed radically: from punk and Hollywood to national poems and quasi-folkloric commercial music (in contrast to the usual overshadowing of authentic national roots by universal American-Western culture). What we had was a genuine 'primitive accumulation' of democracy,[4] a chaotic story of punkers, students with their sit-ins, committees for human rights, and so on, which literally became invisible the moment the new system established itself – and with it, its own myth of origin was likewise extinguished. The same people who, a few years previously, abused 'new social movements' from their position as party hard-liners, now, as members of the ruling anti-Communist coalition, accused their representatives of 'proto-Communism'.

This dialectics is especially interesting in its theoretical aspect. Roughly, we could say that in the last two decades, two philosophical orientations dominated intellectual life in Slovenia: Heideggerianism among the opposition, and Frankfurt School Marxism among 'official' party circles. So, one would expect the main theoretical fight to take place between those two orientations, with the third block – us, Lacanians and Althusserians – playing the role of innocent bystanders. Yet, as

soon as polemics broke out, both orientations ferociously attacked the same author, Althusser. And, even more surprisingly, the two main proponents of these polemics, a Heideggerian and a (then) Frankfurt School Marxist, are now both ruling members of the ruling anti-Communist coalition.

In the 1970s, Althusser actually functioned as a kind of symptomatic point, a name apropos of which all of the 'official' adversaries – Heideggerians and Frankfurt School Marxists in Slovenia, praxis philosophers and central committee ideologues in Zagreb and Belgrade – *suddenly started speaking the same language*, pronouncing the same accusations. From the very beginning, our starting point was this experience of the way that the name 'Althusser' triggered an enigmatic uneasiness in all camps. One is even tempted to suggest that the unfortunate event in Althusser's private life (his strangling of his wife) played the role of a welcome pretext, a 'little piece of reality' enabling his theoretical adversaries to repress the real trauma represented by his theory ('How can a theory of someone who strangled his wife be taken seriously?').

It is perhaps more than a mere curiosity that, in Yugoslavia, Althusserians (and, more generally, the structuralist and poststructuralist orientations) were the only ones who remained 'pure' in the fight for democracy; all other philosophical schools at some point or other sold themselves to the régime. The analytic philosophers were sending the régime the message: 'True, we're not Marxists, but we are also not dangerous; our thought is pure apolitical professional apparatus, so not only do you not have to be afraid of us, but by leaving us alone you can even gain a reputation for allowing non-Marxism without risking your hold on political power.' The message was received, and they were left alone.

In the Republic of Bosnia, it was the Frankfurt School that enjoyed a semi-official status in the 1970s, whereas in Croatia and partly in Serbia there were 'official' Heideggerians, especially in army circles. There were cases in which, in university purges, someone lost his job for not understanding the subtleties of negative dialectics (as it was put in the justification after the fact), and cases in which the apology for socialist armed forces was written in the purest Heideggerian style ('the essence of the self-defence of our society is the self-defence of the essence of our society', etc.).

The resistance to Althusser indicated that it was precisely Althusserian theory – often defamed as proto-Stalinist – that functioned as a kind of

'spontaneous' theoretical tool for effectively undermining the Communist totalitarian régimes: his theory of ideological state apparatuses assigned the crucial role in the reproduction of an ideology to 'external' rituals and practices with regard to which 'inner' beliefs and convictions are strictly secondary.[5] And is it necessary to call attention to the central place of such rituals in 'Really Existing Socialism'? What counted was external obedience, not 'inner' conviction; that is, obedience coincided with the *semblance of obedience*, which is why the only way to be truly 'subversive' was to act 'naïvely', to make the system 'eat its own words', to undermine the *appearance* of its ideological consistency.

This disappearance of the 'vanishing mediator', of course, is not peculiar to Slovenia. Is not the most spectacular case of this the role of *Neues Forum* in East Germany? There is an inherently tragic ethical dimension in its fate: it presents a point at which an ideology takes itself literally and ceases to function as an 'objectively cynical' legitimation of existing power relations. *Neues Forum* consisted of groups of passionate intellectuals who took socialism seriously and were prepared to put everything at stake in order to destroy the compromised system and replace it with a utopian 'third way' beyond capitalism and 'Really Existing Socialism'. Their sincere belief and insistence that they were not working for the restoration of Western capitalism, of course, proved to be nothing but an illusion; however, we could say that precisely this (a thorough illusion without substance) made it *stricto sensu* non-ideological: it did not 'reflect' in an inverted-ideological form any actual relations of power.

At this point, I should correct the Marxist vulgate: contrary to the commonplace according to which an ideology becomes 'cynical' (accepts the gap between words and deeds, no longer 'believes in itself', and is no longer experienced as truth but treats itself as a purely instrumental means of legitimating power) in the period of the 'decadence' of a social formation, it could be said that precisely such a period opens up the possibility of 'taking itself seriously' to the ruling ideology, and effectively opposes its own social basis (with Protestantism, the Christian religion opposes feudalism as its social basis; the same with *Neues Forum*, which opposes 'Really Existing Socialism' in the name of a 'true' socialism). In this way, unknowingly, it unleashes the forces of its own final destruction: once their job is done, they are 'overrun by history' (*Neues Forum* obtained three per cent of the vote in the elections). A new 'scoundrel time' sets in; people are in power who were mostly silent

during the Communist repression and nonetheless now accuse *Neues Forum* of being 'crypto-Communist'.

The general theoretical lesson to be drawn from this illustration is that the concept of ideology must be disengaged from the 'representationalist' problematic: *ideology has nothing to do with 'illusion'*, with a false, distorted representation of its social content. To put it another way: a political standpoint can be quite accurate ('true') as to its objective content and yet thoroughly ideological, and vice versa: the idea it presents of its social content can prove totally wrong, and yet there is absolutely nothing 'ideological' about it. With regard to 'factual truth', the position of *Neues Forum* – conceiving of the disintegration of the Communist régime as the opening up of a possibility to invent some new form of social space that would reach beyond the confines of capitalism – was doubtless illusory. *Neues Forum* was opposed by the forces who put their bets on the quickest possible annexation to West Germany, that is, on the inclusion of their country in the world capitalist system; for them, the people around *Neues Forum* were nothing but a bunch of heroic daydreamers. This position proved accurate, *yet it is nonetheless thoroughly ideological.* Why?

The conformist adoption of the West German model implied an ideological belief in the unproblematic, non-antagonistic functioning of the late-capitalist 'social State', whereas the first stance, although illusory as to its factual ('enunciated') content, by means of its scandalous and exorbitant position of enunciation attested to an awareness of the antagonism that pertains to late capitalism. This is one way to conceive of the Lacanian thesis according to which truth has the structure of fiction: in those confused months along the passage from 'Really Existing Socialism' to capitalism, *the fiction of a 'third way' was the only point at which social antagonism was not obliterated.* Therein resides one of the tasks of the 'postmodern' criticism of ideology: to designate those elements within an existing social order that – in the guise of 'fiction', that is, of the utopian narratives of possible but failed alternative histories – point towards its antagonistic character and thus 'estrange' us from the self-evidence of its established identity.

The other monster that haunts liberal democracy, the stain that disturbs the idyllic image of pluralist democracy, is nationalism. One usually states with regret that, even after the fall of Communism, we cannot begin to live in peace and true pluralist democracy because the disintegration of Communism opened up space for the emergence of

nationalist obsessions, provincialism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, ideologies about national security, anti-feminism, a post-socialist Moral Majority inclusive of the pro-life movement – in short, *enjoyment* in its entire 'irrationality'. At this point, the implicit demand made to a critical intellectual from Eastern Europe is at its strongest: he or she is expected to decry this dark reverse of Eastern European democracy, to depict all the dirty details that belie the image of Eastern Europe's nations bathing in freedom and democracy ... and I in no way intend to disown such a demand, and yet what is deeply suspicious about this attitude, about the attitude of an anti-nationalist liberal Eastern European intellectual, is the obvious fascination that nationalism exerts upon him: liberal intellectuals refuse it, mock it, yet at the same time stare at it with powerless fascination. The intellectual pleasure procured by the denunciation of nationalism is uncannily close to the satisfaction of successfully explaining one's own impotence and failure (which was always the speciality of Western Marxism).

The Western gaze upon the East encounters here its own uncanny reversal, usually qualified (and by the same token disqualified) as 'fundamentalism': the end of cosmopolitanism, liberal democracy's impotence in the face of this return to tribalism, and so on. It is precisely here that, for the sake of democracy itself, one has to gather the strength to repeat the exemplary heroic gesture of Freud who answered the threat of fascist anti-Semitism by targeting Jews themselves and depriving them of their founding father: *Moses and Monotheism* is Freud's answer to Nazism. In a similar move, one has to detect the flaw of liberal democracy, which opens up the space for 'fundamentalism'. That is to say, there is ultimately only one question that confronts political philosophy today: is liberal democracy the ultimate horizon of our political practice, or is it possible effectively to institute its inherent limitation?

The standard neo-conservative answer here is to bemoan the 'lack of roots' that allegedly pertains to liberal democracy, to this kingdom of Nietzsche's 'last man', in which there is no place left for ethical heroism, in which we are more and more submerged in the idiotic routine of everyday life regulated by the pleasure principle, and so on: within this perspective, fundamentalism is simply a reaction to this loss of roots, a perverted yet desperate search for new roots in an organic community. Yet this neo-conservative answer falls short in its failure to demonstrate the way that the very project of formal democracy,

conceived in its philosophical founding gesture, opens up the space for fundamentalism itself.

The structural homology between Kantian formalism and formal democracy is a classical *topos*: in both cases, the starting point, the founding gesture, consists in an act of radical emptying, an evacuation. With Kant, what is evacuated is the locus of the Supreme Good: every positive object destined to occupy this place is by definition 'pathological', marked by moral contingency; this is why the moral Law must be reduced to pure Form, which would then bestow upon our acts the character of universality. The elementary operation of democracy is also the evacuation of the locus of Power: every pretender to this place is by definition a 'pathological' usurper – 'nobody can rule innocently', to quote Saint-Just. The crucial point is that 'nationalism', as a specifically modern, post-Kantian phenomenon, designates the moment when the Nation, the national Thing, usurps, fills out the empty place of the Thing opened up by Kantian formalism, by its reduction of every 'pathological' content. The Kantian term for this filling out of the void, of course, is the fanaticism of *Schwärmerei*: does not nationalism epitomize fanaticism in politics?

This paradox of filling out the empty place of the Supreme Good defines the modern notion of Nation. The ambiguous and contradictory nature of the modern Nation is the same as that of the vampires and other living dead:[6] they are wrongly perceived as 'leftovers from the past' – their place is constituted by the very break from modernity. On the one hand, 'Nation' of course designates the modern community delivered of traditional 'organic' ties, a community in which the premodern links that connect the individual to a particular estate, family, religious group, and so on, are broken: the traditional corporate community is replaced by the modern nation-state whose constituents are 'citizens', that is, people as abstract members, not as members of particular estates, for example. On the other hand, 'Nation' can never be reduced to a network of purely symbolic ties: there is always a kind of 'surplus of the Real' that sticks to it; to define itself, 'national identity' must appeal to the contingent materiality of 'common roots', of *Blut und Boden*. In short, 'Nation' designates both the instance by means of which traditional 'organic' links are dissolved *and* the 'remainder of the premodern in modernity', the form 'organic inveteracy' acquires within the modern post-traditional universe, the form 'organic substance' acquires within the universe of substanceless Cartesian subjectivity. The crucial

point is again to conceive of both aspects in their interconnectedness: it is the new 'suture' brought about by the Nation that renders possible the 'desuturing', the disengagement from traditional organic ties. 'Nation' is a pre-modern leftover that functions as the inner condition of modernity itself, as an inherent impetus to its progress.

This pathological 'stain' also determines the deadlocks of liberal democracy today. The problem with liberal democracy is that – for structural reasons – it cannot be universalized *a priori*. Hegel said that the moment of victory of a political force is the very moment of its splitting: the triumphant liberal-democratic 'New World Order' is more and more marked by a frontier separating its 'inside' from its 'outside', a frontier between those who succeeded in remaining 'within' (the 'developed', those to whom the rules of human rights, social security, etc., still apply) and the others, the excluded (the main concern of the 'developed' with regard to them is how to contain their explosive potential, even if the price to be paid is the neglect of elementary democratic principles).

This opposition – and not the one between capitalist and socialist 'blocs' – defines the contemporary constellation: the 'socialist' bloc was the true 'third way', a desperate attempt at modernization outside the constraints of capitalism. What is effectively at stake in the present crisis of post-socialist states is the struggle for one's place, now that the illusion of this 'third way' has evaporated: who will be admitted 'inside', integrated into the developed capitalist order, and who will remain excluded from it? Ex-Yugoslavia is perhaps the exemplary case: every actor in the blood-play of its disintegration endeavours to legitimize its place inside by presenting itself as the last bastion of European civilization (the current ideological designation for the capitalist 'inside') in the face of oriental barbarism. For the right-wing nationalist Austrians, this imaginary frontier is Karavanke, the mountain chain between Austria and Slovenia: beyond it, the rule of Slavic hordes begins. For the nationalist Slovenes, this frontier is the river Kolpa, separating Slovenia from Croatia: we Slovenians are *Mitteleuropa*, while Croatians are already Balkan, involved in irrational ethnic feuds that do not really concern us. We are on their side, we sympathize with them, yet in the same way that one sympathizes with a third world victim of aggression. For Croatians, of course, the crucial frontier is the one between them and the Serbians, that is, between Western Catholic civilization and the Eastern Orthodox collective spirit, which cannot

grasp the values of Western individualism. Serbians, finally, conceive of themselves as the last line of defence of Christian Europe against the fundamentalist danger embodied in Muslim Albanians and Bosnians. (It should now be clear who, within ex-Yugoslavia, effectively behaves in the civilized 'European' way: those at the very bottom of this ladder, excluded from all other groups – Albanians and Muslim Bosnians.) Thus, the traditional liberal opposition between 'open' pluralist societies and 'closed' nationalist-corporatist societies founded on the exclusion of the Other must be brought to its point of self-reference: the liberal gaze itself functions according to the same logic, insofar as it is founded upon the exclusion of the Other to whom one attributes fundamentalist nationalism, and so on.

This antagonistic splitting inherent to capitalism as a world-system opens up the field for the Khmer Rouge, Sendero Luminoso and other similar movements that seem to personify the 'radical Evil' in politics today: if 'fundamentalism' functions as a kind of 'negative judgement' on liberal capitalism, as an inherent negation of the universalist claim of liberal capitalism, then movements like Sendero Luminoso enact an 'infinite judgement' on liberal capitalism. In his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel conceives of the 'rabble [*Pöbel*]' as a necessary product of modern society: a segment not integrated into the legal order, prevented from participating in its benefits, and for this very reason delivered from responsibility towards it – a necessary structural surplus excluded from the closed circuit of the social edifice.[7] It seems as if it is only today, with the advent of late capitalism, that this notion of the 'rabble' has achieved its adequate realization in social reality, with the political forces that paradoxically unite the most radical indigenist anti-modernism (the refusal of everything that defines modernity: market, money, individualism) with the eminently modern project of effacing the entire symbolic tradition and beginning from a zero point (in the case of Khmer Rouge, the abolition of the entire system of education and the physical liquidation of intellectuals). In what precisely does the 'shining path' of the Senderistas consist? In the idea of reinscribing the construction of socialism within the frame of the return to the ancient Incan empire (much as Khmer Rouge saw their régime as the return to the lost grandeur of the old Khmer kingdom).

The result of this desperate endeavour to surmount the antagonism between tradition and modernity is a double negation: a radically anti-capitalist movement (the refusal of integration into the world market)

coupled with a systematic dissolution of all traditional hierarchical social links, beginning with the family (at the level of 'micropower', the Khmer Rouge régime incited adolescents to denounce their parents: an anti-Oedipal régime at its purest). The truth articulated in an inverted form in the paradox of this double negation is that capitalism cannot reproduce itself without the support of pre-capitalist forms of the social link. In other words, far from presenting a case of exotic barbarism, the 'radical Evil' of Khmer Rouge and the Senderistas is conceivable only against the background of the constitutive antagonism of capitalism today. There is more than a contingent idiosyncrasy in the fact that, in both cases, the leader of the movement is an intellectual, well-skilled in the subtleties of Western culture (prior to becoming a revolutionary, Pol Pot was a teacher at a French lycée in Phnom Penh, known for his subtle readings of Rimbaud and Mallarmé; Antonio Guzman, 'presidente Gonzalo', the leader of the Senderistas, is a philosophy professor whose favourite authors are Heidegger and Jaspers). For that reason, it is too simple to conceive of these movements as the last embodiments of the millenarian radicalism that structures the social space as the exclusive antagonism between 'us' and 'them', allowing for no possible forms of mediation: rather, they represent a desperate attempt to break out of the vicious circle of the constitutive imbalance of capitalism, without seeking support in some previous tradition supposed to enable us to master this imbalance (Islamic fundamentalism, within this logic, is, for that reason, ultimately a perverted instrument of modernization). In other words, behind Sendero Luminoso's attempt to erase the entire tradition and to begin again 'from scratch', in an act of creative sublimation, is the correct insight into the complementary relationship of modernity and tradition: any true return to tradition today is *a priori* impossible; its role is simply to serve as a shock absorber for the process of modernization. Khmer Rouge and the Senderistas as the 'infinite judgement' on late capitalism are, therefore, in Hegelese, an integral part of its notion: if one wants to constitute capitalism as a world system, one must take into account its inherent negation, 'fundamentalism', as well as its absolute negation – the infinite judgement on it.

The exotic story of Eastern Europe's nineteenth-century nationalism thus changes into a story about the West itself: for Western liberal intellectuals, the affirmation of their own autochthonous tradition is a redneck horror, a site of populist proto-fascism (for example, in the United States, the 'backwardness' of Polish, Italian and other

communities, the alleged brood of 'authoritarian personalities' and similar liberal scarecrows), whereas they are always ready to hail the autochthonous ethnic communities of the other (blacks, Puerto Ricans, native Americans). Enjoyment is good, on the condition that it is not too close to us, that it remains the *other's* enjoyment.

The positive expression of this ambivalence toward the other's enjoyment is the obsessive attitude that one can easily detect in what is usually referred to as 'PC', Political Correctness: the compulsive effort to uncover ever new, ever more refined forms of racial and/or sexual domination and violence (it is not PC to say that the President 'smoked a peace pipe', because this patronizes native Americans, etc.). The problem here is simple: how can one be a white heterosexual male and still retain a clear conscience? All other positions can affirm their specificity, their specific mode of enjoyment, and only the white-heterosexual-male position must remain empty, must sacrifice its enjoyment.

The weak point of the PC position is thus the weak point of the neurotic compulsion: the problem is not that it is too severe, too fanatical, but quite the contrary: that *it is not severe enough*. At first glance, the PC attitude seems to involve extreme self-sacrifice, the renunciation of everything reminiscent of sexism and racism, the unending effort to unearth traces of it in oneself, an effort not unworthy of the early Christian saint who dedicated his life to discovering in himself ever new layers of sin. Yet all this effort should not deceive us; it is ultimately a stratagem whose function is to conceal the fact that the PC type is not ready to renounce what really matters: 'I'm prepared to sacrifice everything *but that*' – but what? The very gesture of self-sacrifice. In other words, the PC attitude implies the same antagonism between the enunciated content and the position of enunciation that Hegel denounced apropos of ascetic self-humiliation: it conceals a patronizing elevation over those whose discriminations are allegedly compensated. In the very act of emptying the white-male-heterosexual position of all positive content, it retains it as a universal form of subjectivity. Or, to put it in straightforward, old-fashioned political terms: far from being a disguised expression of the extreme Left, the PC attitude is the primary ideological protective shield of bourgeois liberalism against a genuine Leftist alternative.[8]

What truly disturbs liberals is therefore *enjoyment* organized in the form of self-sufficient ethnic communities. Against this background, we should conceive of the ambiguous consequences of the politics of school

bussing in the United States, for example. Its principal aim, of course, was to surmount racist barriers: children from black communities will widen their cultural horizons by partaking in the white way of life; children from white communities will experience the nullity of racial prejudices by way of contact with blacks. Yet inextricably intermixed with this was another logic, especially where bussing was externally imposed by the 'enlightened' liberal state bureaucracy: to destroy the enjoyment of the closed ethnic communities by abrogating their boundaries. For that reason, bussing – insofar as it was experienced by the affected communities as imposed from the outside – reinforced or to some extent even generated racism where previously an ethnic community maintained a relative closure in its way of life, a phenomenon that is *not* in itself 'racist' (as liberals themselves admit through their fascination with exotic 'modes of life' of others).[9]

What one should do here is call into question the entire theoretical apparatus that sustains this liberal attitude, up to its Frankfurt School psychoanalytic *pièce de résistance*, the theory of the so-called authoritarian personality, which ultimately designates the form of subjectivity that 'irrationally' insists on its specific way of life and, in the name of its own enjoyment, resists liberal evidence of what are its supposed 'true interests'. The theory of 'authoritarian personality' is nothing but an expression of the *ressentiment* of the leftist-liberal intellectuals apropos of the fact that the 'unenlightened' working classes were not prepared to accept their guidance: an expression of their incapability of offering a positive theory of this resistance.[10]

The impasses around bussing enable us also to delineate the inherent limitation of the liberal political ethic as articulated in John Rawls's theory of distributive justice.[11] That is to say, bussing fully meets the conditions of distributive justice (it stands the trial of what Rawls calls the 'veil of ignorance'): it procures a more just distribution of social goods, it equalizes the chances of success of individuals from different social strata, etc. Yet the paradox is that everyone, including those deemed to profit most by it, somehow felt cheated and wronged. Why? The dimension infringed upon was precisely that of *fantasy*. The Rawlsian liberal-democratic idea of distributive justice ultimately relies on a 'rational' individual who is able to abstract a particular position of enunciation, to look upon him- or herself and all others from a neutral position of pure 'metalanguage', and thus perceive all of their 'true interests'. This individual is the supposed subject of the social contract

that establishes the coordinates of justice. What is thereby *a priori* left out of consideration is the realm of fantasy in which a community organizes its 'way of life' (its mode of enjoyment). Within this space, what 'we' desire is inextricably linked to (what we perceive as) the other's desire, so that what 'we' desire may turn out to be the very destruction of our object of desire (if, in this way, we deal a blow to the other's desire). In other words, human desire, insofar as it is always already mediated by fantasy, can never be grounded in (or translated back into) our 'true interests': the ultimate assertion of our desire – sometimes the only way to assert its autonomy in the face of a 'benevolent' other providing for our Good – is to act *against* our Good.[12]

Every 'enlightened' political action legitimized by reference to some form of 'true interests' encounters sooner or later the resistance of a particular fantasy space: in the guise of the logic of 'envy', the 'theft of enjoyment'. Even such a clear-cut issue as that of the Moral Majority pro-life movement is, in this respect, more ambiguous than it may seem: one aspect of it is *also* the reaction to the attempt of upper-middle-class ideology to pervade lower-class community life. On another level, was not the same attitude at work in the uneasiness of a wide circle of English leftist-liberal intellectuals apropos of the long and traumatic miners' strike in 1988? Many were quick to denounce it as 'irrational', the 'expression of an outdated working-class fundamentalism', and while all this was undoubtedly true, the fact remains that this strike was also the desperate form of resistance of a certain traditional working-class way of life. As such it was perhaps more 'postmodern', on account of the very features that its critics perceived as 'regressive', than the usual 'enlightened' leftist-liberal criticism of it.[13]

The liberal horror of 'fundamentalist' overidentification thus epitomizes the current spontaneous ideological perception of threats to the existing world order: today, with the disintegration of Really Existing Socialism, the neutral, universal medium, the presupposed measure of the 'normal' state of things, is organized around the notion of capitalist democracy (media, market, pluralism, etc.), whereas those who oppose it are more and more reduced to 'irrational' marginal positions ('terrorists', 'fundamentalist fanatics'). As soon as some political force threatens the circulation of Capital too much – even if it is, for example, a benign ecological protest against the destruction of old-growth forests – it is instantly labelled 'terrorist', 'irrational', and so on. Perhaps our very survival depends on our capacity to perform a kind of

dialectical reversal and to locate the true source of madness in the allegedly neutral measure of 'normality', which enables us to perceive all opposition to it as 'irrational'. Today, when the media bombard us with shocking revelations about different versions of madness that threaten the normal course of our everyday lives, from serial killers to religious fundamentalists, from Saddam Hussein to narco-cartels, one has to rely more than ever on Hegel's dictum that *the true source of Evil is the very neutral gaze that perceives Evil all around.*[14]

The fear of 'excessive' identification is therefore the fundamental feature of late-capitalist ideology: the Enemy is the 'fanatic' who 'over-identifies', instead of maintaining a proper distance from the dispersed plurality of subject-positions. In short: the elated 'deconstructivist' logomachy focused on 'essentialism' and 'fixed identities' ultimately fights a straw-man. Far from containing any kind of subversive potential, the subject hailed by postmodern theories – the dispersed, plural, constructed subject, the subject who undermines every performative mandate by way of its parodic repetition, the subject prone to particular, inconsistent modes of enjoyment – simply designates *the form of subjectivity that corresponds to late capitalism.* Perhaps the time has come to resuscitate the Marxian insight concerning Capital as the ultimate power of 'deterritorialization' that undermines every fixed social identity, and to see 'late capitalism' as the epoch in which the traditional fixity of ideological positions (patriarchal authority, fixed sex roles, etc.) becomes an obstacle to the unbridled commodification of everyday life.

Where then are we to look for the way out of this vicious circle? Needless to stress, I am here far from advocating fundamentalist overidentification as 'anti-capitalist': the point is precisely that the contemporary forms of 'paranoiac' overidentification are the inherent reverse of Capital's universalism, an inherent reaction to it. *The more the logic of Capital becomes universal, the more its opposite will assume features of 'irrational fundamentalism'.* In other words, there is no way out as long as the universal dimension of our social formation remains defined in terms of Capital. The way to break out of this vicious circle is not to fight 'irrational' ethnic particularism but to invent forms of political practice that contain a dimension of universality beyond Capital: the exemplary case today, of course, is ecology.

And where does this leave us with regard to Eastern Europe? The liberal point of view, which opposes liberal-democratic 'openness' to nationalist-organic 'closure' – the view sustained by the hope that

'true' liberal-democratic society will arise once we get rid of proto-Fascist nationalistic constraints – falls short, since it fails to take into account their interconnection, that is, the way the supposedly neutral liberal-democratic framework produces nationalist closure as its inherent opposite.[15] The only way to prevent the emergence of proto-Fascist nationalist hegemony is to call into question the very standard of 'normality', the universal framework of liberal-democratic capitalism – as was done, for a brief moment, by the 'vanishing mediators' in the passage from socialism into capitalism.

The general theoretical lesson to be drawn from this second part is that a cynical non-identification with the ruling ideology's explicit content is a positive condition of its functioning: the ideological apparatuses 'run smoothly' precisely when subjects experience their innermost desire as 'oppositional', as 'transgressive', as the desire for a moment when one is, so to speak, allowed to break the Law in the name of the Law itself. What we encounter here is perversion as a socially constructive attitude: one can indulge in illicit drives, torture and kill for the protection of law and order. This perversion relies on the split of the field of Law into Law *qua* 'Ego-Ideal', that is, the symbolic order that regulates social life and maintains peace, and its obscene, superegoic reverse. As numerous analyses from Bakhtin onward have shown, periodic transgressions are inherent to the social order; they function as a condition of the latter's stability. (The mistake of Bakhtin – or, rather, of some of his followers – was to present an idealized image of these 'transgressions', to pass in silence over lynching parties, and so forth, as the crucial form of the 'carnivalesque suspension of social hierarchy'.) The deepest identification that holds a community together is not so much an identification with the Law that regulates its 'normal' everyday rhythms, but rather identification with the specific form of transgression of the Law, of its suspension (in psychoanalytic terms, with the specific form of *enjoyment*).

Let us return to those rural white communities in the American South of the 1920s, where the rule of the official, public Law was accompanied by its shadowy double, the nightly terror of Ku Klux Klan, with its lynchings of helpless blacks: a (white) man could easily be forgiven minor infractions of the Law, especially when they could be justified by a 'code of honour' – the community still recognizes him as 'one of us'. But he would be effectively excommunicated, perceived as 'not one of us', the moment that he disowned the specific form of *transgression* that

pertains to this community – say, the moment he refused to partake in ritual lynchings by the Klan, or even reported them to the Law (which, of course, did not want to hear about them since they represented its own hidden underside). The Nazi community relied on the same solidarity-in-guilt adduced by participation in a common transgression: it ostracized those who were not ready to assume the dark side of the idyllic *Volksgemeinschaft*, the night pogroms, the beatings of political opponents – in short, all that 'everybody knew, yet did not want to speak about aloud'.

The truly subversive gesture is therefore to undermine the fundamental identification with the 'transgressive' mode of enjoyment that holds a community together, to contaminate the stuff of which the ideological dream effectively consists. The same holds for Really Existing Socialism: nationalism, the attachment to the national Thing, was from the very beginning its fantasy-support, its inherent transgression, so that what we are left with now, once the symbolic network intertwined around this Thing dissolved, is simply the always already present fantasy-support in its nakedness, devoid of its symbolic clothing. Nationalism is what one obtains after the public proclamation that the socialist emperor is naked, that is, after one assumes the nullity of the socialist ideological fabric.

In this way, the final question is already answered: Wherein consists the link between the two surpluses that disturb the liberal-democratic gaze? On the one hand, the democratic Communists and new social movements in general present the moment of the 'vanishing mediator', of what must disappear, must become invisible, for the new order to establish its identity-with-itself. The agent who actually triggered the process must be perceived as its main impediment, or, to use the terms of Propp's structural analysis of fairy tales, the Donor must appear as the Malefactor, like Lady Catherine de Bourgh in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* who, under her mask as the evil impediment to Darcy and Elizabeth's marriage, is effectively the hand of Destiny that enables the happy outcome. 'Nation' as the substantial support is, on the other hand, what the new ruling ideology *sees* so that it can *not see, overlook*, the 'vanishing mediator': 'Nation' is a fantasy entity that fills the void of the vanishing mediator. Here one must learn the materialist lesson of anti-evolutionist creationism, which resolves the contradiction between the literal meaning of Scripture (according to which the universe was created about 5,000 years ago) and irrefutable proofs of its greater age

(million-year-old fossils and the like) not via the usual indulging in the delicacies of the allegorical reading of Scripture ('Adam and Eve were not really the first couple but a metaphor for the early stages of humanity') but by sticking to the literal truth: the universe was created recently, only 5,000 years ago, *but with built-in false traces of the past* (God created fossils to give humans a false perspective of infinite openness).[16] The past is always strictly synchronous; it is *the way a synchronous universe thinks its antagonism*. It suffices to recall the infamous role of the 'remnants of the past' in accounting for the difficulties of the 'construction of socialism'. In this sense, the tale of ethnic roots is from the very beginning a 'myth of origins': what is 'national heritage' if not a kind of ideological fossil created retroactively by the ruling ideology in order to blur its *present* antagonism?

In other words, instead of marvelling in a state of traumatic disorientation at the shocking swiftness of the emergence of nationalism in Eastern Europe, it would perhaps be more appropriate to accomplish a kind of Hegelian reversal and to transpose this shock into the 'thing itself', to conceive of this traumatic disorientation not as a problem but as a key to the solution: the recourse to nationalism itself emerged in order to protect us from the traumatic disorientation, from the loss of the ground under our feet caused by the disintegration of the social order, of the Lacanian 'big Other' epitomized by Really Existing Socialism.

Notes

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1 Slavoj Žižek, 'Eastern Europe's Republics of Gilead', *New Left Review* 183, 1990, pp. 50–62.

2 Fredric Jameson, 'The vanishing mediator; or, Max Weber as storyteller', in *The Ideologies of Theory, Essays 1971–1986: Volume 2, Syntax of History*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1988, pp. 3–34.

3 As to this problematic, see Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*, London and New York, Verso, 1991, pp. 182–8.

4 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1*, London, Penguin/New Left Review, 1976, pp. 873–4. [eds]

5 Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and ideological state apparatuses (notes towards an investigation)', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster, London, New Left Books, 1971, pp. 166–8. [eds]

6 For a further development of this point, see Slavoj Žižek, 'A hair of the dog that bit you', in *Interrogating the Real: Selected Writings, Volume 1*, ed. Rex Butler and Scott Stephens, London, Continuum, 2005, pp. 167–70. [eds]

7 G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 349–55. [eds]

8 The hysterical counterpoint to this American obsessional attitude is the position of the traditional European 'critical intellectual' tormented by the question: Which is the legitimate power that I would be allowed to obey with a clear conscience? In other words, the traditional European Left is – even more than Jane Eyre, the classic example of the female hysteric – *in search of a Good Master*: he wants a master, but a master whom he would dominate, who would follow his advice. This attitude provokes a hysterical reaction, the reaction of 'This is not *that*!' whenever his side comes to power: a desperate search for reasons that would legitimate his continuing disobedience. (An exemplary case is that of French Leftist intellectuals after the electoral victory of Mitterand's socialists in 1981: they were quick to discover in the socialist government features that made it even worse than the preceding liberal-conservative government, up to the signs of proto-fascist nationalism!)

9 See the success of Peter Weir's thriller *Witness*, which takes place mostly in an Amish community: are not the Amish an exemplary case of a closed community that persists in its way of life, yet without falling prey to a paranoiac logic of the 'theft of enjoyment'? In other words, the paradox of the Amish is that, while they live according to the highest standards of the Moral Majority, they have absolutely nothing to do with the Moral Majority *qua* politico-ideological movement, that is, they are as far as possible from the Moral Majority's paranoiac logic of envy, of aggressive imposition of its standards upon others. And, incidentally, the fact that the most affecting scene of the film is the collective building of a new barn testifies again to what Fredric Jameson calls the 'utopian' potential of contemporary mass culture. See, particularly, his 'Reification and utopia in mass culture', in *Signatures of the Visible*, New York and London, Routledge, 1990, pp. 9–34.

10 As already noted by numerous critics, the theory of 'authoritarian personality' is actually a foreign body within the Frankfurt School theoretical edifice: it is based on suppositions undermined by Adorno–Horkheimer's theory of late-capitalist subjectivity.

11 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1971.

12 The notion of fantasy thus designates the inherent limitation of distributive justice: although the other's interests are taken into account, the other's fantasy is wronged. In other words, when the trial by 'veil of ignorance' tells me that, even if I were to occupy the lowest place in the community, I would still accept my ethical choice, I move within my own fantasy-frame – what if the other judges within the frame of an absolutely incompatible fantasy? For a more detailed Lacanian critique of Rawls's theory of justice, see Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, New York and London, Routledge, 1992, pp. 70–105.

13 The reverse of this resistance is a desire to maintain the 'other' in its specific, limited form of (what our gaze perceives as) 'authenticity'. In the recent case of Peter Handke, who expressed doubts about Slovene independence, he also claimed that the notion of Slovenia as an independent state is something imposed on Slovenes from outside, not part of the inherent logic of their national development. Handke's mother was Slovene and, within his artistic universe, Slovenia functions as a mythical point of reference, a kind of maternal paradise, a country where words still refer directly to objects, somehow miraculously by-passing commodification, where people are still organically rooted in their landscape, and so on. (See Peter Handke, *Repetition*, trans. Ralph Manheim, London and New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988.) What ultimately bothers him is therefore simply the fact that the actual Slovenia does not conform to his private myth and hence disturbs the balance of his artistic universe.

14 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 401–2. [eds]

15 Thereby it repeats the mistake of the classic liberal opposition of the 'open' liberal and the 'closed' authoritarian personalities: here, also, the liberal perspective fails to notice that the authoritarian personality is not an external opposite to the 'open' tolerant liberal personality, a simple distortion of it, but its hidden 'truth' and presupposition.

16 Stephen Jay Gould, 'Adam's navel', in *The Flamingo's Smile: Reflections on Natural History*, New York and London, W. W. Norton, 1985, pp. 99–113.

2

Why we all love to hate Haider

The entry of Jörg Haider's Freedom Party into a coalition government in Austria has been greeted with expressions of horror from the entire spectrum of the 'legitimate' democratic political bloc in the Western world. From the social-democratic Third Way to the Christian conservatives, from Chirac to Clinton – not to mention, of course, the Israeli régime – all voiced 'dismay' and announced a diplomatic quarantine of Austria until the plague should disappear. Establishment commentators naturally hailed this demonstrative reaction as evidence that the anti-fascist consensus of post-war European democracy holds firm. But are things really so unequivocal?

Plain to see, in fact, is the structural role of the populist Right in the legitimation of the current liberal-democratic hegemony. For what this Right – e.g., Buchanan, Le Pen, Haider – supplies is the negative common denominator of the entire established political spectrum. These are the excluded ones who, by their very exclusion (their 'unacceptability' for governmental office), furnish the proof of the benevolence of the official system. Their existence displaces the focus of political struggle – whose true object is the stifling of any radical alternative to the Left – to the 'solidarity' of the entire 'democratic' bloc against the Rightist danger. The *Neue Mitte* manipulates the rightist scare in order better to hegemonize the 'democratic' field, i.e., to define the terrain and discipline its real adversary, the radical Left. Therein resides the ultimate rationale of the Third Way: that is, a social democracy purged of its minimal subversive sting, extinguishing even the faintest memory of anti-capitalism and class struggle.

The result is what one would expect. The populist Right moves to occupy the terrain evacuated by the Left, as the only 'serious' political

force that still employs an anti-capitalist rhetoric – even if thickly coated with a nationalist/racist/religious veneer (international corporations are 'betraying' the decent working people of our nation, etc.). At the congress of the National Front a couple of years ago, Jean-Marie Le Pen brought on stage an Algerian, an African and a Jew, embraced them all, and told his audience: 'They are no less French than I am – it is the representatives of big multinational Capital, ignoring their duty to France, who are the true danger to our identity!' In New York, Pat Buchanan and black activist Leonora Fulani can proclaim a common hostility to unrestricted free trade, and both (pretend to) speak on behalf of the legendary *desaparecidos* of our time, the proverbially vanished proletariat. While multicultural tolerance becomes the motto of the new and privileged 'symbolic' classes, the far Right seeks to address and mobilize whatever remains of the mainstream 'working class' in our Western societies.

The consensual form of politics in our time is a bi-polar system that offers the appearance of a choice where essentially there is none, since today poles converge on a single economic stance – the 'tight fiscal policy' that Clinton and Blair declare to be the key tenet of the modern Left, that sustains economic growth, that allows us to improve social security, education and health. In this uniform spectrum, political differences are more and more reduced to merely cultural attitudes: multicultural/sexual (etc.) 'openness' versus traditional/natural (etc.) 'family values'. This choice – between Social Democrat or Christian Democrat in Germany, Democrat or Republican in the States – recalls nothing so much as the predicament of someone who wants an artificial sweetener in an American cafeteria, where the omnipresent alternatives are *Nutra-Sweet* or *Sweet & Low*, small bags of red and blue, and most consumers have a habitual preference (avoid the red ones, they contain cancerous substances, or vice versa), whose ridiculous persistence merely highlights the meaninglessness of the options themselves.

Does the same not go for late-night talk shows, where 'freedom of channels' comes down to a choice between Jay Leno and David Letterman? Or for the soda drinks: Coke or Pepsi? It is a well-known fact that the 'Close the Door' button in most elevators is a totally inoperative placebo, placed there just to give people the impression they are somehow contributing to the speed of the elevator journey – whereas in fact, when we push this button, the door closes in exactly the same time as when we simply pressed the floor button. This extreme case of fake

participation is an appropriate metaphor for the role accorded citizens in our 'postmodern' political process. Postmoderns, of course, will calmly reply that antagonisms are radical only so long as society is still – anachronistically – perceived as a totality. After all, did not Adorno admit that contradiction is difference under the aspect of identity?[1] So today, as society loses any identity, no antagonism can any longer cut through the social body.

Postmodern politics thus logically accepts the claim that 'the working class has disappeared' and its corollary, the growing irrelevance of class antagonisms *tout court*. As its proponents like to put it, class antagonisms should not be 'essentialized' into an ultimate point of hermeneutic reference to whose 'expression' all other antagonisms can be reduced. Today we witness a thriving of new multiple political subjectivities (class, ethnic, gay, ecological, feminist, religious), alliances between which are the outcome of open, thoroughly contingent struggles for hegemony. However, as thinkers as different as Alain Badiou and Fredric Jameson have pointed out, today's multiculturalist celebration of the diversity of lifestyles and thriving of differences relies on an underlying One – that is, a radical obliteration of Difference, of the antagonistic gap.[2] (Of course, the same goes for the standard postmodern critique of sexual difference as a 'binary opposition' to be deconstructed: 'there are not two sexes but a multitude of sexes and sexual identities.' The truth of these multiple sexes is Unisex, the erasing of Difference in a boringly repetitive, perverse Sameness that is the container of this multitude.) In all these cases, the moment we introduce the 'thriving multitude' what we effectively assert is its exact opposite, an underlying all-pervasive Sameness – a non-antagonistic society in which there is room for all manner of cultural communities, lifestyles, religions, sexual orientations. The reply of a materialist theory is to show that this very One already relies on certain exclusions: the common field in which plural identities disport is from the start sustained by an invisible antagonistic split.

Memory traces of Labour

Of course, even to mention terms like 'class' or 'labour' is enough to invite the reproach of 'economic essentialism' from the postmodernists of the Third Way. My first reaction to the charge is: *why not?* If we look around the world today, we soon see how handy a dose of this

out-of-date way of thinking can be. The lands of former 'socialism', which the ideology of the moment still finds so hard to assign to their place in its scheme of things, offer particularly rich examples. How else should we conceive the connection between the two mega-powers, the United States and China, for example? They relate to each other more and more as Capital and Labour. The United States is turning into a country of managerial planning, banking, servicing, etc., while its 'disappearing working class' (except for migrant Chicanos and others who mainly toil in the service economy) is reappearing in China, where a large proportion of American goods, from toys to electronic hardware, is manufactured in ideal conditions for capitalist exploitation: no strikes, little safety, tied labour, miserable wages. Far from being merely antagonistic, the relationship between China and the United States is actually also symbiotic. The irony of history is that China is coming to deserve the title of a 'working-class state': it is turning into the state of the working class for American Capital.

Meanwhile, the failed 'Real Socialist' venture has left another legacy in Europe. There, the idea of labour (material, industrial production) as the privileged site of community and solidarity was especially strong in East Germany. Not only was engagement in the collective effort of production in the GDR supposed to bring individual satisfaction, but the problems of private life (from divorce to illness) were held to be put in their proper perspective by discussion in the workplace. This notion is the focus of what is arguably the ultimate GDR novel, Christa Wolf's *Divided Heaven*. It is to be confused neither with the pre-modern idea of work as a ritualized communal activity, nor with the romantic celebration of older industrial forms of production (say, elegies for the authenticity of the Welsh miners' lives in the manner of *How Green Was My Valley*), still less with any proto-fascist cult of craft work (along the lines of *Die Meistersinger*). The production group is a collective of modern individuals who rationally discuss their problems, not an archaic organic community.

Therein perhaps resides the ultimate cause of *Ostalgie*, a continuing sentimental attachment to the defunct 'Real Socialism' of the former GDR – the sense that, in spite of all its failures and horrors, something precious was lost with its collapse, which now has been repressed once again into a criminal underground. For in the ideological sensibility of the West today, is it not work itself – manual labour as opposed to 'symbolic' activity – rather than sex, that has become the site of obscene

indecency to be concealed from the public eye? The tradition, which goes back to Wagner's *Rhinegold* and Lang's *Metropolis*, in which the working process takes place in dark caves underground, now culminates in the millions of anonymous workers sweating in Third World factories, from Chinese gulags to Indonesian or Brazilian assembly lines. Due to the invisibility of all these, the West can afford to babble on about the 'disappearance of the working class'. Crucial to this tradition is a tacit equation of labour with crime: the idea that hard work is a felonious activity to be hidden from public view.

Thus the only place in Hollywood films where we see a production process in all its amplitude is in the genre of the thriller where the hero penetrates the master criminal's secret domain, and sees a hidden installation of furiously concentrated labour (distilling and packaging drugs, constructing a rocket that will destroy New York, etc.). When the arch-villain, after capturing Bond or his like, typically takes the hero on a tour of his monstrous enterprise, is not this vision of some vast, illegal production-complex the nearest American equivalent to the proud socialist-realist images of the Soviet epoch? Bond's role, of course, is to escape and blow up the whole assemblage in a spectacular fireball that returns us to the daily semblance of our life in a world cleansed of the working class. What is abolished in the final orgy of such violence is a certain utopian moment in Western history, when participation in a collective process of material labour was perceived as the ground of an authentic sense of community and solidarity. The dream was not to get rid of physical labour, but to find fulfilment in it, reversing its biblical meaning as a curse for Adam's Fall.

In his short book on Solzhenitsyn, one of his last works, Georg Lukács offered an enthusiastic appraisal of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, a novella that depicted for the first time in Soviet literature daily life in a gulag (its publication had to be cleared by Nikita Khrushchev in person). Lukács singled out the scene in which, towards the end of the long working day, Ivan Denisovich rushes to complete the section of wall he has been building; when he hears the guard's call for all the prisoners to re-group for the march back to the camp, he cannot resist the temptation of quickly inserting a final couple of bricks into it, although he thereby risks the guard's wrath. Lukács read this impulse to finish the job as a sign of how, even in the brutal conditions of the gulag, the specifically socialist notion of material production as the locus of creative fulfilment survived; when, in the evening, Ivan Denisovich

takes mental stock of the day, he notes with satisfaction that he has built a wall and enjoyed doing so. Lukács was right to make the paradoxical claim that this seminal dissident text perfectly fits the most stringent definition of socialist realism.[3]

Perduring in the place

Yugoslavia offers another variant of postmodern misconceptions of post-communism which casts more light on the West than on the former East. 'Enlightened' liberal states seem baffled by the reaction of rulers like Slobodan Milošević and Saddam Hussein to the campaigns against them. They appear to be impervious to all external pressures: the West bombards them, chips off parts of their territory, isolates them from their neighbours, imposes tough boycotts on them, humiliates them in every way possible, and yet they survive with their glory intact, maintaining the semblance of courageous leaders who dare to defy the New World Order. It is not so much that they turn defeat into triumph; it is rather that, like some version of a Buddhist sage, they sit in their palaces and perdure, occasionally defying expectations with eccentric gestures of almost Bataillean expenditure, like Milošević's son opening a local version of Disneyland in the midst of the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, or Saddam completing a large amusement park for his elite *nomenklatura*. Sticks (threats and bombings) achieve nothing, and neither do carrots. So where have Western perceptions gone wrong? Our theorists, projecting on to these régimes a stereotyped opposition of the rational hedonistic pursuit of happiness and ideological fanaticism, fail to take note of a more apposite couple: apathy and obscenity. The apathy that pervades daily life in Serbia today expresses not only popular disillusion in the 'democratic opposition' to Milošević, but also a deeper indifference towards 'sacred' nationalist goals themselves. How was it that Serbs did not rally against Milošević when he lost Kosovo? Every ordinary Serb knows the answer – it's an open secret in Yugoslavia. They really don't care about Kosovo. So when the region was lost, the secret reaction was a sigh of relief: 'Finally, we are rid of that overrated piece of soil which caused us so much trouble!' The key to the readiness of 'ordinary' Serbs to tolerate Milošević lies in the combination of this kind of apathy with its apparent opposite, an obscene permissivity. Here is how Aleksandar Tijanić, a leading Serb columnist who was even for a

brief period Milošević's minister for information and public media, describes 'the strange symbiosis between Milošević and the Serbs':

> Milošević generally suits the Serbs. Under his rule, Serbs have abolished working hours. No one does anything. He has allowed the black market and smuggling to flourish. You can appear on state TV and insult Blair, Clinton, or any other 'international dignitary' of your choice. Milošević gave us the right to carry weapons, and to solve all our problems with weapons. He gave us the right to drive stolen cars ... Milošević changed the life of Serbs into one long holiday, making us all feel like high-school pupils on a graduation trip – which means that nothing, but really nothing, of what you do is punishable.[4]

Marx long ago emphasized that the critical test of any historico-materialist analysis is not its ability to reduce ideological or political phenomena to their 'actual' economic foundations, but to cover the same path in the opposite direction – that is, to show why these material interests articulate themselves in just such an ideal form.[5] The true problem is not so much to identify the economic interests that sustain Milošević, as to explain how the rule of obscene permissivity can serve as an effective ideological social bond in today's Yugoslavia. Of course, Milošević's rule also yields an unexpected bonus for the nationalist 'democratic opposition' in the country, because for the Western powers he is a pariah who embodies all that is wrong in Yugoslavia. The opposition is therefore counting on his death as the moment when, like Christ, he will take upon himself all their sins. His demise will be hailed as the chance of a new democratic beginning, and Yugoslavia will be accepted again into the 'international community'. This is the scenario that has already taken place with the death of Franjo Tudjman in Croatia. Ignoring the ominous pomp of his funeral, Western commentators dwelt on the way his personal obstinacy had been the main obstacle to the democratization of Croatia, opening up a fair prospect for the future of the nation – as if all the skeletons of independent Croatia, from corruption to ethnic cleansing, had now magically vanished, interred forever with Tudjman's corpse. Will this be Milošević's last service to his nation, too?

Expelling the material realities of sweat-shop labour, collective production and anomic licence from its visions of the East, the official imaginary naturally has no time for traces of the working class in the West. In today's political discourse, the very term 'workers' tends to have

disappeared from sight, substituted or obliterated by 'immigrants' – Algerians in France, Turks in Germany, Mexicans in the United States, etc. In this new vocabulary, the class problematic of exploitation is transformed into the multiculturalist problematic of 'intolerance of the Other', and the investment of liberals in the particular rights of ethnic minorities draws much of its energy from the repression of the general category of the collective labourer. The 'disappearance' of the working class then fatally unleashes its reappearance in the guise of aggressive nativism. Liberals and populists meet on common ground; all they talk about is identity. Is not Haider himself the best Hegelian example of the 'speculative identity' of the tolerant multiculturalist and the postmodern racist? Now that his party has reached office, he takes pains to stress the affinity between New Labour and the Austrian Free Democrats, which renders the old oppositions of Left/Right irrelevant. Both forces, he notes, have jettisoned old ideological ballast, and now combine a flexible market economics, determined to dismantle statist controls and free entrepreneurial energies, with a politics of care and solidarity concerned to protect children and help the elderly and disadvantaged, without reverting to dogmas of the welfare state. As for immigration, Haider contends that his policies are more liberal than those of Blair.[6]

There is both truth and falsehood in such claims. Once in power, Haider – blatantly an opportunist rather than a genuine 'extremist' – would no doubt perform quite conventionally. After all, in Italy his homologue Fini, until recently a fervent admirer of Mussolini, is now the most respectable of democratic statesmen, whose reputation the whole Italian establishment – from President Ciampi and Prime Minister D'Alema downwards – has rushed to defend against 'anachronistic' slurs from Schröder. But for the moment, Haider is still a demagogue whose attraction in Austria is based on remaining an outsider. His self-comparisons with New Labour are to that extent deliberately misleading, designed to cover up the xenophobic kernel of his populism. They belong to the same series as attempts by Afrikaans politicians of old to present apartheid as just another version of identity politics, devoted to safeguarding the rich variety of cultures in South Africa. Ernesto Laclau has taught us the distinction between the elements of an ideological construct and the articulation that gives them their meaning. Thus fascism was not characterized simply by a series of features like economic corporatism, populism, xenophobic racism, militarism and so on, for these could also be included in other ideological configurations;

what made these features 'fascist' was their specific articulation within an overall political project (for example, large public works did not play the same role in Nazi Germany and New Deal America). Along the same lines, it would be easy to show that Haider's manipulation of a menu of free-market and social-liberal dishes is not to be confused with the Third Way: even if Haider and Blair do propose a set of identical measures, these are inscribed in different ideological enterprises.

This, however, is not the whole story. There is also a sense in which Haider is indeed a kind of uncanny double of Blair, his obscene sneer accompanying New Labour's big smile like a shadow. For New Right populism is the necessary supplement of the multiculturalist tolerance of global Capital, as the return of the repressed. The 'truth' of Haider's claim does not lie in the identity of New Labour and the New Right, but in the generation of his populism by the zombification of European social democracy as a whole. In Haider's clinching to Blair – I use the term in the precise sense, of the boxing-ring – the Third Way gets its own message back in inverted form. Participation by the far Right in government is not punishment for 'sectarianism' or a failure to 'come to terms with postmodern conditions'. It is the price the Left pays for renouncing any radical political project, and accepting market capitalism as 'the only game in town'.

Notes

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1 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton, London and New York, Routledge, 1973, pp. 149–52. [eds]
2 Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamour of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2000, p. 56; Fredric Jameson, 'Notes on globalization as a political issue', in *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, Durham, Duke University Press, 1998, p. 71. [eds]
3 Georg Lukács, *Solzhenitsyn*, trans. William David Graf, London, Merlin, 1970, pp. 17–23. [eds]
4 Aleksandar Tijanić, 'The remote day of change', *Mladina*, 6 August 1999, p. 33.
5 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes, London, Penguin, 1976, pp. 164–5. [eds]
6 Jörg Haider, 'Blair and me versus the forces of conservatism', *The Daily Telegraph*, 22 February 2000.

3

Heiner Müller out of joint

The documentary on Heiner Müller and his 1989 staging of *Hamlet*, 'Zeit aus den Fügen', deploys the entire scope of his reticence to embrace German unification and the simple direct transposition of the BRD model on to the GDR. What distinguishes Müller is that he went much further than those who merely complained that the unique chance of developing a 'third way' beyond State socialism and global capitalism had been missed: Müller questioned the *a priori* legitimacy of free elections themselves, proposing a risky comparison with 1933 ('free elections also brought Hitler to power'). Was this just an arrogant display of a fake dissident whose narcissism was injured when the masses rejected the alternative of democratic socialism? Was Müller himself thrown out of joint, or can his stance be defended? Now that the tenth anniversary of Müller's death is approaching, it is perhaps time to revisit this question. My aim here is to take Müller's stance seriously as a *theoretico-political* position, not just as pseudo-radical chic tolerated and excused in advance as belonging to an eccentric artist.

To begin with, the case against Müller seems clear. One can immediately reproach him with succumbing to the temptation of catastrophism, of perceiving the situation (in 1989) as one of utter despair – recall his statements from those years that he just wants to drown himself in alcohol and drugs. Most of today's claims that the twentieth century was the most catastrophic in human history, the lowest point of nihilism, a situation of extreme danger, etc., forget the elementary lesson of dialectics: the twentieth century appears as such because the criteria themselves changed – today, we simply have much higher standards of what constitutes a violation of human rights, and so on. The fact that the situation *appears* catastrophic is thus in itself a positive sign, a sign of

(some kind of) progress: we are today much more sensitive to things that were also occurring in previous epochs. Take the example of feminism: only in the last 200 years was the situation of women progressively perceived as unjust, although it was 'objectively' getting better. Or recall the treatment of disabled individuals: even a couple of decades ago, the special entrances that enable them access to restaurants, theatres, etc., would have been unthinkable.

More specifically, is Müller's stance not emblematic of privileged 'official dissidents' with visas for travelling freely to the West, angry at the stupid crowd for betraying their dreams? Along the same lines, there is the hypocrisy of pro-Castro Western leftists who despise what Cubans themselves call *'gusanos* [worms]', those who emigrated from Cuba. With all sympathy for the Cuban revolution, what right does a typical middle-class Western leftist have to despise Cubans who decided to leave Cuba, not only because of political disenchantment, but also because of poverty (so severe as to involve genuine hunger)? I myself remember how, in the early 1990s, dozens of Western leftists proudly declared that, as far as they were concerned, Yugoslavia still existed, and reproached me for betraying a unique chance to maintain Yugoslavia – to which I have always answered that I am not yet ready to lead my life so that it will not disappoint the dreams of Western leftists. There are few things more worthy of contempt, few attitudes more *ideological* (if this word has any meaning today, it should be applied here), than a tenured Western academic leftist arrogantly dismissing (or, even worse, 'understanding' in a patronizing way) an Eastern European from a Communist country who longs for Western liberal democracy and a few consumer goods.

It is here that the Frankfurt School miserably failed: one cannot but be struck by the almost total absence of theoretical confrontation with Stalinism in the Frankfurt School, in clear contrast to its permanent obsession with fascist anti-Semitism. The very exceptions to this rule are telling: Franz Neumann's *Behemoth*, a study of National Socialism which, in the typical fashionable style of the late 1930s and early 1940s, suggested that the three great world systems – the emerging New Deal capitalism, fascism and Stalinism – tend towards the same bureaucratic, globally organized, 'administered' society; Herbert Marcuse's *Soviet Marxism*, his least passionate and arguably worst book, a strangely neutral analysis of the Soviet ideology with no clear commitments; and, finally, attempts by some Habermasians who, reflecting upon the

emerging dissident phenomenon, have endeavoured to elaborate the notion of civil society as a site of resistance to the Communist régime – a position that is interesting politically, but far from offering a satisfactory global theory of the specificity of Stalinist 'totalitarianism'.

The standard excuse (authors in the Frankfurt School did not want to oppose Communism too openly because, in so doing, they would play into the hands of their domestic Cold Warriors) is obviously insufficient – the point is not that this fear of being placed in the service of official anti-Communism proves how they were secretly pro-Communist, but rather the opposite: if they were *really* cornered as to where they stood with respect to the Cold War, they would have chosen Western liberal democracy (as Max Horkheimer explicitly did in some of his late writings). 'Stalinism' (that is, Really Existing Socialism) was thus, for the Frankfurt School, a traumatic topic apropos of which it *had* to remain silent – this silence was the only way for them to retain the inconsistency of their position of underlying solidarity with Western liberal democracy, without losing their official guise of 'radical' leftist critique. Openly acknowledging this solidarity would have deprived them of their 'radical' aura, changing them into yet another version of Cold War anti-Communist leftist liberals, while showing too much sympathy for the Really Existing Socialism would have forced them to betray their unacknowledged basic commitment to Western liberal democracy.

This ultimate solidarity with the Western system when the latter was genuinely threatened displays a clear symmetry with the stance of the 'democratic socialist opposition' in the German Democratic Republic. While its members criticized Communist Party rule, they endorsed the basic premise of the GDR régime: the thesis that the Federal Republic of Germany is a neo-Nazi State, the direct heir of Nazism and, therefore, that the existence of the GDR as an anti-Fascist bulwark must be protected at any cost. For that reason, as soon as the situation got really serious and the socialist system was effectively threatened, they publicly supported the system (like Brecht apropos of East Berlin workers' demonstrations in 1953, and Christa Wolf apropos of the Prague Spring in 1968). They sustained a belief in the inherent reformability of the system – but for this true democratic reform to take place, time and patience were needed: a too rapid disintegration of socialism would return Germany to the capitalist-fascist régime and thus strangle the utopia of that 'Other Germany' which, in spite of all its horrors and

failures, the GDR continued to represent. Hence the deep distrust of these intellectuals for 'people' as opposed to Power: in 1989, they openly opposed free elections, well aware that, if free elections were to be held, the majority would have chosen despised capitalist consumerism. Heiner Müller was thus quite consequent when, in 1989, he claimed that free elections also brought Hitler to power ... (Many Western social democrats played the same game, feeling much closer to 'reform-minded' Communists than to dissidents – the latter somehow embarrassed them as an obstacle to the process of *détente*.) Along the same lines, it was also clear to perceptive dissidents like Václav Havel that Soviet intervention in a way saved the myth of the Prague Spring of 1968, i.e., the utopian notion that, if the Czechs were left alone, they would effectively give birth to a 'socialism with a human face', to an authentic alternative to both Real Socialism and Real Capitalism. That is to say, what would have happened if the Warsaw Pact forces had *not* intervened in August of 1968? Either the Czech Communist leadership would have imposed restraint and Czechoslovakia would remain a (more liberal, true) Communist régime, or it would have turned into a 'normal' Western capitalist society (maybe with a stronger Scandinavian social-democratic flavour).

One should thus fully admit the falsity of what I am tempted to call the 'interpassive socialism' of the Western academic Left: what these leftists displace on to the Other is not a specific kind of activity, but their passive authentic experience. They allow themselves to pursue their well-paid academic careers in the West, while using an idealized Other (like Cuba, Nicaragua, Tito's Yugoslavia) as the stuff of their ideological fantasy: they dream through the Other, and rage against it if it in any way disturbs their complacency (by abandoning socialism and opting for liberal capitalism). What is of particular interest here is the basic misunderstanding, the lack of communication, between the Western Left and dissidents in late socialism – it is as if it was forever impossible for them to find a common language. Although sensing that they should be on the same side, an elusive gap seemed forever to separate them: for Western Leftists, Eastern dissidents were all too naïve in their belief in democracy (in their rejection of socialism, they unknowingly threw out the baby with the bath water); in the eyes of the dissidents, the Western Left played the patronizing game of disavowing the true harshness of the totalitarian régime (the accusation that dissidents were somehow guilty of not seizing the unique opportunity

amid the disintegration of socialism and inventing an authentic alternative to capitalism was hypocrisy at its purest). However, what if this *lack of communication* was, in fact, an example of successful communication in the precise Lacanian sense? What if each of the two positions received from its other its own repressed message in an inverted and true form?

However, the constellation is not as simple as it may appear. As Alain Badiou pointed out, in spite of its horrors and failures, Really Existing Socialism was the only political force that – for some decades, at least – seemed to pose a serious threat to the global rule of capitalism, genuinely scaring its representatives, driving them into paranoiac reaction.[1] But now that, today, capitalism defines and structures the totality of human civilization, every 'Communist' territory was and is – again, in spite of its horrors and failures – a kind of 'liberated territory', as Fredric Jameson put it apropos of Cuba.[2] What we are dealing with here is the old structural notion of the gap between a space and the positive content that fills it: although, as to their positive content, Communist régimes were mostly a dismal failure, generating terror and misery, *at the same time* they opened up a certain space, the space of utopian expectations which, among other things, enabled us to measure the failure of Really Existing Socialism itself. What anti-Communist dissidents as a rule tend to overlook is that the very space from which they themselves criticized and denounced the everyday misery of the régimes *was opened and sustained by the Communist breakthrough, by its attempt to escape the logic of Capital.* In short, when dissidents like Havel denounced the existing Communist régime from the standpoint of authentic human solidarity, they (unknowingly, for the most part) spoke from the space opened up by Communism itself – which is why they tended to be so disappointed when 'really existing capitalism' failed to meet the high expectations of their anti-Communist struggle. Perhaps Václav Klaus, Havel's pragmatic double, was right when he dismissed Havel as a 'socialist' ...

This externality to capitalism also compelled dissidents to question the incessant drive towards productivity shared by capitalism and State socialism. The obverse of this drive is the growing piles of useless waste, mountains of used cars, computers, etc. (like the famous airplanes' 'resting place' in the Mojave desert); in these ever-growing piles of inert, dysfunctional 'stuff', which cannot but impress us with their useless, bare presence, one can, as it were, perceive the capitalist drive at rest. Therein resides the interest of Andrei Tarkovsky's masterpiece *Stalker*,

with its post-industrial wasteland of wild vegetation growing over abandoned factories, concrete tunnels and railroads full of stale water, a terrain of wild overgrowth in which stray dogs and cats wander. Here, nature and industrial civilization again overlap, but through their common decay – a decaying civilization is in the process of being reclaimed (not by an idealized harmonious Nature, but) by nature in its decomposition. The ultimate irony is that an author from the Communist East displayed the greatest sensitivity for this obverse of the drive to produce-and-consume. Perhaps, however, this irony displays a deeper necessity which hinges on what Heiner Müller called the 'waiting-room mentality' of Communist Eastern Europe:

> There would be an announcement: The train will arrive at 18:15 and depart at 18:20 – and it never did arrive at 18:15. Then came the next announcement: The train will arrive at 20:10. And so on. You went on sitting there in the waiting room, thinking, it's bound to come at 20:15. That was the situation. Basically, a state of Messianic anticipation. There are constant announcements of the Messiah's impending arrival, and you know perfectly well that he won't be coming. And yet somehow, it's good to hear him announced all over again.[3]

The point of this Messianic attitude was not that hope was maintained, but that, because the Messiah did *not* arrive, people began to look around and take note of the inert materiality of their surroundings, in contrast to the West, where people, engaged in permanent frenetic activity, fail properly to notice what goes on all around them. Because of the lack of acceleration, people could enjoy greater contact with the earth on which the waiting room was built; caught in this delay, they deeply experienced the idiosyncrasies of their world, all of its topographical and historical details ...

There are, therefore, good reasons to take Müller's reticence seriously. There are four motifs, four topics, around which his political stance is crystallized: (a) the rejection of the unconditional drive towards productivity, (b) the distrust of democracy, (c) the theatralization of politics and (d) the inevitability of violence. These four imperatives directly contradict the four dogmas of today's post-politics: (a) the focus on economic growth, (b) liberal democracy, (c) non-theatrical pragmatism and (d) non-violent tolerance.

Let us begin with the key role of theatralization. Recall the staged performance of the 'Storming of the Winter Palace' in Petrograd on the

third anniversary of the October Revolution (7 November 1920). This event (directed by Nikolai Evreinov who, in 1925, immigrated to France) involved 8,000 direct participants and an audience of 100,000 (a quarter of the city's population) in spite of heavy rain. The underlying idea was formulated by Anatoli Lunatcharsky, People's Commisar for Enlightenment, in the spring of 1920: 'In order to acquire a sense of self the masses must outwardly manifest themselves, and this is possible only when, in Robespierre's words, they become a spectacle unto themselves.'[4] Thousands of workers, soldiers, students and artists worked round the clock, living on *kasha* (tasteless wheat porridge), tea and frozen apples, preparing the performance at the very place where the event 'really took place' three years earlier. Their work was coordinated by Army officers, as well as by avant-garde artists, musicians and directors, from Malevich to Meyerhold. Although this was acting and not 'reality', the soldiers and sailors were playing *themselves* – many of them not only actually participated in the event of 1917, but also were simultaneously involved in the real battles of the civil war that was raging in the nearby vicinity of Petrograd, a city under siege and suffering from severe shortages of food. A contemporary commented on the performance: 'The future historian will record how, throughout one of the bloodiest and most brutal revolutions, all of Russia was acting.'[5] The formalist theoretician Viktor Shklovski further noted that, 'some kind of elemental process is taking place where the living fabric of life is being transformed into the theatrical.'[6]

We all remember the infamous, self-celebratory 'First of May' parades that were one of the supreme signs of recognition of the Stalinist régime. If one needs proof of how Leninism functioned in an entirely different way, are such performances as the 'Storming of the Winter Palace' not the ultimate proof that the October Revolution was definitely *not* a simple *coup d'état* by a small group of Bolsheviks, but an event that unleashed a tremendous emancipatory potential? Does the 'Storming of the Winter Palace' performance not display the force of a sacred (pagan?) pageant, the magic act of founding a new community? It is here that, perhaps, one should look for the realization of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, of what he aimed at with the designation of his *Parsifal* as *Bühnenweihfestspiel* ('sacred festival drama'): it was in the Petrograd of 1920, much more than in Ancient Greece, that, 'in intimate connection with its history, the people itself that stood facing itself in the work of art, becoming conscious of itself, and, in the space of a few hours,

rapturously devouring, as it were, its own essence'.[7] This aestheticization, in which the people quite literally 'plays itself', certainly does not fall under Benjamin's indictment of the Fascist 'aestheticization of the political' – instead of abandoning this aestheticization to the political Right, instead of a blanket dismissal of every mass political spectacle as 'proto-fascist', one should perceive in this minimal, purely formal, difference of the people from itself the unique case of 'real life' differentiated from art by nothing more than an invisible formal gap. The very fact that, in historical documentaries, footage from the performance (as well as from Eisenstein's *October* of 1927) of the 'Storming of the Winter Palace' is often presented as though in the form of a documentary, is to be taken as an indication of this deeper identity of people playing themselves.

The archetypal Eisensteinian cinematic scene rendering the exuberant orgy of revolutionary destructive violence (what Eisenstein himself called 'a veritable bacchanalia of destruction') belongs to the same series: when, in *October*, the victorious revolutionaries penetrate the wine cellars of the Winter Palace, they indulge in an ecstatic orgy of smashing thousands of expensive wine bottles. In *Behzin Meadow*, the village pioneers force their way into the local church and desecrate it, robbing it of its relics, squabbling over an icon, sacrilegiously trying on vestments, heretically laughing at the statuary. In this suspension of goal-orientated instrumental activity, we effectively get a kind of Bataillean 'unrestrained expenditure'. Recall the classic reproach of Robespierre to the Dantonist opportunists: 'What you want is a revolution without revolution!' – the pious desire to deprive the revolution of this excess is simply the desire to have a revolution without revolution.

However, this 'unrestrained expenditure' is not enough: in a revolution proper, such a display of what Hegel would have called 'abstract negativity' merely, as it were, wipes the slate clean for the second act, the imposition of a New Order. The tautology 'revolution *with* revolution' thus has another aspect: it also signals the urge to repeat the negation, to relate it to itself – in its course, a true revolution revolutionizes its own starting presuppositions. This is what Mao Zedong called the 'Cultural Revolution' as the condition of successful social revolution. What, exactly, does this mean? The problem with hitherto revolutionary attempts was not that they were 'too extreme', but that they were *not radical enough*, that they did not question their own presuppositions. In a wonderful essay on *Chevengur*, Andrei Platonov's great peasant utopia

written between 1927 and 1928 (just prior to forced collectivization), Fredric Jameson describes the two moments of the revolutionary process. It begins with the gesture of radical negativity:

> This first moment of world-reduction, of the destruction of the idols and the sweeping away of an old world in violence and pain, is itself the precondition for the reconstruction of something else. A first moment of absolute immanence is necessary, the blank slate of absolute peasant immanence or ignorance, before new and undreamed-of sensations and feelings can come into being.[8]

There then follows a second stage, the invention of a new life – not only the construction of a new social reality within which our utopian dreams would be realized, but the (re)construction of these dreams themselves:

> a process that it would be too simple and misleading to call reconstruction or Utopian construction, since in effect it involves the very effort to find a way to begin imagining Utopia to begin with. Perhaps in a more Western kind of psychoanalytic language ... we might think of the new onset of the Utopian process as a kind of desiring to desire, a learning to desire, the invention of the desire called Utopia in the first place, along with new rules for the fantasizing or daydreaming of such a thing – a set of narrative protocols with no precedent in our previous literary institutions.[9]

The reference to psychoanalysis here is crucial and very precise: in a radical revolution, people not only 'realize their old (emancipatory, etc.) dreams'; rather, they have to reinvent their very modes of dreaming.[10] Is this not the exact formula of the link between death drive and sublimation? It is *only* this reference to what happens *after* the revolution, the proverbial 'morning after', that allows us to distinguish between libertarian pathetic outbursts and true revolutionary upheavals: these upheavals lose their energy when one has to approach the prosaic work of social reconstruction – at this point, lethargy begins to set in. By contrast, recall the immense creativity of the Jacobins just prior to their fall: the numerous proposals about new civic religion, about how to sustain the dignity of old people, and so on. Therein also resides the interest in reading reports about daily life in the Soviet Union in the early 1920s, with its enthusiastic urge to invent new rules for quotidian existence: How does one get married? What are the new rules

of courting? How does one celebrate a birthday? How is one to be buried? It is precisely with regard to *this* dimension that revolution proper is to be opposed to carnivalesque reversal as temporary respite, the exception stabilizing the hold of power.

And this brings us to the key question: how are we to construct a social space within which revolution can stabilize itself? Perhaps, one of the options is to pursue the trend of self-organized collectives in areas outside the law. Arguably the greatest literary monument to such a utopia comes from an unexpected source – Mario Vargas Llosa's *The War of the End of the World*, a novel about Canudos, an outlaw community deep in the Brazilian backlands, which was home to prostitutes, freaks, beggars, bandits and the most wretched of the poor.[11] Canudos, led by an apocalyptic prophet, was a utopian space without money, property, taxes and marriage. In 1897, it was destroyed by the military forces of the Brazilian government.

Echoes of Canudos are clearly discernible in today's *favelas* in Latin American megalopolises: in some sense, are they not the first 'liberated territories', cells of future self-organized societies? Are institutions like community kitchens not a model of 'socialized' communal local life? The Canudos' liberated territory in Bahia will remain forever the model of a liberated space, an alternative community, which thoroughly negates the existing space of State. Everything is to be endorsed here, right up to religious 'fanaticism'. It is as if, in such communities, *the Benjaminian other side of historical progress, the defeated ones, acquires a space of their own*. Utopia *existed* here for a brief period of time – this is the only way to account for the 'irrational', excessive violence of the destruction of these communities (in Brazil in 1897, *all* inhabitants of Canudos, children and women included, were slaughtered, as if the very memory of the possibility of freedom had to be erased – and this by a government that presented itself as 'progressive' liberal-democratic-republican ...). Until now, such communities irrupted from time to time as passing phenomena, sites of eternity that interrupted the flow of temporal progress – one should have the courage to recognize them in the wide span from the Jesuit *reduciones* in the eighteenth century in Paraguay (brutally destroyed by the joint action of Spanish and Portuguese armies) up to the settlements controlled by Sendero Luminoso in Peru in the 1990s. Can one imagine a point at which this subterranean dimension of the utopian 'Other Space' could unite with the positive space of 'normal' social life?

The key political question here is: in our 'postmodern' time, does a space for such communities still exist? Are they limited to the underdeveloped outskirts (*favelas*, ghettos, etc.), or is a space for them emerging in the very heart of the 'post-industrial' landscape? Can one make a wild wager that the dynamics of 'postmodern' capitalism, with its rise of new eccentric geek communities, provide a unique opportunity? That, perhaps for the first time in history, the logic of alternative communities can be grafted on to the latest state of technology?

The primary form of such alternative communities in the twentieth century were so-called councils ('soviets') – (almost) everybody in the West loved them, up to liberals like Hannah Arendt who perceived in them echoes of the ancient Greek social form of the *polis*. Throughout the era of Really Existing Socialism, the secret hope of 'democratic socialists' was the direct democracy of the 'soviets', local councils as the form of self-organization of the people; and it is deeply symptomatic that, with the decline of Really Existing Socialism, this emancipatory shadow which accompanied it constantly also disappeared. (Is this not the ultimate confirmation of the fact that the council-version of 'democratic socialism' was just a spectral double of 'bureaucratic' Really Existing Socialism, its inherent transgression with no substantial positive content of its own – i.e., unable to serve as the permanent basic organizing principle of a society?) What both Really Existing Socialism and council-democracy shared is the belief in the possibility of a self-transparent organization of society that would preclude political 'alienation' (state apparatuses, institutionalized rules of political life, legal order, police, etc.) – and is the basic experience of the end of Really Existing Socialism not precisely the rejection of this *shared* feature, the resigned 'postmodern' acceptance of the fact that society is a complex network of 'sub-systems', which is why a certain level of 'alienation' is constitutive of social life, so that a completely self-transparent society is deemed a utopia with totalitarian potentials?[12] (In this sense, it is Habermas who is 'postmodern', in contrast to Adorno who, in spite of all his political compromises, remained attached to a radically utopian vision of revolutionary redemption to the end.)

But, apropos of democracy, are things really so simple? First, direct democracy is not only still alive in many places (like *favelas*), it is even being 'reinvented' and given a new impetus by the rise of 'post-industrial' digital culture – do the descriptions of new 'tribal' communities of computer-hackers not often evoke the logic of 'council-democracy'?

Second, the awareness that politics is a complex game in which a certain level of institutional alienation is irreducible should not lead us to ignore the fact that there nevertheless remains a line of separation that divides those who are 'in' from those who are 'out', excluded from the space of the *polis* – there are citizens, and there is the spectre of *homo sacer* haunting them all. In other words, even 'complex' contemporary societies still rely on the basic divide between inclusion and exclusion. The now fashionable notion of 'multitude' is insufficient precisely insofar as it cuts across this divide: there is a multitude *within* the system and a multitude of those *excluded*, and simply to encompass them within the scope of a single notion amounts to the same obscenity as equating starvation with dieting to lose weight. Those who are excluded do not simply dwell in a psychotic non-structured Outside – they have (and are forced into) their own self-organization, one of names (and practices) that are precisely those of 'council-democracy'.

But should it still be called 'democracy'? It seems politically more productive and theoretically more adequate to limit 'democracy' to the translation of *antagonism* into *agonism*: while democracy acknowledges an irreducible plurality of interests, ideologies, narratives, etc., it excludes those who, as we put it, reject the democratic rules of the game – liberal democrats are quite right to claim that populism is inherently 'anti-democratic'. 'Democracy' is not merely the 'power of, by and for the people'; it is not enough simply to claim that, in democracy, the will and interests (the two in no way automatically coincide) of the majority determine decisions of State. Democracy – in the way the term is used today – concerns, above all, *formal legality*: its minimal definition is the unconditional adherence to a certain set of formal rules which guarantee that antagonisms are fully absorbed into the agonistic game. 'Democracy' means that, whatever electoral manipulation takes place, every political agent will unconditionally respect the results. In this sense, the American presidential elections of 2000 were effectively 'democratic': despite obvious electoral manoeuvrings, and the patent meaninglessness of the fact that a few hundred Floridian voices decided who would be President, the Democratic candidate accepted his defeat. In the weeks of uncertainty following the elections, Bill Clinton made an appropriately acerbic comment: 'The American people have spoken; we just don't know what they said.' This comment should be taken more seriously than it was intended: even now, we

don't know what the American people said – and, maybe, it is because there was no substantial 'message' behind the result at all.

At this point, it is crucial to avoid the 'democratic' trap. Many 'radical' leftists accept the legalistic logic of 'transcendental guarantee': they refer to 'democracy' as the ultimate guarantee of those who are aware that there is no guarantee. That is to say, because no political act can claim direct foundation in some transcendent figure of the big Other (of the 'we are just instruments of a higher Necessity or Will' type), because every such act involves the risk of a contingent decision, nobody has the right to impose a choice on others – which means that every collective choice must be democratically legitimized. From this perspective, democracy is not so much a guarantee of the correct choice as a kind of opportunistic 'insurance' against possible failure: if things turn out wrong, one can always say we are all responsible ... Consequently, this last refuge must be abandoned; one should fully assume the risk of one's decision. The only adequate position is the one advocated already by Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness*: democratic struggle should not be fetishized; it is merely one of many forms of struggle, and its choice should be determined by a global strategic assessment of circumstances, not by its ostensibly superior intrinsic value. Like the Lacanian analyst, a political agent has to commit acts that can only be authorized by themselves, for which there is no external guarantee. An authentic political act can be, as to its form, democratic as well as non-democratic. There are some elections or referendums in which 'the impossible happens' – recall, decades ago in Italy, a referendum on divorce where, to the great surprise of the Left (which distrusted the people), the pro-divorce side convincingly won, so that even the Left, while privately sceptical, was ashamed of its distrust. (There were elements of the event even in the unexpected initial electoral victory of François Mitterand.) It is only in *such* cases that one is justified in saying that, over and above mere numerical majority, the people effectively *have spoken* in the substantial sense of the term. On the other hand, an authentic act of popular will can *also* occur in the form of a violent revolution, of a progressive military dictatorship, etc.

Interestingly enough, there is at least one scenario in which formal democrats themselves (or, at least, a substantial portion of them) would tolerate the suspension of democracy: what if a 'free election' was won by an anti-democratic party whose platform promised the abolition of formal democracy? (This did happen, among other places, in Algeria a couple of years ago.) In such a case, many a democrat would concede

that the people were not yet 'mature enough' to be entrusted with democracy, and that some kind of enlightened despotism, whose aim will be to educate the majority into proper democrats, is preferable. Every old leftist remembers Marx's reply in *The Communist Manifesto* to critics who reproached the Communists that they aim at undermining family, property, etc.: it is the capitalist order itself whose economic dynamics are destroying the traditional family order (incidentally, a fact more true today than in Marx's time), as well as expropriating a large majority of the population.[13] In the same vein, is it not precisely that those who pose today as global defenders of democracy are effectively undermining it? This gradual limitation of democracy is clearly perceptible in the attempts to 'rethink' the present situation – of course, one is for democracy and human rights, but one should 'rethink' them ... A series of recent interventions in public debate give a clear sense of the direction of this 'rethinking'. More than a year ago, Jonathan Alter and Alan Derschowitz proposed to 'rethink' human rights so that they include torture (of suspected terrorists). In *The Future of Freedom*, Fareed Zakaria, Bush's favourite columnist, already drew a more general conclusion: he located the threat to freedom in 'overdoing democracy', i.e., in the rise of 'illiberal democracy at home and abroad'.[14]

In a recent television interview, Ralf Dahrendorf linked the growing distrust in democracy to the fact that, after every revolutionary change, the road to new prosperity leads through a 'valley of tears': after the breakdown of socialism, one cannot pass directly to the abundance of a successful market economy – the limited, but real, social welfare and security had to be dismantled, and these first steps are necessarily painful; the same goes for Western Europe, where the passage from the post-World War II welfare State to a new global economy involved painful renunciations, less security, less guaranteed social care. For Dahrendorf, the problem is best encapsulated in the simple fact that this passage through the 'valley of tears' lasts longer than the average period between (democratic) elections, so that the temptation to postpone such difficult changes for short-term electoral gains is considerable. For him, the paradigmatic constellation is the disappointment of the large strata of post-Communist nations over the economic results of the new democratic order: in the glorious days of 1989, they equated democracy with the abundance of Western consumerist societies; now, ten years later, when that abundance is still missing, they blame democracy itself. Unfortunately, Dahrendorf avoids discussing the opposite temptation: if

the majority resists necessary structural changes in the economy, would not (one of) the logical conclusion(s) be that, for a decade or so, an enlightened élite should seize power, even by non-democratic means, in order to enforce the necessary measures and thus lay the foundations for a truly stable democracy? Along these lines, Zakaria points out that democracy can only 'catch on' in economically developed countries: if developing countries are 'prematurely democratized', the result is a populism that will end in economic catastrophe and political despotism – it is no wonder that today's most economically successful Third World countries (Taiwan, South Korea and Chile) embraced full democracy only after a period of authoritarian rule. And does the predicament of Germany not point in the same direction? In the Federal Republic of Germany, the welfare State remained more or less intact, rendering its economy less competitive and flexible; the necessary 'restructuring' of the economy (the dismantling of the welfare State) met with strong opposition from the majority of voters (workers, retirees, etc.), so it could only be implemented by *non-democratic* means.

The exemplary economic strategy of today's capitalism is out-sourcing – to subcontract the 'dirty' process of material production (but also publicity, design, accountancy, etc.) to another company. In this way, one easily avoids ecological and health regulations: production is done in, say, Indonesia where regulations are much lower than in the West, and the Western international corporation that owns the logo then claims that it is not responsible for violations in another company. Are we not seeing something homologous with regard to torture? Is torture also not being 'out-sourced' to Third World allies of the United States who can do it without worrying about legal problems or public protest? Was such out-sourcing not explicitly advocated by Jonathan Alter in *Newsweek* immediately after 11 September? After stating, 'We can't legalize torture; it's contrary to American values', he nevertheless concludes, 'we'll have to think about transferring some suspects to our less squeamish allies, even if that's hypocritical. Nobody said this was going to be pretty.'[15] This is how, today, First World democracy increasingly functions: by way of 'out-sourcing' its dirty underside to other countries ...

This inherent crisis of democracy is also the reason for the renewed popularity of Leo Strauss. The key feature that makes his political thought relevant today is its élitist notion of democracy, i.e., the idea of a 'necessary lie', of how the élites should rule: though they are aware of the actual state of things (driven by the brutal materialist logic of

power, etc.), they feed the people with fables designed to keep them satisfied in their blessed ignorance. For Strauss, the lesson of the trial and execution of Socrates is that *Socrates was guilty as charged*: philosophy *is*, in fact, a threat to society. By questioning the gods and the *ethos* of the city, philosophy undermined the citizens' loyalty, and thus the basis of normal social life. Yet philosophy is also the highest, the worthiest, of all human endeavours. Strauss' resolution of this conflict is that the philosophers should, and in fact did, keep their teachings secret, passing them on by the esoteric art of writing 'between the lines'. The true, hidden message contained in the 'Great Tradition' of philosophy from Plato to Hobbes and Locke is that there are no gods, that morality is ungrounded prejudice, and that society is not grounded in nature.[16]

This is the sense in which one should render democracy problematic: why should the Left always and unconditionally respect the formal democratic 'rules of the game'? Why should it not, in some circumstances at least, call into question the legitimacy of the outcome of a formal democratic procedure? All democratic leftists venerate Rosa Luxemburg's famous dictum, 'Freedom is freedom for those who think differently'. Perhaps, the time has come to shift the accent from 'differently' to 'think': 'Freedom is freedom for those who *think* differently' – i.e., *only* for those who *really think*, not for those who blindly (unthinkingly) act out their opinions. What this means is that one should gather the courage radically to question today's predominant attitude of anti-authoritarian tolerance. It was, surprisingly, Bernard Williams who, in his perspicacious reading of David Mamet's *Oleanna*, outlined the limits of this attitude:

> A complaint constantly made by the female character is that she has made sacrifices to come to college, in order to learn something, to be told things that she did not know, but that she has been offered only a feeble permissiveness. She complains that her teacher ... does not control or direct her enough: he does not tell her what to believe, or even, perhaps, what to ask. He does not exercise authority. At the same time, she complains that he exercises power over her. This might seem to be a muddle on her part, or the playwright's, but it is not. The male character has power over her (he can decide what grade she gets), but just because he lacks authority, this power is mere power, in part gender power.[17]

Power appears (is experienced) 'as such' at the very point where it is no longer covered by 'authority'. There are, however, further complications

to Williams' view. First, 'authority' is not simply a direct property of the master-figure, but an effect of the social relation between the master and his subjects: even if the master remains the same, it may happen, because of the change in the socio-symbolic field, that his position is no longer perceived as legitimate authority, but as mere illegitimate power. (Is such a shift not the most elementary gesture of feminism: male authority is all of a sudden unmasked as mere power?) The lesson of every revolution from 1789 to 1989 is that such a disintegration of authority, its transformation into arbitrary power, always precedes the revolutionary irruption. Where Williams is correct is in his emphasis on how the very permissiveness of the power-figure, his restraint from exercising authority by directing, controlling, his subject makes that authority appear as illegitimate power. Therein resides the vicious cycle of today's academia: the more professors renounce 'authoritarian' active teaching, the imposition of knowledge and values, the more they are experienced as figures of power. And, as every parent knows, the same goes for parental education: a father who exerts true transferential authority will never be experienced as 'oppressive' – it is, on the contrary, a father who tries to be permissive, who does not want to impose his views and values on his children, but allows them to discover their own way, who is denounced as exerting power, as being 'oppressive' ...

The paradox to be fully endorsed here is that the only way effectively to abolish power relations is through freely accepting relations of authority: the model of the free collective is not a group of libertines indulging their pleasures, but an extremely disciplined revolutionary collective. The injunction that holds together such a collective is best encapsulated in the logical form of double negation (prohibition), which, precisely, is *not* the same as direct positive assertion. Towards the end of Brecht's *Die Massnahme*, the Four Agitators declare:

> It is a terrible thing to kill.
> But not only others would we kill, but ourselves too if need be
> Since only force can alter this
> Murderous world, as
> Every living creature knows.
> It is still, we said
> Not given to us not to kill.[18]

Notice, the text does *not* say, 'we are allowed to kill', but, 'it is still not permitted (an adequate paraphrase of *vergönnen*) for us not to kill' – or,

simply, it is still *prohibited* for us not to kill. Brecht's precision is here admirable. 'It is allowed to kill' would have amounted to simple immoral permissivity; 'it is ordered to kill' would have transformed killing into an obscene-perverse superego injunction, which is the truth of the first version (as Lacan put it, the permitted *jouissance* inexorably turns into a prescribed one). The only correct way is thus the reversal of the biblical prohibition, the prohibition *not* to kill, which obtains all the way to the anti-Antigonean prohibition to provide a proper funeral ritual: the young comrade has to 'vanish, and vanish entirely', i.e., his disappearance (death) itself should disappear, not leaving any (symbolic) traces.

Bernard Williams can again be of some help here, when he elaborates the distance that separates *must* from *ought*: '*Ought* is related to *must* as *best* is related to *only*.'[19] We arrive at what we must do after a long and anxious consideration of alternatives, and we can even retain 'that belief while remaining uncertain about it, and still very clearly seeing the powerful merits of alternative courses.'[20] This difference between 'must' and 'ought' also relies on temporality: we can reproach somebody for not having done what he 'ought to have done', but we cannot say to someone, 'you must have done it' if he did not do it – we use the expression, 'you must have done it' when consoling somebody who *did* a thing that he found distasteful (such as, 'Do not blame yourself. Even if you loved him, you must have punished him!'), while the standard use of the expression, 'you ought to have done it' implies, on the contrary, that you did *not* do it.

This reference to 'must' creates the space of manipulation, like when a bargaining partner or outright blackmailer says that, 'regrettably', this leaves him with no alternative but to take an unpleasant course of action – and, we may add, like the ruthless Stalinist who 'cannot but' engage in terror. The falsity of this position resides in the fact that, when we 'must' do something, it is not simply that we 'cannot do otherwise than this' within the limits of our situation: the character of a person is not just revealed in that he does what he must, but also 'in the location of those limits, and in the very fact that one can determine, sometimes through deliberation itself, that one cannot do certain things, and must do others.'[21] One *is* thus responsible for one's character, i.e., for the choice of coordinates which prevent me from doing some things and impel me to do others. This brings us to the Lacanian notion of *l'acte*: in an act, I redefine the very coordinates of what I *cannot* and *must* do.

'Must' and 'Ought' thus correspond to Real and Symbolic: the Real of a drive whose injunction cannot be avoided (which is why Lacan says that the status of a drive is ethical); the Ought as a symbolic ideal caught in the dialectic of desire (if you ought not do something, this very prohibition generates the desire to do it). When you 'must' do something, it means you have no choice *but* to do it, even if it is terrible: in Wagner's *Die Walküre*, Wotan is confronted by Fricka and he 'must' ('cannot but') allow the murder of Siegmund, even though his heart bleeds for him; he 'must' ('cannot but') punish Brünnhilde, his dearest child, the embodiment of his own innermost striving. And, incidentally, the same goes for Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, the Bayreuth staging of which was Müller's last great theatrical achievement: they 'must' ('cannot but') indulge their passion, even if this goes against their *Sollen*, their social obligations.

In Wotan's forced act of punishment, Wagner encounters here the paradox of 'killing with *pietà*' at work from the Talmud (which calls us to dispense Justice with Love) to Brecht's two key *Lehrstücke*, *Der Jasager* and *Die Massnahme*, in which the young comrade is killed by his companions with loving tenderness. And although Müller disagreed with *Die Massnahme*, proposing, in his *Mauser*, a critique of its political logic, his critique is strictly internal: he reproaches Brecht precisely for not drawing all consequences from the stance of 'killing with *pietà*', of killing without dehumanizing the enemy. And this is why, today, in our time in which the abstract humanitarian rejection of violence is accompanied by its obscene double, we need just this anonymous killing '*without pietà*' more than ever.

Notes

1 Alain Badiou, *Le siècle*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2005, pp. 10–13, 89–90. [eds]
2 Fredric Jameson, 'Actually existing Marxism', in *Marxism Beyond Marxism*, ed. Saree Makdisi, Cesare Casarino and Rebecca E. Karl, New York and London, Routledge, 1996, p. 15. [eds]
3 Heiner Müller and Jan Höt, 'Insights into the Process of Production: A Conversation', *documenta* 9, 1992, pp. 96–7.
4 Quoted in Richard Taylor, *October*, London, British Film Institute, 2002, p. 8.
5 Quoted in Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001, p. 144.
6 Quoted in Buck-Morss, ibid.

7 Taylor, *October*, pp. 8–9. [eds]
8 Fredric Jameson, 'Utopia, modernism and death', in *The Seeds of Time*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 89. [*Editorial note*: Jameson provides his most cogent description of this 'moment of world-reduction' in an early essay on Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* ('World-Reduction in Le Guin: The emergence of utopian narrative', *Science-Fiction Studies* 2, 1975, p. 223): 'a principle of systematic exclusion, a kind of surgical excision of empirical reality, something like a process of ontological attenuation in which the sheer teeming multiplicity of what exists, of what we call reality, is deliberately thinned and weeded out through an operation of radical abstraction and simplification.']
9 Jameson, ibid., p. 90.
10 Fredric Jameson, 'Progress versus utopia; or, Can we imagine the future', *Science-Fiction Studies* 9, 1982, pp. 147–58. [eds]
11 Mario Vargas Llosa, *The War of the End of the World*, trans. Helen R. Lane, London, Penguin, 1981. [eds]
12 For a clear articulation of this stance, see Martin Jay, 'No power to the Soviets,' in *Cultural Semantics: Keywords of Our Time*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1998, pp. 79–84.
13 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party', in *The Revolutions of 1848: Political Writings, Volume I*, ed. David Fernbach, London, Penguin, 1973, pp. 82–4. [eds]
14 Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*, New York and London, W. W. Norton, 2003.
15 Jonathan Alter, 'Time to think about torture', *Newsweek*, November 2001, p. 45. [eds]
16 Furthermore, does Strauss' notion of esoteric knowledge not confuse two different phenomena: the cynicism of power, its unreadiness to admit publicly its own true foundations, and the subversive insights of those who aim at undermining the power system itself? For instance, in Really Existing Socialism there is a difference between a critical intellectual who, in order to convey his message, has to conceal it in the terms of official ideology, and the cynical top member of *nomenklatura* who is aware of the falsity of the basic claims of the ruling ideology – equating the two is, again, like equating starvation and dieting.
17 Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2002, pp. 7–8.
18 Bertolt Brecht, *The Collected Plays: Volume III, Part Two*, ed. John Willett and Ralph Mannheim, trans. John Willett *et al.*, London, Methuen, 1997, p. 87.
19 Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 125.
20 Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 126.
21 Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 130.

SECTION II

Really existing socialism

4

Why are Laibach and the *Neue Slowenische Kunst* not Fascists?

Superego is the obscene 'nightly' law that necessarily redoubles and accompanies, as its shadow, the 'public' Law. This inherent and constitutive splitting in the Law is the subject of Rob Reiner's film, *A Few Good Men,* a court-martial drama about two United States marines accused of murdering one of their fellow soldiers. The military prosecutor claims that the two marines' act was deliberate murder, whereas the defence successfully proves that the defendants were merely obeying a so-called 'Code Red', which authorizes the clandestine night-time beating of a fellow soldier who, in the opinion of his peers or superior officer, has broken the ethical code of the marines. The function of this 'Code Red' is extremely interesting: it condones an act of transgression – illegal punishment of a fellow soldier – and yet at the same time reaffirms the cohesion of the group, i.e., it calls for an act of absolute identification with group values. Such a code must remain under the cover of night, unacknowledged, unuttered – in public everybody pretends to know nothing about it, or even actively denies its very existence. It represents *l'ésprit du corps* in its purest form, exerting strong pressure on the individual to comply with its mandate of group identification. Yet, simultaneously, it violates the explicit rules of community life. (The plight of the two accused soldiers is that they are unable to grasp this exclusion of 'Code Red' from the 'Big Other', the domain of public Law: they desperately ask themselves, 'What did we do wrong?', because they just followed the orders of their superior officer.) Where does this splitting of Law into the written public Law and its underside, the 'unwritten', obscene secret code, come from? The answer

is from the incomplete, 'not-all' character of public Law itself: explicit, public rules do not suffice, so they must be supplemented by a clandestine, 'unwritten' code aimed at those who, although they violate no public rules, maintain a kind of inner distance and do not truly identify with *l'ésprit du corps*.

The field of Law is thus split into Law *qua* 'Ego-Ideal', i.e., a symbolic order that regulates social life and maintains harmony, and its obscene, superegoic inverse. As has been shown by numerous analyses from Mikhail Bakhtin onwards, periodic transgressions of the public Law are inherent to social order, they function as a condition of the latter's stability. (The mistake of Bakhtin – or, rather, of some of his followers – was to present an idealized image of these 'transgressions', while passing over in silence lynching parties, etc., as a crucial form of the 'carnivalesque suspension of social hierarchy'.) What most deeply 'holds together' a community is not so much identification with the Law that regulates the community's 'normal' everyday rhythms, but rather *identification with a specific form of transgression of the Law, of the Law's suspension* (in psychoanalytic terms, with a specific form of enjoyment). Let us return to those rural white communities in the American South of the 1920s, where the rule of the official, public Law was accompanied by its shadowy double, the nightly terror of the Ku Klux Klan, with its lynchings of helpless blacks: a (white) man could easily be forgiven minor infractions of the Law, especially when they could be justified by a 'code of honour' – the community still recognizes him as 'one of us'. But he would be effectively excommunicated, perceived as 'not one of us', the moment that he disowned the specific form of transgression that pertains to this community – say, the moment he refused to partake in ritual lynchings by the Klan, or even reported them to the Law (which, of course, did not want to hear about them since they represented its own hidden underside). The Nazi community relied on the same solidarity-in-guilt adduced by participation in a common transgression: it ostracized those who were not ready to assume the dark side of the idyllic *Volksgemeinschaft*, the night pogroms, the beatings of political opponents – in short, all that 'everybody knew, yet did not want to speak about aloud'.

It is against the background of this constitutive tension within the Law between public-written Law and obscene superego that one should comprehend the extraordinary critical-ideological impact of the *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, especially of the group Laibach. In the process of the

disintegration of socialism in Slovenia, they staged an aggressive, inconsistent mixture of Stalinism, Nazism and *Blut und Boden* ideology. The first reaction of enlightened leftist critics was to conceive of Laibach as the ironic imitation of totalitarian rituals; however, their support for Laibach was always accompanied by an uneasy feeling: 'What if they really mean it? What if they truly identify with totalitarian rituals?' – or, in a more cunning version of the same thing, transferring one's own doubt on to the other: 'What if Laibach overestimates their public? What if the public takes seriously what Laibach mockingly imitates, so that Laibach actually strengthens what it purports to undermine?' This uneasy feeling feeds on the assumption that ironic distance is automatically a subversive attitude. What if, on the contrary, the dominant attitude of the contemporary 'post-ideological' universe is precisely cynical distance towards public values? What if this distance, far from posing any threat to the system, designates the supreme form of conformism, since the normal function of the system *requires* cynical distance? In this sense, the strategy of Laibach appears in a new light: *it 'frustrates' the system (the ruling ideology) precisely insofar as it is not its ironic imitation, but represents an over-identification with it* – by bringing to light the obscene superego underside of the system, over-identification suspends its efficiency. (In order to clarify the way this baring, this public staging of the obscene fantasmatic kernel of an ideological edifice, suspends its normal functioning, let us recall a somewhat homologous phenomenon in the sphere of individual experience: each of us has some private ritual, phrases [like nicknames, etc.] or a gesture, used only within the most intimate circle of closest friends or relatives; when these rituals are rendered public, their effect is necessarily one of extreme embarrassment and shame – one wishes to be swallowed by the earth.)

The ultimate expedient of Laibach is its deft manipulation of transference: its public (especially intellectuals) is obsessed with the 'desire of the Other' – what is Laibach's actual position, is it really totalitarian or not? – i.e., they address Laibach with a question and expect from it an answer, failing to notice that Laibach itself *does not function as an answer but a question*. By means of the elusive character of its desire, of the undecidability as to 'where it actually stands', Laibach compels us to take up our own position and decide upon our desire. Laibach here actually accomplishes the reversal that defines the end of the psychoanalytic cure. At the outset of the cure is transference: the transferential relationship is put in force as soon as the analyst appears

in the guise of the 'subject supposed to know [*sujet supposé savoir*]' – the one who knows the truth about the analysand's desire. When, in the course of analysis, the analysand complains that he doesn't know what he wants, all this moaning and groaning is addressed to the analyst, with the implicit supposition that the analyst *does* know what he wants. In other words, insofar as the analyst stands for the Big Other, the analysand's illusion lies in the reduction of his ignorance to an 'epistemological' *incapacity*: the truth about his desire already exists, it is registered somewhere in the Big Other, one has only to bring it to light and his desiring will run smoothly. The end of psychoanalysis, the dissolution of transference, occurs when this 'epistemological' incapacity shifts into 'ontological' *impossibility*: the analysand has to experience the fact that the Big Other does not possess the truth about his desire as well, that his desire is without guarantee, groundless, authorized only in itself. In this precise sense, the dissolution of transference designates the moment when the arrow of the question that the analysand pointed at the analyst turns back towards the analysand himself: first, the analysand's (hysterical) question is addressed to the analyst supposed to possess the answer; then, the analysand is forced to acknowledge that the analyst himself is nothing but a big question mark addressed to the analysand. Here one can clarify Lacan's thesis that an analyst is authorized only by himself: an analysand becomes analyst upon assuming that his desire has no support in the Other, that the authorization of his desire can come only from himself. And insofar as this same reversal of the direction of the arrow defines drive, we could say (as Lacan does) that what takes place at the end of psychoanalysis is the shift from desire to drive.

Notes

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5
The fetish of the party

The totalitarian body

In his speech 'On the death of Lenin' in 1924, Stalin made the following pronouncement: 'We Communists are people of a special mould. We are made of a special stuff.'[1] Here we immediately recognize that the Lacanian name for this 'special stuff' is *objet petit a*. The weight of Stalin's sentence comes from the basic fetishist functioning of the Stalinist Party: that the Party functions as the miraculous immediate incarnation of an objective, neutral Knowledge, which in turn serves as a point of reference to legitimate the activity of the Party (the so-called 'knowledge of objective laws'). Similarly, Marx determines money in its relation to other commodities as a paradoxical element that immediately incarnates, through its very singularity, the generality of 'all', that is to say, as a 'singular reality, that includes in itself all the really existing species of the same thing':

> It is as if, next to and other than lions, tigers, hares, and all the other real animals that constitute in a group different races, species, sub-species, families, etc., of the animal kingdom, existed, furthermore, *the animal*, the individual incarnation of the animal kingdom.[2]

This is precisely the logic of the Party: it is as if, next to and other than classes, social strata, social groups and subgroups, and their economic, political and ideological organizations, that constitute in a group the different parts of the socio-historical universe ruled by the objectives of

The Fetish of the Party

Slavoj Zizek * *

The Totalitarian Body

At the beginning of the "Pledge of the Bolshevik Party to its Chief Lenin," Stalin says: "We are, us communists, people of a different making. We are cut in a different fabric" (History … 1971, p. 297). Here we immediately recognize the Lacanian name of this "different fabric:" the object small a . The weight of Stalin's sentence comes from the basic fetishist functioning of the Stalinist Party; it comes from the basis that the Party functions as the miracle of an immediate incarnation of an objective and neutral Knowledge that serves as a reference point to legitimate the activity of the Party (the so-called "knowledge of objective laws"). Marx determines money in its relation to other merchandises as a paradoxical element that immediately incarnates, in its very singularity, the generality of "all," that is to say, as a "singular reality, that includes in itself all the really existing species of the same thing":

It is as if, next to and other than lions, tigers, hares, and all the other real animals that constitute in a group different races, species, sub-species, families, etc, of the animal kingdom, existed, furthermore, the animal, the individual incarnation of the animal kingdom. (Dognin, 1977, p. 73)
This is the logic of the Party: it is as if, next to and other than classes, social strata, social groups and subgroups, and their economic, political, and ideological organizations, that constitute in a group the different parts of the sociohistorical universe ruled by the objectives of social development, existed, furthermore, the Party—the immediate and individual incarnation of these objective laws, the short circuit, the paradoxical crossing point between the subjective will and objective laws. Therefore, the "different fabric" of the communists is the "objective reason of history" incarnated. Since the fabric in which they are cut is, after all, their body, this body undergoes a true transsubstantiation; it becomes the carrier of another body, the sublime body. It is interesting to read the letters of Lenin to Maxim Gorki on the basis of the logic of the Communists' sublime body, especially those letters of 1913, related to the debate on the "Construction of God/bogobraditel'stvo/" of which Gorki was an advocate (Lenin, 1964). The first obvious thing is an apparently not-so-important trait, lacking theoretical weight. Lenin is literally obsessed by Gorki's health. Here are the ending of a few letters:
- "Please write to me about your health./ Yours, Lenin."
- "Are you in good health?/ Yours, Lenin."
- "Enough of this joking. Stay well. Send me word. Rest more./ Yours, Lenin."
When, in the fall of 1913, Lenin hears of Gorki's pulmonary illness, he writes to him immediately:
That a Bolshevist, old it is true, treats you by a new method, I must confess that it worries me terribly! God save us from doctor friends in general, and from Bolshevist doctors in particular! … I assure you that one must be treated only by the best specialists (unless for benign cases). It is horrible to experiment with the invention of a Bolshevik doctor on oneself! Unless under the supervision of professors from Naples (at this time, Gorki lived in Capri). If these professors are really knowledgeable. … I would even tell you that if you are leaving this winter, consult without fail the best doctors in Switzerland and in Vienna—You would be unforgivable if you fail to do it!
Let us leave aside the associations that a retroactive reading of these sentences of Lenin triggers (twenty years later, all of Russia experimented with the new methods of a certain Bolshevist). Rather, let us set the question of the field of meaning of Lenin's worry for Gorki's health. At first sight, the question is clear and quite innocent: Gorki was a valuable ally, thus worthy of care. But the following letter sheds a different light on the affair. Lenin is alarmed by Gorki's positive attitudes toward the "Construction of God" that should be, according to Gorki, only "postponed" and put aside for the moment but not at all rejected. Such attitudes are for Lenin incomprehensible, an extremely unpleasant surprise. Here are the beginning and the end of this letter:
Dear Alexis Maximovitch, /But what are you doing? Really, this is simply terrible!// Why are you doing this? It is terribly unfortunate./ Yours, V.I.
And here is the postscript:

Take care of yourself more seriously, really, so that you can travel in the winter without catching a cold (in the winter it is dangerous).

The true stakes are even more clearly observable at the end of the following letter, sent together with the preceding letter:

I enclose my letter from yesterday: do not hold it against me if I got carried away. Perhaps I did not understand you correctly? Perhaps you were joking in writing "for the moment?" Concerning the "construction of God," perhaps you were not serious?/ For heavens sake, take care of yourself a little better./ Yours, Lenin.

Here, it is stated in an explicit and formal manner that, in the last resort at least, Lenin takes Gorki's fluctuations and ideological confusion for an effect of his physical exhaustion and illness. Thus he does not take Gorki's arguments seriously. Finally, his response consists in saying: "Rest, take care of yourself a little better. …" The foundation of Lenin's procedure is not a vulgar materialism nor an immediate reduction of ideas to body movements. Quite the contrary, his presupposition and implication are precisely that a Communist is a man of a "different fabric." When the Communist speaks and acts as a Communist, it is the objective necessity of history itself that speaks and acts through him. In other words, the spirit of a true Communist cannot deviate, since this spirit is immediately the self-awareness of the historical necessity. Consequently, the only thing that can disturb or introduce disorder and deviation, is his body, this fragile materiality serving to support another body, the sublime body, "cut in a different fabric."

Phallus and Fetish

Can we also maintain the proposition of the fetishist character of the Party in the analytic use of this term? The fetish is, as we well know, the ersatz of the maternal phallus: it is a question of repudiation of castration. Thus, we should approach fetishism from the phallic signifier.

One side of the "meaning of the Phallus" was already developed by Saint Augustine. The phallic organ incarnates the revolt of the human body against mastery by man. The phallic organ is the divine punishment for the arrogance of man who wanted to be God's equal and become the master of the world. The phallus is the organ whose pulsation and erection mostly escape man, his will, and his power. All the parts of the human body are in principle at the disposal of man's will. Their unavailability is always "de facto," with the exception of the phallus, whose pulsation is unavailable "in principle." However, we must relate this aspect to another, indicated by this witticism: "Which is the lightest object in the world? The phallus, since it is the only thing that can be raised by the very thought of it."

That is the "Meaning of the Phallus:" the short-circuit where the "inside" and the "outside" intersect, the point where the pure exteriority of the body unavailable to the subjective will passes immediately into the interiority of the "pure thought." We could almost recall the Hegelian critique of the Kantian "chose en soi" where this transcendental "chose en soi," inaccessible to human thought, is revealed being only the interiority of pure thought with the abstraction of each objective content. Such is precisely the "contradiction" that could be described as the "phallic experience:" I can nothing (the Augustinian moment) although everything depends on me (the moment of the above mentioned witticism). The "Meaning of the Phallus" is the very pulsation between the EVERYTHING and the NOTHING. Potentially, it is "all meanings" or the very universality of meaning (in other words: "in the last instance, we only talk about this"), and for this reason the "Meaning of the Phallus" is effectively without any determined meaning; it is the signifier-without-signified. Naturally, this is one of the commonplaces of the Lacanian theory. As soon as we try to grasp "all" the signifiers of a structure, as soon as we try to "fill" its universality by its particular components, we must add a paradoxical signifier that does not have a particular-determined signified but that incarnates in a way "all meanings" or the very universality of this structure while at the same time, being "the signifier without signified." A passage from Class Struggle in France by Marx is of special interest to us here since it develops the logic of the phallic element precisely relative to the political party. It is a question of the role of the "party of order" during the revolutionary events in the middle of the nineteenth century:

The secret of its existence, the coalition in a party of the Orleanists and Legitimists … the anonymous kingdom of the republic was the only one under which the two fractions could maintain with equal power their common class interest without renouncing to their reciprocal rivalry. … If each of their fractions considered separately was royalist, the product of their chemical combination must necessarily be republican. (Marx, 1973, p. 58–59)

According to this logic, the republican is a species inside the genus of royalism. Within (the species of) this genus, the republican stands for the genus itself. This paradoxical element, the specific point where the universal genus falls on itself among its particular species, is this very phallic element. Its paradoxical place, the crossing point between the "outside" and the "inside," is crucial for grasping fetishism: it is precisely this place that is lost. In other words, the castrative dimension of the phallic element is repudiated with the fetish, the "nothing" that necessarily accompanies its "all," the radical heterogeneity of this element relative to the universality that it is meant to incarnate (the fact that the phallic signifier can bring the potential universality of meaning only as a signifier-without-signified, that we can be royalist in general only in the form of republicans). The fetish is the Sl that, by its position of exception, immediately incarnates its Universality, the Particular that is immediately "merged" with its Universal.

This is the logic of the Stalinist Party that appears as the immediate incarnation of the Universality of the Masses or the Working Class. The Stalinist Party would be, to speak in Marx's terms, something like royalism in general in the very form of royalism, which is also the fetishist illusion. In fetishism, the phallic element, the intersection of the two species ("Orleanists" and "Legitimists") is immediately set as All, "the general line," and the two species whose intersection it is, become two "deviations" (that of the "right" and that of the "left") of the "general line.

In the "short-circuit" between the Universal (the Masses, the Class) and the Particular (the Party), the relation between the Party and the Masses is not dialectized, such that if there is a conflict between the Party and the rest of the working class (as today in Poland), this does not mean that the Party is "alienated" from the working class but that, on the contrary, elements of the working class itself have become "strange" to their own Universality ("the true interests of the working class") incarnated in the party. It is because of this fetishist character of the Party that there is, for the Stalinist, no contradiction between the demand that the Party should be open to the Masses and merged with the Masses, and the Party in the position of Exception, the authoritarian Party, concentrating power in itself. Let us, for example, take up this passage from Questions of Leninism:

Speaking of the difficulties of stocking wheat, the communists generally put the responsibility on the peasants, pretending that the latter are guilty of everything. But this is completely wrong and absolutely unjust. The peasants have nothing to do with it. If it is a question of responsibility and guilt, the responsibility falls entirely on the communists, and the guilty ones in all of this are us and only us, the communists.

There is no power as strong, and never has been, with as great an authority as ours, as the power of the Soviets. There is no party as powerful, and never has been, with as great an authority as ours, as the Communist Party. Nobody is or can prevent us from leading the Kolkhoz as their interests require, the interests of the State. (Stalin, 1977, p. 659–60)

Here, the authoritarian character of the Party is directly accentuated. Stalin insists explicitly that all power, without any division, is in the hand of the Party and that people, the "ordinary" people, "have nothing to do with it," that they are neither responsible nor guilty. However, this exclusive and authoritarian power is set immediately as a truly democratic power, as an effective power of the people. From there a certain "naivety" of the "dissident" critiques follows. The Stalinist discursive field is organized in such a way that the critique misses its aim; one can guess in advance what the critique bothers to demonstrate (the authoritarian character of power, etc.) in giving to this fact another scope, in taking it precisely for the proof of the effective power of the people. In short, to speak in the usual way: the critique tries to attack the Stalinist at the level of facts within a presupposed common code that plays on the contradiction between effectiveness and ideological legitimation ("in principle, the USSR is supposed to be a democratic society, but effectively …"), while displacing in advance the conflict at the level of the code itself.

Here is the "impossible" position of the fetish: a singular that immediately "incarnates" the general, without signifying this with "castration." It is an element that occupies the position of metalanguage while being part of the "very-thing" itself; it is at the same time an "objective" gaze and an "involved party." In Bananas, Woody Allen's political comedy, there is a scene that perfectly illustrates this point. The protagonist, who is in a non-identified dictatorship in Central America, is invited to dinner by the ruling general, an invitation that is delivered to him in his hotel room. As soon as the messenger is gone, the protagonist throws himself on the bed in joy, turns his eyes toward celestial heights as the sound of harp is heard. As spectators, we perceive this

sound, of course, as a musical accompaniment and not as a real (quasi-) music present in the event itself. Suddenly, however, the protagonist sobers up, rises, opens the armoire and discovers a "typical" Latin American who plays the harp. The paradox of this scene is this passage from outside to inside: what we had perceived as "external" musical accompaniment is affirmed as "internal" to the (quasi) "reality" of the scene. The comical effect comes from the position of the impossible knowledge of the protagonist. He behaves as if he is in a position from where he could hear at the same time what is in the realm of cinematographic (quasi-) "reality" and its "external" musical accompaniment.

It is not surprising that we find this same "short-circuit" clue of the position of the fetish in the "totalitarian" discourse, and precisely where it is necessary to affirm at the same time the ideological "neutrality" and the "professional" character of the regions of "culture" (art, science), and their submission to the ruling "doctrine" and to the "people." Let us take up this passage of the famous letter of Joseph Goebbels to Wilhelm Furtwangler of 11 April 1933:

It is not sufficient that art be excellent, it should also present itself as the expression of the people. In other words, only an art that takes inspiration from the people can at the end be considered as excellent and mean something for the people it addresses.

Here is the pure form of the logic that is in question: it is not only excellent but also an expression of the people, since to tell the ruth , it can be excellent only in being an expression of the people. In replacing art by science, we obtain one of the topics of the Stalinist ideology: "scientificness alone does not suffice, we also need a just ideological orientation, a dialectic-materialistic vision of the world, since it is only through a just ideological orientation that we can achieve true scientific results."

The Stalinist Discourse

The fetishist functioning of the Party guarantees the position of a neutral knowledge, "décapitonné ," that of the agent of the Stalinist discourse. The Stalinist discourse is presented as a pure metalanguage, as the knowledge of "objective laws," applied "on" the "pure" object, S2, descriptive [constatif] discourse, objective knowledge. The very engagement of theory on the side of the proletariat, its ''hold over the party," is not "internal"—Marxism does not speak of the position of the proletariat; it "is oriented to" the proletariat from an external, neutral, "objective" position:

In 1889–90, the proletariat of Russia was a minute minority relative to the masses of individual peasants who formed the great majority of the population. But the proletariat was developing insofar as class, while the peasantry insofar as class was disintegrating. Since it was precisely the proletariat that was developing as a class, Marxists founded their actions on them. In this they were not mistaken, since we know that the proletariat, that was only a force of little importance, later became a first rate historical and political force. (History, 1871, p.121–122)

At the time of their struggle against the Populists, from where could Marxists speak to be mistaken in their choice of the proletariat? They could of course speak from an external place where the historic process extends as a field of objective forces, where one must "be careful of not being mistaken," and "be guided by just forces," those that will win. In short, one must "bet on the right horse." From this external position, we can approach the famous "theory of reflection:" one must ask the question of who occupies the "neutral-objective" position from where this "objective reality," reflected yet external to reflection can be judged, whence the reflection can be "compared" to the "objective reality" and judged if the reflection corresponds to it or not.

We have already touched the "secret" of the functioning of this "objective knowledge": this very point of "pure objectivity" to which the Stalinist discourse is related and by which it is legitimized (the "objective meaning" of facts) is already constituted by the performative. It is even the point of the pure performative, the tautology of pure self-reference. It is precisely there, at the point where, "in words," the discourse refers to a pure reality outside language, that "in (its own) act," it refers only to itself. Here, we could almost recall the Hegelian critique of the Kantian "chose en soi" where this transcending entity, independent of subjectivity, is revealed to be only the interiority of pure thought, abstraction made of each objective content. In classical terminology, the propositions of validity (just-unjust) take the form of propositions of being. When the Stalinist pronounces a judgment, he pretends to describe and "observe" the "objective" state. In short, in the Stalinist discourse the performative functions as the repressed truth of the descriptive

[constatif], as it is pushed "under the bar." Consequently, we could write the relation between S1 and S2 in the following manner: S2/S1. This means that the Stalinist discourse presents a neutral-objective knowledge as its agent, while the repressed truth of this knowledge remains S1, the performative of the master. This is the paradox where the Stalinist discourse finds the victim of the political process. If I insist on the descriptive [constatif] falsehood of the judgment of the party ("you are a traitor!"), in reality I act against the party and "effectively" break its unity. The only way to affirm my adherence to the party "by my acts," at the performative level, is, of course, to confess. What? Precisely my exclusion, the fact that I am a "traitor."

Then, what takes the place of the other? At first the answer appears rather easy. The other of the "objective knowledge" is obviously only a subjective knowledge, a knowledge that is only a seeming of knowledge like "metaphysics" and "idealism," relative to which the Stalinist "objective knowledge" ("different from metaphysics that …") is defined. The paradoxical nature of this opposing pole appears as soon as we look more closely at the Stalinist divisive procedure. We can read the four famous "Fundamental Traits of the Marxist Dialectic Method" in opposition to the traits of metaphysics as a process of differentiation, of disjunction, proceeding by a choice in four stages:

1. either we look at nature as an accidental accumulation of objects or we look at it as a unified, coherent all;
2. either we look at the unified All as a state of rest and immobility or we look at it as a process of development;
3. either we look at the process of development as a circular movement or we look at it as a development from the inferior to the superior;
4. either we look at the development from the inferior to the superior as a harmonious evolution or we look at it as a struggle of the opposites.

At first sight, we are dealing with a classical case of exhaustive disjunction: at each level, the genus is divided in two species. However, if we look at things more closely, we will immediately perceive the paradoxical character of this division. There is basically an implicit affirmation that all the variants of metaphysics are "by their essence," "objectively," "the same thing." We can verify this by reading the scheme "backward." The harmonic development, "by its essence," "objectively," is in no way a development from the inferior to the superior, but a pure and simple circular movement. The circular movement, "by its essence," is not at all a movement but a conservation of the state of immobility. This means that there is at the end only one choice: that between Dialectics and M etaphysics. In other words, the diagonal that separates dialectics from metaphysics is to be read as a vertical line. If we choose the harmonious evolution, we lose not only the struggle of the opposites but also the very common genus, the development from the inferior to the superior, since, "objectively," we fall in the circular movement.
This vertical reading of the diagonal unifies the "enemy." We can evade the fact that it is a question of a gradual differentiation. First it was Bukharin who, together with Stalin, got rid of Trotsky. The conflict with Bukharin emerged only later, in the same manner that it was first the circular movement that, in connection with the evolutive movement, was opposed to immobility and became its opposite only after the "expulsion" of immobility. With all these oppositions, we construct only one "Bukharin-Trotskiist plot." The "short-circuit" of such a "unification," is, of course, a particular perversion of the "primacy of synchrony over diachrony." We project backward the present distinction, the opposition that determines the present "concrete situation." Thus, the mplicit presupposition of official historians of East Germany is that it was West Germany that began the Second World War.
What is thus the "secret" of this process of division? The History of the Communist Party (b) characterizes the "monsters of the Bukharinist and Trotskiist gang" as "scraps of the human kind." This distinction is to be taken literally and must be applied to the very process of differentiation. In this process each genus has only one true and proper species; the other species is only a scrap of the genus, the nongenus under the appearance of a species of the genus. The development from the inferior to the superior has only one species, the struggle of the opposites; the harmonious evolution is only the scrap of this genus.

From there, unexpectedly we fall into the scheme of the division encountered in the process of the Hegelian dialectics: each genus has only one species, the other species is the paradoxical negative of the genus itself. Just as in the case of the "limit case" of the logic of the signifier, the All is divided into its Part and a remainder that is not nothing but a paradoxical, impossible, contradictory entity. Metaphysics pretends at the same time that (1) nature is an accidental accumulation and not an All and (2) nature as All is a state of immobility and not a movement. Unlike the Hegelian division, however, instead of including through its specification/determination, the genus excludes its own absence and "negativity." The development from the inferior to the superior as a concretization of the process of development "in general" is not a "synthesis" of initial abstract universality and its negation (of the "circular movement") but precisely the exclusion of the "circular movement" from the "process of development" in general. Through its specification, the genus is purified of its scraps. Far from "particularizing" it, the division "consolidates" the All as All. If from the All of the genus we subtract its scrap, we subtract nothing and the All remains All. The "development from the inferior to the superior" is no less "all" than the process of development "in general." From there we can grasp the logic of this apparently absurd formulation: "In its immense majority the party wholeheartedly rejected the platform of the bloc." The "immense majority" is equivalent to "wholeheartedly," the rest (the "minority") does not count. In other words, we are dealing with a fusion between the Universal and the Particular, between the genus and the species. This is, in reality, why one does not choose between Nothing and the Party. Each Particular is immediately fusioned with the Universal and we are thrown in this way toward the "ou bien ou bien absolu," between the Nothing and the All . Thus, the Stalinist disjunction is precisely the contrary of the habitual disjunction in two particulars where we can never "catch up with the turtle," (to be understood on the account of the movement of ennunciation itself), to divide in a part and a remainder that would not be nothing, that would come in the place of the ennunciation itself (this division functions as an inaccessible asymptotic point). In the Stalinist disjunction, the problem is rather to get out of "ou bien ou bien absolu:" the inaccessible is a division in particulars, a division where one of the terms would not evaporate in a "nothing" of pure seeming.

"Metaphysics" consequently functions as a paradoxical object that "is not nothing," an "irrational" surplus, a purely contradictory element, nonsymbolizable, that is the "other of oneself," a lack where "nothing is missing," precisely the object-cause of desire or the pure seeming that is always added to S2 and forces us in this manner to continue with the differentiation. Or, in terms of the order of classification and articulation of genuses and species, "metaphysics" functions as a "surplus" that disturbs the symmetrical articulation and as a paradoxical species that "does not want to be limited to being only a species" or the "unilaterally accentuated partial object" ("absolutization of a determined moment," as Lenin used to write). Thus, we can write the relation between the agent of the Stalinist discourse, the "objective knowledge," and its other in the following way: S2->a, the arrow indicating the repetitive differentiation by which knowledge tries to penetrate its "positive" object and grasp it in demarcating it from the "surplus" of the "metaphysical" seeming-object that always prevents the accomplishment of the "objective knowledge of reality." In other words, the object of the Stalinist discourse in the sense of "positive object" is of course the so-called "objective reality." It is, nevertheless, far from occupying the place of the object-cause of desire. The plus-de-jouir that "pushes forward" its process of differentiation is to be sought rather in the pure seeming of "metaphysics."

The Stalinist political process functions precisely as a hallucinatory "mise-en-scene" of this desire, which the Stalinist renounces and with which he refuses to be identified. The condemned (the "victim") is the one who acknowledges desire (his own desire and thereby, in accord with the hysteric's formula of desire, the desire of the Stalinist other). This function of "victim" in the Stalinist discourse is not at all comparable to the same function in the fascist discourse. For the fascist, the Jew is sacrificed as the object of desire. The logic of this sacrifice is: I love you but since unexplainably I love in you something more than you, the object a, I mutilate you. The Stalinist "traitor" is not at all in the position of the object of desire. The Stalinist is not at all in love with it. Rather, he is $, the desiring divided subject. This division indicates the very confession that is purely unthinkable in fascism.

In fascism, the "universal" medium is missing, the medium that the accuser and the guilty would have in common and by which we could "convince" the guilty of his or her fault. One of the

fundamental mechanisms of the Stalinist trials consisted in displacing the split between the neutral place of the "objective knowledge" and the hold of the particularity of the "scraps" over the victim. The victim is guilty and at the same time capable of reaching the "universal-objective" point of view, from which s/he can recognize his or her fault. This fundamental mechanism of "self-criticism" is unthinkable in fascism. In its pure form, we can find it in the self-accusations of Slansky and Rajk during the well known trials. To the question of how did he become a traitor, Slansky responds very clearly, in the style of a positivist observation or of a pure metalanguage, that it was because of his bourgeois milieu and education that he could never be part of the working class. This is the moment where the Stalinist discourse is the heir of the Lumières. They share the same presupposition of a universal and uniform reason that even the most abject Trotskiist scrap has the capacity of "comprehending" and from there confessing.

The Real of the "Class Struggle"

At this point, we can link all the moments we developed. The Stalinist discourse is presented as a neutral "objective knowledge," S2, whose other is a pure seeming of a "subjective" (metaphysical) knowledge. The reality of this neutral knowledge is the performative gesture of the master, S1, who addresses S, the hystericized-split subject of desire. This result is disenchanting as this is something known for a long time: the formulae of the discourse of the University. The Stalinist discourse is perhaps the purest form of the discourse of the University in the position of the master (a possibility already envisioned by A. Grosrichard). We can add a series of additional distinctions between fascism and Stalinism by examining, for example, The book of Fascism and The book of Stalinism. On the one hand, in My Combat, the immediate speech of the Master presents his vision "in person" with a quasi-"existential" passion; on the other, the History of the Communist Party, Abridged Course (b) is an anonymous "objective" summary whose "academic" character is already revealed by its subtitle. The latter book is not the immediate word of the Master but a commentary. On the other hand, the fascist discourse's medium par excellence is the living speech that hypnotizes by its very performative strength, without taking into account its signified content. To cite Hitler himself: "All great events that have shaken the world have been provoked by speech and not writing." In addition, the Stalinist discourse's medium par excellence is really the writing. The Stalinist is almost obliged to read his very discourses in a monotonous voice clearly attesting that we are dealing with the reproduction of a prior writing.

In the Lacanian theorization, the real has two principal sides. One is the real as a remainder impossible to symbolize, a scrap, a refuse of the symbolic, a hole in the Other, (it is really a question of the real side of the object a, the voice, the gaze) and the other is the real as writing, construct, number, and matheme.

These two sides precisely correspond to the opposition fascism/Stalinism. The hypnotic power of the fascist discourse is supported by the "gaze" and especially by the "voice" of the Chief. The support of the Stalinist discourse is in turn the writing. Which writing? We must consider the decisive difference between the "classical" texts and their "commentaries" and "applications." The impossible-real is the institution of the "classics of Marxism-Leninism" as the sacred-incensed Text, approachable only through the proper-just commentary that gives it its "meaning," and vice versa. It is precisely the reference to the nonsense of the "classical text" (the famous "citation") that "gives sense" to the commentary-application (to take up again the distinction between "sense" and "meaning": sense = meaning + nonsense).

We could prolong this ad infinitum but let us rather remain at a general level. In linking what we just said to the fact that the capitalist discourse is that of the Hysteric, we can read the scheme of the four discourses as providing a schema for three types of current political discourses: the capitalist discourse of the Hysteric, the attempt of its suppression by a return to the discourse of the Master in fascism, and the discourse of the University of the post-revolutionary society, that is to say, the Stalinist discourse.

As far as the idea that the capitalist discourse is the discourse of the Hysteric, we should add the proposition I have suggested elsewhere: it was Marx who discovered the symptom. What does hysterical-capitalism "produce" as its symptom? The proletariat, of course, as its "own gravedigger," the "irrational" element of the given totality, the "class whose very existence is the negation of the rationality of the existing order," S2, the place of a knowledge (the "class awareness") that later (after the revolution) will take the place of the agent. Lacan precisely links this to the Marxian discovery of the symptom: the existence of the proletariat as pure subjectivity,

freed of the particular links (of states, corporations, etc.) of the Middle Ages. We also recall the connection established by Lacan between plus-de-jouir and the Marxian surplus value. Capitalism, really the common ground of historical materialism, is different from preceding formations in that an internal condition of its reproduction is to surpass itself constantly, revolutionize the given state, and develop the productive forces. The reason should be sought in surplus value as a "driving goal" that pushes the mechanism of social reproduction. In short, in the place of the "truth" of the capitalist discourse we find the plus-de-jouir.

And the fourth moment, the analytic discourse? Is it really the destiny of the political field to wander between the three positions of the Master, who constitutes the new social contract (the "new harmony") of the Academic, who elaborates it in a system, and of the Hysteric, who produces its symptom? Should the void in the place of the fourth discourse be read as a mark of the very fact that we are at the political level? We are tempted to suggest some indications that go a different way.

Marx writes in a letter that The Capital must conclude with class struggle as the "dissolution of all this shit." It is of course precisely this dissolution that "does not stop from not being written," and that is lacking in the very text. The third book of The Capital is interrupted, as we know, at the beginning of the chapter on classes. In this manner, we could say that class struggle functions in a strict sense as the "object" of The Capital, that which precisely cannot become the "positive object of research" and that which necessarily falls outside and thus makes of the totality of the three books of The Capital a "not-all" totality. This "object" never arrives "at the end," as some "subjective expression of objective economic processes." Rather, it is an agent always at work at the very heart of the "positive content" of The Capital. All the categories of The Capital are already "colored" by class struggle, all "objective" determinations (labor value, the degree of surplus value, etc.) are already achieved "by struggling."

If we say that an aspect of class struggle is of the real, we are only reiterating the Lacanian formula of the impossibility of the sexual relation. "There is no class relation"; classes are not "classes" in the usual or logical-classificatory sense; there is no universal medium. The "struggle" (the relation that is precisely a nonrelation) between classes has a constitutive role for the very same classes. In other words, class struggle functions as this "real" because of which the socioideological discourse is never "all." Consequently, class struggle is not some "objective fact" but rather the name (one of the names) of the impossibility for a discourse to be "objective," to be at an objective distance and to tell "the truth on truth," the name of the fact that each word on class struggle falls into class struggle.

From this logic it follows that the Stalinist discourse dissimulates the essential dimension of class struggle. The "objective knowledge" is presented as a neutral discourse on society, stated from an excluded place, a place that is not in itself split or marked by the separating line of class struggle. That is why one could say that for the Stalinist discourse "all is politics," or "politics is all," which is different from the Maoist discourse where, for example, politics is inscribed on the "feminine" as "not-all." However, it is here that we must be most careful of the paradoxes of not-all. Precisely because "all is politics," the Stalinist discourse always needs exceptions , "neutral" foundations in which politics is invested from outside such as the innocence of technology, language as the neutral-universal tool at the disposition of all classes, and so forth. These traits are not at all indices of some "de-Stalinization" process but precisely the internal condition of Stalinist "totalitarianism."

Stalinism Versus Fascism

Class struggle today seems, of course, like something outmoded. However, the reasoning by which we reach this conclusion is very much homologous to that which leads us to affirm (in the era of the so-called "permissive sexual morals") the obsolescence of the object of psychoanalysis (the repression of sexual desire). During the "heroic" epoch of psychoanalysis, it was believed that the "unleashing of sexual taboos" would bring or at least contribute to a life without anxiety, without repression, a life full of free enjoyment. The experience of this so-called "sexual liberation" helps us rather to recognize the dimension proper to the constitutive law of desire, of a "crazy" law that inflicts jouissance. Likewise, at the "heroic" epoch of the labor movement, it was believed that with the abolition of private ownership, classes and their struggles would be abolished and that we would arrive at a new solidarity. The experience of so-called "Stalinism" helped us rather to recognize, in "real socialism, the realization of the very concept of class

struggle in its "distilled" form, no longer clouded by the difference between the "civil society" and the State.

Here again "real socialism" differs radically from fascism. Let us start with the latter: how can we link class struggle (insofar as the core of an "impossible" difference) to the fact that, in the fascist discourse, a is really the Jew? The answer is that the Jew functions as a fetish that masks class struggle and comes in its place. Fascism struggles against capitalism and liberalism, which are supposed to destroy and corrupt the harmony of the society as "all organic" where particular "states" have the function of "members," that is to say, where "each and everyone has his natural and determined place" (the "head" and the "hands"). Fascism thus tries to restore a harmonious relation between the classes in the framework of an organic all, and the Jew incarnates the moment that introduces a discord "from outside." The Jew is the surplus that "disturbs" the harmonious cooperation of the "head" and the "hands," of "capital" and "labor." The "Jew" suits this in multiple ways by his historical "connotations." He is there as a "condensation" of the "negative" traits of the two poles of the social scale. On the one hand, he incarnates the "exorbitant," nonharmonious behavior of the ruling class (the financier who "drains" his workers), and on the other, the "dirt" of the lower classes. Moreover, the Jew appears as the personification of the mercantile capital that is (according to the spontaneous ideological representation) the true place of exploitation and thereby reinforces the ideological fiction of capitalists and "honest" workers, of the "productive" classes exploited by the "Jewish" merchant. In brief, the "Jew," in playing the role of the "disturbing" element and introducing "from outside" the "surplus" of class struggle, is really the "positive" repudiation of class struggle and of "there is no class relation." It is for this reason that fascism, as distinct from socialism, is not a sui generis discourse, a global social contract, determining the whole social edifice. We could say that fascism, with its ideology of corporativism, of returning to the prebourgeois Master, causes in some way interference on the capitalist discourse without changing its fundamental nature, with the proof being precisely the figure of the Jew as enemy.

To grasp it, we should start from the decisive cut in the relation of domination that occurs with the passage from the prebourgeois society to the bourgeois society. In the prebourgeois order, the "civil society" is not liberated yet from the "organic" links, that is to say, we are dealing with "the immediate relations of domination and servitude" (Marx). The relation of the master to his subject is that of an "interpersonal" link, of a direct subjection, paternal concern on the part of the master and veneration on the part of the subject. With the advent of bourgeois society, this rich network of "affective" and "organic" relations between the master and his subjects is tattered. The subject frees himself from tutelage and stands as an autonomous and rational subject. Now, Marx's fundamental lesson is that the subject remains nevertheless subjected to a certain master, that the link to the master is only displaced. The fetishism of the "personal" Master is replaced by the fetishism of the merchandise. The will of the person of the Master is replaced by the anonymous power of the market or this famous "invisible hand" (A. Smith) that decides the destiny of individuals behind their back.

It is in this framework that we must place the fundamental stake of fascism. While preserving the fundamental relation of capitalism (that between "capital" and "labor"), fascism wants to abolish its "organic," anonymous, and savage character. That is to say, to make of it an "organic" relation of patriarchal domination between the "hand" and the "head," between the Chief and his "escort," and replace the anonymous "invisible hand" by the Will of the Master. Now, insofar as we stay in the fundamental framework of capitalism, this operation does not work. There is always a surplus of the "invisible hand" that contradicts the design of the Master. The only way of recognizing this surplus is (for the fascist whose "epistemic" field is that of the Master) to again "personalize" the "invisible hand" and imagine another Master, a hidden master who in reality pulls all the strings and whose clandestine activity is the true secret behind this anonymous "invisible hand" of the market, i.e., the Jew.

As to "socialism," it should be conceived as a paradox of the class society with only one class . This is the solution to the question of whether "real socialism" is a class society or not. The so-called "ruling bureaucracy" is not just the "new class"; it comes in the place of or stands for the ruling class. This must be taken literally and not in an evolutionist-teleological perspective (in a way that the "new class" already has some traits of the ruling class and the future will show that it will be consolidated as a ruling class). This "in the place of" is not at all to be seen as a mark of

an unfinished, half-way character. In "real socialism" the ruling bureaucracy is found in the place of the ruling class, which does not exist, holding its place empty. In other words, "real socialism" would be this paradoxical point where class difference really becomes differential. It is no longer a question of difference between the two "positive" entities but rather a difference between the "absent" class and the "present" class, between the lacking class (ruling) and the existing class (working). This lacking class can really be the working class itself insofar as it is opposed to actual "empirical" workers. In this manner, class difference coincides with the difference between the Universal (the working class) and the Particular (the empirical working class), with the ruling bureaucracy incarnating its own Universality facing the "empirical" working class. It is this split between The Class as Universal and its own particular-empirical existence that clarifies an apparent contradiction of the Stalinist text. History ends with a long quotation of Stalin against the "varnish of bureaucratism" that reveals for us the "secret of the invincibility of the Bolshevik direction:"

<http://emedia.netlibrary.com/nlreader/nlReader.dll?BookID=5181&FileName=tab.gif>
I think that the Bolsheviks remind us of Antaeus, the hero of the Greek mythology. Just as Antaeus, they are strong because they are attached to their mother, to the masses that gave them birth, fed them, and educated them. And as long as they stay attached to their mother and to the people, they have all the chances of remaining invincible. (History, 1971, p.402)
The same allusion to Antaeus is found at the beginning of Marx's 18th Brumaire as a metaphor of the class enemy in the face of proletarian revolutions that "knock their adversary to the ground only for the adversary to regain his strength so he can reemerge in front of them even bigger." We must read these lines in relation to the beginning of this famous "Pledge of the Bolshevik Party to its Chief Lenin who will live through centuries:" "We are, us Communists, people of a different making. We are cut in a different fabric." At first sight, these two passages seem to be contradictory: on the one hand, it is a question of fusion of Bolsheviks with "masses" as the source of their strength; on the other, they are "people of a different making." We can resolve this paradox (how does the privileged link with the masses separate them from other people, precisely from the masses?) if we take into account the above mentioned difference between the Class (the "working masses") as All and "masses" insofar as "not-all," i.e., an "empirical" collection. The Bolsheviks (the Party) are the only "empirical" representatives, the only "incarnation" of the "true" masses, of the Class as All. (1)
From there it is not difficult to determine the place of the "Party" in the economy of the Stalinist discourse. This "striking force of the working class," composed of "people of a different making" and at the same time intimately attached to their mother or the masses, really takes the place of the "maternal phallus," the fetish that rejects the real of class difference, of the "struggle," of the nonrelation between All of the class and its own not-all. While, in the fascist discourse, the role of the fetish is played by the Jew, or the enemy, the Stalinist fetish is the Party itself.
Although already in Lenin, we find this logic of the Party, the incarnation of the historic objectivity, the continuity between Leninism and Stalinism should not lead us to an immediate identification of their discursive positions. On the contrary, it is precisely on the basis of this continuity that we can highlight their difference, the decisive "step forward" relative to Leninism accomplished by Stalin. In Lenin, we already find the fundamental position of a neutral-objective knowledge and the "objectivation" of our "subjective intentions" that follows: "the important thing, is the objective meaning of your acts, regardless of your subjective intentions, sincere as they may be." The "objective meaning" is determined, of course, by the Leninist himself from his position of neutral-objective knowledge. Now, Stalin takes a step forward and again subjectifies this "objective meaning," projecting it on the subject himself as his secret desire: what your act objectively means, is what you in fact wanted. We can also deduce the different status of the political adversary: for Lenin, the adversary (of course, always the "internal enemy," the Menshevik, the "social revolutions of the left," the "opportunist," etc.) is, according to the rule, determined as the hysteric who has lost contact with reality, who, unable to be his own master, reacts emotionally when reasoning is required, who does not know what he is talking about, and who is all talk and no action. The elementary figures are Martov, Kamenev, and Zinoviev at the time of October, and Olga Spiridonovna (arrested after the missed coup attempt of the social revolutionaries of the left in the summer of 1918 when, at the Bolshoi Theater where the Constituent Assembly took place,

she played the role of the hystericized speaker and was later interned in a psychiatric hospital). The hidden truth of the Leninist is, of course, the fact that he, by his position as holder of the neutral-objective knowledge and a universal and uniform reason, produces the hysteric . This position of the "objective knowledge" implies that there is basically no dialogue, as it is impossible to have a discussion with someone who has the access to reality itself, with the one who incarnates historical objectivity. Any different position is, in advance, defined as a seeming, as a nothing, and the dialogue is replaced by pedagogy, by the patient work of persuasion (the elegy of Lenin's great art of persuasion is, it is well known, a common place of the Stalinist hagiography). In this climate of total blockage, the only possibility open to the one who thinks otherwise is the hysterical cry that announces a knowledge that escapes this universality. Now, with Stalin, we are done with the hysterical game: the Stalinist adversary, the "traitor," is not at all the one who "does not know what he is talking about" or "what he is doing," but on the contrary, it is precisely the one who, to use a Stalinist turn of phrase par excellence, "knows very well what he is doing." With the menace implied by this syntagm, a conspirator is the one who plots consciously, with intention. In other words, while Leninism remains a "normal" academic discourse (knowledge in the position of the agent produces as its result the barred-hystericized subject), Stalinism takes a step into "madness," the academic knowledge becomes that of the paranoid and the adversary becomes the intentioned and literally "divided" conspirator, the rubbish, the pure scrap, who has nevertheless access to neutral-objective knowledge whence he can recognize the importance of his act and confess. The Totalitarian Phantasm,

The Totalitarianism of the Phantasm

What is essential here is not to reduce this "psychotization" to a simple "excess" but to grasp it as an immanent possibility that brings out the truth of the fundamental position itself. This is already Marx's truth. This allows a new approach to the passage from "utopian" socialism to the so-called "scientific" socialism. Although Marx discovered the symptom and developed the logic of the social symptom (the moment when the fundamental blockage of the given social order emerges and when it seems to call on its own ''revolutionary" practical-dialectical dissolution), he underestimated the importance of the phantasm in the historical process, and the importance of inertia that does not dissolve due to its dialectization and whose exemplary intrusion would be what is called the "negative behavior of the masses," who appear to be "acting against their true interest" and let themselves get entangled in diverse forms of the "conservative revolution." The enigmatic character of such a phenomenon is to be sought in the simple jouissance that they imply through their actions: social theory tries to get rid of what is worrisome in this jouissance by designating it as the "delirium of the masses," its "mindlessness," its "regression," its "lack of conscience."

Where is the phantasm here? The phantasmatic scene aims at the realization of the sexual relation, blinding us with its fascinating presence, to the impossibility of the sexual relation. Similarly with the "social" phantasm, the phantasmatic construct supports an ideological field. We are always dealing with the phantasm of a class relation, with the utopia of a harmonious, organic, and complementary relation between diverse parts of the social totality. The elementary image of the "social" phantasm is that of a social body, with which one eludes the impossible, the "antagonism" around which the social field is structured. The anti-"liberal" ideologies of the right that serve as a foundation for the so-called "regressive behavior of the masses" are precisely distinguished by recourse to this organicist metaphoric. Their leitmotif is that of society as a body, an organic totality of members corrupted later by the intrusion of a liberalist atomism.

We already find this phantasmatic dimension in so-called "utopian" socialism. Lacan determines the illusion specific to Sade's perverse phantasm as "utopia of desire" (Lacan 1966, p. 775). In the sadist scene, the split between desire and jouissance is suppressed (an impossible operation insofar as desire is supported by the interdiction of jouissance, that is to say, insofar as desire is the structural other side of jouissance), and at the same time the gap that separates jouissance from pleasure is removed. By way of pain, or the "negative" of pleasure, an attempt is made at reaching jouissance in the very field of pleasure. The word "utopia" should also be taken in the political sense: the famous sadist "One more effort …" (in Philosophy in the Boudoir) should be placed along the same line as "utopian socialism," as one of its most radical variants since "utopian socialism" always implies a "utopia of desire." In the utopian project from Campanella to Fourier, we are always dealing with a regulated and finally dominated phantasm of enjoyment.

With the passage to "scientific socialism," Marx has foreclosed this phantasmatic dimension. We must give to the term "foreclosure" all the weight it has in Lacanian theory: that is to say, not only the repression but also the exclusion and the rejection of a moment outside the symbolic field. And whatever is foreclosed in the symbolic, we well know that it returns in the real, in our case, in the real socialism. Utopian, scientific, and real, socialism thus form a sort of triad. The utopian dimension, excluded by its "scientification," returns in the real, or in the "Utopia in Power," to borrow the well-justified title of a book on the Soviet Union. "Real socialism" is the price paid in the flesh for the mis-recognition of the phantasmatic dimension in scientific socialism.

To speak of the "social phantasm" seems nevertheless to imply a fundamental theoretical error insofar as a phantasm is basically nonuniversalizable. The social phantasm is particular, "pathological" in the Kantian sense, "personal" (the very foundation of the unity of the "person" insofar as it is distinguished from the subject and the signifier), the unique way that each of us tries to come to terms with the Thing, the impossible Jouissance. That is to say, the manner in which, with the help of an imaginary construct, we try to dissolve the primordial impasse in which parlêtre is situated, the impasse of the inconsistent Other, of the hole at the heart of the Other. The field of the Law, of rights and duties, on the contrary, is not only universalizable but universal in its very nature. It is the field of universal equality, of equalization effected by exchange in equivalent principal. According to this perspective, we could designate the object a, the plus-de-jouir as a surplus, and that is why the formula of the phantasm insofar as it is nonuniversalizable is written S‹›a, that is to say, the confrontation of the subject with this "impossible," nonexchangeable remainder. There you have the link between plus-de-jouir and surplus value as a surplus that contradicts the equal exchange between capitalism and the proletariat, a surplus that the capitalist appropriates in the framework of the equal exchange of capital for the labor force.

Now, there was no need to wait for Marx to experience the cul-de-sac of the equal exchange. In its effort to enlarge the bourgeois form of the egalitarian and universal law, does not Sade's heroism rely precisely on the universal exchange, on the rights and duties of man in the domain of jouissance? Its starting point is that the Revolution stopped midway, since in the domain of jouissance it continued to be a prisoner of patriarchal and theological prejudices, that is to say, the Revolution did not get to the end of its project of bourgeois emancipation. Now, as Lacan demonstrates in "Kant with Sade," the formulation of a universal norm, of a "categorical imperative" that would legislate the enjoyment necessarily fails and ends in an impasse. Thus, we cannot, according to the model of formal bourgeois rights, legislate the right to jouissance in the mode of "To each his phantasm!" or "Each has a right to his particular mode of enjoyment!" Sade's hypothetical universal law is reinstated by Lacan as a "I have the right to enjoy your body, someone may say to me, and this right I shall exercise without any limit stopping me in the caprice of (whatever) exactions I have the fancy to gratify" (Lacan, 1966, p. 768–69). Its impasse is glaring, the symmetry is false: to occupy in a consistent manner the position of the torturer is revealed impossible since each is in the final analysis a victim.

How can we, then, repudiate the reproach that speaking of a "social phantasm" is equivalent to an in adjecto contradiction? Far from being simply epistemological, far from indicating an error in the theoretical approach, this impasse defines the thing itself . The fundamental trait of the "totalitarian" social link, is it not precisely the loss of distance between the phantasm that gives the indicators of the enjoyment of the subject and the formal-universal Law that rules the social exchange? The phantasm is "socialized" in an immediate manner as the social Law coincides with the injunction "Enjoy!" It starts to function as a superego imperative. In other words, in totalitarianism, it is really the fantasy (phantasm) that is in power and this is what distinguishes the stricto sensu totalitarianism (Germany in 1938–45, the Soviet Union in 1934–51, Italy in 1943–45) from the patriarchal-authoritarian regimes of law-and-order (Salazar, Franco, Bolfuss, Mussolini until 1943) or from the real "normalized" socialism. Such a "pure" totalitarianism is necessarily self-destructive; it cannot be stabilized; it cannot arrive at a minimum of homeostasis that would allow it to reproduce in a circuit of equilibrium. It is constantly shaken by convulsions. An imminent logic pushes it to violence directed at the external (Naziism) or internal (the Stalinist purges) "enemy." The theme of the post-Stalinist "normalization" in the USSR was for good reason that of the "return to the socialist legality." The only way out of the vicious circle of the purges was perceived to be the reaffirmation of a Law supposed to introduce a minimal distance

toward a phantasm, of a symbolic-formal system of rules that would not be immediately impregnated with jouissance.

This is why we can determine totalitarianism also as the social order where, although there is no law (no positive legality with universal validity, established in an explicit form), all that we do can at any moment pass for an illegal and forbidden thing. The positive legislation does not exist (or if it does, it has a totally arbitrary and nonobligatory character), but despite this we can at any moment find ourselves in the position of the infractor of an unknown and nonexistent Law. If the paradox of the Interdiction that founds the social order consists in forbidding something already impossible, totalitarianism reverses this paradox in putting us in the no less paradoxical position of the infractor who transgresses a non-existent law. In the law-less state, although the law does not exist, we can nevertheless transgress against it, which is the supreme proof that, as Lacan emphasizes in Seminar II , the famous proposition of Dostoevski should be turned around: if God (the positive legality) does not exist, everything is forbidden (Lacan, 1978, p. 156).

From there the difference between the fascist chief and the Stalinist chief is also explained. Let us start from the duality of power developed by A. Grosrichard: despot/vizier corresponds approximately to the Hegelian duality monarch/ministerial power. This means that despotism is not at all the phantasm of the "totalitarian" power, which is defined precisely by a "short-circuit" in the relation despot/vizier. If the fascist master wants to rule in his own name, if he does not want to part with the "effective" power but wants to be "his own vizier" (at least in the domain of war as the only domain worthy of the master), he discovers that the impossibility of the operation of integrating the "effective" knowledge, S2, provokes the phantasmatic transposition of this knowledge in the "Jews," who "hold effectively all the lines." The Stalinist chief is by contrast the paradox of the vizier without the despot-master . He acts in the name of the working class itself and constitutes it as a master opposed to the "empirical" class (cf. Grosrichard, 1979).

Note

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6

Georg Lukács as the philosopher of Leninism

Georg Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) is one of the few authentic events in the history of Marxism.[1] Today, we cannot but experience the book as a strange remainder from a bygone era – it is difficult even to imagine properly the traumatic impact its appearance had on generations of Marxists, including the later Lukács himself who, in his Thermidorian phase, i.e., from the early 1930s onwards, desperately tried to distance himself from it, to confine it to a document of merely historical interest, and conceded to its reprint only in 1967, accompanied by a new, long, self-critical introduction. Until this 'official' reprint, the book led the kind of underground spectral existence of an 'undead' entity, circulating in pirated editions among German students in the 1960s, available in some rare translations (like the legendary French one from 1959). In my own country, the now defunct Yugoslavia, reference to *History and Class Consciousness* served as the ritualistic *signe de reconnaissance* of the entire critical Marxist circle around the journal *Praxis* – its attack on Engels' notion of the 'dialectics of nature' was crucial for the critical rejection of the 'reflection' theory of knowledge as the central tenet of 'dialectical materialism'. This impact was far from confined to Marxist circles: even Heidegger was obviously affected by *History and Class Consciousness*, since there are a couple of unmistakable hints at it in *Being and Time* – for instance, in the very last paragraph, Heidegger, in an obvious reaction to Lukács' critique of 'reification', asks the question: 'We have long known that ancient ontology deals with "reified concepts" and that the danger exists of "reifying consciousness." But what does reifying [*Verdinglichung*] mean? Where does it arise from? ... Is the "distinction" between "consciousness" and "thing" sufficient at all for a primordial unfolding of the ontological problematic?'[2]

I

So how did *History and Class Consciousness* attain this cult status of a quasi-mythical forbidden book, comparable, perhaps, only to the no less traumatic impact of *For Marx*, written by Louis Althusser, Lukács' later great anti-Hegelian antipode? The answer that first comes to one's mind, of course, is that we are dealing with the founding text of the entire tradition of Western Hegelian Marxism, with a book that combines an engaged revolutionary stance with topics that were later developed by the different strands of so-called critical theory up to cultural studies today (the notion of 'commodity fetishism' as the structural feature of the entire social life, of 'reification' and 'instrumental reason', and so on). However, on a closer look, things appear in a slightly different light: there is a radical break between *History and Class Consciousness* – more precisely, between Lukács' writings from circa 1915 to circa 1930, inclusive of his *Lenin* from 1924, a series of his other short texts from this period not included in *History and Class Consciousness* and published in the 1960s under the title *Tactics and Ethics*, as well as the manuscript of *Tailism and the Dialectic* [*Chvostismus and Dialektik*], Lukács' answer to his Comintern critics[3] – and the later tradition of Western Marxism. The paradox (from our Western 'post-political' perspective) of *History and Class Consciousness* is that we have a philosophically extremely sophisticated book, one that can compete with the highest achievements of the non-Marxist thought of its period, and yet a book that is thoroughly engaged in the ongoing political struggle, a reflection of the author's own radically Leninist political experience (among other things, Lukács was a minister of cultural affairs in the short-lived Hungarian Communist government of Bela Kun in 1919).[4] The paradox is thus that, with regard to 'standard' Frankfurt School Western Marxism, *History and Class Consciousness* is at the same time much more openly politically engaged *and* philosophically much more speculative-Hegelian in character (see the notion of proletariat as the subject-object of history, a notion towards which members of the Frankfurt School always retained an uneasy distance) – if there ever was a philosopher of Leninism, of the Leninist party, it is the early Marxist Lukács who went to the very limit in this direction, up to defending the 'undemocratic' features of the first year of the Soviet power against Rosa Luxemburg's famous criticism, accusing her of 'fetishizing' formal democracy, instead of treating it as one of the possible strategies to be endorsed or rejected with regard to

the demands of a concrete revolutionary situation.[5] And what one should avoid today is precisely the temptation to obliterate this aspect, thereby reducing Lukács to a gentrified and depoliticized cultural critic, warning about 'reification' and 'instrumental reason', motifs long ago appropriated even by the conservative critics of 'consumer society'.

So, precisely as the originating text of Western Marxism, *History and Class Consciousness* occupies the position of an exception, confirming yet again Schelling's notion that 'the beginning is the negation of that which begins with it'.[6] In what is this exceptional state grounded? In the mid-1920s, what Alain Badiou calls the 'Event of 1917' began to exhaust its potential, and the process took a Thermidorian turn.[7] This term is to be conceived of not only in the usual Trotskyist way (the betrayal of the revolution by a new bureaucratic class), but also in the strict sense elaborated by Badiou: as the cessation of the Event, as the betrayal not of a certain social group and/or their interests, but of the fidelity to the (revolutionary) Event itself. From the Thermidorian perspective, the Event and its consequences became unreadable, 'irrational', dismissed as a bad dream of the collective plunge into madness – 'we were all caught in a strange destructive vortex ...'

What then happened with the saturation of what Badiou calls the 'revolutionary sequence of 1917' is that a direct theoretico-political engagement like that of Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness* became impossible. The socialist movement definitively split into social-democratic parliamentary reformism and the new Stalinist orthodoxy, while Western Marxism, which abstained from openly endorsing either of these two poles, abandoned the stance of direct political engagement and turned into a part of the established academic machine whose tradition runs from the early Frankfurt School up to cultural studies today – therein resides the key difference that separates it from the Lukács of the 1920s. On the other hand, Soviet philosophy gradually assumed the form of 'dialectical materialism' as the legitimizing ideology of 'Really Existing Socialism' – one of the signs of the gradual rise of Thermidorian Soviet orthodoxy in philosophy is precisely the series of vicious attacks on Lukács and his theoretical colleague Karl Korsch, whose *Marxism and Philosophy* is a kind of companion piece to *History and Class Consciousness*, even to the extent of being published in the same year (1923).[8] The watershed for this development was the Fifth Congress of the Comintern in 1924, the first congress after Lenin's death, and simultaneously the first after it became clear that the era of revolutionary agitation in

Europe was over and that socialism would have to survive in Russia on its own.[9] In his famous intervention at this Congress, Zinoviev afforded himself a rabble-rousing anti-intellectualist attack on the 'ultra-leftist' deviations of Lukács, Korsch and other 'professors', as he contemptuously referred to them, supporting Lukács' Hungarian Party companion László Rudas in the latter's critical rejection of Lukács' 'revisionism'. Afterwards, the main criticism of Lukács and Korsch originated in Abram Deborin and his philosophical school, at that time predominant in the Soviet Union (although later purged as 'idealist Hegelian'), who were the first systematically to develop the notion of Marxist philosophy as a universal dialectical method, elaborating general laws which can then be applied either to natural or to social phenomena – Marxist dialectics was thus deprived of its directly engaged, practical-revolutionary attitude, and turned into a general epistemological theory dealing with the universal laws of scientific knowledge.

As was noted already by Korsch in the aftermath of these debates, their crucial feature was that critiques from the Comintern and those from the 'revisionist' social-democratic circles, officially sworn enemies, basically repeated the *same* counter-arguments, being disturbed by the same theses in Lukács and Korsch, denouncing their 'subjectivism' (the practical-engaged character of Marxist theory, and so on). Such a position was no longer admissible at a time when Marxism was changing into a state ideology whose ultimate *raison d'être* was to provide the after-the-fact legitimation for the pragmatic political party decisions in the ahistorical ('universal') laws of dialectics. Symptomatic here was the sudden rehabilitation of the notion that dialectical materialism was the 'world-view [*Weltanschauung*] of the working class': for Lukács and Korsch, as well as for Marx, a 'world-view' by definition designates the 'contemplative' stance of ideology with which Marxist revolutionary engaged theory has to break.

Evert Van der Zweerde developed in detail the ideological functioning of the Soviet philosophy of dialectical materialism as the 'scientific world-view of the working class':[10] although it was a self-proclaimed ideology, the catch is that it was not the ideology it claimed to be – it did not motivate, but rather legitimated political acts; it was not to be believed in, but ritualistically enacted; the point of its claim to be 'scientific ideology' and thus the 'correct reflection' of social circumstances was to preclude the possibility that there could still be in Soviet society a 'normal' ideology which 'reflected' social reality in a 'wrong' way; and so on.

We thus totally miss the point if we treat the infamous 'diamat' as a genuine philosophical system: it was an instrument of power legitimation to be enacted ritualistically and, as such, to be located in the context of the thick cobweb of power relations. Emblematic here are the different fates of I. Ilyenkov and P. Losev, two prototypes of Russian philosophy under socialism. Losev was the author of the last book published in the Soviet Union (in 1929) that openly rejected Marxism (discarding dialectical materialism as 'obvious nonsense'); however, after a short prison term, he was allowed to pursue his academic career and, during the Second World War, even started lecturing again – the 'formula' of his survival was that he withdrew into the history of philosophy (aesthetics) as a specialist scientific discipline, focusing on ancient Greek and Roman authors. Under the guise of reporting on and interpreting past thinkers, especially Plotinus and other neo-Platonists, he was thus able to smuggle in his own spiritualist mystical theses while, in the introductions to his books, paying lip service to the official ideology by a quote or two from Khrushchev or Brezhnev. In this way, Losev survived all of the vicissitudes of socialism and lived to see the end of Communism, hailed as the grand old man of the authentic Russian spiritual heritage! In contrast to Losev, the problem with Ilyenkov, a superb dialectician and expert on Hegel, was that he was the eerie figure of a sincere Marxist–Leninist; for that reason (i.e., because he wrote in a personally engaging way, endeavouring to elaborate Marxism as a serious philosophy, not merely as a legitimizing set of ritualistic formulae), he was gradually excommunicated and finally driven to suicide – was there ever a better lesson on how an ideology effectively functions?[11]

In the gesture of a personal Thermidor, Lukács himself, in the early 1930s, withdrew and turned to the more specialized areas of Marxist aesthetics and literary theory, justifying his public support of Stalinist politics in the terms of the Hegelian critique of the Beautiful Soul: the Soviet Union, including all its unexpected hardships, was the outcome of the October Revolution, so, instead of condemning it from the comfortable position of the Beautiful Soul keeping its hands clean, one should bravely 'recognize the heart in the cross of the present' – Adorno was fully justified in sarcastically designating this Lukács as someone who misread the clatter of his chains for the triumphant march forward of World Spirit, and, consequently, endorsed the 'extorted reconciliation' between the individual and society in the East European Communist countries.[12]

II

This fate of Lukács nonetheless confronts us with the difficult problem of the emergence of Stalinism: it is too easy to contrast the authentic revolutionary *élan* of the 'Event of 1917' with its later Stalinist Thermidor – the true problem is 'how did we get from there to here?' As Alain Badiou has emphasized, the great task today is to think the necessity of the passage from Leninism to Stalinism without denying the tremendous emancipatory potential of the Event of October, i.e., without falling into the old liberal babble of the 'totalitarian' potential of radical emancipatory politics, on account of which every revolution must end up in a repression worse than that of the old overthrown social order. The challenge to be faced here is the following one: while conceding that the rise of Stalinism was the inherent result of the Leninist revolutionary logic (not the result of some particular external corruptive influence, like the 'Russian backwardness' or the 'Asiatic' ideological stance of its masses), one should nonetheless stick to a concrete analysis of the logic of the political process and, at any price, avoid recourse to some immediate quasi-anthropological or philosophical general notion like 'instrumental reason'. The moment we endorse this gesture, Stalinism loses its specificity, its specific political dynamic, and turns into just another example of this general notion (the gesture exemplified by Heidegger's famous remark, from his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, that, from the epochal historical view, Russian communism and Americanism are 'metaphysically the same'[13]).

Within Western Marxism, it was, of course, Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, as well as Horkheimer's later numerous essays on the 'critique of instrumental reason', that accomplished this fateful shift from concrete socio-political analysis to philosophico-anthropological generalization, the shift by means of which the reifying 'instrumental reason' is no longer grounded in concrete capitalist social relations, but itself almost imperceptibly becomes their quasi-transcendental 'principle' or 'foundation'.[14] Strictly correlative to this shift is the almost total absence of theoretical confrontation with Stalinism in the Frankfurt School, in clear contrast to its permanent obsession with fascist anti-Semitism. The very exceptions to this rule are telling: Franz Neumann's *Behemoth*,[15] a study of National Socialism which, in the typical fashionable style of the late 1930s and early 1940s, suggested that the three great world systems – the emerging New Deal capitalism,

fascism and Stalinism – tend towards the same bureaucratic, globally organized, 'administered' society; Herbert Marcuse's *Soviet Marxism*,[16] his least passionate and arguably worst book, a strangely neutral analysis of the Soviet ideology with no clear commitments; and, finally, attempts by some Habermasians who, reflecting upon the emerging dissident phenomenon, have endeavoured to elaborate the notion of civil society as a site of resistance to the Communist régime – a position that is interesting politically, but far from offering a satisfactory global theory of the specificity of Stalinist 'totalitarianism'. The standard excuse – that authors in the Frankfurt School did not want to oppose Communism too openly because, in so doing, they would play into the hands of their domestic Cold Warriors – is obviously insufficient: the point is not that this fear of being placed in the service of official anti-Communism proves how they were secretly pro-Communist, but rather the opposite: if they were *really* cornered as to where they stood with respect to the Cold War, they would have chosen Western liberal democracy (as Max Horkheimer explicitly did in some of his late writings). It was *this* ultimate solidarity with the Western system when it was really threatened that they were somehow ashamed to acknowledge publicly, in clear symmetry to the stance of the 'critical democratic socialist opposition' in the German Democratic Republic, whose members criticized Party rule, but, the moment the situation became really serious and the socialist system was threatened, publicly supported the system (Brecht apropos of East Berlin workers' demonstrations in 1953, and Christa Wolf apropos of the Prague Spring in 1968). 'Stalinism' (that is, Really Existing Socialism) was thus, for the Frankfurt School, a traumatic topic apropos of which it *had* to remain silent – this silence was the only way for them to retain the inconsistency of their position of underlying solidarity with Western liberal democracy, without losing their official guise of 'radical' leftist critique. Openly acknowledging this solidarity would have deprived them of their 'radical' aura, changing them into yet another version of Cold War anti-Communist leftist liberals, while showing too much sympathy for Really Existing Socialism would have forced them to betray their unacknowledged basic commitment.

It is difficult not to be surprised by the unconvincing, 'flat' character of the standard anti-Communist accounts of Stalinism with their references to the 'totalitarian' character of radical emancipatory politics, and so on – today, more than ever, one should insist that only a Marxist dialectical-materialist account can effectively explain the rise of

Stalinism. While, of course, this task is far beyond the scope of the present essay, one is tempted to risk a brief preliminary remark. Every Marxist recalls Lenin's claim, from his *Philosophical Notebooks*, that no one who has not read and studied in detail Hegel's entire *Science of Logic* can really understand Marx's *Capital* – along the same lines, one is tempted to claim that no one who has not read and studied in detail the chapters on judgement and syllogism from Hegel's *Logic* can grasp the emergence of Stalinism. That is to say, the logic of this emergence can perhaps best be grasped as the succession of the three forms of syllogistic mediation, which vaguely fit the triad of Marxism–Leninism–Stalinism. The three mediated terms (Universal, Particular and Singular) are History (the global historical movement), the proletariat (the particular class with a privileged relationship to the Universal) and the Communist Party (the singular agent). In the first, classical Marxist form of their mediation, the Party mediates between History and proletariat: its action enables the 'empirical' working class to become aware of its historical mission inscribed into its very social position and to act accordingly, i.e., to become a revolutionary subject. The accent is here on the 'spontaneous' revolutionary stance of the proletariat: the Party only acts in a maieutic role, rendering possible the purely formal conversion of the proletariat from Class-in-Itself to Class-for-Itself.

However, as always in Hegel, the 'truth' of this mediation is that, in the course of its movement, its starting point, the presupposed identity, is falsified. In the first form, this presupposed identity is that between proletariat and History, i.e., the notion that the revolutionary mission of universal liberation is inscribed in the very objective social condition of the proletariat as the 'universal class', the class whose true particular interests overlap with the universal interests of humanity – the third term, the Party, is merely the operator of the actualization of this universal potential of the particular. What becomes palpable in the course of this mediation is that the proletariat can 'spontaneously' achieve only trade-unionist reformist awareness, so we come to the (supposedly) Leninist conclusion: the constitution of the revolutionary subject is possible only when (those who will become) Party intellectuals gain insight into the inner logic of the historical process and accordingly 'educate' the proletariat.[17] In this second form, the proletariat is thus diminished to the role of the mediator between History (global historical process) and the scientific knowledge about it embodied in the Party: after gaining insight into the logic of historical process, the Party

'educates' workers into being the willing instrument of the realization of the historical goal. The presupposed identity in this second form is that between Universal and Singular, between History and the Party, i.e., the notion that the Party as the 'collective intellectual' possesses effective knowledge of the historical process. This presupposition is best rendered by the overlapping of the 'subjective' and the 'objective' aspects: the notion of History as an objective process determined by necessary laws is strictly correlative to the notion of Party intellectuals as the Subject whose privileged knowledge of, and insight into, this process allows it to intervene and direct it. And, as one might expect, it is this presupposition that is falsified in the course of the second mediation, bringing us to the third, 'Stalinist', form of mediation, the 'truth' of the entire movement, in which the Universal (History itself) mediates between the proletariat and the Party: to put it in somewhat simplistic terms, the Party merely uses the reference to History – that is, its doctrine, 'dialectical and historical materialism', embodying its privileged access to the 'inexorable necessity of historical progress' – in order to legitimate its actual domination over and exploitation of the working class, that is, to provide opportunistic pragmatic Party decisions with a kind of 'ontological cover'.[18]

To put it in the terms of the speculative coincidence of the opposites, or of the 'infinite judgement' in which the highest coincides with the lowest, the fact that Soviet workers were awakened early in the morning by music from loudspeakers playing the first chords of the *Internationale*, whose words are, 'Arise, you prisoners of work!', is granted a deeper ironic meaning: the ultimate 'truth' of the pathetic original meaning of these words ('Resist, break the chains that constrain you and reach for freedom!') turns out to be its literal meaning, the call to tired workers, 'Get up, slaves, and start working for us, the Party *nomenklatura*!'

III

So, back to the triple syllogistic mediation of History, the proletariat and the Party: if each form of mediation is the 'truth' of the preceding one (the Party that instrumentalizes the working class as the means to realize its goal, founded on insight into the logic of historical progress, is the 'truth' of the notion that the Party merely enables the proletariat to become aware of its historical mission, that it only enables it to discover

its 'true interest'; the Party ruthlessly exploiting working classes is the 'truth' of the notion that the Party just realizes through them its profound insight into the logic of History), does this mean that this movement is inexorable, that we are dealing with an iron logic on account of which, the moment we endorse the starting point – the premise that the proletariat is, as to its social position, potentially the 'universal class' – we are caught, with a diabolic compulsion, in a process that ends with the gulag? If this were the case, *History and Class Consciousness*, in spite of (or, rather, on account of) its intellectual brilliance, would be the founding text of Stalinism, and the standard postmodernist dismissal of this book as the ultimate manifestation of Hegelian essentialism, as well as Althusser's identification of Hegelianism as the secret philosophical core of Stalinism – the teleological necessity of the progress of History towards the proletarian revolution as its great turning point, in which the proletariat, as the historical Subject-Object, the 'universal class' enlightened by the Party about the mission inscribed into its very objective social position, accomplishes the self-transparent act of liberation – would be fully justified. The violent reaction of the partisans of 'dialectical materialism' against *History and Class Consciousness* would again be an example of Lucien Goldmann's rule of the way that the ruling ideology must necessarily disavow its true fundamental premises: in this perspective, the Lukácsian megalomaniac Hegelian notion of the Leninist Party as the embodiment of the historical Spirit, as the 'collective intellectual' of the proletariat *qua* absolute Subject-Object of History, would be the hidden 'truth' of the apparently more modest 'objectivist' Stalinist account of revolutionary activity as grounded in a global ontological process dominated by universal dialectical laws. And, of course, it would be easy to play against this Hegelian notion of Subject-Object the basic deconstructionist premise that the subject emerges precisely in/as the *gap* in Substance (objective Order of Things), that there is subjectivity only in so far as there is a 'crack in the edifice of Being', only in so far as the universe is in a way 'derailed', 'out of joint', in short, that not only does the full actualization of the subject always fail, but that what Lukács would have dismissed as a 'defective' mode of subjectivity, as a thwarted subject, is effectively the subject itself.

The Stalinist 'objectivist' account would thus also be the 'truth' of *History and Class Consciousness* for strictly inherent philosophical reasons: since the subject is failed by definition, its full actualization as the Subject-Object of History necessarily entails its self-cancellation, its

self-objectivization as the instrument of History. And, furthermore, it would be easy to assert, against this Hegelian–Stalinist deadlock, the Laclauian postmodern assertion of radical contingency as the very terrain of (political) subjectivity: political universals are 'empty', the link between them and the particular content that hegemonizes them is what is at stake in an ideological struggle, which is thoroughly contingent; in other words, no political subject has its universal mission written into its 'objective' social condition.

Is, however, this actually the case with *History and Class Consciousness*? Can Lukács be dismissed as the advocate of such a pseudo-Hegelian assertion of the proletariat as the absolute Subject-Object of History? Let us return to the concrete political background of *History and Class Consciousness*, in which Lukács continues to speak as a fully engaged revolutionary. To put it in somewhat rough and simplified terms, the choice, for the revolutionary forces in the Russia of 1917, in the difficult situation in which the bourgeoisie was not able to bring to fruition the democratic revolution, was the following one.

On the one hand, the Menshevik stance was that of obedience to the logic of the 'objective stages of development': first the democratic revolution, then the proletarian revolution. In the whirlpool of 1917, instead of capitalizing on the gradual disintegration of state apparatuses and building on the widespread popular discontent and resistance against the provisional government, all radical parties must resist the temptation to push the movement too far and rather join forces with democratic bourgeois elements in order first to achieve the democratic revolution, waiting patiently for the 'mature' revolutionary situation. From this point, a socialist take-over in 1917, when the situation was not yet 'ripe', would trigger a regression to primitive terror. (Although this fear of the catastrophic terrorist consequences of a 'premature' uprising may seem to augur the shadow of Stalinism, the ideology of Stalinism effectively marks a *return* to this 'objectivist' logic of the necessary stages of development.)[19]

On the other hand, the Leninist stance was to take a leap, throwing oneself into the paradox of the situation, seizing the opportunity and intervening, even if the situation was 'premature', with a wager that this very 'premature' intervention would radically change the 'objective' relationship of forces itself, within which the initial situation appeared as 'premature', that is, that it would undermine the very standards with reference to which the situation was judged as 'premature'.

Here, one must be careful not to miss the point: it is not that, in contrast to Mensheviks and sceptics among the Bolsheviks themselves, Lenin thought that the complex situation of 1917 – that is, the growing dissatisfaction of the broad masses with the irresolute politics of the provisional government – offered a unique chance of 'jumping over' one phase (the democratic bourgeois revolution), of 'condensing' the two necessary consecutive stages (democratic bourgeois revolution and proletarian revolution) into one. Such a notion still accepts the fundamental underlying objectivist 'reified' logic of 'necessary stages of development'; it merely allows for the different rhythm of its course in different concrete circumstances (in other words, that in some countries, the second stage can immediately follow the first one). In contrast to this, Lenin's point is much stronger: ultimately, there is no objective logic of 'necessary stages of development', since 'complications' arising from the intricate texture of concrete situations and/or from the unanticipated results of 'subjective' interventions always derail the straight course of things. As Lenin was keen on observing, the fact of colonialism and of the super-exploited masses in Asia, Africa and Latin America radically affects and 'displaces' the 'straight' class struggle in developed capitalist countries – to speak about 'class struggle' without taking into account colonialism is an empty abstraction which, translated into practical politics, can result only in condoning the 'civilizing' role of colonialism and thus, by subordinating the anti-colonialist struggle of the Asian masses to the 'true' class struggle in developed Western states, *de facto* accepts that the bourgeoisie defines the terms of class struggle.[20] One is tempted to resort here to Lacanian terms: what is at stake in this alternative is the (in)existence of the 'big Other': the Mensheviks relied on the all-embracing foundation of the positive logic of historical development, while the Bolsheviks (Lenin, at least) were aware that 'the big Other doesn't exist' – a political intervention proper does not occur within the coordinates of some underlying global matrix, since what it achieves is precisely the 'reshuffling' of this very global matrix.

This, then, is the reason for Lukács' high admiration for Lenin: his Lenin was the one who, apropos of the split in Russian social democracy between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, when the two factions fought over the precise formulation of who could be a Party member as defined by the Party Programme, wrote: 'Sometimes, the fate of the entire working-class movement for long years to come can be decided by a word or two

in the party programme.' Or the Lenin who, when he saw the chance for the revolutionary take-over in late 1917, said: 'History will never forgive us if we miss this opportunity!' At a more general level, the history of capitalism is a long history of the way that the predominant ideologico-political framework was able to accommodate – and soften the subversive edge of – the movements and demands that seemed to threaten its very survival. For example, for a long time, sexual libertarians thought that monogamic sexual repression was necessary for the survival of capitalism – we now know that capitalism can not only tolerate, but even actively incite and exploit, forms of 'perverse' sexuality, not to mention promiscuous indulgence in sexual pleasures. However, the conclusion to be drawn from this is *not* that capitalism has the endless ability to integrate and thus cut off the subversive edge of all particular demands – the question of *timing*, of 'seizing the moment', is crucial here. A certain particular demand possesses, at a specific moment, a global detonating power; it functions as a metaphoric stand-in for the global revolution: if we unconditionally insist on it, the system will explode; if, however, we wait too long, the metaphorical short-circuit between this particular demand and the global overthrow is dissolved, and the system can, with sneering hypocritical satisfaction, reply in turn, 'You wanted this? Here, have it!', without anything truly radical happening. The art of what Lukács called *Augenblick* – the moment when, briefly, there is an opening for an act to intervene in a situation – is the art of seizing the right moment, of aggravating the conflict before the system can accommodate itself to our demand. So we have here a Lukács who is much more 'Gramscian' and conjuncturalist than is usually assumed – the Lukácsian *Augenblick* is unexpectedly close to what, today, Alain Badiou endeavours to formulate as the Event: an intervention that cannot be accounted for in terms of its pre-existing 'objective conditions'. The crux of Lukács' argumentation is to reject the reduction of the act to its 'historical circumstances': there are no neutral 'objective conditions', or, in Hegelese, all presuppositions are already minimally posited.

Exemplary here is, at the very beginning of *Tailism and the Dialectic*, Lukács' analysis of the 'objectivist' enumeration of the causes of the failure of the Hungarian revolutionary council-dictatorship in 1919: the treason of the officers in the army, the external blockade that caused hunger ...[21] Although these are undoubtedly facts that played a crucial role in this revolutionary defeat, it is none the less methodologically

wrong to evoke them as raw facts, without taking into account the way they were 'mediated' by the specific constellation of 'subjective' political forces. Take the blockade: why was it that, in contrast to the even stronger blockade of the Russian Soviet State, the latter did not succumb to the imperialist and counter-revolutionary onslaught? Because, in Russia, the Bolshevik Party made the masses aware of how this blockade was the result of foreign and domestic counter-revolutionary forces, while, in Hungary, the Party was ideologically not strong enough, so that the working masses succumbed to anti-Communist propaganda, which claimed that the blockade was the result of the 'anti-democratic' nature of the régime – the logic of 'let's return to "democracy" and foreign aid will start to flow in ...'. What about the treason of the officers? Yes, but why did similar treason not lead to the same catastrophic consequences in Soviet Russia? And, when traitors were discovered, why was it not possible to replace them with reliable cadres? Because the Hungarian Communist Party was not strong and active enough, while the Russian Bolshevik Party mobilized properly the soldiers who were ready to fight to the end to defend the revolution. Of course, one can claim that the weakness of the Communist Party is again an 'objective' component of the social situation; however, behind this 'fact', there are again other subjective decisions and acts, so that we never reach the zero level of a purely 'objective' state of things – the ultimate point is not objectivity, but social 'totality' as the process of the global 'mediation' between the subjective and the objective aspects. In other words, the act cannot ever be reduced to an outcome of objective conditions.

To take an example from a different domain, the way an ideology involves 'positing its presuppositions' is also easily discernible in the standard (pseudo-) explanation for the growing acceptance of Nazi ideology in Germany in the 1920s: that the Nazis were deftly manipulating ordinary middle-class people's fears and anxieties generated by the economic crisis and rapid social changes. The problem with this explanation is that it overlooks the self-referential circularity at work here: yes, the Nazis certainly did deftly manipulate fears and anxieties – however, far from being simple pre-ideological facts, these fears and anxieties were already the product of a certain ideological perspective. In other words, Nazi ideology itself (co)generated the 'anxieties and fears' against which it then proposed itself as a solution.

IV

We can now return, once again, to our triple 'syllogism' and determine wherein, precisely, resides its mistake: in the very opposition between its first two forms. Lukács, of course, was opposed to the 'spontaneist' ideology of advocating the autonomous grass-roots self-organization of the working masses against the externally imposed 'dictatorship' of Party bureaucrats, as well as to the pseudo-Leninist (actually Kautsky's) notion that the 'empirical' working class can, on its own, only reach the level of trade-unionist reformism, and that the only way for it to become the revolutionary subject is that independent intellectuals gain neutral 'scientific' insight into the 'objective' necessity of the passage from capitalism to socialism, and then import this knowledge into the empirical working class, 'educating' them about the mission inscribed into their very objective social position. It is here that we encounter the opprobrious dialectical 'identity of opposites' at its purest: the problem with these oppositions is not that the two poles are too crudely opposed and that the truth is somewhere in between, in their 'dialectical mediation' (class consciousness emerges from the 'interaction' between the spontaneous self-awareness of the working class and the educational activity of the Party); the problem is rather that the very notion that the working class has the inner potential to reach adequate revolutionary class consciousness (and, consequently, that the Party merely plays a modest, self-erasing, maieutic role of enabling the empirical workers to actualize this potential) legitimizes the Party's exertion of dictatorial pressure over the 'empirical', actually existing workers and their confused, opportunistic self-awareness, in the name of (the Party's correct insight into) what their true inner potentials and/or their 'true long-term interests' in fact are. In short, Lukács is here simply applying the Hegelian speculative identification of the 'inner potential' of an individual with the external pressure exerted on him by his educators to the false opposition between 'spontaneism' and external Party domination: to say that an individual possesses 'inner potential' to be a great musician is strictly equivalent to the fact that this potential has to be already present in the educator who, through external pressure, will compel the individual to actualize it.

So the paradox is that the more we insist on the way that a revolutionary stance directly translates the true 'inner nature' of the working class, the more we are compelled to exert external pressure on

the 'empirical' working class to actualize this inner possibility. In other words, the 'truth' of this immediate identity of opposites, of the first two forms, is, as we have seen, the third form, the Stalinist mediation – why? Because this immediate identity precludes any place for the *act* proper: if class consciousness arises 'spontaneously', as the actualization of inner potential inscribed into the very objective situation of the working class, then there is no real act at all, just the purely formal conversion from in-itself to for-itself, the gesture of bringing to light what was always-already there; if the proper revolutionary class consciousness is to be 'imported' via the Party, then we have, on the one hand, 'neutral' intellectuals who gain 'objective' insight into historical necessity (without engaged *intervention* into it), and then what is ultimately their instrumental-manipulative use of the working class as a tool to actualize the necessity already written into the situation – again, no place for an *act* proper.

This notion of the act also enables us to deal with the feature that seems fully to justify the critical dismissal of Lukács as a determinist 'Hegelian' Marxist: his ill-famed distinction between empirical, factual, class consciousness (a phenomenon of collective psychology to be established via positive sociological research) and 'attributed/ascribed/imputed [*zugerechnete*]' class consciousness (consciousness that it is 'objectively possible' for a certain class to achieve if it fully mobilizes its subjective resources). As Lukács emphasizes, this opposition is not simply the opposition between truth and falsity: in contrast to all other classes, it is 'objectively possible' for the proletariat to achieve the self-consciousness which allows it correct insight into the true logic of the historical totality – it depends on the mobilization of its subjective potential through the Party to what extent the factual working class will reach the level of this 'ascribed' class consciousness. In contrast to the proletariat, the 'imputed' consciousness of all other classes, although it also reaches beyond their factual consciousness, is not yet the true insight into historical totality, but remains an ideological distortion (Lukács refers here to Marx's well-known analysis of the French Revolution of 1848, in which the cause of Napoleon III's 'Eighteenth Brumaire' was that the radical bourgeoisie did not even fully actualize its own progressive political potential). The reproach imposes itself here almost automatically: does not Lukács himself implicitly regress to the Kantian opposition between ideal formal possibility and the empirical factual state of things that always lags behind this ideal? And is not

implicit in this lag the justification for the domination of the Party over the working class: the Party is ultimately precisely the mediator between the 'imputed' and the factual consciousness – it knows the potential ideal consciousness and endeavours to 'educate' the empirical working class to reach this level? If this were all that Lukács meant by 'subjective mediation', by act and decision, then, of course, we would still remain within the confines of a 'reified' reliance on the 'objective stages of development': there is the prescribed ideal-typical limit of what is 'objectively possible', the limit of the 'ascribed' consciousness determined by the objective social position of a class, and the entire manoeuvring space that is left for historical agents is the gap between this 'objectively possible' maximum and the extent to which they effectively approach this maximum.

There, is, however, another possibility open to us: to read the gap between factual and 'imputed' class consciousness not as the standard opposition between the ideal type and its factual blurred actualization, but as the inner self-fissure (or 'out-of-jointness') of the historical subject. To be more precise, when one speaks of the proletariat as the 'universal class', one should bear in mind the strictly dialectical notion of universality which becomes actual, 'for itself', only in the guise of its opposite, in an agent who is out-of-place in any particular position within the existing global order and thus entertains towards it a negative relationship – let me quote here Ernesto Laclau's apposite formulation (thoroughly Hegelian notwithstanding Laclau's declared anti-Hegelianism):

> The universal is part of my identity in so far as I am penetrated by a constitutive lack – that is, in so far as my differential identity has failed in its process of constitution. The universal emerges out of the particular not as some principle underlying and explaining it, but as an incomplete horizon suturing a dislocated particular identity.[22]

In this precise sense, as he says in the same paper, 'the universal is the symbol of a missing fullness': I can relate to the Universal as such only in so far as my particular identity is thwarted, 'dislocated', only in so far as some impediment prevents me from 'becoming what I already am' (with regard to my particular social position). The claim that the proletariat is the 'universal class' is thus ultimately equivalent to the claim that, within the existing global order, the proletariat is the class that is radically dislocated (or, as Badiou would have put it, occupying the

point of 'symptomal torsion') with regard to the social body: while other classes can still maintain the illusion that 'Society exists', and that they have their specific place within the global social body, the very existence of the proletariat repudiates the claim that 'Society exists'. In other words, the overlapping of the Universal and the Particular in the proletariat does not stand for their immediate identity (in the sense that the particular interests of the proletariat are at the same time the universal interests of humanity, so that proletarian liberation will be equivalent to the liberation of the entire humanity): the universal revolutionary potential is rather 'inscribed into the very being of the proletariat' as its inherent radical split. This split, again, is not the immediate split between the particular interests/positions of the proletariat and its universal historical mission – the 'universal mission' of the proletariat arises from the way that the very particular existence of the proletariat is 'barred', hindered, from the way that proletariat is *a priori* ('in its very notion', to put it in Hegelese) not able to realize its *particular* social identity. The split is thus the split between the particular positive identity and the barrier, inherent blockage, that prevents proletarians from actualizing this very particular positive identity (their 'place in society') – only if we conceive of the split in this way, is there a space for the act proper, not merely for actions that follow universal 'principles' or 'rules' given in advance – and thus providing the 'ontological cover' for our activity.

Therein resides the ultimate difference between, on the one hand, the authentic Leninist Party, and, on the other hand, the Kautskyist–Stalinist Party as embodying the non-engaged 'objective knowledge' that is to be imparted to the uneducated working class: the Kautskyist–Stalinist Party addresses the proletariat from a position of 'objective' knowledge intended to supplement the proletarian subjective (self-) experience of suffering and exploitation, i.e., the split here is the split between proletarian 'spontaneous' subjective self-experience and objective knowledge about one's social situation, while, in an authentic Leninist Party, the split is thoroughly subjective, i.e., the Party addresses the proletariat from a radically subjective, engaged position of the lack that prevents the proletarians from achieving their 'proper place' in the social edifice.[23] And, furthermore, it is this crucial difference that also explains why the Stalinist sublime body of the Leader (with mausoleums and all the accompanying theatrics) is unthinkable within the strict Leninist horizon: the Leader can be elevated into a figure of Sublime

Beauty only when the 'people', whom he represents, is no longer the thoroughly dislocated proletariat, but the positively existing substantial entity, the 'working masses'.

To those whose reaction here is that what we are describing now is a hair-splitting philosophical distinction of no use to engaged fighters, let us recall a similar experience with Kant's practical philosophy: is it not that Kant's apparently 'difficult' propositions on the pure form of Law as the only legitimate motif of an ethical act, and so on, suddenly become clear if we directly relate them to our immediate ethical experience? The same goes for the above-mentioned distinction: the gap that separates reliance on 'objective logic' from the risk of an authentic act is 'intuitively' known to anyone engaged in a struggle.

V

At this point, a further possible misunderstanding must be clarified: Lukács' position is not, as it may appear to a superficial reader, that the whole of history hitherto was dominated by 'reified' objective necessity, and that it is only with the late capitalist crisis, and the concomitant strengthening of the revolutionary proletarian stance, that the 'objective possibility' arises for the all-encompassing chain of necessity to be broken. All human history is characterized by the dialectical tension and interdependence between necessity and contingency; what one should be careful about is to distinguish different historical shapes of this interdependence. In pre-modern society, it was, of course, not only possible – it effectively happened all the time – that totally meaningless contingencies (the madness or some other psychological peculiarity of the monarch) could lead to global catastrophic consequences (like the utter destruction of rich and highly civilized Arab cities by the Mongols); however, psychological idiosyncrasies could have such consequences only within certain well-defined power relations and relations of production in which so much authority is effectively invested in the leader. In modern capitalist society, contingency reigns in the guise of the 'unpredictable' interplay of market forces, which can, 'for no apparent reason at all', instantly ruin individuals who worked hard all their lives: as Marx and Engels already put it, the Market is the modern reincarnation of ancient capricious Fate;[24] in other words, this 'contingency' is the form of appearance of its dialectical obverse, the impenetrable blind

necessity of the capitalist system. Finally, in the revolutionary process, the space is open, not for a metaphysical foundational 'act', but for a contingent, strictly 'conjunctural', intervention that can break the very chain of necessity dominating all history hitherto.

Exemplary here is Lukács' critique of the liberal sceptical attitude towards the October Revolution, which is regarded as an important, but risky, 'political experiment': the position is that of 'let's wait and patiently observe its final outcome . . .'. As Lukács was fully justified to retort, such an attitude transposes the experimental/observational stance of natural sciences on to human history: it is the exemplary case of observing a process from a safe distance, exempting oneself from it, not of the engaged stance of someone who – as always-already caught, embedded, in a situation – intervenes in it. Of course, Lukács' key point here is that we are not dealing with a simple opposition between the stance of impassive observation and that of practical intervention ('enough of words and empty theories, let's finally do something!'): Lukács advocates the dialectical unity/mediation of theory and practice, in which even the utmost contemplative stance is eminently 'practical' (in the sense of being embedded in the totality of social [re]production and thus expressing a certain 'practical' stance of how to survive within this totality), and, on the other hand, even the most 'practical' stance implies a certain 'theoretical' framework; it materializes a set of implicit ideological propositions.[25] For example, the resigned 'melancholic' stance of searching for the meaning of life in withdrawn contemplative wisdom is clearly embedded in the historical totality of a society in decay, in which public space no longer offers an outlet for creative self-affirmation; or, the stance of the external observer who treats social life as an object in which one 'intervenes' in an instrumental-manipulative way and 'makes experiments', is the very stance required for the participation in a market society.[26] On the other hand, the utmost individualistic stance of radical hedonism 'practises' the notion of man as a hedonistic being, that is, as Hegel would have put it, a person is never directly a hedonist, rather he relates himself to himself as one. In classical Marxist terms, not only is social consciousness a constitutive part of social being (of the actual process of social [re]production), but this 'being' itself (the actual process of social [re]production) can run its course only if mediated/sustained by an adequate form of 'consciousness': say, if, in a capitalist society, individuals are, in their daily practical lives, not prey to 'commodity

fetishism', the very 'real' process of capitalist (re)production is perturbed. At this point we encounter the crucial Hegelian notion of (self-) consciousness, which designates the gaining of self-awareness as an inherently *practical act*, to be opposed to the contemplative notion of a scientific 'correct insight': self-consciousness is an insight that directly 'changes its object', affects its actual social status – when the proletariat becomes aware of its revolutionary potential, this very 'insight' transforms it into an *actual* revolutionary subject.

In so far as (self-)consciousness designates the way that things appear to the subject, this identity of thought and being in the practical act of self-consciousness can also be formulated as the dialectical identity of Essence and its Appearance. Lukács relies here on Hegel's analysis of the 'essentiality' of appearance: appearance is never 'mere' appearance, but belongs to essence itself. This means that consciousness (ideological appearance) is also an 'objective' social fact with an effectivity of its own: as we have already pointed out, bourgeois 'fetishistic' consciousness is not simply an 'illusion' masking actual social processes, but a mode of organization of the very social being, crucial to the actual process of social (re)production.[27]

Lukács here can be said to participate in the great 'paradigm shift' at work also in quantum physics, and whose main feature is not the dissolution of 'objective reality', its reduction to a 'subjective construction', but, on the contrary, the unheard-of assertion of the 'objective' status of appearance itself. It is not sufficient to oppose the way things 'objectively are' to the way they 'merely appear to us': the way they appear (to the observer) affects their very 'objective being'. This is what is so pathbreaking in quantum physics: the notion that the limited horizon of the observer (or of the mechanism that registers what goes on) determines what effectively goes on. We cannot say that self-awareness (or colour or material density or ...) designate merely the way we experience reality, while 'objectively' there are only sub-atomic particles and their fluctuations: these 'appearances' have to be taken into account if we are to explain what 'effectively is going on'.[28] In a homologous way, the crux of Lukács' notion of class consciousness is that the way the working class 'appears to itself' determines its 'objective' being.[29]

It is of crucial importance not to misread Lukács' theses as another version of the standard hermeneutical opposition between *Erklären* (the explanatory procedure of the natural sciences) and *Verstehen* (the form of comprehension at work in the human sciences): when Lukács opposes

the act of self-consciousness of a historical subject to the 'correct insight' of natural sciences, his point is not to establish an epistemological distinction between two different methodological procedures, but, precisely, to break up the very standpoint of formal 'methodology' and to assert that *knowledge itself is part of social reality*. All knowledge, of nature and of society, is a social process, mediated by society, an 'actual' part of the social structure, and, on account of this self-referential inclusion of knowledge into its own object, a revolutionary theory is ultimately (also) its own meta-theory. Although Lukács was adamantly opposed to psychoanalysis, the parallel with Freud is here striking: in the same way that psychoanalysis interprets the resistance against itself as the result of the very unconscious processes that are its topic, Marxism interprets the resistance against its insights as the 'result of class struggle in theory', as accounted for by its very object – in both cases, theory is caught in a self-referential loop; it is, in a way, the theory about the resistance to itself.

However, a further, even more fateful, misunderstanding would be to read this thesis on the social mediation of every form of knowledge in terms of the standard historicist assertion that each form of knowledge is a social phenomenon, 'a child of its age', dependent upon and expressing the social conditions of its emergence. Lukács' point is precisely to undermine this false alternative of historicist relativism (there is no neutral knowledge of 'objective reality', since all knowledge is biased, embedded in a specific 'social context') and the distinction between the socio-historical conditions and the inherent truth-value of a body of knowledge (even if a certain theory emerged within a specific social context, this context provides only external conditions, which in no way diminish or undermine the 'objective truth' of its propositions – for example, although, as everyone knows, Darwin elaborated his evolutionary theory under the stimulus of Malthus' economics, Darwinism is still acknowledged as true, while Malthus is deservedly half-forgotten). As he put it in *History and Class Consciousness*, the problem of historicism is that it is not 'historicist' enough: it still presupposes an empty external observer's point *for* which and *from* which all that happens is historically relativized.[30] Lukács overcomes this historicist relativization by bringing it to its conclusion, that is, by including in the historical process the observing subject itself, thus undermining the very exempted measure with regard to which everything is relativized: the attainment of self-consciousness of a revolutionary subject is *not* an insight into the

ways its own stance is relativized, conditioned by specific historical circumstances, but a practical act of *intervening* into these 'circumstances'.[31] Marxist theory describes society from the engaged standpoint of its revolutionary change and thereby transforms its object (the working class) into a revolutionary subject – the neutral description of society is formally 'false', since it involves the acceptance of the existing order. Far from 'relativizing' the truth of an insight, the awareness of its own embeddedness in a concrete constellation – and thereby of its engaged, partial, character – is a positive condition of its truth.

And therein resides the great achievement of *Tailism and the Dialectic*: Lukács sets the record straight with regard to the possible misreadings of his basic position as articulated in *History and Class Consciousness*, not only against its obvious target, the emerging pseudo-Leninist Soviet orthodoxy that was later sanctified in the guise of Stalinist 'Marxism–Leninism', but – for us today even more importantly – against the already mentioned predominant Western reception of *History and Class Consciousness* focused on the fashionable motif of 'reification'. When, in *Tailism*, Lukács elaborates in detail the passing critical remarks on Engels' notion of the 'dialectics of nature' from *History and Class Consciousness*, he makes it clear that his critique of the 'dialectics of nature' is embedded in a more fundamental critique of the notion of the revolutionary process as determined by the 'objective' laws and stages of historical development. The point of Lukács' polemics against the 'dialectics of nature' is thus not the Kantian abstract-epistemological one (the idea that 'dialectics of nature' misrecognizes the 'subjective mediation' of what appears as natural reality, i.e., the subjective constitution of – what we perceive as – 'reality'), but ultimately a *political* one: the 'dialectics of nature' is problematic because it legitimizes the stance towards the revolutionary process as obeying 'objective laws', leaving no space for the radical contingency of *Augenblick*, for the *act* as a practical intervention irreducible to its 'objective conditions'.

And today, in the era of the worldwide triumph of democracy when (with some notable exceptions like Alain Badiou) no leftist dares to question the premises of democratic politics, it is more crucial than ever to bear in mind Lukács' reminder, in his polemics against Rosa Luxemburg's critique of Lenin, as to the way that the authentic revolutionary stance of endorsing the radical contingency of *Augenblick* should also not endorse the standard opposition between 'democracy' and 'dictatorship' or 'terror'. The first step to make, if we are to leave

behind the opposition between liberal-democratic universalism and ethnic/religious fundamentalism on which even today's mass media focus, is to acknowledge the existence of what one is tempted to call 'democratic fundamentalism': the ontologicization of democracy into a depoliticized universal framework that is not itself to be (re)negotiated as the result of politico-ideological hegemonic struggles. Lukács is well aware that the qualification of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as the 'democratic rule of the wide working classes, directed only against the narrow circle of ex-ruling classes', is a simplistic sleight of hand: the Bolsheviks, of course, often *did* break the democratic 'rules of the game', we *did* experience the Bolshevik 'Red Terror'.

Democracy as the form of State politics is inherently 'Popperian': the ultimate criterion of democracy is that the régime is 'falsifiable', that is, that a clearly defined public procedure (the popular vote) can establish that the régime is no longer legitimate and must be replaced by another political force. The point is not that this procedure is 'just', but rather that all parties concerned agree in advance and unambiguously upon it irrespective of its 'justice'. In their standard procedure of ideological blackmail, defenders of State democracy claim that the moment we abandon this feature, we enter the 'totalitarian' sphere in which the régime is 'non-falsifiable', that is, it forever avoids the situation of unequivocal 'falsification': whatever happens, even if thousands demonstrate against the régime, the régime continues to maintain that it is legitimate, that it stands for the true interests of the people and that the 'true' people support it ... Here, we should *reject* this blackmail (as Lukács does apropos of Rosa Luxemburg): there are no 'democratic (procedural) rules' that one is *a priori* prohibited to violate. Revolutionary politics is not a matter of 'opinions', but of the truth on behalf of which one often *is* compelled to disregard the 'opinion of the majority' and to impose the revolutionary will against it. In the difficult times of foreign intervention and civil war after the October Revolution, Trotsky openly admitted that the Bolshevik government was ready sometimes to act against the factual opinion of the majority – not on behalf of a privileged 'insight into objective truth', but on behalf of the very 'subjective' tension between fidelity to the Revolutionary Event and the opportunistic retreat from it, the tension that is inherent to the revolutionary process itself. (Significantly, although Stalinism was factually a much more violent dictatorship, it would never openly acknowledge acting against the opinion of the majority – it always clung

to the fetish of the People whose true will the leadership expresses.) The political legacy of Lukács is thus the assertion of the unconditional, 'ruthless' revolutionary will, ready to 'go to the end', effectively to seize power and undermine the existing totality; its wager is that the alternative between authentic rebellion and its later 'ossification' in a New Order is not exhaustive, in other words, that revolutionary effervescence should take the risk of translating its outburst into a New Order. Lenin was right: after the Revolution, the anarchic disruptions of the disciplinary constraints of production should be replaced by an even stronger discipline. Such an assertion is thoroughly opposed to the 'postmodern' celebration of the good 'revolt' as opposed to bad 'revolution', or, in more fashionable terms, of the effervescence of the multitude of marginal 'sites of resistance' against any actual attempt to attack the totality itself (see the mass media's depoliticizing appropriation of May '68 as an 'outburst of spontaneous youthful creativity against the bureaucratized mass society').[32]

As Alain Badiou repeatedly emphasizes, an Event is fragile and rare – so instead of merely focusing on 'how did the October Revolution turn into a Stalinist Thermidor?', we should perhaps turn the question around: is it the Thermidorian forswearing of the Event, the passive following of the course of things, that appears as 'natural' to the human animal? The big question is rather the opposite one: how is it possible that, from time to time, the impossible miracle of an Event does take place at all and leaves traces in the patient work of those who remain faithful to it? So the point is not to 'develop further' Lukács in accordance with the 'demands of new times' (the great motto of all opportunist revisionism, up to New Labour), but to repeat the Event in new conditions. Are we still able to imagine ourselves a historical moment when terms like 'revisionist traitor' were not yet parts of the Stalinist mantra, but expressed an authentic engaged insight?

In other words, the question to be asked today apropos of the unique Event of the early Marxist Lukács is not: 'How does his work stand in relation to today's constellation? Is it still alive?', but, to paraphrase Adorno's well-known reversal of Croce's patronizing historicist question concerning, 'what is dead and what is alive in Hegel's dialectic' (the title of his main work):[33] how do we today stand in relation to – in the eyes of – Lukács? Are we still able to commit the *act* proper, described by Lukács? Which social agent is, on account of its radical dislocation, *today* able to accomplish it?

Notes

A longer version of this essay first appeared as the 'Postface' to Georg Lukács, *A Defence of 'History and Class Consciousness': Tailism and the Dialectic*, trans. Esther Leslie, London and New York: Verso, 2000, pp. 151–82. [eds]

1 See Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1971. [eds]

2 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1996, p. 397.

3 See Georg Lukács, *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of His Thought*, trans. Nicholas Jacobs, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1971; *Tactics and Ethics: Political Essays, 1919–1929*, trans. Michael McColgan, New York, Harper and Row, 1975; *A Defence of 'History and Class Consciousness': Tailism and the Dialectic*, trans. Esther Leslie, London and New York, Verso, 2000. [eds]

4 *History and Class Consciousness* thus also marks a radical break from the early pre-Marxist Lukács himself, whose main work, *A Theory of the Novel*, belongs to the Weberian tradition of socio-cultural criticism – no wonder that, in this book, he signed his name Georg von Lukács! [See Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1971. (eds)]

5 Of course, if one is willing to play alternative history games, one can safely surmise that, if Lenin were to have read *History and Class Consciousness*, he would have rejected its philosophical premises as 'subjectivist' and contrary to 'dialectical materialism' with its 'reflection' theory of knowledge (it is already significant how, in order to maintain his Leninist credentials, Lukács has virtually to ignore Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*). On the other hand, in Lenin's entire writings, there is only one mention of Lukács: in 1921, in a brief note for the journal *Kommunismus*, the organ of the Comintern for south-eastern Europe, Lenin intervenes in a debate between Lukács and Bela Kun, ferociously attacking Lukács' text as 'very leftist and very bad. In it, Marxism is present only at a purely verbal level' (see V. I. Lenin, *Complete Works, Volume 41*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1969, pp. 135–7). However, this is no way undermines the claim that Lukács is the ultimate philosopher of Leninism: it was rather Lenin himself who was not fully aware of the philosophical stance he 'practised' in his revolutionary work, and who only gradually (through reading Hegel during World War I) became aware of it. The other key question, of course, is: was this misrecognition of one's true philosophical stance necessary for one's political engagement? In other words, does the rule, established already by Lucien Goldmann, in his classic *The Hidden God*, apropos of Pascal and the Jansenists (who were also unacceptable for the ruling Catholic circles), of how the ruling ideology necessarily has to disavow its true fundamental premises, apply also to Leninism? If the

answer is 'yes', if the Leninist misrecognition of its philosophical premises is structurally necessary, then Leninism is just another ideology and Lukács' account of it, even if true, is insufficient: it can penetrate to the true philosophical premises of Leninism, but what it cannot explain is the very gap between truth and appearance, i.e., the necessary disavowal of the truth in the false (objectivist, ontological, 'dialectical materialist') Leninist self-consciousness – as Lukács himself knew very well (this is one of the great Hegelian theses of *History and Class Consciousness*), appearance is never merely appearance, but is, precisely as appearance, essential.

6 F. W. J. Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. K. F. A. Schelling, Stuttgart, Cotta, 1856–61, Volume 6, p. 600.

7 See Alain Badiou, 'Qu'est-ce qu'un thermidorien?', in *Abrégé de métapolitique*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1998, pp. 139–54.

8 Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, trans. Fred Halliday, London, New Left Books, 1971. [eds]

9 Incidentally, the lesson of these early years of the October Revolution is ultimately the same as that of post-Maoist China: contrary to liberal ideologues, one has to assert that there is no necessary link between market and democracy. Democracy and market go together only with stable property relations: the moment they are perturbed, we get either dictatorship *à la* Pinochet's Chile or a revolutionary explosion. That is to say, the paradox to be emphasized is that, in the hard years of 'war communism' prior to the application of the New Economic Policy (NEP) which opened up the space again for market 'liberalization', there was much more democracy in Soviet Russia than in the years of the NEP. The market liberalization of the NEP goes hand-in-hand with the emergence of a strong party of *apparatchiks* gaining control over society: this party arose precisely as a reaction to the autonomy of the market civil society, out of the need to establish a strong power structure in order to control these newly unleashed forces.

10 Evert van der Zweerde, *Soviet Historiography of Philosophy*, Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1997.

11 Paradigmatic here is the legendary story of Ilyenkov's failed participation at a world philosophy congress in the United States in the mid-1960s: Ilyenkov had already been granted a visa and was set to take a plane, when his trip was cancelled because his written intervention, 'From the Leninist point of view', which he had to present in advance to the Party ideologues, displeased them – not because of its (wholly acceptable) content, but simply because of its style, the engaged manner in which it was written; already the opening sentence ('It is my personal contention that . . .') struck a wrong chord.

12 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Extorted reconciliation: on Georg Lukács' *Realism in Our Time*', in *Notes to Literature, Volume One*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, New York, Columbia University Press, 1991, pp. 216–40.

13 Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2000, p. 48. [eds]

14 Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Nörr, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2002. [eds]

15 Franz Neumann, *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism, 1933–1944*, New York, Octagon, 1963. [eds]

16 Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1958. [eds]

17 See V. I. Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?*, trans. Joe Fineberg and George Hanna, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1962, p. 98. [eds]

18 What makes Fidel Castro's famous statement – 'Within the Revolution, everything. Outside it, nothing!' – problematic and 'totalitarian' is the way its radicality covers up its total indeterminacy: what it leaves unsaid is who, and based on what criteria, will decide if a particular artistic work (the statement was formulated to provide the guidelines for dealing with artistic freedom) effectively serves the revolution or undermines it. The way is thus open for the *nomenklatura* to enforce its arbitrary decisions. (There is, however, another possible reading that may redeem this slogan: revolution is not a process that follows predestined 'laws', so there are no *a priori* objective criteria that would allow us to draw a line of separation between the revolution and its betrayal – fidelity to the revolution does not reside in simply following and applying a set of norms and goals given in advance, but in the continuous struggle to redefine again and again the line of separation.)

19 Let us also not forget that, in the weeks before the October Revolution, when the debate was raging between Bolsheviks, Stalin did take sides against Lenin's proposal for an immediate Bolshevik take-over, arguing, along Menshevik lines, that the situation was not yet 'ripe', and that, instead of such dangerous 'adventurism', one should endorse a broad coalition of all anti-Tsarist forces!

20 Again, one can discern here an unexpected closeness to the Althusserian notion of 'overdetermination': there is no ultimate rule that allows one to measure 'exceptions' against it – in real history, there are, in a way, nothing but exceptions.

21 Lukács, *Tailism and the Dialectic*, pp. 51–3. [eds]

22 Ernesto Laclau, 'Universalism, Particularism, and the question of identity', *October* 61, 1992, p. 89.

23 Perhaps, a reference to Kierkegaard might be of some help here: this difference is the one between the positive Being of the Universal (the 'mute universality' of a species defined by what all members of the species have in common) and what Kierkegaard called the 'Universal-in-becoming', the Universal as the power of negativity that undermines the fixity of every

particular constellation. For a closer elaboration of this distinction, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, London and New York, Verso, 1999, pp. 90–8.

24 See, for instance, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party', in *The Revolutions of 1848: Political Writings, Volume 1*, ed. David Fernbach, London, Penguin/New Left Review, 1973, pp. 70–1. [eds]

25 Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, pp. 97–100. [eds]

26 Žižek's description here condenses his early paper on 'pathological narcissism', published as a foreword to the Croatian edition of Christopher Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism* (*Narcisistička kultura*, Zagreb, Naprijed, 1986). It was subsequently translated and published as '"Pathological Narcissus" as a socially mandatory form of subjectivity', in *Manifesta*, Ljubljana, European Biennial of Contemporary Art, 2000, pp. 234–55. [eds]

27 In a more detailed approach, one would have to elaborate here this key Hegelian notion of the essentiality of appearance. Hegel's point is not the standard platitude that 'an essence has to appear', that it is only as deep as it is wide – expressed – externalized, etc., but a much more precise one: essence is, in a way, its own appearance, it appears as essence in the domain of appearance, i.e., essence is *nothing but* the appearance of essence, the appearance that there is something behind which is the Essence.

28 For Žižek's further elaboration of this point, see 'Quantum physics with Lacan', in *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters*, London and New York, Verso, 1996, pp. 208–13. As Žižek notes, the so-called *qualia* or 'seemings' of consciousness take on the same status within cognitivism; see *Organs without Bodies: Deleuze and Consequences*, New York and London, Routledge, 2004, pp. 135–6. [eds]

29 Here also, it would be interesting to establish the connection between Lukács and Badiou, for whom 'appearance' is the domain of the consistency of positive 'hard reality', while the order of Being is inherently fragile, inconsistent, elusive, accessible only through mathematics, which deals with pure multitudes. See Alain Badiou, 'Being and appearance', in *Theoretical Writings*, ed. and trans. Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano, London and New York, Continuum, 2004, pp. 163–75. Although Lukács and Badiou are far from deploying the same notion of appearance, what they do have in common is the way both turn around the standard metaphysical opposition between Appearance and Being, in which appearance is transitory; in contrast to the hard positivity of Being – with Lukács, 'appearance' stands for 'reified' objective reality, while the true 'actuality' is that of the transitory movement of subjective mediation. The homology with quantum physics again presents itself: in the latter, what we experience as 'reality' is also the order of consistent 'appearance' that emerges through the collapse of quantum fluctuation, while the order of Being is that of the transitory, substanceless quantum fluctuations.

30 Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, pp. 186–9. [eds]

31 The same criticism could also be made apropos of Richard Rorty's notion that there is no objective truth, just a multitude of (more or less effective) stories about ourselves that we narrate to ourselves: the problem with this notion is not that it is too relativistic, but that it is not 'relativistic' enough – in a typically liberal way, Rorty still presupposes a non-relative neutral universal framework of rules (respect for others' pain, etc.) that everyone should respect when indulging in their own idiosyncratic way of life, the framework that guarantees the tolerable co-existence of these ways of life.

32 See, as exemplary of this stance, Kristeva's statements: 'Today the word "revolt" has become assimilated to Revolution, to political action. The events of the twentieth century, however, have shown us that political "revolts" – Revolutions – ultimately betrayed revolt, especially the psychic sense of the term. Why? Because revolt, as I understand it – psychic revolt, analytic revolt, artistic revolt – refers to a state of permanent questioning, of transformation, change, an endless probing of appearances. If we look at the history of political revolts, we see that the process of questioning has ceased ... in the case of the Russian Revolution, a revolution that became increasingly dogmatic as it stopped questioning its own ideals until it ultimately degenerated into totalitarianism.' (Julia Kristeva, 'The necessity of revolt', *Trans* 5, 1998, p. 125.) One is tempted to add sarcastically to this last thesis: were not the great Stalinist or the Khmer Rouge purges the most radical form of the political régime's 'permanent questioning'? More seriously, what is problematic with this position of depoliticizing the revolt is that it precludes any actual radical political change: the existing political régime is never effectively undermined or overturned, just endlessly 'questioned' from different marginal 'sites of resistance', because every actual radical change is in advance dismissed as inevitably ending up in some form of 'totalitarian' regression. So what this celebration of the 'revolt' effectively amounts to is the old reactionary thesis of the way that, from time to time, the existing order has to rejuvenate itself with some fresh blood in order to remain viable, like the vulgar conservative wisdom that every good conservative was in his youth briefly a radical leftist ...

33 Theodor W. Adorno, *Drei Studien zu Hegel*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1971, p. 13.

7

Prolegomena to a theory of Kolkhoz musicals

The first thing one cannot but take note of apropos of Stalinist discourse is its contagious nature: the way (almost) everyone likes mockingly to imitate it, use its terms in various political contexts, in stark contrast to fascism. Stalinism is not prohibited in quite the same way: even if we are fully aware of its monstrous aspects, one nonetheless finds *Ostalgie* acceptable: 'Goodbye Lenin' is tolerated, 'Goodbye Hitler' is not – why?

John Berger recently made a salient point regarding a French publicity poster for Selftrade, an internet-based company for investment brokers: beneath an image of a hammer and sickle cast in solid gold and embedded with diamonds, the caption reads, 'And if the stock market profited everybody?' The strategy of this poster is obvious: today, the stock market fulfils the criteria of egalitarian Communism, which is that everybody can participate in it. Berger indulges in a simple mental experiment: 'Imagine a communications campaign today using an image of a swastika cast in solid gold and embedded with diamonds! It would of course not work. Why? The swastika addressed potential victors not the defeated. It invoked domination not justice.' By way of contrast, the hammer and sickle invoke the hope that 'history would eventually be on the side of those struggling for fraternal justice'. Or, to indulge in a similar mental experiment, in the last days of Really Existing Socialism, the protesting crowds often sang the official songs, including national anthems, reminding the powers of their unfulfilled promises. What better strategy for an East German crowd to undertake in 1989 than simply to sing the GDR national anthem? Because its words ('*Deutschland einig Vaterland* [Germany, the united Fatherland]') no longer fitted the emphasis on East Germany as a new socialist nation, it was *prohibited*

to be sung in public from the late 1950s up until 1989: at official ceremonies, only the orchestral version was performed. (The GDR was thus a unique country in which singing the national anthem was a criminal act!) Can one imagine the same thing under Nazism?

Already at an anecdotal level, the difference between fascism and the Stalinist universe is obvious; say, in the Stalinist show trials, the accused has publicly to confess his crimes and give an account of how he came to commit them – in stark contrast to Nazism, in which it would be meaningless to demand from a Jew the confession that he was involved in a Jewish plot against the German nation. This difference points towards different attitudes to the Enlightenment: Stalinism still conceives of itself as part of the Enlightenment tradition, within which truth is accessible to any rational person, no matter how depraved he is, which is why he is subjectively responsible for his crimes, in contrast to the Nazis, for whom the guilt of the Jews is a direct fact of their very biological constitution – one does not have to prove that they are guilty, they are guilty solely by virtue of being Jews. For this same reason, on Stalin's birthday, prisoners sent telegrams to Stalin, wishing him all the best and the success of socialism, even from the darkest gulags like Norilsk or Vorkuta, while one cannot even imagine Jews sending Hitler a telegram from Auschwitz for his birthday.

It is against this background that one should approach Ernst Nolte's book on Heidegger,[1] which brought a breath of fresh air into the eternal debate on 'Heidegger and the political' – it did so on account of its very 'unacceptable' option: far from excusing Heidegger's infamous political choice in 1933, it justifies it – or, at least, it de-demonizes it, rendering it as a viable and meaningful choice. Against the standard defenders of Heidegger, whose mantra is that Heidegger's Nazi engagement was a personal mistake of no fundamental consequence for his thought, Nolte accepts the basic claim of Heidegger's critics that his Nazi choice is inscribed necessarily into his thought – but with a twist: instead of problematizing his thought, Nolte justifies his political choice as a viable option in the situation of late 1920s and early 1930s, with its looming economic chaos and the Communist threat:

> Insofar as Heidegger resisted the attempt at the [Communist] solution, he, like countless others, was historically right ... In committing himself to the [National Socialist] solution perhaps he became a 'fascist'. But in no way did that make him historically wrong from the outset.[2]

Nolte also formulated the basic terms and topics of the 'revisionist' debate whose basic tenet is to 'objectively compare' fascism and Communism: fascism, and even Nazism, was ultimately a reaction to the Communist threat and a repetition of its worst practices (concentration camps, mass liquidations of political enemies):

> Could it be the case that the National Socialists and Hitler carried out an 'Asiatic' deed [i.e., the Holocaust] only because they considered themselves and their kind to be potential or actual victims of a [Bolshevik] 'Asiatic' deed? Did not the 'Gulag Archipelago' precede Auschwitz?[3]

The merit of Nolte's approach is to take seriously the task of grasping fascism – and even Nazism – as a feasible political project, which is a *sine qua non* of its effective criticism. It is here that one has to make the choice: the 'pure' liberal stance of equidistance toward leftist and rightist 'totalitarianism' (they are both dead, based on intolerance towards political and other differences, the rejection of democratic and humanist values, etc.) is *a priori* false – one *has* to take a side and proclaim one fundamentally 'worse' than the other. For this reason, the ongoing 'relativization' of fascism, the notion that one should rationally compare the two totalitarianisms, *always* involves the – explicit or implicit – thesis that fascism was 'better' than Communism, an understandable reaction to the Communist threat. When, in the summer of 2003, Silvio Berlusconi provoked a violent outcry with his statements that, while a dictator, Mussolini was not a political criminal and murderer like Hitler, Stalin or Saddam, one should bear in mind the true stakes of this scandal: far from deserving to be dismissed as Berlusconi's personal idiosyncrasies, his statements are part of a larger ongoing ideologico-political project of changing the terms of the post-World War II symbolic pact of European identity based on anti-Fascist unity.

This is why Nolte's 'revisionist' argument concerning the relationship between Nazism and (Soviet) Communism cannot be so easily dismissed. According to Nolte, reprehensible though it was, Nazism not only appeared after Communism, it was also, with regard to its content, an excessive *reaction* to the Communist threat. Furthermore, all of the horrors committed by Nazism were mere formal copies of the horrors already committed by Soviet Communism: the reign of secret police, concentration camps, genocidal terror, etc. But is this the form we are talking about? Is the idea that Communism and Nazism share the same totalitarian form, and that the difference concerns only the empirical

agents that fill the same structural places ('Jews' instead of 'class enemy', etc.)? The usual liberal reaction to Nolte consists in a moralistic outcry: Nolte relativizes Nazism, reducing it to a secondary echo of Communist Evil – however, how can one even compare Communism, this thwarted attempt at liberation, with the radical Evil of Nazism? In contrast to this dismissal, one should fully concede Nolte's central point: yes, Nazism effectively was a reaction to the Communist threat; it effectively *just* replaced class struggle with the struggle between Aryans and Jews – the problem, however, resides in this 'just', which is by no means as innocent as it appears. We are dealing here with displacement [*Verschiebung*] in the Freudian sense of the term: Nazism displaces class struggle on to racial struggle and thereby obfuscates its true site. What changes in the passage from Communism to Nazism is the *form*, and it is in this change of the form that the Nazi ideological mystification resides: political struggle is naturalized into racial conflict, the (class) antagonism inherent to the social edifice is reduced to an invasion by a foreign (Jewish) body which disturbs the harmony of the Aryan community. The difference between fascism and Communism is thus 'formal-ontological', not simply ontic: it is not (as Nolte claims) that we have in both cases the same formal antagonistic structure, where only the place of the Enemy is filled in with a different positive element (class, race). In the case of race, we are dealing with a positive naturalized element (the presupposed organic unity of Society is perturbed by the intrusion of a foreign body), while class antagonism is absolutely inherent to and constitutive of the social field – fascism thus obfuscates antagonism, translating it into a conflict between positive opposed terms.

Correlative to this failure is the lack of any systematic and thorough confrontation with the phenomenon of Stalinism, which constitutes the absolute *scandal* of the Frankfurt School. How could a Marxist thought that claimed to focus on the conditions of the failure of the Marxist emancipatory project abstain from analysing the nightmare of Really Existing Socialism? Was not its focus on fascism *also* a displacement, a silent admission of its failure to confront the true trauma? To put it in a slightly simplified way: Nazism was enacted by a group of people who wanted to do very bad things, and they did them; Stalinism, on the contrary, emerged as the result of a radical emancipatory attempt. (Perhaps, therein resides the ultimate enigma of the tension between Adorno and Hannah Arendt: while they both shared the radical rejection of Stalinism, Arendt based her rejection on an explicit large-scale analysis

of the 'origins of totalitarianism', as well as on the positive normative notion of *vis activa*, of the engaged political life; Adorno, on the other hand, rejected this step altogether.) It is no wonder, then, that Stalinism is often misplaced, sought and located where it is not to be found. For instance, in his famous short poem, 'The Solution' from 1953 (published in 1956), Brecht mocks the arrogance of the Communist *nomenklatura* when faced with the workers' revolt:

> After the uprising of the 17th June
> The Secretary of the Writers Union
> Had leaflets distributed in the *Stalinallee*
> Stating that the people
> Had forfeited the confidence of the government
> And could win it back only
> By redoubled efforts.
> Would it not be easier
> In that case for the government
> To dissolve the people
> And elect another?[4]

However, this poem is not only politically opportunistic, the obverse of his letter of solidarity with the East German Communist régime published in *Neues Deutschland* – to put it brutally, Brecht wanted to cover both his flanks, to profess his support for the régime as well as to hint at his solidarity with the workers, so that whoever won, he would be on the winning side – but it is also simply *wrong* in the theoretico-political sense: one should bravely admit that it effectively *is* a duty – *the* duty, even – of a revolutionary party to 'dissolve the people and elect another', i.e., to bring about the transubstantiation of the 'old' opportunistic people (the inert 'crowd') into a revolutionary body aware of its historical task. Far from being an easy task, to 'dissolve the people and elect another' is the most difficult of them all ...

The proper task is thus to think the *tragedy* of the October Revolution: to perceive its greatness, its unique emancipatory potential, and, simultaneously, the *historical necessity* of its Stalinist outcome. One should oppose both temptations: the Trotskyite notion that Stalinism was ultimately a contingent deviation, as well as the notion that the Communist project is, in its very core, totalitarian. How are we to draw the line here? A revolutionary process is not a well-planned strategic activity, with no place in it for a full immersion into the Now, without

regard for long-term consequences. Quite the contrary: the suspension of all strategic considerations based upon hope for a better future, the stance of '*On s'engage et puis ... on voit*' (a Napoleonic slogan to which Lenin often referred),[5] is a key part of any revolutionary process. Recall the staged performance of the 'Storming of the Winter Palace' in Petrograd on the third anniversary of the October Revolution (7 November 1920). This event (directed by Nikolai Evreinov who, in 1925, immigrated to France) involved 8,000 direct participants and an audience of 100,000 (a quarter of the city's population) in spite of heavy rain. The underlying idea was formulated by Anatoli Lunatcharsky, People's Commisar for Enlightenment, in the spring of 1920: 'In order to acquire a sense of self the masses must outwardly manifest themselves, and this is possible only when, in Robespierre's words, they become a spectacle unto themselves.'[6] Thousands of workers, soldiers, students and artists worked round the clock, living on *kasha* (tasteless wheat porridge), tea and frozen apples, preparing the performance at the very place where the event 'really took place' three years earlier. Their work was co-ordinated by army officers, as well as by avant-garde artists, musicians and directors, from Malevich to Meyerhold. Although this was acting and not 'reality', the soldiers and sailors were playing themselves – many of them not only actually participated in the event of 1917, but also were simultaneously involved in the real battles of the Civil War that was raging in the nearby vicinity of Petrograd, a city under siege and suffering from severe shortages of food. A contemporary commented on the performance: 'The future historian will record how, throughout one of the bloodiest and most brutal revolutions, all of Russia was acting.'[7] The formalist theoretician Viktor Shklovski further noted that, 'some kind of elemental process is taking place where the living fabric of life is being transformed into the theatrical'.[8]

We all remember the infamous, self-celebratory 'First of May' parades that were one of the supreme signs of recognition of the Stalinist régime. If one needs proof of how Leninism functioned in an entirely different way, are such performances as the 'Storming of the Winter Palace' not the ultimate proof that the October Revolution was definitely *not* a simple *coup d'état* by a small group of Bolsheviks, but an event which unleashed a tremendous emancipatory potential? Does the 'Storming of the Winter Palace' performance not display the force of a sacred (pagan?) pageant, the magic act of founding a new community? It is *here* that Heidegger should have looked when writing about founding a State

as the event of truth (and not to the Nazi rituals); it is, perhaps, *here* that there occurred the only meaningful 'return of the sacred'. In short, it is here that, perhaps, one should look for the realization of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, of what he aimed at with the designation of his *Parsifal* as *Bühnenweihfestspiel* ('sacred festival drama'): it was in Petrograd of 1920, much more than in Ancient Greece, that, 'in intimate connection with its history, the people itself stood facing itself in the work of art, becoming conscious of itself, and, in the space of a few hours, rapturously devouring, as it were, its own essence.' This aestheticization, in which the people quite literally 'plays itself', certainly does not fall under Benjamin's indictment of the fascist 'aestheticization of the political' – instead of abandoning this aestheticization to the political Right, instead of a blanket dismissal of every mass political spectacle as 'proto-fascist', one should perceive in this minimal, purely formal, difference of the people from itself, the unique case of 'real life' differentiated from art by nothing more than an invisible formal gap. The very fact that, in historical documentaries, footage from the performance (as well as from Eisenstein's *October* of 1927) of the 'Storming of the Winter Palace' is often presented in the form of a documentary, is to be taken as an indication of this deeper identity of the people playing itself.

The archetypal Eisensteinian cinematic scene rendering the exuberant orgy of revolutionary destructive violence (what Eisenstein himself called 'a veritable bacchanalia of destruction') belongs to the same series: when, in *October*, the victorious revolutionaries penetrate the wine cellars of the Winter Palace, they indulge in an ecstatic orgy of smashing thousands of expensive wine bottles. In *Behzin Meadow*, the village pioneers force their way into the local church and desecrate it, robbing it of its relics, squabbling over an icon, sacrilegiously trying on vestments, heretically laughing at the statuary. In this suspension of goal-orientated instrumental activity, we effectively get a kind of Bataillean 'unrestrained expenditure'. Recall the classic reproach of Robespierre to the Dantonist opportunists: 'What you want is a revolution without revolution!' – the pious desire to deprive the revolution of this excess is simply the desire to have a revolution without revolution. However, this 'unrestrained expenditure' is not enough: in a revolution proper, such a display of what Hegel would have called 'abstract negativity' merely, as it were, wipes the slate clean for the second act, the imposition of a New Order.

It is this dimension that disappears in Stalinism. According to the standard leftist periodization (first proposed by Trotsky), the

'Thermidor' of the October Revolution occurred in the mid-1920s – in short, when Trotsky lost power, when the revolutionary *élan* changed into the rule of the new *nomenklatura* bent on constructing 'socialism in one country'. To this, one is tempted to oppose two alternatives: either the claim (advocated by Sylvain Lazarus and Alain Badiou[9]) that the proper revolutionary sequence ended precisely in October 1917, when the Bolsheviks took over State power and thereby began to function as a *State* party; or the claim (articulated and defended in detail by Sheila Fitzpatrick[10]) that the collectivization and rapid industrialization of the late 1920s was part of the inherent dynamic of the October Revolution, so that the revolutionary sequence proper ended only in 1937 – the true 'Thermidor' occurred only when the large-scale purges were cut short to prevent what Getty and Naumov called the complete 'suicide of the Party',[11] and the party *nomenklatura* stabilized itself into a 'new class'. And, effectively, it was only during the terrible events of 1928–1933 that the body of Russian society effectively underwent a radical transformation: in the difficult but enthusiastic years of 1917–1921, the entire society was in a state of emergency; the period of the New Economic Policy (NEP) marked a step backwards, a consolidation of Soviet State power leaving basically intact the texture of the social body (the large majority of peasants, artisans, intellectuals, etc.). It was only the thrust of 1928 that directly and brutally aimed at transforming the very composition of the social body, liquidating peasants as a class of individual owners, replacing the old intelligentsia (teachers, doctors, scientists, engineers, and technicians) with a new one. As Sheila Fitzpatrick suggests in plastic terms: if an emigrant who left Moscow in 1914 were to return in 1924, he would still recognize the same city, with the same array of shops, offices, theatres, and, in most cases, the same people in charge; if, however, he were to return another ten years later, in 1934, he would no longer recognize the city, so different was the entire texture of social life.[12] The difficult thing to grasp about the terrible years after 1929, the years of the great push forward, was that, within all those horrors beyond recognition, one can nonetheless discern a ruthless, but sincere and enthusiastic, will to a total revolutionary upheaval of the social body, to create a new state, intelligentsia, legal system ... In the domain of historiography, the 'Thermidor' occurred with the forceful reassertion of Russian nationalism, the reinterpretation of the great figures of the Russian past as 'progressive' (including the Tsars Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great, and conservative composers like Tchaikovsky), the

ordered refocusing of historical writing from anonymous mass trends towards great individuals and their heroic acts. In literary ideology and practice, the 'Thermidor' coincides with the imposition of 'socialist Realism' – and here, precisely, one should not miss the mode of this imposition. It was *not* that the doctrine of socialist Realism repressed the thriving plurality of styles and schools; on the contrary, socialist Realism was imposed against the predominance of the 'proletarian-sectarian' RAPP (the acronym for the 'Revolutionary Association of Proletarian Writers'), which, in the epoch of the 'second revolution' (1928–1932), became 'a sort of monster that seemed to be swallowing the small independent writers' organizations one by one'.[13] This is why the elevation of socialist Realism into the 'official' doctrine was greeted by the majority of writers with the sigh of relief: it was perceived (and also intended!) as the defeat of 'proletarian sectarianism', as the assertion of the right of writers to refer to the large corpus of 'progressive' figures of the past, and the primacy of wide 'humanism' over class sectarianism.

It was – again – the unique greatness of Eisenstein that, in his *Ivan the Terrible*, he rendered the libidinal economy of this 'Thermidor'. In the second part of the film, the only colourized reel (the penultimate one) is limited to the hall in which the carnivalesque orgy takes place. It stands for the Bakhtinian fantasmatic space in which 'normal' power relations are inverted, in which the Tsar is the slave of the idiot whom he proclaims a new Tsar; Ivan provides the imbecile Vladimir with all the imperial insignias, then humbly prostrates himself in front of him and kisses his hand. The scene in the hall begins with the obscene chorus and dance of the Oprichniki (Ivan's private army), staged in an entirely 'unrealistic' way: a weird mixture of Hollywood and Japanese theatre, a musical number whose words tell a strange story (they celebrate the axe which cuts off the heads of Ivan's enemies). The song first describes a group of boyars having a rich meal: 'Down the middle ... the golden goblets pass ... from hand to hand.' The chorus then asks with pleasurable nervous expectation: 'Come along. Come along. What happens next? Come on, tell us more!' And the solo Oprichnik, bending forward and whistling, shouts the answer: 'Strike with the axes!' We are here at the obscene site where musical enjoyment meets political liquidation. And, taking into account the fact that the film was shot in 1944, does this not confirm the carnivalesque character of the Stalinist purges? We encounter a similar nocturnal orgy in the third part of *Ivan* (which was not shot – see the scenario), where the sacrilegious

obscenity is explicit: Ivan and his Oprichniks perform their nightly drinking feast as a black mass, with black monastic robes over their normal clothing. Therein resides the true greatness of Eisenstein: that he detected (and depicted) the fundamental shift in the status of political violence, from the 'Leninist' liberating outburst of destructive energy to the 'Stalinist' obscene underside of the Law.

One must thus learn to look for displaced traces of Stalinist terror in 'official' Soviet culture and art. For instance, the climactic scene of Vsevolod Pudovkin's *Deserter* (1933) presents a weird displacement of the Stalinist show trials: when the film's hero, a German proletarian working in a gigantic Soviet metallurgical plant, is praised in front of the entire collective for his outstanding labour, he replies with a surprising public confession: no, he does not deserve this praise, he merely came to the Soviet Union to work in order to escape his cowardice and betrayal in Germany itself (when the police attacked the striking workers, he stayed at home, because he believed social democratic treacherous propaganda)! The public (simple workers) listen to him with perplexity, laughing and clapping – a properly uncanny scene reminding us of the scene in Kafka's *The Trial* when Josef K. confronts the courts – here also, the public laughs and claps at the most unexpected and inappropriate moments. The worker then returns to Germany to fight the battle at his proper place. This scene is so striking because it stages the secret fantasy of the Stalinist trial: the traitor publicly confesses his crime out of his own free will and feeling of guilt, without any pressure from the secret police.

If there ever was a novel that stands as the absolute classic of literary Stalinism, it is Nikolai Ostrovsky's *How the Steel Was Tempered*. In it, Pavka, a Bolshevik fully engaged first in the Civil War and then, during the 1920s, in the construction of steel-mills, ends up his life in dirty rags and totally crippled, immobilized, deprived of limbs, thus reduced to an almost non-bodily existence. In such a state, he finally marries a young girl named Taya, making it clear that there will be no sex between them, just companionship, with her function being to take care of him. Here we, in a way, encounter the 'truth' of the Stalinist mythology of the Happy New Man: a dirty desexualized cripple, sacrificing everything for the construction of socialism. This fate coincides with that of Ostrovsky himself, who, in the mid 1930s, after finishing the novel, was dying, crippled and blind; and, like Ostrovsky, Pavka – reduced to a living dead, a kind of living mummy – is reborn at the novel's end through writing a novel about his life. (In the last two years of his life, Ostrovsky

lived in a Black Sea resort house as a 'living legend', on a street named after himself, his house a site of countless pilgrimages and of great interest to foreign journalists.) This mortification of one's own treacherous body is itself embodied in a piece of shrapnel that has lodged itself in Pavka's eye, gradually blinding him; at this point, Ostrovsky's bland style suddenly explodes into a complex metaphor:

> The octopus has a bulging eye the size of a cat's head, a dull-red eye, green in the centre, burning, pulsating with a phosphorescent glow ... The octopus moves. He can see it almost next to his eyes. The tentacles creep over his body; they are cold and they burn like nettles. The octopus shoots out its sting, and it bites into his head like a leech, and, wriggling convulsively, it sucks at his blood. He feels the blood draining out of his body into the swelling body of the octopus.[14]

To put it in Lacanian–Deleuzian terms, the octopus stands here for an 'organ without body', a partial object that invades our ordinary biological body and mortifies it; it is not a metaphor for the capitalist system squeezing and choking workers within its tentacles (the standard popular use of the metaphor between the two World Wars), but, surprisingly, a 'positive' metaphor for the absolute self-control that a Bolshevik revolutionary must exert over his body (and over his 'pathological', potentially corrupting, bodily desires) – the octopus is a superego organ which controls us from within: when, at the lowest point of despair, Pavka reviews his life, Ostrovsky himself characterizes this moment of reflection as 'a meeting of the Politburo with his "I" about the treacherous behaviour of his body'. Yet another proof of the way that literary ideology can never simply lie: truth articulates itself in it through its very displacements.

If, then, Ostrovsky and Eisenstein stage the obscene underside of the Stalinist universe, what would have been its public face, the Stalinist genre par excellence? My thesis is: not heroic wartime, historic or revolutionary epics, but *musicals*, the unique genre of so-called 'kolkhoz-musicals' that thrived from the mid 1930s to the early 1950s, whose greatest star was Ljubov Orlova, a kind of Soviet counterpart to Ginger Rogers. The representative films of this genre are: *The Merry Children* (a.k.a., *The Shepherd Kostja*), *Volga, Volga* (Stalin's favourite film) and *The Cossacks of the Kuban District*, the swan song of the genre. There are no traitors in these films, and life is fundamentally happy in them: the 'bad' characters are merely opportunists or lazy frivolous seducers, who are, at

the film's end, re-educated and gladly assume their place in society. In this harmonious universe, even animals – pigs, cows and chickens – happily dance with humans.

And it is here that the circle of co-dependence with Hollywood closes: not only were these films part of an attempt to build a Soviet version of the Hollywood production system; surprisingly, the influence also went the other way around. Not only is the legendary shot of King Kong on top of the Empire State Building a direct echo of a constructivist project for the Palace of Soviets with a gigantic Lenin statue at its top; in 1942, Hollywood itself produced its own version of the kolkhoz musical, *The North Star*, one of the three directly pro-Stalinist movies which were, of course, part of the wartime propaganda. The image of kolkhoz life that we get here is no poor reflection of its Soviet model: scenario by Lillian Hellmann, words by Ira Gershwin, music by Aaron Copland. Does this strange film not bear witness to an inner complicity between Stalinist cinema and Hollywood?

Pluto's Judgement Day, a Disney classic from 1935, stages a mocking show-trial of Pluto who, after falling asleep near a fire, endures a nightmarish dream about being dragged to a cats' court, where he is designated as a Public Enemy, accused by a series of witnesses of anti-feline behaviour and then condemned to public burning. When Pluto starts to burn, he, of course, awakens: the dream scene of burning incorporated the real-life fact that fire was getting nearer and nearer to his tail. What makes this dream so interesting is not merely the obvious political references (not only was 1935 the first big year of Moscow trials; in the United States itself, the orchestrated campaign against gangster Public Enemies was part of the public relations policy of Hoover's FBI), but, even more, the way the cartoon stages the show-trial as a musical number, with a series of ironic references to popular songs, up to 'Three Little Maids' from Gilbert and Sullivan's *Mikado*. Ten years before Eisenstein, the link between the musical and a political show-trial is established.

Notes

1 Ernst Nolte, *Martin Heidegger – Politik und Geschichte im Leben und Denken*, Berlin, Vittorio Klostermann Verlag, 1992.

2 Nolte, *Martin Heidegger*, p. 296.

3 Nolte, *Martin Heidegger*, p. 277.
4 Bertolt Brecht, *Die Gedichte in einem Band*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1999, pp. 1009–10.
5 V. I. Lenin, 'Our revolution (apropos of N. Sukhanov's notes)', in *Selected Works, Volume 3*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1975, p. 707: 'Napoleon, I think, wrote, "*On s'engage et puis ... on voit.*" Rendered freely this means, "First engage in a serious battle and then see what happens." Well, we did first engage in a serious battle in October 1917, and then saw such details of development (from the standpoint of world history they were certainly details) as the Brest peace, the New Economic Policy, and so forth. And now there can be no doubt that in the main we have been victorious.' [eds]
6 Quoted in Richard Taylor, *October*, London, British Film Institute, 2002, p. 8.
7 Quoted in Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001, p. 144.
8 Quoted in Buck-Morss, ibid.
9 See Alain Badiou, 'Qu'est-ce qu'un thermidorien?', in *Abrégé de métapolitique*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1998, pp. 139–54. [eds]
10 Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1992. [eds]
11 J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov, *The Road to Terror: Stalin and Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932–1939*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1999. [eds]
12 Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front*, pp. 9–13. [eds]
13 Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 3rd ed., Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2000, p. 32.
14 Nikolai Ostrovsky, *How the Steel was Tempered*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1979, pp. 195–6.

8

Attempts to escape the logic of capitalism

Václav Havel's life would seem to be an unrivalled success story: the Philosopher-King, a man who combines political power with a global moral authority comparable only to that of the Pope, the Dalai Lama or Nelson Mandela. And just as at the end of a fairy tale, when the hero is rewarded for all his suffering by marrying the princess, he is married to a beautiful movie actress. Why, then, did John Keane choose the subtitle of his biography: *Václav Havel: A Political Tragedy in Six Acts* (London, Bloomsbury, 1999)?

In the 1970s, when Havel was still a relatively unknown Czech dissident writer, Keane played a crucial role in making him known in the West: he organized the publication of Havel's political texts and became a close friend. He also did a great deal to resuscitate Havel's notion of 'civil society' as the site of resistance to late socialist régimes. Despite their personal connection, Keane's book is far from hagiography – he gives us the 'real Havel' with all his weaknesses and idiosyncrasies. He divides his life into six stages: the early student years under the Stalinist régime; the playwright and essayist of the 1960s; the defeat of the last great attempt at 'socialism with a human face' in Prague in the Spring of 1968; the years of dissidence and arrest which culminated in Havel's emergence as the leading spokesman for Charter 77; the Velvet Revolution; and, finally, the presidency. Along the way, we get an abundance of 'endearing foibles', which, far from tarnishing Havel's heroic image, seem somehow to make his achievement all the more palpable. His parents were rich 'cultural capitalists', owners of the famous Barrandov cinema studios ('bourgeois origins'). He has always had unreliable habits (a fondness for *eau de toilette* and sleeping late, listening to rock music) and is known for his promiscuity, notwithstanding the celebrated prison

letters to his working-class wife Olga. (When he was released from jail in 1977, he spent his first weeks of freedom with a mistress.) In the 1980s, he was ruthless in establishing himself as Czechoslovakia's most important dissident – whenever a potential rival emerged, doubtful rumours would start to circulate about the rival's links with the secret police, etc. As President he used a child's scooter to zoom along the corridors of the huge presidential palace.

The reason for the 'tragedy' of Havel, however, is not the tension between the public figure and the 'real person', nor even his gradual loss of charisma in recent years. Such things characterize every successful political career (with the exception of those touched by the grace of premature demise). Keane writes that Havel's life resembles a 'classical political tragedy', because it has been 'clamped by moments of ... triumph spoiled by defeat', and notes that 'most of the citizens in President Havel's republic think less of him than they did a year ago'. The crucial issue, in fact, is the tension *between his two public images*: that of the heroic dissident who, in the oppressive and cynical universe of late socialism, practised and wrote about 'living in truth', and that of postmodern President who (not unlike Al Gore) indulges in New Age ruminations that aim at legitimizing NATO military intervention. How do we get from the lone, fragile dissident with a crumpled jacket and uncompromising ethics, who opposed almighty totalitarian power, to the President who babbles about the anthropic principle and the end of the Cartesian paradigm, reminds us that human rights are conferred on us by the Creator, and is applauded in the United States Congress for his defence of Western values? Is this depressing spectacle the necessary outcome, the 'truth', of Havel the heroic dissident? To put it in Hegel's terms: how does the ethically impeccable 'noble consciousness' imperceptibly pass into the servile 'base consciousness'? Of course, for a 'postmodern' Third Way democrat immersed in New Age ideology, there is no tension: Havel is simply following his destiny, and is deserving of praise for not shirking political power. But there is no escape from the conclusion that his life has descended from the sublime to the ridiculous.

Rarely has one individual played so many different parts: the cocky young student in the early 1950s, and member of a closed circle that holds passionate political discussions and somehow survives the worst years of Stalinist terror; the modernist playwright and critical essayist struggling to assert himself in the mild thaw of the late 1950s and 1960s; the first encounter with History – in the Prague Spring – which was also

Havel's first big disappointment; the long ordeal of the 1970s and most of the 1980s, when he was transformed from a critical playwright into a key political figure; the miracle of the Velvet Revolution, with Havel emerging as a skilful politician negotiating the transfer of power and ending up as President; finally, the Havel in the 1990s, the man who presided over the disintegration of Czechoslovakia and who is now a proponent of the full integration of the Czech Republic into Western economic and military structures. Havel himself has been shocked by the swiftness of the transformation – a television camera famously caught his look of disbelief as he sat down to his first official dinner as President.

Keane highlights the limitations of Havel's political project, and the Havel he describes is sometimes remarkably naïve, as when, in January 1990, he greeted Chancellor Kohl with the words: 'Why don't we work together to dissolve all political parties? Why don't we set up just one big party, the Party of Europe?' There is a nice symmetry in the two Vaclavs who have dominated Czech politics during the last decade: Havel, the charismatic Philosopher-King, the head of a democratic monarchy, finding an appropriate double in Vaclav Klaus, his Prime Minister – the cold technocratic advocate of full market liberalism who dismisses any talk of solidarity and community.

In 1974, Paul Theroux visited Vietnam after the peace agreement and the withdrawal of the United States Army but before the Communist takeover. He wrote about it in *The Great Railway Bazaar*. A couple of hundred American soldiers were still there – deserters, officially and legally non-existent, living in slum shacks with their Vietnamese wives, earning a living by smuggling or other crimes. In Theroux's hands, these individuals become representative of Vietnam's place in global power politics. From them, he gradually unravels the complex totality of Vietnamese society. When Keane is at his best, he displays the same ability to extract the global context of what was going on in Czechoslovakia from smallest details. The weakest passages in the book are those that attempt to deal more conceptually with the nature of 'totalitarian' régimes or the social implications of modern technology. Instead of an account of the inner antagonisms of Communist régimes, we get the standard liberal clichés about 'totalitarian control', etc.

Towards the end of his book, Keane touches on the old idea of the 'King's Two Bodies', and points to the equivalent importance of the Leader's body in Communist régimes. A 'pre-modern' political order, he

writes, relies on having such sacred bodies, while the democratic system, in which the place of power is supposedly empty, is open to competitive struggle. But this contrast fails to grasp the intricacies of 'totalitarianism'. It is not that Keane is too directly anti-Communist, but that his liberal-democratic stance prevents him from seeing the horrifying paradox of the 'Stalinist Leader'.

Lenin's first major stroke, which he suffered in May 1922, left his right side virtually paralysed and for a while deprived him of speech. He realized that his active political life was over and asked Stalin for some poison so that he could kill himself; Stalin took the matter to the Politburo, which voted against Lenin's wish. Lenin assumed that because he was no longer of any use to the revolutionary struggle, death was the only option – 'calmly enjoying old age' was out of the question. Further, the idea of his funeral as a great State event was repulsive to him. This was not modesty: he was simply indifferent to the fate of his body, regarding it as an instrument to be ruthlessly exploited and discarded when no longer useful.

With Stalinism, however, the body of the Leader became 'objectively beautiful'. In 'On the problem of the beautiful in Soviet art', an essay from 1950, the Soviet critic Nedoshivin wrote: 'Amid all the beautiful material of life, the first place should be occupied by images of our great leaders ... The sublime beauty of the leaders ... is the basis for the coinciding of the "beautiful" and the "true" in the art of socialist realism.' This has nothing to do with the Leader's physical attributes and everything to do with abstract ideals. The Leader in fact is like the Lady in courtly love poetry – cold, distanced, inhuman. Both the Leninist and the Stalinist Leader are thoroughly alienated, but in opposite ways: the Leninist Leader displays radical self-instrumentalization on behalf of the Revolution, while in the case of the Stalinist Leader, the 'real person' is treated as an appendix to the fetishized and celebrated public image. It is no wonder the official photos of the Stalinist era were so often retouched, and with a clumsiness so obvious that it almost seemed intentional. It signalled that the 'real person', with all his idiosyncrasies, had been replaced by a wooden effigy. One rumour circulating about Kim Jong Il is that he actually died in a car crash a couple of years ago and a double has taken his place for rare public appearances, so that the crowds can catch a glimpse of the object of their worship. This is the ultimate confirmation that the 'real personality' of the Stalinist leader is thoroughly irrelevant. Havel, of course, is the inverse of this structure:

while the Stalinist Leader is reduced to a ritualistically praised effigy, Havel's charisma is that of a 'real person'. The paradox is that a genuine 'cult of personality' can thrive only in a democracy.

Havel's essay on 'The Power of the powerless', written in 1978, was perceptive in explaining how late socialism operated at the domestic, day-to-day level. What was important was not that, deep down, the people believed in the ruling ideology, but that they followed the external rituals and practices by means of which this ideology acquired material existence. Havel's example is the green-grocer, a modest man profoundly indifferent to official ideology. He just mechanically follows the rules: on State holidays, he decorates the window of his shop with official slogans, such as 'Long live socialism!' When there are mass gatherings, he takes part *affectlessly*. Although he privately complains about the corruption and incompetence of 'those in power', he takes comfort in pieces of folk wisdom ('power corrupts', etc.), which enable him to legitimize his stance in his own eyes and to retain a false appearance of dignity. When someone tries to engage him in dissident activity, he protests: 'Why are you getting me mixed up in these things which are bound to be used against my children? Is it really up to me to set the world right?'

Havel saw that if there was a 'psychological' mechanism at work in Communist ideology, it had nothing to do with belief, but rather with shared guilt: in the 'normalization' that followed the Soviet intervention of 1968, the Czech régime made sure that, in one way or another, the majority of people were somehow morally discredited, compelled to violate their own moral standards. When an individual was blackmailed into signing a petition against a dissident (Havel, for example), he knew that he was lying and taking part in a campaign against an honest man, and it was precisely this ethical betrayal that rendered him the ideal Communist subject. The régime relied on and actively condoned the moral bankruptcy of its subjects. Havel's concept of 'living in truth' involved no metaphysics: it simply designated the act of suspending one's participation, of breaking out of the vicious cycle of 'objective guilt'. He blocked off all false escape-routes, including seeking refuge in the 'small pleasures of everyday life'. Such acts of indifference – making fun in private of official rituals, for instance – were, he said, the very means by which the official ideology was reproduced.

A 'sincere' believer in official late socialist ideology was, therefore, potentially much more dangerous to the régime than a cynic. Consider

two examples from countries other than Czechoslovakia: first, the emblematic figures of Evald Iljenkov (1924–1979) and Aleksei Losev (1893–1988), the two prototypes of Russian philosophy under late socialism. Losev was the author of the last book published in the USSR (in 1929) which openly rejected Marxism (he called dialectical materialism 'obvious nonsense'). After a short prison term, he was allowed to pursue his academic career and, during World War II, even started lecturing again – his formula for survival was to withdraw into the history of aesthetics. Under the guise of interpreting past thinkers, especially Plotinus and other Neoplatonists, he was able to smuggle in his own spiritualist beliefs, while, in the introductions to his books, paying lip service to the official ideology with a quote or two from Khrushchev or Brezhnev. In this way, he survived all the vicissitudes of Communism and was hailed after 1989 as the representative of an authentic Russian spiritual heritage. Iljenkov, a superb dialectician and expert on Hegel, was, on the other hand, a sincere Marxist–Leninist. He wrote lively, individual prose and endeavoured to engage with Marxism as a serious philosophy rather than as a set of official maxims. This didn't go down well: he was excommunicated and committed suicide.

The second example is Yugoslav 'self-management socialism' and the fundamental paradox contained within it. Tito's official ideology continually exhorted people to take control of their lives outside of the structures of Party and State; the authorized media criticized personal indifference and the escape into privacy. However, it was precisely an authentic, self-managed articulation and organization of common interests that the régime feared most. Between the lines of its propaganda, the government suggested that its official solicitations were not to be taken too literally, that a cynical attitude towards its ideology was what was actually wanted. The greatest catastrophe for the régime would have been for its own ideology to be taken seriously and acted upon by its subjects.

Havel was especially penetrating in his denunciation of the inherent hypocrisy of Western Marxism and of the 'socialist opposition' in Communist countries. Consider the almost total absence of any theoretical confrontation with Stalinism in the works of the Frankfurt School, in contrast to its permanent obsession with fascism. The standard excuse was that Frankfurt School critics did not want to oppose Communism too openly, for fear that they would be playing into the hands of the Cold Warriors in the Western countries where they

lived. But this is obviously not sufficient: had they been cornered and made to say where they stood in the Cold War, they would have chosen Western liberal democracy (as Max Horkheimer did explicitly in some of his late writings). 'Stalinism' was a traumatic topic on which the Frankfurt School *had* to remain silent – silence was the only way for its members to retain their underlying solidarity with Western liberal democracy, without losing their mask of radical leftism.

Their ultimate alignment with the Western system is equivalent to the stance of the 'democratic socialist opposition' in the German Democratic Republic. Although members of the opposition criticized Communist Party rule, they endorsed the basic premise of the régime: that the Federal Republic of Germany was a neo-Nazi State, the direct heir of Nazism and, therefore, that the existence of the GDR as an anti-fascist bulwark had to be protected at any cost. When the socialist system was really threatened, the opposition publicly supported it (take Brecht's position on the East Berlin workers' demonstrations in 1953, or Christa Wolf's on the Prague Spring). The opposition retained its belief in the inherent reformability of the system, but argued that true democratic reform would take time. A rapid disintegration of socialism would, it thought, only return Germany to fascism and strangle the utopia of the 'Other Germany', which, in spite of all its horrors and failures, the GDR represented.

This is why opposition intellectuals so deeply distrusted 'the people'. In 1989, they opposed free elections, well aware that, if given the chance, the majority would choose capitalist consumerism. Free elections, Heiner Müller said, had brought Hitler to power. Many Western social democrats played the same game, feeling much closer to 'reform-minded' Communists than to dissidents – the latter somehow embarrassed them as an obstacle to the process of *détente*. It was clear to Havel that Soviet intervention in 1968 had preserved the Western myth of the Prague Spring: the utopian notion that, were the Czechs to be left alone, they would give birth to an authentic alternative to both Real Socialism and Real Capitalism. In fact, had the forces of the Warsaw Pact not intervened in August 1968, either the Czech Communist leadership would have had to impose restraint, and Czechoslovakia would have remained a fully Communist country, or it would have turned into a 'normal' Western capitalist society (though perhaps one with a Scandinavian social-democratic flavour).

Havel also discerned the fraudulence of what I would call the 'interpassive socialism' of the Western academic Left. These leftists aren't

interested in activity – merely in 'authentic' experience. They allow themselves to pursue their well-paid academic careers in the West, while using the idealized Other (Cuba, Nicaragua, Tito's Yugoslavia) as the stuff of their ideological dreams: they dream through the Other, but turn their backs on it if it disturbs their complacency by abandoning socialism and opting for liberal capitalism. What is of special interest here is the lack of understanding between the Western Left and dissidents such as Havel. In the eyes of the Western Left, Eastern dissidents were too naïve in their belief in liberal democracy – in rejecting socialism, they threw out the baby with the bath water. In the eyes of the dissidents, the Western Left was playing patronizing games with them, disavowing the true harshness of totalitarianism. The idea that dissidents were somehow guilty for not seizing the unique opportunity provided by the disintegration of socialism to invent an authentic alternative to capitalism was pure hypocrisy.

In dissecting late socialism, Havel was always aware that Western liberal democracy was far from meeting the ideals of authentic community and 'living in truth' on behalf of which he and other dissidents had opposed Communism. He was faced, therefore, with the problem of combining a rejection of 'totalitarianism' with the need to offer critical insights into Western democracy. His solution was to follow Heidegger and to see in the technological hubris of capitalism, its mad dance of self-enhancing productivity, the expression of a more fundamental transcendental-ontological principle – 'will to power', 'instrumental reason' – equally evident in the Communist attempt to overcome capitalism. This was the argument of Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which first engineered the fateful shift from concrete socio-political analysis to philosophico-anthropological generalization, by means of which 'instrumental reason' is no longer grounded in concrete capitalist social relations, but is instead posited as their quasi-transcendental 'foundation'. The moment that Havel endorsed Heidegger's recourse to quasi-anthropological or philosophical principle, Stalinism lost its specificity, its specific *political* dynamic, and turned into just another example of this principle (as exemplified by Heidegger's remark, in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, that, in the long run, Russian Communism and Americanism were 'metaphysically one and the same').

Keane tries to save Havel from this predicament by emphasizing the ambiguous nature of his intellectual debt to Heidegger. Like Heidegger, Havel conceived of Communism as a thoroughly modern régime, an

inflated caricature of modern life, with many tendencies shared by Western society – for instance, technological hubris and the crushing of human individuality attendant on it. However, in contrast to Heidegger, who excluded any active resistance to the social-technological framework ('only God can save us', as he put it in an interview published after his death), Havel put faith in a challenge 'from below' – in the independent life of 'civil society' outside the frame of State power. The 'power of the powerless', he argued, resides in the self-organization of civil society that defies the 'instrumental reason' embodied in the State and the technological apparatuses of control and domination.

I find this idea of civil society doubly problematic. First, the opposition between State and civil society works *against* as well as *for* liberty and democracy. For example, in the United States, the Moral Majority presents itself (and is effectively organized as) the resistance of local civil society to the regulatory interventions of the liberal State – the recent exclusion of Darwinism from the school curriculum in Kansas is in this sense exemplary. So while in the specific case of late socialism the idea of civil society refers to the opening up of a space of resistance to 'totalitarian' power, there is no essential reason why it cannot provide space for all the politico-ideological antagonisms that plagued Communism, including nationalism and opposition movements of an anti-democratic nature. These are authentic expressions of civil society – 'civil society' designates the terrain of open struggle, the terrain in which antagonisms can articulate themselves, without any guarantee that the 'progressive' side will win.

Second, civil society, as Havel conceived it, is not, in fact, a development of Heidegger's thinking. The essence of modern technology for Heidegger was not a set of institutions, practices and ideological attitudes that can be opposed, but the very ontological horizon that determines how we experience Being today, how reality discloses itself to us. For that reason, Heidegger would have found the concept of 'the *power* of the powerless' suspect, caught in the logic of the 'will to power' that it endeavours to denounce.

Havel's understanding that 'living in truth' could not be achieved by capitalism, combined with his crucial failure to understand the origins of his own critical impulse, has pushed him towards New Ageism. Although the Communist régimes were mostly a dismal failure, generating terror and misery, at the same time they opened up a space for utopian expectations which, among other things, facilitated the failure of

Communism itself. What anti-Communist dissidents such as Havel overlook, then, is that the very space from which they criticized and denounced terror and misery was opened and sustained by *Communism's attempt to escape the logic of capitalism*. This explains Havel's continuing insistence that capitalism in its traditional, brutal form cannot meet the high expectations of his anti-Communist struggle – the need for authentic human solidarity, etc. This is, in turn, why Václav Klaus, Havel's pragmatic double, has dismissed Havel as a 'socialist'.

Even the most 'totalitarian' Stalinist ideology is radically ambiguous. While the universe of Stalinist politics was undoubtedly one of hypocrisy and arbitrary terror, in the late 1930s the great Soviet films (say, the Gorky trilogy) epitomized authentic solidarity for audiences across Europe. In one memorable film about the Civil War, a mother with a young son is exposed as a counter-revolutionary spy. A group of Bolsheviks put her on trial and, at the very beginning of the trial, an old Bolshevik demands that the sentence be severe, but just. After she confesses her crime, the court (an informal collective of Bolshevik soldiers) rules that she was seduced into enemy activity by her difficult social circumstances; she is therefore sentenced to be fully integrated into the new socialist collective, to be taught to write and read and to acquire a proper education, while her son, who is unwell, is to be given proper medical care. The surprised woman bursts out crying, unable to understand the court's benevolence, and the old Bolshevik nods: 'Yes, this is a severe but just sentence!' No matter how manipulative such scenes were, no matter how far they were from the reality of 'revolutionary justice', they nonetheless bore witness to a new sense of justice and, as such, gave viewers new ethical standards against which reality could be measured.

Havel seems now to be blind to the fact that his own opposition to Communism was rendered possible by the utopian dimension generated and sustained by Communist régimes. So we get the tragi-comic indignity which is his recent essay in the *New York Review of Books* on 'Kosovo and the end of the nation-state'. In it, he tries to say that the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia placed human rights above the rights of the State, that the NATO alliance's attack on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia without a direct mandate from the United Nations was not an irresponsible act of aggression, or of disrespect for international Law. It was, on the contrary, according to Havel, prompted by respect for the

Law, for a Law that ranks higher than the Law which protects the sovereignty of States. The alliance has acted out of respect for human rights, as both conscience and international treaties dictate.

Havel further invokes this 'higher Law' when he claims that 'human rights, human freedoms ... and human dignity have their deepest roots somewhere outside the perceptible world ... while the State is a human creation, human beings are the creation of God.' He seems to be saying that NATO forces were allowed to violate international Law because they acted as direct instruments of the 'higher Law' of God – a clear-cut case of religious fundamentalism. Havel's statement is a good example of what Ulrich Beck, in an article in *Die Süddeutsche Zeitung* in 1999, called 'militaristic humanism' or even 'militaristic pacifism'. The problem with this approach is not that it is inherently contradictory, an Orwellian 'peace is war'. Nor is NATO intervention best met with the pacifist-liberal argument that 'more bombs and killing never bring peace' (it goes without saying that this is wrong). It is not even enough to point out, as a Marxist would, that the targets of bombardment weren't chosen with moral considerations in mind, but were determined by geopolitical and economic interests. The main problem with Havel's argument is that intervention is presented as having been undertaken for the sake of the victims of hatred and violence – that is, justified by a depoliticized appeal to universal human rights.

A report by Steven Erlanger on the suffering of the Kosovo Albanians in the May 1999 edition of the *New York Times* was entitled 'In one Kosovo woman, an emblem of suffering'. This woman is from the outset identified as a powerless victim of circumstance, deprived of political identity, reduced to bare suffering. As such, she is beyond political recrimination – an independent Kosovo is not on her agenda, she just wants the horror over:

> Does she favour an independent Kosovo?
> 'You know, I don't care if it's this or that', Meli said. 'I just want all this to end, and to feel good again, to feel good in my place and my house with my friends and family.'
> Her support for the NATO intervention is grounded in her wish for the horror to end.
> She wants a settlement that brings foreigners here 'with some force behind them'. She is indifferent as to who the foreigners are.
> She sympathizes with all sides:

'There is tragedy enough for everyone,' she says. 'I feel sorry for the Serbs who've been bombed and died, and I feel sorry for my own people. But maybe now there will be a conclusion, a settlement for good. That would be great.'

Meli is the ideal subject-victim to whose aid NATO comes running: not a political subject with a clear agenda, but a subject of helpless suffering, someone who sympathizes with all suffering sides in the conflict, caught in the madness of a local clash that can only be stopped by the intervention of a benevolent foreign power.

The ultimate paradox of the NATO bombing of Serbia is not the one that was regularly rehearsed by Western opponents of the war: that by an attempt to stop ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, NATO triggered cleansing on a larger scale and created the very humanitarian catastrophe it wanted to prevent. A deeper paradox involves the ideology of victimization: when NATO intervened to protect Kosovar victims, it ensured at that same time that they would *remain* victims, inhabitants of a devastated country with a passive population – they were not encouraged to become an active politico-military force capable of defending itself. Here we have the basic paradox of victimization: the Other to be protected is good in so far as it remains a victim (which is why we were bombarded with pictures of helpless Kosovar mothers, children and old people, telling moving stories of their suffering); the moment it no longer behaves as a victim, but wants to strike back on its own, it all of a sudden magically turns into a terrorist, fundamentalist, drug-trafficking Other. This ideology of global victimization, the identification of the human subject as 'something that can be hurt', is the perfect fit for today's global capitalism, though most of the time it remains invisible to the public eye.

Havel praised the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia as the first case of a military intervention in a country with full sovereign power, undertaken not out of any specific economico-strategic interest but because that country was violating the elementary human rights of an ethnic group. To understand the falseness of this, compare this new moralism with the great emancipatory movements inspired by Gandhi and Martin Luther King. These were movements directed not against a specific group of people, but against concrete (racist, colonialist) institutionalized practices; they involved a positive, all-inclusive stance that, far from excluding the 'enemy' (whites, English colonizers), made an appeal to its moral sense and asked it to do something that would restore

its own moral dignity. The predominant form of today's 'politically correct' moralism, on the other hand, is that of Nietzschean *ressentiment* and envy: it is the fake gesture of disavowed politics, the assuming of a 'moral', depoliticized position in order to make a stronger political case. This is a perverted version of Havel's 'power of the powerless': powerlessness can be manipulated as a stratagem in order to gain more power, in exactly the same way that today, in order for one's voice to gain authority, one has to legitimize oneself as being some kind of (potential or actual) victim of power.

The ultimate cause of this moralistic depoliticization is the retreat of the Marxist historico-political project. A couple of decades ago, people were still discussing the political future of humanity – will capitalism prevail or will it be supplanted by Communism or another form of 'totalitarianism'? – while silently accepting that, somehow, social life would continue. Today, we can easily imagine the extinction of the human race, but it is impossible to imagine a radical change of the social system – even if life on earth disappears, capitalism will somehow remain intact. In this situation, disappointed leftists, who are convinced that radical change of the existing liberal-democratic capitalist system is no longer possible, but who are unable to renounce their passionate attachment to global change, invest their excess of political energy in an abstract and excessively rigid moralizing stance.

At a recent meeting of the leaders of the Western powers dedicated to the 'Third Way', the Italian Prime Minister Massimo d'Alema said that one should not be afraid of the word 'socialism'. Clinton and, following him, Blair and Schröder, are supposed to have burst out laughing. This says much about the Third Way, which is 'problematic' not least because it exposes the absence of a 'second way'. The idea of a 'third way' emerged at the very moment when, at least in the West, all other alternatives, from old-style conservatism to radical social democracy, crumbled in the face of the triumphant onslaught of global capitalism and its notion of liberal democracy. The true message of the notion of the Third Way is that there is no 'second way', no alternative to global capitalism, so that, in a kind of mocking pseudo-Hegelian 'negation of negation', the Third Way brings us back to the first and only way. Is this not global capitalism with a human face?

This, then, is Havel's tragedy: his authentic ethical stance has become a moralizing idiom cynically appropriated by the knaves of capitalism. His heroic insistence on doing the impossible (opposing the seemingly

invincible Communist régime) has ended up serving those who 'realistically' argue that any real change in today's world is impossible. This reversal is not a betrayal of his original ethical stance, but is inherent in it. The ultimate lesson of Havel's tragedy is thus a cruel, but inexorable one: the direct ethical foundation of politics sooner or later turns into its own comic caricature, adopting the very cynicism it originally opposed.

Notes

This paper was originally published in the *London Review of Books*, 28 October 1999, pp. 3–7. [eds]

SECTION III

Really existing capitalism

9

Multiculturalism, or, the cultural logic of multinational capitalism

Those who still remember the good old days of socialist realism are well aware of the key role played by the notion of the 'typical': truly progressive literature should depict 'typical heroes in typical situations'. Writers who presented a bleak picture of Soviet reality were not simply accused of lying; the accusation was rather that they provided a distorted reflection of social reality by depicting the remainders of the decadent past instead of focusing on phenomena that were 'typical', in the sense of expressing the underlying historical tendency of the progress towards Communism. Ridiculous as this notion may sound, its grain of truth resides in the fact that each universal ideological notion is always hegemonized by some particular content that colours its very universality and accounts for its efficiency.

Why is the single mother 'typical'?

In the rejection of the social welfare system by the New Right in the United States, for example, the universal notion of the welfare system as inefficient is sustained by the pseudo-concrete representation of the notorious African-American single mother, as if, in the last resort, social welfare is a programme for black single mothers – the particular case of the 'single black mother' is silently conceived as 'typical' of social welfare and what is wrong with it. In the case of the anti-abortion campaign, the 'typical' case is the exact opposite: a sexually promiscuous professional woman who values her career over her 'natural' assignment of motherhood – although this characterization is a blatant

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In the rejection of the social welfare system by the New Right in the United States, for example, the universal notion of the welfare system as inefficient is sustained by the pseudo-concrete representation of the notorious African-American single mother, as if, in the last resort, social welfare is a programme for black single mothers – the particular case of the 'single black mother' is silently conceived as 'typical' of social welfare and what is wrong with it. In the case of the anti-abortion campaign, the 'typical' case is the exact opposite: a sexually promiscuous professional woman who values her career over her 'natural' assignment of motherhood – although this characterization is a blatant

contradiction of the fact that the great majority of abortions occur in lower-class families with a lot of children. This specific twist – a particular content that is promulgated as 'typical' of the universal notion – is the element of fantasy, of the fantasmatic background/support of the universal ideological notion. To put it in Kantian terms, it plays the role of 'transcendental schematism', translating the empty universal concept into a notion that directly relates and applies to our 'actual experience'. As such, this fantasmatic specification is by no means an insignificant illustration or exemplification: it is at this level that ideological battles are won or lost – the moment we perceive as 'typical' the case of abortion in a large lower-class family unable to cope with another child, the perspective changes radically.[1]

This example makes clear in what sense 'the universal results from a constitutive split in which the negation of a particular identity transforms this identity into the symbol of identity and fullness as such':[2] the universal acquires concrete existence when some particular content begins to function as its stand-in. A couple of years ago, the English yellow press focused on single mothers as the source of all of the evils of modern society, from budget crises to juvenile delinquency. In this ideological space, the universality of 'modern social Evil' was operative only through the split of the figure of the 'single mother' into itself in its particularity and itself as the stand-in for 'modern social Evil'. The fact that this link between the Universal and the particular content that acts as its stand-in is *contingent* means precisely that it is the outcome of a *political* struggle for ideological hegemony. However, the dialectic of this struggle is more complex than in its standard Marxist version – that of particular interests assuming the form of universality: 'universal human rights are effectively the rights of white male property owners ...' In order to be operative, the ruling ideology must incorporate a series of features in which the exploited majority will be able to recognize its authentic longings. In other words, each hegemonic universality must incorporate *at least two* particular contents: the authentic popular content, as well as its distortion by the relations of domination and exploitation. Of course, fascist ideology 'manipulates' authentic popular longings for true community and social solidarity against fierce competition and exploitation; of course, it 'distorts' the expression of this longing in order to legitimize the continuation of the relations of social domination and exploitation. However, in order to be able to achieve this distortion of authentic longing, it has first to incorporate it ...

Étienne Balibar was thus fully justified in reversing Marx's classic formula: the ruling ideas are precisely *not* directly the ideas of those who rule.[3] How did Christianity become the ruling ideology? By incorporating a series of crucial motifs and aspirations of the oppressed – truth is on the side of the suffering and humiliated, power corrupts and so on – and rearticulating them in such a way that they became compatible with the existing relations of domination.

Desire and its articulation

One is tempted to refer here to the Freudian distinction between the latent dream-thought and the unconscious desire expressed in a dream. The two are not the same: the unconscious desire articulates itself, inscribes itself, through the very 'perlaboration' or translation of the latent dream-thought into the explicit text of a dream. In a homologous way, there is nothing 'fascist' (or 'reactionary' and so forth) in the 'latent dream-thought' of fascist ideology (the longing for authentic community and social solidarity); what accounts for the properly fascist character of fascist ideology is the way this 'latent dream-thought' is transformed and elaborated by the ideological 'dream-work' into the explicit ideological text that continues to legitimize social relations of exploitation and domination. And is it not the same with today's right-wing populism? Are liberal critics not too quick in dismissing the very values populism refers to as inherently 'fundamentalist' or 'proto-fascist'?

Non-ideology – what Fredric Jameson calls the utopian moment present even in the most atrocious ideology[4] – is thus absolutely indispensable: ideology is in a way *nothing but the form of appearance, the formal distortion, displacement, of non-ideology*. To take the worst imaginable case, was Nazi anti-Semitism not grounded in the utopian longing for authentic community life, in the fully justified rejection of the irrationality of capitalist exploitation? Our point, again, is that it is theoretically and politically wrong to denounce this longing as a 'totalitarian fantasy', that is, to search within it for the 'roots' of fascism – the standard mistake of the liberal-individualist critique of fascism: what makes it 'ideological' is its articulation, the way this longing is made to function as the legitimization of a very specific notion of what capitalist exploitation is (the result of Jewish influence, of the predominance of financial over 'productive' Capital – only the latter tends towards a harmonious

'partnership' with workers) and of how we are to overcome it (by getting rid of the Jews).

The struggle for ideological and political hegemony is thus always the struggle for the appropriation of the terms that are 'spontaneously' experienced as 'apolitical', as transcending political boundaries. No wonder that the name of the strongest dissident movement in Eastern European Communist countries was Solidarity: a signifier of the impossible fullness of society, if there ever was one. It was as if, in Poland in the 1980s, what Laclau calls the logic of equivalence was brought to an extreme: 'Communists in power' served as *the* embodiment of non-society, of decay and corruption, magically uniting everyone against themselves, including the disappointed 'honest Communists' themselves. Conservative nationalists accused the Communists of betraying Polish interests to the Soviet master; business-orientated individuals saw in them an obstacle to unbridled capitalist activity; for the Catholic Church, Communists were amoral atheists; for the farmers, they represented the force of violent modernization which threw rural life off the rails; for artists and intellectuals, Communism was synonymous with oppressive and stupid censorship; workers saw themselves not only as exploited by the Party bureaucracy, but as even further humiliated by the claims that this was done on their behalf; finally, old disillusioned leftists perceived the régime as the betrayal of 'true socialism'. The impossible *political* alliance between all these divergent and potentially antagonistic positions was possible only under the banner of a signifier which stands, as it were, on the very border that separates the political from the pre-political, and 'Solidarity' was the perfect candidate: it is politically operative as designating the 'simple' and 'fundamental' unity of human beings that should unite them beyond all political differences.[5]

Conservative basic instincts

What does all this tell us about Labour's recent electoral victory in the United Kingdom? It is not only that, in a model hegemonic operation, they reappropriated 'apolitical' notions like 'decency'; what they successfully focused on was the inherent obscenity of Tory ideology. The Tories' explicit ideological statements were always supported by their shadowy double, by an obscene, publicly unacknowledged, between-the-lines message. When, for example, they launched their infamous

'back to basics' campaign, its obscene supplement was clearly indicated by Norman Tebbitt, who is, as Jacqueline Rose puts it, 'never shy about exposing the dirty secrets of the Conservative unconscious': 'Many traditional Labour voters realized that they shared our values – that man is not just a social but also a territorial animal; it must be part of our agenda to satisfy those basic instincts of tribalism and territoriality.'[6] This, then, is what 'back to basics' was really all about: the reassertion of 'basic' egoistic, tribal, barbarian 'instincts' that lurk beneath the semblance of civilized bourgeois society. We all remember the (deservedly) famous scene from Paul Verhoeven's film *Basic Instinct* (1992) in which, in the course of a police investigation, Sharon Stone for a brief moment spreads her legs and reveals to the fascinated policemen what is (or is it?) a glimpse of her pubic hair. A statement like Tebbitt's is undoubtedly the ideological equivalent of this gesture, allowing a brief glance into the obscene intimacy of the Thatcherite ideological edifice. (Lady Thatcher herself was too 'dignified' to perform directly this ideological Sharon-Stone-gesture too often, so poor Tebbitt had to act as her stand-in.) Against this background, the Labour emphasis on 'decency' was not a case of simple moralism – rather, its message was that they are *not* playing the same obscene game, that their statements do not contain, 'between the lines', the same obscene message.

In today's general ideological constellation, this gesture is more important than it may seem, When the Clinton administration resolved the deadlock of gays in the United States army by means of the compromise, 'Don't ask, don't tell!' – by which soldiers are not directly asked if they are gay, so they are also not compelled to lie and deny it, and although they are not formally allowed in the army, they are tolerated as long as they keep their sexual orientation private and do not actively endeavour to engage others in it – this opportunist measure was deservedly criticized for endorsing homophobic attitudes. Although the direct prohibition of homosexuality is not to be enforced, its very existence as a virtual threat compelling gays to remain in the closet affects their actual social status. In other words, what this solution amounted to was an explicit elevation of hypocrisy into a social principle, like the attitude towards prostitution in traditional Catholic countries – if we pretend that gays in the army do not exist, it is as if they effectively do not exist (for the big Other). Gays are to be tolerated, on condition that they accept the basic censorship concerning their identity ...

While fully justified at its own level, the notion of censorship at work in this criticism, with its Foucauldian background of Power, which, in the very act of censorship and other forms of exclusion, generates the excess it endeavours to contain and dominate, nonetheless seems to fall short at a crucial point: what it misses is the way in which censorship not only affects the status of the marginal or subversive force that the Power discourse endeavours to dominate, but, at an even more radical level, causes a split within the Power discourse itself. One should ask here a naïve, but nonetheless crucial question: why does the army so strongly resist publicly accepting gays into its ranks? There is only one possible consistent answer: not because homosexuality poses a threat to the alleged 'phallic and patriarchal' libidinal economy of the army community, but, on the contrary, because *the army community itself relies on a thwarted/disavowed homosexuality as the key component of the soldiers' male-bonding*.

From my own experience, I remember the way that the old infamous Yugoslav People's Army was homophobic in the extreme – when someone was discovered as having homosexual inclinations, he was instantly turned into a pariah, before being formally dismissed from the army – and yet, at the same time, everyday army life was excessively permeated by an atmosphere of homosexual innuendo. For instance, while soldiers were standing in line for their meal, a common vulgar joke was to stick a finger into the arse of the person ahead of you and then to withdraw it quickly, so that when the surprised victim turned around, he did not know who among the soldiers sharing a stupid obscene smile had done it. A predominant way of greeting a fellow soldier in my unit, instead of simply saying 'Hello!', was to say 'Smoke my prick!' ('Pusi kurac!' in Serbo-Croat); this formula was so standardized that it had completely lost any obscene connotation and was pronounced in a totally neutral way, as a pure act of politeness.

Censorship, power and resistance

This fragile coexistence of extreme and violent homophobia with a thwarted, that is, publicly unacknowledged, 'underground' homosexual libidinal economy, bears witness to the fact that the discourse of the military community can operate only by way of censoring its own libidinal foundation. At a slightly different level, the same goes for the

practice of hazing – the ceremonial beating and humiliation of United States marines by their elder peers, who stick medals directly on to their skin and so on. When the public disclosure of these practices (somebody secretly shot them on video) caused such an outrage, what disturbed the public was not the practice of hazing itself (everybody was aware that things like this were going on), but the fact of it being rendered publicly. Outside of the confines of military life, do we not encounter a strictly homologous self-censoring mechanism in conservative populism with its sexist and racist bias? In the election campaigns of Jesse Helms, the racist and sexist message is not publicly acknowledged – at the public level, it is sometimes even violently disavowed – but is instead articulated in a series of double-entendres and coded allusions. This kind of self-censorship is necessary if, in the present ideological conditions, Helms' discourse is to remain effective. If it were to articulate directly, in a public way, its racist bias, this would render it unacceptable in the hegemonic political discourse; if it were effectively to abandon the self-censored coded racist message, it would endanger the support of its targeted electoral body. Conservative populist political discourse thus offers an exemplary case of a Power discourse whose efficiency depends on the mechanism of self-censorship: it relies on a mechanism that is effective only in so far as it remains censored. Against the image, ever-present in cultural criticism, of a radical subversive discourse or practice 'censored' by the Power, one is even tempted to claim that today, more than ever, the mechanism of censorship intervenes predominantly to enhance the efficiency of the Power discourse itself.

The temptation to be avoided here is the old leftist notion that it is 'better for us to deal with an enemy who openly admits his (racist, homophobic ...) bias, than with the hypocritical attitude of publicly denouncing what one secretly and effectively endorses'. This notion fatefully underestimates the ideological and political significance of *maintaining appearances*: appearance is never 'merely an appearance', but profoundly affects the *actual* socio-symbolic position of those concerned. If racist attitudes were to be rendered acceptable in mainstream ideological and political discourse, this would radically shift the balance of the entire ideological hegemony. This, probably, is what Alain Badiou had in mind when he mockingly designated his work as a search for the 'good terror':[7] today, in the face of the emergence of new racism and sexism, the strategy should be to *make such enunciations unutterable*, so that anyone relying upon them is automatically disqualified – as happens, in

our universe, to those who approvingly refer to fascism. While one may be aware of the way in which authentic yearnings for, say, community, are twisted by fascism, one should emphatically *not* discuss 'how many people really died in Auschwitz', 'the good side of slavery', 'the necessity of cutting back on workers' collective rights' and so on; the position should be here quite unabashedly 'dogmatic' and 'terrorist', that these are *not* objects of 'open, rational, democratic discussion'.

This inherent split and self-censorship of the Power mechanism is to be opposed to the Foucauldian motif of the interconnection of Power and resistance. Our point is not only that resistance is immanent to Power, that Power and counter-Power generate each other: it is not only that Power itself generates the excess of resistance that it can no longer dominate; it is also not only that – in the case of sexuality – the disciplinary 'repression' of a libidinal investment eroticizes this gesture of repression itself, as in the case of the obsessional neurotic who gets libidinal satisfaction out of the very compulsive rituals destined to keep the traumatic *jouissance* at bay. This last point must be further radicalized: the Power edifice itself is split from within, that is, to reproduce itself and contain its Other, it has to rely on an inherent excess that grounds it. To put it in the Hegelian terms of speculative identity, Power is always-already its own transgression; if it is to function, it has to rely on a kind of obscene supplement – the gesture of self-censorship is co-substantial with the exercise of Power. It is thus not enough to say that the 'repression' of some libidinal content retroactively eroticizes the very gesture of 'repression' – this 'eroticization' of Power is not a secondary effect of its exertion on its object, but its very disavowed foundation, its 'constitutive crime', its founding gesture that has to remain invisible if Power is to function normally. What we get in the kind of military drill depicted in the first part of Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), for example, is not a secondary eroticization of the disciplinary procedure that creates military subjects, but the constitutive obscene supplement of this procedure that renders it operative.

The logic of Capital

So, back to the recent Labour victory, one can see how it not only involved a hegemonic reappropriation of a series of motifs that were usually inscribed into the Conservative field – family values, law and

order, individual responsibility; the Labour ideological offensive also separated these motifs from the obscene fantasmatic subtext that sustained them in the Conservative field, in which 'toughness on crime' and 'individual responsibility' subtly referred to brutal egotism, to disdain for victims and other 'basic instincts'. The problem, however, is that the New Labour strategy involved its own 'message between the lines': we fully accept the logic of Capital, we will not meddle with it.

Today, financial crisis is a permanent state of things, the reference to which legitimizes the demands to cut social spending, health care, the support of culture and scientific research, in short, the dismantling of the welfare state. Is, however, this permanent crisis really an objective feature of our socio-economic life? Is it not rather one of the effects of the shift of balance from 'class struggle' towards Capital, resulting from the growing role of new technologies as well as the direct internationalization of Capital and the co-dependent diminished role of the Nation-State that was further able to impose certain minimal requirements and limitations to exploitation? In other words, the crisis is an 'objective fact' if and only if one accepts in advance as an unquestionable premise the inherent logic of Capital – as more and more left-wing or liberal parties have done. We are thus witnessing the uncanny spectacle of social-democratic parties that have come to Power with the between-the-lines message to Capital, 'we will do the necessary job for you in an even more efficient and painless way than the Conservatives'. The problem, of course, is that, in today's global socio-political circumstances, it is practically impossible effectively to call into question the logic of Capital: even a modest social-democratic attempt to redistribute wealth beyond the limit acceptable to Capital 'effectively' leads to an economic crisis, inflation, a fall in revenues and so on. Nevertheless, one should always bear in mind the way that the connection between 'cause' (rising social expenditure) and 'effect' (economic crisis) is not a direct, objective causal one: it is always-already embedded in a situation of social antagonism and struggle. The fact that, if one does not obey the limits set by Capital, a crisis 'really follows' in no way 'proves' that the necessity of these limits is an objective necessity of economic life. It should rather be conceived of as proof of the privileged position Capital holds in the economic and political *struggle*, as in the situation where a stronger partner threatens that if you do X, you will be punished by Y, and then, upon your doing X, Y effectively ensues.

An irony of history is that, in the Eastern European ex-Communist countries, the 'reformed' Communists were the first to learn this lesson. Why did many of them return to power via free elections? This very return offers the ultimate proof that these states have effectively entered capitalism. That is to say, what do ex-Communists stand for today? Due to their privileged links with the newly emerging capitalists – mostly members of the old *nomenklatura* 'privatizing' the companies they once ran – they are first and foremost the party of big Capital; furthermore, to erase the traces of their brief, but nonetheless rather traumatic experience with politically active civil society, as a rule they ferociously advocate a withdrawal from ideology, a retreat from active engagement in civil society to passive, apolitical consumerism – the very two features that characterize contemporary capitalism. Dissidents are thus astonished to discover that they played the role of 'vanishing mediators' on the path from socialism to capitalism in which the same class as before is in power, but now merely under a new guise. It is therefore wrong to claim that the return of the ex-Communists to power signals the way that people are disappointed with capitalism and long for the old socialist security – rather, in a kind of Hegelian 'negation of negation', it is only with the return to power of ex-Communists that socialism was effectively negated; that is, what the political analysts (mis)perceive as the 'disappointment with capitalism' is effectively disappointment with an ethico-political enthusiasm for which there is no place in 'normal' capitalism.[8]

At a somewhat different level, the same logic underlies the social impact of cyberspace: this impact does not derive directly from technology but relies on the network of social relations, that is, the predominant way that digitalization affects our self-experience is mediated by the frame of the globalized market economy of late capitalism. Bill Gates has commonly celebrated cyberspace as opening up the prospect of what he calls 'frictionless capitalism' – this expression renders perfectly the social fantasy that underlies the ideology of cyberspace capitalism: that of a wholly transparent, ethereal medium of exchange in which the last trace of material inertia vanishes. The crucial point here is that the 'friction' we dispose of in the fantasy of 'frictionless capitalism' does not only refer to the reality of material obstacles that sustain any exchange process, but, above all, to the Real of traumatic social antagonisms, Power relations and so forth that brand the space of social exchange with a pathological twist. In his *Grundrisse* manuscripts, Marx pointed out the way that the very material disposition of a nineteenth-century

industrial production site directly materializes the capitalist relationship of domination – the worker as a mere appendix subordinated to the machinery owned by the capitalist;[9] *mutatis mutandis*, the same goes for cyberspace. In the social conditions of late capitalism, the very materiality of cyberspace automatically generates the illusory abstract space of 'frictionless' exchange in which the particularity of the participants' social position is obliterated.

The predominant 'spontaneous ideology of cyberspace' is so-called 'cyber-revolutionism', which relies on the notion of cyberspace – or the world wide web – as a self-evolving 'natural' organism.[10] Crucial here is the blurring of the distinction between 'culture' and 'nature': the obverse of the 'naturalization of culture' (market, society as living organism) is the 'culturalization of nature' (life itself is conceived of as a set of self-reproducing data – 'genes are memes').[11] This new notion of Life is thus neutral with respect to the distinction between natural and cultural or 'artificial' processes. The Earth (as *Gaia*) and the global market both appear as gigantic self-regulated living systems whose basic structure is defined in terms of the process of coding and decoding, of transmitting information. The idea of the world wide web as a living organism is often evoked in contexts that may seem liberating – say, against the State censorship of the Internet. However, this very demonization of the State is thoroughly ambiguous, because it is predominantly appropriated by right-wing populist discourse and/or market liberalism: its main targets are the State interventions that try to maintain a kind of minimal social balance and security. The title of Michael Rothschild's book – *Bionomics: The Inevitability of Capitalism* – is indicative here.[12] So, while cyberspace ideologists can dream about the next evolutionary step in which we will no longer be mechanically interacting 'Cartesian' individuals, in which each 'person' will cut their substantial link to their body and conceive of themselves as part of the new holistic Mind that lives and acts through them, what is obfuscated in such a direct 'naturalization' of the world wide web or market is the set of power relations – of political decisions, of institutional conditions – that 'organisms' like the Internet (or the market or capitalism ...) need in order to thrive.

Ideological underground

What one should thus do is to reassert the old Marxist critique of 'reification': today, emphasizing the depoliticized 'objective' economic

logic against the allegedly 'outdated' forms of ideological passions is *the* predominant ideological form, because ideology is always self-referential, that is, it always defines itself through some distance towards an Other dismissed and denounced as 'ideological'.[13] Jacques Rancière gave a poignant expression to the 'bad surprise' that awaits today's postmodern ideologues of the 'end of politics': it is as if we are witnessing the ultimate confirmation of Freud's thesis, from *Civilization and its Discontents*, concerning the way that, after every assertion of Eros, Thanatos reasserts itself with a vengeance. At the very moment when, according to the official ideology, we are finally leaving behind 'immature' political passions (the régime of the 'political' – class struggle and other 'out-dated' divisive antagonisms) for the 'mature' post-ideological pragmatic universe of rational administration and negotiated consensus, for a universe, free of utopian impulses, in which the dispassionate administration of social affairs goes hand in hand with aestheticized hedonism (the pluralism of 'ways of life') – at this very moment, the foreclosed political is celebrating a triumphant comeback in its most archaic form: that of pure, distilled racist hatred of the Other that renders the rational tolerant attitude utterly impotent.[14] In this precise sense, contemporary 'postmodern' racism is the *symptom* of multiculturalist late-capitalism, bringing to light the inherent contradiction of the liberal-democratic ideological project. Liberal 'tolerance' condones the folklorist Other deprived of its substance – like the multitude of 'ethnic cuisines' in a contemporary megalopolis; however, any 'real' Other is instantly denounced for its 'fundamentalism', because the kernel of Otherness resides in the regulation of its *jouissance*: the 'real Other' is by definition 'patriarchal', 'violent', never the Other of ethereal wisdom and charming customs. One is tempted to reactualize here the old Marcusean notion of 'repressive tolerance', reconceiving of it as the tolerance of the Other in its aseptic, benign form, which forecloses the dimension of the Real of the Other's *jouissance*.[15]

The same reference to *jouissance* enables us to shed new light on the horrors of the Bosnian war, as they are reflected in Emir Kusturica's film, *Underground* (1995). The political meaning of this film does not reside primarily in its overt tendentiousness, in the way that it takes sides in the post-Yugoslav conflict – heroic Serbs versus the treacherous, pro-Nazi Slovenes and Croats – but, rather, in its very 'depoliticized' aestheticist attitude. That is to say, when, in his conversations with the journalists of *Cahiers du cinéma*, Kusturica insisted that *Underground* is not a political

film at all, but a kind of liminal trance-like subjective experience, a 'deferred suicide', he thereby unknowingly placed his true political cards on the table by indicating that *Underground* stages the 'apolitical' fantasmatic background of post-Yugoslav ethnic cleansing and war time cruelties. How? The predominant cliché about the Balkans is that the Balkan people are caught in the fantasmatic whirlpool of historical myth – Kusturica himself endorses this view: 'In this region, war is a natural phenomenon. It is like a natural catastrophe, like an earthquake that explodes from time to time. In my film, I tried to clarify the state of things in this chaotic part of the world. It seems that nobody is able to locate the roots of this terrible conflict.'[16] What we find here, of course, is an exemplary case of 'Balkanism', functioning in a similar way to Edward Said's concept of 'Orientalism': the Balkans as the timeless space on to which the West projects its fantasmatic content. Together with Milche Manchevski's *Before the Rain* (which almost won the Oscar for best foreign film in 1995), *Underground* is thus the ultimate ideological product of Western liberal multiculturalism: what these two films offer to the Western liberal gaze is precisely what this gaze wants to see in the Balkan war – the spectacle of a timeless, incomprehensible, mythical cycle of passions, in contrast to decadent and anaemic Western life.[17]

The weak point of the universal multiculturalist gaze does not reside in its inability to 'throw out the bath water without losing the baby': it is deeply wrong to assert that, when one throws out the nationalist bath water – 'excessive' fanaticism – one should be careful not to lose the baby of 'healthy' national identity, so that one should trace the line of separation between the proper degree of 'healthy' nationalism that guarantees the requisite minimum of national identity and 'excessive' nationalism. Such a common sense distinction *reproduces the very nationalist reasoning that aims to get rid of 'impure' excess*. One is therefore tempted to propose a homology with psychoanalytic treatment, whose aim is also not to get rid of the bath water (symptoms, pathological tics) in order to keep the baby (the kernel of the healthy Ego) safe, but, rather, to throw out the baby (to suspend the patient's Ego) in order to confront the patient with his 'bath water', with the symptoms and fantasies that structure his *jouissance*. In the matter of national identity, one should also endeavour to throw out the baby (the spiritual purity of national identity) in order to render visible the fantasmatic support that structures the *jouissance* in the national Thing. And the merit of *Underground* is that, unknowingly, it renders visible precisely this bath water.

The time machine

Underground brings to the light of day the obscene 'underground' of public, official discourse – represented in the film by the Titoist Communist régime. One should bear in mind that the 'underground' to which the film's title refers is not only the domain of 'deferred suicide', of the eternal orgy of drinking, singing and copulating, which takes place in the suspension of time and outside public space: it also stands for the 'underground' workshop in which the enslaved workers, isolated from the rest of the world, and misled into thinking that World War II is still going on, work day and night and produce arms sold by Marko, the hero of the film, their 'owner' and the big Manipulator, the only one who mediates between the 'underground' and the public world. Kusturica refers here to the old European fairy-tale motif of diligent dwarfs (usually controlled by an evil magician) who, during the night, while people are asleep, emerge from their hiding-place and accomplish their work (set the house in order, cook the meals), so that when, in the morning, people awaken, they find their work magically done. Kusturica's 'underground' is the last embodiment of this motif that is found from Wagner's *Rheingold* (the Nibelungs who work in their underground caves, driven by their cruel master, the dwarf Alberich) to Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, in which the enslaved industrial workers live and work deep beneath the earth's surface to produce wealth for the ruling capitalists.

This schema of the 'underground' slaves, dominated by a manipulative evil Master, takes place against the background of the opposition between the two figures of the Master: on the one hand, the 'visible' public symbolic authority; on the other hand, the 'invisible' spectral apparition. When the subject is endowed with symbolic authority, he acts as an appendix to his symbolic title, that is, it is the 'big Other', the symbolic institution, that acts through him: suffice it to recall a judge who may be a miserable and corrupt person, but the moment he puts on his robe and other insignia, his words are those of Law itself. On the other hand, the 'invisible' Master – whose exemplary case is the anti-Semitic figure of the 'Jew' who, invisible to the public eye, pulls the strings of social life – is a kind of uncanny double of public authority: he has to act in shadow, invisible to the public eye, irradiating a phantom-like, spectral omnipotence.[18] Marko from *Underground* is to be located in this lineage of the evil magician who controls an invisible empire of enslaved workers: he is a kind of uncanny double of Tito as the public symbolic

Master. The problem with *Underground* is that it falls into the cynical trap of presenting this obscene 'underground' from a benevolent distance. *Underground* is, of course, multi-layered and self-reflective, it plays with a multitude of clichés (the Serbian myth of a true man who, even when bombs fall around him, calmly continues his meal and so on) that are 'not to be taken literally' – however, *it is precisely through such self-distance that 'postmodern' cynical ideology functions*. In a well-known and much-reprinted piece, 'Fourteen theses on fascism' (1995), Umberto Eco enumerated the series of features that define the kernel of the Fascist attitude: dogmatic tenacity, the absence of humour, insensibility to rational argument ... he couldn't have been more wrong. Today's neo-fascism is more and more 'postmodern', civilized, playful, involving ironic self-distance, and *yet for all that no less fascist*.

So, in a way, Kusturica was right in his interview with *Cahiers du cinéma*: he does somehow 'clarify the state of things in this chaotic part of the world' by way of bringing to light its 'underground' fantasmatic support. He thereby unknowingly provides the libidinal economy of the ethnic slaughter in Bosnia: the pseudo-Bataillean trance of excessive expenditure, the continuous mad-rhythm of drinking-eating-singing-fornicating. And, *therein consists the 'dream' of the ethnic cleansers, therein resides the answer to the question, 'How were they able to do it?'* If the standard definition of war is that of 'a continuation of politics by other means', then the fact that Radovan Karadžić, the leader of the Bosnian Serbs, is a poet is more than a gratuitous coincidence: ethnic cleansing in Bosnia was the 'continuation of (a kind of) *poetry* by other means'.

'Concrete' versus 'abstract' universality

How, then, is this multiculturalist ideological poetry embedded in today's global capitalism? The problem that lurks beneath it is that of universalism. Étienne Balibar discerned three levels of universality in today's societies: the 'real' universality of the process of globalization and the supplementary process of 'internal exclusions' (the extent to which, now, the fate of each of us hinges on the intricate web of global market relations); the universality of the fiction that regulates ideological hegemony (Church or State as the universal 'imagined communities', which allow the subject to acquire a distance towards his immersion in his immediate social group – class, profession, sex,

religion – and posit himself as a free subject); the universality of an Ideal, as exemplified by the revolutionary demand for *égaliberté* (equality freedom), which remains an unconditional excess, setting in motion permanent insurrection against the existing order, and thus can never be 'gentrified', included in the existing order.[19]

The point, of course, is that the boundary between these three universals is never stable and fixed: *égaliberté* can serve as the hegemonic idea that enables us to identify with our particular social role (I am a poor artisan, but precisely as such, I participate in the life of my Nation-State as an equal and free citizen), or as the irreducible excess that destabilizes every fixed social order. In the Jacobin universe, what initially was the destabilizing universality of the Ideal, which, setting in motion the incessant process of social transformation, later became the ideological fiction allowing each individual to identify with his specific place in the social space. In Hegelese, the alternative here is as follows: is the Universal 'abstract' (opposed to concrete content) or 'concrete' (in the sense that I experience my very particular mode of social life as the specific mode of my participation in the universal social order)? Balibar's point, of course, is that the tension between the two is irreducible: the excess of abstract-negative-ideal universality, its unsettling-destabilizing force, can never be fully integrated into the harmonious whole of a 'concrete universality'.[20] However, there is another tension, the tension between the two modes of 'concrete universality' itself, which seems more crucial today. That is to say, the 'real' universality of today's globalization through the global market involves its own fiction (or even ideal) of multiculturalist tolerance, respect and protection of human rights, democracy and so forth; it involves its own pseudo-Hegelian 'concrete universality' of a world order whose universal features of the world market, human rights and democracy allow each specific 'lifestyle' to flourish in its particularity. So a tension inevitably emerges between this postmodern, post-Nation-State, 'concrete universality' and the earlier 'concrete universality' of the Nation-State.

Hegel was the first to elaborate the properly modern paradox of *individualization through secondary identification*.[21] At the beginning, the subject is immersed in the particular life-form into which he was born (family, local community); the only way for him to tear himself away from his primordial 'organic' community, to cut his links with it and to assert himself as an 'autonomous individual', is to shift his fundamental allegiance, to recognize the substance of his being in another, secondary

community that is universal and, simultaneously, 'artificial', no longer 'spontaneous' but 'mediated', sustained by the activity of independent free subjects – nation versus local community; a profession in the modern sense (a job in a large anonymous company) versus the 'personalized' relationship between an apprentice and his Master-artisan; the academic community of knowledge versus the traditional wisdom passed from generation to generation. In this shift from primary to secondary identification, primary identifications undergo a kind of transubstantiation: they start to function as the form of appearance of the universal secondary identification – say, precisely by being a good member of my family, I thereby contribute to the proper functioning of my Nation-State. The universal secondary identification remains 'abstract' in so far as it is directly opposed to the particular forms of primary identification, that is, in so far as it compels the subject to renounce his primary identifications; it becomes 'concrete' when it reintegrates primary identifications, transforming them into the modes of appearance of the secondary identification. This tension between 'abstract' and 'concrete' universality is clearly discernible in the precarious social status of the early Christian Church: on the one hand, there was the zealotry of the radical groups that saw no way to combine the true Christian attitude with the existing space of predominant social relations, and thus posed a serious threat to the social order; on the other hand, there were the attempts to reconcile Christianity with the existing structure of domination, so that participation in social life and occupying a place within a hierarchy were compatible with being a good Christian – indeed, accomplishing your determinate social role was not only seen as compatible with being a Christian, it was even perceived as a specific way to fulfil the universal duty of being a Christian.

In the modern era, the predominant social form of the 'concrete universal' is the Nation-State as the medium of our particular social identities: the determinate form of my social life (as, say, worker, professor, politician, farmer, lawyer) is the specific mode of my participation in the universal life of my Nation-State. With regard to this logic of transubstantiation that guarantees the ideological unity of a Nation-State, the United States plays the unique role of an exception: the key element of standard 'American ideology' consists in the endeavour to transubstantiate the very fidelity to one's particular ethnic roots into an expression of 'being American': in order to be 'a good American', one does not have to renounce one's ethnic roots – Italians, Germans,

Africans, Jews, Greeks, Koreans, they are 'all Americans', that is, the very particularity of their ethnic identity, the way they 'stick to it', makes them Americans. This transubstantiation, by means of which the tension between my particular ethnic identity and my universal identity as a member of a Nation-State is surpassed, is threatened today: it is as if the positive charge of pathetic patriotic identification with the universal frame of the American Nation-State has been seriously eroded; 'Americanness', the fact of 'being American', less and less gives rise to the sublime effect of being part of a gigantic ideological project – 'the American dream' – so that the American state is more and more experienced as a simple formal framework for the coexistence of the multiplicity of ethnic, religious or lifestyle communities.

Modernism in reverse

This gradual collapse – or, rather, loss of substance – of the 'American dream' bears witness to the unexpected *reversal* of the passage from primary to secondary identification described by Hegel: in our 'post-modern' societies, the 'abstract' institution of secondary identification is increasingly experienced as an external, purely formal frame that is not really binding, so that one is more and more looking for support in 'primordial', usually smaller (ethnic, religious) forms of identification. Even when these forms of identification are more 'artificial' than national identification – as is the case with gay communities – they are more 'immediate' in the sense of seizing the individual directly and overwhelmingly, in his specific 'way of life', thereby restraining the 'abstract' freedom he possesses in his capacity as the citizen of a Nation-State. What we are dealing with today is thus a reverse process to that of the early modern constitution of a Nation: in contrast to the 'nationalization of the ethnic' – the de-ethnicization, the 'sublation [*Aufhebung*]' of the ethnic into the national – we are now dealing with the 'ethnicization of the national', with a renewed search for (or reconstitution of) 'ethnic roots'. The crucial point here, however, is that this 'regression' from secondary to 'primordial' forms of identification with 'organic' communities is already 'mediated': it is a *reaction* to the universal dimension of the world market – as such, it occurs on its terrain, against its background. For that reason, what we are dealing with in these phenomena is not a 'regression' but rather the form of

appearance of its exact opposite: in a kind of 'negation of negation', *this very reassertion of 'primordial' identification signals that the loss of organic-substantial unity is fully consummated.*

To make this point clear, one should bear in mind what is perhaps the fundamental lesson of postmodern politics: far from being a 'natural' unity of social life, a balanced frame, a kind of Aristotelian *entelechia* towards which all previous development advances, the universal form of the Nation-State is rather a precarious, temporary balance between the relationship to a particular ethnic Thing (patriotism, *pro patria mori* and so forth) and the (potentially) universal function of the market. On the one hand, it 'sublates' organic local forms of identification into the universal 'patriotic' identification; on the other hand, it posits itself as a kind of pseudo-natural boundary of the market economy, delimiting 'internal' from 'external' commerce – economic activity is thus 'sublimated', raised to the level of the ethnic Thing, legitimated as a patriotic contribution to the nation's greatness. This balance is constantly threatened from both sides, from the side of previous organic forms of particular identification that do not simply disappear but continue their subterranean life outside the universal public sphere, as well as from the side of the immanent logic of Capital whose 'transnational' nature is inherently indifferent to the boundaries of Nation-State. And today's new 'fundamentalist' ethnic identifications involve a kind of 'desublimation', a process of disintegration of this precarious unity of the 'national economy' into its two constituent parts, the transnational market function and the relationship to the ethnic Thing.[22] It is therefore only today, in contemporary 'fundamentalist' ethnic, religious, lifestyle communities, that the splitting between the abstract form of commerce and the relationship to the particular ethnic Thing, inaugurated by the Enlightenment project, is fully realized: today's postmodern ethnic or religious 'fundamentalism' and xenophobia are not only not 'regressive', but, on the contrary, offer the supreme proof of the final emancipation of the economic logic of the market from the attachment to the ethnic Thing.[23] Therein resides the highest speculative effort of the dialectic of social life: not in describing the process of mediation of the primordial immediacy – say, the disintegration of organic community in 'alienated' individualist society – but in explaining how this very process of mediation characteristic of modernity can give birth to new forms of 'organic' immediacy. The standard story of the passage from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* should therefore be

supplemented by an account of the way that this process of becoming-society of community gives rise to different forms of new, 'mediated' communities – say, 'lifestyle communities'.

Multiculturalism

How, then, does the universe of Capital relate to the form of Nation-State in our era of global capitalism? Perhaps this relationship is best designated as 'auto-colonization': with the direct multinational functioning of Capital, we are no longer dealing with the standard opposition between metropolis and colonized countries; a global company, as it were, cuts its umbilical cord with its mother-nation and treats its country of origin as simply another territory to be colonized. This is what disturbs so much the patriotically oriented right-wing populists, from Le Pen to Buchanan: the fact that the new multinationals have exactly the same attitude towards the French or American local population as they do towards the population of Mexico, Brazil or Taiwan. Is there not a kind of poetic justice in this self-referential turn? Today's global capitalism is thus again a kind of 'negation of negation', after national capitalism and its internationalist/colonialist phase. At the beginning (ideally, of course), there is capitalism within the confines of a Nation-State, with the accompanying international trade (exchange between sovereign Nation-States); what follows is the relationship of colonization in which the colonizing country subordinates and exploits (economically, politically, culturally) the colonized country; the final moment of this process is the paradox of colonization in which there are only colonies, no colonizing countries – the colonizing power is no longer a Nation-State but directly the global company. In the long term, we shall all not only wear Banana Republic shirts, but also live in banana republics.

And, of course, the ideal form of ideology of this global capitalism is multiculturalism, the attitude that, from a kind of empty global position, treats *each* local culture the way the colonizer treats colonized people – as 'natives' whose mores are to be carefully studied and 'respected'. That is to say, the relationship between traditional imperialist colonialism and global capitalist self-colonization is exactly the same as the relationship between Western cultural imperialism and multiculturalism: in the same way that global capitalism involves the paradox of colonization without the colonizing Nation-State metropole, multiculturalism

involves patronizing Eurocentrist distance and/or respect for local cultures without roots in one's own particular culture. In other words, multiculturalism is a disavowed, inverted, self-referential form of racism, a 'racism with a distance' – it 'respects' the Other's identity, conceiving of the Other as a self-enclosed 'authentic' community towards which he, the multiculturalist, maintains a distance rendered possible by his privileged universal position. Multiculturalism is a racism which empties its own position of all positive content (the multiculturalist is not a direct racist, he doesn't oppose to the Other the *particular* values of his own culture), but nonetheless retains this position as the privileged *empty point of universality* from which one is able to appreciate (and depreciate) properly other particular cultures – the multiculturalist respect for the Other's specificity is the very form of asserting one's own superiority.

What about the rather obvious counter-argument that the multiculturalist's neutrality is false, since his position silently privileges Eurocentrist content? This line of reasoning is right, but for the wrong reason. The particular cultural background or roots that always support the universal multiculturalist position are not its 'truth', hidden beneath the mask of universality – 'multiculturalist universalism is really Eurocentrist' – but rather the opposite: the stain of particular roots is the fantasmatic screen that conceals the fact that the subject is already thoroughly 'rootless', that his true position is the void of universality. Let me recall here my own paraphrase of de Quincey's witticism about the simple art of murder: how many people have begun with an innocent group sex orgy and ended up sharing meals in a Chinese restaurant![24] The point of this paraphrase is to reverse the standard relationship between the surface-pretext and the unacknowledged wish: sometimes, the most difficult thing is to accept appearance at its surface value – we imagine multiple fantasmatic scenarios in order to cover it up with 'deeper meanings'. It may well be that my 'true desire', discernible behind my refusal to share a Chinese meal, is my fascination with the fantasy of a group orgy, but the key point is that this fantasy which structures my desire is in itself already a defence against my 'oral' drive, which goes its way with absolute coercion ...

What we find here is the exact equivalent of Darian Leader's example of the man in a restaurant with his date, who, when asking the waiter for the table, says 'Bedroom for two, please!', instead of 'Table for two, please!' One should turn around the standard Freudian explanation

('Of course, his mind was already on the night of sex he planned after the meal!'): this intervention of the subterranean sexual fantasy is rather the screen that serves as the defence against the oral drive that effectively matters more to him than sex.[25] In his analysis of the French Revolution of 1848, Marx provides a similar example of such a double deception:[26] the Party of Order, which took over after the Revolution, publicly supported the Republic, yet secretly, they believed in Restoration – they used every opportunity to mock republican rituals and to signal in any way possible where 'their heart is'. The paradox, however, was that the truth of their activity resided in the external form they privately mocked and despised: this republican form was not a mere semblance beneath which the royalist desire lurked – it was rather the secret clinging to royalism that enabled them to fulfil their actual historical function, to implement the bourgeois republican law and order. Marx himself mentions the way that members of the Party of Order found immense pleasure in their occasional Royalist 'slips of the tongue' against the Republic – referring, for instance, to France as a Kingdom in their parliamentary debates: these slips of the tongue articulated their fantasmatic illusions, which served as the screen enabling them to blind themselves to the social reality of what was taking place *on the surface*.

The machine in the ghost

And, *mutatis mutandis*, the same goes for today's capitalist who still clings to some particular cultural heritage, identifying it as the secret source of his success – Japanese executives participating in tea ceremonies or obeying the bushido code – or for the inverse case of the Western journalist in search of the particular secret of the Japanese success: this very reference to a particular cultural formula is a screen for the universal anonymity of Capital. The true horror does not reside in the particular content hidden beneath the universality of global Capital, but rather in the fact that Capital is effectively an anonymous global machine blindly running its course, that there is effectively no particular secret agent who animates it. The horror is not the (particular living) ghost in the (dead universal) machine, but the (dead universal) machine in the very heart of each (particular living) ghost.

The conclusion to be drawn is thus that the problematic of multiculturalism – the hybrid coexistence of diverse cultural life-worlds – that imposes itself today is the form of appearance of its opposite, of the massive presence of capitalism as *universal* world system: it bears witness to the unprecedented homogenization of the contemporary world. It is effectively as if, since the horizon of social imagination no longer allows us to entertain the idea of an eventual demise of capitalism – since, as we might put it, everybody silently accepts that *capitalism is here to stay* – critical energy has found a substitute outlet in fighting for cultural differences, which leave the basic homogeneity of the capitalist world system intact. So we are fighting our PC battles for the rights of ethnic minorities, of gays and lesbians, of different lifestyles and so on, while capitalism pursues its triumphant march – and today's critical theory, in the guise of 'cultural studies', is doing the ultimate service to the unrestrained development of capitalism by actively participating in the ideological effort to render its massive presence invisible: in a typical postmodern 'cultural criticism', the very mention of capitalism as world system tends to give rise to the accusation of 'essentialism', 'fundamentalism' and other crimes.

The structure here is that of a *symptom*. When one is dealing with a universal structuring principle, one always automatically assumes that – in principle, precisely – it is possible to apply this principle to all of its potential elements, and that the empirical non-realization of the principle is merely a matter of contingent circumstances. A symptom, however, is an element that – although the non-realization of the universal principle in it appears to hinge on contingent circumstances – *must* remain an exception, that is, the point of suspension of the universal principle: if the universal principle were to apply also to this point, the universal system itself would disintegrate. As is well known, in the paragraphs on civil society in his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel demonstrated how the large class of 'rabble [*Pöbel*]' in modern civil society is not an accidental result of social mismanagement, inadequate government measures or economic bad luck: the inherent structural dynamics of civil society necessarily give rise to a class that is excluded from the benefits of civil society, a class deprived of elementary human rights and therefore also delivered of duties toward society, an element within civil society that negates its universal principle, a kind of 'un-Reason inherent to Reason itself' – in short, its *symptom*.

Are we not witnessing the same phenomenon today, and in an even stronger form, with the growth of an underclass excluded, sometimes for generations, from the benefits of affluent liberal-democratic society? Today's 'exceptions' – the homeless, the ghettoized, the permanently unemployed – are the symptom of the late capitalist universal system, a growing and permanent reminder of how the immanent logic of late capitalism works: the properly capitalist utopia is that, through appropriate measures (for progressive liberals, affirmative action; for conservatives, a return to self-reliance and family values), this 'exception' could be – in the long term and in principle, at least – abolished. And is not a homologous utopia at work in the notion of a 'rainbow coalition': in the idea that, at some utopian future moment, all 'progressive' struggles – for gay and lesbian rights, for the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, the ecological struggle, the feminist struggle and so on – will be united in the common 'chain of equivalences'? Again, this necessity of failure is structural: the point is not simply that, because of the empirical complexity of the situation, all particular 'progressive' fights will never be united, that 'wrong' chains of equivalences will always occur – say, the enchainment of the fight for African-American ethnic identity with patriarchal and homophobic ideology – but rather that emergences of 'wrong' enchainments are grounded in the very structuring principle of today's 'progressive' politics of establishing 'chains of equivalences': the very domain of the multitude of particular struggles with their continuously shifting displacements and condensations is sustained by the 'repression' of the key role of economic struggle – the leftist politics of the 'chains of equivalences' among the plurality of struggles is strictly correlative to the silent abandonment of the analysis of capitalism as a global economic system and to the acceptance of capitalist economic relations as the unquestionable framework.[27]

The falsity of elitist multiculturalist liberalism thus resides in the tension between content and form that already characterized the first great ideological project of tolerant universalism, that of freemasonry: the doctrine of freemasonry (the universal brotherhood of all men based on the light of Reason) clearly clashes with its form of expression and organization (a secret society with its rituals of initiation) – the very form of expression and articulation of freemasonry belies its positive doctrine. In a strictly homologous way, the contemporary 'politically correct' liberal attitude that perceives itself as surpassing the limitations of its ethnic identity (as a 'citizen of the world' without anchors in any

particular ethnic community) functions, *within its own society*, as a narrow, elitist, upper-middle-class circle clearly opposing itself to the majority of common people, despised for being caught in their narrow ethnic or community confines.

For a leftist suspension of the law

How, then, do leftists, who are aware of the falsity of this multiculturalist postmodernism, react to it? Their reaction assumes the form of what Hegel called the *infinite judgement*: the judgement which posits the speculative identity of two thoroughly incompatible terms – Hegel's best-known example is from the sub-chapter on phrenology in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*: 'the Spirit is a bone'. The infinite judgement that best encapsulates this reaction is: 'Adorno (the most sophisticated 'elitist' critical theorist) is Buchanan (the lowest of American rightist populism)'. That is to say, those critics of postmodern multiculturalist elitism – from Christopher Lasch to Paul Piccone – risk endorsing neo-conservative populism, with its notions of the reassertion of community, local democracy and active citizenship, as the only politically relevant answer to the all-pervasive predominance of 'instrumental Reason', of the bureaucratization and instrumentalization of our life-world.[28] Of course, it is easy to dismiss today's populism as a nostalgic reactive formation to the process of modernization, and as such inherently paranoiac, in search of an external cause of malignancy, of a secret agent who pulls the strings and is thus responsible for the woes of modernization – Jews, international capital, non-patriotic multiculturalist managers, state bureaucracy and so on; the problem is rather to conceive of this populism as a new form of 'false transparency', which, far from presenting a serious obstacle to capitalist modernization, paves the way for it. In other words, far more interesting than bemoaning the disintegration of community life through the impact of new technologies is to analyse the way that technological progress itself gives rise to new communities that gradually 'naturalize' themselves – like virtual communities.

What these leftist advocates of populism fail to perceive is that today's populism, far from presenting a threat to global capitalism, remains its inherent product. Paradoxically, today's true conservatives are rather the leftist 'critical theorists' who reject liberal multiculturalism as well as fundamentalist populism, those who clearly perceive the complicity

between global capitalism and ethnic fundamentalism. They point towards the third domain which belongs neither to global market-society nor to the new forms of ethnic fundamentalism: the domain of the *political*, the public space of civil society, of active, responsible citizenship – the fight for human rights, ecology and so forth. However, the problem is that this very form of political space is more and more threatened by the onslaught of globalization; consequently, one cannot simply return to it or revitalize it. To avoid a misunderstanding: our point is not the old 'economic essentialist' one according to which, in the case of England today, the Labour victory really did not change anything – and as such is even more dangerous than continuing Tory rule, since it gave rise to the misleading impression that there was a change. There are many things the Labour government can achieve; it can contribute a great deal to the passage from traditional English parochial jingoism to a more 'enlightened' liberal democracy with a much stronger element of social solidarity (from health care to education), to the respect for human rights (in its diverse forms, from women's rights to the rights of ethnic groups); one should use the Labour victory as an incentive to revitalize the diverse forms of the struggle for *égaliberté*. (With the socialist electoral victory in France, the situation is even more ambiguous, because Jospin's programme does contain some elements of a direct confrontation with the logic of Capital.) Even when the change is not substantial but the mere semblance of a new beginning, the very fact that a situation is perceived by the majority of the population as a 'new beginning' opens up the space for important ideological and political rearticulations – as we have already seen, the fundamental lesson of the dialectic of ideology is that appearances *do* matter.

Nonetheless, the post-Nation-State logic of Capital remains the Real that lurks in the background, while all three main leftist reactions to the process of globalization – liberal multiculturalism; the attempt to embrace populism by way of discerning, beneath its fundamentalist appearance, the resistance against 'instrumental reason'; the attempt to keep open the space of the political – seem inappropriate. Although the last approach is based on the correct insight about the complicity between multiculturalism and fundamentalism, it avoids the crucial question: *how are we to reinvent political space in today's conditions of globalization?* The politicization of the series of particular struggles that leaves intact the global process of Capital is clearly not sufficient. What this means is that one should reject the opposition that, within the frame

of late capitalist liberal democracy, imposes itself as the main axis of ideological struggle: the tension between 'open' post-ideological universalist liberal tolerance and particularist 'new fundamentalisms'. Against the liberal centre that presents itself as neutral and post-ideological, relying on the rule of the Law, one should reassert the old leftist motif of the necessity to suspend the neutral space of Law.

Of course, both the Left and the Right involve their own mode of the suspension of the Law on behalf of some higher or more fundamental interest. The rightist suspension, from anti-Dreyfusards to Oliver North, acknowledges its violation of the letter of the Law, but justifies it via the reference to some higher national interest: it presents its violation as a painful self-sacrifice for the good of the Nation.[29] As to the leftist suspension, suffice it to mention two films, *Under Fire* (Roger Spottiswoode, 1983) and *Watch on the Rhine* (Herman Shumlin, 1943). The first takes place during the Nicaraguan revolution, when an American photo-journalist faces a troublesome dilemma: just prior to the victory of the revolution, Somozistas kill a charismatic Sandinista leader, so the Sandinistas ask the journalist to fake a photograph of their dead leader, presenting him as alive, thus belying the Somozistas' claims about his death – in this way, he would contribute to a swift victory of the revolution and reduce bloodshed. Professional ethics, of course, strictly prohibit such an act, because it violates the unbiased objectivity of reporting and makes the journalist an instrument of the political fight; the journalist nevertheless chooses the 'leftist' option and fakes the picture. In *Watch on the Rhine*, based on a play by Lillian Hellmann, this dilemma is even more aggravated: in the late 1930s, a fugitive family of German political emigrants involved in the anti-Nazi struggle comes to stay with its distant relatives, an idyllic all-American small-town middle-class family; soon, however, the Germans face an unexpected threat in the guise of an acquaintance of the American family, a rightist who blackmails the emigrants and, via his contacts with the German embassy, endangers members of the underground in Germany itself. The father of the emigrant family decides to kill him and thereby puts the American family in a difficult moral dilemma: the empty moralizing solidarity with the victims of Nazism is over; now they have effectively to take sides and dirty their hands by covering up the killing. Here also, the family decides on the 'leftist' option. 'Left' is defined by this readiness to suspend the abstract moral frame, or, to paraphrase Kierkegaard, to accomplish a *political suspension of the Ethical*.

The universality to come

The lesson of all of this, which gained actuality in relation to the Western reaction to the Bosnian war, is that there is no way to avoid being partial, since neutrality involves taking sides – in the case of the Bosnian war, 'balanced' talk about the Balkan ethnic 'tribal warfare' already endorses the Serbian standpoint: the humanitarian liberal equidistance can easily slip into or coincide with its opposite and effectively tolerate the most violent 'ethnic cleansing'. So, in short, the leftist does not simply violate the liberal's impartial neutrality; what he claims is that there is no such neutrality. The cliché of the liberal centre, of course, is that both suspensions, the rightist and the leftist, ultimately amount to the same thing, to a totalitarian threat to the rule of Law. The entire consistency of the Left hinges on proving that, on the contrary, each of the two suspensions follows a different logic. While the Right legitimizes its suspension of the Ethical by its anti-universalist stance, by way of a reference to its particular (religious, patriotic) identity which overrules any universal moral or legal standards, the Left legitimizes its suspension of the Ethical precisely by means of a reference to the true universality to come. Or, to put it in another way, the Left simultaneously accepts the antagonistic character of society (there is no neutral position, struggle is constitutive) *and* remains universalist (speaking on behalf of universal emancipation): in the leftist perspective, accepting the radically antagonistic – that is, *political* – character of social life, accepting the necessity of 'taking sides', is the only way effectively to be *Universal*.

How are we to comprehend this paradox? It can only be conceived of if *the antagonism is inherent to universality itself*, that is, if universality itself is split into the 'false' concrete universality that legitimizes the existing division of the Whole into functional parts and the impossible/Real demand of 'abstract' universality (Balibar's *égaliberté*). The leftist political gesture par excellence (in contrast to the rightist motif 'to each his or her own place') is thus to question the concrete existing universal order on behalf of its symptom, of the part that, although inherent to the existing universal order, has no 'proper place' within it (say, illegal immigrants or the homeless in our societies). This procedure of *identifying with the symptom* is the exact and necessary obverse of the standard critical and ideological move of recognizing a particular content behind some abstract universal notion ('the "man" of human rights is

effectively the white male owner'), of denouncing the neutral universality as false: in it, one pathetically asserts (and identifies with) *the point of inherent exception/exclusion, the 'abject', of the concrete positive order, as the only point of true universality*, as the point which belies the existing concrete universality. It is easy to demonstrate that, say, the subdivision of the people who live in a country into 'full' citizens and temporary immigrant workers privileges 'full' citizens and excludes immigrants from the public space proper – in the same way in which man and woman are not two species of a neutral universal genus of humanity, because the content of the genus as such involves some mode of 'repression' of the feminine; it is far more productive, theoretically as well as politically – because it opens up the way for the 'progressive' subversion of hegemony – to perform the opposite operation of *identifying universality with the point of exclusion*, in our case, of saying 'we are all immigrant workers'. In a hierarchically structured society, the measure of its true universality resides in the way its parts relate to those 'at the bottom', excluded by and from all others – in ex-Yugoslavia, for example, universality was represented by Albanian and Bosnian Muslims, looked down on by all other nations. The recent pathetic statement of solidarity, 'Sarajevo is the capital of Europe', was also an exemplary case of such a notion of exception as embodying universality: the way that enlightened liberal Europe related to Sarajevo bore witness to the way it related to itself, to its universal notion.[30]

This assertion of the universality of antagonism in no way entails that 'in social life, there is no dialogue, only war'. Rightists speak of social (or sexual) *warfare*, while leftists speak of social (or class) *struggle*. There are two variations on Joseph Göbbels' infamous statement, 'When I hear the word "culture", I reach for my pistol': first, 'When I hear the word "culture", I reach for my cheque-book', pronounced by the cynical cinema producer in Godard's *Mépris*, and then the leftist enlightened reversal, 'When I hear the word "gun", I reach for culture'. When today's neo-Nazi street-fighter hears the word 'Western Christian culture', he reaches for his gun in order to defend it from the Turks, Arabs, Jews, thereby destroying what he purports to defend. Liberal capitalism has no need for such direct violence: the market does the job of destroying culture far more smoothly and efficiently. In clear contrast to both these attitudes, the leftist Enlightenment is defined by the wager that culture can serve as an efficient answer to the gun: the outburst

of raw violence is a kind of *passage à l'acte* rooted in the subject's ignorance – as such, it can be counteracted by the struggle whose main form is *reflective knowledge*.

Notes

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1 Another name for this short-circuit between the Universal and the Particular is, of course, the 'suture': the operation of hegemony 'sutures' the empty Universal to a particular content.
2 Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)*, London and New York, Verso, 1996, pp. 14–15.
3 Étienne Balibar, 'Ambiguous identities', in *Politics and the Other Scene*, trans. Christine Jones, James Swenson and Chris Turner, London and New York, Verso, 2002, pp. 56–73.
4 Fredric Jameson, 'Reification and utopia in mass culture', in *Signatures of the Visible*, New York and London, Routledge, 1990, p. 30. [eds]
5 Now, when this magic moment of universal solidarity is over, the signifier that, in some post-socialist countries, is emerging as the signifier of the 'absent fullness' of society is *honesty*: it forms the focus of the spontaneous ideology of 'ordinary people' caught in the economic and social turbulence in which the hopes of a new fullness of society that should follow the collapse of socialism were cruelly betrayed, so that, in their eyes, 'old forces' (ex-Communists) and ex-dissidents who entered the ranks of power joined hands in exploiting them even more than before, now under the banner of democracy and freedom. The battle for hegemony, of course, is now focused on the particular content which will give a spin to this signifier: what does 'honesty' mean? And, again, it would be wrong to claim that the conflict is ultimately about the different meanings of the term 'honesty': what gets lost in this 'semantic clarification' is that each position claims that *their honesty is the only 'true' honesty*: the struggle is not simply a struggle among different particular contents, it is a struggle that emerges from the split within the universal itself.
6 Quoted in Jacqueline Rose, *States of Fantasy*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996, p. 149.
7 Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward, London and New York, Verso, 2001, pp. 72–7. [eds]
8 Retroactively, one thus becomes aware of how deeply the phenomenon of so-called 'dissidence' was embedded in the socialist ideological framework, of the extent to which 'dissidence', in its very utopian 'moralism' (preaching social solidarity, ethical responsibility and so forth) provided the disavowed ethical core of socialism: perhaps, one day, historians will note that – in the same sense in which Hegel claimed that the true spiritual result of the Peloponnesian war, its spiritual End, is Thucydides' book about it – 'dissidence' was the true spiritual result of 'Really Existing Socialism'.
9 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus, London, Penguin/New Left Review, 1973, p. 692. [eds]
10 Tiziana Terranova, 'Digital Darwin: nature, evolution and control in the rhetoric of computer mediated communications', *New Formations* 29, 1996, pp. 69–83.
11 Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989.
12 Michael L. Rothschild, *Bionomics: The Inevitability of Capitalism*, New York, Henry Holt, 1990. [eds]
13 Slavoj Žižek, 'The spectre of ideology', in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. Slavoj Žižek, London and New York, Verso, 1994, pp. 1–33.
14 Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, trans. Liz Heron, London and New York, Verso, 1995, p. 22.
15 For a more detailed account of the role of *jouissance* in the process of ideological identification, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, London and New York, Verso, 1997, pp. 45–82.
16 'Propos de Emir Kusturica', *Cahiers du cinéma* 492, 1995, p. 69.
17 As to this Western perception of the Balkans as fantasy-screen, see Renata Salecl, *The Spoils of Freedom: Psychoanalysis and Feminism after the Fall of Socialism*, London and New York, Routledge, 1994, pp. 11–19.
18 Slavoj Žižek, ' "I hear you with my eyes"; or, The invisible master', in *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, ed. Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek, Durham, Duke University Press, 1996, pp. 90–126.
19 Étienne Balibar, 'Ambiguous universality', in *Politics and the Other Scene*, pp. 146–75.
20 Here, the parallel is clear with Laclau's opposition between the logic of difference (society as a differential symbolic structure) and the logic of antagonism (society as 'impossible', thwarted by an antagonistic split). Today, the tension between the logic of difference and the logic of antagonism assumes the form of the tension between the liberal-democratic universe of negotiation and the fundamentalist universe of the struggle between Good and Evil.
21 For instance, G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H.B. Nisbet, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 339–53. [eds]
22 One of the minor, yet tell-tale, events that bear witness to this withering-away of the Nation-State is the slow spreading of the obscene institution of private prisons in the United States and other Western countries: the exercise of what should be the monopoly of the State (physical violence and coercion) becomes the object of a contract between the State and a private company, which exerts coercion on individuals for the sake of profit – what we have

here is simply the end of the monopoly on the legitimate use of violence that (according to Max Weber) defines the modern State.

23 These three stages (pre-modern communities, the Nation-State and today's emerging transnational 'universal society') clearly fit the triad of traditionalism, modernism and postmodernism, elaborated by Fredric Jameson: here also, the retro-phenomena that characterize postmodernism should not deceive us – it is only with postmodernism that the break with pre-modernity is fully consummated. The allusion to Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London and New York, Verso, 1991) in the title of this essay is thus deliberate.

24 Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, New York and London, Routledge, 1992, p. 1.

25 Darian Leader, *Why do women write more letters than they post?*, London, Faber and Faber, 1996, pp. 152–3.

26 Karl Marx, 'The class struggles in France: 1848 to 1850', in *Surveys from Exile: Political Writings, Volume 2*, ed. David Fernbach, trans. Ben Fowkes *et al.*, London, Penguin/New Left Review, 1973, pp. 136–9.

27 Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995, pp. 10–18.

28 Paul Piccone, 'Postmodern populism', *Telos* 103, 1995, pp. 45–86. Exemplary here is also the attempt by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese to oppose to upper-middle-class feminism interested in the problems of literary and cinema theory, lesbian rights and so forth, a 'family feminism' that focuses on the actual concerns of ordinary working women and articulates concrete questions of how to survive within the family, with children and work. See Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Feminism is Not the Story of My Life*, New York, Anchor, 1996.

29 The most concise formulation of the rightist suspension of public (legal) norms was provided by Eamon de Valera: 'The people has no right to do wrong.'

30 This, perhaps, is how one should read Rancière's notion of *singulier universel*: the assertion of the singular exception as the locus of universality, which simultaneously affirms and subverts the universality in question. When we say, 'We are all citizens of Sarajevo', we are obviously making a 'false' nomination, a nomination that violates a proper geopolitical disposition; however, precisely as such, this violation nominates the injustice of the existing geopolitical order.

10

A leftist plea for 'Eurocentrism'

Politics and its disavowals

When one says *Eurocentrism*, every self-respecting postmodern leftist intellectual has as violent a reaction as Joseph Göbbels had to culture – to reach for a gun, hurling accusations of proto-fascist Eurocentrist cultural imperialism. However, is it possible to imagine a leftist appropriation of the European political legacy?

Let us begin with the question: 'What is politics proper?'[1] It is a phenomenon that appeared for the first time in ancient Greece when the members of the *demos* (those with no firmly determined place in the hierarchical social edifice) presented themselves as the representatives, the stand-ins, for the whole of society, for the true universality ('we – the "nothing", not counted in the order – are the people, we are all, against others who stand only for their particular privileged interest'). Political conflict proper thus involves the tension between the structured social body, where each part has its place, and the part of no-part, which unsettles this order on account of the empty principle of universality, of the principled equality of all men *qua* speaking beings, what Étienne Balibar calls *égaliberté*.[2] Politics proper thus always involves a kind of short-circuit between the universal and the particular; it involves the paradox of a singular that appears as a stand-in for the universal, destabilizing the 'natural' functional order of relations in the social body. This *singulier universel* is a group that, although without any fixed place in the social edifice (or, at best, occupying a subordinate place), not only demands to be heard on equal footing with the ruling oligarchy or

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aristocracy (that is, to be recognized as a partner in political dialogue and the exercise of power) but, even more, presents itself as the immediate embodiment of *society as such*, in its universality, against the particular power interests of aristocracy or oligarchy. This identification of the non-part with the whole, of the part of society with no properly defined place (or which resists its allocated subordinate place) with the universal, is the elementary gesture of politicization, discernible in all great democratic events, from the French Revolution (in which the Third Estate proclaimed itself identical to the nation as such against the aristocracy and clergy) to the demise of European socialism, in which such groups as the Czech Civic Forum proclaimed themselves representative of the entire society against the party *nomenklatura*.

The political struggle proper is therefore never simply a rational debate between multiple interests but, simultaneously, the struggle for one's voice to be heard and recognized as that of a legitimate partner. When the excluded, from the Greek *demos* to Polish workers, protested against the ruling elite (the aristocracy or *nomenklatura*), the true stakes were not only their explicit demands (for higher wages, better working conditions, and so forth) but their very right to be heard and recognized as an equal participant in the debate. In Poland, the *nomenklatura* lost the brief moment it had to accept Solidarity as an equal partner. In this precise sense, politics and democracy are synonymous: the basic aim of anti-democratic politics always and by definition is (and was) depoliticization, that is, the unconditional demand that things should return to normal, with each individual doing his or her particular job. Jacques Rancière, of course, emphasizes the way that the line of separation between what he calls policing (in the broad sense of maintaining social order, the smooth running of the social machine) and politics proper is always blurred and contested. In the Marxist tradition, for instance, proletariat can be read as the subjectivization of the part of no-part that elevates its injustice into the ultimate test of universality and, simultaneously, as the operator that will bring about the establishment of a post-political, rational society.[3]

It is thus politicization that re-emerged violently in the disintegration of Eastern European socialism. From my own political past, I remember the way that, after four journalists were arrested and brought to trial by the Yugoslav army in Slovenia in 1988, I participated in the Committee for the Protection of the Human Rights of the Four Accused. Officially, the goal of the Committee was simply to guarantee fair treatment for the

journalists; however, the Committee turned into the major oppositional political force, practically the Slovenian version of the Czech Civic Forum or the East German *Neues Forum*, the body that coordinated democratic opposition, a *de facto* representative of civil society. Four items made up the programme of the Committee: while the first three directly concerned the accused, the devil residing in the details, of course, consisted of the fourth item, which said that the Committee wanted to clarify the entire background of the arrest of the four accused and thus to contribute to the creation of the circumstances in which such arrests would no longer be possible – a coded way of saying that we wanted to abolish the existing socialist system. Our demand – 'Justice for the accused four!' – started to function as the metaphoric condensation of the demand for the global overthrow of the socialist régime. For that reason, in almost daily negotiations with the Committee, Communist Party officials were always accusing us of having a hidden agenda, claiming that the liberation of the accused four was not our true goal, that is, that we were exploiting and manipulating the arrest and trial for other, darker political goals. In short, the Communists wanted to play the so-called rational, depoliticized game: they wanted to deprive the slogan 'Justice for the accused four!' of its explosive general connotation and to reduce it to its literal meaning, which concerned merely a minor legal matter; they cynically claimed that it was we, the Committee, who were behaving undemocratically and playing with the fate of the accused, exerting global pressure and using blackmailing strategies instead of focusing on the particular problem of their plight.

Let us take an example from the opposite part of the world, from Japan, where the caste of the untouchables is called the *burakumin*: those who have contact with dead flesh (butchers, leatherworkers, gravediggers), who are sometimes even referred to as *eta*, 'much filth'. Even today, in our supposedly enlightened times, when they are no longer openly despised, they are still silently ignored. Not only do companies still avoid hiring them and parents refuse to allow their children to marry them, but, under the 'politically correct' pretence of not offending them, ignoring the issue altogether is the preferred course of action. The recently deceased author Sue Sumii, in her great series of novels, *The River with No Bridge*, used a reference to the *burakumin* to expose the meaninglessness of the entire Japanese caste hierarchy. Significantly, her primordial traumatic experience was the shock that occurred when, as a child, she witnessed the way that one of her

relatives scratched the toilet used by the Emperor to preserve a piece of his shit as a sacred relic. This excremental identification of the *burakumin* is crucial: when Sumii saw her relative cherishing the Emperor's excrement, her conclusion was that, following the tradition of the king's two bodies, in which the king's body stands for the social body as such, the *burakumin* as the excrement of the social body should be cherished in the same way. In other words, Sumii took the structural homology between the Emperor's two bodies more literally and further than usual: even the lowest part, the excrement, of the Emperor's body has to be reduplicated in his other, sublime body, which stands for the body of society. Her predicament was similar to that of Plato who, in *Parmenides*, bravely confronts the embarrassing problem of the exact scope of the relationship between eternal forms/ideas and their material copies: which material objects are ontologically covered by eternal ideas as their models?[4] Is there even an eternal idea of base objects such as mud, filth or excrement? However, the crucial point and the proof of the non-political, corporate functioning of Japanese society is the fact that, although voices like that of Sumii are heard on their behalf, the *burakumin* did not actively *politicize* their destiny or constitute their position as that of *singulier universel*, by claiming that, precisely as the part of no-part, they stand for the true universality of Japanese society.

Although politics proper is thus something specifically 'European', the entire history of European political thought is ultimately nothing but a series of disavowals of the political moment, of the proper logic of political antagonism. There are four main versions of this disavowal:

Archipolitics: the 'communitarian' attempt to define a traditional, close, organically structured, homogeneous social space that allows for no void in which the political moment or event can emerge.

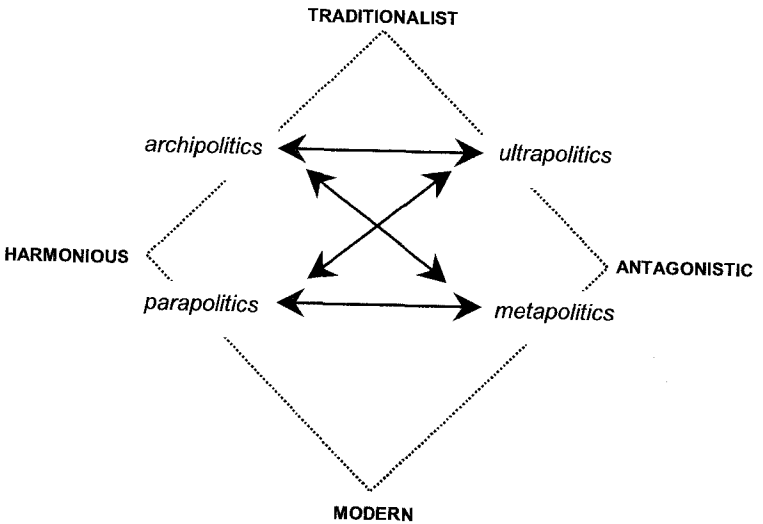
Parapolitics: the attempt to depoliticize politics. One accepts the political conflict but reformulates it into a competition, within the representational space, between acknowledged parties/agents for the (temporary) occupation of the place of executive power. This parapolitics, of course, has a series of different successive versions: the main rupture is that between its classical formulation and its modern Hobbesian version, which focuses on the problematic of social contract, of the alienation of individual rights in the emergence of sovereign power. Habermasian or Rawlsian ethics are perhaps the last philosophical vestiges of this

attitude: the attempt to de-antagonize politics by formulating clear rules to be obeyed so that the agonistic procedure of litigation does not explode into politics proper.

Marxist (or utopian socialist) *metapolitics*: political conflict is fully asserted, *but* as a shadow theatre in which events whose proper place is in another scene (that of economic processes) are played out. The ultimate goal of true politics is thus its self-cancellation, the transformation of the administration of people into the administration of things within the fully self-transparent rational order of a collective will. (More precisely, Marxism is here ambiguous since the very term *political economy* also opens up a space for the opposite gesture of introducing politics into the very heart of the economy, that is, of denouncing the apolitical character of the economic processes as the supreme ideological illusion. Class struggle does not express some objective economic contradiction; it is the very form of existence of this contradiction.)

The *ultrapolitics* of Carl Schmitt: the attempt to depoliticize the conflict by way of bringing it to extremes, via the direct militarization of politics. In ultrapolitics, the repressed political returns in the guise of the attempt to resolve the deadlock of political conflict by its false radicalization – that is, by reformulating it as a war between us and them, our enemy, where there is no common ground for symbolic conflict. It is deeply symptomatic, for example, that instead of class *struggle* the radical Right speaks of class (or sexual) *warfare*.

What we have in all four cases is thus an attempt to gentrify the properly traumatic dimension of the political. Something emerged in ancient Greece under the name of the *demos* demanding its rights, and, from the very beginning (that is, from Plato's *Republic* onwards) to the recent revival of liberal political philosophy, political philosophy itself was an attempt to suspend the de-stabilizing potential of the political, to disavow and/or regulate it in one way or another: by bringing about a return to some pre-political social body, by fixing the rules of political competition and so forth. Political philosophy is thus, in all its different shapes, a kind of defence formation, and perhaps its typology could be established by reference to the different modalities of defence against some traumatic experience in psychoanalysis.[5] Archi-, para-, meta- and ultrapolitics form a kind of Greimasian logical square:



Archi- and ultra- are the two faces of the traditionalist attitude (self-enclosed community versus war of a community against external enemies), and para- and meta- the two versions of modern politics (democratic formal rules versus the notion that this kind of democratic game merely expresses and/or distorts the level of pre-political socio-economic processes at which things really happen). On the other axis, both meta- and ultrapolitics involve the notions of unsurpassable struggle, conflict and antagonism against the assertion of harmonious collaboration in archi- and parapolitics.

From politics to post-politics

Of importance here is Rancière's critical distance towards Marxist metapolitics. The key feature of metapolitics is that, to put it in the terms of Jacques Lacan's matrix of the four discourses, the place of the agent is occupied by *knowledge*.[6] Marx presented his position as *scientific* materialism, which is to say that metapolitics is a politics that legitimizes itself by means of a direct reference to the scientific status of its knowledge. (It is this knowledge that enables metapolitics to draw

a distinction between those immersed in politico-ideological illusions and the Party, which grounds its historical intervention in knowledge of effective socio-economic processes.) This knowledge (about class society and relations of production in Marxism) suspends the classic opposition of *Sein* and *Sollen*, of *Being* and the *Ought*, of that which Is and the ethical Ideal. The ethical Ideal towards which the revolutionary subject strives is directly grounded in (or coincides with) the 'objective', 'disinterested' scientific knowledge of social processes. This coincidence opens up a space for totalitarian violence because, in this way, acts that run against the elementary norms of ethical decency can be legitimized as grounded in (insight into) historical necessity (say, the mass killing of members of the bourgeois class is grounded in the scientific insight that this class is already in itself condemned to disappear, past the moment in which it played a progressive role). Therein resides the difference between the standard, destructive, even murderous dimension of strict adherence to the ethical Ideal and modern totalitarianism. The terrorism of the Jacobins in the French Revolution, grounded in their adherence to the ideal of *égaliberté*, that is, in their attempt to realize directly this Ideal, to impose it directly on to reality, this coincidence of the purest idealism with the most destructive violence, analyzed by Hegel in the famous chapter of his *Phenomenology of Spirit* on absolute terror,[7] is not enough to explain twentieth-century totalitarianism. What the Jacobins lacked was reference to the objective or neutral scientific knowledge of history to legitimize their exercise of unconditional power. It is only the Leninist revolutionary, not yet the Jacobin, who thus occupies the properly perverted position of the pure instrument of historical necessity, made accessible by means of scientific knowledge.

Rancière here follows Claude Lefort's insight into the way that the space for (Communist) totalitarianism was opened by the 'democratic invention' itself: totalitarianism is an inherent perversion of democratic logic.[8] First, we have the traditional master who grounds his authority in some transcendent reason (divine right, for example). What becomes visible with the democratic invention is the gap that separates the positive person of the master from the place he occupies in the symbolic network; with the democratic invention the place of Power is posited as originally *empty*, occupied only temporarily and in a contingent way by different subjects. In other words, it now becomes visible that (to paraphrase Marx) people do not regard somebody as king because he is in himself king; he is king *because* and *as long as* people regard him as

king. Totalitarianism takes into account this rupture accomplished by the democratic invention; the totalitarian master fully accepts the logic, 'I am master only insofar as you treat me as one'; that is, his position involves no reference to some transcendent ground. On the contrary, he emphatically tells his followers, 'In myself I am nothing; my whole strength derives from you. I am only the embodiment of your deepest strivings; the moment I lose my roots in you, I am lost.' His entire legitimacy derives from his position as a pure servant of the people. The more he 'modestly' diminishes and instrumentalizes his role, the more he emphasizes that he simply expresses and realizes the strivings of the people itself, which is the true master, the more all-powerful and untouchable he becomes, because, in this case, any attack on him is effectively an attack on the people itself, on its members' innermost longings. The people is thus split into actual individuals (prone to treason and all kinds of human weaknesses) and the People, embodied in the master. So, perhaps these three logics (the traditional master; the democratic, regulated fight for the empty place of power; the totalitarian master) fit the three modes of the disavowal of politics conceptualized by Rancière: the traditional master functions within the space of archipolitics; democracy involves parapolitics, that is, the gentrification of politics proper in regulated agon (the rules of elections and representative democracy, and so forth); and the totalitarian master is only possible within the space of metapolitics.[9]

Rancière is thus right to emphasize the radical ambiguity of the Marxist notion of the gap between formal democracy (the rights of man, political freedom and so forth) and the economic reality of exploitation and domination. One can read this gap between the appearance of *égaliberté* and the social reality of economic and cultural (among other) differences in the standard, meta-political, 'symptomatic' way (the form of universal rights, equality, freedom and democracy is just a necessary but illusory form of expression of its concrete social content, the universe of exploitation and class domination); or, one can read it in the much more subversive sense of a tension in which the appearance of *égaliberté*, precisely, is *not* merely an appearance but evinces an effectivity of its own that allows it to set in motion the process of rearticulating actual socio-economic relations by way of their progressive politicization (why should women not vote? why should conditions at the workplace not be of public political concern? and so forth). One is tempted to use here the old Lévi-Straussian term *symbolic efficiency*:

the appearance of *égaliberté* is a symbolic fiction that, as such, possesses an actual efficiency of its own. One should resist the properly cynical temptation of reducing it to a mere illusion that conceals a different actuality.

Crucial here is the distinction between appearance and the postmodern notion of the simulacrum as that which is no longer clearly distinguishable from the Real.[10] The notion of the political as the domain of appearance (opposed to the social reality of class and other distinctions, for example, those of society as the articulated social body) has nothing in common with the postmodern notion that we are entering an era of universalized simulacra, in which reality itself becomes indistinguishable from its simulated double. The nostalgic longing for the authentic experience of being lost in the deluge of simulacra (detectable in Paul Virilio's work) as well as the postmodern assertion that the brave new world of universalized simulacra is the sign that we are finally getting rid of the metaphysical obsession with authentic Being (detectable in the writings of Gianni Vattimo) both miss the distinction between simulacrum and appearance: what gets lost in today's plague of simulations is not the firm, true, non-simulated Real, but *appearance itself*. To put it in Lacanian terms: the simulacrum is Imaginary (illusion), while appearance is Symbolic (fiction); when the specific dimension of Symbolic appearance begins to disintegrate, Imaginary and Real become more and more indistinguishable. The key to today's universe of simulacra, in which the Real is less and less distinguishable from its Imaginary simulation, resides in the retreat of symbolic efficiency. And, in socio-political terms, this domain of appearance (that is, of symbolic fiction) is none other than that of politics, as distinguished from the social body subdivided into parts. There is appearance in so far as we are dealing with a part of no-part, in so far as a part not included in the whole of the social body (or included/excluded in a way it resists) protests against its position, against its allocated place, and symbolizes its position as that of a tort, an injustice, claiming that, against other parts, it stands for the universality of *égaliberté*. We are dealing here with appearance in contrast to the 'reality' of the structured social body. The old conservative motto of 'keeping up appearances' thus today obtains a new twist: it no longer stands for the wisdom according to which it is better not to disturb the rules of social etiquette too much, because social chaos might ensue. Today, rather, keeping up appearances stands for the effort to save the properly political space

against the onslaught of the multitude of particular identities of the postmodern, all-embracing social body.[11]

This is also how one has to read Hegel's famous dictum from *Phenomenology of Spirit*, according to which 'the Suprasensible is appearance qua appearance'.[12] In a sentimental answer to a child who asks what God's face looks like, a priest answers that whenever the child encounters a human face radiating benevolence and goodness, no matter to whom this face belongs, he gets a glimpse of His face. The truth of this sentimental platitude is that the suprasensible (God's face) is discernible as a momentary, fleeting appearance, a kind of grimace, of an ordinary face. It is this dimension of appearance that transubstantiates a piece of reality into something that, for a brief moment, illuminates the suprasensible eternity that is missing in the logic of the simulacrum. In the simulacrum, which becomes indistinguishable from the Real, everything is present, so that no other transcendental dimension effectively appears in or through it. Here we return the Kantian problematic of the sublime. In Kant's famous reading of the enthusiasm evoked by the French Revolution in the enlightened public around Europe, the revolutionary events functioned as a sign through which the dimension of trans-phenomenal freedom, of a free society, appeared.[13] Appearance is thus not simply the domain of phenomena but also those magic moments in which the other, noumenal dimension momentarily appears in (or shines through) some empirical or contingent phenomenon. So, back to Hegel, 'the Suprasensible is appearance qua appearance' does not simply mean that the suprasensible is not a positive entity *beyond* the phenomenon, but rather points to the inherent power of negativity, which makes appearance 'merely an appearance', that is, something that is not in itself fully actual but condemned to perish in the process of self-sublation. It also means that the suprasensible comes to exist only in the guise of an appearance of another dimension that interrupts the standard, normal order of phenomena.

Today, however, we are dealing with another form of the denegation of the political, postmodern post-politics, which no longer merely represses the political, trying to contain it and to pacify the returns of the repressed, but much more effectively forecloses it, so that the postmodern forms of ethnic violence, with their irrational, excessive character, are no longer simple returns of the repressed but, rather, present the case of the foreclosed (from the Symbolic), which, as we know from Lacan, returns in the Real. In post-politics, the conflict of

global ideological visions embodied in different parties who compete for power is replaced by the collaboration of enlightened technocrats (economists and public opinion specialists, for example) and liberal multiculturalists; via the process of negotiation of interests a compromise is reached in the guise of a more or less universal consensus. The political (the space of litigation in which the excluded can protest the wrong or injustice done to them) foreclosed from the Symbolic then returns in the Real in the guise of new forms of racism. It is crucial to perceive the way that postmodern racism emerges as the ultimate consequence of the post-political suspension of the political, of the reduction of the State to a mere police agent servicing the (consensually established) needs of market forces and multiculturalist, tolerant humanitarianism. The foreigner whose status is never properly 'regulated' is the *indivisible remainder* of the transformation of democratic political struggle into the post-political procedure of negotiation and multiculturalist policing. Instead of the *political subject* 'working class' demanding its universal rights, we get, on the one hand, the multiplicity of particular social strata or groups, each with its problems (the dwindling need for manual workers, and so forth), and, on the other hand, the immigrant increasingly prevented from *politicizing* his predicament of exclusion.[14]

Here one should oppose *globalization* to *universalization*: globalization (not only in the sense of global capitalism, the establishment of a global world market, but also in the sense of the assertion of 'humanity' as the global point of reference of human rights, legitimizing the violation of state sovereignty and policing activities – from trade restrictions to direct military interventions – in parts of the world where global human rights are violated) is precisely the name for the emerging post-political logic that progressively precludes the dimension of universality at work in politicization proper. The paradox is that there is no *universal* proper without the process of political litigation of the part of no-part, of an out-of-joint entity presenting/manifesting itself as the stand-in for the Universal. The otherness excluded from the consensual domain of tolerant/rational post-political negotiation and administration returns in the guise of the inexplicable pure evil whose emblematic image is that of the holocaust. What defines postmodern post-politics is thus the secret solidarity between its Janus faces: on the one hand, the replacement of politics proper by depoliticized, so-called humanitarian operations (the humanitarian protection of human and civil rights and aid to Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda, North Korea and so forth); on the other hand, the

violent emergence of depoliticized pure evil in the guise of excessive ethnic or religious fundamentalist violence. In short, what Rancière proposes here is a new version of the old Hegelian motto, 'Evil resides in the gaze itself which perceives the object as Evil':[15] the contemporary figure of evil too strong to be accessible to political analysis (such as the holocaust) appears as such only to the gaze that constitutes it as such – that is, as depoliticized. Crucial is their speculative identity, that is, the infinite judgement: humanitarian depoliticized compassion *is* the excess of evil over its political forms.

Excessive violence

One should link this problematic to the notion proposed by Balibar of excessive, non-functional cruelty as a feature of contemporary life:[16] a cruelty whose figures range from fundamentalist racist and/or religious slaughter to the supposedly senseless outbursts of violence performed by adolescents and the homeless in our megalopolises, the violence one is tempted to call *id-evil* – violence not grounded in utilitarian or ideological reasons. That is to say, what catches the eye in these cases is the 'primitive' level of their underlying libidinal economy – primitive not in the sense of a regression to some archaic stratum, but in the sense of the utmost *elementary* nature of the relationship between pleasure and *jouissance*, between the circle of the pleasure principle that strives for balance, for the reproduction of its closed circuit, and the extimate foreign body. The libidinal economy that sustains the infamous battle cry, *'Ausländer raus!* [foreigners out!]', can be exemplified by Lacan's schema of the relationship between the *Ich* and *Lust*, where the *Unlust* is defined in the terms of (non)assimilation as 'what remains unassimilable, irreducible to the pleasure principle'.[17] The terms used by Freud and Lacan to describe the relationship of *Ich* and *jouissance* perfectly fit the metaphoric structure of the racist attitude towards foreigners: assimilation and resistance to assimilation, expulsion of a foreign body, disturbed balance. In order to locate this type of evil with regard to the usual types of evil, one is tempted to use as the classificatory principle the Freudian triad of ego, superego and id. The most common kind of evil is *ego-evil*: behaviour motivated by selfish calculation and greed, that is, by disregard for universal ethical principles. The evil attributed to the so-called fundamentalist fanatics, on the contrary,

is *superego-evil*: evil accomplished in the name of fanatical devotion to some ideological ideal. In the example of a skinhead beating up foreigners, however, one can discern neither a clear selfish calculation nor a clear ideological identification. All the talk about foreigners stealing work from us, or about the threat they represent to our Western values, should not deceive us: on closer examination, it soon becomes clear that this talk provides a rather superficial secondary rationalization. The answer we ultimately obtain from the skinhead is that it makes him feel good to beat up foreigners, that their presence disturbs him. What we encounter here is *id-evil*, that is, the evil structured and motivated by the most elementary imbalance in the relationship between the *Ich* and *jouissance*, by the tension between pleasure and the foreign body of *jouissance* at the very heart of it. Id-evil thus stages the most elementary short-circuit in the relationship of the subject to the primordially missing object-cause of his desire. What bothers us in the Other (the Jew, the Japanese, the African, the Turk and so forth) is that he appears to entertain a privileged relationship to the object. The Other either possesses the object-treasure, having snatched it away from us (which is why we don't have it), or poses a threat to our possession of the object.[18]

What one should propose here, again, is the Hegelian infinite judgement asserting the speculative identity of this supposedly useless and excessive outburst of violence, which displays nothing but a pure and naked (non-sublimated) hatred of Otherness, with the post-political multiculturalist universe of tolerance for difference in which nobody is excluded. Of course, the term *non-sublimated* is here used in its common meaning, which in this case stands for the exact opposite of its strict psychoanalytic meaning. In short, what takes place in the focusing of our hatred on some representative of the (officially tolerated) Other is the very mechanism of sublimation at its most elementary. The all-encompassing nature of the post-political concrete universality, which accounts for everybody at the level of symbolic inclusion, this multiculturalist vision and practice of unity in difference (all-equal, all different), leaves open, as the only way to mark the difference, the proto-sublimating gesture of elevating a contingent Other (of race, sex, or religion, for example) into the absolute Otherness of the impossible Thing, the ultimate threat to our identity – this Thing which should be annihilated if we are to survive. Therein resides the properly Hegelian paradox: the final arrival of the truly rational concrete universality – the abolition of antagonisms, the mature universe of negotiated coexistence

of different groups – coincides with its radical opposite, with thoroughly contingent outbursts of violence.

There are two further Hegelian aspects to this excessive violence. First, Hegel's fundamental rule is that objective excess (the direct reign of abstract universality that imposes its law mechanically, with utter disregard for the concerned subject caught in its web) is always supplemented by subjective excess (the irregular, arbitrary exercise of whims). An exemplary case of this interdependence between objective and subjective excess is provided by Balibar, who distinguishes two opposite, but complementary, modes of excessive violence: the ultra-objective (or structural) violence that is inherent to the social conditions of global capitalism (the automatic creation of excluded and dispensable individuals, from the homeless to the unemployed), and the ultra-subjective violence of newly emerging ethnic and/or religious (in short, racist) fundamentalisms.[19] The second aspect is that this supposedly excessive and groundless violence involves its own mode of knowledge, that of impotent cynical reflection. Back to our example of id-evil, the skinhead who beats up foreigners: when really pressed for the reasons for his violence, and if capable of minimal theoretical reflection, the skinhead will suddenly start to talk like social workers, sociologists and social psychologists, citing diminished social mobility, rising insecurity, the disintegration of paternal authority, the lack of maternal love in his early childhood and so forth. In short, he will provide the more or less precise psycho-sociological account of his acts so dear to enlightened liberals eager to understand the violent youth as the tragic victim of his social and familial conditions.[20] The standard enlightened formula of the efficiency of the critique of ideology from Plato onwards ('they are doing it because they do not know what they are doing', which asserts that knowledge is in itself liberating, as when the erring subject reflects upon what he is doing he will no longer do it) is here turned around: the violent skinhead knows very well what he is doing, but he is nonetheless doing it.[21] This cynically impotent reflective knowledge is the obverse of senseless, excessive violence. We are dealing here with something akin to the well-known unpleasant scene from Terry Gilliam's *Brazil*: in a high-class restaurant, the waiter recommends to his customers the best choices from the daily menu ('Today, our tournedos is really special!'), yet what the customers get is a dazzling colour photo of the meal on a stand above their plates and, on the plates themselves, a loathsome, excremental, paste-like lump. In the same

way, the symbolically efficient knowledge embedded in the subject's effective social praxis disintegrates into, on the one hand, excessive, irrational violence with no ideologico-political foundation and, on the other hand, into impotent external reflection that leaves the subject's acts intact. So, in the guise of this cynically impotent, reflecting skinhead who, with an ironic smile, explains to the perplexed journalist the roots of his senselessly violent behaviour, the enlightened, tolerant multiculturalist bent on understanding forms of excessive violence gets his own message in its inverted, true form. In short, as Lacan would have put it, at this point the communication between him and the object of his study, the intolerant skinhead, is perfectly successful.[22]

Crucial here is the distinction between this excessive, irrational, dysfunctional, cruel violence and the outbursts of obscene violence that serve as the implicit support of the standard ideological universal notion; say, when the rights of man are not really universal but, effectively, the right of white males with property, any attempt to disregard this implicit, underlying set of unwritten rules that effectively constrains the universality of rights is met by outbursts of violence. Nowhere is this contrast stronger than in the case of African Americans in the United States. The old parapolitical, democratic racism excluded blacks from effectively participating in universal political life by way of silently enforcing their exclusion (through verbal and physical threats and so forth). The adequate answer to this standard exclusion from the universal was the great civil rights movement associated with Martin Luther King, Jr., suspending the implicit obscene supplement that enacted the actual exclusion of blacks from formal universal equality. Of course, it was easy for such a gesture to gain the support of a large majority of the white, liberal, upper-class establishment, which dismissed their opponents as dumb, lower-class Southern rednecks. Today, however, the very terrain of the struggle has changed. The post-political liberal establishment not only fully acknowledges the gap between a mere formal equality and its actualization or implementation, it not only recognizes the exclusionary logic of false ideological universality, but it even actively fights this logic by applying to it a vast legal/psychological/sociological network of measures, from identifying the specific problems of each group and subgroup (not only homosexuals but African American lesbians, African American lesbian mothers, African American single unemployed lesbian mothers, and so on) to proposing a set of measures (affirmative action, for example) to amend the wrong.

However, what such a tolerant procedure prevents is the gesture of *politicization* proper: although the difficulties of being an African American single unemployed lesbian mother are adequately catalogued, including even the category's most specific features, the concerned subject nonetheless somehow feels that there is something wrong and frustrating in this very effort to render justice for her specific predicament. What she is deprived of is the possibility of the metaphoric elevation of her specific wrong into the stand-in for the universal wrong. The only way openly to articulate this universality – the fact that one, precisely, is *not* merely that specific individual exposed to a set of specific injustices – consists then in its apparent opposite, in the thoroughly irrational, excessive outburst of violence. The old Hegelian rule is here again confirmed: the only way for the universality to come into existence, to posit itself as such, is in the guise of its very opposite, of what cannot but appear as an excessive, irrational whim.

One can see now why the reference to Schmitt is crucial in detecting the deadlocks of post-political liberal tolerance. Schmittean ultrapolitics – the radicalization of politics into the open warfare of us-against-them discernible in different fundamentalisms – *is the form in which the foreclosed political returns in the post-political universe of pluralist negotiation and consensual regulation*. For that reason, the way to counteract this re-emerging ultrapolitics is not more tolerance, more compassion and multicultural understanding, but the *return of the political proper*, that is, the reassertion of the dimension of antagonism that, far from denying universality, is consubstantial with it. Therein resides the key component of the proper *leftist* stance, as opposed to the rightist assertion of particular identity: in the equation of *universalism* with the militant, *divisive* position of engagement in a struggle. True universalists are not those who preach global tolerance of differences and all-encompassing unity but those who engage in a passionate fight for the assertion of the truth that engages them. Theoretical, religious and political examples abound here: from Saint Paul, whose unconditional Christian universalism (everyone can be redeemed, since, in the eyes of Christ, there are no Jews and Greeks, no men and women) made him into a proto-Leninist militant fighting different 'deviations', through Marx, whose notion of class struggle is the necessary obverse of the universalism of his theory, which aims at the 'redemption' of the whole of humanity, up to Freud, and including many great political figures. When de Gaulle, for example, almost alone in England in 1940, launched his call for

resistance to German occupation, he was at the same time presuming to speak on behalf of the universality of France and, *for that very reason*, introducing a radical split, a fissure between those who followed him and those who preferred the collaborationist fleshpots of Egypt. To put it in Alain Badiou's terms, it is crucial here not to translate the terms of this struggle, set in motion by the violent and contingent assertion of the new universal truth, into the terms of the order of positive Being with its groups and subgroups, conceiving of it as the struggle between two social entities defined by a series of positive characteristics.[23] Therein resided the 'mistake' of Stalinism, which reduced class struggle to a struggle between classes defined as social groups with a set of positive features (their place in the mode of production, and so forth). From a truly radical Marxist perspective, although there is a link between the working class as a social group and the proletariat as the position of the militant fighting for universal Truth, this link is not a determining causal connection, and the two levels are to be strictly distinguished. To be proletarian involves assuming a certain *subjective stance* (of class struggle destined to achieve redemption through revolution) that, in principle, can occur to any individual; to put it in religious terms, irrespective of his (good) works, any individual can be touched by grace and interpellated as a proletarian subject. The limit that separates the two opposed sides in the class struggle is thus not objective, not the limit separating two positive social groups, but ultimately *radically subjective*; it involves the position individuals assume towards the Event of universal Truth. Again, the crucial point here is that subjectivity and universalism are not only *not* exclusive but are, rather, two sides of the same coin. It is precisely because class struggle interpellates individuals to adopt the subjective stance of a proletarian that its appeal is universal, aiming at everyone with no exceptions. The division it mobilizes is not the division between two well-defined social groups but the division, which runs 'diagonally' to the social division in the Order of Being, between those who recognize themselves in the call of the Truth-Event, becoming its followers, and those who deny or ignore it. In Hegelese, *the existence of the true Universal* (as opposed to the false concrete universality of the all-encompassing global Order of Being) *is that of an endless and incessantly divisive struggle*; it is ultimately the division between the two notions (and material practices) of universality, that which advocates the positivity of the existing global Order of Being as the ultimate horizon of knowledge and action, and that which accepts the efficiency of the

dimension of the Truth-Event irreducible to (and unaccountable in terms of) the Order of Being.

From the sublime to the ridiculous

How do these insights enable us to shed new light on the prospect of today's leftist (re)politicization of our common predicament? Let us return to the disintegration of Eastern European socialism. The passage from Really Existing Socialism to really existing capitalism in Eastern Europe brought about a series of comic reversals, in which sublime democratic enthusiasm was transformed into the ridiculous. The dignified East German crowds gathering around Protestant churches and heroically defying Stasi terror all of a sudden turned into vulgar consumers of bananas and cheap pornography; the civilized Czechs mobilized by the appeal of Václav Havel and other cultural icons all of a sudden turned into cheap swindlers of Western tourists. The disappointment was mutual. The West, which began by idolizing the Eastern dissident movement as the reinvention of its own tired democracy, disappointedly dismissed the present post-socialist régimes as a mixture of the corrupted ex-Communist oligarchy and/or ethnic and religious fundamentalists (even the dwindling group of liberals is mistrusted as not being politically correct enough: where is their feminist awareness? is but one of many critiques levelled at them). The East, which began by idolizing the West as the example of affluent democracy, finds itself in a whirlpool of ruthless commercialization and economic colonization. Perhaps, however, this double disappointment, this double failed encounter between ex-Communist dissidents and Western liberal democrats is crucial for the identity of Europe; perhaps what transpires in the gap that separates the two perspectives is a glimpse of a Europe worth fighting for.

The hero of Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*, the private detective Sam Spade, tells the story of being hired to find a man who had suddenly left his settled job and family and vanished. Spade is unable to track him down, but a few years later, he encounters the man in another city. Under an assumed name, the man leads a life remarkably similar to the one he fled from (a regular boring job, a new wife and children); however, in spite of this similarity, the man is convinced that beginning again was not in vain, that it was well worth the trouble to cut his ties and

start a new life. Perhaps the same goes for the passage from actually existing socialism to actually existing capitalism in ex-Communist Eastern European countries. In spite of the betrayed enthusiastic expectations, something *did* take place in between, in the passage itself, and it is in this event in between, this vanishing mediator, in this moment of democratic enthusiasm, that we should locate the crucial dimension obfuscated by later re-normalization.

It is clear that the protesting crowds in East Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia wanted something else, a utopian object of impossible fullness designated by a multiplicity of names ('solidarity', 'human rights' and so forth), *not* what they effectively got. Two reactions towards this gap between expectations and reality are possible; the best way to capture them is by reference to the well-known opposition between *fool* and *knave*. The fool is a simpleton, a court jester who is allowed to tell the truth precisely because the performative power (the socio-political efficiency) of his speech is suspended; the knave is the cynic who openly states the truth, a crook who tries to sell the open admission of his crookedness as honesty, a scoundrel who admits the need for illegitimate repression in order to maintain social stability. This opposition has a clear political connotation: today's right-wing intellectual is a knave, a conformist who refers to the mere existence of the given order as an argument for it and mocks the Left for harbouring utopian plans that will necessarily lead to totalitarian or anarchic catastrophe; while the left-wing intellectual is a fool, a court jester who publicly displays the lie of the existing order but in a way that undercuts the socio-political efficiency of his speech. After the fall of socialism, the knave is a neo-conservative advocate of the free market who cruelly rejects all forms of social solidarity as counterproductive sentimentalism, while the fool is a multiculturalist, 'radical' social critic who, by means of ludic procedures designed to subvert the existing order, actually serves as its supplement. With regard to Eastern Europe, a knave dismisses the 'third way' project of the *Neues Forum* in the former East Germany as a hopelessly outdated utopian vision and exhorts us to accept the cruel market reality, while a fool insists that the collapse of socialism effectively opened up a third way, a possibility left unexploited by the Western recolonization of the East.

This cruel reversal of the sublime into the ridiculous was, of course, grounded in the fact that a double misunderstanding was at work in the public (self-)perception of the social protest movements in the last years

of Eastern European socialism (from Solidarity to *Neues Forum*). On the one hand, there were attempts by the ruling *nomenklatura* to reinscribe these events in their police/political framework, by way of distinguishing between 'honest critics' with whom one should talk, but in a calm, rational, depoliticized atmosphere, and a bunch of extremist provocateurs who served foreign interests. (This logic was brought to its absurd extreme in the former Yugoslavia, in which the very notion of a workers' strike was incomprehensible because, according to the dominant ideological paradigm, workers already ruled through self-management of their companies – against whom, then, could they strike?) The battle was thus not only for higher wages and better conditions but also, and above all, for the workers to be acknowledged as legimitate partners in negotiations with representatives of the régime. The moment power was forced to accept this, the battle was, in a way, already won. The interesting point here is how, in this struggle within socialism in decay, the very term *political* functioned in an inverted way: it was the Communist Party (standing for the police logic) which 'politicized' the situation (by speaking of counter-revolutionary tendencies and so forth), while the opposition movement insisted on its fundamentally apolitical, civic-ethical character. They merely stood for the so-called simple values of dignity and freedom, for example. No wonder their main signifier was the apolitical notion of solidarity.

When these movements exploded into a broad mass phenomenon, their demands for freedom and democracy (and solidarity and so on) were also misperceived by Western commentators. They saw in them the confirmation that the people of the East wanted what people in the West already had; that is, they automatically translated these demands into the Western liberal-democratic notion of freedom (the multi-party representational political game *cum* global market economy). Emblematic to the point of caricature was the figure of Dan Rather, the American news reader, reporting on Tiananmen Square in 1989, who stood in front of a replica of the Statue of Liberty and claimed that this statue said it all about what the protesting students demanded (in short, if you scratch the skin of a Chinese person, underneath you find an American). What this statue effectively represented was a utopian longing having nothing to do with the actual United States (incidentally, it was the same with many immigrants to America for whom the view of the statue stood for a utopian longing soon crushed down). The perception of the American media thus offered another example of

the reinscription of the explosion of Balibar's *égaliberté*, the unconditional demand for freedom and equality that explodes any positive order, within the confines of a given order.

For a leftist appropriation of the European legacy

Are we then condemned to the debilitating alternative of choosing between a knave or a fool, or is there a *tertium datur*? Perhaps the contours of this *tertium datur* can be discerned by reference to the fundamental European legacy. As we have already seen, politics proper designates the moment at which a particular demand is not simply part of the negotiation of interests but aims at something more, that is, starts to function as the metaphoric condensation of the global restructuring of the entire social space. The contrast is clear between this subjectivization of a part of the social body that rejects its subordinated place in the social-police edifice, and demands to be heard at the level of *égaliberté*, and today's proliferation of postmodern identity politics, whose goal is the exact opposite, that is, precisely the assertion of one's particular identity, of one's proper place within the social structure. The postmodern identity politics of particular (ethnic, sexual and so forth) lifestyles fits perfectly the depoliticized notion of society in which every particular group is accounted for and has its specific status (of victimhood) acknowledged through affirmative action or other measures destined to guarantee social justice. For this kind of justice to be rendered to victimized minorities, an intricate police apparatus is required (for identifying the group in question, for punishing the offenders against its rights, for determining how legally to define sexual harassment or racial injury and so forth, and for providing for the preferential treatment that is intended to outweigh the wrong this group suffered). Postmodern identity politics involves the logic of *ressentiment*, of proclaiming oneself a victim and expecting the dominant social Other to pay for the damage, while *égaliberté* breaks out of the vicious cycle of *ressentiment*. What is usually praised as postmodern politics (the pursuit of particular issues whose resolution is to be negotiated within the 'rational' global order, allocating to a particular component its proper place) is thus effectively the end of politics proper.

Two interconnected traps apropos of the fashionable topic of the end of ideology brought about by the present process of globalization are to

be avoided at any cost: first, the commonplace according to which today's main antagonism is between global liberal capitalism and different forms of ethnic/religious fundamentalism; second, the hasty identification of globalization (the contemporary trans-national functioning of Capital) with universalization. As we have already emphasized, the true opposition today is rather between *globalization* (the emerging global market new world order) and *universalism* (the properly political domain of universalizing one's particular fate as representative of global injustice). This difference between globalization and universalism becomes more and more palpable today, when Capital, in the name of penetrating new markets, quickly renounces requests for democracy in order not to lose access to new trade partners. This shameful retreat is then, of course, legitimized as respect for cultural difference, as the right of the (ethnic/religious/cultural) Other to choose the way of life that suits it best – as long as it does not disturb the free circulation of Capital.

This opposition between universalism and globalization is best exemplified by two countries: France and the United States. French republican ideology is the epitome of modernist universalism: of democracy based on a universal notion of citizenship. In clear contrast to it, the United States is a global society, a society in which the global market and legal system serve as the container (rather than the proverbial melting pot) for the endless proliferation of particular group identities. The paradox is that the proper roles seem to be reversed: France, in its republican universalism, is more and more perceived as a *particular* phenomenon threatened by the process of globalization, while the United States, with its multitude of groups demanding recognition of their particular, specific identities, more and more emerges as the universal model. So, perhaps, the parallel between our time and the Roman empire, with the United States rather than Rome as the one global superpower, is not without foundation, especially if one brings into the picture the emergence of Christianity. The first centuries of our era saw the opposition of the *global* 'multicultural' Roman empire and Christianity, which posed such a threat to the empire precisely on account of its *universal* appeal. Furthermore, Christianity opposed itself to two types of discourses: the Greek discourse of philosophical sophistry and the Jewish discourse of obscurantist prophetism, like today's twin brothers of deconstructionist sophistry and New Age obscurantism. Is, then, our task today not exactly homologous to that of Christianity:

to undermine the global empire of Capital, not by asserting particular identities, but through the assertion of a new universality?[24]

The re-emerging populist fundamentalism is the inherent product of globalization and, as such, the living proof of the failure of the postmodern abolition of politics, in which the basic economic logic is accepted as the depoliticized Real (a neutral expert knowledge that defines the parameters within which the different strata of population and political subjects are expected to reach a compromise and formulate their common goals). Within this space, the political returns in two guises: on the one hand, rightist populism; on the other hand, the 'wild' demands for social justice, for security of employment and so forth, which are then denounced by supposedly neutral economic specialists as irrational, out of touch with the new reality of the demise of the welfare state, as the remainders of old ideological battles. The (potential) partner is here neutralized, not acknowledged as a partner at all; the position from which he or she speaks is disqualified in advance. Multiculturalist openness versus a new fundamentalism is thus a false dilemma: they are the two faces of today's post-political universe.

The late-capitalist solution is best epitomized by two city-states, Hong Kong and Singapore. In Singapore, we find the paradoxical combination of capitalist economic logic with corporate communitarian ethics aimed at precluding any politicization of social life. Hong Kong under Chinese rule seems to move towards the same solution, albeit in a more Americanized, multiculturalist and pluralist spirit. It is deeply significant that, in the last years of his life, the late Deng Xiaobing himself, the so-called father of Chinese reforms, expressed his admiration for Singapore as the model to be followed in China. The motto of 'wise' Asian rulers like Singapore's Lee Kwan Yew – the combination of the full inclusion of their economies into global capitalism with the traditional Asian values of discipline, respect for tradition and so forth – points precisely toward *globalization without universalism*, that is, with the political dimension suspended. In a different way, the model towards which the United States seems to be moving – the permissive coexistence of a multitude of ways of life within the global capitalist framework – approaches in another way the same result of depoliticization. This rising globalization without universalism demonstrates that the opposition of globalization to particular cultural identity embodied in a specific way of life is deeply misleading. What is effectively threatened by globalization is not the *cosa nostra* (our private secret way of life from

which others are excluded, which others want to steal from us) but its exact opposite: universality itself, in its eminently political dimension. One of today's common wisdoms is that we are entering a new medieval society in the guise of the New World Order. The grain of truth in this comparison is that, as in medieval times, the New World Order is global, but not universal, since it strives for a new global order with each part in its allocated place.

A typical advocate of liberalism today throws together workers' protests against the loss of their rights and right-wing insistence on fidelity to the Western cultural heritage; he perceives both as pitiful remainders of the so-called age of ideology that have nothing to do with today's post-ideological universe. However, the two resistances to globalization follow totally incompatible logics: the Right insists on a *particular* communal identity (based on *ethnos* or habitat) threatened by the onslaught of globalization, while for the Left, the threatened dimension is that of politicization, of articulating 'impossible' *universal* demands (impossible from within the existing space of the world order). From the sublime heights of Jürgen Habermas' theory to vulgar market ideologists, we are bombarded by different versions of depoliticization: no longer struggle but dialogic negotiation, regulated competition and so on. No wonder that border control emerges as one of the main points of today's international negotiations – a clear indication that we are dealing with the reduction of politics to social *Polizei*. Against this end-of-ideology politics, one should insist on the potential of democratic politicization as the true European legacy from ancient Greece onwards. *Will we be able to invent a new mode of re-politicization questioning the undisputed reign of global Capital?* Only such a re-politicization of our predicament can break the vicious cycle of liberal globalization destined to engender the most regressive forms of fundamentalist hatred.

Notes

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1 I rely here on Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999. The present essay develops further the ideas first elaborated in 'Multiculturalism, or, the cultural logic of multinational capitalism' (reprinted as Chapter 9 of this volume).

2 See, for instance, Étienne Balibar, 'Is a European citizenship possible?', in *Politics and the Other Scene*, trans. Christine Jones, James Swenson and Chris Turner, London and New York, Verso, 2002, pp. 104–28.

3 Sometimes the shift from politics proper to policing can simply be a matter of changing the definite to the indefinite article, like when the East German crowds demonstrated against the Communist régime in the last days of the GDR. First they shouted, 'We are *the* people! [*Wir sind* das *Volk!*], thereby performing the gesture of politicization at its purest. They, the excluded counter-revolutionary 'scum' of the official whole of the people, with no proper place in official space (or, more precisely, with little more than titles such as 'counter-revolutionaries', 'hooligans', or, at best, 'victims of bourgeois propaganda', reserved for their designation), claimed to stand for the people, for 'all'. However, a couple of days later, the slogan changed into, 'We are a/one people! [*Wir sind ein Volk!*]', clearly signalling the closure of the momentary authentic political opening, the reappropriation of the democratic impetus by the thrust towards the re-unification of Germany, which meant rejoining West Germany's liberal-capitalist police/political order.

4 Plato, 'Parmenides', in *Plato IV: Cratylus, Parmenides, Greater Hippias, Lesser Hippias*, trans. Henry N. Fowler, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1970, pp. 211–13. [eds]

5 The metaphoric frame that we use in order to account for the political process is thus never innocent and neutral; it schematizes the concrete meaning of politics. Ultra-politics has recourse to the model of war: politics is conceived as a form of social warfare, as the relationship to 'them', to an enemy. Archi-politics today usually has recourse to a medical model: society is a corporate body, an organism, and social divisions are like illnesses of this organism; that is, what we should fight, our enemy, is a cancerous intruder, a pest, a foreign parasite to be exterminated if the health of the social body is to be guaranteed. Para-politics uses a model of agonistic competition, which follows a series of commonly accepted, strictly established rules, much like a sporting event. Post-politics involves the model of business negotiation and strategic compromise.

6 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan XVII: L'envers de la psychanalyse, 1969–70*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1991, pp. 31–59. [eds]

7 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 355–63. [eds]

8 Claude Lefort, *L'Invention démocratique: Les limites de la domination totalitaire*, Paris, Librarie Arthème Fayard, 1981.

9 Perhaps the distinction between the Communist and the Fascist masters resides in the fact that – in spite of all the talk about racial science and so forth – the innermost logic of fascism is not meta-political, but ultra-political: the Fascist master is a warrior in politics.

10 Rancière, *Disagreement*, pp. 99–104.
11 This crucial distinction between simulacrum (which overlaps with the Real) and appearance is also easily discernible in the domain of sexuality as the distinction between pornography and seduction: pornography 'shows it all', it is 'real sex', and for that very reason produces the mere simulacrum of sexuality, while the process of seduction consists entirely in the play of appearances, hints and promises and thereby evokes the elusive domain of the suprasensible sublime Thing. For a more detailed analysis of the libidinal impact of pornography, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, London and New York, Verso, 1997, pp. 171–91.
12 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 89.
13 Immanuel Kant, 'On the common saying: "This may be true in theory, but it does not apply in practice"', in *Political Writings*, ed. H. S. Reiss, trans. H. B. Nisbet, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 61–92. [eds]
14 Rancière, *Disagreement*, pp. 115–18.
15 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 401.
16 Étienne Balibar, 'Violence, ideality and cruelty', in *Politics and the Other Scene*, trans. Christine Jones, James Swenson and Chris Turner, London and New York, Verso, 2002, pp. 136–7, 141–4.
17 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, 1964*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York and London, W. W. Norton, 1977, p. 241; see also p. 240.
18 For a closer examination of these three forms of evil, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality*, London and New York, Verso, 1994, pp. 54–85. My argument here is drawn from material previously published in this work, pp. 70–71.
19 Balibar, 'Violence, ideality and cruelty', pp. 142–4.
20 Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters*, London and New York, Verso, 1996, p. 199.
21 For a more detailed account of this reflected cynical attitude, see Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder*, pp. 189–236.
22 See Jacques Lacan, 'Seminar on "The purloined letter"', trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, in *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida and Psychoanalytic Reading*, ed. John P. Muller and William J. Richardson, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988, pp. 47–8. [eds]
23 Alain Badiou, *L'être et l'événement*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1988, pp. 121–8.
24 Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2003, pp. 40–54.

11

A plea for 'passive aggressivity'

Amish communities practise the institution of *rumspringa* (from the German *herumspringen*, 'to jump around'): at 17 their children (until then subjected to strict family discipline) are set free, allowed, encouraged even, to go out and experience the ways of the 'English' world around them – they drive cars, listen to pop music, watch television, get involved in drinking, drugs, wild sex ... After a couple of years, they are then expected to decide: will they become members of the Amish community, or leave it and turn into ordinary American citizens? Far from being permissive and allowing the adolescents a truly free choice – i.e., giving them the opportunity to decide based on the full knowledge and experience of both alternatives – such a solution is biased in a most brutal way, a fake choice if ever there was one. When, after long years of discipline and fantasizing about the transgressive illicit pleasures of the outside 'English' world, the adolescent Amish are all of a sudden and unprepared thrown into it, they cannot but indulge in extreme forms of transgressive behaviour. And since, in such a life, they lack any inherent limitation or regulation, such a permissive situation inexorably backlashes and generates unbearable anxiety – it is thus a safe bet that, after a couple of years, they will return to the seclusion of their community. It is no wonder that 90 per cent of the adolescents do exactly that.

And is this not how our academic freedoms function? (This does not *a priori* render them meaningless or 'co-opted' – one should just be aware of it.) There is nothing better for one's proper integration into the hegemonic ideologico-political community than a 'radical' past in which one lived out one's wildest dreams. The latest instalments of this saga are today's American neo-conservatives, a surprising number of whom were in their youth Trotskyites.[1] Is it not possible to ascertain, retroactively,

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that even the glorious Parisian May '68 was such a collective *rumspringa*, which, in the long term, contributed to the reproductive capacity of the system itself? In his 'The problem of hegemony',[2] Simon Critchley provides a consistent justification of such critical *rumspringa*:

> We inhabit states. ... Now, it is arguable that the state is a limitation on human existence and we would be better off without it. Such is perhaps the eternal temptation of anarchism, and we will come back to anarchism. However, it seems to me that we cannot hope, at this point in history, to attain a withering away of the state either through anarcho-syndicalism or revolutionary proletarian praxis, or through the agency of the party for example. ... If class positions are not simplifying, but on the contrary becoming more complex through processes of dislocation, if the revolution is no longer conceivable in Marx's manner, then that means that, for good or ill, let's say for ill, we are stuck with the state, just as we are stuck with capitalism. The question becomes: what should our political strategy be with regard to the state, to the state that we're in? ... In a period when the revolutionary subject has decidedly broken down, and the political project of a disappearance of the state is not coherent other than as a beautifully seductive fantasy, politics has to be conceived at a distance from the state. Or, better, politics is the praxis of taking up distance with regard to the state, working independently of the state, working in a situation. Politics is praxis in a situation and the work of politics is the construction of new political subjectivities, new political aggregations in specific localities, new political sequences.
>
> Perhaps it is at this intensely situational, indeed local level that the atomising force of capitalist globalization is to be met, contested and resisted. That is, it is not to be resisted by constructing a global anti-globalisation movement that, at its worst, is little more than a highly-colourful critical echo of the globalisation it contests. It is rather to be resisted by occupying and controlling the terrain upon which one stands, where one lives, works, acts and thinks. This needn't involve millions of people. It needn't even involve thousands. It could involve just a few at first. It could be what Julia Kristeva has recently called the domain of 'intimate revolt'. That is, politics begins right here, locally, practically and specifically, around a concrete issue and not by running off to protest at some meeting of the G8. You shouldn't meet your enemy on their ground, but on your own, on the ground that you have made your own. Also, think of the money and time you save on travel! ...
>
> [True democracy is thus] enacted or even simply acted – practically, locally, situationally – at a distance from the state. ... It calls the state into question, it calls the established order to account, not in order to do away with the state, desirable though that might well be in some utopian sense, but in order to better it or attenuate its malicious effects.[3]

The main ambiguity of this position resides in a strange *non sequitur* that it contains: if the State is here to stay, if it is impossible to abolish the State (and capitalism), why act with a *distance* towards the State? Why not *with(in) the State*? Why not accept the basic premise of the Third Way? Perhaps it is time to take seriously Stalin's obsessive critique of 'bureaucracy', and appreciate in a new (Hegelian) way the necessary work done by State bureaucracy itself. In other words, does Critchley's position not rely on the fact that someone else will assume the task of running the State machinery, enabling us critically to distance ourselves from the State? Furthermore, if the space of democracy is defined by this 'distance', is Critchley not abandoning the field (of the State) all too easily to the enemy? Is it not crucial *what* form the State power has? Does not Critchley's position lead to the reduction of this crucial question to a secondary place: whatever State we have, it is inherently non-democratic?

This brings us to the second ambiguity: is the sentiment that the State 'is here to stay' a temporary withdrawal, a specific claim about today's historico-political situation, or a transcendental limitation conditioned by human finitude? That is to say, when Critchley defines today's political constellation as one in which the State is permanent and in which we are caught within multiple displacements, etc., this thesis is radically (and necessarily) ambiguous: (1) is it – as some of his formulations appear (for instance, 'In a period when the revolutionary subject has decidedly broken down, and the political project of a disappearance of the State is not coherent other than as a beautifully seductive fantasy ...') – that this is merely today's historical constellation, in which progressive political forces are in retreat; or (2) is it that this is a general 'truth' to which we were blind when we believed in essentialist utopian political ideologies (for instance, 'The revolution is not going to be generated out of systemic or structural laws. We are on our own and what we do we have to do for ourselves. Politics requires subjective invention. No ontology or eschatological philosophy of history is going to do it for us ...')? Again, the ambiguity is here necessary:

> The revolution is not going to be generated out of systemic or structural laws. We are on our own and what we do we have to do for ourselves. Politics requires subjective invention. No ontology or eschatological philosophy of history is going to do it for us. Working at a distance from the state, a distance that I have tried to describe as democratic, we need to construct political subjectivities in specific situations, subjectivities that are not arbitrary or

relativistic, but which are articulations of an ethical demand whose scope is universal and whose evidence is faced in a situation. This is dirty, detailed, local, practical and largely unthrilling work. It is time we made a start.[4]

Is this dilemma not *all too coarse*? Is it not effectively a case of 'binary opposition'? That is to say, even if emancipatory progress cannot be directly grounded in some 'objective' social necessity, even if it is true that 'what we do we have to do for ourselves' (incidentally, this is a thesis with which the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness*, the ultimate straw-man of the critics of 'teleological' Hegelian-Marxism, would fully agree – he provided the most convincing version of it), it presupposes a certain specific historical site, what Alain Badiou called 'an evental site [*un site événementiel*]'.[5] Is then Critchley not paradigmatic of the position of an ideal supplement to the Third Way Left: the 'revolt' against it which poses no effective threat since it endorses in advance the logic of hysterical provocation, bombarding the Power with 'impossible' demands, demands which are not meant to be met? Critchley is therefore consequent in his assertion of the primacy of the ethical over the political: the ultimate motivating force of political interventions is the experience of *injustice*, of the ethical unacceptability of the state of things.[6]

Against Critchley's call for the modest local 'practical' action, one is thus tempted to evoke Badiou's provocative thesis: 'It is better to do nothing than to contribute to the invention of formal ways of rendering visible that which Empire already recognizes as existent.'[7] Better to do nothing than to engage in localized acts whose ultimate function is to make the system run more smoothly (acts like providing the space for the multitude of new subjectivities, etc.). The threat today is thus not passivity, but *pseudo-activity*, the urge to 'be active', to 'participate', to mask the Nothingness of what goes on. People intervene all the time, academics participate in meaningless 'debates', etc., but the truly difficult thing is to step back from activity, to withdraw from it. Those in power often even prefer 'critical' participation, a dialogue, to silence – they would prefer to engage us in a 'dialogue', just to make sure that our ominous passivity is broken.

However, the ultimate argument against 'big' political interventions which aim at global transformation is, of course, the terrifying experience of the catastrophes of the twentieth century, catastrophes that unleashed previously unheard of modes of violence. There are three

main ways of theorizing these catastrophes: (1) the way epitomized by Habermas: while Enlightenment is in itself a positive emancipatory process with no inherent 'totalitarian' potential, these catastrophes are merely an indicator that it remains an unfinished project, so our task should be to bring 'Enlightenment' itself to completion; (2) the way associated with Adorno and Horkheimer's 'dialectic of Enlightenment', as well as, today, with Agamben:[8] the 'totalitarian' potential of the Enlightenment is inherent and crucial, the 'administered world' is the truth of Enlightenment, the concentration camps and genocide of the twentieth century are a kind of negative-teleological endpoint of the entire history of the West; (3) the 'third way', developed by Étienne Balibar, among others: modernity opens up a field of new freedoms, but at the same time of new dangers, and there is no ultimate teleological guarantee of the outcome – the battle is an open one, as yet undecided.

The starting point of Balibar's remarkable intervention is the insufficiency of the standard Hegelian-Marxist notion of 'converting' violence into an instrument of historical Reason, a force which begets new social formations: the 'irrational' brutality of violence is thus *aufgehoben*, 'sublated' in the strict Hegelian sense, reduced to a particular stain that contributes to the overall harmony of historical progress.[9] The twentieth century confronted us with catastrophes, some of them directed against Marxist political forces and some of them generated by the Marxist political engagement itself, which cannot be 'rationalized' in this way: their instrumentalization into the tools of the 'cunning of reason' is not only ethically unacceptable but also theoretically wrong, *ideological* in the strongest sense of the term. In his close reading of Marx, Balibar nonetheless discerns an oscillation between this teleological 'conversion'-theory of violence and a much more interesting notion of history as an open, undecided process of antagonistic struggles whose final 'positive' outcome is not guaranteed by any all-encompassing historical Necessity.

According to Balibar, for necessarily structural reasons, Marxism is unable to conceive of an excess of violence that cannot be integrated into the narrative of historical progress – more specifically, it cannot provide an adequate theory of fascism and Stalinism and their 'extreme' expressions, the Shoah and gulag. The task then becomes double: to deploy a theory of historical violence as something that cannot be mastered, instrumentalized by any political agent, which threatens to engulf this very agent in a self-destructive cycle, and – the other side

of the same task – to pose the question of how to 'civilize' revolution, of how to make the revolutionary process itself a 'civilizing' force. Recall the infamous St Bartholomew's Day Massacre – what went wrong? Catherine de Medici's goal was limited and precise: hers was a Machiavellian plot to have Admiral de Coligny, a powerful Protestant pushing for war with Spain in the Netherlands, assassinated and let the blame fall on the all-powerful Catholic Guise family. In this way, Catherine hoped that the final outcome would be the fall of both houses that posed a menace to the unity of the French State. But this ingenious plan to play her enemies against each other degenerated into an uncontrolled frenzy of blood: in her ruthless pragmatism, Catherine was blind to the passion with which people cling to their beliefs.

Balibar further proposes the notion of excessive, non-functional cruelty as a feature of contemporary life:[10] a cruelty whose figures range from 'fundamentalist' racist and/or religious slaughter to the 'senseless' outbursts of violence performed by adolescents and the homeless in our megalopolises, a violence one is tempted to call *Id-Evil*, a violence grounded in no utilitarian or ideological reason. All the talk about foreigners stealing work from us or the threat they represent to our Western values should not deceive us: under closer examination, it soon becomes clear that this talk provides a rather superficial secondary rationalization. The answer we ultimately obtain from skinheads is that it makes them feel good to beat foreigners, that their very presence is what is disturbing ... Such Id-Evil is structured around and motivated by the most elementary imbalance in the relationship between the Ego and *jouissance*, by the tension between pleasure and the foreign body of *jouissance* at its very heart. Id-Evil thus stages the most elementary 'short-circuit' in the relationship of the subject to the primordially missing object-cause of his desire: what bothers us in the 'other' (Jew, Japanese, African, Turk, etc.) is that he appears to entertain a privileged relationship to the object – the other either possesses the *agalma*, having snatched it away from us (which is why we don't have it), or he poses a threat to our possession of the object. What one should propose here, again, is the Hegelian 'infinite judgement', which asserts the speculative identity of these 'useless' and 'excessive' outbursts of violence that display nothing but a naked ('non-sublimated') hatred of Otherness, with the post-political multiculturalist universe of tolerance for difference in which no one is excluded.

(Of course, we are using the term *non-sublimated* in its common, vulgar meaning, which, in this case, stands for the exact opposite of its strict psychoanalytic meaning. In short, what takes place when we focus our hatred on some representative of the [officially tolerated] Other is the very mechanism of sublimation at its most elementary: the all-encompassing nature of post-political 'concrete universality', which accounts for everybody at the level of symbolic inclusion, this multiculturalist vision and practice of 'unity in difference' [e.g., 'everyone is equal, everyone is different'], leaves open, as the only way to mark difference, the proto-sublimatory gesture of elevating a contingent Other [race, sex, religion, etc.] into the 'absolute Otherness' of the impossible Thing, the ultimate threat to our identity – this Thing that must be annihilated if we are to survive. Therein resides the properly Hegelian paradox: the final arrival of a truly rational 'concrete universality' – the abolition of antagonisms, the 'mature' universe of a negotiated co-existence of different groups – coincides with its radical opposite, with thoroughly contingent outbursts of violence.)

Hegel's fundamental rule is that 'objective' excess (the direct reign of abstract universality which imposes its law 'mechanically', with utter disregard for the concerned subject caught in its web) is always supplemented by a 'subjective' excess (the irregular, arbitrary exercise of the whims of the individual).[11] An exemplary case of this interdependence is provided by Balibar, who distinguishes two opposite but complementary modes of excessive violence: the *ultra-objective* ('structural') violence that is inherent to the social conditions of global capitalism (the 'automatic' creation of excluded and dispensable individuals, from the homeless to the unemployed), and the *ultra-subjective* violence of newly emerging ethnic and/or religious (in short, racist) 'fundamentalisms'. This excessive, groundless violence involves its own mode of knowledge, that of impotent cynical reflection – back to our example of Id-Evil, of a skinhead beating up foreigners: when really pressed for reasons for his violence, and if capable of minimal theoretical reflection, he would suddenly begin to speak like a social worker, sociologist or social psychologist, quoting diminished social mobility, rising insecurity, the disintegration of paternal authority, the lack of maternal love in his early childhood, etc.; in short, he would provide a more-or-less precise psycho-sociological account of his acts, so as to endear him to enlightened liberals eager to 'understand' the violent

youth as a tragic victim of social and familial conditions. The standard enlightened formula for the efficiency of the 'critique of ideology' from Plato onwards ('they are doing it because they do not know what they are doing', i.e., knowledge is in itself liberating: when the erring subject reflects upon what he is doing, he will no longer be doing it) is here inverted: the violent skinhead 'knows very well what he is doing, but he is nonetheless doing it'.[12] The symbolic efficiency of knowledge embedded in the subject's effective social praxis disintegrates into, on the one hand, excessive 'irrational' violence with no ideological-political foundation and, on the other hand, impotent external reflection that leaves the subject's behaviour intact. While the skinhead, in the guise of this cynically-impotent reflection, explains to the perplexed journalist the roots of his senseless violent behaviour, the enlightened tolerant multiculturalist bent on 'understanding' these forms of excessive violence receives his own message in its inverted, true form – in short, as Lacan would have put it, at this point, the communication between him and the 'object' of his study, the intolerant skinhead, is thoroughly successful.

But the complementarity of these modes of excessive violence is nowhere more apparent than in the dynamics of capitalism itself. On one level, capitalism entails the radical secularization of social life – it mercilessly tears apart any aura of authentic nobility, sacredness and honour. However, the fundamental lesson of the 'critique of political economy' elaborated by the mature Marx in the years following the *Manifesto* is that this reduction of all heavenly chimeras to brutal economic reality generates a quasi-theological spectrality of its own.[13] When Marx describes the mad self-enhancing circulation of Capital, whose solipsistic process of self-fecundation[14] reaches its apogee in today's meta-reflexive speculations on futures, it is far too simplistic to claim that the spectre of this self-engendering monster that pursues its path disregarding any human or environmental concern is an ideological abstraction, and that one should never forget that, behind this abstraction, there are real people and natural objects on whose productive capacities and resources Capital's circulation is based and on which it feeds itself like a gigantic parasite. The problem is that this 'abstraction' is not merely in the misperception of social reality, but that it is 'Real' in the precise sense of determining the structure of the material social processes themselves: the fate of an entire strata of the population and sometimes of whole countries can be decided by the

'solipsistic' speculative dance of Capital, which pursues its goal of profitability in a blessed indifference towards the way its movement will affect social reality. Therein resides the fundamental character of the systemic violence of capitalism, which is much more uncanny than direct pre-capitalist socio-ideological violence: this violence can no longer be attributed to concrete individuals and their 'evil' intentions, but is purely 'objective', structural, anonymous.

Here we encounter the Lacanian difference between reality and the Real: 'reality' is the lived social experience of actual people involved in the productive process, while the Real is the inexorable 'abstract' spectral logic of Capital that determines what goes on in social reality. And, again, today is this not more accurate than ever? Do phenomena usually designated as 'virtual capitalism' (futures trading and other abstract financial speculations) not point towards the immanent reign of 'real abstraction' at its purest? The ideological rationalizations of this process are those different theories of 'postmodernism' or 'second modernization' that emphasize the notion of global reflexivity: today, the process of the dissolution of all traditional authorities described by Marx, the process through which 'all that is solid melts into air', has reached an unprecedented peak far beyond what Marx and Engels were able to imagine, penetrating even the intimate domain of sexuality.[15]

Hannah Arendt's insights at this point are particularly fitting. She emphasized the distinction between political power and the mere exercise of (social) violence: organizations run by direct non-political authority – for instance, by an order of command that is not politically grounded (as in the army, church, family or school) – represent examples of violence [*Gewalt*], not of political power in the strict sense of the term. Here, however, it would be productive to introduce the distinction between public symbolic Law and its obscene supplement: the notion of an obscene superegoic 'double' of Power implies that there is no power without violence. Power must always rely on an obscene stain of violence; political space is thus never 'pure', but always involves some kind of reliance on 'pre-political' violence. Of course, the relationship between political Power and pre-political violence is one of mutual implication: not only is violence the necessary supplement to Power, but (political) Power is itself always-already present at the core of every apparently 'non-political' social bond. The accepted violence and direct relationship of subordination in the army, church, family and other 'non-political' social forms are themselves simply the

'reified' expressions of certain ethico-political struggles – the task of critical analysis is to discern the hidden political processes that sustain all these 'non-' or 'pre-political' forms. In human society, the political is the encompassing structuring principle, so that every neutralization of some partial social content as 'non-political' is itself a political gesture par excellence.

This acceptance of violence, this 'political suspension of the ethical', is the limit that even the most 'tolerant' liberal stance is unable to cross – witness the uneasiness of 'radical' post-colonialist Afro-American studies apropos of Frantz Fanon's fundamental insight into the unavoidability of violence in the process of effective decolonization. Consider Fredric Jameson's suggestion that, in a revolutionary process, violence plays the same role as worldly wealth in the Calvinist logic of predestination: although it has no intrinsic value, it is a sign of the authenticity of the revolution, of the fact that this process is effectively disturbing the existing Power relations.[16] In other words, the dream of a revolution without violence is precisely the dream of a 'revolution without revolution' (Robespierre). On the other hand, the role of the fascist spectacle of violence is exactly the opposite: it is a violence whose aim is to *prevent* true change – something spectacular happens constantly so that, precisely, nothing really happens.

But, again, the ultimate argument against this perspective is the simple encounter with excessive suffering generated by political violence. Sometimes, one cannot but be shocked by the excessive indifference towards suffering, even and especially when this suffering is widely reported in the media and condemned – it is as if the very outrage at suffering is what turns us into immobilized fascinated spectators. Recall, in the early 1990s, the three-years-long siege of Sarajevo, whose population was starving and constantly exposed to shelling and sniper fire. The real enigma is this: although the media were full of pictures and reports, why didn't the UN forces, NATO or the United States accomplish the seemingly insignificant act of *breaking the siege of Sarajevo*, of imposing a corridor through which people and provisions could pass freely? It would have cost nothing: with a little bit of serious pressure on the Serb forces, the prolonged spectacle of an encircled Sarajevo exposed to such ridiculous terror would have been over. There is only one answer to this enigma, the one proposed by Rony Brauman himself who, on behalf of the Red Cross, coordinated the aid to Sarajevo: the very presentation of the crisis in Sarajevo as 'humanitarian', the very

recasting of the political-military conflict into humanitarian terms, was sustained by an eminently *political* choice, that of, basically, taking the side of Serbia in the conflict. Especially ominous and manipulative here was the role of Mitterand:

> The celebration of 'humanitarian intervention' in Yugoslavia took the place of a political discourse, disqualifying in advance all conflicting debate ... It was apparently not possible, for François Mitterand, to express his analysis of the war in Yugoslavia. With the strictly humanitarian response, he discovered an unexpected source of communication or, more precisely, of cosmetics, which is a little bit the same thing. ... Mitterand remained in favour of the maintenance of Yugoslavia within its borders and was persuaded that only a strong Serbian power was in the position to guarantee a certain stability in this explosive region. This position rapidly became unacceptable in the eyes of the French people. All the bustling activity and the humanitarian discourse permitted him to reaffirm the unfailing commitment of France to the Rights of Man in the end, and to mimic an opposition to greater Serbian fascism, all in giving it free rein.[17]

From this specific insight, one should then move to the more general level of rendering problematic the very 'depoliticized' humanitarian politics of 'human rights' as the ideology of military interventionism serving specific economic-political purposes. As Wendy Brown insists apropos of Michael Ignatieff, such humanitarianism 'presents itself as something of an antipolitics – a pure defence of the innocent and the powerless against power, a pure defence of the individual against immense and potentially cruel or despotic machineries of culture, state, war, ethnic conflict, tribalism, patriarchy, and other mobilizations or instantiations of collective power against individuals'.[18] However, the real question is, 'what kind of politicization [do those who intervene on behalf of human rights] set in motion against the powers they oppose? Do they stand for a different formulation of justice or do they stand in opposition to collective justice projects?'[19] It is clear, for instance, that the American gesture of overthrowing Saddam Hussein, legitimized in terms of ending the suffering of the Iraqi people, was not only motivated by other politico-economic interests (i.e., oil), but also relied on a determinate idea of the political and economic conditions (Western liberal democracy, guarantee of private property, inclusion in the global market economy, etc.) that should open up the prospect of freedom to the Iraqi people. The purely humanitarian anti-political politics of

simply preventing suffering thus effectively amounts to the implicit prohibition of elaborating a positive collective project of socio-political transformation.

And, at an even more general level, one should problematize the very opposition between the universal (pre-political) human rights that belong to every human being 'as such' and the specific political rights of citizens, members of a particular political community; along these lines, Balibar argues for the '*reversal* of the historical and theoretical relationship between "man" and "citizen" ' which proceeds by 'explaining how *man is made by citizenship* and not citizenship by man'.[20] He is referring here to Hannah Arendt's insight apropos of the twentieth-century phenomenon of refugees: 'The conception of human rights based upon the assumed existence of a human being as such broke down at the very moment when those who professed to believe in it were for the first time confronted with people who had indeed lost all other qualities and specific relationships – except that they were still human.'[21] This line, of course, leads straight to Agamben's notion of *homo sacer* as a human being reduced to 'bare life': in a properly Hegelian paradoxical dialectics of the universal and the particular, it is precisely when a human being is deprived of his particular socio-political identity, which accounts for his determinate citizenship, that he, in the very same gesture, is no longer recognized and/or treated as human. In short, the paradox is that one is deprived of human rights precisely when one is effectively, in one's social reality, reduced to a human being 'in general', without citizenship, profession, etc. – that is to say, *precisely when one effectively becomes the ideal bearer of 'universal human rights'* (which belong to me independently of my profession, sex, citizenship, religion, ethnic identity . . .).

We thus arrive at the standard 'postmodern', 'anti-essentialist' position, a kind of political version of Foucault's notion of sex as generated by a multitude of sexual practices: 'man', the bearer of human rights, is generated by a set of political practices which materialize citizenship – but is this sufficient? Jacques Rancière has proposed a very elegant and precise solution to the antinomy between human rights (belonging to 'man as such') and the politicization of citizens:[22] while human rights cannot be posited as an unhistorical essentialist 'Beyond' with regard to the contingent sphere of political struggles, as universal 'natural rights of man' exempted from history, they also should not be dismissed as a reified fetish, a product of concrete historical processes of the politicization of citizens. The gap between the universality of human

rights and the political rights of citizens is thus not a gap between the universality of man and a specific political sphere; rather, it 'separates the whole of the community from itself',[23] as Rancière put it in a precise Hegelian way. Far from being pre-political, 'universal human rights' designate the very space of politicization proper: what they amount to is *the right to universality as such*, the right of a political agent to assert its radical non-coincidence with itself (in its particular identity), i.e., to posit itself – precisely in so far as it is the 'surnumerary' one, the 'part with no part', the one without a proper place in the social edifice – as an agent of the universality of the Social as such. This paradox is thus a very precise one, and symmetrical to the paradox of universal human rights as the rights of those reduced to inhumanity: *at the very moment when we try to conceive political rights of citizens without the reference to universal 'meta-political' human rights, we lose politics itself*, i.e., we reduce politics to a 'post-political' play of negotiated particular interests. What, then, happens to human rights when they are reduced to the rights of *homo sacer*, of those excluded from the political community, those reduced to 'bare life'? Rancière proposes here an extremely salient dialectical reversal:

> When they are of no use, you do the same as charitable persons do with their old clothes. You give them to the poor. Those rights that appear to be useless in their place are sent abroad, along with medicine and clothes, to people deprived of medicine, clothes, and rights. It is in this way, as the result of this process, that the Rights of Man become the rights of those who have no rights, the rights of bare human beings subjected to inhuman repression and inhuman conditions of existence. They become humanitarian rights, the rights of those who cannot enact them, the victims of the absolute denial of right. For all this, they are not void. Political names and political places never become merely void. The void is filled by somebody or something else . . . If those who suffer inhuman repression are unable to enact Human Rights that are their last recourse, then somebody else has to inherit their rights in order to enact them in their place. This is what is called the 'right to humanitarian interference' – a right that some nations assume to the supposed benefit of victimized populations, and very often against the advice of the humanitarian organizations themselves. The 'right to humanitarian interference' might be described as a sort of 'return to sender': the disused rights that had been sent to the rightless are sent back to the senders.[24]

The reference to Lacan's formula of communication (in which the sender gets back from the receiver-addressee his own message in its

inverted, i.e., true, form) is here especially pertinent: in the reigning discourse of humanitarian interventionism, the developed West is getting back from the victimized Third World its own message in its true form.[25] And the moment human rights are in this way depoliticized, the discourse dealing with them has to change its register to that of ethics, mobilizing some reference to the pre-political opposition of Good and Evil. Today's 'new reign of Ethics',[26] clearly discernible in, say, Michael Ignatieff's work, thus relies on a violent gesture of depoliticization, of denying political subjectivization to the victimized other. And, as Rancière has pointed out, liberal humanitarianism *à la* Ignatieff unexpectedly meets the 'radical' position of Foucault or Agamben with regard to this depoliticization: the Foucauldian–Agambenian notion of 'biopolitics' as the culmination of the whole of Western thought ends up getting caught in a kind of 'ontological trap' in which concentration camps appear as an 'ontological destiny: each of us would be in the situation of the refugee in a camp. Any difference grows faint between democracy and totalitarianism and any political practice proves to be already ensnared in the biopolitical trap'.[27] When, in a shift from Foucault, Agamben identifies sovereign power and biopolitics (in today's generalized state of exception, the two overlap), he thus precludes the very possibility of the emergence of political subjectivity.

However, the rise of political subjectivity takes place against the background of a certain limit of the 'inhuman', so that one should continue to endorse the paradox of the inhumanity of the human being deprived of citizenship, and posit the 'inhuman' pure man as a necessary excess of humanity over itself, its 'indivisible remainder', a Kantian limit-concept of the phenomenal notion of humanity. Just as, in Kant's philosophy, the sublime noumenal appears as pure horror when we come too close to it, man 'as such', deprived of all phenomenal qualifications, appears as an inhuman monster, something like Kafka's *odradek*. The problem with human rights humanism is that it covers up the monstrosity of this 'human as such', presenting it as a sublime human essence.

What then is the way out of this deadlock? Balibar concludes his paper on 'human civic rights' with an ambiguous reference to Mahatma Gandhi. It is true that Gandhi's formula, 'Be yourself the change you would like to see in the world', encapsulates perfectly the basic attitude of emancipatory change: do not wait for the 'objective process' to generate the expected/desired change – if you merely wait for it, it will never come. Instead, throw *yourself* into it, *be* this change,

take upon yourself the risk of enacting it directly. However, is not the ultimate limitation of Gandhi's strategy the fact that it only works against a liberal-democratic régime which adheres to certain minimal ethico-political standards – i.e., in which, to put it in pathetic terms, those in Power still 'have a conscience'? Recall Gandhi's reply, in the late 1930s, to the question of what the Jews in Germany should do against Hitler: they should commit collective suicide and thus arouse the conscience of the world ... One can easily imagine the Nazi reaction: OK, we will help you, where do you want the poison delivered?

There is, however, another way in which Balibar's plea for a renunciation of violence can be given a specific twist. Recall the two symmetrically opposed modes of the 'living dead', when one finds oneself in the uncanny place 'between two deaths [*l'êntre deux morts*]': one is either biologically dead while symbolically alive (surviving one's biological death as a spectral apparition or the symbolic authority of the Name), or symbolically dead while biologically alive (those excluded from the socio-symbolic order, from Antigone to today's *homo sacer*). And what if we apply the same logic to the opposition of violence and non-violence, identifying the two ways in which they intersect?[28] We all know the pop-psychological notion of 'passive-aggressive behaviour', usually applied to a housewife who, instead of actively opposing her husband, passively sabotages him (and this brings us back to our beginning): perhaps this attitude of *passive aggressivity* is a proper radical political gesture, in contrast to aggressive passivity, the standard 'interpassive' mode of our participation in socio-ideological life in which we are active all the time in order to make sure that nothing will happen, that nothing will really change. In such a constellation, the first truly critical ('aggressive', violent) step is to *withdraw* into passivity, to refuse to participate – this is the necessary first step that, as it were, clears the ground for a true activity, for an act that will effectively change the coordinates of today's constellation.

Notes

1 One should, of course, resist the stupid temptation to use this fact as grounds for the retroactive legitimization of Stalin's brutal suppression of Trotskyism ('So Stalin was nonetheless right when he pointed out how Trotskyism ends up directly serving imperialism – he was half a century ahead of his time!'); such a line of reasoning can only end up in a cheap paraphrase of de Quincey:

'How many an honest man started with a modest leftist critique of Stalinism and ended up as servants of imperialism . . .'

2 Simon Critchley, 'The problem of hegemony', lecture from the 2004 *Albert Schweitzer Series on Ethics and Politics* at New York University. It appears on the *Political Theory* website [www.politicaltheory.info/essays/critchley.htm]. Page references are taken from this site. [eds]

3 Critchley, 'Problem of hegemony', pp. 3–4. [eds]

4 Critchley, 'Problem of hegemony', p. 5. [eds]

5 Alain Badiou, *L'être et l'événement*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1988, pp. 195–6. [eds]

6 Critchley, 'Problem of hegemony', p. 5. [eds]

7 Alain Badiou, 'Fifteen theses on contemporary art', lecture presented at the launch of *lacanian ink* 22, The Drawing Center, New York, 4 December 2003. See also Badiou's commentary on his theses in *lacanian ink* 23, 2004, pp. 103–19. [eds]

8 See Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Nörr, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2002; Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1998; and *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, New York, Zone, 1999. [eds]

9 Étienne Balibar, 'Three concepts of politics: emancipation, transformation, civility', in *Politics and the Other Scene*, trans. Christine Jones, James Swenson and Chris Turner, London and New York, Verso, 2002, pp. 23–35. [eds]

10 Étienne Balibar, 'Violence, ideality and cruelty', in *Politics and the Other Scene*, pp. 136–7, 141–4.

11 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 151–7; and *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 54–7. [eds]

12 Žižek is here referring to the 'fetishist disavowal' famously elaborated by Octave Mannoni in his, 'I know well, but all the same . . .', in *Perversion and the Social Relation*, ed. Molly Anne Rothenberg, Dennis A. Foster and Slavoj Žižek, Durham, Duke University Press, 2003, 68–92. [eds]

13 See, for instance, Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes, London, Penguin/New Left Review, 1976, p. 256. Marx's formulation here is crucial: '[I]nstead of simply representing the relations of commodities, [value] now enters into a private relationship with itself, as it were. It differentiates itself as original value from itself as surplus-value, just as God the Father differentiates himself from himself as God the Son, although both are of the same age and form, in fact one single person. Value therefore now becomes value in process, money in process, and, as such, capital.' [eds]

14 See, for instance, Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 3*, trans. David Fernbach, London, Penguin/New Left Review, 1981, p. 966: 'Capital thereby already becomes a very mystical being, since all the productive forces of social labour appear attributable to it, and not to labour as such, as a power springing forth from its own womb.' [eds]

15 See Balibar, 'Violence, ideality and cruelty', pp. 143–4. [eds]

16 Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2003, p. 175 n. 26. [eds]

17 Rony Brauman, 'From philanthropy to humanitarianism', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103, 2004, pp. 398–9, 416.

18 Wendy Brown, 'Human rights as the politics of fatalism', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103, 2004, p. 453.

19 Brown, 'Human rights as the politics of fatalism', p. 454.

20 Étienne Balibar, 'Is a philosophy of human civic rights possible?', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103, 2004, pp. 320–1.

21 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York, Meridian, 1958, p. 297.

22 See Jacques Rancière, 'Who is the subject of the rights of man?', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103, 2004, pp. 297–310.

23 Rancière, 'Who is the subject of the rights of man?', p. 305.

24 Rancière, 'Who is the subject of the rights of man?', pp. 307–9.

25 And this is also where we should look for candidates for the position of 'universal singular', a particular group whose fate stands for the injustice of today's world. Palestine is today the site of a potential event precisely because all of the standard 'pragmatic' solutions to the 'Middle East crisis' repeatedly fail, so that the utopian invention of a new space is the only 'realistic' choice. Furthermore, Palestinians are particularly good candidates on account of their paradoxical status of being *the victims of the ultimate Victims themselves* (i.e., Jews), which, of course, puts them in an extremely difficult position: when they resist, their resistance can immediately be denounced as a prolongation of anti-Semitism, as a secret solidarity with the Nazi 'final solution'. Indeed, if – as Lacanian Zionists like to claim – Jews are the *objet petit a* among nations, the troubling excess of Western history, how can one resist them with impunity? Is it possible to be the *objet a* of *objet a* itself? It is precisely this ethical blackmail that one should reject.

There is, however, a privileged site among these other candidates: the slums of the new megalopolises and their inhabitants. The explosive growth of slums in the last few decades – particularly in Third World megalopolises from Mexico City and other Latin American capitals through Africa (e.g., Lagos, Chad) to India, China, the Philippines and Indonesia – is perhaps the crucial geopolitical event of our times. While one should certainly resist the easy temptation to elevate and idealize slum-dwellers into a new revolutionary

class, one should nonetheless, in Badiou's terms, perceive slums as one of the few authentic 'evental sites' in today's society – slum-dwellers are literally a collection of those who are the 'part of no-part', the 'surnumerary' element of society, excluded from the benefits of citizenship, the uprooted and dispossessed, those who effectively 'have nothing to lose but their chains'.

26 Rancière, 'Who is the subject of the rights of man?', p. 309.

27 Rancière, 'Who is the subject of the rights of man?', p. 301.

28 In what follows, I rely on certain ideas developed by Rob Rushing (University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana).

12

The three faces of Bill Gates

There is more than one story to be told about Bill Gates.

First, there is the American success story: a young boy starting a company in his garage a mere quarter of a century ago, borrowing ridiculously small amounts of money from his neighbours and relatives, who is now the richest man in the world – the latest proof of the infinite opportunities of America, the American dream at its purest.

Then, there is the story of Bill Gates the evil monopolist, the ominous master with his weird smile, whom we all love to hate – the obverse of the American dream, one of the ideal figures of American paranoia. In spite of its apparent anti-capitalist stance, this story is no less ideological than the first one: it is sustained by another myth, that of American freedom, of a freedom fighter destroying the bad Institution (from the Watergate journalists to Noam Chomsky). In short, what these two stories share is the fetishized personification of social struggles: the belief in the key role of the heroic individual.

Finally, there is the Bill Gates of 'frictionless capitalism', the emblem of post-industrial society in which we witness the 'end of labour', in which software is winning over hardware and the young nerd over the old top manager in black suit – in the new company headquarters, there is little external discipline, (ex-)hackers who dominate the scene work long hours, enjoying free drinks in green surroundings, etc. How, then, do these three stories relate? Let us begin, in the good old Marxist way, with the last narrative, that of the historical vicissitudes of capitalism.

Perhaps it is only today, within global capitalism in its 'post-industrial' form, that, to put it in Hegelian terms, 'really existing capitalism' is achieving the level of its notion: perhaps, one should once again follow Marx's infamous anti-evolutionist motto (incidentally, taken verbatim

from Hegel) that 'human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape', i.e., that, in order to deploy the inherent notional structure of a social formation, one must start with its most developed form.[1] As is well known, Marx located capitalism's elementary antagonism in the opposition between use- and exchange-value: in capitalism, the potentials of this opposition are fully realized, the domain of exchange-values acquires autonomy, and is transformed into the spectre of self-propelling speculative Capital which uses the productive capacities and needs of actual people only as its dispensable temporal embodiment. Marx derived the very notion of economic crisis from this gap: a crisis occurs when reality catches up with the illusory self-generating mirage of money begetting more money – this speculative madness cannot go on indefinitely, it has to explode in ever stronger crises. The ultimate root of the crisis is for him the gap between use- and exchange-value: the logic of exchange-value follows its own path, its own mad dance, irrespective of the real needs of real people. It may appear that this analysis is more actual today than ever, when the tension between the virtual universe and the Real is reaching almost palpably unbearable proportions: on the one hand, we have crazy solipsistic speculations about futures, mergers, etc., following their own inherent logic; on the other hand, reality is catching up in the guise of ecological catastrophes, poverty, the Third World collapse of social life, Mad Cow Disease, etc. This is why cyber-capitalists can appear as the paradigmatic capitalists today, and why Bill Gates can dream of cyberspace as providing the frame for what he calls 'frictionless capitalism'. What we have here is an ideological short-circuit between the two versions of the gap between reality and virtuality: the gap between real production and the virtual/spectral domain of Capital, and the gap between experiential reality and the virtual reality of cyberspace. The actual horror of the motto 'frictionless capitalism' is that, since actual 'frictions' continue to insist, they become invisible, repressed into the netherworld outside our 'postmodern' post-industrial universe; this is why the 'frictionless' universe of digitalized communication, technological gadgets, etc., is always haunted by the notion that there is a global catastrophe waiting around the corner, threatening to explode at any moment.

Jeremy Rifkin designated this new stage of commodification as 'cultural capitalism'.[2] In 'cultural capitalism', the relationship between an object and its symbol-image is inverted: the image does not represent the product, but, rather, the product represents the image.[3] We buy a

product – say, an organic apple – because it represents the image of a healthy lifestyle. This reversal is brought to its extreme when a secondary association becomes the ultimate point of reference, as in the case of Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 20: when, decades ago, its second movement was used for the soundtrack of the popular Swedish sentimental love story, *Elvira Madigan*, even its 'serious' recordings as a rule added the film's title to it – e.g., Mozart, Piano Concerto No. 20 ('Elvira Madigan') – so that, when we buy and listen to the CD, we are in fact buying the experience of that insipid Romantic melodrama. Along the same lines, the main reason why so many people still continue to visit 'real' stores (as opposed to on-line shopping) is not so much that you can 'see and feel' the products there, but that you can 'enjoy browsing itself as a recreational activity'.[4]

As the example of buying an organic apple indicates, the very ecological protest against capitalist ruthless exploitation of natural resources is already caught in the commodification of experiences: although ecology perceives itself as a protest against the digitalization/virtualization of our daily lives and advocates a return to the direct experience of sensual material reality in all its unpredictable fragility and inertia, ecology itself is branded as a new lifestyle – what we are effectively buying when we buy 'organic food', for instance, is already a certain cultural experience, the experience of a 'healthy, ecologically-friendly lifestyle'. And the same goes for every return to 'reality': in a recent publicity spot widely broadcast on all the main American television stations, a group of ordinary people is depicted as engaged in a barbecue picnic with country music and dancing, with the accompanying message: 'Beef. Real food for real people.' The irony is that the beef offered here as the symbol of a certain lifestyle ('real' grass-roots working-class Americans) is much more chemically and genetically manipulated than the 'organic' food consumed by 'artificial' yuppies.

What we are witnessing today, the defining feature of 'postmodern' capitalism, is the direct commodification of our experience: what we are buying on the market less and less are products (material objects) that we want to own, and more and more life-experiences – experiences of sex, eating, communication, cultural consumption, participation in a lifestyle. Material objects serve merely as props for such experiences, increasingly offered for free in order to seduce us into buying the true 'experiential commodity'[5] (like free cellular phones if we sign a one-year contract):

> As cultural production comes to dominate the economy, goods increasingly take on the qualities of props. They become mere platforms or settings around which elaborate cultural meanings are acted out. They lose their material importance and take on symbolic importance. They become less objects and more tools to help facilitate the performance of lived experiences.[6]

The logic of market exchange is here brought to a kind of Hegelian self-relating identity: we no longer buy objects, we ultimately buy (the time of) our lives. Michel Foucault's notion of turning one's self itself into a work of art thus gets an unexpected confirmation: I buy my 'body' by visiting fitness clubs; I buy my spiritual enlightenment by enrolling in courses on transcendental meditation; I buy my public persona by going to the restaurants visited by people with whom I want to be associated, etc.

Although this shift may appear as a break with capitalist market economy, one can argue that it brings its logic to its consequent climax. Industrial market economy involves a temporal gap between the purchase of a commodity and its consumption: from the standpoint of the seller, the affair is over the moment he sells the commodity – what happens afterwards (what the purchaser does with it, the direct consumption of the commodity) does not concern him. But in the commodification of experience, this gap is closed, and *consumption itself is the commodity purchased*. However, the possibility of closing this gap is inscribed into the very nominalist logic of the modern society and its community. That is to say, since the purchaser buys a commodity for its use-value, and because this use-value can be decomposed into its components (when I buy a Land Rover, I do this in order to drive myself and other people around, *plus* to signal my participation in a certain life-style associated with it), there is a logical next step towards the commodification and direct sale of these components (leasing a car instead of buying, etc.). At the end of the road is thus the solipsistic fact of subjective experience: because the subjective experience of individual consumption is the ultimate goal of production as a whole, is it not logical to bypass the object and sell directly this experience? And, perhaps, instead of interpreting this commodification of experience as the result of a shift in the predominant mode of subjectivity (from the classical bourgeois subject focused on the possession of objects to the 'postmodern' Protean subject focused on the wealth of his experiences), one should rather conceive of this Protean subject itself as the effect of the commodification of experience.[7]

This, of course, compels us thoroughly to reformulate the standard Marxist topic of 'reification' and 'commodity fetishism', insofar as this topic still relies on the notion of fetish as a solid object whose stable presence obfuscates its social mediation. Paradoxically, fetishism reaches its acme precisely when the fetish itself is 'dematerialized', turned into a fluid 'immaterial' virtual entity; money fetishism will culminate in its passage to electronic form, when the last traces of its materiality disappear – electronic money is the third form, after 'real' money, which directly embodies its value (gold, silver), and paper money, which, although a 'mere sign' with no intrinsic value, still clings to its material existence. And it is only at this stage, when money becomes a purely virtual point of reference, that it finally assumes the form of an indestructible spectral presence: I owe you $1,000, and no matter how many material notes I burn, I will still owe you $1,000 – the debt is inscribed somewhere in virtual digital space. It is only through this 'dematerialization', when Marx's famous old thesis from the *Manifesto*, according to which 'all that is solid melts into air', acquires a much more literal meaning than the one Marx had in mind, when not only our material social reality is dominated by the spectral/speculative movement of Capital, but when reality itself is progressively 'spectralized' (the 'Protean Self' instead of the old self-identical subject, the elusive fluidity of its experiences instead of the stability of owned objects), in short, when the usual relationship between firm material objects and fluid ideas is reversed (objects are progressively dissolved in fluid experiences, while the only stable things are virtual symbolic obligations) – it is at this point that what Derrida called the spectral aspect of capitalism is fully actualized.[8]

The inherent analysis of 'cultural capitalism' thus brings us to a new type of subjectivity that emerges out of the disintegration of paternal authority. This disintegration has two facets: on the one hand, symbolic prohibitive norms are increasingly replaced by imaginary ideals (of social success, of bodily fitness, etc.); on the other hand, the lack of symbolic prohibition is supplemented by the re-emergence of ferocious superego figures. So, we have a subject who is extremely narcissistic, i.e., who perceives everything as a potential threat to his precarious imaginary balance (this is the universalization of the logic of the victim: every contact with another human being is experienced as a potential threat – if the other smokes, if he casts a covetous glance at me, he is already hurting me); however, far from allowing him to float freely in an

undisturbed balance, this narcissistic self-enclosure leaves the subject to the (not so) tender mercies of the superego injunction to enjoy. This so-called 'postmodern' subjectivity thus involves a kind of direct 'superegoization' of the imaginary Ideal, caused by the lack of proper symbolic Prohibition; exemplary are here the 'postmodern' hackers–programmers, those extravagant eccentrics hired by large corporations to pursue their programming hobbies in an informal environment. They are under the injunction to be what they are, to follow their innermost idiosyncrasies, they are allowed to ignore social norms of dress and behaviour (what they obey are just some elementary rules of polite tolerance of each other's idiosyncrasies); they thus seem to realize a kind of proto-socialist utopia of overcoming the opposition between alienated business (where you actually earn money) and private hobby-activity (that you pursue for pleasure). In a way, their job is their hobby, which is why they spend long hours at weekends in their workplace behind the computer screen: when one is paid for indulging in one's hobby, the result is that one is exposed to a superego pressure incomparably stronger than that of the good old 'Protestant work ethic'. Therein resides the unbearable paradox of postmodern 'disalienation': the tension is no longer between my innermost idiosyncratic creative impulses and the Institution that either doesn't appreciate them or wants to crush them in order to 'normalize' me: what the superego-injunction of the postmodern Corporation (like Microsoft) targets is precisely this core of my idiosyncratic creativity – I become useless for them the moment I start losing this 'imp of perversity', the moment I lose my 'counter-cultural' subversive edge and start to behave like a 'normal' mature subject. There thus emerges a strange alliance between the rebellious subversive core of my personality and the external Corporation.

And it is interesting to note how the public image of Bill Gates reproduces this tension between narcissistic satisfaction and superego anxiety. What matters is not the factual accuracy ('Is Gates really like that?'), but the very fact that a certain figure started to function as an icon, to fill in some fantasmatic slot – if the features do not correspond to the 'true' Gates, they are all the more indicative of an underlying fantasmatic structure. Gates is not only no longer the patriarchal Father-Master, he is also no longer the corporate Big Brother running a stiff bureaucratic empire, dwelling in the inaccessible top floor, guarded by a host of secretaries and deputies. He is rather a kind of 'Little Brother': his very ordinariness functions as an indication of its opposite, of some

monstrous dimension so uncanny that it can no longer publicly be rendered in the guise of some symbolic title. What we encounter here in a most violent way is the deadlock of the 'double', the *doppelgänger* who is simultaneously like us and the harbinger of an uncanny, properly monstrous dimension – indicative of this is the way title-pages, drawings or photo-montages present Gates as an ordinary guy, whose devious smile nonetheless points towards a wholly different underlying dimension of monstrosity beyond representation that threatens to shatter his 'ordinary guy' image. In this respect, it is also a crucial feature of Gates as icon that he is (perceived as) the ex-hacker who made it – one should confer on the term 'hacker' all of the subversive, marginal, anti-establishment connotations of those who wanted to disturb the smooth functioning of large bureaucratic corporations. At the fantasmatic level, the underlying notion here is that Gates is a subversive marginal hooligan who has taken over and dresses himself up as a respectable chairman.

In Bill Gates, the Little Brother, the average ugly guy, thus coincides with and contains the figure of the Evil Genius who aims at total control of our lives. In the 1960s and 1970s, it was possible to buy soft-porn postcards with a girl clad in bikini or wearing a proper gown; however, when one moved the postcard a little bit or looked at it from a slightly different angle, the dress magically disappeared and one was able to see the naked body of the girl – is something similar not happening with the image of Bill Gates, whose benevolent features, when viewed from a slightly different perspective, magically acquire a sinister and threatening dimension? In the early James Bond movies, the Evil Genius was still an eccentric figure, dressed up extravagantly or in a proto-Communist Maoist grey uniform – in the case of Gates, this ridiculous charade is no longer needed: the Evil Genius turns out to be the obverse of the common 'guy next door'. In other words, what we encounter in the icon of Bill Gates is a kind of reversal of the motif of the hero endowed with supernatural powers, but who is in daily life a common, confused, clumsy guy (like Superman, who is in his ordinary existence a clumsy, bespectacled journalist): here it is the bad guy who is characterized by this kind of a split. The ordinariness of Bill Gates is thus not of the same order as the emphasis on the so-called ordinary human features of the traditional patriarchal Master. The fact that this Master never lived up to his mandate, that he was always imperfect, marked by some failure or weakness, not only did not impede his symbolic authority, but even

served as its support, rendering palpable the constitutive gap between the purely formal function of symbolic authority and the empirical individual who occupies its position. In contrast to this gap, Bill Gates' ordinariness points to a different notion of authority, that of the obscene superego that operates in the Real.

There is an old European fairy-tale motif of diligent dwarfs (usually controlled by an evil magician) who, during the night, while people are asleep, emerge from their hiding-place and accomplish their work (set the house in order, cook the meals, etc.), so that when, in the morning, people awaken, they find their work magically done. This motif appears in places such as Richard Wagner's *Rheingold* (the Nibelungs who work in their underground caves, driven by their cruel master, the dwarf Alberich) and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (in which enslaved industrial workers live and work deep beneath the earth's surface to produce wealth for the ruling capitalists). This dispositif of the 'underground' slaves dominated by a manipulative evil Master brings us back to the old duality of the two modes of the Master, the public symbolic Master and the secret evil magician who effectively pulls the strings and does his work at night. Are the two 'Bills' who ran the United States during the 1990s, Bill Clinton and Bill Gates, not the ultimate exemplification of this duality? And, perhaps, this link between the two 'Bills' is more telling than it may first appear: the Gates figure is no longer the ultimate emblem of capitalism – after 11 September 2001, it turned into a nostalgic symbol of what now appears as *la belle époque* of the Clintonian 'roaring 90s', irretrievably lost under the impact of this new violence.

When the subject is endowed with symbolic authority, he acts as an appendix to his symbolic title, i.e., it is the big Other, the symbolic institution, who acts through him: suffice it to recall a judge, who may be a miserable and corrupt person, but the moment he puts on his robe and other insignia, his words are the words of Law itself. On the other hand, the 'invisible' Master (whose exemplary case is the anti-Semitic figure of the 'Jew' who, invisible to the public eye, pulls the strings of social life) is a kind of uncanny double of public authority: he has to act in shadow, irradiating a phantom-like, spectral omnipotence. This, then, is the conclusion to be drawn from the Bill Gates icon: how the disintegration of patriarchal symbolic authority, of the Name-of-the-Father, gives rise to the new figure of Master who is simultaneously our common peer, our 'neighbour', our imaginary double, and for this very reason, fantasmatically endowed with another dimension of Evil

Genius. In Lacanian terms: the suspension of the Ego Ideal, of the feature of Symbolic identification (i.e., the reduction of the Master to an Imaginary ideal) necessarily gives rise to its monstrous obverse, to the superego figure of an omnipotent Evil Genius who controls our lives. In this figure, the Imaginary (semblance) and the Real (of paranoia) overlap, due to the suspension of proper Symbolic efficiency.

The point of our insistence that we are dealing with Bill Gates as an *icon* is that it would be mystifying to elevate the 'real' Gates into some kind of Evil Genius who masterminds a plot to achieve global control over our lives. Here, more than ever, it is crucial to remember the lesson of the Marxist dialectic of fetishization: the 'reification' of relations between people (the fact that they assume the form of fantasmagorical 'relations between things') is always redoubled by the apparently opposite process, by the false 'personalization' of what are effectively objective social processes. It was already in the 1930s that the first generation of Frankfurt School theoreticians drew attention to the way – at the very moment when global market relations began to exert their full domination, making the individual producer's success or failure dependent on capricious market cycles – that the notion of a charismatic 'business genius' reasserted itself in the 'spontaneous ideology of capitalism', attributing the success or failure of a businessman to some mysterious *je ne sais quoi* which he possesses. And does the same not hold even more today, when the abstraction of market relations that run our lives is brought to its extreme? The book market is overflowing with psychology manuals advising us how to succeed, how to outdo our partner or competitor – in short, making our success dependent on our proper 'attitude'. So, in a way, one is tempted to invert Marx's famous formula: in contemporary capitalism, objective market 'relations between things' tend to assume the fantasmagorical form of pseudo-personalized 'relations between people'. No, Bill Gates is no genius, good or bad; he is just an opportunist who knew how to seize the moment, and as such the result of the capitalist system runs amok. The question to ask is not, 'How did Gates do it?', but rather, 'How is the capitalist system structured? What is wrong with it, so that an individual can achieve such disproportionate power?'

Phenomena like that of Bill Gates thus seem to point towards their own solution: once we are dealing with a gigantic global network formally owned by a single individual or corporation, is it not that ownership becomes in a way irrelevant to its functioning (there is no

longer any worthwhile competition, profit is guaranteed), so that it becomes possible simply to cut off this head and socialize the entire network without greatly perturbing its operation? Does such an act not amount to a purely formal conversion that simply brings together what *de facto* already belongs together: the collective of individuals and the global communications network they are all using, and which thus forms the substance of their social lives?

We can see, now, that the three stories of Bill Gates belong together: in order to get the complete picture, one should add a *fourth* story, one that would supplement the third (the ideology of 'frictionless capitalism') in the same way the ominous figure of Gates the evil monopolist supplements the figure of the next-door boy who made it and became the richest man in the world – namely, the (Marxist) narrative of the inherent antagonisms and destructive potentials of capitalism.

Notes

1 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus, London, Penguin/New Left Review, 1973, p. 105. As Marx puts it: 'Bourgeois society is the most developed and the most complex historic organization of production. The categories which express its relations, the comprehension of its structure, thereby also allow insights into the structure and the relations of production of all the vanished social formations ... The bourgeois economy thus supplies the key to the ancient, etc.' [eds]

2 See Jeremy Rifkin, *The Age of Access: The New Culture of Hypercapitalism, Where All of the Life Is a Paid-for Experience*, New York, Putnam, 2000.

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7 For an attempt to assert the potentially liberating aspects of the rise of the 'Protean subject', see Robert Lifton, *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1999.

8 Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, London and New York, Routledge, 1994.

13

The prospects of radical politics today

Today, in a time of continuous swift changes, from the 'digital revolution' to the retreat of old social forms, thought is more than ever exposed to the temptation of 'losing its nerve', of precociously renouncing the old conceptual coordinates. The media is bombarding us constantly with the need to abandon 'old paradigms': if we are to survive, we have to change our most fundamental notions of personal identity, society, environment, etc. New Age wisdom claims that we are entering a new 'post-human' era; psychoanalysts hasten to concede that the Oedipal matrix of socialization is no longer operative, that we live in times of universalized perversion, that the concept of 'repression' is of no use in our permissive times; postmodern political thought tells us that we are entering a post-industrial society, in which the old categories of labour, collectivity, class, etc., are theoretical zombies, no longer applicable to the dynamics of modernization ... Third Way ideology and political practice are effectively the model of this defeat, of this inability to recognize how the New is here to enable the Old to survive. Against this temptation, one should rather follow the unsurpassed example of Pascal and ask the difficult question: How are we to remain faithful to the Old in the new conditions? It is *only* in this way that we can generate something effectively New.

Habermas designated the present era as that of the *neue Unübersichtlichkeit* – the new opacity.[1] More than ever, our daily experience is mystifying: modernization generates new obscurantisms, the reduction of freedom is presented to us as the arrival of new freedoms.

Today, in the era of 'risk society', the ruling ideology endeavours to sell us the insecurity caused by the dismantling of the Welfare State as an opportunity for new freedoms. Do you have to change jobs every

longer any worthwhile competition, profit is guaranteed), so that it becomes possible simply to cut off this head and socialize the entire network without greatly perturbing its operation? Does such an act not amount to a purely formal conversion that simply brings together what *de facto* already belongs together: the collective of individuals and the global communications network they are all using, and which thus forms the substance of their social lives?

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Today, in the era of 'risk society', the ruling ideology endeavours to sell us the insecurity caused by the dismantling of the Welfare State as an opportunity for new freedoms. Do you have to change jobs every

year, relying on short-term contracts instead of a long-term stable appointment? Why not see it as liberation from the constraints of a fixed job, as a chance to reinvent yourself again and again, to become aware of and realize the hidden potentials of your personality? Can you no longer rely on standard health insurance and retirement plans, so that you have to pay for additional coverage? Why not perceive it as an additional opportunity to choose: either better life now or long-term security? And if this predicament causes you anxiety, the postmodern or 'second modernity' ideologists will immediately accuse you of being unable to assume full freedom, of an 'escape from freedom', of an immature grasping of old stable forms ... Even better, when this is inscribed into the ideology of the subject as the psychological individual pregnant with innate abilities and tendencies, then I, as it were, automatically interpret all these changes as the result of my personality, not of being tossed around by market forces.

In these circumstances, one should be especially careful not to confuse the ruling ideology with the ideology which *seems* to dominate. More than ever, one should bear in mind Walter Benjamin's reminder that it is not enough to ask how a certain theory (or art) declares itself with regard to social struggles – one should also ask how it effectively functions in these very struggles.[2] In sex, the hegemonic attitude is not patriarchal repression, but promiscuity; in art, provocations in the style of the notorious *Sensation* exhibitions are the norm, an example of art fully integrated into the establishment. I am therefore tempted to reverse Marx's thesis 11: the first task today is precisely *not* to succumb to the temptation to act, to intervene directly and change things (which then inevitably ends in a cul-de-sac of debilitating impossibility: 'What can one do against global Capital?'), but to question the hegemonic ideological coordinates. If, today, one follows a direct call to act, this act will not be performed in an empty space – it will be an act *within* the hegemonic ideological coordinates: those who 'really want to do something to help people' get involved in (undoubtedly honourable) exploits like Médecins sans Frontières, Greenpeace, feminist and anti-racist campaigns, which are all not only tolerated, but even supported by the media, even if they seemingly enter economic territory (say, denouncing and boycotting companies that do not respect ecological conditions or that use child labour) – they are tolerated and supported as long as they do not get too close to a certain limit.

Let us take two predominant topics of today's American radical academia: postcolonial and queer (gay) studies. The problem of postcolonialism is undoubtedly crucial; however, 'postcolonial studies' tends to translate it into the multiculturalist problematic of colonized minorities' 'right to narrate' their experience of victimization, of the power mechanisms that repress 'otherness', so that, at the end of the day, we learn that the root of postcolonial exploitation is our intolerance towards the Other, and, furthermore, that this intolerance itself is rooted in our intolerance towards the 'Stranger in Ourselves', in our inability to confront what we repressed in and of ourselves. The politico-economic struggle is thus imperceptibly transformed into a pseudo-psychoanalytic drama of the subject unable to confront its inner traumas ... The true corruption of American academia is not primarily financial, it is not only that they are able to buy many European critical intellectuals (myself included – up to a point), but conceptual: notions of 'European' critical theory are imperceptibly translated into the benign universe of Cultural Studies chic.

My personal experience is that practically all of the 'radical' academics silently count on the long-term stability of the American capitalist model, with a secure tenured position as their ultimate professional goal (a surprising number of them even play on the stock market). If there is one thing they are genuinely horrified of, it is a radical shattering of the (relatively) safe living environment of the 'symbolic classes' in developed Western societies. Their excessive Politically Correct zeal when dealing with sexism, racism, Third World sweatshops, etc., is thus ultimately a defence against their own innermost identification, a kind of compulsive ritual whose hidden logic is: 'Let's talk as much as possible about the necessity of radical change in order to make sure that nothing will really change!' Symptomatic here is the journal *October*: when you ask one of the editors to what the title refers, they will half-confidentially signal that it is, of course, *that* October – in this way, one can indulge in jargonistic analyses of modern art, with the hidden assurance that one is somehow retaining a link with the radical revolutionary past ... With regard to this radical chic, the first gesture towards Third Way ideologues and practitioners should be that of praise: they, at least, play their game straight and are honest in their acceptance of global capitalist coordinates, in contrast to the pseudo-radical academic leftists who adopt an attitude of utter disdain towards the Third Way,

while their own radicality ultimately amounts to an empty gesture which obliges no one to anything determinate.

From human to animal rights

We live in a 'postmodern' era in which truth-claims as such are dismissed as expressions of hidden power mechanisms – as the reborn pseudo-Nietzscheans like to emphasize, truth is the lie that is most efficient in asserting our will to power. The very question, 'Is it true?', apropos of some statement is supplanted by another question: 'Under what power conditions can this statement be uttered?' What we get, instead of universal truth, is a multitude of perspectives, or, as it is fashionable to put it today, 'narratives' – not only literature, but also politics, religion, science, they are all different narratives, stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, and the ultimate goal of ethics is to guarantee the neutral space in which this multitude of narratives can peacefully coexist, in which everyone, from ethnic to sexual minorities, will have the right and ability to tell his/her story. *The* two philosophers of today's global capitalism are the two great Left-liberal 'progressives', Richard Rorty and Peter Singer – both honest in their respective stances. Rorty defines the basic coordinates: the fundamental dimension of a human being is the ability to suffer, to experience pain and humiliation – consequently, because humans are symbolic animals, the fundamental right is to narrate one's experience of suffering and humiliation.[3] Singer then provides the Darwinian background.[4]

Singer – usually designated as a 'social Darwinist with a collectivist socialist face' – begins innocently enough, trying to argue that people would be happier if they led lives committed to ethics: a life spent trying to help others and reduce suffering is truly the most moral and fulfilling one.[5] He thus radicalizes and actualizes Jeremy Bentham, the father of utilitarianism: the ultimate ethical criterion is not the dignity (rationality, soul) of man, but the ability to *suffer*, to experience pain, which man shares with animals.[6] With inexorable radicality, Singer levels the animal/human divide: better to kill an old suffering woman than a healthy animal ... Look an orang-utan straight in the eye and what do you see? A none-too-distant cousin – a creature worthy of all the legal rights and privileges that humans enjoy. One should thus extend aspects of equality – the right to life, the protection of individual liberties, the

prohibition of torture – at least to the non-human great apes (chimpanzees, orang-utans, gorillas).[7]

Singer argues that 'speciesism' (privileging the human species) is no different from racism: our perception of a difference between humans and (other) animals is no less illogical and unethical than our one-time perception of an ethical difference between, say, men and women, or blacks and whites. Intelligence is no basis for determining ethical stature: the lives of humans are not worth more than the lives of animals simply because they display more intelligence (if intelligence were a standard of judgement, Singer points out, we could perform medical experiments on the mentally retarded with moral impunity).[8] Ultimately, all things being equal, an animal has as much interest in living as a human. Therefore, all things being equal, medical experimentation on animals is immoral: those who advocate such experiments claim that sacrificing the lives of 20 animals will save millions of human lives – however, what about sacrificing 20 humans to save millions of animals? As Singer's critics like to point out, the horrifying extension of this principle is that the interests of 20 people outweigh the interests of one, which gives the green light to all sorts of human rights abuses.

Consequently, Singer argues that we can no longer rely on traditional ethics for answers to the dilemmas that our universe imposes on us; he proposes a new ethics meant to protect the quality, not the sanctity, of human life.[9] As sharp boundaries disappear between life and death, between humans and animals, this new ethics casts doubt on the morality of animal research, while offering a sympathetic assessment of infanticide. When a baby is born with severe defects of the sort that once killed babies, are doctors and parents now morally obliged to use the latest technologies, regardless of cost? *No*. When a pregnant woman loses all brain function, should doctors use new procedures to keep her body living until the baby can be born? *No*. Can a doctor ethically help terminally ill patients to kill themselves? *Yes*.

The first thing to discern here is the hidden utopian dimension of such a survivalist stance. The easiest way to detect ideological surplus-enjoyment in an ideological formation is to read it as a dream and analyse the displacement at work in it. Freud reports a dream of one of his patients which consists of a simple scene: the patient is at the funeral of a relative.[10] The key to the dream (which repeats a real-life event from the previous day) is that, at this funeral, the patient unexpectedly encounters a man, her old love for whom she still feels very deeply – far

from being a masochistic dream, this dream thus simply articulates the patient's joy at meeting again her old love. Is the mechanism of displacement at work in this dream not strictly homologous to the one elaborated by Fredric Jameson apropos of science-fiction films which take place, typically, in California in the near future, after a mysterious virus or some other catastrophe has quickly killed a great majority of the population?[11] When the films' heroes, for instance, wander empty shopping malls, with all the merchandize intact and at their disposal, is this libidinal gain of having access to material goods without the alienating market machinery not the true point of the film occluded by the displacement of the official focus of the narrative on to the catastrophe caused by the virus? At an even more elementary level, is not one of the commonplaces of sci-fi theory that the true point of novels or movies about a global catastrophe resides in the sudden reassertion of social solidarity and the spirit of collaboration among the survivors? It is as if, in our society, global catastrophe is the price one has to pay for gaining access to solidary collaboration ...

When my son was a small boy, his most cherished personal possession was a special 'survival knife', whose handle contained a compass, a sack of powder to disinfect water, a fishing-hook and line, and other similar items – totally useless in our social reality, but perfectly fitting the survivalist fantasy of finding oneself alone in wild nature. It is this same fantasy that, perhaps, provides the clue to the success of Joshua Piven and David Borgenicht's surprise best-seller, *The Worst-Case Scenario Survival Handbook*.[12] Suffice it to mention two of the finest examples from it: What do you do if an alligator has closed its jaws on one of your limbs? (Answer: you should tap or punch it on the snout, because alligators automatically react to it by opening their mouths.) What do you do when confronted by a lion that is threatening to attack you? (Answer: try to make yourself appear bigger than you are by opening your coat.) The joke of the book thus consists in the discord between its enunciated content and its position of enunciation: the situations it describes are effectively serious and the solutions correct – the only problem is, *Why is the author telling us all this? Who needs this advice?*

The underlying irony is that, in our individualistic competitive society, the most useless advice concerns survival in extreme physical situations – what one effectively needs is the very opposite, the Dale Carnegie type of book that tells us how to win over (manipulate) other

people: the situations rendered in *The Worst-Case Scenario* lack any symbolic dimension, they reduce us to pure survival machines. In short, *The Worst-Case Scenario* became successful for the very same reason as Sebastian Junger's *The Perfect Storm*, a story (and movie) about the struggle for survival of a fishing vessel caught in the 'storm of the century' east of the Canadian coast in 1991: they both stage the fantasy of a pure encounter with a natural threat in which the socio-symbolic dimension is suspended. In a way, *The Perfect Storm* even provides the secret utopian background of *The Worst-Case Scenario*: it is only in such extreme situations that an authentic intersubjective community, held together by solidarity, can emerge. Let us not forget that *The Perfect Storm* is ultimately a book about the solidarity of a small working-class collective! The humorous appeal of *The Worst-Case Scenario* can thus be read as bearing witness to our utter alienation from nature, exemplified by the shortage of contact with 'real life' dangers.

On account of its utter 'realism', *The Worst-Case Scenario* is a Western book par excellence; its Oriental counterpart is *chindogu*, arguably the finest spiritual achievement of Japan in the last few decades, the art of inventing objects which are sublime in the strictest Kantian sense of the term – practically useless on account of their very excessive usefulness (for instance, glasses with electric miniature windscreen wipers, so that your view will remain clear even if you have to walk through the rain without an umbrella; or butter contained in a lipstick tube, so that you can carry it with you and spread it on bread without a knife). That is to say, in order to be recognized, *chindogu* objects must meet two basic criteria: it must be possible actually to construct them and they should work; simultaneously, they must not be 'practical', that is, it should not be feasible to market them.

This comparison between *The Worst-Case Scenario Survival Handbook* and *chindogu* offers us a unique insight into the difference between the Eastern and Western Sublime, an insight far superior to New Age pseudo-philosophical treatises. In both cases, the effect of the Sublime resides in the way that the uselessness of the product is the outcome of an extremely 'realistic' and pragmatic approach. However, in the case of the West, we get simple realistic advice for problems (or situations) that most of us will never encounter (who of us will really have to face a hungry lion?); in the case of the East, we get impractically complicated solutions for problems that all of us encounter (who of us has not been caught in the rain?). The Western Sublime offers a practical solution

for a problem that does not arise; the Eastern Sublime offers a useless solution for a common problem.

So, back to Singer, one cannot simply dismiss him as a monstrous exaggeration – what Adorno said about psychoanalysis (that its truth resides in its very exaggerations)[13] fully applies to Singer: he is so traumatic and intolerable because his scandalous 'exaggerations' directly render visible the truth of so-called postmodern ethics. Is not the ultimate horizon of postmodern 'identity politics' effectively Darwinian – defending the right of some particular species of humankind within the panoply of their proliferating multitude (gays with AIDS, single black mothers, etc.)? The very opposition between 'conservative' and 'progressive' politics can thus be conceived of in Darwinian terms: ultimately, conservatives defend the right of those with might (their very success proves that they won the struggle for survival), while progressives advocate the protection of endangered human species (i.e., those losing the struggle for survival).

In an incident in American academia a couple of years ago, a lesbian feminist claimed that today gays are the privileged victims, so that an analysis of the way that gays are underprivileged provides the key to understanding all other exclusions, repressions, acts of violence (religious, ethnic, class), etc. What is problematic about this thesis is precisely its implicit (or, in this case, even explicit) *universal* claim: it makes exemplary victims of those that are not, of those who can be fully integrated into public space much more easily than religious or ethnic Others, and who thus can enjoy full rights. There is a long tradition of leftist gay bashing, whose traces are discernible up to Adorno – suffice it to mention Maxim Gorky's infamous remark from his essay 'Proletarian Humanism' (1934): 'Exterminate [*sic!*] homosexuals, and fascism will disappear.'[14] This cannot be reduced to a merely opportunistic flirtation with the traditional patriarchal sexual morality of the working classes, or with the Stalinist reaction against the liberation of the first years following the October Revolution; one should remember that Gorky's above-quoted statement, as well as Adorno's reservations about homosexuality (his conviction about the libidinal link between homosexuality and the spirit of military male-bonding), are both based on the same historical experience: that of the SA, the 'revolutionary' paramilitary Nazi organization of street-fighting thugs, in which homosexuality abounded (including its head, Ernst Röhm). The first thing to note here is that it was Hitler himself who purged the

SA in order to make the Nazi régime publicly acceptable by cleansing it of its obscene-violent excess/excesses, and that he justified slaughtering the SA leadership precisely by evoking their 'sexual depravity'. In order to function as the support of a 'totalitarian' community, homosexuality has to remain a publicly disavowed 'dirty secret', shared by those who are 'in'. Does this mean that, when gays are persecuted, they deserve only qualified support, a kind of, 'Yes, we know we should support you, but nonetheless ... (you are partly responsible for Nazi violence)'? No, but one *should* insist that the political overdetermination of homosexuality is far from simple, that the homosexual libidinal economy can be co-opted by different political orientations, and that it is *here* that one should avoid the 'essentialist' mistake of dismissing rightist 'militaristic' homosexuality as a secondary distortion of 'authentic' subversive homosexuality.

In the chapter on Reason in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel speaks about *das geistige Tierreich* (the spiritual animal kingdom): the social world that lacks any spiritual substance, so that, in it, individuals effectively interact as 'intelligent animals'. They use reason, but only in order to assert their individual interests, to manipulate others into serving their own pleasures.[15] Is not a world in which the highest rights are human rights precisely such a 'spiritual animal kingdom'? There is, however, a price to be paid for such liberation – in this kind of universe, human rights ultimately function as *animal* rights. This, then, is the ultimate truth of Singer: our universe of human rights is the universe of animal rights.

This, then, is what gets lost in Singer's *geistige Tierreich*: the Thing, something to which we are unconditionally attached irrespective of its positive qualities. In Singer's universe, there is a place for mad cows, but no place for an Indian sacred cow. In other words, what gets lost here is simply the dimension of truth – *not* 'objective truth' as the notion of reality from a point of view which somehow floats above the multitude of particular narratives, but truth as the Singular Universal. When Lenin says, 'The Marxist doctrine is omnipotent because it is true',[16] everything depends on how we understand 'truth' here: is it neutral 'objective knowledge', or the truth of an engaged subject? Lenin's wager – today, in our era of postmodern relativism, more actual than ever – is that universal truth and partisanship, the gesture of taking sides, are not only not mutually exclusive, but condition each other: in a concrete situation, its *universal* truth can only be articulated from a thoroughly *partisan* position – truth is by definition one-sided. This, of course, goes against

the predominant ethic of compromise, of finding a middle path among the multitude of conflicting interests. If one does not specify the *criteria* of the different, alternate narrativizations, then this endeavour courts the danger of endorsing, in the Politically Correct mood, ridiculous 'narratives' like the ones about the supremacy of some aboriginal holistic wisdom, or that dismiss science as just another narrative on a par with pre-modern superstitions.

On closer analysis, one could expose the way that the cultural relativism of the 'right-to-narrate' contains its own apparent opposite, the fixation on the Real of some trauma that resists narrativization. This properly dialectical tension sustains today's academic 'holocaust-industry'. My own experience of the holocaust-industry police occurred in 1997 at a round-table at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris: I was viciously attacked for an intervention in which (among other things) I claimed, against the neoconservatives deploring the decline of faith today, that the basic need of a normal human being is not to be a believer himself, but to have another subject who will believe for him, in his place.[17] The reaction of one of the distinguished participants was that, by claiming this, I am ultimately endorsing holocaust revisionism, justifying the claim that, since everything is a discursive construct, this includes the holocaust as well, so it is meaningless to search for what really happened ... Apart from displaying hypocritical paranoia, my critic was doubly wrong. First, holocaust revisionists (to my knowledge) *never* argue in the terms of postmodern discursive constructivism, but in the terms of empirical factual analysis: their claims range from the 'fact' that there is no written documentation in which Hitler ordered the holocaust, to the weird mathematics of 'taking into account the number of gas ovens in Auschwitz, it was not possible to burn so many corpses'. Furthermore, not only is the postmodern logic of 'everything is a discursive construct, there are no direct firm facts', never used to deflate the holocaust; in a paradox worth noting, it is precisely the postmodern discursive constructivists (like Lyotard) who tend to elevate the holocaust into the supreme ineffable metaphysical Evil – the holocaust functions as an untouchable-sacred Real, as the negative of contingent language games.

The Möbius strip of politics and economy

What all of the new French (or French-orientated) theories of the Political – from Étienne Balibar through Jacques Rancière to Alain

Badiou – aim at is, to put it in traditional philosophical terms, the reduction of the sphere of economy (of material production) to an 'ontic' sphere deprived of 'ontological' dignity. Within this horizon, there is simply no place for the Marxian 'critique of political economy': the structure of the universe of commodities and Capital in Marx's *Capital* is *not* just that of a limited empirical sphere, but a kind of socio-transcendental *a priori*, the matrix that generates the totality of social and political relations. The relationship between economy and politics is ultimately that of the well-known visual paradox of the 'two faces or a vase': one sees either two faces or a vase, never both of them – in other words, one has to make a choice.[18] In the same way, one either focuses on the political, and the domain of economy is reduced to the empirical 'servicing of goods', or one focuses on economy, and politics is reduced to a theatre of appearances, to a passing phenomenon which will disappear with the arrival of a developed communist (or technocratic) society, in which, as Engels put it, the 'administration of people' will vanish in the 'administration of things'. (Does not the same 'vase/faces' paradox occur in the case of the holocaust and gulag? We either elevate the holocaust into the ultimate crime, and Stalinist terror is thereby half-redeemed, reduced to a minor role as an 'ordinary' crime; or we focus on the gulag as the ultimate result of the logic of modern revolutionary terror, and the holocaust is thereby at best reduced to another example of the same logic. Somehow, it does not seem possible to deploy a truly 'neutral' theory of totalitarianism, without giving a hidden preference to either the holocaust or gulag.)

What we are dealing with here is another version of the Lacanian *il n'y a pas de rapport* ...: if, for Lacan, there is no sexual relationship, then, for Marxism proper, there is no relationship between economy and politics, no 'metalanguage' enabling us to grasp both two levels from the same neutral standpoint, although – or, rather, *because* – these two levels are inextricably intertwined. 'Political' class struggle takes place in the very midst of economy (recall that the very last paragraph of *Capital 3*, where the text abruptly stops, tackles class struggle), while, at the same time, the domain of economy serves as the key enabling us to decode political struggles. It is no wonder that the structure of this impossible relationship is that of the Möbius strip: first, we have to progress from the political spectacle to its economic infrastructure; then, in the second step, we have to confront the irreducible dimension of the political struggle at the very heart of economy.

In this context, the first myth to be debunked is that of the diminishing role of the State. What we are witnessing today is a shift in its functions: while partially withdrawing from its welfare obligations, the State is strengthening its apparatuses in other domains of social regulation. In order to start a business now, one has to rely on the State to guarantee not only law and order, but the entire infrastructure (access to water and energy, means of transportation, ecological criteria, international regulations, etc.), to an incomparably larger extent than a hundred years ago. The recent electricity debacle in California makes this point palpable: for a couple of weeks in January and February 2001, the privatization ('deregulation') of the electricity supply changed southern California, one of the most highly developed 'post-industrial' landscapes in the entire world, into a Third World country with regular blackouts. Of course, its defenders claimed that the deregulation was not thorough enough, thereby engaging in the old false syllogism of 'my fiancée is never late for an appointment, because the moment she is late, she is no longer my fiancée': deregulation by definition works, so if it does not work, it was not truly a deregulation ... Does the recent panic over Mad Cow Disease (which probably presages dozens of similar phenomena that await us in the near future) also not point towards the need for strict State and global institutionalized control of agriculture?

The key antagonism of the so-called new (digital) industries is thus: how to maintain the form of (private) property – the only context in which the logic of profit can be maintained (see also the 'Napster' problem, the free circulation of music). And do the legal complications in biogenetics not point in the same direction? The key element of the new international trade agreements is the 'protection of intellectual property': whenever, in a merger, a large First World company takes over a Third World company, the first thing they do is close down the research department. What we have here is the emergence of phenomena which bring the notion of property to extraordinary dialectical paradoxes: in India, local communities suddenly discover that medical practices and materials they have been using for centuries are now owned by American companies, so that the rights to them now have to be bought; with the patenting of genes of biogenetic companies, we are discovering that parts of ourselves, our genetic components, are already copyrighted, owned by others ...

However, the outcome of this crisis of private property, of the means of production, is in no way guaranteed – it is *here* that one should take

into account the ultimate paradox of Stalinist society: against capitalism, which is class-based society, though in principle egalitarian, without direct hierarchical divisions, 'mature' Stalinism was a classless society articulated in precisely defined hierarchical groups (top *nomenklatura*, technical intelligence, the army, etc.). What this means is that, already for Stalinism, the classical Marxist notion of class struggle is no longer adequate to describe its hierarchy and domination: in the Soviet Union from the late 1920s onwards, the key social division was not defined by property but by the direct access to power mechanisms and to the privileged material and cultural conditions of life (food, housing, health care, freedom of travel and education). And, perhaps, the ultimate irony of history will be that, in the same way that Lenin's vision of 'central bank socialism' can be properly read only retroactively, from today's world wide web, the Soviet Union provided the first model of a developed 'post-property' society, of true 'late capitalism' in which the ruling class will be defined by direct access to the (informational, administrative) means of social power and control and attendant material and social privileges: the point will no longer be to own companies, but to run them directly, to have the right to use a private jet, to have access to top health care, etc. – privileges which will be acquired not by property but by other (educational, managerial, etc.) mechanisms. The ultimate answer to the reproach that radical Left proposals are utopian should thus be that, today, the true utopia is the belief that the present liberal-democratic capitalist consensus could go on indefinitely, without radical changes. We are thus back to the old '68 motto, 'Soyons realistes, demandons l'impossible!': in order to be truly a 'realist', one must consider breaking from the constraints of what appears 'possible' (or, as we usually put it, 'feasible').

Today, we can already discern the signs of a kind of general unease – recall the series of events usually grouped under the nomination 'Seattle'. The ten-year honeymoon of triumphant global capitalism is over, the long-overdue 'seven-year itch' is here; witness the panicky reactions of the big media, which – from *Time* magazine to CNN – all of a sudden began to warn about Marxists manipulating the crowd of 'honest' protesters. The problem is now a strictly Leninist one: how to *actualize* the media's accusations, how to invent the organizational structure which will confer upon this unrest the *form* of a universal political demand? Otherwise, the momentum will be lost, and what will remain is a marginal disturbance, perhaps organized as a new Greenpeace,

with a certain efficiency, but also strictly limited goals, a marketing strategy, etc. In other words, the key 'Leninist' lesson today is: *politics without the organizational form of the party is politics without politics*, so the answer to those who want just the (quite adequately named) 'new *social* movements' is the same as the answer of the Jacobins to the Girondin compromisers: 'You want revolution without a revolution!' Today's blockade is that there are two ways open for socio-political engagement: either play the game of the system, engage in the 'long march through the institutions', or get active in new social movements, from feminism through ecology to anti-racism. And, again, the limit of these movements is that they are not *political* in the sense of the Universal Singular: they are 'single-issue movements' which lack the dimension of the Universal, that is, they do not relate to the social *totality*.

Here, Lenin's reproach to liberals is crucial: they only *exploit* the discontent of the working class to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the conservatives, instead of identifying with it to the end.[19] Is this also not the case with today's leftist liberals? They like to evoke racism, ecology, workers' grievances, etc., to score points over the conservatives *without endangering the system*. Recall how, in Seattle, Bill Clinton himself deftly referred to the protesters on the streets outside, reminding the gathered leaders inside the guarded palaces that they should listen to the message of the demonstrators (a message that, of course, Clinton interpreted, depriving it of its subversive sting, which was attributed to dangerous extremists introducing chaos and violence into the majority of peaceful protesters). It is the same with all 'New Social Movements', up to the Zapatistas in Chiapas: systemic politics is always ready to 'listen to their demands'. The system is by definition ecumenical, open, tolerant, ready to 'listen' to all – even if one insists on one's demands, they are deprived of their universal political sting by the very form of negotiation. The true Third Way we have to look for is this third way between institutionalized parliamentary politics and new social movements.

Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* was the last great attempt to combine in a subversive synthesis the Marxist and psychoanalytic traditions. They fully recognized the revolutionary, deterritorializing impact of capitalism, which, in its inexorable dynamics, undermines all stable traditional forms of human interaction; what they reproached capitalism with is that its deterritorialization is not thorough enough, that it generates new re-territorializations – a verbatim repetition of Marx's claim that the ultimate obstacle to capitalism

is capitalism itself, that capitalism unleashes a dynamic that it will not be able to contain.[20] Far from being outdated, this claim seems to gain actuality with today's growing deadlock in/of globalization in which the inherently antagonistic nature of capitalism belies its worldwide triumph. However, the real problem is this: is it still possible to imagine communism (or another form of post-capitalist society) as a formation that sets free the deterritorializing dynamics of capitalism, liberating it from its inherent constraints? Marx's fundamental vision was that a new, higher social order (communism) is possible, an order that would not only maintain, but even raise to a higher degree and effectively fully release the potential of the self-increasing spiral of productivity which, in capitalism, on account of its inherent obstacle/contradiction, is again and again thwarted by socially destructive economic crises. What Marx overlooked is that, to put it in standard Derridean terms, this inherent obstacle/antagonism as the 'condition of impossibility' of the full deployment of the productive forces of capitalism is simultaneously its 'condition of possibility': if we abolish the obstacle, the inherent contradiction of capitalism, we do not get the fully unleashed drive towards productivity finally delivered of its impediment, but we lose precisely this productivity that seemed to be generated and simultaneously thwarted by capitalism – if we take away the obstacle, the very potential thwarted by this obstacle dissipates ... Therein would reside a possible Lacanian critique of Marx, focusing on the ambiguous overlapping between 'surplus-value [*la plus-value*]' and 'surplus-enjoyment [*le plus-de-jouir*]'.[21] (It is often said that the ultimate products of capitalism are piles of trash – useless computers, cars, televisions and VCRs: places like the famous 'graveyard' of hundreds of abandoned planes in the Mojave desert confront us with the obverse truth of capitalist dynamics, its inert objectal remainder. And it is against this background that one should read the ecological dream-notion of total recycling – in which every remainder is used again – as the ultimate capitalist dream, even if it is couched in terms of the retention of the natural balance on Planet Earth; the dream of the self-propelling circulation of Capital which would succeed in leaving behind no material residue – proof of the way that capitalism can appropriate ideologies which seem to oppose it.)

While this constant self-propelling revolution still holds for high Stalinism, with its total productive mobilization, 'stagnant' late Real Socialism legitimizes itself (between the lines, at least) as a society in which one can live peacefully, avoiding capitalist competitive stress. This

was the last line of defence when, from the late 1960s onwards, after the fall of Khrushchev (the last enthusiast who, during his visit to the United States, prophesied that 'your grandchildren will be Communists'), it became clear that Real socialism was losing the competitive edge in its war with capitalism. So stagnant late Real Socialism was, in a way, already 'socialism with a human face': silently abandoning great historical tasks, it provided the security of everyday life enduring in a benevolent boredom. Today's *Ostalgie* for defunct socialism mostly consists in such conservative nostalgia for the self-satisfied constrained way of life; even nostalgic anti-capitalist artists from Peter Handke to Joseph Beuys celebrate this aspect of socialism: the absence of stressful mobilization and frantic commodification. Of course, this unexpected shift tells us something about the deficiency of the original Marxist project itself: it points towards the limitation of its goal of unleashed productive mobilization.

Fetishism today

The ultimate postmodern irony is the strange exchange currently taking place between Europe and Asia: at the very moment when, at the level of 'economic infrastructure', 'European' technology and capitalism are triumphing worldwide, at the level of 'ideological superstructure', the Judaeo-Christian legacy is threatened in the European space itself by the onslaught of New Age 'Asiatic' thought, which, in its different guises, from 'Western Buddhism' (today's counterpoint to Western Marxism, as opposed to 'Asiatic' Marxism–Leninism) to different 'Taos', is establishing itself as the hegemonic ideology of global capitalism. Therein resides the highest speculative identity of opposites in today's global civilization: although 'Western Buddhism' presents itself as the remedy to the stressful tension of capitalist dynamics, allowing us to uncouple and retain inner peace and *Gelassenheit* [placidity], it actually functions as its perfect ideological supplement. One should mention here the well-known topic of 'future shock', that is, of how, today, people are no longer psychologically able to cope with the dazzling rhythm of technological development and the social changes that accompany it – things simply move too fast; before one can accustom oneself to an invention, this invention is already supplanted by a new one, so that one more and more lacks the most elementary 'cognitive

mapping'.[22] The recourse to Taoism or Buddhism offers a way out of this predicament, which definitely works better than the desperate escape into old traditions: instead of trying to cope with the accelerating rhythm of technological progress and social change, one should rather renounce the very endeavour to retain control over what goes on, rejecting such control as an expression of the modern logic of domination – one should, instead, 'let oneself go', drift along, while retaining an inner distance and indifference towards the mad dance of accelerated process, a distance based on the insight that all of this social and technological upheaval is ultimately just an insubstantial proliferation of semblances which do not really concern the innermost kernel of one's being ... One is almost tempted to resuscitate here the old infamous Marxist cliché of religion as the 'opiate of the people', as the imaginary supplement of terrestrial misery: the 'Western Buddhist' meditative stance is arguably the most efficient way, for us, fully to participate in capitalist dynamics, while retaining the appearance of sanity. If Max Weber were to live today, he would definitely have written a second, supplementary, volume to his *Protestant Ethic*, entitled *The Taoist Ethic and the Spirit of Global Capitalism*.

'Western Buddhism' thus perfectly fits the fetishist mode of ideology in our allegedly 'post-ideological' era, as opposed to its traditional symptomal mode, in which the ideological lie that structures our perception of reality is threatened by symptoms *qua* 'returns of the repressed', cracks in the fabric of the ideological lie. The fetish is effectively a kind of symptom *à l'envers*. That is to say, a symptom is the exception which disturbs the surface of false appearance, the point at which the repressed truth erupts, while a fetish is the embodiment of the lie which enables us to sustain the unbearable truth. Let us take the case of the death of a loved one: when I 'repress' this death, I try not to think about it, but the repressed trauma persists and returns in symptoms. For instance, after my beloved wife dies of breast cancer, I try to repress this fact by throwing myself into hard work or a vivacious social life, but then there is always something that reminds me of her, I cannot escape her ghost. In the case of a fetish, on the contrary, I 'rationally' accept this death entirely, I am able to talk about her most painful moments in a cold and clear way, because I cling to the fetish, to some feature that embodies for me the disavowal of this death. In this sense, a fetish can play a very constructive role of allowing us to cope with harsh reality: fetishists are not dreamers lost in their private worlds, they are thorough

'realists', able to accept the way things are – *because* they have their fetish to which they can cling in order to defuse the full impact of reality.

So, when we are bombarded by claims that, in our post-ideological cynical era, nobody believes in the proclaimed ideals, when we encounter a person who claims he is cured of any beliefs, accepting social reality the way it really is, one should always counter such claims with the question: 'OK, but where is the fetish that enables you to (pretend to) accept reality "the way it really is"?' 'Western Buddhism' is such a fetish: it enables you fully to participate in the frantic pace of the capitalist game, while sustaining the perception that you are not really in it, that you are well aware how worthless this spectacle really is – what really matters to you is the peace of the inner self to which you know you can always withdraw ...

Perhaps the most succinct definition of ideology was produced by Christopher Hitchens, when he tackled the difficult question of what the North Koreans effectively think about their 'Beloved Leader' Kim Jong Il: 'mass delusion is the only thing that keeps a people sane.'[24] This paradox points towards the fetishist split at the very heart of an effectively functioning ideology: individuals transpose their beliefs on to the big Other (embodied in the collective), which thus believes in their place – individuals thus remain sane *qua* individuals, maintaining the distance towards the 'big Other' of the official discourse. It is not only the direct identification with the ideological 'delusion' that would render individuals insane, but also the suspension of their (disavowed, displaced) belief. In other words, if individuals were to be deprived of this belief (projected on to the 'big Other'), they would have to jump in and themselves directly assume the belief. (Perhaps this explains the paradox that many a cynic becomes a sincere believer at the very point of the disintegration of 'official' belief.) This is what Lacan aimed at in his claim that the true formula of atheism is not 'God doesn't exist' but 'God is unconscious'[25] – suffice it to recall what, in a letter to Max Brod, Milena Jesenska wrote about Kafka: 'Above all, things like money, the stock exchange, foreign currency administration, the typewriter, are for him thoroughly mystical (what they effectively are, only not for us, but for the others).'[26] One should read this statement against the background of Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism: the fetishist illusion resides in our real social life, not in our perception of it – a bourgeois subject knows very well that there is nothing magic about money, that money

is just an object which stands for a set of social relations, but he nevertheless *acts* in real life as if he believed that money is a magical thing. This, then, gives us a precise insight into Kafka's universe: Kafka was able to experience directly these fantasmatic beliefs that we 'normal' people disavow – Kafka's 'magic' is what Marx liked to refer to as the 'theological freakishness' of commodities.

This definition of ideology indicates the best way to answer the tedious standard reproach against the application of psychoanalysis to social-ideological processes: is it 'legitimate' to expand the use of the notions that were originally deployed for the treatment of individuals to collective entities and to speak, say, of religion as a 'collective compulsive neurosis'? The focus of psychoanalysis is entirely different: the 'social', the field of social practices and socially held beliefs, is not simply at a different level than individual experience, but something to which the individual him/herself must relate, which the individual him/herself must experience as an order that is minimally 'reified', externalized. The problem is, therefore, not 'how to jump from the individual to the social level'; the problem is: how should the decentred socio-symbolic order of institutionalized practices and beliefs be structured, if the subject is to retain his/her 'sanity', his/her 'normal' functioning? Which delusions should be deposited there so that individuals can remain sane? Recall the proverbial egotist, cynically dismissing the public system of moral norms: as a rule, such a subject can only function if this system is 'out there', publicly recognized – i.e., in order to be a private cynic, he has to presuppose the existence of naïve other(s) who 'really believe'. This is how a true 'cultural revolution' should be conducted: not by directly targeting individuals, endeavouring to 're-educate' them, to 'change their reactionary attitudes', but by depriving individuals of support in the 'big Other', in the institutional symbolic order.

It is easy to be 'radical' apropos of gay marriage, incest, etc. – however, what about child sex and torture? On what grounds are we justified in opposing them without having recourse to the 'legal fiction' of the adult autonomous subject responsible for his/her acts? (And, incidentally, *why* should marriage be constrained to *two* persons, gay or not? Why not three or more? Is this not the last remainder of 'binary logic'?) More generally, if we adopt the standard postmodern mantra of the autonomous responsible subject as a legal fiction, what are the consequences of this denial when dealing with, say, child rapists? Is it

not deeply symptomatic how the very same theorists who denounce the liberal autonomous subject as a Western legal fiction *at the same time* fully endorse the discourse of victimization, treating the perpetrators of sexual harassment as guilty (i.e., responsible) for their acts? Furthermore, the attitude towards sex between adults and children is the best indicator of the changes in sexual mores: three or four decades ago, in the heyday of the Sexual Revolution, child sex was *celebrated* as overcoming the last barrier, the ideologically enforced desexualization of children, while the Politically Correct ideology of victimization offers the sexually abused child as the ultimate image of horror.

In a recent pamphlet against the 'excesses' of May '68 and, more generally, the 'sexual liberation' of the 1960s, *The Independent* brought back to memory what the radicals of '68 thought about child sex. A quarter of a century ago, Daniel Cohn-Bendit wrote about his experience as an educator in a kindergarten: 'My constant flirt with all the children soon took on erotic characteristics. I could really feel how from the age of five the small girls had already learned to make passes at me ... Several times a few children opened the flies of my trousers and started to stroke me ... When they insisted, I then stroked them.' Shulamith Firestone went even further, expressing her hopes that, in a world 'without the incest taboo ... relations with children would include as much genital sex as they were capable of – probably considerably more than we now believe'.[27] Decades later, when confronted with these statements, Cohn-Bendit played them down, claiming that 'this did not really happen, I only wanted to provoke people. When one reads it today, it is unacceptable.'[28] However, the question still hovers: how, at that time, was it possible to provoke people, presenting sexual games among preschool children as something appealing, when today the same 'provocation' would immediately give rise to an outburst of moral disgust? After all, child sexual harassment is one of *the* notions of Evil today.

Without directly taking sides in this debate, one should read it as a sign of the change in our mores from the utopian energies of the 1960s and early 1970s to the contemporary stale Political Correctness, in which every authentic encounter with another human being is denounced as a victimizing experience. What we are unable even to conjecture today is the idea of *revolution*, be it sexual or social. Perhaps, in today's stale times of proliferating pleas for tolerance, one should take the risk of recalling the liberating dimension of such 'excesses'.

Notes

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SECTION IV

What is (not) to be done

14

Against the double blackmail

The prize winner in the contest for the greatest blunder of 1998 was a Latin-American patriotic terrorist who sent a letter bomb to a United States consulate in order to protest against America's interference in local politics. As a conscientious citizen, he wrote his return address on the envelope, but he did not put enough stamps on it, and so the letter was returned to him. Forgetting what he put in it, he opened it and blew himself up – a perfect example of how, ultimately, a letter always arrives at its destination. And is something similar not happening to the Slobodan Milošević régime with the recent NATO bombing? (Over the last few days, incidentally, it has been interesting to watch Serbian satellite state television, which is aimed at the foreign public: no reports on atrocities in Kosovo; refugees are mentioned only as people fleeing NATO bombing; the overall image is that Serbia – an island of peace, the only place in ex-Yugoslavia not to be touched by the war raging all around – is being attacked irrationally by NATO madmen, who destroy bridges, hospitals ...) For years, Milošević has been sending letter bombs to his neighbours, from the Albanians to Croatia and Bosnia, keeping himself out of the conflict while igniting fire all around Serbia – finally, his last letter returned to him. Let us hope that the result of the NATO intervention will be that Milošević will be proclaimed the political blunderer of the year.

And there is a kind of poetic justice in the fact that the West has finally intervened apropos of Kosovo – let us not forget that it was there that it all began with the ascension to power of Milošević: this ascension was legitimized by the promise to amend the underprivileged situation of Serbia within the Yugoslav federation, especially with regard

Slavoj Zizek

Welcome To The Desert Of The Real

The ultimate American paranoiac fantasy is that of an individual living in a small idyllic Californian city, a consumerist paradise, who suddenly starts to suspect that the world he lives in is a fake, a spectacle staged to convince him that he lives in a real world, while all people around him are effectively actors and extras in a gigantic show. The most recent example of this is Peter Weir's The Truman Show (1998), with Jim Carrey playing the small town clerk who gradually discovers the truth that he is the hero of a 24-hours permanent TV show: his hometown is constructed on a gigantic studio set, with cameras following him permanently. Among its predecessors, it is worth mentioning Philip Dick's Time Out of Joint (1959), in which a hero living a modest daily life in a small idyllic Californian city of the late 50s, gradually discovers that the whole town is a fake staged to keep him satisfied... The underlying experience of Time Out of Joint and of The Truman Show is that the late capitalist consumerist Californian paradise is, in its very hyper-reality, in a way IRREAL, substanceless, deprived of the material inertia.

So it is not only that Hollywood stages a semblance of real life deprived of the weight and inertia of materiality - in the late capitalist consumerist society, "real social life" itself somehow acquires the features of a staged fake, with our neighbors behaving in "real" life as stage actors and extras... Again, the ultimate truth of the capitalist utilitarian de-spiritualized universe is the de-materialization of the "real life" itself, its reversal into a spectral show. Among them, Christopher Isherwood gave expression to this unreality of the American daily life, exemplified in the motel room: "American motels are unreal! /.../ they are deliberately designed to be unreal. /.../ The Europeans hate us because we've retired to live inside our advertisements, like hermits going into caves to contemplate." Peter Sloterdijk's notion of the "sphere" is here literally realized, as the gigantic metal sphere that envelopes and isolates the entire city. Years ago, a series of science-fiction films like Zardoz or Logan's Run forecasted today's postmodern predicament by extending this fantasy to the community itself: the isolated group living an aseptic life in a secluded area longs for the experience of the real world of material decay.

The Wachowski brothers' hit Matrix (1999) brought this logic to its climax: the material reality we all experience and see around us is a virtual one, generated and coordinated by a gigantic mega-computer to which we are all attached; when the hero (played by Keanu Reeves) awakens into the "real reality," he sees a desolate landscape littered with burned ruins - what remained of Chicago after a global war. The resistance leader Morpheus utters the ironic greeting: "Welcome to the desert of the real." Was it not something of the similar order that took place in New York on September 11? Its citizens were introduced to the "desert of the real" - to us, corrupted by Hollywood, the landscape and the shots we saw of the

collapsing towers could not but remind us of the most breathtaking scenes in the catastrophe big productions.

When we hear how the bombings were a totally unexpected shock, how the unimaginable Impossible happened, one should recall the other defining catastrophe from the beginning of the XXth century, that of Titanic: it was also a shock, but the space for it was already prepared in ideological fantasizing, since Titanic was the symbol of the might of the XIXth century industrial civilization. Does the same not hold also for these bombings? Not only were the media bombarding us all the time with the talk about the terrorist threat; this threat was also obviously libidinally invested - just recall the series of movies from Escape From New York to Independence Day. The unthinkable which happened was thus the object of fantasy: in a way, America got what it fantasized about, and this was the greatest surprise.

It is precisely now,when we are dealing with the raw Real of a catastrophe, that we should bear in mind the ideological and fantasmatic coordinates which determine its perception. If there is any symbolism in the collapse of the WTC towers, it is not so much the old-fashioned notion of the "center of financial capitalism," but, rather, the notion that the two WTC towers stood for the center of the VIRTUAL capitalism, of financial speculations disconnected from the sphere of material production. The shattering impact of the bombings can only be accounted for only against the background of the borderline which today separates the digitalized First World from the Third World "desert of the Real." It is the awareness that we live in an insulated artificial universe which generates the notion that some ominous agent is threatening us all the time with total destruction.

Is, consequently, Osama Bin Laden, the suspected mastermind behind the bombings, not the real-life counterpart of Ernst Stavro Blofeld, the master-criminal in most of the James Bond films, involved in the acts of global destruction. What one should recall here is that the only place in Hollywood films where we see the production process in all its intensity is when James Bond penetrates the master-criminal' s secret domain and locates there the site of intense labor (distilling and packaging the drugs, constructing a rocket that will destroy New York...).

When the master-criminal, after capturing Bond, usually takes him on a tour of his illegal factory, is this not the closest Hollywood comes to the socialist-realist proud presentation of the production in a factory? And the function of Bond' s intervention, of course, is to explode in firecraks this site of production, allowing us to return to the daily semblance of our existence in a world with the "disappearing working class." Is it not that, in the exploding WTC towers, this violence directed at the threatening Outside turned back at us?

The safe Sphere in which Americans live is experienced as under threat from the

Outside of terrorist attackers who are ruthlessly self-sacrificing AND cowards, cunningly intelligent AND primitive barbarians. Whenever we encounter such a purely evil Outside, we should gather the courage to endorse the Hegelian lesson: in this pure Outside, we should recognize the distilled version of our own essence. For the last five centuries, the (relative) prosperity and peace of the "civilized" West was bought by the export of ruthless violence and destruction into the "barbarian" Outside: the long story from the conquest of America to the slaughter in Congo. Cruel and indifferent as it may sound, we should also, now more than ever, bear in mind that the actual effect of these bombings is much more symbolic than real. The US just got the taste of what goes on around the world on a daily basis, from Sarajevo to Grozny, from Rwanda and Congo to Sierra Leone. If one adds to the situation in New York snipers and gang rapes,one gets an idea about what Sarajevo was a decade ago.

It is when we watched on TV screen the two WTC towers collapsing, that it became possible to experience the falsity of the "reality TV shows": even if this shows are "for real," people still act in them - they simply play themselves. The standard disclaimer in a novel ("characters in this text are a fiction, every resemblance with the real life characters is purely contingent") holds also for the participants of the reality soaps: what we see there are fictional characters, even if they play themselves for the real. Of course, the "return to the Real" can be given different twists: Rightist commentators like George Will also immediately proclaimed the end of the American "holiday from history" - the impact of reality shattering the isolated tower of the liberal tolerant attitude and the Cultural Studies focus on textuality. Now, we are forced to strike back, to deal with real enemies in the real world... However, WHOM to strike? Whatever the response, it will never hit the RIGHT target, bringing us full satisfaction. The ridicule of America attacking Afghanistan cannot but strike the eye: if the greatest power in the world will destroy one of the poorest countries in which peasant barely survive on barren hills, will this not be the ultimate case of the impotent acting out?

There is a partial truth in the notion of the "clash of civilizations" attested here - witness the surprise of the average American: "How is it possible that these people have such a disregard for their own lives?" Is not the obverse of this surprise the rather sad fact that we, in the First World countries, find it more and more difficult even to imagine a public or universal Cause for which one would be ready to sacrifice one' s life? When, after the bombings, even the Taliban foreign minister said that he can "feel the pain" of the American children, did he not thereby confirm the hegemonic ideological role of this Bill Clinton' s trademark phrase? Furthermore, the notion of America as a safehaven, of course, also is a fantasy: when a New Yorker commented on how, after the bombings, one can no longer walk safely on the city' s streets, the irony of it was that, well before the bombings, the streets of New York were well-known for the dangers of being attacked or, at least, mugged - if anything, the bombings gave rise to a new sense of solidarity, with the scenes of young African-Americans helping an old

Jewish gentlemen to cross the street, scenes unimaginable a couple of days ago.

Now, in the days immediately following the bombings, it is as if we dwell in the unique time between a traumatic event and its symbolic impact, like in those brief moment after we are deeply cut, and before the full extent of the pain strikes us - it is open how the events will be symbolized, what their symbolic efficiency will be, what acts they will be evoked to justify. Even here, in these moments of utmost tension, this link is not automatic but contingent. There are already the first bad omens; the day after the bombing, I got a message from a journal which was just about to publish a longer text of mine on Lenin, telling me that they decided to postpone its publication - they considered in opportune to publish a text on Lenin immediately after the bombing. Does this not point towards the ominous ideological rearticulations which will follow?

We don' t yet know what consequences in economy, ideology, politics, war, this event will have, but one thing is sure: the US, which, till now, perceived itself as an island exempted from this kind of violence, witnessing this kind of things only from the safe distance of the TV screen, is now directly involved. So the alternative is: will Americans decide to fortify further their "sphere," or to risk stepping out of it? Either America will persist in, strengthen even, the attitude of "Why should this happen to us? Things like this don' t happen HERE!", leading to more aggressivity towards the threatening Outside, in short: to a paranoiac acting out. Or America will finally risk stepping through the fantasmatic screen separating it from the Outside World, accepting its arrival into the Real world, making the long-overdued move from "A thing like this should not happen HERE! "to "A thing like this should not happen ANYWHERE!". America' s "holiday from history" was a fake: America' s peace was bought by the catastrophes going on elsewhere. Therein resides the true lesson of the bombings: the only way to ensure that it will not happen HERE again is to prevent it going on ANYWHERE ELSE.

THE IRAQ WAR: WHERE IS THE TRUE DANGER?

by Slavoj Zizek

We all remember the old joke about the borrowed kettle which Freud quotes in order to render the strange logic of dreams, namely the enumeration of mutually exclusive answers to a reproach (that I returned to a friend a broken kettle): (1) I never borrowed a kettle from you; (2) I returned it to you unbroken; (3) the kettle was already broken when I got it from you. For Freud, such an enumeration of inconsistent arguments of course confirms per negationem what it endeavors to deny - that I returned you a broken kettle... Do we not encounter the same inconsistency when high US officials try to justify the attack on Iraq? (1) There is a link between Saddam's regime and al-Qaeda, so Saddam should be punished as part of the revenge for 9/11; (2) even if there was no link between Iraqi regime and al Qaeda, they are united in their hatred of the US - Saddam's regime is a really bad one, a threat not only to the US, but also to its neighbors, and we should liberate the Iraqi people; (3) the change of regime in Iraq will create the conditions for the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The problem is that there are TOO MANY reasons for the attack... Furthermore, one is almost tempted to claim that, within the space of this reference to the Freudian logic of dreams, the Iraqi oil supplies function as the famous "umbilical cord" of the US justification(s) - almost tempted, since it would perhaps be more reasonable to claim that there are also three REAL reasons for the attack: (1) the control of the Iraqi oil reserves; (2) the urge to brutally assert and signal the unconditional US hegemony; (3) the "sincere" ideological belief that the US are bringing to other nations democracy and prosperity. And it seems as if these three "real" reasons are the "truth" of the three official reasons: (1) is the truth of the urge to liberate Iraqis; (2) is the truth of the claim the attack on Iraq will help to resolve the Middle East conflict; (3) is the truth of the claim that there is a link between Iraq and al-Qaeda. - And, incidentally, opponents of the war seem to repeat the same inconsistent logic: (1) Saddam is really bad, we also want to see him toppled, but we should give inspectors more time, since inspectors are more efficient; (2) it is all really about the control of oil and American hegemony - the true rogue state which terrorizes others are the US themselves; (3) even if successful, the attack on Iraq will give a big boost to a new wave of the anti-American terrorism; (4) Saddam is a murderer and torturer, his regime a criminal catastrophe, but the attack on Iraq destined to overthrow Saddam will cost too much...

The one good argument for war is the one recently evoked by Christopher Hitchens: one should not forget

that the majority of Iraqis effectively are Saddam's victims, and they would be really glad to get rid of them. He was such a catastrophe for his country that an American occupation in WHATEVER form may seem a much brighter prospect to them with regard to daily survival and much lower level of fear. We are not talking here of "bringing Western democracy to Iraq," but just of getting rid of the nightmare called Saddam. To this majority, the caution expressed by Western liberals cannot but appear deeply hypocritical - do they really care about how the Iraqi people feel? One can make even a more general point here: what about pro-Castro Western Leftists who despise what Cubans themselves call "gusanos /worms/," those who emigrated - but, with all sympathy for the Cuban revolution, what right does a typical middle class Western Leftist have to despise a Cuban who decided to leave Cuba not only because of political disenchantment, but also because of poverty which goes up to simple hunger? In the same vein, I myself remember from the early 1990s dozens of Western Leftists who proudly threw in my face how for them, Yugoslavia still exists, and reproached me for betraying the unique chance of maintaining Yugoslavia - to which I always answered that I am not yet ready to lead my life so that it will not disappoint Western Leftist dreams... There are effectively few things more worthy of contempt, few attitudes more ideological (if this word has any meaning today, it should be applied here) than a tenured Western academic Leftist arrogantly dismissing (or, even worse, "understanding" in a patronizing way) an Eastern European from a Communist country who longs for Western liberal democracy and some consumerist goods... However, it is all too easy to slip from this fact to the notion that "under their skin, Iraqis are also like us, and really want the same as we do." The old story will repeat itself: America brings to the people new hope and democracy, but, instead of hailing the US army, the ungrateful people do want it, they suspect a gift in the gift, and America then reacts as a child with hurt feelings because of the ingratitude of those it selflessly helped.

The underlying presupposition is the old one: under our skin, if we scratch the surface, we are all Americans, that is our true desire - so all is needed is just to give people a chance, liberate them from their imposed constraints, and they will join us in our ideological dream... No wonder that, in February 2003, an American representative used the word "capitalist revolution" to describe what Americans are now doing: exporting their revolution all around the world. No wonder they moved from "containing" the enemy to a more aggressive stance. It is the US which is now, as the defunct USSR was decades ago, the subversive agent of a world revolution. When Bush

recently said "Freedom is not America's gift to other nations, it is god's gift to humanity," this apparent modesty nonetheless, in the best totalitarian fashion, conceals its opposite: yes, BUT it is nonetheless the US which perceives itself as the chosen instrument of distributing this gift to all the nations of the world!

The idea to "repeat Japan in 1945," to bring democracy to Iraq, which will then serve as model for the entire Arab world, enabling people to get rid of the corrupt regimes, immediately faces an insurmountable obstacle: what about Saudi Arabia where it is in the vital US interest that the country does NOT turn into democracy? The result of democracy in Saudi Arabia would have been either the repetition of Iran in 1953 (a populist regime with an anti-imperialist twist) or of Algeria a couple of years ago, when the "fundamentalists" WON the free elections.

There is nonetheless a grain of truth in Rumsfeld's ironic pun against the "old Europe." The French-German united stand against the US policy apropos Iraq should be read against the background of the French-German summit a month ago in which Chirac and Schroeder basically proposed a kind of dual Franco-German hegemony over the European Community. So no wonder that anti-Americanism is at its strongest in "big" European nations, especially France and Germany: it is part of their resistance to globalization. One often hears the complaint that the recent trend of globalization threatens the sovereignty of the Nation-States; here, however, one should qualify this statement: WHICH states are most exposed to this threat? It is not the small states, but the second-rate (ex-)world powers, countries like United Kingdom, Germany and France: what they fear is that, once fully immersed in the newly emerging global Empire, they will be reduced at the same level as, say, Austria, Belgium or even Luxembourg. The refusal of "Americanization" in France, shared by many Leftists and Rightist nationalists, is thus ultimately the refusal to accept the fact that France itself is losing its hegemonic role in Europe. The leveling of weight between larger and smaller Nation-States should thus be counted among the beneficial effects of globalization: beneath the contemptuous deriding of the new Eastern European post-Communist states, it is easy to discern the contours of the wounded Narcissism of the European "great nations." And this great-state-nationalism is not just a feature external to the (failure of) the present opposition; it affects the very way France and Germany articulated this opposition. Instead of doing, even more actively, precisely what Americans are doing - MOBILIZING the "new European" states on their own politico-military platform, ORGANIZING the common new front -, France and Germany arrogantly acted alone.

In the recent French resistance against the war on Iraq, there definitely is a clear echo of the "old decadent" Europe: escape the problem by non-acting, by new resolutions upon resolutions - all this reminiscent of the inactivity of the League of Nations against Germany in the 1930s. And the pacifist call "let the inspectors do their work" clearly IS hypocritical: they are only allowed to do the work because there is a credible threat of military intervention. Not to mention the French neocolonialism in Africa (from Congo-Brazzaville to the dark French role in the Rwanda crisis and massacres)? And about the French role in the Bosnian war? Furthermore, as it was made clear a couple of months ago, is it not clear that France and Germany worry about their own hegemony in Europe?

Is the war on Iraq not the moment of truth when the "official" political distinctions are blurred?

Generally, we live in a topsy-turvy world in which Republicans freely spend money, creating record budget deficits, while Democrats practice budget balance; in which Republicans, who thunder against big government and preach devolution of power to states and local communities, are in the process of creating the strongest state mechanism of control in the entire history of humanity. And the same applies to post-Communist countries. Symptomatic is here the case of Poland: the most ardent supporter of the US politics in Poland is the ex-Communist president Kwasniewski (who is even mentioned as the future secretary of NATO, after George Robertson), while the main opposition to the participation of Poland in the anti-Iraq coalition comes from the Rightist parties. Towards the end of January 2003, the Polish bishops also demanded from the government that it should add to the contract which regulates the membership of Poland in the EU a special paragraph guaranteeing that Poland will "retain the right to keep its fundamental values as they are formulated in its constitution" - by which, of course, are meant the prohibition of abortion, of euthanasia and of the same-sex marriages. The very ex-Communist countries which are the most ardent supporters of the US "war on terror" deeply worry that their cultural identity, their very survival as nations, is threatened by the onslaught of cultural "americanization" as the price for the immersion into global capitalism - we thus witness the paradox of pro-Bushist anti-Americanism. In Slovenia, my own country, there is a similar inconsistency: the Rightist nationalist reproach the ruling Center-Left coalition that, although it is publicly for joining NATO and supporting the US anti-terrorist campaign, it is secretly sabotaging it, participating in it for opportunist reasons, not out of conviction. At the same time, however, it is reproaching the ruling coalition that it wants to undermine Slovene national

identity by advocating full Slovene integration into the Westernized global capitalism and thus drowning Slovenes into contemporary Americanized pop-culture. The idea is that the ruling coalition sustains pop culture, stupid TV amusement, mindless consumption, etc., in order to turn Slovenes into an easily manipulated crowd unable of serious reflection and firm ethical posture... In short, the underlying motif is that the ruling coalition stands for the "liberal-Communist plot" : ruthless unconstrained immersion in global capitalism is perceived as the latest dark plot of ex-Communists enabling them to retain their secret hold on power.

The almost tragic misunderstanding is that the nationalists, on the one hand, unconditionally support NATO (under the US command), reproaching the ruling coalition with secretly supporting antiglobalists and anti-American pacifists, while, on the other hand, they worry about the fate of Slovene identity in the process of globalization, claiming that the ruling coalition wants to throw Slovenia into the global whirlpool, not worrying about the Slovene national identity. Ironically, the new emerging socio-ideological order these nationalist conservatives are bemoaning reads like the old New Left description of the "repressive tolerance" and capitalist freedom as the mode of appearance of unfreedom. Here, the example of Italy is crucial, with Berlusconi as prime minister: the staunchest supporter of the US AND the agent of the TV-idiotizing of the public opinion, turning politics into a media show and running a large advertisement and media company.

Where, then, do we stand with reasons pro et contra? Abstract pacifism is intellectually stupid and morally wrong - one has to stand up against a threat. Of course the fall of Saddam would have been a relief to a large majority of the Iraqi people. Even more, of course the militant Islam is a horrifying anti-feminist etc. ideology. Of course there is something of a hypocrisy in all the reasons against: the revolt should come from Iraqi people themselves; we should not impose our values on them; war is never a solution; etc. BUT, although all this is true, the attack is wrong - it is WHO DOES IT that makes it wrong. The reproach is: WHO ARE YOU TO DO THIS? It is not war or peace, it is the correct "gut feeling" that there is something terribly wrong with THIS war, that something will irretrievably change with it.

One of Jacques Lacan's outrageous statements is that, even if what a jealous husband claims about his wife (that she sleeps around with other men) is all true, his jealousy is still pathological; along the same lines, one could say that, even of most of the Nazi claims about the Jews were true (they exploit Germans, they seduce German girls...), their anti-Semitism would still be (and was) pathological - because it

represses the true reason WHY the Nazis NEEDED anti-Semitism in order to sustain their ideological position. And the same should be said today, apropos of the US claim "Saddam has weapons of mass destruction!" - even if this claim is true (and it probably is, at least to some degree), it is still false with regard to the position from which it is enunciated.

Everyone fears the catastrophic outcome of the US attack on Iraq: an ecological catastrophe of gigantic proportions, high US casualties, a terrorist attack in the West... In this way, we already accept the US standpoint - and it is easy to imagine how, if the war will be over soon, in a kind of repetition of the 1990 Gulf War, if Saddam's regime will disintegrate fast, there will be a universal sigh of relief even among many present critics of the US policy. One is even tempted to consider the hypothesis that the US are on purpose fomenting this fear of an impending catastrophe, counting on the universal relief when the catastrophe will NOT occur... This, however, is arguably the greatest true danger. That is to say, one should gather the courage to proclaim the opposite: perhaps, the bad military turn for the US would be the best thing that can happen, a sobering piece of bad news which would compel all the participants to rethink their position.

On 9/11 2001, the Twin Towers were hit; twelve years earlier, on 11/9 1989, the Berlin Wall fell. 11/9 announced the "happy 90s," the Francis Fukuyama dream of the "end of history," the belief that liberal democracy has in principle won, that the search is over, that the advent of a global liberal world community lurks round the corner, that the obstacles to this ultra-Hollywood happy ending are just empirical and contingent, local pockets of resistance where the leaders did not yet grasp that their time is over; in contrast to it, 9/11 is the main symbol of the end of the Clintonite happy 90s, of the forthcoming era in which new walls are emerging everywhere, between Israel and the West Bank, around the European Union, on the US-Mexican border. The prospect of a new global crisis is looming: economic collapses, military and other catastrophes, emergency states...

And when politicians start to directly justify their decisions in ethical terms, one can be sure that ethics is mobilized to cover up such dark threatening horizons. It is the very inflation of abstract ethical rhetorics in George W. Bush's recent public statements (of the "Does the world have the courage to act against the Evil or not?" type) which manifests the utter ETHICAL misery of the US position - the function of ethical reference is here purely mystifying, it merely serves to mask the true political stakes, which are not difficult to discern. In their recent The War

Over Iraq, William Kristol and Lawrence F. Kaplan wrote: "The mission begins in Baghdad, but it does not end there. /.../ We stand at the cusp of a new historical era. /.../ This is a decisive moment. /.../ It is so clearly about more than Iraq. It is about more even than the future of the Middle East and the war on terror. It is about what sort of role the United States intends to play in the twenty-first century." One cannot but agree with it: it is effectively the future of international community which is at stake now - the new rules which will regulate it, what the new world order will be. What is going on now is the next logical step of the US dismissal of the Hague court.

The first permanent global war crimes court started to work on July 1, 2002 in The Hague, with the power to tackle genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Anyone, from a head of state to an ordinary citizen, will be liable to ICC prosecution for human rights violations, including systematic murder, torture, rape and sexual slavery, or, as Kofi Annan put it: "There must be a recognition that we are all members of one human family. We have to create new institutions. This is one of them. This is another step forward in humanity's slow march toward civilization." However, while human rights groups have hailed the court's creation as the biggest milestone for international justice since top Nazis were tried by an international military tribunal in Nuremberg after World War Two, the court faces stiff opposition from the United States, Russia and China. The United States says the court would infringe on national sovereignty and could lead to politically motivated prosecutions of its officials or soldiers working outside U.S. borders, and the U.S. Congress is even weighing legislation authorizing U.S. forces to invade The Hague where the court will be based, in the event prosecutors grab a U.S. national. The noteworthy paradox here is that the US thus rejected the jurisdiction of a tribunal which was constituted with the full support (and votes) of the US themselves! Why, then, should Milosevic, who now sits in the Hague, not be given the right to claim that, since the US reject the legality of the international jurisdiction of the Hague tribunal, the same argumentation should hold also for him? And the same goes for Croatia: the US are now exerting tremendous pressure onto the Croat government to deliver to the Hague court a couple of its generals accused of war crimes during the struggles in Bosnia - the reaction is, of course, how can they ask this of US when THEY do not recognize the legitimacy of the Hague court? Or are the US citizens effectively "more equal than others"? If one simply universalizes the underlying principles of the Bush-doctrine, does India not have a full right to attack Pakistan? It does directly

support and harbor anti-Indian terror in Kashmir, and it possesses (nuclear) weapons of mass destruction. Not to mention the right of China to attack Taiwan, and so on, with unpredictable consequences...

Are we aware that we are in the midst of a "silent revolution," in the course of which the unwritten rules which determine the most elementary international logic are changing? The US scold Gerhardt Schroeder, a democratically elected leader, for maintaining a stance supported by a large majority of the population, plus, according to the polls in the mid-February, around 59% of the US population itself (who oppose strike against Iraq without the UN support). In Turkey, according to opinion polls, 94% of the people are opposed to allowing the US troops' presence for the war against Iraq - where is democracy here? Every old Leftist remembers Marx's reply, in The Communist Manifesto, to the critics who reproached the Communists that they aim at undermining family, property, etc.: it is the capitalist order itself whose economic dynamics is destroying the traditional family order (incidentally, a fact more true today than in Marx's time), as well as expropriating the large majority of the population. In the same vein, is it not that precisely those who pose today as global defenders of democracy are effectively undermining it? In a perverse rhetorical twist, when the pro-war leaders are confronted with the brutal fact that their politics is out of tune with the majority of their population, they take recourse to the commonplace wisdom that "a true leader leads, he does not follow" - and this from leaders otherwise obsessed with opinion polls...

The true dangers are the long-term ones. In what resides perhaps the greatest danger of the prospect of the American occupation of Iraq? The present regime in Iraq is ultimately a secular nationalist one, out of touch with the Muslim fundamentalist populism - it is obvious that Saddam only superficially flirts with the pan-Arab Muslim sentiment. As his past clearly demonstrates, he is a pragmatic ruler striving for power, and shifting alliances when it fits his purposes - first against Iran to grab their oil fields, then against Kuwait for the same reason, bringing against himself a pan-Arab coalition allied to the US - what Saddam is not is a fundamentalist obsessed with the "big Satan," ready to blow the world apart just to get him. However, what can emerge as the result of the US occupation is precisely a truly fundamentalist Muslim anti-American movement, directly linked to such movements in other Arab countries or countries with Muslim presence.

One can surmise that the US are well aware that the era of Saddam and his non-fundamentalist regime is coming to an end in Iraq, and that the attack on Iraq is probably conceived as a much more radical

preemptive strike - not against Saddam, but against the main contender for Saddam's political successor, a truly fundamentalist Islamic regime. Yes in this way, the vicious cycle of the American intervention gets only more complex: the danger is that the very American intervention will contribute to the emergence of what America most fears, a large united anti-American Muslim front. It is the first case of the direct American occupation of a large and key Arab country - how could this not generate universal hatred in reaction? One can already imagine thousands of young people dreaming of becoming suicide bombers, and how that will force the US government to impose a permanent high alert emergency state... However, at this point, one cannot resist a slightly paranoid temptation: what if the people around Bush KNOW this, what if this "collateral damage" is the true aim of the entire operation? What if the TRUE target of the "war on terror" is the American society itself, i.e., the disciplining of its emancipatory excesses?

On March 5 2003, on "Buchanan & Press" news show on NBC, they showed on the TV screen the photo of the recently captured Khalid Shakh Mohammed, the "third man of al-Qaeda" - a mean face with moustaches, in an unspecified nightgown prison-dress, half opened and with something like bruises half-discernible (hints that he was already tortured?) -, while Pat Buchanan's fast voice was asking: "Should this man who knows all the names all the detailed plans for the future terrorist attacks on the US, be tortured, so that we get all this out of him?" The horror of it was that the photo, with its details, already suggested the answer - no wonder the response of other commentators and viewers' calls was an overwhelming "Yes!" - which makes one nostalgic of the good old days of the colonial war in Algeria when the torture practiced by the French Army was a dirty secret... Effectively, was this not a pretty close realization of what Orwell imagined in 1984, in his vision of "hate sessions," where the citizens are shown photos of the traitors and supposed to boo and yell at them. And the story goes on: a day later, on another Fox TV show, a commentator claimed that one is allowed to do with this prisoner whatever, not only deprive him of sleep, but break his fingers, etc.etc., because he is "a piece of human garbage with no rights whatsoever." THIS is the true catastrophe: that such public statements are today possible.

We should therefore be very attentive not to fight false battles: the debates on how bad Saddam is, even on how much the war will cost, etc., are false debates. The focus should be on what effectively goes on in our societies, on what kind of society is emerging HERE as the result of the "war on terror." Instead of talking about hidden conspirative agendas, one should shift the focus onto what is going on, onto

what kind of changes are taking place here and now. The ultimate result of the war will be a change in OUR political order.

The true danger can be best exemplified by the actual role of the populist Right in Europe: to introduce certain topics (the foreign threat, the necessity to limit immigration, etc.) which were then silently taken over not only by the conservative parties, but even by the de facto politics of the "Socialist" governments. Today, the need to "regulate" the status of immigrants, etc., is part of the mainstream consensus: as the story goes, le Pen did address and exploit real problems which bother people. One is almost tempted to say that, if there were no le Pen in France, he should have been invented: he is a perfect person whom one loves to hate, the hatred for whom guarantees the wide liberal "democratic pact," the pathetic identification with democratic values of tolerance and respect for diversity - however, after shouting "Horrible! How dark and uncivilized! Wholly unacceptable! A threat to our basic democratic values!", the outraged liberals proceed to act like "le Pen with a human face," to do the same thing in a more "civilized" way, along the lines of "But the racist populists are manipulating legitimate worries of ordinary people, so we do have to take some measures!"...

We do have here a kind of perverted Hegelian "negation of negation": in a first negation, the populist Right disturbs the aseptic liberal consensus by giving voice to passionate dissent, clearly arguing against the "foreign threat"; in a second negation, the "decent" democratic center, in the very gesture of pathetically rejecting this populist Right, integrates its message in a "civilized" way - in-between, the ENTIRE FIELD of background "unwritten rules" has already changed so much that no one even notices it and everyone is just relieved that the anti-democratic threat is over. And the true danger is that something similar will happen with the "war on terror": "extremists" like John Ashcroft will be discarded, but their legacy will remain, imperceptibly interwoven into the invisible ethical fabric of our societies. Their defeat will be their ultimate triumph: they will no longer be needed, since their message will be incorporated into the mainstream.

Author's afterword

Where do we stand today?

The arch-conservative William Butler Yeats was correct in his diagnosis of the twentieth century:

> The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
> the ceremony of innocence is drowned;
> the best lack all conviction, while the worst
> are full of passionate intensity.
> ('The Second Coming', 1920)

The key to his diagnosis is contained in the phrase 'the ceremony of innocence', which is to be taken in the precise sense of Edith Wharton's 'age of innocence': Newton's wife, the 'innocent' referred to in the title, was not a naïve believer in her husband's fidelity – she knew well of his passionate love for Count Olenska, but just politely ignored it and staged the belief in his fidelity. Or, take the angry response of Groucho Marx when caught in a lie: 'Whom do you believe, your eyes or my words?' This apparently absurd logic renders perfectly the functioning of the symbolic order, in which the symbolic mask-mandate matters more than the direct reality of the individual who wears this mask and/or assumes this mandate. This functioning involves the structure of fetishist disavowal: 'I know very well that things are the way I see them – i.e., that this person is a corrupt weakling – but I nonetheless treat him respectfully, because he wears the insignia of a judge, so that when he speaks, it is the Law itself which speaks through him.' So, in a way, I effectively believe his words, not my eyes, i.e., I believe in another domain (that of pure symbolic authority), which matters more than the reality of its spokesmen. The cynical reduction to reality thus falls short: when a judge speaks, there is in a way more truth in his words (the

words of the institution of Law) than in the direct reality of the person of judge – if one limits oneself to what one sees, one simply misses the point. This paradox is what Lacan aims at with his phrase, 'les non-dupes errent': those who do not let themselves be caught in the symbolic deception/fiction and continue to believe their eyes are the ones who err most. What is missed by a cynic who 'only believes his eyes' is the efficiency of the symbolic fiction, the way this fiction structures our experience of reality. The same gap is at work in our most intimate relationship with our neighbours: we behave *as if* we do not know that they also smell badly, secrete excrement, etc. – a minimum of idealization, of fetishistic disavowal, is the basis of our co-existence. And doesn't the same disavowal account for the sublime beauty of the idealizing gesture discernible from Anne Frank to American Communists who continued to believe in the Soviet Union? Although we know that Stalinist Communism was an appalling thing, we nonetheless admire the victims of McCarthyism who heroically persisted in their belief in Communism and support for the Soviet Union. The logic here is the same as that of Anne Frank who, in her diaries, expresses belief in the ultimate goodness of man in spite of the horrors accomplished by men against Jews in World War II: what renders such an assertion of belief (in the essential goodness of man, in the truly human character of the Soviet régime) sublime is the very gap between it and the overwhelming factual evidence to the contrary, i.e., the active will to disavow the actual state of things. Perhaps therein resides the most elementary metaphysical gesture: in this refusal to accept the Real in its idiocy, to disavow it and to search for another domain behind it. The big Other is thus *the order of the Lie*, the domain of lying sincerely. And it is in this sense that 'the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity': even the best are no longer able to sustain their symbolic innocence, their full engagement in symbolic ritual, while 'the worst', the mob, engage in (racist, religious, sexist . . .) fanaticism. Is this opposition not a good description of today's split between tolerant but anaemic liberals and fundamentalists full of 'passionate intensity'?

What is thus gradually suspended is *symbolic efficiency*, the performative power of signifying systems best encapsulated by the Pascalean formula used by Alcoholics Anonymous: 'Fake it until you make it'. This causality of the habit is more complex than it may appear: far from offering an explanation of the way that beliefs emerge, it itself calls for an explanation. The first thing to specify is that Pascal's formula, 'Kneel

and you will believe!', must be understood as involving a kind of self-referential causality: 'Kneel and you will believe *that you knelt down because you believed!*' The second thing is that, in the 'normal' cynical functioning of ideology, belief is displaced on to another, on to a 'subject supposed to believe', so that the true logic is: 'Kneel and you will thereby *make someone else believe!*' One has to take this literally and even risk a kind of inversion of Pascal: 'Do you believe too much, too directly? Do you find your belief too oppressing in its raw immediacy? Then kneel, act as if you believe, and *you will get rid of your belief* – you will no longer have to believe yourself, your belief will already exist objectified in your act of praying!' That is to say, what if one kneels down and prays not so much to regain one's own belief but, to the contrary, to *rid oneself* of belief, of its over-proximity, to acquire the breathing space of a minimal distance towards it? To believe – to believe 'directly,' without the externalizing mediation of a ritual – is a heavy, oppressive, traumatic burden, which, by engaging in a ritual, one has a chance to transfer on to an Other ...

Today, theists are no longer opposed to atheists – on the contrary, one of their standard rhetorical strategies is to emphasize the way that, when abandoning the abstract 'God of philosophers', atheists are much closer to the 'true' God than metaphysical theologians: 'The god-less thinking which must abandon the god of philosophy, god as *causa sui*, is thus perhaps closer to the divine God. Here this means only: god-less thinking is more open to Him than onto-theo-logic would like to admit.'[1] Even in the late Derrida, one finds a variation on this ploy: in his reflections on prayer, he proposes not only that atheists also pray but, today, it is perhaps *only atheists that truly pray*.[2] Against this rhetoric, one should assert the *literal* truth of Lacan's statement that theologians are the only true materialists.

Niels Bohr, who gave the right response to Einstein's claim 'God doesn't play dice' ('Don't tell God what to do!'), also provided the perfect example of the way that such a fetishist disavowal of belief works in ideology: seeing a horseshoe on his door, the surprised visitor said that he isn't superstitious and doesn't believe that such things bring luck, to which Bohr snapped: 'I don't believe in it either; I keep it there because I was told that it works even if one doesn't believe in it!' What this paradox renders clearly is the way belief is a reflexive attitude: it is never a case of just believing, one has to believe in belief itself. Kierkegaard was thus right to claim that we do not really believe (in Christ), we just

believe in order to believe; Bohr simply confronts us with the logical negative of this reflexivity (one can also *not* believe in one's beliefs ...).

The obverse of this gradual suspension of symbolic efficiency is the fact that, today, politics is increasingly the politics of *jouissance*, concerned with ways of soliciting or controlling and regulating *jouissance*. Is the entire opposition between liberal Western tolerance and Islamic fundamentalism not condensed in the opposition between, on the one hand, a woman's right to free sexuality – inclusive of the freedom to display/expose oneself and provoke/disturb a man – and, on the other hand, the desperate male attempt to eradicate or, at least, keep this threat under control? (Recall the ridiculous Taliban prohibition of metal heels for women; it is as if, even if women were completely covered, the metallic sound of their heels would still drive men crazy!) And, of course, both sides ideologically/morally mystify their position: for the liberal West, the right provocatively to expose oneself to male desire is legitimized as the right freely to offer one's body and to enjoy it as one wants; for Islam, the control of feminine sexuality is, of course, legitimized as the defence of woman's dignity against the threat of being reduced to an object of male sexual exploitation. So while, when the French government prohibited women from wearing veils in schools, one can claim that they were enabled to dispose of their bodies, one can also point out that the truly disturbing point for critics of Muslim 'fundamentalism' was that there *were* women who did not participate in the game of offering their bodies for seduction, for the social circulation/exchange involved in it. What the two opposing attitudes – liberal tolerance and fundamentalism – share is the extreme *disciplinary* approach, which is in each case differently directed: 'fundamentalists' regulate the feminine self-presentation in great detail in order to prevent sexual provocation; politically-correct feminist liberals impose a no-less-severe regulation of behaviour aimed at containing different forms of harassment.

One should nonetheless add a qualification here. What we have today is not so much the *politics* of *jouissance* but, more precisely, the *regulation* (or administration) of *jouissance*, which is *stricto sensu* post-political. *Jouissance* is in itself limitless, the obscure excess of the unnameable, and the fundamental task is to regulate this excess. The superego imperative to 'Enjoy!' thus functions as the reversal of Kant's 'Du kannst, denn du sollst! [You can, because you must!]' – it relies on, 'You must, because you can!' That is to say, the superego dimension of today's 'non-repressive' hedonism (the constant provocation we

are exposed to, enjoining us to explore all modes of *jouissance* to their end) resides in the way that permitted *jouissance* necessarily turns into obligatory *jouissance*.

However, the question here is: does the capitalist injunction to enjoy effectively aim at soliciting *jouissance* in its excessive character, or rather are we ultimately dealing with a kind of universalized pleasure-principle, with a life dedicated to pleasures? In other words, are not the injunctions to have a good time, to acquire self-realization and self-fulfilment, etc., precisely injunctions to *avoid* excessive *jouissance*, to find a kind of homeostatic balance? Is the Dalai Lama's advice not advice as to how to maintain a balanced 'proper measure' and avoid disturbing extremes? The situation here is more complex: the problem is that, although the immediate and explicit injunctions call for the rule of the pleasure-principle that would maintain homeostasis, the effective functioning of the injunction explodes these constraints into a striving towards excessive enjoyment.

I am tempted here to oppose the post-'68 leftist push towards *jouissance* (to reach the extreme of forms of sexual pleasures that would dissolve all social links and allow one to find a climax in the solipsism of absolute *jouissance*) to the consumption of commodities promising *jouissance*: the first still stands for a radical, 'authentic' even, subjective position, while the second signals defeat, a surrender to market forces. Is, however, this opposition quite so clear? Is it not all too easy to denounce the *jouissance* offered on the market as 'false', as providing only the empty package-promise with no substance? Rather, is the hole, the void, at the very heart of our pleasures not the structure of every *jouissance*? Furthermore, is it not precisely that the commodified provocations to enjoy that bombard us constantly push us towards an autistic-masturbatory, 'asocial' *jouissance*, whose supreme case is addiction? Are drugs not, at the same time, the means for the most radical autistic experience of *jouissance* and the commodity par excellence?

The drive to pure autistic *jouissance* (through drugs or other trance-inducing means) arose at a precise political moment: when the emancipatory 'sequence' of '68 exhausted its potential. At this critical point (in the mid 1970s), the only remaining option was a kind of direct, brutal *passage à l'acte*, a push-towards-the-Real, which assumed three main forms: the search for extreme forms of sexual *jouissance*; leftist political terrorism (the Red Army Faction in Germany, the Red Brigade in Italy, etc.), whose wager was that, in an epoch in which the masses are

totally immersed in a capitalist ideological sleep, the standard critique of ideology is no longer operative, so that only a resort to the raw Real of direct violence – *l'action directe* – can awaken the masses; and, finally, the turn towards the Real of an inner experience (Oriental mysticism). What all three share is their withdrawal from concrete socio-political engagement to a direct contact with the Real.

Freud's 'naïve' reflections on the way that the artist renders embarrassing, disgusting even, intimate fantasies socially palpable by way of wrapping them up in a socially acceptable form – i.e., by way of 'sublimating' it, of offering the pleasure of the beautiful artistic form as a lure which seduces us into accepting the otherwise repulsive excessive pleasure of intimate fantasizing[3] – obtain new actuality in today's era of permissivity, when performance and other artists are under pressure directly to stage the innermost private fantasies in their desublimated nakedness. Such 'transgressive' art confronts us immediately with *jouissance* in its most solipsistic form, with pure masturbatory phallic *jouissance*. And, far from being individualist, such *jouissance* precisely characterizes individuals in so far as they are caught in a 'crowd': what Freud called 'crowd [*Masse*]' is *not* an articulated communal network, but a direct conglomerate of solipsistic individuals – as the saying goes, one is by definition lonely in a crowd. The paradox is thus that a crowd is a fundamentally *anti-social* phenomenon.

The problem with today's superego injunction to enjoy is that, in contrast to previous modes of ideological interpellation, it opens up no 'world' proper – it just refers to an obscure Unnameable. Even Nazism opened up a world: by describing the present critical situation, naming the enemy ('Jewish conspiracy'), the goal and the means to achieve it, Nazism disclosed reality in a way that allowed its subjects to acquire a global 'cognitive mapping', inclusive of the space for their meaningful engagement. Perhaps, it is here that one should locate the 'danger' of capitalism: although it is global, encompassing the entire world, it sustains a *stricto sensu* 'worldless' ideological constellation, depriving the large majority of people of any meaningful 'cognitive mapping'.[4]

In what, more precisely, does this 'worldlessness' consist? As Lacan points out in his *Seminar XX*, *jouissance* involves a logic strictly homologous to that of the ontological proof of the existence of God.[5] In the classic version of this proof, my awareness of myself as a finite, limited being immediately gives birth to the notion of an infinite, perfect being, and because this being is perfect, its very notion contains its existence;

in the same way, our experience of *jouissance* accessible to us as finite, located, partial, 'castrated', immediately gives birth to the notion of a full, achieved, unlimited *jouissance* whose existence is necessarily presupposed by the subject who imputes it to another subject, his/her 'subject supposed to enjoy'.

Our first reaction here is, of course, that this absolute *jouissance* is a myth, that it never effectively existed, that its status is purely differential, i.e., that it exists only as a negative point of reference with regard to which every actually experienced *jouissance* falls short ('pleasurable as this is, it's not *that*!'). However, the recent advances in cognitive studies have opened up another approach: one can (no longer only) imagine the situation in which pain (or pleasure) is not generated through sensory perceptions, but through a direct excitation of the appropriate neuronal centres (by means of drugs or electrical impulses) – what the subject experiences in this case would be 'pure' pain, pain 'as such', the *Real* of pain, or, to put it in precise Kantian terms, non-schematized pain, pain that is not yet grounded in the experience of reality constituted by transcendental categories.

In order properly to grasp what is taking place here, one has to take a detour through what Lacan called *la jouissance de l'Autre* – what is this mysterious *jouissance*? Imagine (a real clinical case, though) two lovers who arouse each other by verbalizing, telling each other, their innermost sexual fantasies to such a degree that they reach full orgasm without touching, just as the effect of 'mere talking'. The result of such an excess of intimacy is not difficult to guess: after such a radical mutual exposure, they will no longer be able to maintain their amorous link – too much had been said, or, rather, the spoken word, the big Other, was too directly flooded by *jouissance*, so the two are embarrassed by each other's presence and slowly drift apart, start to avoid one another. *This*, not a full perverse orgy, is the true excess: not 'practising your innermost fantasies instead of just talking about them', but, precisely, *talking* about them, allowing them to invade the medium of the big Other to such an extent that one can literally 'fuck with words', so that the elementary, constitutive barrier between language and *jouissance* breaks down. Measured by this standard, the most extreme 'real orgy' is but a poor substitute.

The presentation of the sexual act in Adrian Lyne's *Unfaithful* renders perfectly the logic of the feminine *jouissance de l'Autre*: after the couple (the married Diane Lane and the young Frenchman) embrace in his

apartment, there is a direct cut to Diane Lane returning home on the suburban train, sitting alone and reminiscing. Her remembering (rendered through a wonderful display of embarrassed smiles, tears, gestures of incredulity at what happened, etc.) is intercepted with short, fragmented flashbacks of the couple making love – we thus only see the love act as it were in *futur antérieur*, as it is recollected. The direct sexual *jouissance* is immediately 'sublated' in the *jouissance* of the Other; the two magically overlap. The lesson is that the 'true' *jouissance* is neither in the act itself nor in the expectant thrill of the pleasures to come, but in the melancholic remembrance of it. And here is the enigma: is it possible to imagine a sexual act in which the participants, while 'really doing it', already adopt the imagined position of the remembering it, from which they *now* enjoy it? Furthermore, can one say that this melancholic position of *futur antérieur* is feminine, while the *jouissance* engendered by the thrill of pleasures to come is masculine? Recall the famous scene in Bergman's *Persona* of Bibi Andersson telling about a beach orgy and passionate love-making in which she participated: we see no flashback pictures, and nonetheless the scene is one of the most erotic in the entire history of cinema – the excitement is in the way she tells it, and this excitement that resides in speech itself is *jouissance féminine* ...

And it is this dimension of the *jouissance* of the Other that is threatened by the prospect of 'pure' *jouissance*. Is such a short-circuit not the basic and most disturbing feature of consuming drugs to generate the experience of enjoyment? What drugs promise is a purely autistic *jouissance*, a *jouissance* accessible without the detour through the Other (of the symbolic order) – *jouissance* generated not by fantasmatic representations, but by directly attacking our neuronal pleasure-centres. It is in this precise sense that drugs involve the suspension of symbolic castration, whose most elementary meaning is precisely that *jouissance* is accessible only through the medium of (as mediated by) symbolic representation. This brutal Real of *jouissance* is the obverse of the infinite plasticity of imagining, no longer constrained by the rules of reality. Significantly, the experience of drugs encompasses both these extremes: on the one hand, the Real of noumenal (non-schematized) *jouissance* that bypasses representations; on the other hand, the wild proliferation of fantasizing (recall the proverbial reports on how, after taking a drug, you imagine scenes you never thought you were able to access – new dimensions of shapes, colours, smells ...).

One should thus learn to discern the lesson of recent bio-technological advances. In 2003, Japanese telecom carriers came up with the world's first mobile phone that enables users to listen to calls inside their heads by conducting sound through bone. The phone is equipped with a 'Sonic Speaker', which transmits sounds through vibrations that move from the skull to the cochlea in the inner ear, instead of relying on the usual method of sound hitting the outer eardrum. With the new handset, the key to better hearing in a noisy situation is thus to plug your ears to prevent outside noise from drowning out bone-conducted sounds. Here we encounter the Lacanian distinction between reality and the Real: this spectral voice that we hear in our interior, although it has no place in external reality, is the Real at its purest.

In a step further, in 2003, at the Center for Neuro-Engineering at Duke University, monkeys with brain implants were trained to move a robot arm with their thoughts: a series of electrodes containing tiny wires were implanted in the brains of two monkeys; a computer then recorded signals produced by the monkeys' brains as they manipulated a joystick controlling the robotic arm in exchange for a reward (sips of juice). The joystick was later unplugged and the arm, which was in a separate room, was controlled directly by the brain signals coming from the implants. The monkeys eventually stopped using the joystick, as if they knew their brains were controlling the robot arm. The Duke researchers have now moved on to researching similar implants in humans: in the summer of 2004, it was reported that they succeeded at temporarily implanting electrodes in the brains of volunteers; the volunteers then played videogames while the electrodes recorded the brain signals – the scientists trained a computer to recognize the brain activity corresponding to the different movements of the joystick. This procedure of 'eavesdropping' on the brain's digital crackle with electrodes (where computers use zeros and ones, neurons encode our thoughts in all-or-nothing electrical impulses), and transmitting the signals to a computer that can read the brain's code and then use the signals to control a machine, already has an official name: brain–machine interface. Further prospects include not only more complex tasks (say, implanting the electrodes in the language centres of the brain and thus wirelessly transmitting a person's inner voice to a machine, so that one can speak 'directly', bypassing voice or writing), but also sending the brain signals to a machine thousands of miles away and thus directing it from a great distance. And what about sending the signals to somebody standing

nearby with electrodes implanted in his hearing centres, so that he can 'telepathically' listen to my inner voice?[6] The Orwellian notion of 'thought control' will thus acquire a much more literal meaning.

Even Stephen Hawking's proverbial little finger – the minimal link between his mind and the outside reality, the only part of his paralysed body that he can move – will thus no longer be necessary: with my mind, I can *directly* cause objects to move, i.e., it is the brain itself that will directly serve as the remote control machine. In the terms of German Idealism, this means that what Kant called 'intellectual intuition [*intelektuelle Anschauung*]' – the closing of the gap between mind and reality, a mind-process that, in a causal way, directly influences reality, this capacity that Kant attributed only to the infinite mind of God – is now potentially available to all of us, i.e., we are potentially deprived of one of the basic features of our finitude. And because, as we learned from Kant as well as from Freud, this gap of finitude is at the same time the resource of our creativity (the distance between 'mere thought' and causal intervention into external reality enables us to test the hypotheses in our mind and, as Karl Popper put it, let them die instead of ourselves), the direct short-circuit between mind and reality implies the prospect of a radical closure.

It may seem that this scientific-technological breakthrough brings to the extreme Freud's story of three successive humiliations of man, three 'narcissistic illnesses' ('Copernicus-Darwin-Freud'), which is much more complex than it may appear. The first thing to add is that the latest scientific breakthroughs seem to add to it a whole series of further 'humiliations' which radicalize the first three, so that, as Peter Sloterdijk perspicuously noted, with regard to today's 'cognitive sciences', psychoanalysis rather seems to belong to the traditional 'humanist' field threatened by the latest humiliations. Is the proof of it not the predominant reaction of psychoanalysts to the latest advances in cognitive sciences? Their defence of psychoanalysis often reads as just another variation of the standard philosophico-transcendental gesture of pointing out the way that a positive science can never encompass and account for the very horizon of meaning within which it is operative. There are, however, some complications to this image. First: from the very beginning of modernity, humiliation, the 'narcissistic illness', seems to generate a sense of superiority paradoxically grounded in the very awareness of the miserable character of our existence. As Pascal has already put it in an unsurpassable way, man is a mere insignificant speck

of dust in the infinite universe, but he *knows* about his nullity, and that makes all the difference. Paradigmatically modern is this notion of greatness not as simply opposed to misery, but as a misery aware of itself ... The second complication concerns the precise status of this knowledge: it is not only knowledge about our own vanity, but also its inherent obverse, technological *savoir-faire*, knowledge as power. Strictly correlative to the 'humiliation' of man is the exponential growth of humankind's technological domination over nature in modernity.

These two features combined give us the basic paradox of the modern philosophy of subjectivity: the couplet of the humiliation of empirical man and the elevation of the transcendental subject. It was Descartes, already, who asserted the *cogito* as the starting point of philosophy, simultaneously reducing all of reality, life included, to mere *res extensa*, the field of matter obeying mechanical laws. In this precise sense, the thought of modern subjectivity is *not* 'humanism', but, from the very outset, 'anti-humanist': humanism characterizes Renaissance thought which celebrated man as the crown of creation, the highest term in the chain of created beings, while modernity proper occurs only when man loses his privileged place and is reduced to just another element of reality – and correlative to this loss of privilege is the emergence of subject as the pure immaterial void, not as a substantial part of reality. The Kantian sublime itself is grounded in this gap: it is the very experience of the impotence and nullity of man (as a part of nature) when he is exposed to a powerful display of natural forces that evokes in a negative way his greatness as a noumenal ethical subject.

These two complications, however, are part of the standard narrative of modernity; it is only the third one which effectively disturbs the received image: the fact that the twentieth-century 'humiliations' are much more ambiguous than it may appear – and, retroactively, render visible the ambiguity of these classical humiliations. That is to say, in a first approach, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud all share the same 'desublimating' hermeneutics of suspicion: a 'higher' capacity (ideology and politics, morality, consciousness) is unmasked as a shadow-theatre that is effectively governed by the conflict of forces that takes place on another 'lower' scene (economic processes, conflict of unconscious desires). And, today, things go much further: in cognitivism, human thinking itself is conceived as modelled after the functioning of a computer, so that the very gap between understanding (the experience of meaning, of the openness of a world) and the 'mute' functioning of a

machine potentially disappears; in neo-Darwinism (not only) human individuals are conceived of as mere instruments or, rather, vehicles, of the reproduction of 'their' genes, and, in a homologous way, human culture, the cultural activity of the mankind, as a vehicle for the proliferation of 'memes'. However, one is tempted to say that, in so far as nineteenth-century 'demystification' is a reduction of the noble appearance to some 'lower' reality (Marx-Nietzsche-Freud), then the twentieth century adds to it another turn of the screw by rehabilitating (a weird, previously unheard-of) appearance itself. Indicative is here Husserlian *phenomenology*, the first true event of twentieth-century philosophy, with its stance of 'reduction', which aims at observing the phenomena 'as such', in their autonomy, not as mere attributes/expressions/effects of some underlying 'real entities' – a line is opened up here that leads to figures as different as Bergson, Deleuze, Wittgenstein and quantum physics, each of them focusing on the autonomy of the pure flux-event of becoming with regard to real entities ('things').

What is even more crucial is that this insight into the autonomy of phenomena enables us to approach the classic 'demystifiers' themselves in a new way. What we find in Marx is not only the 'reduction' of ideology to an economic base and, within this base, of exchange to production, but a much more ambiguous and mysterious phenomenon of 'commodity fetishism', which designates a kind of proto-'ideology' inherent to the reality of the 'economic base' itself. Freud accomplishes a strictly homologous breakthrough with regard to the paradoxical status of fantasy: the ontological paradox, scandal even, of the notion of fantasy resides in the fact that it subverts the standard opposition of 'subjective' and 'objective': of course, fantasy is by definition not 'objective' (in the naïve sense of 'existing independently of the subject's perceptions'); however, it is also not 'subjective' (in the sense of being reducible to the subject's consciously experienced intuitions). Fantasy rather belongs to the 'bizarre category of the objectively subjective – the way things actually, objectively seem to you even if they don't seem that way to you' (as Dennett put it in his acerbic critical remark against the notion of qualia).[7] When, for example, we claim that someone who is consciously well disposed towards Jews nonetheless harbours profound anti-Semitic prejudices he is not consciously aware of, do we not claim that (in so far as these prejudices do not render the way Jews really are, but the way they appear to him) he is not aware of the way Jews really seem to him?

Apropos of commodity fetishism, Marx himself uses the term 'objectively-necessary appearance'. So, when a critical Marxist encounters a bourgeois subject immersed in commodity fetishism, the Marxist's reproach should not be, 'The commodity may seem to you a magical object endowed with special powers, but it really is just a reified expression of relations between people'; but rather, 'You may think that the commodity appears to you as a simple embodiment of social relations (that, for example, money is just a kind of voucher entitling you to a part of the social product), but this is not how things really seem to you – in your social reality, by means of your participation in social exchange, you bear witness to the uncanny fact that a commodity really appears to you as a magical object endowed with special powers ...' This difference between the two appearances (the way things *really* appear to us versus the way they *appear* to appear to us) is linked to the structure of the well-known Freudian joke about a Jew who complains to his friend, 'Why are you telling me you are going to Lemberg when you are really going to Lemberg?': say, in the case of commodity fetishism, when I immediately perceive money as just a knot of social relations, not any kind of magic object, and I only treat it like a fetish in my practice, so that the site of fetishism is my actual social practice, I could effectively be reproached with: 'Why are you saying that money is just a knot of social relations, when money really *is* just a knot of social relations?' Jean Laplanche wrote about the hysteric's 'primordial lie' which articulates the original fantasy: 'The term *proton pseudos* aims at something different from a subjective lie; it renders a kind of passage from the subjective to the founding, even, one could say, to the transcendental; in any case, a kind of objective lie, inscribed into the facts.'[8] Is this not also the status of Marxian commodity fetishism – not simply a subjective illusion, but an 'objective' illusion, an illusion inscribed into facts (social reality) themselves? Let us read carefully the famous first sentence of the section on 'Commodity Fetishism' in *Capital*:

> A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.[9]

Kojin Karatani is right to link this passage to the starting point of the Marxian critique, the famous lines from 1843, that 'the criticism of religion is the presupposition of all criticism':[10] with it, the circle is in a

way closed upon itself, i.e., at the very bottom of the critique of actual life (of the economic process), we again encounter the theological dimension inscribed into social *reality* itself. Karatani refers here to the Freudian notion of drive [*Trieb*] as opposed to the multitude of human desires: capitalism is grounded in the Real of a certain quasi-theological impersonal 'drive', the drive to reproduce and grow, to expand and accumulate profit.

This is also one of the ways of clarifying the meaning of Lacan's assertion of the subject's constitutive 'decentrement': its point is not that my subjective experience is regulated by objective unconscious mechanisms that are 'decentred' with regard to my self-experience and, as such, beyond my control (a point asserted by every materialist), but rather something much more unsettling – I am deprived of even my most intimate 'subjective' experience, the way things 'really seem to me', that of the fundamental fantasy that constitutes and guarantees the core of my being, because I can never consciously experience it and assume it. According to the standard view, the dimension that is constitutive of subjectivity is that of the phenomenal (self-)experience – I am a subject the moment I can say to myself: 'No matter what unknown mechanism governs my acts, perceptions and thoughts, nobody can take from me what I see and feel now.' Say, when I am passionately in love, and a biochemist informs me that all my intense sentiments are just the result of biochemical processes in my body, I can respond by clinging to the appearance: 'All that you're saying may be true, but, nonetheless, no one can take from me the intensity of the passion that I am experiencing now ...' Lacan's point, however, is that the psychoanalyst is the one who, precisely, *can* take this from the subject, i.e., his ultimate aim is to deprive the subject of the very fundamental fantasy that regulates the universe of his (self-)experience. The Freudian 'subject of the unconscious' emerges only when a key aspect of the subject's phenomenal (self-)experience (his 'fundamental fantasy'), becomes inaccessible to him, i.e., is 'primordially repressed'. At its most radical, the unconscious is the *inaccessible phenomenon*, not the objective mechanism that regulates my phenomenal experience. So, in contrast to the commonplace that we are dealing with a subject the moment an entity displays signs of 'inner life', i.e., of a fantasmatic self-experience that cannot be reduced to external behaviour, one should claim that what characterizes human subjectivity proper is rather the gap that separates the two, i.e., the fact that fantasy, at its most

elementary, becomes inaccessible to the subject; it is this inaccessibility that makes the subject 'empty'. We thus obtain a relationship that totally subverts the standard notion of the subject who directly experiences himself, his 'inner states': an 'impossible' relationship between the empty, non-phenomenal subject and the phenomena that remain inaccessible to the subject. When David Chalmers opposes phenomenal and psychological concepts of mind (conscious awareness/experience and what mind does), he quotes the Freudian unconscious as the exemplary case of the psychological mind external to the phenomenal mind:[11] what Freud describes as the work of the unconscious is a complex network of mental causality and behavioural control that takes place 'on the other scene', without being experienced. However, is it really like that? Is not the status of the unconscious fantasy nonetheless, in an unheard-of sense, *phenomenal*? Is *this* not the ultimate paradox of the Freudian unconscious – that it designates the way things 'really appear' to us, beyond their conscious appearance?

Another version of this shift in the logic of 'demystification' is discernible in two opposite readings of Lacan's famous thesis on 'Kant avec Sade' (Sade as the truth of Kantian ethics) – what does Lacan's 'Kant with Sade' effectively mean? The first association here is, of course: what's all the fuss about? Today, in our post-idealist Freudian era, doesn't everybody know what the point of the 'with' is – the truth of Kant's ethical rigourism is the sadism of the Law, i.e., the Kantian Law is a superego agency that sadistically enjoys the subject's deadlock, his inability to meet its inexorable demands, like the proverbial teacher who tortures pupils with impossible tasks and secretly savours their failings? Lacan's point, however, is the exact opposite of this first association: it is not Kant who was a closet sadist, it is Sade who is a closet Kantian. That is to say, what one should bear in mind is that the focus of Lacan is always Kant, not Sade: what he is interested in are the ultimate consequences and disavowed premises of the Kantian ethical revolution. In other words, Lacan does not try to make the usual 'reductionist' point that every ethical act, as pure and disinterested as it may appear, is always grounded in some 'pathological' motivation (the agent's own long-term interest, the admiration of his peers, up to the 'negative' satisfaction provided by the suffering and extortion often demanded by ethical acts); the focus of Lacan's interest rather resides in the paradoxical reversal by means of which desire itself (i.e., acting upon one's desire, not conceding it) can no longer be grounded in any

'pathological' interests or motivations and thus meets the criteria of the Kantian ethical act, so that 'following one's desire' overlaps with 'doing one's duty'.

Far from being overrun by the later decentrement of the cognitive sciences, the Freudian decentrement is thus much more unsettling and radical than cognitivism, which remains confined within a simple naturalization: it opens up a new domain of weird 'asubjective phenomena', of appearances with no subject to whom they can appear – it is only here that the subject is 'no longer a master in his own house', in the house of his (self-)appearances themselves. Ten minutes into Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, there is the scene of Scottie encountering Madeleine for the first time. We begin with Scottie sitting at the bar counter in the front room of Ernie's, looking through a partition into a large room full of tables and guests. A long panning shot (without a cut) then takes us back and to the left, giving us an overview of the entire crowded room, the soundtrack reproducing the chatter and clatter of a busy restaurant – we should bear in mind that this, clearly, is *not* Scottie's point-of-view. All of a sudden, our (or, rather, the camera's) attention is caught by a focal point of attraction, a *fascinum* that fixes our gaze, a bright, dazzling stain that we soon identify as the naked back of a beautiful woman. The background sound is then drowned out by Bernard Hermann's passionate music, which accompanies the camera in its gradual approach to the *fascinum* – we first recognize Elster facing us, and from it we deduce that the woman must be Madeleine. After this long shot, there is a cut back to Scottie peeping at Madeleine's table from a different perspective than the previous long shot approaching her, and then another cut to Scottie's point-of-view and what he sees (Madeleine covering her back with her jacket and getting ready to leave). After Madeleine and Elster leave their table and approach Scottie on their way out, we get another famous shot. Scottie sees that the couple are getting close and, in order not to betray his mission, he looks away towards the glass across the partition of the bar, just barely peeping over his back. When Madeleine comes close to him and has to stop for a moment (while her husband is settling the bill with the waiter), we see her mysterious profile (and the profile is always mysterious – we see only one half, while the other half could be a disgusting, disfigured face, or, as a matter of fact, the 'true', common face of Judy). This fascinating shot is thus again *not* Scottie's point-of-view shot: it is only after Elster rejoins Madeleine, with the couple moving away from Scottie and approaching

the exit from the restaurant, that we get, as a counter-shot to the shot of Scottie behind the bar, his point-of-view shot of Madeleine and Elster.

The ambiguity of subjective and objective is crucial here: precisely in so far as Madeleine's profile is *not* Scottie's point-of-view, the shot of her profile is *totally* subjectivized, depicting, in a way, not what Scottie effectively sees, but what he imagines, that is, his hallucinatory inner vision (recall how, while we see Madeleine's profile, the red background of the restaurant wall seems to get even more intense, almost threatening to explode in red heat turning into a yellow blaze – as if his passion is directly inscribed into the background). No wonder, then, that, although Scottie does not see Madeleine's profile, he acts as if he is mysteriously captivated by it, deeply affected by it. These two excessive shots are somehow 'subjectivized', without the subject being given: it is as if they directly register the passion of an intensity that cannot be assumed by the (diegetic) subject. So, what we get in these two shots, which are subjectivized without being attributed to a subject, is precisely the *pure, pre-subjective phenomenon*. Is the profile of Madeleine not such a pure appearance, permeated with an excessive libidinal investment – in a way, precisely *too 'subjective'*, too intense, to be assumed by the subject? Or, to put it in Lacan's terms, this shot of the profile of Madeleine appears on the Other Scene, inaccessible to the subject precisely in so far as it is located in its very core.

And even the twentieth-century evolution of 'hard' sciences generated the same paradox: in quantum physics, the 'appearance' (perception) of a particle determines its reality. The very emergence of 'hard reality' out of fluctuation through the collapse of wave-function is the outcome of observation, i.e., of the intervention of consciousness. Consciousness is thus not the domain of potentiality, multiple options, etc., opposed to hard single reality – instead, reality *previous* to its perception is fluid, multiple, open, and conscious perception reduces this spectral, pre-ontological, multiplicity to one ontologically fully constituted reality. This opens up the way that quantum physics conceives of the relationship between particles and their interactions: in an initial moment, it appears as if first (ontologically, at least) there are particles interacting in the mode of waves, oscillations, etc.; then, in a second moment, we are forced to enact a radical shift of perspective – the primordial ontological fact is the waves themselves (trajectories, oscillations), and particles are nothing but the nodal points in which different waves intersect.

Consequently, quantum physics confronts us with the gap between the Real and reality at its most radical: what we get in it is the mathematized Real of formulas that cannot be translated into ontologically consistent reality, or, to put it in Kantian terms, they remain pure concepts that cannot be 'schematized', translated or transposed into objects of experience. This is also how, after the crisis of the 1920s, quantum physics in practice resolved the crisis of its ontological interpretation: by renouncing the very effort to provide such an interpretation – quantum physics is scientific formalization at its most radical, formalization without interpretation. Is it then not accurate to say that quantum physics involves a kind of reversal of the Kantian transcendental ontology?[12] In Kant, we have access to ordinary experiential reality, but the moment we try to apply our transcendental categories to the noumenal Real itself, we get involved in contradictions; in quantum physics, it is the noumenal Real that can be grasped and formulated in a consistent theory, while the moment we try to translate this theory into the terms of our experience of phenomenal reality, we get caught up in senseless contradictions (time runs backwards, the same object is in two places simultaneously, an entity is a particle and a wave, etc.). (However, it can still be claimed that these contradictions only emerge when we try to transpose the 'Real' of the quantum processes into our experiential reality – in itself, this reality remains the same as before, a consistent realm with which we are well acquainted.)

So not only is appearance inherent to reality; what we get beyond this is a weird split in appearance itself, an unheard-of mode designating 'the way things really appear to us', as opposed to both their reality and their (direct) appearance. This shift from the split between appearance and reality to the split inherent to appearance itself, between 'true' and 'false' appearance, is to be linked to its obverse, to a split inherent to reality itself. If, then, there is appearance (as distinct from reality) because there is a (logically) prior split inherent to reality itself, is it also that 'reality' itself is ultimately nothing but a (self-)split of appearance (the 'parallax' thesis)?

There are three main attitudes one can adopt towards this breakthrough. The first is simply to insist on radical naturalism whatever the price, heroically to pursue the logic of the scientific 'disenchantment of reality' whatever the cost, i.e., even if the very fundamental coordinates of our horizon of meaningful experience are shattered. (In cognitive sciences, Patricia and Paul Churchland have most radically opted for this

attitude.) The second option is the attempt at some kind of New Age 'synthesis' between the scientific Truth and the premodern world of Meaning: the claim is that new scientific results themselves (say, quantum physics) compel us to abandon materialism and point towards some new (gnostic or Eastern) spirituality. The third option is that of a neo-Kantian state philosophy whose exemplary instance today is Habermas. It is a rather sad spectacle to see Habermas trying to control the explosive results of biogenetics, to curtail their philosophical consequences – his entire effort betrays the fear that something would effectively happen, that a new dimension of the 'human' would emerge, that the old image of human dignity and autonomy would not survive unscathed. The very *excessiveness* of these reactions is symptomatic here, like the ridiculous overreaction to Peter Sloterdijk's Elmau speech on Heidegger and biogenetics, discerning echoes of Nazi eugenics in the (quite reasonable) proposal that biogenetics compels us to formulate new rules of ethics. What this attitude towards scientific progress amounts to is a kind of 'temptation of (resisting) temptation': the temptation to be resisted is precisely the pseudo-ethical attitude of presenting scientific exploration as a temptation that can lead us into 'going too far' – entering the forbidden territory (of biogenetic manipulations, etc.) and thus endangering the very core of our humanity.

The latest ethical 'crisis' apropos of biogenetics effectively created the need for what one is fully justified in calling a 'state philosophy': a philosophy that would, on the one hand, condone scientific research and technical process, and, on the other hand, contain its full socio-symbolic impact, i.e., prevent it from posing a threat to the existing theologico-ethical constellation. No wonder those who come closest to meeting these demands are neo-Kantians: Kant himself was focused on the problem of how, while fully taking into account Newtonian science, to guarantee that there is a space of ethical responsibility exempted from the reach of science – i.e., as Kant himself put it, he limited the scope of knowledge to create the space for faith and morality. And are today's state philosophers not facing the same task? Is their effort not focused on how, through different versions of transcendental reflection, to restrict science to its preordained horizon of meaning and thus to denounce as 'illegitimate' its consequences for the ethico-religious sphere? It is interesting to note how, although Sloterdijk was the target of a violent Habermasian attack, his proposed solution, a 'humanist' synthesis of the new scientific Truth and the old horizon of Meaning, although much

more refined and ironically-sceptical than the Habermasian 'state philosophy', is ultimately separated from it by an almost invisible frontier (more precisely, it seems to persist in the ambiguity between the Habermasian compromise and the New Age obscurantist synthesis). According to Sloterdijk, 'humanism' always involves such a reconciliation, a bridge between the New and the Old: when scientific results undermine the old universe of meaning, one should find a way to reintegrate them into the universe of Meaning, or, rather, to expand metaphorically the old universe of Meaning so that it can 'cover' also new scientific propositions. If we fail in this mediating task, we remain stuck in the brutal choice: either a reactionary refusal to accept scientific results, or the shattering loss of the very domain of Meaning. Today, we confront the same challenge: 'Mathematicians will have to become poets, cyberneticists philosophers of religion, [medical] doctors composers, information-workers shamans.'[13] Is this solution, however, not that of *obscurantism* in the precise sense of the attempt to keep meaning and truth harnessed together?

> The simplest definition of God and of religion lies in the idea that truth and meaning are one and the same thing. The death of God is the end of the idea that posits truth and meaning as the same thing. And I would add that the death of Communism also implies the separation between meaning and truth as far as history is concerned. 'The meaning of history' has two meanings: on the one hand, 'orientation', history goes somewhere; and then history has a meaning, which is the history of human emancipation by way of the proletariat, etc. In fact, the entire age of Communism was a period where the conviction that it was possible to make correct political decisions; we were, at that moment, driven by the meaning of history ... Then the death of Communism becomes the second death of God but in the territory of history. There is a connection between the two events and the consequence is, so to speak, that we should be aware that to produce truthful effects that are primarily local (be they psychoanalytical, scientific, etc.) is always an effect of local truth, never of global truth ... Today we may call 'obscurantism' the intention of keeping them harnessed together – meaning and truth.[14]

Badiou is here correct in emphasizing the gap between meaning and truth – i.e., the non-hermeneutic status of truth – as the minimal difference that separates religious idealism from materialism. This is also the difference between Freud and Jung: while Jung remains within the horizon of meaning, Freudian interpretation aims at articulating a truth which is no longer grounded in meaning. Badiou is also correct in

formulating the ultimate alternative that confronts us today, when the impossibility of the conjunction of meaning and truth is imposed on us: either we endorse the 'postmodern' stance and renounce the dimension of truth altogether, constraining ourselves to the interplay of multiple meanings, or we engage in the effort to discern a dimension of truth outside meaning – i.e., in brief, the dimension of truth as *Real*.

However, what remains false is the parallel between the death of God and the death of Communism, implicitly referring to the old boring anti-Communist cliché that Communism is a 'secular religion'; and linked to this falsity is also the all too hasty acceptance of the 'postmodern' notion that, in today's politics, we are limited to 'local' truths, because, without a grounding in global meaning, it is no longer possible to formulate an all-encompassing truth. The fact that renders this conclusion problematic is the very fact of capitalist globalization – what is capitalist globalization? Capitalism is the first socio-economic order which *de-totalizes meaning*: it is not global at the level of meaning (there is no global 'capitalist world view', no 'capitalist civilization' proper – the fundamental lesson of globalization is precisely that capitalism can accommodate itself to all civilizations, from Christian to Hindu and Buddhist); its global dimension can only be formulated at the level of truth-without-meaning, as the 'Real' of the global market mechanism. Consequently, in so far as capitalism already enacts the rupture between meaning and truth, it can be opposed at two levels: either at the level of meaning (conservative reactions to re-enframe capitalism within some social field of meaning, to contain its self-propelling movement within the confines of a system of shared 'values' that cement a 'community' in its 'organic unity'), or to question the Real of capitalism with regard to its truth-outside-meaning (what, basically, Marx did). Of course, the predominant religious strategy today is that of trying to contain the scientific Real within the confines of meaning – it is as an answer to the scientific Real (materialized in biogenetic threats) that religion is finding its new *raison d'être*:

> Far from being effaced by science, religion, and even the syndicate of religions, in the process of formation, is progressing every day. Lacan said that ecumenism was for the poor of spirit. There is a marvellous agreement on these questions between the secular and all the religious authorities, in which they tell themselves they should agree somewhere in order to make echoes equally marvellous, even saying that finally the secular is a religion like the others. We see this because it is revealed in effect that the discourse of science has partly connected with the death drive. Religion is planted in the position of the unconditional defence of the living, of life in mankind, as guardian of life, making life an absolute. And that extends to the protection of human nature ... This is what gives a future to religion through meaning, namely by erecting barriers – to cloning, to the exploitation of human cells – and to inscribe science in a tempered progress. We see a marvellous effort, a new youthful vigour of religion in its effort to flood the Real with meaning.[15]

This simple, but salient, diagnosis ends up in a surprising paraphrase of Heidegger, defining the analyst as the 'shepherd of the Real'. However, it leaves some key questions open. Is the death drive for which science stands, which it mobilizes in its activity, not simultaneously an *excess of obscene life*, of life as Real, exempted from and external to meaning (life that we find embodied in Kafka's 'odradek' as well as in the 'alien' from the film of the same name)? One should not forget that death drive is a Freudian name for immortality, for a pressure, a compulsion, which insists beyond death (and let us also not forget that immortality is also implicitly promised by science). One should therefore also assert a gap between life and meaning, homologous to that between truth and meaning – life and meaning in no way fully overlap. Furthermore, can all religious experiences and practices themselves effectively be contained within the dimension of the conjunction of truth and meaning? Does not Judaism, with its imposition of a traumatic Law, point towards a dimension of truth outside meaning (which is why Judaism is the mortal enemy of any Gnostic obscurantism)? And does not, at a different level, the same go for St Paul himself? This is why it is wrong to oppose the Christian god of Love to the Jewish god of cruel justice: excessive cruelty is the necessary obverse of Christian Love, and, again, the relationship between these two is one of parallax: there is no 'substantial' difference between the god of Love and god of excessive-arbitrary cruelty – it is one and the same god who appears in a different light only due to a parallactic shift of our perspective.

Notes

1 Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, London, Harper and Row, 1969, p. 72.

2 For instance, Jacques Derrida, *Foi et Savoir, suivi de 'Le Siècle et le Pardon'*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2000. [eds]

3 For instance, Sigmund Freud, 'Delusions and dreams in Jensen's *Gradiva*', in *The Penguin Freud Library, 14: Art and Literature*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1985, pp. 66–87. [eds]
4 I rely here on conversations with Alain Badiou.
5 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan XX: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge (Encore), 1972–73*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink, New York and London, W. W. Norton, 1998, pp. 66–71. [eds]
6 See Carl Zimmer's concise report, 'The ultimate remote control', in *Newsweek*, 14 June 2004, p. 73.
7 Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1991, p. 397. [eds]
8 Jean Laplanche, *Vie et mort en psychanalyse*, Paris, Flammarion, 1989, p. 58.
9 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes, London, Penguin/New Left Review, 1976, p. 163.
10 Karl Marx, 'Towards a critique of Hegel's philosophy of right: introduction', in *Early Texts*, ed. and trans. David McLellan, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1971, p. 115.
11 David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997, 13. [eds]
12 I rely here on unpublished texts by Adrian Johnston.
13 Peter Sloterdijk, *Nicht gerettet*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp Verlag, 2001, p. 365.
14 'A conversation with Alain Badiou', *lacanian ink* 23, 2004, pp. 100–1.
15 Jacques-Alain Miller, 'Religion, psychoanalysis', *lacanian ink* 23, 2004, pp. 18–19.

Glossary

As noted in the first volume of Žižek's *Selected Writings*, this Glossary could be only a momentary *capitonnage* of Žižek's theoretical system. There are any number of other entries we could have chosen and any number of other passages from Žižek's texts we could have included under any entry. This is evident in those entries that are also to be found in the first volume, but which return here in different circumstances and with different meanings. At the same time, what is attempted to be brought out is the real conceptual rigour that characterizes Žižek's choice of terms: the work they do to organize and hold together the extremely disparate material he covers in his writing. Indeed, in some ways – this is what we attempt to show here by means of the cross-references under every entry – we would even claim that each of these entries is the 'same' entry: that each is as it were a synonym of that *universal exception* (and its covering over) that is the subject of Žižek's work in this volume. Finally, it might be noted that a number of proper names, both here and in the first volume, are listed as concepts. This is true: proper names do the work of concepts in Žižek's system, but this is also to say that these concepts for their part are proper names. When they are used correctly – and this can only be demonstrated ironically in this Glossary, through its very failure – it is always in a singular and event-like way, beyond the reach of any classification.

ACT/ORGANIZATION (see also REAL, REVOLUTION, THINKING, VIOLENCE)
The act is bound by a paradox, which is to say it is always divided from itself. On the one hand, it is necessary to act prematurely, without objective justification: 'Like the Lacanian analyst, a political agent has to commit acts that can only be authorized by themselves, for which there

3 For instance, Sigmund Freud, 'Delusions and dreams in Jensen's *Gradiva*', in *The Penguin Freud Library, 14: Art and Literature*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1985, pp. 66–87. [eds]
4 I rely here on conversations with Alain Badiou.
5 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan XX: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge (Encore), 1972–73*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink, New York and London, W. W. Norton, 1998, pp. 66–71. [eds]
6 See Carl Zimmer's concise report, 'The ultimate remote control', in *Newsweek*, 14 June 2004, p. 73.
7 Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1991, p. 397. [eds]
8 Jean Laplanche, *Vie et mort en psychanalyse*, Paris, Flammarion, 1989, p. 58.
9 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes, London, Penguin/New Left Review, 1976, p. 163.
10 Karl Marx, 'Towards a critique of Hegel's philosophy of right: introduction', in *Early Texts*, ed. and trans. David McLellan, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1971, p. 115.
11 David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997, 13. [eds]
12 I rely here on unpublished texts by Adrian Johnston.
13 Peter Sloterdijk, *Nicht gerettet*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp Verlag, 2001, p. 365.
14 'A conversation with Alain Badiou', *lacanian ink* 23, 2004, pp. 100–1.
15 Jacques-Alain Miller, 'Religion, psychoanalysis', *lacanian ink* 23, 2004, pp. 18–19.

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ACT/ORGANIZATION (see also REAL, REVOLUTION, THINKING, VIOLENCE)
The act is bound by a paradox, which is to say it is always divided from itself. On the one hand, it is necessary to act prematurely, without objective justification: 'Like the Lacanian analyst, a political agent has to commit acts that can only be authorized by themselves, for which there

is no external guarantee' (54). On the other hand, a simple acting-out or *passage à l'acte* merely reproduces the ideological coordinates in which it takes place: 'If, today, one follows a direct call to act, this act will not be performed in an empty space – it will be an act within the hegemonic ideological coordinates' (238). What is the difference between these two conceptions? How to distinguish a genuine from a false act? In fact, we cannot do so in advance – it is for this reason that an act is always premature – but only by what occurs afterwards. As Žižek says: 'It is *only* this reference to what happens *after* the revolution, the proverbial "morning after", that allows us to distinguish between libertarian pathetic outbursts and true revolutionary upheavals' (50). That is, it is only in retrospect that objective reasons for the act exist, after the revolution has organized and stabilized itself. But there is a further point here: the ultimate act of any revolution is its imposing of a new order. And it is for this reason that the 'instrumentalization' of the revolution is not to be understood as its sublation or compromise, but as part of the revolution itself, for the revolution does not exist *until after it*: '[Revolution] begins with the gesture of radical negativity ... There then follows a second stage, the invention of a new life – not only the construction of a new social reality within which our utopian dreams would be realized, but the (re)construction of these dreams themselves' (50).

ANTAGONISM (see also CLASS STRUGGLE, COMMUNISM, REAL, UNIVERSAL EXCEPTION)
Antagonism is inherent to the social field. As such, the social can only be constructed around its own constitutive void. For Žižek, the essential fantasy is that the social can be rendered as whole, that any antagonism is merely contingent or tied to some particular element: 'The elementary image of the social fantasy is that of a *social body*, through which one eludes the impossible, the antagonism around which the social field is structured' (89). And this denial can take several forms. In fascist ideology, this antagonism is displaced on to an apparently external obstacle, whose removal would restore an imaginary wholeness. (We have a more contemporary version of this in the now-popular idea of the 'clash of civilizations', which reduces the internal limits of capitalism to an 'us' versus 'them' opposition [278]). In postmodern identity politics, the antagonism that is inherent to the 'all' of the social is dispersed into the multitude of local struggles: 'Postmoderns, of course, will calmly reply that antagonisms are radical only so long as society is

still – anachronistically – perceived as a totality' (35). What Žižek himself proposes might, at first, appear similar to this strategy of local struggle: 'Therein resides one of the tasks of the "postmodern" criticism of ideology: to designate those elements within an existing social order that – in the guise of "fiction", that is, of the "utopian" narratives of possible but failed alternative histories – point towards its antagonistic character and thus "estrange" us from the self-evidence of its established identity' (18). However, the crucial difference is that for Žižek this particular thing or event is not an exception to the Universal but *is* the Universal; it does not reveal the failure or impossibility of the Universal, but precisely invokes the Universal as the incessant attempt to take into account that antagonism that makes it possible: '[This paradox] can only be conceived of if *the antagonism is inherent to universality itself*, that is, if universality itself is split into the "false" concrete universality that legitimizes the existing division of the Whole into functional parts and the impossible/Real demand of "abstract" universality' (178).

APPEARANCE (see also COINCIDENTIA OPPOSITORUM, INFINITE JUDGEMENT, MARX/ALTHUSSER/BADIOU, PARALLAX VIEW, TRUTH, UNIVERSAL EXCEPTION)
One of Žižek's great Hegelian themes is his emphasis on the importance of appearance. Indeed, underpinning his entire argument is an inversion of the usual relationship between appearance and what lies behind it. It is not for Žižek a matter of revealing a deeper, material basis for surface, ideal phenomena, but rather of tracing material processes back to their ideal origins. This is consistent not only with the move from energetic industrial production to our own virtual, frictionless capitalism, in which 'the image does not represent the product, but, rather, the product represents the image' (238). It is also part of Žižek's long-running emphasis, derived from Althusser, on the symbolic efficiency of appearances: '[Althusser's] theory of ideological state apparatuses assigned the crucial role in the reproduction of an ideology to "external" rituals and practices with regard to which "inner" beliefs and convictions are strictly secondary' (17). It is the belief that appearances are not important – that it is a matter of the convictions underlying them – that Žižek describes as *cynicism*, the prevailing ideology of contemporary society. It is even, in another way, appearance that is lost with the current emphasis on simulation: 'Crucial here is the distinction between appearance and the postmodern notion of the simulacrum as that which

is no longer clearly distinguishable from the Real ... what gets lost in today's plague of simulations is not the firm, true, non-simulated Real, but *appearance itself*' (19). However, if there is nothing outside of appearance – this is how Žižek differs from that previous notion of cause or exception that might be thought to mark materialism – appearance is nonetheless 'not-all'. Appearance is always split precisely by what ensures that all is appearance. What occasionally shines through appearance is not some deeper cause that is solid and permanent, but something more fleeting and fragile – which can occur at any time and place – a kind of *universal exception*. As Žižek writes: 'It is this dimension of appearance that transubstantiates a piece of reality into something that, for a brief moment, illuminates the suprasensible eternity that is missing in the logic of the simulacrum ... "the Suprasensible is appearance qua appearance" does not simply mean that the suprasensible is not a positive entity *beyond* the phenomenon, but rather points to the inherent power of negativity, which makes appearance "merely an appearance"' (192).

CAPITALISM (see also FETISH, IDEOLOGY, INHERENT TRANSGRESSION)
In a profound formula, Žižek will often speak of capitalism in terms of the Lacanian category of the Real (216–17, 324). By this he means that, in the same way as we cannot avoid the Real, so capitalism today is unavoidable. It represents the totality of our situation, the 'untranscendable horizon' of all particular instances: 'Today, we can easily imagine the extinction of the human race, but it is impossible to imagine a radical change of the social system – even if life on earth disappears, capitalism will somehow remain intact' (149). It is certainly the case that all *partial* attempts to overcome capitalism are doomed in advance: 'the history of capitalism is a long history of the way that the predominant ideologico-political framework was able to accommodate – and soften the subversive edge of – the movements and demands that seemed to threaten its very survival' (106). Accordingly, Žižek rejects every attempt to alleviate its injustices, all forms of humanitarian intervention, up to and including such organizations as the Zapatistas in Chiapas and Médecins sans frontières. He even rejects such powerful single-issue parties as the Greens, which necessarily remain ineffective in so far as they are not organized in terms of some universal struggle. And yet, if these resistances are only the 'inherent transgression' of capitalism,

allowing it to continue, they might also be understood as a kind of 'infinite judgement' upon it, that 'antagonism' outside of which it is not possible. As Žižek will say of another series of political movements, this time conceived of in terms of the Universal: 'It is too simple to conceive of these movements as the last embodiments of the millenarian radicalism that structures the social space as the exclusive antagonism between "us" and "them", allowing for no possible forms of mediation ... Khmer Rouge and the Senderistas as the "infinite judgement" on late capitalism are, therefore, in Hegelese, an integral part of its notion: if one wants to constitute capitalism as a world system, one must take into account its inherent negation, "fundamentalism", as well as its absolute negation – the infinite judgement on it' (23).

CAPITONNAGE (see also LOGIC OF EXCEPTION)
This concept, derived from Ernesto Laclau's analysis of ideological hegemony, continues to be used throughout the later Žižek, despite the increasing distance he adopts toward Laclau's work. To recapitulate what is meant by hegemony: 'the Universal acquires concrete existence when some particular content begins to function as its stand-in ... The fact that this link between the Universal and the particular content that acts as its stand-in is *contingent* means precisely that it is the outcome of a *political* struggle for ideological hegemony' (152). This notion of *capitonnage*, the idea that the meaning of political terms is not given in themselves but according to how they are organized within an overall configuration, allows Žižek to argue against any essential meaning to these terms, to insist that they are always contingent, open to dispute. Thus, on the one hand, he can say: 'Fascism was not characterized simply by a series of features like economic corporatism, populism, xenophobic racism, militarism and so on, for these could also be included in other ideological configurations; what made these features "fascist" was their specific articulation within an overall political project' (40–1). And, on the other: 'I find [Havel's] idea of civil society doubly problematic. First, the opposition between State and civil society works *against* as well as *for* liberty and democracy ... These [conservative cases] are authentic expressions of civil society – "civil society" designates the terrain of open struggle, the terrain in which antagonisms can articulate themselves, without any guarantee that the "progressive" side will win' (145). Indeed, Žižek will speak elsewhere of the way that the ideological meaning of such things as homosexuality, bodily

discipline and even Islamic fundamentalism is also not fixed but open to ideological negotiation.

CLASS STRUGGLE (see also ANTAGONISM, COMMUNISM, INFINITE JUDGEMENT, UNIVERSAL EXCEPTION)
We might ask: where is class struggle? What is the continued relevance of the notion of class struggle? In fact, the existence of class struggle is denied by both the Right and the Left today. As Žižek admits: 'Of course, even to mention terms like "class" or "labour" is enough to invite the reproach of "economic essentialism" from the postmodernists of the Third Way. My first reaction to the charge is: *why not?*' (35). And yet, if Žižek does assert the existence of class struggle – and this is perhaps his difference from Stalinism – it is not as some ontological, actually existing social reality, involving some specifiable group of people. On the one hand, Žižek asserts that – and he fully accepts the comparison often made between Marxism and religion – anyone can be touched by class struggle (199). And, on the other hand, class is not something that can ever be fully embodied, and thus ever entirely resolved, because 'class' is another name for the excess, the inherent division of each particular from itself. 'We could say that class struggle functions in a strict sense as the "object" of *Capital*, that which *cannot* become the "positive object of research" and that which necessarily *falls* outside and thus makes of the totality of the three books of *Capital* [and we might say of Capital itself] a "not-all"' (82). Class, we might say, is Real not Symbolic. Like the Real of the unconscious in psychoanalysis, there is nothing outside of it; it already takes its own denial or resistance into account. And this is to say that it is *self-relating*. Any pronouncement on class applies before all else to itself, is subject to the very procedure it sets out. And, indeed, class does return today, whether it be in the sweatshops of the Third World, making consumer goods for the First (36), or in the heart of Hollywood, in those moments when the villain shows his secret factory to James Bond before killing him (37).

COINCIDENTIA OPPOSITORUM (see also APPEARANCE, INFINITE JUDGEMENT, MESSAGE IN REVERSE, PARALLAX VIEW, THIRD WAY, YUGOSLAVIA)
Žižek notes throughout his writings a strange coming together of opposites, things somehow engendering their own contradiction. From the side of capitalism: 'What defines postmodern post-politics is thus

the secret solidarity between its Janus faces: on the one hand, the replacement of politics proper by depoliticized, so-called humanitarian operations . . . ; on the other hand, the violent emergence of depoliticized pure evil in the guise of excessive ethnic or religious fundamentalist violence' (193–4). From the side of Communism: 'To put it in the terms of the speculative coincidence of the opposites, or of the 'infinite judgement' in which the highest coincides with the lowest . . . "Arise, you prisoners of work!", is granted a deeper ironic meaning: the ultimate "truth" of the pathetic original meaning of these words ("Resist, break the chains that constrain you and reach for freedom!") turns out to be its literal meaning, the call to tired workers, "Get up, slaves, and start working for us, the Party *nomenklatura*!"' (102). And Žižek's point – this is the *coincidentoria oppositorum* that defines the Real – is that we must refuse both of these alternatives. We cannot choose one in an unmediated way, but must insist that both in their very opposition are the truth – a truth that is always split, partial, 'not-all'. In fact, more than this, in a properly Hegelian dialectical process, one of the opposites is also the medium through which this opposition occurs, is not merely one of the species but also the genus the species have in common. This is how a proper 'universality' works, as not only what is specifically opposed to what is but as the very form or possibility of this opposition itself: 'It is far more productive, theoretically as well as politically – because it opens up the way for the "progressive" subversion of hegemony – to perform the opposite operation of *identifying universality with the point of exclusion* . . . In a hierarchically structured society, the measure of its true universality resides in the way its parts relate to those "at the bottom", excluded by and from all others' (179).

COMMUNISM (see also ANTAGONISM, CLASS STRUGGLE, INHUMAN, REVOLUTION)
In the wake of the 'failure' of Really Existing Socialism, it is easy to condemn Communism, along with fascism, as one of the twentieth century's great disasters. However, Žižek insists against such a response that would make Stalinism and Nazism equivalent, which is precisely a way of depoliticizing both, of failing to think their historical and organizational specificity. For him, we *have* to make a distinction between them, declare one worse than the other: 'It is here that one has to make the choice: the "pure" liberal stance of equidistance towards leftist and rightist "totalitarianism" (they are both dead, based on

intolerance towards political and other differences, the rejection of democratic and humanist values, etc.) is *a priori* false – one *has* to take a side and proclaim one fundamentally "worse" than the other' (126). But in what would this distinction lie? What is the difference between them? In fact, for all of their shared fate, the two régimes are fundamentally opposed. In fascism, the inherent antagonism of the social is projected outwards on to some external, contingent agent; in Communism, the social itself is structured by those repeated, failed attempts internally to grasp its own principle, that of the revolutionary vocation of the proletariat as incarnated in the Party: 'In the case of race [in Nazism], we are dealing with a positive naturalized element (the presupposed organic unity of Society is perturbed by the intrusion of a foreign body), while class antagonism [in Communism] is absolutely inherent to and constitutive of the social field – Fascism thus obfuscates antagonism, translating it into a conflict between positive opposed terms' (127). However, if there is an error with Stalinism, it is the belief that – very close to Nazism – this internal principle can be objectively represented, its truth spoken of in some neutral disengaged way: '[In Stalinism] the Party functions as the miraculous immediate incarnation of an objective, neutral Knowledge, which in turn serves as a point of reference to legitimate the activity of the Party' (67). Nevertheless, for all of its mistakes, Communism, even in its Stalinist version, remains for Žižek a model of the materialization of the revolutionary impulse and its life-transforming possibilities: 'As Alain Badiou pointed out, in spite of its horrors and failures, Really Existing Socialism was the only political force that – for some decades, at least – seemed to pose a serious threat to the global rule of capitalism, genuinely scaring its representatives, driving them into paranoiac reaction. But now that, today, capitalism defines and structures the totality of human civilization, every "Communist" territory was and is – again, in spite of its horrors and failures – a kind of "liberated territory", as Fredric Jameson put it' (46).

DEMOCRACY (see also LOGIC OF EXCEPTION, UNIVERSAL EXCEPTION)

Žižek's position on democracy is complex and changing. At times, following the work of the French political theorist Étienne Balibar, he concedes the liberatory potential of democracy and, indeed, its efficacy as a way of thinking the 'universal exception', the fact that political space is permanently open to what can be given no place within it. As he

asks: '"What is politics proper?" It is a phenomenon that appeared for the first time in ancient Greece when the members of the *demos* (those with no firmly determined place in the hierarchical social edifice) presented themselves as the representatives, the stand-ins, for the whole of society, for the true universality' (183). However, Žižek can also condemn contemporary versions of democracy for forgetting this absolute limit – the fact that no political system can constitute an 'all' – or for trying to reduce this limit to a simple 'other': 'The problem with liberal democracy is that – for structural reasons – it cannot be universalized *a priori*. Hegel said that the moment of victory of a political force is the very moment of its splitting: the triumphant liberal-democratic "new world order" is more and more marked by a frontier separating its "inside" from its "outside"' (21). This is why Žižek can on occasions advocate the suppression or even overthrow of democracy, a refusal to follow its rules, because democracy itself is merely a contingent form of political organization: 'At this point, it is crucial to avoid the "democratic" trap. Many 'radical' leftists accept the legalistic logic of "transcendental guarantee": they refer to "democracy" as the ultimate guarantee of those who are aware that there is no guarantee ... The only adequate position is the one advocated already by Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness*: democratic struggle should not be fetishized; it is merely one of many forms of struggle, and its choice should be determined by a global strategic assessment of circumstances, not by its ostensibly superior intrinsic value' (54). And yet at other moments he can also see the signs of 'another' democracy emerging from within the cracks of global capitalism: 'direct democracy is not only still alive in many places (like *favelas*), it is even being "reinvented" and given a new impetus by the rise of "post-industrial" digital culture – do the descriptions of new "tribal" communities of computer-hackers not often evoke the logic of "council-democracy"?' (52).

FAILURE (see also INFINITE JUDGEMENT)

It is a fundamental lesson of Hegelian dialectics that we are aware of failure only from within a horizon that already admits success, that the acknowledgment of failure already is a form of success. Žižek will make this point with regard to the great 'failures' of the twentieth century: 'Most of today's claims that the twentieth century was the most catastrophic in human history, the lowest point of nihilism, a situation of extreme danger, etc., forget the elementary lesson of dialectics: the

twentieth century appears as such because the criteria themselves changed – today, we simply have much higher standards of what constitutes a violation of human rights, and so on. The fact that the situation *appears* catastrophic is thus in itself a positive sign, a sign of (some kind of) progress' (42–3). This will allow Žižek to argue of Communism, for example, that although it is judged a failure it also allowed the space from which this verdict could be rendered: 'What anti-Communist dissidents as a rule tend to overlook is that the very space from which they themselves criticized and denounced the everyday misery of the régimes *was opened and sustained by the Communist breakthrough, by its attempt to escape the logic of Capital*' (46). Indeed, Žižek will even go on to assert something like this of Stalinism, which arguably embodied the very worst extremes of Really Existing Socialism: 'Even the most "totalitarian" Stalinist ideology is radically ambiguous. While the universe of Stalinist politics was undoubtedly one of hypocrisy and arbitrary terror, in the late 1930s the great Soviet films (say, the Gorky trilogy) epitomized authentic solidarity for audiences across Europe' (146). This last example points towards the most important aspect of this notion of failure as success: that every phenomenon is in a way self-splitting, opens up room for its own critique. The dialectical conversion of failure into success does not ever come to an end, but rather suggests a kind of 'infinite judgement'.

FETISH (see also CAPITALISM, IDEOLOGY, LOGIC OF EXCEPTION)

The fetish, within the Freudian psychoanalytic tradition, is the denial of that lack necessary for a universal symbolic order: 'the *castrative* dimension of the phallic signifier is disavowed with the fetish, the "nothing" that necessarily accompanies its "all", the radical heterogeneity of this element relative to the *universality* that it is meant to incarnate' (7). Žižek will emphasize two things in particular with regard to this fetish: the first is that it is not a subjective illusion but is embodied in material practices, and for this reason it works despite – or, indeed, through – our apparent distance from it (the problem of 'cynicism' in contemporary societies). Thus it is not a matter of us directly believing in the magical properties of something like money, but rather of us behaving in our social interactions *as though* we do: 'the fetishist illusion resides in our real social life, not in our perception of it – a bourgeois subject knows very well that there is nothing magic about money, that

money is just an object which stands for a set of social relations, but he nevertheless *acts* in real life as if he believed that money is a magical thing' (254–5). The second is that we believe, not directly, but only through another (again, the question of cynicism). One distinctively modern form this takes is what Žižek calls 'interpassive leftism', in which the Western (often academic) Left idealizes the lives of people under Communism as embodying their own inner beliefs: 'what these leftists displace on to the Other is not a specific kind of activity, but their passive authentic experience. They allow themselves to pursue their well-paid academic careers in the West, while using an idealized Other (like Cuba, Nicaragua, Tito's Yugoslavia) as the stuff of their ideological fantasy: they dream through the Other, and rage against it if it in any way disturbs their complacency' (45).

IDEOLOGY (see also CAPITALISM, FETISH, INHERENT TRANSGRESSION, MESSAGE IN REVERSE)

As Žižek insists, 'ideology is always self-referential, that is, it always defines itself through some distance towards an Other dismissed and denounced as "ideological"' (162). This is why he is able to condemn, on the political Right or Centre, humanitarian interventions in such places as Kosovo or even Rwanda, which understand themselves as strictly non-ideological or depoliticized (219–20). It is also why, on the Left, he is able to condemn Westerners for criticizing Eastern Europe's move to capitalism instead of remaining true to some notion of socialism after the fall of Communism: 'There are few things more worthy of contempt, few attitudes more *ideological* (if this word has any meaning today, it should be applied here), than a tenured Western academic leftist arrogantly dismissing (or, even worse, 'understanding' in a patronizing way) an Eastern European from a Communist country who longs for Western liberal democracy and some consumer goods' (43). And indeed it is something like this 'interpassivity' that characterizes ideology today: while the other is condemned for an excess of belief, our supposedly 'non-ideological' stance is only possible because they believe in our place. That is, even in our personal relationship to ideology, our stance is characterized by a certain distance. As embodied in concrete social practices, it does not matter whether we actually believe – our belief is already assumed by the big Other: '[Althusser's] theory of ideological state apparatuses assigned the crucial role in the reproduction of an ideology to "external" rituals and practices with regard to

which "inner" beliefs and convictions are strictly secondary' (17). This is why the true 'anti-ideological' attitude is not at all to adopt a critical attitude towards ideology, but to seek to do away with any such distance. This is what Žižek sees at stake in those naïve, 'sincere' believers in Communism, who were in fact intolerable for the régime (17), in Václav Havel's notion of 'living in truth' (141) and in the Slovenian rock-performance group Laibach (65). The distinction might be made in this regard between so-called 'reality' TV shows, in which 'real people' falsely play themselves (275), and something like the 1920 restaging of the 1917 October Revolution, in which the participants, simply by playing their assigned roles, did away with any distance between them and the new social order (48–9, 130).

INFINITE JUDGEMENT (see also APPEARANCE, COINCIDENTIA OPPOSITORUM, FAILURE, INHERENT TRANSGRESSION, LOGIC OF EXCEPTION, MESSAGE IN REVERSE, REVOLUTION, THIRD WAY, TRUTH, UNIVERSAL EXCEPTION, YUGOSLAVIA)
Žižek provocatively refers to the 'infinite judgement' that 'asserts the speculative identity of these "useless" and "excessive" outbursts of violence that display nothing but a naked ("non-sublimated") hatred of Otherness, with the post-political multiculturalist universe of tolerance for difference in which no one is excluded' (214). What he means more generally by this is the Hegelian idea that every proper notion is 'self-relating', comes about only by standing in for its opposite. And Žižek uses this idea not only to speak of the way that certain processes when pushed beyond a certain limit begin to produce the opposite effects from those intended – as above, multiculturalist universalism leads to particularist violence, global capitalism leads to the impoverishment of the workers – but of the way that, from the beginning, these processes are possible only because of their opposite. To put this otherwise, every proper notion is subject to the universal law it proposes. There is no exception to universality, not even that place from where it is enunciated: a true universality is one in which he who proposes it is necessarily in breach of the law put forward. Hence, as Žižek can say of the recent American invasion of Iraq: '*The problem with the United States today is not that it represents a new global Empire, but that it does not, i.e., that, while pretending to be Imperial, it continues to act as a Nation-State, ruthlessly pursuing its own interests*' (303 n. 5). On the other hand, a

'good' example of this infinite judgement in action is Freud's analysis in *Moses and Monotheism*, in which he applies the Enlightenment gesture of psychoanalysis to his own Jewish identity: 'One has to gather the strength to repeat the exemplary heroic gesture of Freud who answered the threat of Fascist anti-Semitism by targeting Jews themselves and depriving them of their founding father: *Moses and Monotheism* is Freud's answer to Nazism' (19).

INHERENT TRANSGRESSION (see also CAPITALISM, IDEOLOGY, INFINITE JUDGEMENT, LOGIC OF EXCEPTION)
Inherent transgression is that operation by which an ideology captures us not directly but only through its apparent overturning or opposite: 'The deepest identification that holds a community together is not so much an identification with the Law that regulates its "normal" everyday rhythms, but rather identification with the specific form of transgression of the Law, of its suspension (in psychoanalytic terms, with the specific form of *enjoyment*)' (28). The idea derives from the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin and his understanding of the way societies required periodic fêtes and festivals, the upending of social conventions – that is, instituted days in which the usual social roles were reversed – although, as Žižek argues, Bakhtin's mistake was to present only an 'idealized' version of these transgressions (64). However, this idea is also consistent with Žižek's own understanding of the way ideology works today through our distance from it – our 'interpassive' belief through another, our apparent scepticism towards society's prevailing values. Some examples of this less 'idealized' form of inherent transgression that Žižek points to throughout his work include such things as the 'lynching parties' of the Deep South, where the white population was held together by their shared but denied complicity; the famous 'Code Red' of the film *A Few Good Men*, which permits certain 'illegal' actions in particular circumstances (63); and even the small acts of dishonesty and compromise that Havel sees as contributing to the hold of Communism in his famous essay 'The Power of the powerless' (8). The important ambiguity here – perhaps left slightly unexplored by Žižek – is the way that, if this 'inherent transgression' means that there is no way out of the system, that every transgression is recuperated, it also means that the Law is 'not-all', that it can work only through its other. As Žižek asks: 'Where does this splitting of Law into the written public Law and its underside, the

"unwritten", obscene secret code, come from? The answer is from the incomplete, "not-all" character of public Law itself: explicit, public rules do not suffice, so they must be supplemented by a clandestine, "unwritten" code aimed at those who, although they violate no public rules, maintain a kind of inner distance and do not truly identify with *l'ésprit du corps*' (63–4). In this regard, the notion of inherent transgression is also caught up in the relationship between the 'masculine' logic of a universal proved by an exception and a 'feminine' universality as itself exception.

INHUMAN (see also COMMUNISM, REVOLUTION)
There is a productive version of anti-humanism that runs throughout Žižek's work – which must be seen as opposed to the false empathy and feeling of others' pain of both Third Way politics and Peter Singer and Richard Rorty's versions of ethical pragmatism – but it must be understood very carefully. Take, for example, Žižek's treatment of Lenin's letter to Gorky, written before the revolution in 1913. Lenin repeatedly expresses concerns over Gorky's health. Why? Because, to Lenin's way of thinking, it was the failing of Gorky's health that explained his ideological deviations. For Lenin, the true revolutionary overcomes his body, or more precisely, it is cast aside as unimportant in the revolutionary cause: 'the spirit of a true Communist cannot deviate, because this spirit is immediately the self-awareness of historical necessity. Consequently, the only thing that can disturb or introduce disorder and deviation is his body – this fragile materiality serving to support another body, the sublime body, "made of a special stuff"' (69). We could perhaps compare this 'different fabric' to the Lacanian notion of the subject ($), which is a kind of non-pathological excess over and against its physical incarnation. This is why Žižek emphasizes throughout his work recent advances in genetics and the discovery of the human genome (313–14). The genome, like the revolutionary cause, simply uses the human body for its own impersonal ends. And yet, paradoxically – this is also Lacan's point regarding the subject, following Descartes – this genome is very close to what one might mean by the 'soul': it is what necessarily remains excessive within human experience, separating us from ourselves. In this regard, it might be compared as well to the Freudian death drive, that which takes us beyond ourselves and leaves us 'between two deaths'.

LOGIC OF EXCEPTION (see also CAPITONNAGE, DEMOCRACY, FETISH, INFINITE JUDGEMENT, INHERENT TRANSGRESSION, UNIVERSAL EXCEPTION)
Close to the notion of 'inherent transgression' is what we might call the 'logic of exception'. Instances of this discussed in Žižek's work include Western societies' 'outsourcing' of both their working classes and the torture required for the 'war against terrorism'; America's refusal to allow its citizens to be tried before the Tribunal at the Hague, while insisting that other countries do; and wealthy countries insisting on trade reforms in the Third World, while failing to enact these same measures themselves (296–7). In each case what we are speaking about is an apparently universal principle being enunciated, but that place from where it is enunciated somehow being excluded or exempted. Žižek writes of this empty place that allows the making-equivalent of all others within multiculturalism: 'that of a *symptom*. When one is dealing with a universal structuring principle, one always automatically assumes that – in principle, precisely – it is possible to apply this principle to all of its potential elements, and that the empirical non-realization of the principle is merely a matter of contingent circumstances. A symptom ... is an element that ... *must* remain an exception, that is, the point of suspension of the universal principle: if the universal principle were to apply also to this point, the universal system itself would disintegrate ... the properly capitalist utopia is that, through appropriate measures (for progressive liberals, affirmative action; for conservatives, a return to self-reliance and family values), this "exception" could be – in the long term and in principle, at least – abolished' (171). As Žižek suggests here – and this point is perhaps too little understood – it would never be a matter of entirely doing away with the exception. The 'universal exception' is not simply opposed to the logic of the exception, nor really some principle outside of it. Rather, it is the logic of exception endlessly applied to itself, where each time we find the exception that allows the exception to be stated and reveal that any stated universality is only another exception. This 'opposition' can be seen in the distinction Žižek makes between 'globalization' and 'universalization'. 'Globalization' remains a universality defined by an exception (whether it be the exclusion of the working class, the Third World or 'fundamentalist' ethnic or religious minorities), while 'universalization', although always defined by an exception, is also an attempt to think that for which this exception stands in: 'Here one should oppose *globalization* to

universalization: globalization ... is precisely the name for the emerging post-political logic that progressively precludes the dimension of universality at work in politicization proper. The paradox is that there is no *universal* proper without the process of political litigation of the part of no-part, of an out-of-joint entity presenting/manifesting itself as the stand-in for the universal' (193).

LUKÁCS/ADORNO/BRECHT (see also MARX/ALTHUSSER/BADIOU, STALINISM)

What does this trilogy of authors have in common? What does putting them together like this allow us to think? What is at stake in each of them is a certain disavowed relationship to Stalinism. Žižek emphasizes this several times with regard to Adorno: '"Stalinism" was a traumatic topic on which the Frankfurt School *had* to remain silent – silence was the only way for its members to retain their underlying solidarity with Western liberal democracy, without losing their mask of radical leftism' (143). (And Žižek will go on to speak of the way that the Frankfurt School precisely served as support for the régime in the ex-Yugoslavia.) With regard to Brecht, Žižek will on the one hand approve of his support for the East German government's violent suppression of the workers' strikes of 1953, which proved to him the 'authenticity' of its revolutionary determination. On the other hand, he will also remark that Brecht's gesture was disingenuous: 'as soon as the situation got really serious and the socialist system was effectively threatened, [Brecht] publicly supported the system' (44). Finally, the same ambivalence can also be seen with regard to Žižek's attitude towards Lukács. On the one hand, he seeks to redeem the early Lukács (of, for instance, *History and Class Consciousness*) from the charge of being 'a determinist "Hegelian" Marxist' (106). On the other hand, he does acknowledge that this ambiguous relation to Stalinism can be seen in the later Lukács who, 'in the gesture of a personal Thermidor withdrew and turned to the more specialized areas of Marxist aesthetics and literary theory, justifying his public support of Stalinist politics in the terms of the Hegelian critique of the Beautiful Soul' (98).

MARX/ALTHUSSER/BADIOU (see also APPEARANCE, LUKÁCS/ADORNO/BRECHT)

This conjunction of names allows us to address something surprising, which is often overlooked in Žižek's work: that for Žižek a properly

materialist analysis is not a matter of looking for some 'deeper' cause, of explaining apparently superficial cultural phenomena through a more profound socio-economic (or, in Žižek's case, psychoanalytic) explanation. Indeed, if anything, the opposite is the case. The radical insight of analysis is that the truth lies in *appearance*, that it is a matter of getting rid of the idea of some deeper cause, something behind the surface in which the answer is to be found (if there is a missing figure in Žižek's list of references, it is perhaps Nietzsche). As Žižek writes apropos of Marx, for example: 'Marx long ago emphasized that the critical test of any historico-materialist analysis is not its ability to reduce ideological or political phenomena to their "actual" economic foundations, but to cover the same path in the opposite direction – that is, to show why these material interests articulate themselves in just such an ideal form' (39). This can be seen in such things as Žižek's emphasis (against Marx himself, it must be admitted) that the fetish reaches its highest form when it is dematerialized (231, 276); his argument, derived from Althusser, that the power of ideological state apparatuses lies in their subjects' external behaviour and not their internal beliefs (17); and in his understanding, indebted to Badiou, of the revolutionary Event as an inherently fragile, fleeting circumstance, which exists only for those who are faithful to it (199). In all of this, Žižek seeks to break with any notion of a 'conspiracy' behind things, of some secret agent pulling the strings. A proper critique of ideology must first of all forego any such transferential relationship to the big Other. In this sense, the position of the materialist thinker is akin to that of the analyst (or the saint): they grasp a world in which actions are underwritten only by themselves, in which an act only retrospectively leads to its cause.

MESSAGE IN REVERSE (see also COINCIDENTIA OPPOSITORUM, IDEOLOGY, INFINITE JUDGEMENT)

Žižek takes the well-known Lacanian dictum of 'the speaker gets back from the addressee his own message in its true, inverted form' and applies it to a number of specific situations. As part of the 'coincidence of opposites' that he sees characterizing contemporary society, he will speak of the way that, for example, the violent skinhead repeats the clichés explaining his actions back to the sociologist, who in turn 'receives his own message in its inverted, true form' (216). More generally, in the election of Jörg Haider's Freedom Party in Austria the false multicultural tolerance of something like Tony Blair's Third Way 'gets its own message back in

inverted form' (41). In a more extended development, Žižek will speak – following the French political theorist Jacques Rancière – of the way that, having mailed off their excess, useless 'human rights' to the poor and oppressed, thus depoliticizing their struggles and rendering them helpless, this letter returns in the guise of a series of intractable dilemmas for the West in its 'humanitarian interventions' (221–2). Žižek's point in all of this – this is the 'lesson' of Lacan's original treatment of the theme – is that our actions inevitably lead to unforeseen consequences that are in fact their true meaning. We cannot deny these consequences, for – in a manner akin to Hegelian 'infinite judgement' – we must see that they apply to us, that we are ultimately responsible for them. As Žižek writes: 'In this precise sense, the dissolution of transference designates the moment when the arrow of the question that the analysand pointed at the analyst turns back toward the analysand himself' (66).

PARALLAX VIEW (see also APPEARANCE, COINCIDENTIA OPPOSITORUM)

In a world of dialectical negativity, in which we cannot grasp anything without also grasping its opposite, the correct mode of perception is the 'parallax view'. This term, originally taken from the Japanese philosopher Kojin Karatani, but having precedents in Adorno, indicates an attempt to keep both alternatives in mind at once. The truth is not to be found in either one of them, but only in their impossible simultaneity. Žižek can evoke this 'parallax view' in amusing ways: in his essay on Bill Gates, for example, he speaks of the way that, just as with those postcards that when tilted a certain way reveal a naked woman beneath her clothes, by looking at the Microsoft boss awry we can see a 'sinister and threatening dimension' (233). More substantially, Žižek characterizes the relationship between politics and economics, not only in Communism but also in capitalism, as being like that famous optical trick of 'two faces or a vase': 'one sees either two faces or a vase, never both of them – in other words, one has to make a choice ... if, for Lacan, there is no sexual relationship, then, for Marxism proper, there is no relationship between economy and politics, no "metalanguage" enabling us to grasp both two levels from the same neutral standpoint, although – or, rather, *because* – these two levels are inextricably intertwined' (247). Or, with regard to the alternative between 'terrorism' and the 'war on terrorism' proposed after 11 September: 'The WTC attacks confront us again with the necessity of resisting the temptation of a double blackmail ... the only solution is to reject this very opposition and to adopt both positions simultaneously, which can only be done if one resorts to the dialectical category of *totality*' (282). The difficult aspect of this parallax view – and the true Hegelian lesson implicit in it – is that it is ultimately not a question of looking for some deeper commonality beneath these alternatives, or of somehow mediating between them. The truth lies not in any resolution of the split, but in this split itself: 'If, then, there is appearance (as distinct from reality) because there is a (logically) prior split inherent to reality itself, is it also that "reality" itself is ultimately nothing but a (self-)split of appearance (the "parallax" thesis)?' (321)

REAL (see also ACT/ORGANIZATION, ANTAGONISM, REVOLUTION, VIOLENCE)

Žižek cites French philosopher Alain Badiou's diagnosis of a certain '"passion for the Real [*la passion du réel*]" as the key feature of the twentieth century: in contrast to the utopian or "scientific" projects and ideals, and plans about the future, of the nineteenth century, this century aimed at delivering the thing itself, at directly realizing the longed-for New Order' (267). Examples of this 'passion for the Real' that Žižek provides in his work include the celebration of face-to-face trench warfare in World War I, the perverse universe of Stalinism and even crashing the airplanes into the World Trade Center. However, this 'passion for the Real' and its attempt to 'directly realize' the Thing itself is more ambiguous that it appears. Although Žižek approves of the Real of social revolution, arguing that any genuine challenge to the social order is impossible without it, it is also not sufficient – or, more precisely, this Real can be understood in two different ways. Either this 'passion for the Real' becomes a form of passing enthusiasm, which ends up as merely a 'pure semblance of political theatre', or it is formalized in a political organization that attempts to remain faithful to it. These – as both violence and organization – are the two sides of the Real Žižek speaks of throughout: 'In Lacanian theory, the Real has two principal sides. One is the Real as a remainder that is impossible to symbolize, a scrap, the refuse of the symbolic, a hole in the Other ...; the other is the Real as writing, construct, number and mathème'. He then goes on to say: 'These two sides perfectly correspond to the opposition fascism/Stalinism' (5). Indeed, we could even say that fascism is either one of these sides as such, while Leninism–Stalinism is the necessary simultaneity of both.

REVOLUTION (see also ACT/ORGANIZATION, COMMUNISM, INFINITE JUDGEMENT, INHUMAN, REAL, STALINISM, THINKING, VIOLENCE)

Today, in our liberal democracies, the very possibility of revolution seems unthinkable: we can have the endless critique or questioning of the system, but nothing is fundamentally changed. As Žižek writes: 'what is problematic with this position of depoliticizing the revolt is that it precludes any actual radical political change: the existing political régime is never effectively undermined or overturned, just endlessly "questioned"' (123 n. 32). However, revolution proper is never simply this overturning or doing away with the existing order, which we might associate with a period of revolutionary enthusiasm or even violence (although this too is necessary). Something else is required that is more difficult to grasp: 'In this suspension of goal-orientated instrumental activity, we effectively get a kind of Bataillean "unrestrained expenditure" ... [t]he pious desire to deprive the revolution of this excess is simply the desire to have a revolution without revolution. However, this "unrestrained expenditure" is not enough: in a revolution proper, such a display of what Hegel would have called "abstract negativity" merely, as it were, wipes the slate clean for the second act, the imposition of a New Order.' (130). But what exactly is meant by revolution as at once the wiping of the slate clean for a new order ('abstract negativity') and the imposition of a new order (what we might call, following Hegel, the 'negation of negation')? Perhaps Žižek's ultimate example of revolution, which occurs several times in this volume, is paradoxically the *restaging* of the 1917 October Revolution in Russia some three years afterwards as a kind of theatrical event (48–9, 130). What this restaging suggests for Žižek is revolution as the constant wiping of the slate clean in an 'infinite judgement' that keeps on applying the lessons of the revolution to itself. The bureaucratic implementation of the revolution is not simply the following of some pre-established plan but a radical questioning of the revolution's own assumptions, the field in which the original decision took place. 'And this brings us to the key question: how are we to construct a social space within which revolution can stabilize itself? Perhaps, one of the options is to pursue the trend of self-organized collectives in areas outside the Law. Arguably the greatest literary monument to such a utopia comes from an unexpected source – Mario Vargas Llosa's *The War of the End of the World*, a novel about Canudos, an outlaw community deep in the Brazilian backlands, which was home to

prostitutes, freaks, beggars, bandits and the most wretched of the poor. Canudos ... was a utopian space without money, property, taxes and marriage' (51). We could even paraphrase Žižek by saying that the desire for Leninist revolution without its corresponding Stalinist bureaucracy is the desire for 'revolution without revolution'.

STALINISM (see also LUKÁCS/ADORNO/BRECHT, REVOLUTION, VIOLENCE)

Žižek repeats it several times: Stalinism is neither a contingent deviation of Leninism, having nothing essentially to do with it, nor its logical outcome, the only way it could have turned out. As he writes: 'One should oppose both temptations: the Trotskyite notion that Stalinism was ultimately a contingent deviation, as well as the notion that the Communist project is, in its very core, totalitarian' (128); or elsewhere: 'the great task today is to think the necessity of the passage from Leninism to Stalinism without denying the tremendous emancipatory potential of the Event of October' (99). If we can say this, Stalinism represents the 'infinite judgement' of Leninism, the application of its own logic to itself through the necessity of organization. Stalinism thus embodies the inherent *risk* of Leninism in having to turn its original revolutionary enthusiasm into an ongoing political organization. It is in this sense that Žižek can approve of the violence of Stalinism: it proves that it was serious about the desire to achieve revolution. This is even why he can note with approval that the régime changed its mind three times over its alliances during World War II: it again demonstrated that something 'authentic' was going on. Along the lines of Žižek's remarks on revolution, we might say that Stalinism was precisely the necessary 'second stage' of Leninism: the 'imposition of a New Order' (130). But, if there is a 'mistake in Stalinism', it is that it sees this second stage as separate from the first. If Leninism is always in a sense 'subjective', 'performative', Stalinism believes it can become 'objective', necessary: 'the Kautskyist–Stalinist Party addresses the proletariat from a position of "objective" knowledge intended to supplement the proletarian subjective (self-)experience of suffering and exploitation , i.e., the split here is the split between proletarian "spontaneous" subjective self-experience and objective knowledge about one's social situation, while, in an authentic Leninist Party, the split is thoroughly subjective, i.e., the Party addresses the proletariat from a radically subjective, engaged position of the lack that prevents the proletarians from achieving their "proper

place" in the social edifice' (111). That is, although Stalinism should occupy the position of the Analyst vis-à-vis Leninism, it in fact seeks to occupy that of the University: 'Stalinist discourse presents a neutral-objective knowledge as its agent, while the repressed truth of this knowledge remains S_1, the performative of the master' (76).

THINKING (see also ACT/ORGANIZATION, REVOLUTION)
An unexpected strain of Žižek's work, at odds with the cliché of him endlessly throwing off wild revolutionary schemes, is his continued emphasis on the power of *thinking*. To this extent, as he himself says of Freud and Lacan, Žižek remains faithful to the Enlightenment: 'the leftist Enlightenment is defined by the wager that culture can serve as an efficient answer to the gun: the outburst of raw violence is a kind of *passage à l'acte* rooted in the subject's ignorance – as such, it can be counteracted by the struggle whose main form is *reflective knowledge*' (179–80). This 'reflective' thinking is to be opposed in the first instance to the desire to act immediately, which merely reproduces the existing coordinates and perpetuates what it is opposed to, functioning as its 'inherent transgression': 'I am therefore tempted to reverse Marx's thesis 11: the first task today is precisely *not* to succumb to the temptation to act, to intervene directly and change things ... but to question the hegemonic ideological coordinates. If, today, one follows a direct call to act, this act will not be performed in an empty space – it will be an act *within* the hegemonic ideological coordinates' (238). But in fact Žižek's ultimate point – in the 'coincidence of opposites' that marks his work – is that thinking is *already* a revolutionary act, or more exactly that the discipline of thinking is like the organization that is the true form of revolution: 'Lukács advocates the dialectical unity/mediation of theory and practice, in which even the utmost contemplative stance is eminently "practical" (in the sense of being embedded in the totality of social [re]production and thus expressing a certain "practical" stance of how to survive within this totality), and, on the other hand, even the most "practical" stance implies a certain "theoretical" framework; it materializes a set of implicit ideological propositions' (113).

THIRD WAY (see also COINCIDENTIA OPPOSITORUM, INFINITE JUDGEMENT)
What is Žižek's objection to the Third Way (that form of modern democratic politics that seeks to find a middle path between the

alternatives of socialism and capitalism, and exemplified by such governments as those of Blair in Britain, Schröder in Germany and Clinton in the United States)? It is that it seeks to deny the fundamental antagonism that characterizes the social, believing that capitalism can one day be rendered harmonious and unified, or more simply that there is no alternative to capitalism: 'The idea of a "third way" emerged at the very moment when, at least in the West, all other alternatives, from old-style conservativism to radical social democracy, crumbled in the face of the triumphant onslaught of global capitalism and its notion of liberal democracy. The true message of the notion of the Third Way is that there is no "second way", no alternative to global capitalism, so that, in a kind of mocking pseudo-Hegelian 'negation of negation', the Third Way brings us back to the first and only way. Is this not global capitalism with a human face?' (149). If put into these terms, not only would it be a matter of avoiding the 'blackmail' of the existing alternatives within capitalism, but also of rejecting any 'third' choice somewhere between them. Indeed, the true lesson of Hegelian dialectics is that the very attempt to create a universal necessarily brings about an exception, and this is the case with the Third Way. For what characterizes the period of its emergence in the 1990s after the collapse of Communism is a series of nationalist racisms and religious fundamentalisms, which must be understood as the exact equivalent of its false multicultural inclusiveness: 'The "disappearance" of the working class then fatally unleashes its reappearance in the guise of aggressive nativism. Liberals and populists meet on common ground; all they talk about is identity. Is not Haider himself the best Hegelian example of the "speculative identity" of the tolerant multiculturalist and the postmodern racist?' (40). In fact, in just that kind of 'infinite judgement' that Žižek often speaks of, there was a real 'third way' that emerged at the time of Communism, a brief 'vanishing mediator' that was swept away either by the drive towards capitalism or the revival of nationalism: '*Neues Forum* consisted of groups of passionate intellectuals who took socialism seriously and were prepared to put everything at stake in order to destroy the compromised system and replace it with a utopian "third way" beyond capitalism and "Really Existing Socialism"' (17).

TRUTH (see also APPEARANCE, INFINITE JUDGEMENT, UNIVERSAL EXCEPTION)
Žižek throughout his writings asserts the possibility of Truth. This is against what he sees as both the postmodern relativization of Truth

and the vulgar materialist attempt to reduce Truth to an effect of its socio-historical determinants. As he says of the former: 'We live in a "postmodern" era in which truth-claims as such are dismissed as expressions of hidden power mechanisms ... The very question, "Is it true?", apropos of some statement is supplanted by another question: "Under what power conditions can this statement be uttered?" What we get, instead of universal truth, is a multitude of perspectives, or, as it is fashionable to put it today, "narratives"' (240). As he says of the latter: 'Lukács' point is precisely to undermine this false alternative of historicist relativism (there is no neutral knowledge of "objective reality", since all knowledge is biased, embedded in a specific "social context") and the distinction between the socio-historical conditions and the inherent truth-value of a body of knowledge (even if a certain theory emerged within a specific social context, this context provides only external conditions, which in no way diminish or undermine the "objective truth" of its propositions ...)' (115). However, if Žižek does assert a kind of Truth, it is not so much 'objective' as 'subjective', does not so much speak of the world from somewhere outside of it, introducing a split between it and the world, as from within it, introducing a split between the world and itself. To put this another way, the Truth in Žižek is always *engaged*. It does not erect a division between the Universal and the Exception that speaks of it, but seeks to cross all boundaries in ceaselessly turning upon itself: 'Lenin's wager – today, in our era of postmodern relativism, more actual than ever – is that universal truth and partisanship, the gesture of taking sides, are not only not mutually exclusive, but condition each other: in a concrete situation, its *universal* truth can only be articulated from a thoroughly *partisan* position – truth is by definition one-sided' (245). This particular, engaged Truth is to be seen in such things as the great emancipatory movements led by Gandhi and Martin Luther King (148, 222–3), in de Gaulle's appeal to the 'French people' from exile during World War II (198–9) and elsewhere in the identification with Jews (or Palestinians).

UNIVERSAL EXCEPTION (see also ANTAGONISM, APPEARANCE, CLASS STRUGGLE, DEMOCRACY, INFINITE JUDGEMENT, LOGIC OF EXCEPTION, TRUTH)

Žižek outlines the process involved in Hegelian dialectics, which is not at all a final 'synthesis' of differences, but an ongoing process of continuing

to fold the result over on to itself, attempting to find within each universality the exception that makes it possible: 'each genus has only one species, the other species is the paradoxical negative of the genus itself. Just as in the instance of the "limit case" of the logic of the signifier, the All is divided into its Part and a remainder that is not nothing but a paradoxical, impossible, contradictory entity' (77). Žižek then goes on to draw a distinction between this proper Hegelian conception and its Stalinist perversion: 'Unlike the Hegelian division, however, instead of *including* through its specification/determination, the genus *excludes* its own absence and "negativity"' (78). But all of this needs to be read very carefully. Two points in particular are worth noting: first, that this logic of exception is only the 'limit case' of the usual logic of the universal proved through exception; second, that this 'universal exception' is to be attained only through a process of inclusion (of showing each time how the universal is only an exception) and not exclusion (of holding on to an exception from which the universal is stated). Accordingly, when Žižek says that the universal exception is the bringing-together of the universal and the exception, of directly embodying the universal in the exception, this is to be understood as a goal to be aimed at rather than something to be directly accomplished: 'Politics proper thus always involves a kind of short-circuit between the universal and the particular; it involves the paradox of a singular that appears as a stand-in for the universal ... This *singulier universel* is a group that, although without any fixed place in the social edifice ... presents itself as the immediate embodiment of *society as such*, in its universality' (183–4). Žižek provides a number of examples of this universal exception throughout his work: the networks of the new virtual technologies (236); the proletariat within Marxist theory (101–2); the Palestinians in the West Bank and slum-dwellers across the globe (225 n. 25). However, as Žižek equally insists, each of these is also *not* it, their exceptional character is not some inherent property – as he says, for example, of the proletariat: 'the overlapping of the Universal and the Particular in the proletariat does not stand for their immediate identity ...: the universal revolutionary potential is rather "inscribed into the very being of the proletariat" as its inherent radical split' (111). Nevertheless, this failure does not have the logic of the Hegelian 'bad infinity' or 'inherent transgression'. He is not simply against the American attempt to inaugurate world democracy, beginning with Iraq. Instead, his point is that the United States should be subject to the

very universality it appeals to, that there is precisely *no* exception to this rule of democracy: 'In Hegelese, *the existence of the true Universal* (as opposed to the false concrete universality of the all-encompassing global Order of Being) *is that of an endless and incessantly divisive struggle*; it is ultimately the division between the two notions (and material practices) of universality' (199).

VIOLENCE (see also ACT/ORGANIZATION, REAL, REVOLUTION, STALINISM)

Žižek follows the French political theorist Étienne Balibar's critique of 'standard Hegelian-Marxism' for its 'conversion-theory' of violence: the fact that violence must necessarily be sublated in the political process, eventually to be seen only as a momentary stage within an overall 'rational' progress. And yet, read carefully, neither Žižek nor Balibar proposes a direct, unmediated, unsublimated violence as opposed to this. Rather, the theoretical task is always double: 'According to Balibar, for necessarily structural reasons, Marxism is unable to conceive of an excess of violence that cannot be integrated into the narrative of historical progress... The task then becomes double: to deploy a theory of historical violence as something that cannot be mastered, instrumentalized by any political agent, which threatens to engulf this very agent in a self-destructive cycle, and – the other side of the same task – to pose the question of how to "civilize" revolution, of how to make the revolutionary process itself a "civilizing" force' (213–14). To put this another way, on the one hand, violence is necessary as a sign of the commitment to seizing and maintaining political power: 'Violence is the necessary supplement to power' (217). On the other hand, violence without organization is not enough; it can in fact be the very way *not* to do something, a surface action that hides a true passivity: '[fascist violence] is a violence whose aim is to prevent the true change' (218) – and perhaps the same criticism might apply not only to the violence of the Islamic fundamentalists but also to that of the American invasion of Iraq.

YUGOSLAVIA (see also COINCIDENTIA OPPOSITORUM, INFINITE JUDGEMENT)

The first question to ask – in so far as it is not merely the name for a once-existing nation-state, but a kind of ideological fantasy – is where exactly *is* Yugoslavia? Throughout his work, Žižek is eager to dispel the fantasy that constructs the Balkans in terms of its identification either

with *Mitteleuropa* or with the undifferentiated 'Slavic hordes'. It is a fantasy shared both by those within the old Yugoslavia and by the West itself. For the former, their assertion of long-standing national identity is false, nothing but a response to present-day political exigencies: 'In this sense, the tale of ethnic roots is a long way from being the "myth of origins": what is "national heritage" if not a kind of ideological fossil created retroactively by the ruling ideology in order to blur its present antagonism?' (30) And for the West too, this image of ancient ethnic quarrels is a self-serving illusion: 'What [films like Emir Kusturica's *Underground*] offer to the Western liberal gaze is precisely what this gaze wants to see in the Balkan War – the spectacle of a timeless, incomprehensible, mythical cycle of passions, in contrast to decadent and anaemic Western life' (163). For Žižek, the proper point to be made is that these two fantasies are self-sustaining: the Yugoslavian resort to national identity is staged for and only possible under the Western gaze. As he concludes: 'So the lesson is that the alternative between the New World Order and the neo-racist nationalism opposing it is a false one: these are the two sides of the same coin – the New World Order itself breeds the monstrosities that it fights' (266).

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