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CONTENTS:

PRELOM

The journal *Prelom* was founded in 2001 as a publication of the Belgrade Center for Contemporary Art. In the past five years (seven part in five volumes) *Prelom* has become a space for the critique of political constellations within social theory and political philosophy, of contemporary art and film in today's post-Yugoslav context. It is a collective effort to problematize, theorize and fight against various, heterogenous and paradoxical forms of contemporary neo-liberal capitalism. In the summer of 2004 *Prelom* lost its former institutional support and the editorial board founded an independent organization – Prelom kolektiv, establishing itself as publisher and laying the foundations for integrating and expanding other activities beyond just the production of the *Prelom* journal (exhibitions, conferences, discussions, etc.).

AGAINST
THE
POST-
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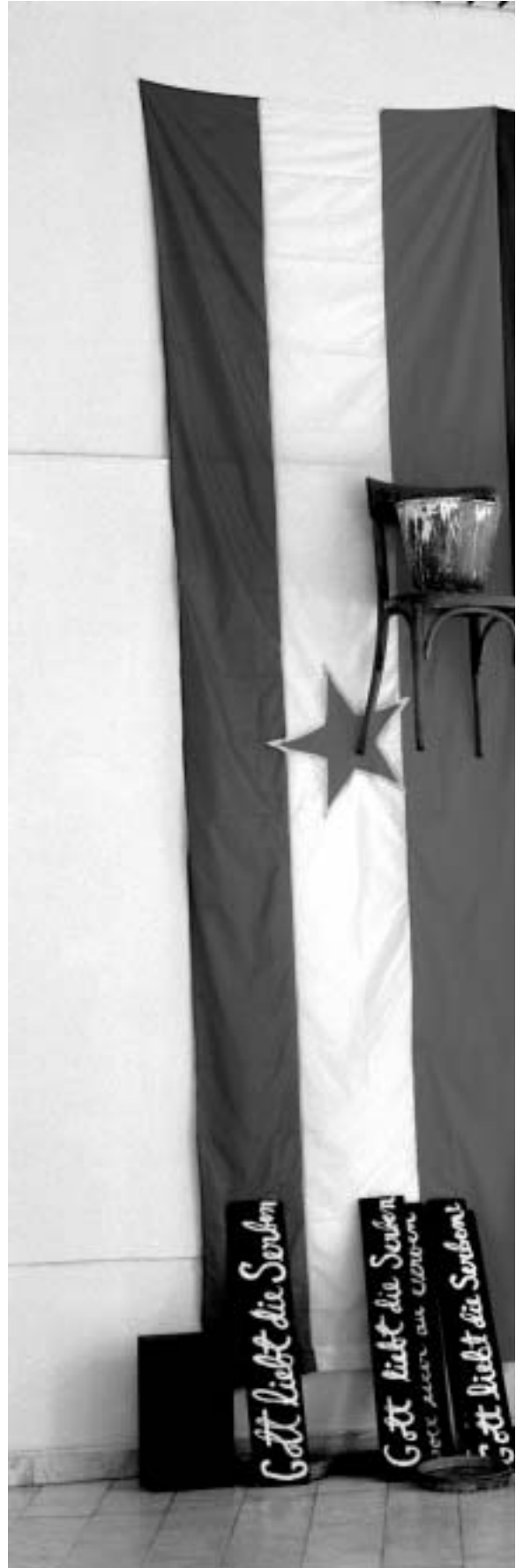
Raša Todosijević, *Gott liebt die Serben*, 1993

Dominant post-socialist "rationality" serves the purpose of rendering Socialism, the Communist movement and Marxism into something belonging definitively to the past. Thereby making historical, revolutionary events nowadays appear as some kind of childish illusion, unrealistic daydreams which were solely enabled by the existence of the paternal figure of welfare state (no matter whether "democratic-" or "party-") that – by taking care of the everyday needs of its subjects – provided the leisure time for rebellious ideas and actions. Dominant neo-liberalism presents itself as a wake-up call, a reminder to everyone that it is time to "get serious" and to take responsibility of oneself, meaning to market ourselves, to become the so-called "prosumers", to be at once, our own labor-force and employees, as well as financial, marketing and PR managers. Therefore, not to "find" but to "create" jobs, as well as to "self-organize" health security and pension funds – in short, to wager an everyday and never-ending fight for our evermore precarious place on the "open market". However, the memory of those rebellious times and, more importantly, the practical need for some tangible alternative to the contemporary capitalist system endures. Therefore, items, images and symbols of the revolutionary past – "memorabilia" of those "naive" and "overly-enthusiastic" events – are readily recycled into artifacts for consumption circulating within the numerous retro-vogues profitable for the growing nostalgia industry. The constraint of perceiving Socialism in this nostalgic mode aims precisely for the enclosing and neutralization of any imaginable form of radical change.

It is against this post-Socialist reason for "nostalgia" and, especially, so-called "Yugo-nostalgia" that *Prelom* is directing its critique. It aims at extricating the revolutionary historical effects of the SFRY project out of neo-liberal anti-Communist grip by re-thinking the (con-)sequences of events: the People's Liberation struggle – revolution – self-management Socialism. This retrospective view is certainly not just some *aide-mémoire* of the lost possibility of "living together", but also a viable historical experience for tackling current pressing issues. It shows the possibilities of breaking with still present political anachronisms in the post-Yugoslav space – from the reactionary nationalist apotheosis of the "fatherland", *via* various religious "revivals" and the "re-traditionalization", to liberal political and economic dogmas that scarcely conceal the brutality of "privatization". This kind of break is quite different from the multicultural emancipation conceived as the "basic human right" to assert one's own specific and irreducible cultural identity – which is, in fact, effectuating nationalist ravages of nation-state building, no matter how a particular "political elite" is inclined to "democratic procedures" and manifestly committed to adopt the "standards" of the European Union. In this perspective the post-Yugoslav space reveals itself as a symptom of the EU project with its own racisms, nationalisms, exclusions and fear-hatred complex. The following texts represent an effort to reflect on the political form that is nowadays foreclosed by the contemporary anti-Communist consensus – precisely that political form which is so "self-evidently" impossible within the dominant neo-liberal post-Socialist rationality – *revolution*.

PROJECT YUGOSLAVIA:
THE DIALECTICS OF THE REVOLUTION

Ozren Pupovac

How can we, today, think Yugoslavia? And, indeed, can we think Yugoslavia today? Is it possible at all to evoke in thought that radical political gesture of 1943?

One cannot but bring out a negative starting point here. Because these questions immediately confront us with imposing difficulties.

In the first place, it is clear that they stand opposed to the very givenness of the historical and ideological conjuncture which we inhabit today. Does not our immediate present, the present of the post-Yugoslav space, already proscribe the very formulation of the question of Yugoslavia? Is it not that the essential ideological consensus upon which this space is constituted, permeated as it is with anti-communist discourses and with an entire bestiary of political anachronisms – from the reactionary nationalist folklore to the political and economic dogmas of liberal capitalism - rules out by its very definition any reference, if only in thought, to Yugoslavia and to the politics that this project embodied? And if a peculiar ideological embargo is not enough, is it not that this same reference readily evokes, at the practical level, an entire variety of repressive sanctions by the juridical and political apparatuses of the State constructs established from the vestiges of the Yugoslav federation? As if the very consistency of these frail political constructions depends on a specific prohibition of thinking.

But the problem of thinking Yugoslavia is not simply the one in which we can grasp the inanity of the discourse of mediocre ideologues and lawyers so predominant these days, in which all the prosaic political falsities with which we confronted on a daily basis reach a definite point of disgrace. The problem of thinking Yugoslavia is a problem internal to thought as such.

This can be perhaps most vividly discerned from a philosophical syntagm appearing shortly before the demise of the historical entity which bore the name Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. It was Zoran Đinđić, a good student of Konstanz philosophy, and a tragic figure of Serbian politics, who seems to have formulated the final sentence on the political construction perishing before his eyes: *Yugoslavia as an unfinished State*.[1]

1 See Đinđić, Zoran (1988) *Jugoslavija kao nedovršena država (Yugoslavia as an Unfinished State),* Novi Sad: Književna Zajednica Novog Sada.

This political philosopheme was tremendously productive: it opened the door to all the commonplace judgements of the present on the "disfunctionality", the "fragility", the "irreality", the "unnaturalness" of Yugoslav socialist federation. Something essential was lacking to the Yugoslav project, an error was inscribed in its very structure, and this is why its necessary faith was one of failure and demise. And, as Đinđić would add, this constitutive mistake, this fundamental lack, was a matter of an inadequate articulation of sovereignty to the political community. What was driving Yugoslavia towards its necessary ruin was its incapacitated statehood.

But it is not the ideological effect of this conception that matters here - even if its consequences were catastrophic, especially if we take into account that the wars of the post-Yugoslav decade were fought precisely in the name of different ideas of "finishing the Yugoslav State". Beyond the arrogant normativity of Đinđić's syntagm, beyond its apparent apology of the political vulgate of present-day capitalism - the "self-evidence" of the liberal-democratic, parliamentary nation-State - this "concluding" thesis on Yugoslavia is important in another sense. Because what this proposition exposes is the precise point where thought folds in front the reality of the Yugoslav project. This is what Đinđić succeeds in elaborating: the ultimate point of unthinkability of Yugoslavia.

Yugoslavia as an unfinished state: this formulation of the problem is not only theoretically and historically false (indeed, Đinđić's falsity is meticulous, as he does manage to assume a precise negation of the historical essence of the Yugoslav project). It represents a general failure of thinking as such. Because Đinđić's syntagm points us to the exact moment in which the entire field of thought named political philosophy collapses in its encounter with the reality of politics which founds the Yugoslav project. And in this, we can start noting the magnitude of the problem of thinking Yugoslavia.

How can a revolutionary political subjectivity, one which is founded upon the production of radically new, be subsumed under the abstract jurisdiction of the philosopher's idea? How can a mode of thinking in the real, a thinking which attempts to transcend the entire horizon of the historical and political present, be seized by any transcendental philosophical construction?

Đinđić's attempt to read the essence of the project Yugoslavia in terms of the ultimate static figure of the "community of the State" reveals the indignity of the entire endeavour of political philosophy. Has this idealist negation of thinking ever succeeded in fabricating anything other than static, mortifying notions? Has the entire philosophical construction of the "political" succeeded in producing anything other than a theoretical legitimation of the *status quo*?

What is really at stake here, however, is not only a conceptual, or even purely epistemological difficulty. The unthinkability of Yugoslavia which appears in Đinđić's syntagm is a problem which pertains to a specific practical dimension of thought. Because the impossibility of thinking Yugoslavia is itself a real, practical problem. It is the problem which Yugoslav philosophy once knew how to call by its proper name: *the thinking of the revolution*.[2]

2 See Petrović, Gajo (1978) *Mišljenje revolucije (The Thinking of the Revolution),* Zagreb: Naprijed.

We can put this differently: the impossibility of posing the question of Yugoslavia today, or in 1988 when Đinđić was writing his book, is nothing but the reflection of the impossibility of formulating such a question in 1943, or in 1918. This impossibility is real. It is the problem of the impossible demand, the demand for the overcoming of the given situation. Which means that the very question of Yugoslavia is inseparable from the subject of the revolution.

It is precisely to the understanding of this peculiar subjectivity, which is both a mode of thinking, and, at the same time, a mode of practice, a *revolutionary method*, that this analysis is dedicated.

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Let us begin with a statement of fact: Yugoslavia which emerges in the course of Second World War is a revolutionary creation. It proceeds from the demand which instructs the revolutionary subject, from the demand for the overcoming of the existing state of affairs. The explosion of this demand takes shape in the process of formation of the Partisan movement, which unites the people of Yugoslavia in their rebellion against the occupation by the Axis powers in 1941 and their fight against the capitulation and collaboration of the apparatuses of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The subject of this demand has a singular name - *the Struggle for the Liberation of the Yugoslav Peoples* (*Narodno-oslobodilačka borba*).

But this qualification leaves us in front of a dilemma: should we read the essence of the Yugoslav project in the antagonistic relation out of which it was constituted, in the act of resistance and in the struggle for liberation, in the violent confrontation with the enemy; or rather, does its essence lie in the constitution of the political bond, in the movement of the masses, in the desire for the unification of a collective? What should the emphasis be placed upon - the figure of the Two or the figure of the One?

This dilemma holds the key to an understanding of the historical significance, and indeed the singularity of the Yugoslav project. It holds the key to the place of Yugoslavia within the history of political forms, and, what is more, within the history of politics of emancipation.

Let us examine the two figures in more detail.

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The figure of the Two: which form corresponds to the antagonistic relation that emerges in the Struggle for the Liberation of the Yugoslav Peoples? What is it that constitutes the Two of the struggle of the people of Yugoslavia against fascism, of their resistance to imperialist exploitation and domination in the fourth decade of the twentieth century?

We can attempt to interpret the antagonism in question, as well as the "sides" which make it, through some classical motifs of modern politics. In the first place, we can grasp the founding act of the project Yugoslavia, the Struggle for the

George Skrigin, *The Plitvice Lakes In Our Hands Again!*, 1942

Liberation of the Yugoslav Peoples, through motifs such as the s*truggle against tyranny* and the *struggle against foreign domination*. These motifs, as we know, represent two fundamental settings of modern politics, settings which inscribe into history the concepts of "sovereignty of the people" and "national liberation". Both terms are constitutive for the modern State, and both terms correspond to the historical moments of the bourgeois revolutions. 1789 and 1848: the French Revolution, which decapitates the king, as well as the *springtime of the nations*, establish the categories of the "people" and of the "nation", or rather the synthesis of the two, as the substance of the order of the modern bourgeois State.

If we approach the constitution of the Yugoslav project through these motifs, this means putting at the forefront the struggle for the defence of the security and the sovereignty of the political order, and, at the same time, the struggle for the affirmation of the "nation" as an irreducible political authority.

Does this mean that the Yugoslav Partisans are fighting to defend and liberate a State, that they are waging a war for the independence of the national community within definite territorial borders?

This interpretation is obviously reductive, but also, it is dangerously deceptive.

Because even if it is unquestionable that these central forms of bourgeois politics are inscribed in the politics of the Struggle for the Liberation of the Yugoslav Peoples, the effects that these motifs produce are neither simple nor noncontradictory. Yes, the struggle against tyranny and against foreign domination - but this does not mean that we can reduce the Struggle for the Liberation of the Yugoslav Peoples to a purely defensive act within the boundaries of the existing national state. Because the Partisans are not only fighting against the fascist and nazi occupation - they are also fighting against the State which collapses in front of this occupation. They are fighting against the monarchical construction of Yugoslavia, against the dictatorship and the hegemony of the Serbian Crown, and against all forms of political, national and social inequality which have characterised this oppressive order. To think the Struggle for the Liberation of the Yugoslav Peoples without thinking this moment of internal revolt, without taking into account the demand for the radical overcoming of the system, would mean sentencing it in advance to defeat, it would mean reducing this entire emancipatory political sequence to that politics which was not able to confront fascism.

But what is it then that we can understand under the name "antifascism" in this political sequence? Can the meaning of this figure of antagonism be reduced to the confrontation of the "people" with fascism, to the mass popular struggle against the fascist armies and against the regimes that these armies have installed?

The struggle of the Partisans is indeed conducted in the name of the "people", in the name of "liberation of peoples", and it does mobilise a *popular front* in the sense of Dimitrov, as a signifier of wide mobilisation of social strata against the fascist forces.[3]

But is this enough to grasp the historical significance of antifascism in this historical moment? Is the antagonistic positing of the "people against fascist occupation" enough to understand the essence of the victory over fascism that this historical subject of politics succeeds in realising?

The problem resides in the fact that fascism also practices a peculiar politics of the "people". For as we know, the imperialist crusades of the fascist and nazi armies are based upon a peculiar conception of antagonism in which the notion of the "people" plays a central role. They are founded upon an idea of an irreducible war between "peoples", a war for their racial purification.

Is it then sufficient to assert that what is at stake here is a confrontation between two opposed conceptions of the "people", one which is "democratic" and "civilised", and the other which is "barbarous" and "tyrannical'?

We can reach the proper way of answering this question only when we introduce another figure of antagonism fundamental to political modernity. This is the figure of class struggle. Indeed, we cannot understand the historical achievements of antifascism and of the Struggle for the Liberation of the Yugoslav Peoples without the Two introduced by the social revolutions of the nineteenth and

3 Cf. Dimitrov, Georgi (1938) *The United Front: The Struggle against Fascism and War,* New York: International Publishers.

the twentieth century, a figure which instructs a radical egalitarian demand, the demand for the abolition of all forms of social inequality and injustice.

Because the common struggle which is initiated by the Slovenian, Serbian, Bosnian, Montenegrin, Macedonian, Croatian and Albanian Partisans, by all the people opposed to the fascist forces, is also a form of class struggle. Already at the very beginning of the movement, a few hundred volunteers of the Spanish Civil War, workers, peasants, women, students and intellectuals, are putting Leninist theses into practice: "Transforming the imperialist war into a civil war of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie".

What does this mean? It means that the resistance to fascism is also, at the same time, a struggle against imperialism and its effects, a struggle against political and economic domination and exploitation, a struggle against the political forms which the capitalist system assumes in the twentieth century. It means that the war that the Partisans are waging is not only aimed at defeating the fascist armies, but also at smashing all the political monstrosities that historical fascism has installed, supported, or provided with ideological references.

This is why the Partisan struggle is defined through a direct negation of the disastrous social and political context of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, a context which was marked, ever since its inception, by acute political and social inequalities, by the terror of the monarchical dictatorship of the twenties and the thirties, and the brutality of collaboration in the forties. And this is why the demand of the Struggle for the Liberation of the Yugoslav Peoples is coextensive with the demand for a dramatic overturning of social relations: a social revolution.

We learn here the true meaning of the Partisan victory over fascism: for it is only the Two of class struggle, a radical form of social antagonism, which is capable of driving the antifascist struggle towards its end, it is only the obstinate egalitarian injunction behind the name of the proletariat which can defeat and destroy fascism at its root. This is because class struggle antagonises antagonism itself – because it draws a radical line of opposition between the struggle for national or racial domination and the struggle for universal emancipation.

* * *

In what concerns the figure of the Two implicated in the acts of inception of Yugoslavia, we can thus find a specific complexity and intertwining of motifs. But the same can be said of the figure of the One. Which shapes of the political subject, of the enunciation of the "we" can we find in the Struggle for the Liberation of the Yugoslav Peoples?

The central category of the One in the founding moment of Yugoslavia, in the Struggle for the Liberation of the Yugoslav Peoples, is definitely the "people". But can this category, in the concrete historical situation of the liberation war of the 1940s be interpreted in its "classically" modern sense, in the sense of the bourgeois post-revolutionary construction? Should we find, behind the pronouncement of

the "we" in this situation, the people as the bearer of sovereignty which is reflected in a state apparatus?

This interpretation clashes not only against the content of the political bond which founds the Yugoslav project, but also against its very form. Because the "people" of the liberation movement are anything but a mere representational figure of the State.

The political form in which the category of the people crystallises during the antifascist struggle cannot be confounded with the bourgeois representation of the political community, with the abstract and lifeless notion of its liberty and sovereignty. It is a dynamic political reality: because the people of antifascism signifies a wide movement of the exploited masses and a heterogeneous unity of social particularities, it constitutes a *popular front* which is being erected against the State, not as the source of its legitimacy. This is a "we" which is heterogeneous by definition: because the struggle for popular liberation does not only concern one people, one nation, but all the nations and peoples within the repressive monarchical order, all the people who bear the stamp of oppression, whether class, national, sexual, religious.

But also, and precisely because of its heterogeneity and its rebellious nature, the category of the people which emerges in the politics of the Yugoslav Partisans embodies an absolutely singular political subject. The subject of historical creation. Because the One of the politics which founds Yugoslavia is not extracted from any predefined political substance, from a certain phantasm of a belonging. It proceeds from the Struggle for the Liberation of the Yugoslav Peoples, which literally means, from *nothing*: from the very negativity of emancipatory politics.

This is the singular meaning of the "people" of the antifascist struggle. And this is also where we can grasp the historical reach of the project Yugoslavia, its radical break with any type of political metaphysic.

Indeed, the federal political construction which is set out by the declaration of the Antifascist Council of the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ) on 29th November 1943 is not based upon a conception of the political or cultural identity of the people-nation, upon the tradition of Yugoslavness. It does not constitute itself out of an idea of ethnic intimacy, nor does have any relation the concept of "national unity" which was foundational for new political order in the Balkans after the First World War. The substance of the project Yugoslavia comes out from politics itself, from the resistance to fascism and from the *fraternité* constituted in the liberation war.

At the beginning of the AVNOJ declaration, we can read: "According to the right of each nation to self-determination, including the right to secession or the right to unification with other nations, and in accordance with the true will of all the nations of Yugoslavia, demonstrated during the course of the three-year long common peoples" liberation struggle that has forged the inseparable fraternity of the Yugoslav nations, the Antifascist Council of the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia brings the following decision".

The AVNOJ document is important in another sense. Because what it also reveals is the radical organisational form in which the "people" is inscribed in the

Struggle for the Liberation of the Yugoslav Peoples. The One of the political order which is being constituted in 1943, at the height of the liberation war, is the One of the revolutionary republic.

Again, we have a decisive break with the bourgeois nation-State: because the political edifice which proceeds from the Struggle for the Liberation of the Yugoslav Peoples does not take over the "sovereignty" from neither the monarch nor from the limited autonomy of the political apparatus inherited from the bourgeois political order. The entire political construction of the Yugoslav project is created from popular mobilisations and their corresponding organisational forms. It is created out of the *Peoples' Liberation Committees*, out of *Land's Antifascist Councils*, the *Antifascist Front of Women*, *the United Alliance of the Antifascist Youth of Yugoslavia*, in short, from forms of direct democracy of the masses which emerge in the liberation war.

These forms of political organisation, which draw their origins directly from the workers" councils of the Paris Commune and the soviets of the October Revolution, are not only located outside of the State, but are shaped in direct confrontation with it. Their immediate political purpose is defined in the struggle against the bourgeois State apparatus, in the struggle for its *destruction*. The One of the revolutionary rule of the popular masses.

But at the same time, these figures of mass democracy play out another role, which is inseparable from their destructive political force, and which in fact dialectically proceeds from it: they are unleashing the creative energies for a radical subversion and transformation of social relations, for a social revolution. For it is precisely in these figures of multiplicity which emerge in the Partisan struggle, figures which are heterogeneous and radical both in their *presentation* and their demand for equality, that we can find the deepest seeds of the resistance to capitalism and its effects on the European periphery.

The end of all forms of domination and exploitation: this is the axiomatic of the ultimate figure of the One inscribed in the Yugoslav project. And in this sense, there exists a strict continuity between the popular liberation struggle and the socialist construction of Yugoslavia. Because it is impossible to talk about the emancipatory force of the liberation war without the internationalist and militant spirit of the workers' movement, without an uncompromising egalitarian vision of society, without the demand for the abolition of all forms of social injustice. What this means is that the Struggle for the Liberation of the Yugoslav Peoples is immanently producing the One of universal emancipation, or what is actually the same, the One of communism.

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Complexity and interweaving of motifs of political unity and scission. Is this designation sufficient to understand the singular nature of the Struggle for the Liberation of the Peoples of Yugoslavia and of the Yugoslav project?

This cannot but bring us back to the dilemma with which we started. Because the true question here concerns the form of the relationship which binds these diverse and opposing figures of the One and the Two. The true question here is the question of the dialectic.

Let us put this straight: does this heterogeneity and, what is more, contradictority of forms of unity and antagonism which we have seen to characterise the Yugoslav project add up to and resolve with a dialectical synthesis, or does it rather imply a further movement of contradiction, a development without a synthetic moment? Are the contradictions which surround Yugoslavia to be overcome through an internal fusion or are they exacerbated further and further? Which of the two forms takes primacy in the moment of their interrelation: the desire of unity, of the One, or the desire of division, of the Two?

It seems to me impossible to understand the essence of the historical constitution of the Yugoslav project without asserting the superiority of the latter principle. For how else can we explain the manner in which the revolutionary subjectivity of the Yugoslav Partisans posits one next to each other a set of irreducibly diverse political forms? How else can we grasp the way in which this subjectivity sets out an emancipatory project out of certain classical figures of political modernity, whilst at the same time overcoming and abolishing these figures?

The primacy of the figure of antagonism posits a negative dialectical formula behind project Yugoslavia: *one divides into two*. This formula uncovers the permanent inscription of the Two of division and creation into different forms of being-together, or, what amounts to the same, the production of forms of political life which introduce their own disappearance.

And this is precisely where we can find the historical significance and singularity of Yugoslavia: in the fact that it represents a contradictory unity of contradictions. A unity which, moreover, stands under the constant pressure of partition and transformation. This means that project Yugoslavia is a political and historical project whose immanent constitution implies a tendency towards its own revolutionising, a drive towards a creative division and the construction of the new. A tendency in contradiction, so to say.

This allows us to grasp how the Yugoslav project realises a contradictory figure of collectivity: a people which is already a non-people, a form of the One which includes a break with the logics of representation and identity on which the modern bourgeois construction of the State resides. Because the *popular front,* or the political unity formed in the antifascist struggle, is a "people" which resists its own representation and symbolisation, a collective which is not exhaustible in an institutional referent, in the illusion of historical continuity. The "people" formed in 1943 is a "people" which is not identical to itself. This is because it proceeds from *nothing*, from emancipatory negativity as such.

But in the same way, this formula also allows us to understand the resolute break with the nation-form on which the entire construction of the Yugoslav project resides.

We can see this from the exact manner in which the problem of "national liberation" is framed in the context of the *Struggle for the Liberation of Yugoslav Peoples*.

For what is the "national question" for the Yugoslav Partisans?

In the first place, it is a question with an anomalous form: instead of being posed in the singular, it is question which appears in the plural (or, if we are allowed some slight dialectical phrasing, it is a question in the singular plural). Because the struggle for national or popular liberation implies the emancipation of all the peoples of Yugoslavia, it implies liberty and the equality for everyone.[4]

Already here we have an immense break with the previous order. If the monarchical construction of Yugoslavia symbolically privileged three nations (and effectively, only one) whilst at the same time practising remarkably repressive politics over other particular groups, the federal political construction which emerges in wartime is built upon an explicit recognition of the political equality of all the Yugoslav nations, of all its particular peoples.[5] The formal political setting of the Yugoslav already implies a decisive rupture with the identitary One of the national community.

4 In December 1942, at the high point of the liberation war, Tito wrote in the journal *Proleter*: "Our People's-liberation struggle would not be so persistent and so successful, if the peoples of Yugoslavia wouldn't see in it, apart from the victory over fascism, the victory over those who were oppressing and who tend towards further oppression of the peoples of Yugoslavia. The word *people's-liberation struggle* – would be a mere phrase, even a deceit, if it wouldn't carry, apart from the general Yugoslav sense, the national sense for each particular nation, or, if it wouldn't, apart from the liberation of Yugoslavia, simultaneously mean the liberation of Croats, Slovenes, Serbs, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Albanians, Muslims, and others, if the people's-liberation struggle wouldn't carry that content, that it truly brings freedom, equality, and brotherhood to all the peoples of Yugoslavia".

5 The political inscription of the "rights to self-determination" into the antifascist struggle grants a formal recognition to some of the national political and cultural particularities of Yugoslavia for the first time – Montenegrins, Bosnian Muslims and Macedonians, who did not enjoy any specific means of political expression in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, are proclaimed as constitutive nations according to the AVNOJ documents.

But at the same time, the revolutionary subjectivity of project Yugoslavia poses the question of national liberation in another sense, in a sense which takes us beyond mere formal constructions of politics. It poses the question of national liberation as inseparable from the wider problem of social emancipation. And in this, it submerges the entire problematic of the nation-form into the dialectics of class struggle.

This can be most clearly shown with regard to the Leninist formulation of the "rights of nations to self-determination" which the Yugoslav Partisans put into practice. What does this syntagm stand for in the revolutionary political situation of 1943? One cannot simply speak about a juridical norm here. Because the formulation of the "rights of nations to self-determination" has a singular political meaning in this situation: it constitutes, simply, and forcefully, the smallest common denominator in the antifascist and anti-imperialist struggle, in the struggle for the radicalisation of the egalitarian maxim. What the Leninist formulation of the "self determination of nations" therefore implies is not the principle according to which each national entity is to be reflected in its own state apparatus. It implies the constitution of a collective which unites peoples and nations in their common

struggle for emancipation from all forms of domination. It implies, effectively, a *right to resistance*, a figure of "right" subordinated to the Two of class struggle.

This is precisely what Tito had in mind when he stated in 1942 that the "right to self-determination" is accorded to each people "with a rifle in its hand, in this struggle for popular liberation today"

National self-determination as class struggle: this is nothing but the dialectisation of political forms.

What should also be stressed here, however, is that the intrusion of the proletarian struggle - of which Marx once remarked that it "has no homeland" - into the entire problematic of national liberation, does not only bring out something other than the nation-form itself, but also opens the tendency towards the self-abolition of the latter. Class struggle, propelled by radical egalitarianism, does not only equalise the questions of national emancipation for all, but transcends this question itself. It sets out the dialectics of subversion of the One of the nation, as a form of violence over the irreducible multiplicity and heterogeneity of society. It is in this radical sense that we should also read the notion of national liberation in the Yugoslav revolutionary sequence.

But what is left to ask is what was Yugoslavia then, as a statist construction erected from the revolutionary subjectivity of 1943? We can say that Đinđić got only his phrasing right: because if the Yugoslav project represented anything, then it represented, not an unfinished but an unfinishable State. Indeed, which possible political form might be adequate to the creative historical force of the Struggle for the Liberation of the Yugoslav Peoples? We must think of Lenin again here: a State which is at the same time a non-State. What emerges in 1943, constitutes, in the first place, a contradictory unity of the state apparatus and those forms of politics which represent an anti-apparatus, forms of mass popular organisation and direct democracy. In other words, what we can read in the paradoxical assemblage of the Yugoslav project is precisely the formula of the *dictatorship of the proletariat*. Already at its inception, Yugoslavia is being made as a State which is supposed to "wither away".

This qualification is important. Because it is only from this perspective that one can adequately pose the question of the history and of the structure of the statist construction of Yugoslavia. It is only through the problem of the internal development of contradictions, that we can grasp correctly the contradictions of development, and of the destruction of the Yugoslav socialist federation. In other words: we need to take the theoretical and political perspective set out by the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat with all possible rigour. Because only then we can understand some of those catastrophic moves that the League of Communists of Yugoslavia had taken - in its stupefying incapacity - when it attempted to forcefully localise and institutionalise the revolutionary subjectivity of the Struggle for the Liberation of the Peoples of Yugoslavia, when it attempted to give the latter a dignified "death in representation".

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Let us sum up: the essence of the Yugoslav project consists in the material practice of transformation of politics, which is at the same time a practice of invention and creation. This practice generates transitive and dialectical forms of political being-together, forms of unity in contradiction: a people which is a non-people, a nation which is a non-nation, a State which is a non-State. If we look at the inside of project Yugoslavia, we find the Two of destruction and creation posited in perpetual motion, we find antagonistic division, a negative dialectical movement, always already present in the formation of the One, we find the Two of class struggle which drives forms of political life towards incessant transformation, revolutionisation. One divides into two: this is the emancipatory formula of project Yugoslavia.

But does this not expose the utter paradoxality of the syntagm which Đinđić puts forward? Does it not illuminate the bitter and tragic illusion of the perspective which is only able to recognise in Yugoslavia the One which political philosophy has been carefully constructing and reproducing for the past two millennia, the One of Order, the One of the Community, the One of the State?

Against the philosophical and ideological negation of politics and of thinking, we need to acknowledge the real thought of the Yugoslav project, which is the thought of the intransience of contradictions, the thought and the practice of political invention. It is imperative to hold on to this interpretation. Because as a political subjectivity which is capable of developing itself incessantly, as a subjective form which possess the capacity to transform itself without interruptance, the Yugoslav project teaches us an important lesson. It teaches us that experiment and experimentation resides at the heart of politics. It teaches us that political practice should necessarily be measured with regard to innovation, if it wants to bear the name of emancipation.

This is what we owe today to the heroic gesture of the Yugoslav Partisans. This intransigence of thinking and practising the impossible: this is where we learn that project Yugoslavia is more than an actual reality. It is our necessity.

George Skrigin, The 29th of November 1943

Edi Hila, *Resize Wizzard 2*, 2006

KOSOVO
AFTER YUGOSLAVIA

Slobodan Karamanić

The following question is on the agenda: is a democratic solution possible for Kosovo?

The perplexity of this question seems to catch hold of all the "involved" political actors, all those who give themselves the right to interpret, propose or impose one such solution: from the clerks of the so-called "international community" to the administration of the State Department, from the commissaries of the EU to Serbian politocracy and other guardians of the national interest, from the Kosovo (or Kosovar) political caste to ethnic minority councils, ect.

All of this, today, looks like a grand bazaar of political offers and demands:

The High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security policy of the EU, Javier Solana, wants to calm down the tensions around the question of the final status of Kosovo: "We have to consider this problem from a wider perspective. In the end, if everybody is in agreement, everybody will end up in the European Union. Then, borders will be less important than they are today, and I believe that if people start thinking in this way, they will be able to consider more rationally the pros and cons and thus to find a solution compatible to the desire to become a member of the EU."[1] The UN General Secretary, Kofi Annan, brings a considerable dose of political realism to this optimistic view of common future, as he welcomes the proposal for an independent Kosovo put forward by the Slovenian President Janez Drnovšek.[2] The President of Serbia, Boris Tadić, has a different opinion, and thus proposes a particular strategy of defence of the Serbian national interest: "If we are only to rely on international law, our negotiation position will be weak. We should make a continuous effort to explain to the key members of the UN Security Council what their interest in preventing the independence of Kosovo is, why the security of the Serbian state is crucial for this interest, why stability in the Balkans is essentially tied to the prevention of the independence of Kosovo, itself a sort of a legal exception"[3] The representatives of the Serbian minority in Kosovo put forward the plan for the decentralization of the Kosovo *province*, as well as the establishment of Serbian municipalities and enclaves.[4]

1 "Kosovo: undoubtedly and irresolvable", B92.net, January 14th 2006.

2 "Kosumi ready for direct dialogue", B92.net, January 4th 2006.

3 "Kosovo: everyday a whole day", B92.net, December 28th 2005.

4 "How to get the Serbian entity?", B92.net, January 6th 2006.

Likewise, the Albanian minorities in the south of Serbia announce their own political platform, demanding the political and cultural autonomy for the Albanian-majority municipalities, as well as the possibility, in the case of the division of Kosovo, for these municipalities to be granted unification with Kosovo.[5] The Prime Minister of Kosovo, Bajram Kosumi, in the spirit of tolerance and dialogue, rejects any form of division of the territory into enclaves, and advocates: "The best way to protect the Serbian minority in Kosovo is to integrate them, and not to form enclaves. We have to convince the Serbs in Gračanica that they are free in Prishtina, and that they can move around freely without any problems, but we must also convince the Albanians to freely enter Gračanica. The identity of Serbs must be persevered, but they must disregard the idea of enclavisation."[6]

So, which effective democratic solution can we derive from this charade of opposing offers and demands? Perhaps, *Kosovo within the European Union?* This would only make sense if, besides its economic *raison d'être*, the EU would succeed in constituting itself as a political community. *Kosovo a Serbian province*? Today only Serbian politicians can, in their arrogance and stupidity, really believe this. *Division of Kosovo*? This would imply a direct legitimation of the politics based on ethnicity, and thus also the acceptance of the consequences of ethic cleansing. *A multiethnic Kosovo*? Is this not simply a euphemism for an ethnically differentiated and ghettoized society? *Kosovo as an independent and sovereign state?* If we take into account the post-Dayton situation in Bosnia, this formal status of a State would hardly coincide with the real independence of the people who inhabit it. In any case, we could learn of the true meaning of the promises of sovereignty already from the case of the former Yugoslav republics, where the political and comprador bourgeois elites try to compensate their powerlessness and dependency on international level only by the sovereignty in the creation of national symbols.

The thesis around which we would like to orient the following analysis is that this entire repertoire of solutions on offer today effectively avoids and blocks a veritable democratic solution for Kosovo. Because, we must note in the first place: all the offered solutions remain within the current liberal-democratic horizon and its ultimate political object – the establishment of a legal and legitimate model of statehood. And it is exactly from this perspective that one can hardly identify any possible solutions. Or, to be more precise, it is exactly from this particular understanding of democracy, founded on the state norm, on official procedures, on the implementation of standards, as well as on the apolitical recognition of various national and state interests, that a debilitating political incapacity surfaces in relation to Kosovo – an incapacity of providing a solution *for everyone*. The acceptance of the one-dimensional "political reality" in terms of the existence of "subjects of interests" anterior to politics itself, represents the opportunistic dimension of this "neutral" spectacle of democracy – a spectacle which, in its desire to resolve conflicts of interest through compromises and negotiations, masks its own role in the production of these conflicts of interest as such.

5 „Albanians adopted the Platform", B92.net, January 14th 2006.

6 „Kosumi ready for direct dialogue", B92.net, January 4th 2006.

This form of the pragmatic democracy of "the objective" is not able to provide any solutions, because it is a part of the problem itself. It is a part of the problem which is both the consequence and the cause of the current political situation – the situation of *post-political pragmatism*. This is why we have to seek for the specificity of the current Kosovo situation through its relation to some general historical tendencies which appear together with the end of all political alternatives to liberal democracy. Because, it was precisely the so-called "Kosovo crisis" in the 1980s, and its dramatic resolution at the end of this decade, which marked the decisive beginning of the end of the socialist project of Yugoslavia, an end of the universalism that this project represented. The entire political impasse of today is, in other words, preceded by a critical moment of "recomposition" of the Yugoslav self-management socialism, a moment in which the desires of the "popular will" towards a bourgeois State carried the entire drama of the introduction of capitalist relations of exploitation and domination.

7 The 1974 constitution of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia guaranteed considerable political, economical and cultural autonomy of Kosovo. Even still defined as a province, Kosovo at that time got the status and jurisdiction that were almost identical to the status and jurisdiction of any other federal republics. However, what we must point out is that this constitutional arrangement was directly opposed to any kind of liberal nation-state, based on the identity between the state and nation. In the Constitution of 1974 we find the formulation of the state as the unity of contradictory political principles; the unity that supposed to be overdetermined by the process of emancipation of the working class: "Socialist republic is a state based upon the sovereignty of the people, and the rule and the self-management of the working class and all working people, as well as the socialist self-governing democratic community of working people, citizens and equal nations and nationalities." *Ustav Socijalističke Federativne Republike Jugoslavije* (*The Constitution of Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia*), Beograd: Književne novine, 1974, Article 3. p. 21.

8 In fact, the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia (September 28th 1990) only legitimated the 1989 amendments on the 1974 constitution of the Socialist Republic of Serbia, which suspended the political autonomy of Kosovo.

Until we do not attempt to grasp the nature of this change, we will not be able to comprehend the entire complexity of the current Kosovo situation, trapped as it is between violence and apoliticallity.

The following contribution is dedicated to the understanding of this dramatic moment.

* * *

We know that it was precisely in the name of the defence of the socialist constitution of Yugoslavia of 1974[7] that NATO sought to reinstate the political autonomy of Kosovo (which was denied by the Serbian constitution of 1990) by dropping bombs in 1999.[8] Moreover, the autonomy guaranteed by the 1974 constitution remained the binding legal status of Kosovo even after Kosovo effectively became an UN protectorate, that is, even after the passing of UN Security Council Resolution 1244. Besides the apparent cynicism of the international community in its evocation of a socialist constitutional arrangement, we have to note that, at least up until the intervention itself, no other pertinent political solution truly appeared. Accordingly, if the solution of the Constitution of 1974 was seen, even in the eyes of the international community as a universal "juridical" accomplishment of Yugoslav socialism, then it is logical to examine the meaning of such a constitutional configuration.

Indeed, it seems that the Constitution of 1974 represents a traumatic point of eternal return. Especially from today's dominant political perspective, i.e. from the perspective of the normality of the liberal nation-state, the Constitution of 1974 is usually understood as a prelude to the later bloody disintegration of the SFRY. The argument is usually constructed along the following lines: by diminishing the power of the central federal state, by instigating the growing independence of the republics and the provinces, and by concentrating power in them, the Yugoslav communists, under the conditions of an overall political and economic crisis, opened up the road to the destitution of the federal rule and, at the same time, facilitated the constitution of separate national states.[9]

But this is to confuse the consequences for the causes. Indeed, such an interpretation of the disintegration of former Yugoslavia seems to serve no other purpose but to mystify the fundamental transformation in the political rationality which occurs during the 1980s, a transformation which although occurring laterally, hits the very heart of the subjective dimension of the political system of Yugoslav socialism.

In order to understand this, we need to look at the context in which this critique of the constitution of 1974 appears for the first time: the political and ideological context of Serbia at the beginning of the 1980s. This is a context in which the emergent the "Kosovo question" becomes a platform for the resurgence of a nationalist ideological and political front, meticulously propounded by the nationalist dissidents, the traditional intelligentsia and the Serbian Orthodox Church. But this is also a context in which we can observe, under the auspices of a return to the questions of the state, the nation and national interest marked, a spectacular abandonment of the principles of class politics. The Socialist Republic of Serbia in the 1980s: the tragedy of this ideological conjuncture is evident, because this is where the conceptual pinnacle of the workers" movement was done away with in the name of national consolidation and the "defence of the endangered Serbian people" in Kosovo.

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In this context of nationalist revival, we can undoubtedly find the most ferocious critique of the Constitution of 1974 in the infamous *Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts* (SANU) from 1986. But this document, incidentally, also represents the first articulated programme of the resurgent Serbian national aspirations.

Indeed, it is widely accepted that Memorandum laid down the foundation for the Serbian nationalist revision of the multinational federation. However, what is usually ignored and underestimated in relation to this document is the fact that national demands are presented here in the

9 Dejan Jović recently brought out the thesis that SFRY broke-up because of its *ideocratic order*, which was based on decentralization and the withering away of the state power: "The weakness of the state (...) was the main reason why the aggression could not be stopped on the time. Not just the break-up of Yugoslavia but as well the wars that followed had its profound root in the ideology of the withering away of the state." Dejan Jović, *Jugoslavija – država koja je odumrla: Uspon, kriza i pad Četvrte Jugoslavije (1974–1990) (Yugoslavia –The State that withered away: Rise, Crisis and Fall of the Fourth Yugoslavia)*, Zagreb: Prometej & Beograd: Samizdat B92, p. 15.

form of explicit anti-Communist demands, in the form of demands for the restoration of the bourgeois state apparatus. Thus, one of the key demands of academics is: "A demand for an authentic democratic system"[10] And this is also the question of "where we are today in relation to the modern European civilization?"[11]

By criticizing the Yugoslav system of self-management, the academics point out its inefficiency, inflexibility and irrationality. In their opinion, such a system neglects the *coercive laws of economy* (i.e. economic rationality), while at the same time suffering from the *absence of state coordination* at the level of the federation (i.e. the lack of state planning). While criticising the self-management system and rejecting decentralized system of a federation, the academics promote the state as a universal guardian of the conditions of the market, and as an organizer of social reproduction.

The academics thus perceive the self-management system as some sort of a bizarre mixture of the premodern authoritarian state, the state structure of "real-socialism" in the East, and of the Western bourgeois society.[12] Instead of such a hybrid system, the academics are proposing the creation of a new coherent democratic structure in Yugoslavia, the principles of which do nothing but anticipate the political programmes of the so-called "democratic revolutions of "89": *popular sovereignty, the right of nations to self-determination, human rights, and economic and technological rationality.*

The first obstacle to establishing this new democratic system in Yugoslavia was the constitution of 1974:

> Without changing this constitution and the political and economic system which is based on it, it is impossible to solve any essential problems of our society today, it is impossible to prevent the current process of disintegration and the fall into a profound crisis. It is necessary to keep on searching for solutions, bearing in mind the great civilization principles as a precondition for the rise of modern society.[13]

What especially characterises the bourgeois ideology of the academics, based on the integration of the national and state issues, is a profound anti-Communist demagogy. As the academics state, it was only the Serbian nation in Yugoslavia which was left without its own state, and this is because of the Commintern's "revengeful politics towards the Serbs", and because the Serbian communists, due to their own inability and unprincipled compromises, had betrayed Serbian national interests: "This is primarily about the Serbian nation and its state. The nation, which after a long and bloody struggle finally established its own state based on civic democracy, as well as the nation which in the two last world wars lost 2, 5 million compatriots, at the end discovered that some committee consisted of members of

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10 "Memorandum SANU", *Naše teme*, 33 (1-2), 1989, p. 139.

11 Ibid, p. 143.

12 This is why, compared to all other current state systems, they view Yugoslavia as an obsolete concept: "The current political system of Yugoslavia does not have any single advantage of modern political systems. It is neither a liberal democracy, nor a democracy of councils, and it is definitely not the enlightened bureaucratic system. Such a system lacks political freedom, it lacks the direct participation of citizens in political life and the functioning of the system according to predetermined rules and norms". Ibid, p. 138.

13 Ibid, p. 145.

the Communist party decides that after four decades in the new Yugoslavia, it is only the Serbian nation which does not have its own state. A worse historical defeat in peace cannot even be imagined".[14]

Finally, the academics urge for the solution of the the vital historical question and present a possible way out from the existing depressive state which hit "the suffering and bleeding Serbian nation":

If it wants to share its future amongst cultured and civilized nations of the world, the Serbian nation has to be granted opportunity to find itself again, to become a historical subject, to become aware of its historical and spiritual being, to find its economic and cultural interests, and to establish a contemporary social and cultural programme, by which it will inspire the present and future generations.[15]

Amongst those who responded to this task was Zoran Đinđić, a famous figure of Serbian philosophical and political life. With enough courage and imagination, Đinđić applied his knowledge of contemporary liberal thought[16] in order to formulate one of the most consistent long-term Serbian programmes: the establishment of Serbia as a *Rechtsstaat*. Today, these writings provide us with an unique opportunity to grasp, in an "extreme" and "distilled" philosophical form, the dimensions of historical transformation at play in Yugoslavia in the 1980s. They enable us to detect the crucial change in political consciousness of the epoch, the precise shift which would critically influence those "years of disentanglement"[17], at the very end of Yugoslav socialist project.

In the political essays published in the journal *Književne novine* between 1986 and 1988, Đinđić elaborates the thesis on fundamental inadequacy of the Yugoslav state system, which he called an *unfinished State*.[18] Đinđić saw the basic contradiction of socialist Yugoslavia in its status of "stateless–statehood", which means, in the status of the state which is "deprived not only of its sovereignty, but also if its own citizens".[19] Such "stateless–statehood" status is reflected in a particular structural and political relation i.e. in the existence of a discrepancy between its "subjective internal factor", (its citizens), and its "objective external dimensions" (its territory, its name and its statist attributes). The consequences of this discrepancy between the subjective and objective in Yugoslavia can be registered in the simultaneous existence, on the one hand, of an "ontological surplus" of national identifications, and, on the other hand, in the lack of national statehood. This is where, according to Đinđić, the key to the crisis of the Yugoslav state resides: in the absence of a clear and unambiguous belonging to a single political community.

But the perspective from which Đinđić analyses the abnormality of Yugoslavia as an "unfinished state" is nothing but the perspective of the normality of

14 Ibid, p. 153.

15 Ibid, p. 161.

16 However, this knowledge was mostly limited to the German authors such as Hans Kelsen, Carl Schmitt, Jürgen Habermas and Niklas Luhmann.

17 See: Slobodan Milošević, *Godine raspleta* (*The years of Disentanglement*), Beograd: Grafičko-izdavački zavod, 1989.

18 The essays are collected and published in Zoran Đinđić, *Jugoslavija kao nedovršena država (Yugoslavia, an Unfinished State)*, Novi Sad: Književne novine, 1988.

19 Ibid, p. 7.

modern nation-state as a *Rechtsstaat*. This is why he would wonder about the cause of this abnormality: "Is the deficiency of national statehood mainly caused by the surplus of national intensity, or is it a result of a lack of statehood?"[20] Just in order to conclude: "Actually, the non-contradictory status of Yugoslavia as a national state (and then as a constitutional state) has not been put in question only by its inherent national dimension, but to the same extent by its political dimension. The specificity of the Communist concept of the political raises precisely in the abolition of the *political community*, which is just another term for the abolition of the nation-state."[21] Đinđić interprets the Communist abolition of the political community as the absence of the autonomous political sphere, i.e. the sphere in which all citizens bear equal legal responsibilities – on the basis of the recognition of their individual or subjective rights. Since this sphere has been abolished in Communism, along with rejection of a figure of citizen as a bearer of sovereignty, represented in the State, there is no retroactive possibility for citizens themselves to control the political power. Instead, the socialist government, which is based on the class sovereignty, becomes uncontrolled and infinite in principle. This is why the self-managing political system of participation, based on labour representation, is not capable of providing adequate autonomy for political projects, but instead represents a certain form of an "uncontrolled exercise of power". [22] Even within the Yugoslav federal system, as Đinđić warns us, instead of State-controlled power, we have a dispersion of power (divided among particular republican centres).[23] This divided sovereignty (between the republics) further affects the fracture of political power, and sets outs disintegrative processes similar akin to the pre-modern times.[24]

Accordingly, what we have is a quite strange and entirely disfunctional state. Đinđić goes on to conceive this disfunctionality – according to one of its main aspects – through the optics of the modern notion of modern sovereignty, and its accompanying "dialectic" of the "normal state" and the "state of exception."[25] Of course, what we have here is the famous definition from Carl Schmitt's *Political Theology*: "The sovereign is the one who decides on the state of exception". [26] But, according to Đinđić's interpretation, this is not only a question of naked power – where the figure of the sovereign alone decides about the state of exception. Rather, the sovereign is the one who decides about the "normal state of the political community". This is why it is only possible to discuss the modern concept of

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[20] Ibid, p. 6.

[21] Ibid. p. 13.

[22] Ibid. p. 24. Đinđić writes also: "The victory of labour democracy over the political one does not present the dominance of one political concept over another, but the abolishment of political concepts as such, and establishment of the immediate social communication among the authentic – so to speak "productive" – interests." Ibid, p. 69.

[23] Ibid, p. 24.

[24] "There is no state–bureaucratic ethos here (without which there is no State), there are no professional qualifications, no reliable media for the circulation of local interests. As a result, these constructions (with a few rare exceptions), unbearably reminds us of the territorial–political units of the feudal epoch." Ibid, p. 31.

[25] „Ko je suveren u Jugoslaviji – Pravo države" („Who is the Sovereign in Yugoslavia – The Right of the State"), first published in 1.04.1987. Ibid. p. 82-92.

[26] Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie – Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität*, München & Leipzig: Duncker&Humbolt, 1922, p. 9.

sovereignty under the condition of a *constitutional state*. Only in that case, the sovereign has the right to act according to the measures of exception, so as to preserve the unity of peace and the rule of Law.

On the other hand, if state power is not legally approved and limited, the "distinction between the normal state and the state of exception becomes blurred."[27] And this is precisely what characterizes the Yugoslav situation, where we cannot talk anymore about the relationship between the "normal state" and the "state of exception", but rather about the emergence of a unique sovereign dictatorship. This dictatorship perceives itself as an enduring source of norms which regulate the life of community. This is why, in the case of Yugoslavia, we have a permanent rule of the "state of exception." Instead of being strictly bounded by the constitutionally prescribed norms the bearers of political power exercise this power in a meta-constitutional and meta-legal space. A space which Đinđić calls the "metaphysically defined rule of the working class."[28] And this is where Đinđić would again discover, together with Schmitt, an irreducible difference between the *dictatorship of the commissaries* (constitutionally defined and legally approved) and the *dictatorship of the proletariat* (metaphysically defined). Only the former can find its clear source of legitimacy in the State. This is why the surpassing or the suspension of constitutional sovereignty is fully justified in the case of the dictatorship of the commissaries! In case of the former, the Communist dictatorship, the crucial thing is again the separation of the State and of sovereignty. The legitimation of such a form of dictatorship does not proceed from some external entity (such as the constitutional and legal system), but from the world–historical emancipatory mission. If we could thus limit the dictatorship of the commissaries by the limits of subjective rights, the dictatorship of the proletariat is infinite, and extends to all spheres of society. And since it is impossible to measure the success of this world historical mission on the basis of its own metaphysical principles, the Communist Party emerges as the "empirical representative of working class interests". The Communist party structure, however, is not founded on formal and legal bases, but on ideological bonds. This is an internal logic of the functioning of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

And yet, what interests Đinđić are not merely the ("ideological") foundations of the legitimacy of this form of dictatorship, but its inherent effectivity: "Is the sovereign dictatorship an efficient form of political rule?"[29] There is, however, a practical reason for this problem: *Kosovo*. The violence in Kosovo in the 1980s represents, for Đinđić, a veritable indicator of the incapacity of the State to guarantee peace and legal security for its citizens. The incapacity does not only concern a specific weakness of the State, but touches upon its fundamental determination: the absence of any strict juridical norms behind the entire construction of the State.

Because one of the main characteristics of the Communist dictatorship is the lack of distinction between the "normal" and the "exceptional" state, the exceptional measures become insignificant

27 Ibid, p. 82.

28 Ibid, p. 88.

29 Ibid, p. 89.

Zoran Đinđić, Serbian Prime Minister, 2001

and inefficient. Instead of "mobilizing all the resources of political community" (as it would be the case with the dictatorship of the commissaries), the sovereign authorities are not able to react properly in a situation where its citizens are under threat, and thus everything turns into a subject for discussion and interpretation. From this Đinđić would conclude that: "A state which does not seriously consider its own "natural right" to self-defence degrades the importance of its citizens to the level of pre-political beings, who then alone bear responsibility for their bare life."[30]

In other words, for the State to be able to use force efficiently and legitimately so as to protect its citizens, it is necessary to establish clearly defined legal prerogatives for the existence of the "normal state". If the form of the law is to become too narrow in relation to reality, there is a possibility to

30 Ibid, p. 91.

apply "exceptional measures". Relying on these presuppositions, Đinđić would draw the only possible solution: by suggesting the absolute rejection of the current form of sovereignty, which implies the establishment of a new political system of the constitutional state (based on the recognition of *subjective rights*, *popular sovereignty* and *parliamentarism*)**.** Since the existing form of the Yugoslav statial community is unsustainable, it is necessary *to complete its form by creating the unity between its objective and subjective dimensions*. It is necessary to establish a State in which everyone would be entitled to equal rights and obligations. This is why it is necessary to reject the Communist ideology. The fundamental principle of the social system, which in the socialist constitution derives from the "metaphysics of the proletariat", is to be replaced with another fundamental principle: the *principle of subjective rights*.

In what concerns the relations among the republics and the federation:

The alternative solution is quite simple: the political identity of political community cannot be divided; it belongs to either Yugoslavia or the member republics. If it belongs to the member republican states, as it is general opinion nowadays, then it is vital to clearly predict the possible consequences of such a choice, and place the question of real, and not, as until now, ambiguous formation of national states on the agenda.[31]

Concerning Serbia, this would imply that:

...the question of whether and to what extent Serbia is sovereign, is not a question of an agreement between Serbia, Kosovo and Vojvodina, or among the Yugoslav republics. The question is in which sense Serbia is a political community with a unique political identity and a unique will for this identity. This is a pre-constitutional question, and only a positive answer to this question makes the idea of constitution meaningful. The same applies to Yugoslavia, to the degree that the latter has a chance to become a single political community at all.[32]

As we know from the consequent events, the practical realisation of these ideas would fall in the hands of Slobodan Milošević. Playing the role of the guardian of peace and of legal security, Milošević was the one who would finally complete the Serbian political community, as unique and indivisible, whilst establishing the full State sovereignty to the Serbian Republic.

The first article of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, enacted on 28th September 1990 states:

The Republic of Serbia is a democratic state of all citizens living within it, based on freedoms and rights of man and citizen, the rule of law, and social justice.

What this article tells us, with a certain dose of paradox, is the fact that we are facing a civic constitution.[33] In fact, we could assert that the Serbian Constitution of 1990 represents the avant-garde legal form of the definition of constitutional state, not only because it is one of the first constitutions written in the peak of "democratic revolutions of "89", but also by the obvious absence of any reference to

historical and cultural identity of the nation.[34] But, how then was it possible that Milošević's state – instituted on the liberal principles of formal equality of all citizens – turns out to be the motor of national and racial exclusion?

Certainly, the promoters of liberalism would point out the difference between the proclaimed principles, no matter how universal they are, and the bestial politics of violence pursued by Slobodan Milošević (indeed, a violence which could only be grappled by some other violence, namely the subjective violence of Kosovo Liberation Army or NATO). However, from the theoretical perspective of the liberal constitutional state, there is not so much to be objected to Milošević's political practice. Quite the contrary, his practice, was an exceptional example of a political practice which is consistent to the principles of the theory of the constitutional state, i.e. to the defence of constitutional order and peace by the legitimate use of force. And what is more, it was precisely by this use of violence, that Milošević consolidated the moment of State sovereignty, both on the internal and the international level: "A state is sovereign only if it can both maintain law and order internally and protect its borders against external threats. It must be capable of prevailing over all competing powers within its borders and of asserting itself in the international arena as a competitor with equal standing."[35]

How is this legitimate usage of state violence, which Milošević used without restrain, to be theoretically interpreted? The principle of sovereign exceptionality and the right of the dictatorship of the commissaries, as Đinđić explains, proceed from constitutional norms and principles. This type of dictatorship, which can be easily called *bourgeois dictatorship*, derives its legitimacy from what bourgeois political thinking posited as a primordial fear of anarchy and disorder, which means, from a situation where the conditions for the free reproduction of capitalist production are under threat.[36] Capitalism cannot function without a state.[37] The purpose of the capitalist state, as Schmitt himself notes, is not rule of law, but the preservation of order as such: "Since the state of exception is still something different than anarchy and chaos, there exists a certain order in the juridical sense, even thought not the order of law. The existence of the state here confirms absolute primacy over the

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34 This is not the case with the majority of the constitutions written at the time in the East of Europe. These constitutions frequently invoke in their preambles the mythologies of the millennium-long strivings for statehood, and other cultural and religious identity constructions. The paradigmatic case, in this sense, is not only the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, but the German Constitutional Law as well, together with the Constitution of the Czech Republic, the Constitution of Slovakia, ect.

35 Jürgen Habermas, "The European Nation-State: On the Past and Future of Sovereignty and Citizenship", in: Obrad Savić (ed.), *Fictitious Sovereignty*, *Beogradski krug* No 1-4/2003, p. 13.

36 The fear of anarchy is principally deduced from negative anthropology which postulates the figure of the possessive individual in the centre of such a presupposed "natural state", a state without the state. On how Thomas Hobbes's theory of "social contract" became the civil religion of the bourgeois in Britain, see: Richard Tuck, "The civil religion of Tomas Hobbes" in Nicholas Phillipson & Quentin Skinner, *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 120-138.

37 Habermas rightly points out that the state "secures the "general conditions of production'; hence the legal framework and infrastructure that are necessary for capitalistic commodity exchange and for the corresponding organization of the labour force" in: Habermas, op.cit, p. 14.

5th of October, Belgrade, 2000

validity of juridical norm. Decision remains free from any normative prescription, and in the real sense it becomes absolute. In the state of exception the state suspends the law, according to its right for self-preservation, as it is said."[38]

Etienne Balibar warns us here about one of the key lessons of the Schmidt's theory of exceptionality: the role of the particular subject as a bearer of sovereignty. The sovereign always appears in a personified form, as a person, whether fictitious or real, who protects the constitution or the public good. The problem, however, arises from the fact that the constitution cannot define, by itself, the proper moment of its suspension. That is why we cannot say that the exceptionality of the sovereign is prescribed by the forms and limits of the rule of law, but: "Conversely, the forms and limits of the juridical order can be characterised from the perspective of the exception. At its centre is thus an antinomic reality: the unlimited and purely self-referential competence to suspend the laws in order to re-establish the conditions of their effectiveness, the interior exception without which no historical normality could exist."[39]

Hence we can see that bourgeois dictatorship in the last instance also appears as principally infinite. The moment of the establishment of legal objectivity – the rule of law and order – is always (in the logical and the conceptual sense) preceded by some personalized and arbitrary force. Thus we can conclude that, despite its fundamental aspiration towards the rule of law, the bourgeois state is actually the very source of the violation of law, including various forms of extreme violence. This claim about the violence of bourgeois politics, does not refer only to the historically given form of politics, but to the universality of politics *per se*. Politics proper *always* includes certain exclusion. What, however, makes the form of bourgeois exclusion and violence specific, is the fact that it tends to mask this violence: mask class exploitation and class antagonism. It is here that we discover the crucial distinction between the dictatorship of the proletariat – which openly declares its politics of

38 Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie – Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität*, Duncker&Humbolt: München&Leipzig , 1922, p. 13.

39 Etienne Balibar, "Prolegomena to Sovereignty", in: Etienne Balibar, *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship,* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, p.136.

the exclusion[40] – and the bourgeois dictatorship, which obscures class exclusion, by evoking the universality of the interest of the state or the nation.

Having reached the problem of "national interest", we should insert a "concrete" dimension, which, in fact, reverses the order of exposition. Because the question we didn't pose is the crucial question of the concrete situation in Kosovo: why was there in the first place a need for the legitimate use of state violence? Or, to turn this around: why didn't the Kosovo Albanians accept the peace and the order that Milošević was offering? Why didn't the Albanians agree to enjoy equal rights as citizens of Serbia?[41] These questions, again, seem to suggest an obvious answer: because Milošević's politics was a politics of nationalistic particularism! And yet, as our case shows, despite the existence of formal equality of rights among all citizens in Serbia, there was an outbreak of unrest in one part of the territory? Why?

We do not need to search for an answer here in the minutiae of historical facticity, in the speeches of politicians, in media propaganda, in the chauvinist celebrations of the nation. The answer can be found already at the level of the theory of constitutional state.

Because an unsolvable problem residing in the heart of this theory is the problem of the tension between the abstract universality of a juridically defined egalitarian community and the particularity of the historical and cultural characteristics of a nation. As Habermas himself notes: "There is a conceptual gap in the legal construction of the constitutional state, a gap that is tempting to fill with a naturalistic conception of the people. One cannot explain in purely normative terms how the universe of those who come together to regulate their common life by means of positive law should be composed. From a normative point of view, the social boundaries of an association of free and equal consociates under law are perfectly contingent."[42] It is for this reason that we have a "double coding of citizenship" - a term given by Habermas to indicate various cultural characteristics inscribed in the concept of citizenship.

Thus, if liberal theory is defined in its "zero position" in terms of the abstract universal of legal equality, (which means, by the negation of differences, class differences in particular), what is inscribed in this "empty space of abstraction" are national and cultural contents. What follows logically from this is a distorted form of popular sovereignty: the *sovereignty of the majoritarian people*. This gap thus explains the coexistence of nationalism and the abstract principle of citizenship.

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40 For Lenin: „The state is a special organization of force: it is an organization of violence for the suppression of some class. What class must the proletariat suppress? Naturally, only the exploiting class, i.e., the bourgeoisie. The working people need the state only to suppress the resistance of the exploiters, and only the proletariat can direct this suppression, can carry it out. For the proletariat is the only class that is consistently revolutionary, the only class that can unite all the working and exploited people in the struggle against the bourgeoisie, in completely removing it." Vladimir Iljič Lenjin, *Država i revolucija (The State and Revolution)*, Beograd: Bigz, 1973, p. 27.

41 The question perhaps evokes the phrase of the famous Serbian communist and Partisan leader Koča Popović: "Albanians could maybe become Yugoslavs, but Serbs with much more difficulties."

42 Jürgen Habermas, "The European Nation-State: On the Past and Future of Sovereignty and Citizenship" in Obrad Savić (ed.), *Fictitious Sovereignty, Beogradski krug* No 1-4/2003, p. 18.

43 According to the report of the IMF and the World Bank, 37 percent of the population in Kosovo today lives under the ultimate limit of poverty, so to speak, under 1,42 euro of daily income per adult. Source: web.worldbank.org.

Which means: even if Milošević's nationalism was excessive, it was still consistent in relation to the defence of the bourgeoisie state and its construction of the "autonomous political sphere".

For Đinđić and Milošević, however, the idea of politics was strictly attached to the process of establishment of the normal and non-contradictory liberal state – the establishment of the state, as an ultimate limit of politics and the only possible field of conflict resolution. But, instead of solving already apparent political conflicts in Kosovo, this very form of politics is what actually produced further conflicts. The liberal state was that motor which produced the conflicts exactly by means of the establishment of the political community of unique identity and by tending to erase any contradiction within the society. More precisely, the price of negating particular historical and economic position of Kosovo, resulted in that the class problem has been transformed and completed in the national. The juridically legitimated repression of the population of Kosovo was nothing but a form of class exploitation and of an internal exclusion of impoverished masses.[43] A particularly violent episode of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

Going back to the Constitution of 1974, we can say that Đinđić was right: this constitutional arrangement was not based on the identity between the state and its citizens. The main objective of the Yugoslav communists, indeed, was not the creation of a socialist state, as a state that would represent the unity of the people's body. Furthermore, the main purpose of this socialist constitutional arrangement was not in the constitution itself, but in the urge for continuous transformation of society and the practice – the ultimate political goal of which was not establishment of "good state" – but quite the contrary, "withering away of the state". So, this indication could be interpreted by recalling the Leninist standpoint, as the mode of politics that was strictly opposed to any norm of the state: the state should be destroyed through autonomous development of productive forces. The social bond that was suppose to characterize Yugoslav statial community was not a fictitious "social contract", but political and economic emancipation. Not only the bond between different and heterogeneous peoples, but also singular political goal of emancipation, made the essence of the Yugoslav post-revolutionary state. In other words, to remain faithful to the revolutionary request of the emancipation, meant that the place of politics should remain absent from the state system.

Does this not, one more time in history, confirm Lenin's assertion that even the most democratic republican form of the bourgeois rule cannot reach the level of historical achievements of the rule of the proletariat? Because in all its forms, the rule of the bourgeoisie is founded on the objectivity of State violence, which can be confronted only by another form of violence. And does this not explain the paradox why NATO, opposing Milošević's bourgeois dictatorship, intervened in order to "restore" a socialist constitution?

Raša Todosijević, *Gott liebt die Serben*, 1997/2002   →

ŽIVELA SMRT
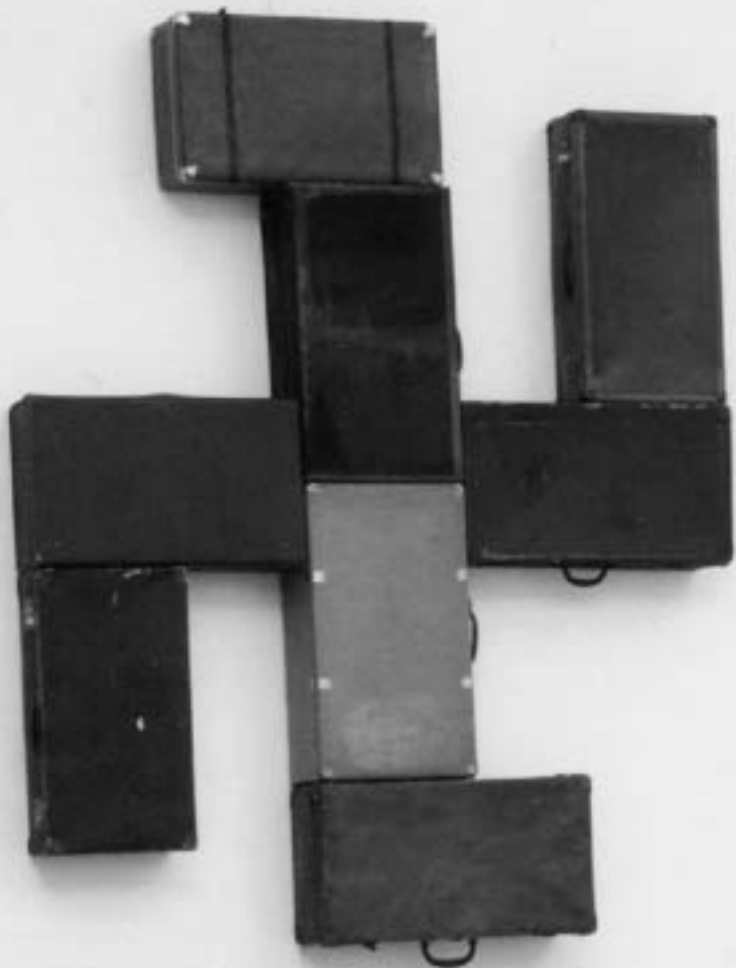
ON THE MARGINS OF EUROPE
AN INTERVIEW WITH RASTKO MOČNIK

PRELOM: *Can the entry of Slovenia and other new member states into the European Union be seen as an historical event? Can we thus speak about a transformation which alters significantly the status and the position of these states within the international context?*

RASTKO MOČNIK: With the entry of Slovenia into the European Union, we can see the end of the process by which Slovenia is constituted as a *subsidiary state* [1].

The same thing also happens to other new members of the European Union. This process unfolded as an agreement between local politico-economic elites and those called Euro-bureaucracy, for which we don't know who they really represent. Although the entry itself did not change much, Slovenia did become a new type of State. From a peripheral "banana republic", it transformed itself into a subsidiary state, which now has a formalized status. It has a formalized status within the European Union, which is a strange construction, resembling, in many ways, the big international institutions such as the WTO or IMF. Because its relationship towards sovereign states is one of directive. The European Commission, in short, gives a directive, and then a state is responsible for its realization, as well as for supplying the socio-political preconditions for it. This also implies that certain states are responsible for the pacification of social conflicts which this directive may cause. Consequently, the subsidiary state is no longer a parliamentary democracy, since the government is no more an executive body of the parliament but has wider powers in the field of negotiations within the European Union. Here, the parliament only "advises" the government whilst providing some "general" political terms. In my view, one of the basic characteristics of such a subsidiary state, and of its activities, is the maintenance of social peace for the processes of global capitalism, that is, for the normal functioning of the global neo-liberal capitalism. Besides this, the instruments which such a state possesses are very complex. They are grounded in the measures of demographic politics – what Michael Foucault and his

1 In the EU terminology, the principle of subsidiarity is a juridical norm which regulates that the "problems" and the "processes" that can be solved on lower levels are not being transferred to a higher level. But a specific "local" jurisdiction over "local" problems means, in fact, just the opposite – direct exclusion of certain states, institutions and populations from global processes, as well as the sanctioning of "local" violence which is structurally caused by that same exclusion. It is in this sense, that this term appears as a sort of euphemism for a "banana republic".

followers call biopolitics. This is why drastic symptoms appear, symptoms which we call "ethnic cleansing". Because ethnic cleansing is a symptom of the normal functioning of a subsidiary state, which is determined by demographic politics.

> PRELOM: *The essential point in your argument here seems to be that in what concerns the periphery and its relation to the European Union, the State apparatus itself already resides upon a specific relation of inequality, i.e. on relation of domination and exploitation. But how should we grasp this situation from a broader historical perspective, from a perspective of the history of political forms? Which "innovations" does the move from a post-revolutionary to a subsidiary state produce? More precisely, what happens to the concept of sovereignty which supports the entire modern political construction? Because, what needs to be taken into account is that the political conflicts on the periphery unfolded primarily under the banner of "national sovereignty". But what were their effects?*

> RM: Now, if we take a historical perspective, we can see that the constitution of national sovereignty as the sovereignty of the people emerges as an act which first takes shape with the American Revolution, and then – more radically – with the French Revolution. What is constituted in these events is the autonomous sphere of politics, which is a sphere of equality and liberty of abstract citizens. This constitution is political, which means that there are determinate exclusions already at place, exclusions which will later be repeated in different phases of the post-revolutionary state. In short, the French Revolution excluded the aristocracy: partially by physical eliminations and partially by abolishing it as a class. The national revolutions of the 19th century – which in our context appear together with the Serbian uprisings and the Balkan Wars, and later with the First World War – excluded the members of other peoples. In other words, we must not forget that what the constitution of the Balkan states signified was also ethnic cleansing: which means, the expulsion of the Turkish people into Turkey, that is, into Anatolia.

This also happens even after the socialist revolution although it stops there. In Slovenia, this was the exile of the German population already after the First World War, but extensively after the Second World War, because the majority of the German population compromised themselves through *Volksdeutscher* societies and through other forms of collaboration with the Nazi regime.

Therefore, we must not idealize this entire process of the revolutionary constitution of the people, even if this moment is very important for us, because it exemplifies political emancipation: through the struggle against tyranny, against the colonial relations - as we could see in the anti-colonial revolutions and the socialist revolution, in the case of Yugoslavia and also the Soviet Union, which was itself a peripheral empire (and which was being placed in a colonial position by Western capital at the very moment of the Bolshevik Revolution).

On the other hand, what happened with the constitution of national sovereignty – after the fall of the post-revolutionary project, which also meant for us the fall of the socialist project – is usually understood in terms of the advance of the

"organic" conception of nation, i.e. the ethnic nation. Although this is acceptable as a descriptive formula, it still doesn't explain what has really happened. In my view, we should conceive of these events of the destruction of Yugoslavia as moments in global trends which first destroy the welfare State in the center of the capitalist system – which is paradoxical, because there was an abundance of money that could sustain it for a very long time – and which then spread to the periphery. Thus also we should conceive of the disintegration of the Soviet Bloc in terms of the dismantling of the peripheral Welfare State. This is why the real question, in my view, is not why the Soviet Union and its satellites fell apart, but how was it possible that they survived for such a long time, especially if we know how this system was so rigid and inadaptable, and that, let us say, the world crisis of the 1970s and the 1980s hit it more severely than it hit the states in the center. In short, we have the fall of the social state in the periphery, that is, the fall of socialism.

2 *Nova revija* is a magazine of Slovenian right-wing intellectuals that published in 1987 "Slovenian National Program", almost simultaneously with the infamous Memorandum of Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

On the other hand again, we have a parallel or simultaneous characteristic of this same process, which is the breakdown of the political sphere in all post-revolutionary societies – from the United States, where the political sphere was traditionally weak, to the West European states – and which happens in a manner which Boris Buden calls the *culturalization of political relations*. This means that if, in the classical post-revolutionary state, class struggle was articulated as the confrontation of political agents within the political apparatuses in the autonomous political sphere, after the dismantling of that system, conflicts begin to articulate themselves as confrontations between cultural options, but cultural in the sense of ethnic characters, religious characteristics and "thousand-year old dreams", i.e. in the sense of the dominant national culture – which was, of course, highly developed already during the period of socialist Yugoslavia, and which gained importance from the 1970s and especially during the 1980s. Because the Yugoslav Socialism was, in the moment of its end, already the rule of the coalition of political bureaucracy, which means, the League of Communists and the cultural bureaucracy – the latter including the Serbian academics, *Nova revija* in Slovenia,[2] and Croatian dissident writers. That was already a division of rule, which was at the same time quite disturbing because this bureaucracy was still, at least officially, part of the internationalist project. Cultural bureaucracy was then already heavily nationalist, and what we witnessed was precisely the process through which the political bureaucracy, in all its pragmatism, rapidly converted itself, becoming nationalist and destroying the post-revolutionary state. Thus it is clear why in a context of such great ethnic, religious and national diversity there are such dramatic and drastic consequences.

But if we are already speaking about Europe, one of the virtues which Europe proudly emphasizes is that the European Union, as a form of resistance to neo-liberal globalization, attempts to guard its own cultural specificities. More exactly, this is the EU bureaucrats defined in the negotiations with the World Trade Organization as *l'exception culturelle*, and then as *diversité culturelle*, as a cultural "exception",

when they stated: "No, culture must not be commodified. We must emancipate culture, in a strictly defined scope, from market relations and free trade". What were they defending? The starting point of their defense was the national cinematographic and audio-visual production of France and Canada. So, none of that was particularly anti-liberal, it was just the protection of little and less successful cultural industries against Hollywood and big cultural actors. What got attached to this was the so-called national culture, which, again, represents the dominant form of educational dressage from above, it represents the normalization of the state body, and that which we know as canonized literature. Therefore, what is at stake here is, in the first place, the dominant national culture, in an archaic sense of the concept of culture, which is characteristic for the 19th century. This is what literary culture in the age of electronic media is.

And this is what Europe is defending. But what does that mean? For me this means that while Europe thinks that it is defending culture, it is actually destroying the political sphere. I'll give a concrete example – the case of pension fund reform. Pension fund reform intervenes in the sphere present in all societies which was first defined by Marcel Mauss when he wrote about deferred exchange (*échange différé*). This is the exchange between generations, whereby we take something from the previous, older generation, which we will later give back to our children. The modern social State achieved this kind of inter-generational exchange through the social insurance system and through social networks. This means that inequalities – which are constantly reproduced under capitalism – were solved politically through state budgets, pension systems, health insurance institutions, and so on. What happens when we hear: "No, now each person has to take care about this by himself", i.e. when this entire area becomes commodified? When, therefore, the classic Marxist situation of commodity fetishism takes effect, when the individual must reappropriate his own sociality which confronts him in the alienated form of abstract value and its expression – money. Then you have destroyed the political means of solving conflicts, and, of course, enlarged and commodified the economic sphere. And at the same time you get a beautiful justification: "The state treats this problem badly. Why? Because it is not sufficiently modernized yet. And why is it not sufficiently modernized? Because it is still based upon the traditional culture, upon religious prejudices, upon the patriarchal society, etc". In this way, you are culturalizing this problem (which was already politically solved), you are positing it in the "archaic form" – and this is the same discourse in which the Renaissance sought to emancipate itself from medieval idiotism – you are setting up a program of cultural reform as a supplementary program for the expansion of economic commodity fetishism: national culture, supposedly, has to be updated. And this means that your are setting in motion a powerful ideological machine, which relies on state power and state money, in support of economic neo-liberal imperialism. If you say that you are supposedly defending culture, then you should say that you are achieving the same neo-liberal program on another front. And this is where, in my view, resides one of the most important political processes at work today in the European Union.

PRELOM: *Of course, one can draw a parallel here with the strategy of Thatcherism in Great Britain, at the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties, which also introduces this specific type of articulation between national culture and national identity, and thus between some traditional conservative values on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the neo-liberal problematic of the market and the individual, all of which is carefully packed together into a Gramscian strategy of cultural hegemony, as Stuart Hall and other Marxist oriented sociologists have shown.*

RM: Just to add something to this. Mrs. Thatcher did not only practice Gramsci, but also Althusser, when she stated: "Society does not exist – there are only individuals and families". This second part is here own supplement, which means, if we translate it, that only atomized individuals and the ideological state apparatuses exist.

PRELOM: *In relation to Althusser and Foucault which you both mention here, it is possible to pose a theoretical question. When you speak about some transformations in today's conjuncture, and especially about the transformations of the relationship between the concept of sovereignty and state institutions, it would be interesting to ask what happens to the problematic that Althusser understood under the rubric of the creation of the society effect, i.e. the problematic of the social totality? If we define the contemporary situation in terms of a shift from the problematic of the "autonomization of the political sphere" - which, as we know, expressed itself in European modernity through the terminology of national culture - to a Foucauldian problematic of biopolitics, of "demographic politics" and politicization of life, then where can we pose the question of the effect of totalization, and can we pose it in the first place? What does this shift from the mechanisms of social reglementation which take place through cultural institutions operating in symbolic-imaginary register, to the particular form of the "social bond" which stems from particularistic institutions of "social care", what does this shift bring about?*

RM: It seems to me that we should not simply speak about the decay of the national state, but rather of its transformation. National state, even as a subsidiary state, still retains some of its functions precisely in the area that you just mentioned. It is true that, at first sight, contemporary politics is managed through a series of discontinuous and particularistic projects. Although, I think that there are two powerful integrating factors – one that operates, so to say, automatically, while the other operates *ad hoc*.

One of the great integrative mechanisms is *commodity fetishism* and *generalized commodity production.* Today we are still experiencing that which Marx, in *Grundrisse,* extrapolated from the industry in the nineteenth century. In other words, we are still experiencing the total fetishization and economization of social life, which also means the total breakdown of society into, as Marx wrote, selfish

individuals, whose main integrating factor is money. Money is a political category today. Finance capital and global speculations on the stock-market which operate through electronic systems (where small percentage differences in exchange rates are the main source of speculative gain for those who have a significant mass of money) necessarily demand brutal force in order to sustain the value of this money, because it is this force which transfers onto the exploited masses of the world the loans in the value which should cover for this initial value, and which has yet to be produced. Inasmuch as I understand how speculative capital functions, I can say that these transactions are *Ponte Rosso* operations,[3] only on a bigger scale. For instance, during the Yugoslav times, I go to Milan in order to buy cheap Dinars, and then I go back to Yugoslavia to spend them of whatever is cheap, gasoline, meat or whatever. This is what all the people living near the border between Yugoslavia and Italy were doing. Then I buy some old, second-hand cowboy boots on Ponte Rosso and sell them in some small town in Yugoslavia as a status symbol. Therefore, first I profit from the difference in exchange rates, then from the difference in price, and finally from the difference between commodity exchange (second-hand cowboy boots) and symbolic economy (status symbols). I buy goods, I sell symbols, and I make profit. Big market speculators play upon on the same differences in prices between markets, only at the global level and with large sums of money. What happens afterwards? Precisely what happened with the first increase in the price of oil – there is an enormous increase of money, paper, or, literally, ideal money appearing on bank accounts which does not have a correlate in the produced value. This fictitious money with no real grounds then needs to be let to someone who thinks that he can use it as real money - and who will certainly pay it back as the money which is "covered" with produced value. This is why the debt crisis emerged in the first place, because this money without a real basis was invested as a loan to underdeveloped countries, which from now on will have to work for centuries in order to cover that money with real production value. In short, these are Ponte Rosso operations at the global level, the effect of which is that the difference between the rich and the poor is being increased more and more.

In order to realize this kind of relationship you have to have power. In other words, nobody would pay their debts if you did not have the army to enforce your debt claims. In my opinion, this system has reached its limits nowadays, because instead of just threatening with political isolation, sanctions and military attacks, these threats had to be realized: when sanctions were imposed against Yugoslavia and Iraq, when NATO bombed Yugoslavia, and when the army had to go into Iraq. When you have to realize threats and enforce them, then there is no proper threat any more. And we know from Freud that that which we imagine as something which could happen is always much worse than that which really happens, even when the worst things actually happen. I think that this system of threats, that is, of political activity, of the

3 *Ponte Rosso* is a bridge over the Trieste Canal situated close to the orthodox church of St. Spiridon. A nearby *Piazza Ponte Rosso* was a huge flea-market where Yugoslavs used to buy cheep goods. In the vicinity of *Ponte Rosso,* there were also numerous exchange offices. This "gray economy" brought several billions of dollars per year to Trieste.

activity at the level of the symbolic, is now worn-out, and certainly brings with it an even worse crisis: *passage á l'acte*, paranoia. This is precisely the economy that needs to be protected by the force of the State, police and military at the same time.

On the other hand, besides the universalism of commodity fetishism we have yet another universalistic discourse which represents the ideal mystification of the material logic of the general equivalent: *human rights*. Thus, this other type, these are the universalistic discourses that have legal or a para-legal form. Today we have, for instance, a big debate within the social sciences about different particularisms which, supposedly, act against universality (for example, the so-called "religious fundamentalisms" against the universal system of human rights and democracy), or which should, on the contrary, be included in the system of human rights ("all different, all equal in rights"). Against this, I think that there is an obvious way in which a certain particular interest can serve itself with an universalistic discourse. Then it is a matter of chance which particularistic demands will be realized through universal revendications and which ones will not. In short, the particularistic demand of the catholic South Slavs for their own state was accepted, while the similar particularistic demand of the orthodox South Slavs living on the territory of a catholic state, who were seeking the protection of their rights, was not respected. What was accepted was the ethnic demand of the majority nation in a Serbian province for their ethnic rights to be transformed into national rights and a national state. In short, the Albanians, yes, but Chechens, no. Why? There are no rules within this exchange of legal floscules and the realization of particularistic or identitarian demands. They are decided by chance, contingency, naked force, the interests of power, etc. Therefore I do not think that there is a veritable opposition between the particularism of identity and the universalism of the Roman Law. What is at play is rather an ideological discourse within which demands are being articulated, but these demands are being resolved, again, more or less, on the backbone of naked force, which again means that the system has reached its own limits.

PRELOM: *Since you mention human rights as one of the global integrative mechanisms, it might be useful to point out to a local excess related to this here in Slovenia. One of the dark sides of the constitution of the Slovenian state at the beginning of the 1990s was the administrative-juridical act of exclusion or, to be more precise, of an erasure of a part of the population that did not fall into the category of the "Slovenian nation". How do you conceive of that process? Is it possible, in this sense, to think of the process of the constitution of borders of state and trans-state constructs, both on the local and global levels, as a phenomenon of "objective violence", as Balibar would call it?*

RM: Concerning the erased people, I would say that there are two crucial things. First, that the violence over the erased is incommensurably large. The state brutality reached sadistic proportions which are symptomatic, because it was an administrative act carried out through the state apparatus, which took

place in a time of peace. There was no war here, so that one can say that this happened under the influence of enmity, the state of emergency, etc. The erasure happened during peacetime, during the time of normal state activity. It was consequently executed throughout the web ob State appratuses, from the ministries right down to the smallest municipal post, in a manner which appears sadistic (confiscation of papers, their ripping up in front of the eyes of the persecuted, etc).

The second thing is that the Slovenian state was not able to solve this problem although it knew it from the very moment from which it appeared. The problem "appeared" in February 1992, and already in September 1992 the government was discussing it. This is why ignorance cannot be a defense, as was the case in Nürnberg. Everybody knew about it, and this thing was effective. The procedure of erasure was against the existing laws of this state, and, in the first place, against its foundational act, the constitution. In spite of all that, the state was incapable of solving this problem, and still is. Therefore, this tells us something important about symptoms.

I try to analyze this entire problem in the following manner: that the same group of people - people who came to Slovenia from the other ex-republics of socialist Yugoslavia or their descendants – are the objects of state violence inasmuch as they are not citizens, whereas if they have citizenship they become the objects of special state care, thus acquiring the status of an endangered group. Of course, it should also be added that this group has no officially recognized status. Their only status which the state recognizes is one of immigrants, and this status is really attributed to them in a particular piece of legislation, in a document called the *National Cultural Program*. This is the only official recognition of that group in the State documents which has some binding power, but which nonetheless still has no legal weight. In short, if such people are citizens, it is the instrumentary of *governmentality* which takes care of them, the Foucauldian specialized instruments of biopolitics take charge (the endangered group, the care of special organs, the development of the specialist discourses of knowledge, etc.). If they are not citizens, then the sovereignty of the republic of Slovenia takes charge. They are effectively constituted as an exception in the sense in which the Schmittian sovereignty operates, that is to say, sovereignty which has the right to decide upon the state of exception. At the same time, within the state, we can find a hygienic discourse in operation, a biopolitico-demographical discourse, clothed in a culturalist jargon, because it is important that the entire thing remains a matter of a cultural program. This is why I think that the erased are trapped between, on the one hand, the logic of the contemporary type of the state, which still acts as a sovereign state, but not in the international arena, but rather in its relation to a group of powerless people, and, on the other hand, that these people are left in front of a special State apparatus of social care which operates on the basis of another ideological discourse, the ideological discourse of anti-Balkanism: of the Balkans as an rientalist phantasm. Both the first and the second thing effectively

imply that the sovereignty of people in this type of state is reduced to the sovereignty of the majority ethnic group.

> PRELOM: *How can we relate this with the problematic of the constitution of contemporary Europe, which is, as we know, being constructed not only on an economic and politico-ideological basis, but also in terms of different administrative and juridical exclusions, whereby the key concept is one of citizenship? What is the connection between the phenomenon of the erased and the problem of contemporary migrants and asylum seekers in developed capitalist states of Europe (for instance, the "sans-papiers" in France and elsewhere)? Can we speak about the same structural causality here?*

RM: If we step back and assume a wider perspective, this is, of course, one and the same thing, which is, at the same time, paradoxical. Because citizenship became important in the second half of the 19th Century with the first elements of the welfare state. As the welfare state begins to take care of the working masses (through networks of social care), suddenly the differences between the citizens who enjoy welfare rights and those who are non-citizens are constituted internally to the industrial proletariat of the time. This was, at the same time, the beginning of racism, the epidermic, biological racism which was not so evident before in countries such as France. France was precisely the state in which social and other differences were successfully incorporated into the Republic. In short, it is interesting that the problem of the separation between citizens and non-citizens within the class division of society appears with the rise of the welfare state.

Nowadays, when the welfare state is gone, this separation between citizens and non-citizens still remains, but with an additional paradox that non-citizens represent the avant-garde within the neo-liberal project, because they are indeed positioned within the labor force market without any kind of social rights or state protection. Thus, if we examine this problem in such a way, the *sans-papiers* and the *erased* are the avant-garde form of sociality which would prevail if the neo-liberal concept is to be fully realized, if it would not be important anymore if someone is a citizen or not, if everybody would be defined only according to their position in the labor market and the labor process. This is why I absolutely uphold the idea that the *erased* are the Slovenian *sans-papiers*, and I mean that literally, keeping in mind that the *sans-papiers* in France are the product of illegal human trafficking, while in Slovenia they are the product of administrative actions of the State. In my view, this represents the difference between the centralized state, which by virtue of its bureaucratic republicanism does not allow the free manipulation of human lives (unless it does it itself), and the peripheral state, which is in fact a comprador state, where the interest of those in charge is not the reproduction of the administrative apparatus and the universalistic discourse of the Republic, but the gain of material wealth - as was the case in Argentina, or what is usually termed "corruption" in transitional states. The state budget is a big source of money which is worth fighting for.

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Ivana Jakšić, *Visa Suisse*, 2002

PRELOM: *Amongst some contemporary French theorists such as Jacques Rancičre and Étienne Balibar, we can find a renewed interest in the reproblematization of some of the basic assumptions of European modernity, exactly around the new problems of work, of exclusion, of class divisions in the states of the center of developed capitalism. Rancičre is attempting to rethink certain potentials of the* Declaration of the Rights of Man, *which includes the issues of human rights, and Balibar focuses on the problem of the political form of citizenship. Do you think that it is adequate to approach the problem of the* erased *and the* sans-papiers – *theoretically as well as politically – through a radical reproblematization, if not a reappropriation of the Jacobin revolutionary gesture?*

RM: If we take this in truly radical sense, then I would agree with you. But in that case, the political sphere must necessarily be constituted outside the existing political apparatus. The political apparatus is, if we speak in traditional sociological jargon, a subsystem which was always in the hands of certain groups. Today, this subsystem has become a prey to those whom we call the political class. The true political sphere is now being opened in the streets. But this sphere is at the same time criminalized by that administrative, state, and political apparatus. Therefore, the new political sphere is constituted by the movements for alternative globalization, in Porto Alegre, etc. Not the NGOs and so on, but precisely these rebellious movements, Zapatistas, radical ecologists and other various groups.

What we should take from the Jacobins, in my view, is their gesture, but not their doctrines. Because the doctrine of the Jacobins is a doctrine of lawyers. This is what one of the early critics of the French Revolution, Edmund Burke, himself a liberal, noted: "When I saw how many provincial lawyers are sitting in the Convent, I knew that nothing good would come out of this". And Robespierre was one of those provincial lawyers too. One of the crucial articles of the Declaration, in my view, is the one which says that a person's access to rights is limited by these same rights of another person. A consequence of this is that everybody is assuming the position of the other, and thus simply looking for where he is endangered. And this is how we get this obsession with minorities, with the inflamed nations, this entire *ressantement* which replaces the revolutionary enthusiasm of the European masses. Today we are all being deprived of something, we are all being hurt, and this is why we have to seek help from a universalistic discourse. From here we can always get to what I call the "hypochondriac turn". This is when I constantly look at the place where something hurts me, and when I thus seek to constitute a group on the basis of this feeling of being endangered and these violations, which means, in a manner in which Urlich Beck is founding his "new cosmopolitanism", which altogether resembles a collective conspiracy of all those imperiled. I think that this destroys society and creates conflicts, because everyone has universalistic discourses on his side. That is why this discourse is "universalistic". I do not believe in *cultural translation*, because cultural translation is the homework which each demagogue can easily do.

So, if we want to look at things radically, if we think that the political sphere really needs to be constituted, if we want to see this constitution as an act of discontinuity, of resistance, then I agree with that. But there is nothing of this sort in the discussions about the European constitution. At the same time, this seems as unattainable for the masses which push upon Europe from the periphery, because they are deprived of their rights and dispossessed. This is what we need to focus on by ourselves, right here.

> PRELOM: *The question that follows directly from this is the question of "history repeating itself", that is, it is the problem of the reautonomization of the political sphere of the State on the European (semi)periphery, which occurs simultaneously when this periphery is getting reinscribed into history through the slogans of the "rebirth of democracy". What is the historical significance of this tragic gesture of historical repetition, and what is the concrete importance of democratic institutions – especially of parliamentary democracy – for the contemporary construction of Europe?*

> RM: I would say, as Marx did in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, that in Eastern Europe in 1989 the specter of 1848 was still looming. This was not the "springtime of nations", but the Eighteenth Brumaire of nations. Why? Because the system which was brought down by this political project already proceeded from the critique of parliamentary democracy. This means that the socialist system already represented the critique of the achievements of the French Revolution. And when this socialist system collapsed, it was not possible to solve the problems which occurred with the collapse of socialism with the instruments which this system already wanted to replace. This is the same as the introduction of neo-liberalism into the world economy. If we step back and reread Adam Smith – who is often, quite wrongly I think, taken as a founding father of neo-liberalism – then contemporary neo-liberalism represents a theoretically different kind of liberalism, which does not take into account the fact that after Smith came Ricardo, who showed that free market simply does not simply work all by itself, that the "invisible hand" is a hand of a thief and that it would destroy the world, that there is an ecological limit to growth which would destroy capitalism, and so on. These were Ricardo's theses.

Thus the repetition of the old patterns of liberal economy and free society, and so on, if I now skip through this problematic, is just a particular class strategy within radically changed circumstances. These circumstances are simply the conditions of the socialization of the labor process and the self-abolishment of work, of the value-economy, which is now visible in the struggles over computer software or the struggles around the Internet. Because the Internet is already a socialized medium of communication and production, and big corporations now have to catch hold of this by means of privatization, because technology always runs ahead of them. Each second we have some technological innovations, or somebody finds a way to circumvent copyright laws, or ownership monopolies, and so on, because

technology already allows this, because I already possesses my sociality, and I do not need to go to the market to buy it there. As a consequence, the corporations, with the assistance of the State, must then pursue these developments and retroactively privatize their achievements with new regulations backed up by the force of the State. In short, we have what Antonio Negri in his interpretation of the *Grundrisse* posited as the function of always-already socialized *general intellect* and as the self-abolition of work with the automatization of the labor process. This is where I see the conflict. These liberal-juridical ideologies are being renewed with copyright laws, with intellectual ownership, with the privatization of social relations and of social services, especially since production itself is already socialized in an extent never seen before. My metahistorical standpoint is that it was possible to introduce communism already during the industrial epoch of the 19th Century. It is also possible to introduce it today, *but*, this always happens within the confrontations of class struggle and it is clear that those who possess political and military power will fight ardently. But others are fighting too.

This contemporary situation was adequately characterized by Bogdan Lešnik in one of his essays in *Mladina*: "I see class struggle, but I see no classes". This is because there are no classes in themselves. Because even the working class had to be made – and E. P. Thomson wrote about this in his *The Making of the English Working Class*. It takes a hundred-year process to transform those dirty, uneducated, drunken, poor, dispersed, downtrodden people which were beating their wives and terrorizing their children at home, into a political class. The bourgeois interpretation was, of course, that those mindless, ignorant and morally corrupt people cannot do anything but to toil in the mines. And yet, despite this, a class came out of this process, a class which had its pride, its own organization, and which said: from now on, we make history.

PRELOM: *This brings us to the question of "making" history. To what extent is it possible today to conceive of a new politics, of a new political strategy – especially at the moment when analysis reveals numerous obscure sides of the processes that develop simultaneously in the center and on the periphery of the world system – and how can we understand our own historical situation today, which is already contaminated with the dominant models of universality? What is the position of today of the intellectuals in Eastern Europe with regards to this? Is an intellectual strategy which insists on the "universal" writing of European history against local "particularisms", possible, even if it is necessarily contradictory? How can we, in your opinion, think and "make Europe" – this last being the title of the recent edition initiated by the French historian Jacques Le Goff, and which is currently being translated into Slovenian?*

RM: The situation is really grim, but I am an optimist. I have foreseen the fall of both of our previous regimes: of the local Stalinism in the 1960s, and of Yugoslav socialism in the 1980s. In a certain period they were indeed both "paper tigers". But a tiger needs to be pushed down so that it becomes a paper tiger. This is, of course, a

question of strategy. But, in the first place, we should notice that Le Goff's edition which bears this name is openly colonialist. It seeks to include such Eastern authors as Bronislaw Geremek, thus, those who are already present in the West. And in general, the list of authors included in the edition is quite exclusive, restricted to Western Europe. What we can see here is how deep the relations of inequality truly are, relations which have, at the same time, been established instantaneously. Because during the sixties things were different. Self-management in Yugoslavia was one of the social models which invited respect around the world, at the same time when Yugoslavia as a state was leading one of the most respectable movements in the world – the non-aligned. These deep inequalities were thus set up in a very short period, and thus also we can hope that they will be as easy to get rid of. Intellectual strategies are, of course, open. I believe in theory. And my thesis is that one of the necessary strategies today is to work on our own tradition. When we were young we were, of course, against *praxis* philosophy, although one should have respected this philosophy as an important trend in Marxism, capable of providing high quality concrete analyses of the social relations in Yugoslavia and in the world. For instance, this is how Yugoslav sociology developed great analytical power in the analysis of conflicts and of class structure in the socialist societies. *This* tradition, the tradition of theory and resistance needs to be reactivated today. That is the first point.

The second one has to do with what I already spoke about. Sometimes I get the feeling that all our lives we were buying second-hand, from the bargain sales in the supermarket of Western Europe. On the other hand, it also seems to me that the decisive theoretical events happened during 1920s in the Soviet Union. To give an example, the idea that ideology has a material existence is the basic thesis of Voloshinov/Bakhtin in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. That the "unconscious is structured as language" is Voloshinov's position in his book *Freudianism*, where he first destroys his previous phantasmagoric representation of Freudianism as biologism, and then states: "The unconscious is ideological, and it is made of words". Therefore, you have an anticipation of Lacan. Not to speak about the formalists, who were, by the way, engaged in a very productive theoretical clash with the Bakhtinians. There are interesting parallels which occur here. As we know, Bakhtin created a theory of class struggle within the symbolic, which he terms polyphony: the sign is the battlefield of class struggle. One other philosopher coming from a very different philosophical tradition to Bakhtin, and who most probably never even heard of him, but who also participated, in his own way, in the historical break of the October Revolution - Alexandre Kojève - wrote an excellent analysis of Julian the Emperor,[5] also known as Julian the Apostate, who wanted to abolish Christianity. Kojève, in this book, literally analyses Bakhtin's polyphony within Julian's discourse. Because Julian is simultaneously speaking as a philosopher, an emperor and an intellectual. As an intellectual he is a skeptic and a nihilist, as a philosopher he is an atheist and a

5 "The emperor Julian and his art of writing", in: *Ancients and Moderns: Essays on the Tradition of Political Philosophy in Honor of Leo Strauss*, J. Cropsey (ed.), Basic Books, New York, 1964

materialist, and as an emperor he is aware that ideology is necessary for the functioning of the state. In short, I want to say that the October Revolution made thinkers and intellectual projects sensitive for the class struggle within the symbolic. Those who lived inside the horizon of the October Revolution have already practiced what we were later rediscovering with Althusser, Lacan, and other such thinkers. And this is one amongst other projects which is very easy, because it is here, within our reach, and we can use it in order to liberate ourselves from the position of the oriental which has been imposed on us.

PRELOM: *Could you, in this sense, also problematize the current strategy of "retro-principle", of the recuperation of traditions, whether of the avant-garde or some other ones from Eastern Europe?*

RM: Generally speaking, the scene is saturated with contradictions and conflicts. It is clear that the Western institutional apparatuses and art markets have gladly accepted the project of colonial conquest of the East, because there was obviously something to take from there. It is also clear that the people from the East naively took part in this project. The consequence of this is a new old system and a novel canonization of Eastern art by the standards of the Western markets, Western museums and archives.

Therefore, the art field is itself internally contradictory. This got me thinking that while some of the tendencies in art are considered to be progressive, they are in fact extremely conservative, because they reestablish the aesthetic sphere in the sense of the romantic ideology, the ideology originally used to establish this sphere in Europe. Now we have the symptoms of this return, because if had Walter Benjamin who was writing about technical reproduction in art, about the end of the artist aura and the end of authorship, what is happening today is precisely the opposite: the emphasis is being placed on the presence of the artist, on the aesthetic value of objects, on the gallery and the museum, on experts and curators – in short, on that entire barrage discourse which surrounds the artistic graveyard.

On the other hand, art is the only sphere where questions like this can be posed, and where they can be discussed. In art catalogues, we find some theoretical articles that cannot be published anywhere else. In mainstream sociological journals, you always find the same mishmash, and you know precisely what you can write about, because there is an awful presence of censorship. While at the same time, people are opening some crucial historical questions are in art catalogues. As a consequence, the aesthetic sphere is a sphere where conflict truly came to be expressed and formulated in clear terms. This is because this same old romantic, outdated, *passé* ideology conceives of art in terms of conflict, in terms of experiment, because it allows experimentation, even when this is not the case in other forms of social life. Thus, I only have a general answer that the aesthetic field is, of course, conservative by definition. But, at the same time, art possesses a strategic value in the current conjuncture.

PRELOM: *But precisely in this conjuncture that you are speaking about, there exists a considerably strong and dominant form of criticism which goes by the name of the critique of totalitarianism. Thus, for instance, when today one is discussing Lukács" concept of the "tendency in art", one would have to point out its totalitarian character. How do you comment on the fact that it is the term "totalitarianism" which reaches the ultimate point of embarrassment of modernity?*

RM: I will reply laterally. The concept of totalitarianism is a category of political philosophy. As soon as you approach it from a different angle, either as Foucault does, or as a sociologist, this concept loses its meaning. For instance, in our own tradition one of the big breakthroughs in the critique of Stalinism is Tomaž Mastnak's book *Towards the Critique of Stalinism.* At the times when we were all fascinated by faction struggles in the Politburo, but in fact fooled by the liberal interpretation of the so-called totalitarianism, Mastnak said no, let us take a look at how people lived their everyday life, let us take a look at what factory regulations were, how the workers struggled against terror through the absenteeism in the factories. Mastnak changed the perspective in such a way, that the concept of totalitarianism became obsolete and lost its meaning. Therefore, we should put in question the hegemony of the politico-philosophical discourse which essentially goes hand-by-hand with the expanding liberal horizon. It does so, in the first place, because it seeks simple solutions, because it reduces contradictions in real historical processes to simple formulae - Hobbes is one of the most important thinkers who was doing this (and this was an intellectual achievement, but of some four centuries ago, and is not today). Secondly, because it activates alternative discourses. My opinion is that after Foucault we cannot speak about totalitarianism. And just to add something to this, someone who wrote about the conditions of totalitarianism was Gramsci. Gramsci said: when you have totalitarianism, you also have the articulation of social conflicts in the form of cultural conflicts. And this is exactly what is happening today within liberalism, as I pointed out at the beginning: political conflicts and social conflicts are articulated through culture, as in the case in fascist Italy. Thus, I think Gramsci that should be turned upside down here, in the way in which can see the same effects that he produced with his own analysis, which means that the contemporary system is quite close to what Gramsci lived through under Mussolini.

PRELOM: *At the end of Yugoslav socialism one of the concepts which sought to reflect the crisis of this system and which also sought to suggest a way out of this crisis, was the concept of the "unfinished state". This comprised, in the first place, a lack of an unambiguous relationship between some of the classical* topoi *of the liberal conception of politics – such as individual rights and civic rights, that is, of citizenship and nationality. And yet, it is clear that it was precisely these ideological motives which carried the violent destruction of Yugoslavia. Could we thus conceive of the present condition of the post-*

Yugoslav space, or at of least some of its parts, as a condition of "finished states", that is, as the consequence of the process of "finishing States"?

RM: Yes, absolutely. This in fact seems really amusing. Because this thesis of Đinđić is extremely normative: "We know what a "finished" state is, and Yugoslavia was not one". We can say that today, when all states are finished, yes, we can see what happened. But Mastnak also inverted this by saying that with the new "independent and autonomous" states, it was civil society which came into power. Both theses, although opposite, are in any case "true" – which means that that the conceptual apparatus which operates with liberal-democratic idea of the State and civil society, is inadequate. Of course that it is inadequate, because this is a problem that is posed at the beginning of the constitution of the republican state, and because civil society is already for Hegel, the residue of feudal corporate relations, of the type of sovereignty in which sovereignty is not centralized, but in which each landlord had his own sovereignty (Hegel was the great thinker of this historical compromise, which did not last for long). Thus, I think that with these concepts we can only arrive at some ironic comments, such as: the state was finished in Srebrenica, or, civil society came to power with the appearance of the erased in Slovenia. But we must move beyond this, which means that we need a more developed apparatus, which is the apparatus of *historical materialism*, basically, the one that is possible today. Which means, the one which respects the 20th century, in which Lukács also has his own place.

PRELOM: *As we can see from the post-Yugoslav space, the current understanding of cultural phenomena is primarily defined through the idiom of "national culture", through the particularistic cultures of nations. And yet, some forms of popular culture are constituted outside of the nationally defined cultural space. There were numerous controversies and polemics around one aspect of such hybrid forms of cultural production – the so-called "turbo-folk". How do you interpret these phenomena? Can one say that popular culture in the Balkans carries a certain transgressive potential?*

RM: Turbo-folk is the only contribution to globalization from the ex-Yugoslav territories. I try to think it now through the concept of peripheral cultural industries, which must activate the social potentials of these spaces if they want to survive the clash with global cultural industries of the center. This means that their relation to existing social networks is, in essence, more intimate than the Hollywood perspective, from which you sell some abstract, predictable stereotypes which are to be equally accepted in territories as diverse as Japan, South Africa and Finland. This also means that turbo-folk in some way expresses the resistance of peripheral regions. I personally like the affair surrounding the [Eurovision] song *Lane moje*, not because I care about copyrights, but because this affirms that there is a unified space from Azerbaijan to Stockholm (where people also voted for this song). There is thus a real cultural and social bond which links these peripheral areas, which unifies the European periphery. Even if such a competition would be

posited on a world scale, it would be no less probable that something like Yugoslavia, or Serbia and Montenegro would win, because this country has its real nexus in Australia, in the US, in Canada, and so on. Just listen to the *Halo Pink* show: "Greetings to my brother in Sydney and my aunt in Philadelphia, and, at also to my grandmother in Vranje". Thus, all these people are living in globalized circumstances for the last forty years. They did not wait for us to tell them that it is called *globalization* now. Because they are living these conditions on their own skin, and that is, of course, the social substrate of this new activism.

This interview was conducted by Ozren Pupovac and Slobodan Karamanić
on 23rd March 2004 in Ljubljana, and published in *Prelom 6/7*.
translated by Ozren Pupovac

Milica Tomić & Branimir Stojanović, *Alone*, 2001

CONSERVATIVE UPHEAVAL AND CAPITALIST UTOPIA: AFTERMATH OF THE RESISTENCE

Vladimir Marković

Tolerance is a form of violence carried out by the system. It is important to bear this in mind in our everyday encounters with the superficial and two-dimensional slogans of the ruling liberal-conservative consensus – the slogans that are astonishing because of the simplicity of their enunciation and the blatant comfort of the positions from which they are stated. In Serbia during the 1990s, anti-Miloševićism represented the common denominator of political articulation and the *raison d'être* of the unified action of ideologically heterogeneous forces that constituted the "pro-democratic bloc". Today it is important to take resolute steps towards reflecting the basic political differences hidden behind this screen, which is always used in the service of disqualifying every attempt at passing critical judgment on the activities of Serbian political alternative.

The upheaval of "democratic nationalism" in Serbia after the fall of Milošević's regime was used to translate genocidal war practice into a normal political pattern. Precisely that kind of normalization is serving as a basis for legitimizing the political power of those forces which during the long period of their "oppositional" mandate – countering Milošević's political tactics in Dayton – were actively supporting the advocates of the strategy of genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Needless to say, the thesis on "democratic nationalism" could be defended only by those who openly state that ethnically based individual and mass murder is democratic. The fact is: nationalism was indeed affirmed through murder in the 1990s. But what makes this ideology sufficiently acceptable – so that it can fit the frame of the dominant liberal-conservative consensus in Serbia today – is the omnipresent brand of anti-Communism. This kind of anti-Communist democratic nationalism, easily facilitates the distancing of its supporters from the local-imperialist nationalism of the previous regime. Following a very simple formula, they proclaimed as a historical fact the continuity of the "anti-Serbian Communist regime" from 1945 to 2000. The fall of Milošević's regime, read in this way, did not signify the end of the decade of reactionary Serbian chauvinism, but represented the final clash of "pro-democratic national forces" with Communism – thereby removing "the last brick from Berlin wall".

A young *Otpor*-ist, 1999

This sequence of events brings us back to the so-called People's movement of *Otpor* (*Resistance*) as avant-garde representatives of such "pro-democratic national forces" in Serbia.[1] Let us remember that the feigned support for the student protests of 1996/1997 went hand-in-hand with the aspirations of the larger part of leaders and participants of the protests to articulate the moral majority – comprising the remains of the former socialist middle class – within some kind of passionate national-romantic discourse. Therefore, getting support for the protests from the so-called national institutions, such as the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serbian Sciences and Arts Academy, was not a surprise. The ideological conjuncture of that historical moment necessitated the conservative turn of the protests with slogans from the repertoire of the constructed tradition of "svetosavlje".[2] *Otpor* emerged from this political tendency and its ideology, being one of the most important means for its proliferation.

Otpor established itself – by evolving from a student to a "people's" movement – as the most important and leading force of Serbian "civil society" in its quest to bring down Milošević. Their "anti-Miloševićism" was generously supported by the budgets of big government and non-government institutions from the US and the European Union. Still, their ideological outlook could not have been completely emancipated from Belgrade's provincial milieu, i.e. the ideology of "democratic nationalism" and its neo-liberal derivatives.

Statements from *Otpor's* "Memorandum" and the "Declaration", public speeches by the movement's leaders and numerous street actions were undoubtedly marked by the overt negation of the traumatic effects of war-politics and were topped off with cheerful national pathos. For the young people shouting slogans like "Slobo, fuckin' cunt, you betrayed Krajina (or Kosovo)" precisely expressed the need for

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1 Otpor was also the avant-garde in a wider process of "democratization" of the new post-Socialist space. The invention of the strategies of "non-violent democratic resistance" through public peaceful and symbolically loaded, carnival-like manifestations was certainly inspired by the anti-globalist movement of the 1990s, but also substantially funded by various US organizations for democracy – such as Freedom House, International Republican Institute, National Democratic Institute and National Endowment for Democracy, Soros Foundation and Open Society Institute. The events of the civic and student protest 1996/7 and their articulation by Otpor, as well as the outcome in the "October the 5th Revolution" provided the model for similar strategies adopted from the 2000 on in Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan... Few members of Otpor even participated in the actual events in some of those countries – in the Georgian "Rose Revolution" the movement called "Kmara!" ("Enough!", which was one of the most frequent Otpor slogans) adopted the symbol of clenched fist and in the Ukrainian "Orange Revolution" the student organization "Pora" ("Now") played an important role learning from Otpor.

2 *Svetosavlje* is the particular religious cult nourished by the Serbian Orthodox Church, which celebrates Saint Sava (originally the prince Rastko Nemanjić, son of Stefan Nemanja, the Serbian ruler and founder of the Serbian medieval state and Church in 12th century).

creating a new political option that would counter the nationally devastating politics of the "Communist dictator". This new politics would supposedly effectuate Serbia's rise to a position of leadership in the Balkans – to become a regional force by means of military or economic power. It also comprised the glorification of the neo-liberal model of the "omnipotent" free market economy – in an utterly comprador style – which could hardly hide the grim colonial future of the Serbian economy once it became open for Western capital. This discourse, even in its most candied form of Serbian micro-imperial economic expansion, still reeked of blood spilled in the recent wars. What was the exact message of the *Otpor* ideologists in their elaboration of their own utopian version of Serbian capitalism?

Milošević regime's propaganda poster against *Otpor*, 2000

For a certain period of time, Serbia held under its immediate military control a large part of territory in the Balkans, but it ultimately failed to sustain it. We must learn from this failure and replace military with economic domination according to the principles of the Balkan Commonwealth – a zone in which Serbia could realize its interests through regional initiatives.

OTPOR! Memorandum, http://www.otpor.com

The ideological project of the leaders of *Otpor* also comprises a metapolitical instance elaborated in their Memorandum that essentializes the clash between two allegedly cultural patterns which forged the destiny of the collective identity of Serbia and Serbian people. In this way, the European and civic Serbia – one with the urban and individualistic outlook that represents, according to its ideologues, the authentic liberal and democratic Serbian tradition of "svetosavlje" – is counter-posed to an image of Serbia that is "inauthentic" – a primitive and Oriental society produced through centuries of Turkish dominion as well as the fifty years of Communist rule. In short this means that some kind of Cold war is necessary in Serbia in order to defend the values of the "free world" against the tendencies to make the "beloved fatherland" some kind of leper-island like Cuba.

There are two historically opposed tendencies in the geo-political space of the Balkans and Serbia that look like two trunks growing out of the two completely different roots of civilization and history. The first root, the one that we call Asiatic – not because it originates from Asia, but for the mentality of oriental despotism and the Islamic Jamahiriya – represents the outcome of the five centuries of Turkish occupation that was cemented by the ruling ideology of pseudo-socialism.

The other root – represented in the enlightened visions of St. Sava and Dositej Obradović – had been severely repressed by that Asiatic root. This European root – grounded in individual initiative and personal motivation as the foundation of social prosperity – was significantly reinforced by our compatriots during the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century. They were educated in Europe and got back to Serbia to renew the squashed European model in the beloved fatherland. This model is based on the wealthy and satisfied individual's motivation to build a rich and prosperous society. The value system implicated in this model is very strict and its laws are the laws of personal motivation and of the free market in all spheres of social life: material (work, individual and familial wealth) or non-material (ideas, culture and education). The basis of this social model, therefore, rests upon personal initiative, making the individual – with his desires and aspirations, his faults and fears, his ideas and deeds – the core of the value system.

The Asiatic model, still dominant, tries with all its might to destroy that European root in Serbia, but it stands no chance in the face of present historical changes, hence the futility of the attempt to make Serbia a leper-island defended by barbed wire and cast off from the rest of the world from ideas that would be "dangerous" for the ruling regime. Striving to sustain such a "closed society" could be successful only temporarily and in god forsaken places – such as Cuba – but impossible at the crossroads of Europe – that is, in Serbia.

OTPOR! Memorandum, http://www.otpor.com

Since in the case of war – or the ideological and cultural "Cold War", as their actors perceive it – nobody is able to choose the means, it becomes clear why *Otpor* developed an association with the Serbian Orthodox Church and certain members of the Serbian Sciences and Arts Academy. This also included frivolous street actions such as "the Great March" on Belgrade on 9th November 1999, which was either a very bad parody of Mussolini's Great March of 1922 or the homage to another 9th November – The Nazi march on Munich in 1923.

Another example for *Otpor*'s dubious political statements is another street action – the public staging of "the investigation of pro-Turks" intended as a parody of a scene from Petar Petrović Njegoš's epic poem *Gorski vjenac*, but actually looked like the well-known theme of ethnic cleansing carried out in the form of a pseudo-scientific questionnaire.

"Citizens, are you for an Asiatic Serbia that looks like Turkey, or Iraq or Lebanon – the regime's image of Serbia – or for a European democratic Serbia that would look like the Western progressive states – the real image worth fighting for?" We are proud to state that the results were: 500 people for European Serbia and only one for Asiatic Serbia.

OTPOR! Info-26.2.2000. http://www.otpor.com

The dominant form of "paralyzing tolerance" – whose structural violence needs to be stressed again – is blocking the articulation of any kind of focused and elaborated critique of *Otpor* as a product of the Serbian civic alternative: the NGO forces which staged the current "efforts of tackling the questions of political responsibility for the wars", dubious as they are. In order to pose the question of responsibility as a political question we also have to open the question of responsibility for the "democratic opposition" and the "forces of civil society" that actually took part in blocking the effective alternative to nationalist politics. Posing the question of responsibility in Serbia's current political situation must not revolve around the formal questions of juridical responsibility for particular incidents during the war. It ends up confined within the procedures of "democratic transition" which serve as a tool for sustaining the dominant positions of the new bourgeoisie that emerged from the wars. Therefore, the question has to be about the ongoing class struggle in the midst of these wars as well as in their political aftermaths.

translated by Dušan Grlja

MAGNET, *FaluSerbia*, 1996

AGAINST LIBERAL POST-YUGOSLAV CONFORMISM

Nebojša Jovanović

The only respect in which the area of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) can unquestionably become part of today's Western neoliberal universe is in the conformism of its intellectual elite: sunken in abjection toward the radical leftist critique and imagination, these intellectual conformists are the main promoters of what Russell Jacoby concisely called "social amnesia" in his now classical eponymous critical study.[1] For benevolent by-standers who know that nationalism is the main social malady in the ex-Yugoslav republics it may come as a surprise that the post-Yugoslav version of social amnesia has nothing to do with blatant ethno-nationalistic rhetoric – the intellectual conformists this paper confronts are not to be found among fervent nationalists, but among some of their most prominent critics. How are we to explain this paradox? Or, to be more precise, can we here speak about a paradox here at all?

Let us thus start with a fresh voice from the Bosnian-Herzegovinian intellectual scene, a voice that announces changes for the better in terms of polemic discussion of current social affairs. Enter Ivan Vukoja, editor-in-chief of *Status*, a recently founded "magazine for (political) culture and social questions." Vukoja states that *Status* aims to

> openly and critically discuss important issues... that are not taboo, but where it is somehow implicit that any writing about them is politically and ideologically tinted or conditioned, and as such is serving those same political and ideological goals.
>
> This assumption is one of the reasons why, in most cases, issues and problems concerning Bosnia-Herzegovina are written about in line with particular trends (in worldview, ideology, and politics), and not in an open critical and theoretical discourse based on facts and coherent arguments.... We hope to make Status a counterweight to these one-sided, ideologized, fashionable lines of thought and (un)conscious attempts at instrumentalizing particular facts, ideas, and theories.[2]

This is nothing short of a manifesto of the post-Yugoslav liberal-bourgeois conformists, who apparently have not learned anything from Jacoby, although *Social Amnesia* was translated in SFRY. The first of these lessons would be, of course, the one about the falsity of the assumption that Vukoja insists on – that there are

1. Russell Jacoby, *Social Amnesia: A Critique of Conformist Psychology from Adler to Laing*, Boston, 1975

2. Ivan Vukoja, *"Otvorena misao" ("Open Thought")*, an editorial, *Status* 2, February/March, 2004, p. 4.

two ways of reacting to social problems: one is absolutely inadequate and phony, because it is ideological, while the other is a salutary consideration of problems from the "objective" position of "open thought," empiricism, and common sense. Jacoby refuted all of this thirty years ago, criticizing, among others, Hannah Arendt (*Origins of Totalitarianism*, 1958), for the premises that are "deeply ingrained in the liberal consciousness which is convinced that ideology is a form of abstract nonempirical logic that issues into violence and terror."[3] For that reason the intellectual conformist likes to see himself in a space beyond ideology, after the proverbial end of history and politics, discarding every appeal to ideological and political commitment as being anachronistic, obsolete, and even dangerous: *Wasn't it ideology and politics that flung us into war and poverty? Don't we therefore need a fact-driven theoretical discourse, apolitical and de-ideologized, to give us refuge from the madness of nationalism and war?*[4]

This very act of distancing oneself from ideological filth is an elementary ideological gesture that actually makes intellectual conformists champions of ideology – more precisely of liberalism, which tries to persuade us that ideological and political struggle is a thing of the past and all that remains today are cultural issues (identity politics, religion, multicultural tolerance/intolerance). It is therefore not surprising that the post-Yugoslav conformist is reminiscent of the most famous film character who cites Baudelaire's witticism about the devil's cleverest ruse, an elementary ideological gesture – to make the world believe that he does not exist. It is the ambiguous figure of Roger "Verbal" Kint in Bryan Singer's *The Usual Suspects*. For most of the film the small-time crook Verbal Kint (Kevin Spacey) tells the self-confident police detective Dave Kujan (Chazz Palminteri) in retrospect about a series of events that lead to the massacre Kujan is investigating. The bloody events, Verbal says, were masterminded by the monstrous, elusive, and mythical crimelord Keyser Söze. But at the very end of the film we find out that Verbal's entire story has in fact been a fabrication, cleverly composed and improvised from elements that he was fed, unintentionally, by Kujan

3. Jacoby, *Social Amnesia*, p. 6.

4. Proof of the utter regression of the "liberal consciousness" in the last thirty years can be traced in the following detail. While thirty years ago Jacoby was accusing Alvin Toffler for indulging in ecstatic glorification of technology, today we can observe that liberal conformists are often fascinated with the obscurantist refashioning of tradition and primordiality. In every issue of *Status*, just after Vukoja's editorial, there is a regular section "Mislioci" ("Thinkers"), presenting the works of authors such as Rudolph Steiner, Béla Hamvas, and their interpreters. How current issues in Bosnia-Herzegovina and "coherent arguments" can possibly be linked with, say, Steiner's reading of Goethe's fairytale *The Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily* or Martin Lings's analyses of Guénon, remains known only to *coherently argued* Vukoja.
Status's fascination with New Age mysticism and "wisdom" culminated obscenely in its fifth issue (November/December 2004), in a section which – judging by its title "Planet žena" ("Planet of Women") – was evidently meant to "open critical and theoretical discourse based on facts" on the status of women in Bosnia-Herzegovina today. Unfortunately even a passing glance at the three articles that make up this section shows that beneath the possible pro-feminist intentions of *Status* there continues to lurk a vulgar obscurantism, mixing a New Age spectacle (the proverbial "war of the sexes") with the most notorious version of machismo. Exemplary proof of this is provided by the text "Planeta žena: Spekulacije o evoluciji i dejstvu seksualnosti žene i muškarca" ("Planet of Women: Speculations on Evolution and the Role of Male and Female Sexuality") by the Serbian "sexologist" Jovo Toševski, who – given his attitudes about women and the superior virility of the Serbian male – can only be described as a mixture of Otto Weininger and Radovan Karadžić.

himself – information and names from a board on the police station wall, or even the porcelain brand Kobayashi which turned into the name of Söze's first associate, etc. Kujan only realizes that he has been tricked after he finally lets Verbal leave the station, having believed his story, or, to be precise, having believed in his own superiority over "poor" Verbal, which – so he thought – allowed him to tell whether Verbal was lying or not.

5. In this sense the West and Kujan are victims of the illusions they have about themselves – that they are brilliant "subjects who are supposed to know" and cannot be deceived. The West and Kujan are therefore perfect embodiments of the Lacanian phrase *"les non-dupes errant"* – precisely those who believe they cannot be duped are most in the wrong, blinded by the belief in their own superiority.

6. We owe this attribute to Ivo Banac's article "Možda ovo nije pjesma" ("Perhaps This Is Not a Poem"), *Feral Tribune*, August 20th 2004.

Is there not an analogous relationship between Western neo-liberals (so-called "radical centrists"), and post-Yugoslav intellectual conformists? The latter deliver the self-confident Kujan-like West inside information on what actually happened at the scene of the bloody crimes when Yugoslavia collapsed, and in the process they use signifiers ultimately adopted from the West – the standard shibboleths of liberal, multicultural Western ideology: identity politics, trendy multiculturalism, seeing in the East an absence of democratic traditions and the evil legacy of real-existing socialism. In short, the conformist Verbals tell the West exactly what it wants to hear – they exist only to confirm to the West what it already "knew."[5] In doing so they present themselves as innocent *goodfellas* who just happened to be at the scene of the crime, thus hushing up the part they themselves played in the whole affair.

The nature of their extremely ambiguous position and role is well illustrated by the case of Ivan Lovrenović, the most prominent Bosnian intellectual and "the most Croatian of Bosnian writers."[6] His recent interview on Croatian (State) Television contained much of the dramaturgy of Singer's movie: he too was questioned by some cocky interviewer who thought his self-confidence gave him an excuse for asking stupid questions (like what would happen if the number of Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina fell to such a level that they went from being a constitutive nationality to a national minority), which gave Lovrenović the cue to deliver a simple, coherent line about nationalists being to blame for everything. But at the very end of the interview there was a complete turnabout that revealed Lovrenović in his full ambiguity – he pulled out a set of books from under the table and donated them to his host, with the following explanation:

> The whole business about so-called identity – cultural, historical, etc. – is much abused. The Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina have a most specific and tangible historical and cultural identity of their own, which, unfortunately, because of the great craving for pan-ethnic identity, which does not recognize any differences, is ignored, neglected, and trampled on by Croats themselves, etc. I have here a collection of old Franciscan texts from an edition which I'm putting out together with my good friend and publisher…, and I'd like to donate it to the TV station; maybe it will animate someone, maybe you, or

someone else; maybe it will provide the basis for a discussion, for some kind of program showing what the Croats in Bosnia really are, because they are spoken about in a way that reduces them to their political dimension – do they or do they not have equal rights, are they or are they not represented at a political level; otherwise they really live in a sad and miserable state where their substance is completely sucked out of them, which in a historical and cultural sense is a large, vibrant, existing, tangible substance. This [he points to the books] is just one fragment of that substance.[7]

This final twist, this final gesture with which the talkative protagonist calls into question the whole story he has just told his interviewer and the viewers, clearly demonstrates why Lovrenović falls into the category of nationally-oriented post-Yugoslav intellectuals who boldly criticize the regimes in power but have no intention of departing, to put it in Bourdieu's terms, from the very national *doxa*, in other words to renounce the main ideologemes of nationalist politics – the belief in the original innocence, purity, and "vibrancy" of the national substance. Subsequently, the greatest achievement of their criticism is precisely the critique of a particular regime that corrupts the original purity of the national substance as contained, for example, in the ecclesiastical writings Lovrenović so loves to edit. In this very point we find a most uncanny question that can be raised about the relation between post-Yugoslav nationalist regimes and their liberal critics. If Slobodan Milošević and Franjo Tudjman were just unscrupulous pragmatists who used nationalist ideas but never really sincerely believed in them, who then are the true, authentic advocates of that idea, the *true believers*, who in contrast to the pragmatic usurpers truly believe in the nation, in the original purity and sanctity of its substance? Who, if not our liberal conformists?

7. TV show *Nedjeljom u 2 (Sunday at Two)*, Hrvatska Radio Televizija, April 10th 2005.

8. Ivan Lovrenović is among the first signatories of such a petition against the "slighting of the name" of the medieval Bosnian king Tvrtko I (Tvrtko Kotromanić): "The name of Tvrtko I has pride of place in the history of Bosnia. It would be impossible to refer to a continuity of Bosnian statehood without Tvrtko's medieval state. We therefore consider that Bosnia and its citizens should show more respect for all that is connected with his name... We express our dissatisfaction, amazement, and disagreement with the initiative for renaming part of the street bearing the name of this greatest Bosnian king after the poet Izet Kiko Sarajlić. Our amazement is all the greater because the initiators of the idea include individuals and associations who publicly declare that they are firmly pro-Bosnian in outlook and claim to respect the history of Bosnian state-formation," *Dani* 386, November 5th 2004.

For that reason, liberal intellectuals cannot but publicly declare their love for their own nation or homeland. True, they cannot resist the temptation to flirt with Witold Gombrowicz and Danilo Kiš, who are great denigrators of patriotism as the last refuge of scoundrels; but, with the same ease, these conformists will sign patriotic petitions full of trite and kitschy elementary-school phrases.[8] An especially perverse feature of this public outpouring of love for one's homeland is that the conformists present the banality of that act as something subversive, something that defies the dominant social and political order. The anti-Milošević camp, known as "the other Serbia," provided perhaps the ultimate example of this utterance:

I tried hard... to explain that although I don't like the powers that be – I love this country. I love this country so much! If the government feels I'm a traitor – that makes me proud! But I'm definitely not a traitor to this country! The government has no greater right to this country than I do. This country is mine – at least as much as it is theirs. And since they have ruined it – and I have labored to save it from ruin – this country is to an extent more mine than it is theirs! [9]

Liberal conformists refuse to see that precisely in this way they are best servicing the national ideologeme. They do not wish to reflect on the fact that the post-Yugoslav nationalist regimes are not aberrations of some originally honorable national consciousness that has suddenly gone haywire and irrationally come off the rails of the civilized, liberal, gentrified concept of the nation, but – quite the opposite – are a complete, logical realization of the bourgeois-liberal belief in a "tangible and vibrant substance" (Lovrenović) or the "organic unity of the nation" (Vlado Gotovac). It is precisely in this regard that "anti-nationalist" projects such as "the other Serbia," or the Croatian liberals and social democrats failed – the former wanted to save "the Serbs" from Milošević, the latter "the Croats" from Tudjman. As such they were a perfect rearguard, protecting the core of the national ideologeme from the incompetent interlopers in power.

In this way the bourgeois-liberal intelligentsia implements the post-Yugoslav variant of what Slavoj Žižek called a postpolitical *Denkverbot – the banning of a leftist political project*. And they can do so because the current constellation of forces – with an unyielding right in the saddle and the left nowhere to be seen – allows the liberal-bourgeois conformists to play the good guys. Every time a Sarajevo liberal conformist says "the two greatest totalitarian evils of the twentieth century were Communism and nationalism," [10] it is a de facto attack on the possible emergence of a "communist" (radical left, Marxist) critical project, and at the same time an attempt to play down the effects of rightist ideology.

The case of Ugo Vlaisavljević, a Derrida-oriented philosophy professor from Sarajevo, provides an outstanding illustration of the awkwardness the post-Yugoslav liberal conformist feels in face of the left, or rather, to be quite exact, Marxist ideology and its radical critique. In November 2004 Vlaisavljević wrote a text in memory of Kasim Prohić, a prominent philosopher of Bosnia-Herzegovina who died twenty years ago. Vlaisavljević's piece was more than just an *in memoriam* – it also warned of attempts by today's nationalist Bosniak intelligentsia to appropriate Prohić's legacy and

9. Srbijanka Turajlić in an interview published in *Šta ste radili u ratu: Glasovi iz crne rupe (What Did You Do During the War? Voices from the Void)*, ed. Radonja Leposavić and Snežana Ristić (Belgrade, 1999), 209. The statements of Sonja Liht, another activist of "the other Serbia" published in the same book are equally illustrative: "Do I have to give up my patriotism and concern for the people just because this regime [Milošević's] has jumped on the bandwagon of nationalism?" (153). This same patriotic tune also goes down well in Bosnia-Herzegovina – Lovrenović himself confesses in one article: "I have never wanted Bosnia to be better and more beautiful, richer and more full of history, so that I could love it more and belong to it more. That's why I have never really understood why today's... ideologues of the state and nation are frustrated to the point of violence with the question of continuity. Can that inadequacy be reason to love the country and people less?" "Bosanski 'kontinuitet'" ("Bosnian 'Continuity'"), *Dani* 123, October 8th 1999.

10. Mile Babić, an intervention during the panel discussion *Dealing with the Past*, "De/Construction of Monument" project, Sarajevo, December 11th 2004

integrate it into their own ideological project. To achieve this, the nationalist intelligentsia deliberately suppressed the Marxist parts of Prohić's oeuvre and emphasized his texts about Bosniak writers such as Meša Selimović and Mak Dizdar, on the assumption that these texts were less Marxist. Vlaisavljević decided to point out that this was a futile ideological endeavor – it was impossible to appropriate Prohić's philosophy of art without considering his Marxism (or even Leninism, because – as Vlaisavljević reminds us – Prohić was openly a Leninist, even in times when it was anything but opportune). But, at the same time as he warns the right-wing intelligentsia that they cannot have Prohić without Marxism, Vlaisavljević performs a far more cunning trick:

> The "Marxist element" in Prohić's work remained without any (ideological) content, it became a Kantian "regulative idea," or in Jacques Derrida's words – the idea of righteousness above any reified justice. This righteousness remained Marxist because it was seen above all as social justice. The Marxist element in Prohić's work ... in no way obligates us to any ideology, least of all "Marxism."...
>
> Prohić's Marxism cannot be understood as ideological partisanship. Or, to phrase it as mindfully as possible: even if everything that appears under his name is reduced to an ideology, there is still a remainder that is more important than all the rest, something the author posited as the very apocryphal source of his philosophy. If we remove that remainder, we will even dare to eliminate philosophy from his work. That would be to deliver him either to his own specters – to reduce him exactly to some Marxist (ideological) work, which it was not at all meant to be – or the specters of some other ideologies currently in vogue.[11]

Thus Vlaisavljević immediately supplements his claim that you cannot have Prohić without Marxism with the claim that you can have Marxism without its ideological content – some kind of distilled Marxism like pure philosophical knowledge, which Prohić must have had before he became a Marxist. This would be a Marxism reduced to some philosophical surplus and stripped of "everything else," although precisely this "everything else," this Marxist, Leninist filth, was Prohić's main stake (and therefore the basis of his self-identification as a Marxist), as it is the main bugbear for manifest nationalists and bourgeois "deconstructionists." Of course, if we know anything about Marxism, it is that it wants to directly intervene ideologically in sociopolitical reality and create a revolutionary subject. Marxism has not just been drawn into the ideological struggle for social change – it *is* that ideological struggle. Therefore, if someone calls themselves a Marxist or even a Leninist, they *undoubtedly* want their work to obligate us to Marxist ideology, they want their work to be seen as an oeuvre with clearly defined ideological potential.

In this respect, Prohić, as *the* Bosnian Marxist-Leninist philosopher, does not need rescuing so much from the nationalist intelligentsia, because they will

certainly seize on several texts that suit them, completely marginalizing Prohić's remaining works as subversive. I would say he needs rescuing more from Vlaisavljević's defense which not only manipulates some parts of Prohić's work, but also tones down the entire framework in which Prohić's work exists, replacing his revolutionary, Marxist incisiveness with a conformist vision of philosophy as an ideology-free practice, and declaring Prohić's ideological partisanship an ephemerality to be disposed of. The only possible Marxist answer to this suggestion can therefore be: let us return Prohić to his "specters of Marx," to the ideological core of Marxism, because that is where the utopian, anti-liberal, nonconformist potential of Prohić's philosophy is to be found.[12]

Another aspect of the postpolitical *Denkverbot* is the conformist politics of memory, a retroactive doctoring of the past from the ideology-free position of pure knowledge supported by common sense. The conformists attempt to purge different "memories" of the past in an bid to remove ideological-political filth and, under the various layers of ideological untruths and distortions, to finally attain the authentic truth about history, nation, and state. This is surely reminiscent of the commonplace of New Age pop-psychology – that we, people living in the modern age, are trapped in a shell of false, distorted identifications and non-authentic feelings; and only when we cast off that shell, when we rid ourselves of all our own narcissistic lies, can we go deep inside and recognize the truth about ourselves, discover authentic wisdom, achieve self-realization, uncover our true self, "actualize" ourselves, etc. Psychoanalysis radically rejects this proposal. Firstly, it warns that the self is nothing but a precipitate of countless forms of identification with various images and ideals, beneath which there is no mystical center, and secondly, that *there is no true identification* that we ought to retrieve from some presupposed space beyond false identifications – *all identifications are false*, all images and ideals that the human subject identifies with throughout its life are nothing but a series of errors. In Lacan's terms, the fundamental function of the ego ("self") is misrecognition, *méconnaissance*. Lacan dissects this word as *mé-connaissance* – literally "me-cognition" (or knowledge of one's self), and thus ultimately says that knowledge we have about our self, our ego, is inevitably illusory.

12. Needless to say, *Status* magazine can be seen as an anti-Marxist magazine in general. Among the ample proof of this I have chosen the most psychotic and most ridiculous one – in the symptomatic section "Mislioci" mentioned above, the Serbian writer Svetislav Basara ruminates about Marxism as perverted cabalism: "Marx, to use the language of the cabala, inverted the way in which the Tree of Life had been perceived. Malkuth, the formative world, the world of vulgar empiricism, the dregs of reality, was now declared the ultimate and only reality, with determinism its law.... Marxism adopted the pentagram as its emblem, the symbol of cosmic chaos. It is no coincidence that Marx was an apostate Jew.... It was logical that a Jew who had abandoned Judaism would initiate the deconstruction of the world.... Even today you can still occasionally hear the opinion that Communism was a noble idea. Far from it – Marxism meant the abolition of all self-discipline and the definitive liberation of all sublunary energies that exist in man.... We should again recall what irreversible damage Marxism has caused. Marxism may appear now to have withdrawn, but it is omnipresent; it has contaminated all thought to such an extent that it also contains in itself the most vehement anti-Marxism. Similarly, the communist mindset is global. National borders are of no avail, nor the CIA, MI5, or diametrically opposed social systems. We are dealing with a mental virus, pollution of the mind, which can only be combated with fasting and prayer." Svetislav Basara, "Virtualna Kabala" ("Virtual Cabala"), *Status* 6 January/February 2005, p. 14.
Combining the *Basaras* and *Vlaisavljevićs*, *Status* recommends itself as a perfect case of, to use Žižek's words, the symbiosis of New Age obscurantism and deconstructionist sophistry – twin discourses that pave the way for a post-political *Denkverbot*. It only remains to be seen how much of a coincidence it is that such a match made in heaven is endorsed with the emblem and financial patronage of the European Union.

If we apply this theorem in the realm of collective memory, we could say that collective memory is equally artificial and false, derived from layers of various ideological-political images and narrations, and that an awareness of this inherent falseness is the first step in any reflection on this issue. Just as psychoanalysis is not about correcting the false images that the analysand identified with (which, after all, would be futile), so too theoretical-critical commitment should not attempt to correct the distortions of the "authentic" collective memory of an event. That memory, just like the ego in psychoanalysis, is irreparable – there has never been anything like original and correct memory that was later distorted by ideological manipulation – memory itself is nothing but a defect, a distortion.

It seems that nothing terrifies the liberal conformists as much as these elementary facts about the artificial, non-authentic nature of the "ego" of the nation and the state. Perhaps the ultimate example of this in Bosnia-Herzegovina today is the way in which Bosnian liberal patriots protect Bosnia from comparison with SFRY – they are horrified, for example, when they hear someone say that Bosnia-Herzegovina is a "Yugoslavia in a nutshell," as it was often called in Socialist Yugoslavia. In their view the key difference between SFRY and Bosnia-Herzegovina is that SFRY was a state, whereas Bosnia-Herzegovina is above all a society. This argument implies that states are unnatural, artificial constructs, undoubtedly alienated from their citizens, imposed on them politically, and maintained through ideology, and that as such it is in their very nature to disintegrate in bloody massacres. On the other hand, the signifier "society" in this argumentation is a special code for – paradoxically – *nature* itself as something original, authentic, and self-explanatory. As the Bosnian patriotic conformists see it, Bosnia is, phrased as an oxymoron, a *natural society*, therefore it cannot collapse like a pleonastic *artificial state* – the political construct that was SFRY. Therefore, if we can speak of the essence of the patriotic national conformists, it lies precisely in their inability to admit that the ideologeme of Bosnianness is equally as unnatural and ideologically created and mediated as the ideologeme of Yugoslavianness that today is so defamed. In other words, the shibboleths of "unity in diversity," the "good Bosnia," or the "Bosnian paradigm" of multiculturalness and tolerance, are equally as artificial as the Yugoslav concept of "brotherhood and unity." The conformist intelligentsia's denial of this fact, paradoxically, goes hand in hand with their lamenting today's Bosnia-Herzegovina not being state enough, or that its state-formation is undermined by the nationalist politics of the Bosnian Serbs and Croats, who still harbor their secessionist plans and/or resentments.

This is perhaps the most illustrative example that shows how Fredric Jameson's good old remark on liberalism – a worldview that doesn't take politics seriously[15] – perfectly fits post-Yugoslav liberalism as well. The strategic choice of the post-Yugoslav liberal conformists *against* Yugoslavia and *for* "their own" national state – based on the assessment that the latter was more politically authentic – was sterling proof of their political incompetence. Hushing up this choice,

13. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act,* London, 1993, p. 289.

pretending that it did not exist at all and that agreement with the national doxa was the only possible scenario, is an act of fundamental denial by post-Yugoslav liberal conformists. Thus they refuse to acknowledge their own share of responsibility for the creation of nation-state-forming ideologemes, whose realization led to the Hamlet-like finish – the disintegration of SFRY. Those who capitulated intellectually in the 1980s, surrendering the political idea of preserving some form of Yugoslav political project to advocates of the Great Serbia who abused it for their expansionist goals, today again – but this time farcically – demonstrate a total lack of critical and political imagination. As if there were some "poetic justice" in the fact that those who yesterday depoliticized Yugoslavianness, who did not recognize the authentic political challenge in it, today have nothing to say that is of political relevance to Bosniaks, Croats, or Serbs.

That would end the short list of replacements that mark post-Yugoslav social amnesia: critical analysis is replaced by deconstruction, politics by culture, the Marxist heritage of dialectical materialism by a surplus of common sense, and Yugoslavia as a political challenge by a sure but corrupted goal, a sitting duck that you cannot miss: independent (mono)national state. There is only one thing left to change before our intellectual conformists enter the liberal Garden of Eden, safe from the serpent of ideology and fruit from the tree of critical knowledge – they should finally change the name of their heavenly journal. From *Status* to *Status Quo*.

IDEOLOGY AND ITS DISS(ID)ENTS

In the first five issues *Prelom* journal consisted of two parts: "Ideology and Its Discontents" and "Reading the Image". It was the usual practice in former issues to publish, as an integral part of it, reactions, interventions and polemics, the purpose being to create a space for discussion and debate in order to reflect the current editorial policy of the journal. The reason for rephrasing the name of the rubric is *Prelom's* involvement in supplying the content for the 8th issue of the Nova Gallery newspaper from Zagreb in December 2005. The editors did not provide Boris Buden – one of the people who inspired the creation of *Prelom* – the space for answering the criticisms contained in Sezgin Boynik's text. The following section does not represent a mere restoration of a text to its rightful context, but a contribution to the rectification of an erroneous tendency – the tendency to neglect debate and self-critical reflection.

Mladen Stilinović, *I Have No Time*, 1979

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BORIS BUDEN'S SILENT ALBANIANS
POLITICS AS NONDISCURSIVITY

Sezgin Boynik

Lulzim Zeqiri, Heroes, 2003

ONE OF THE FORMS OF NEW COLONIZATION is taking place, aided by the techniques of representation. It is a new form of cultural and class control, which can be perceived in all areas of contemporary knowledge, from anthropology to video art.

As it is already known, representation is a way of presenting other (the one who is absent) in your own system.

Words contained in this definition such as "presentation", "other", "absence" and "system" are sufficient for the understanding of political connotation of representation.

I would like to analyse in this essay the representation of Albanians from Kosovo and their interpellation in the great ideology of exclusion.

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Sometime in the beginning of 1990 in Blue Box cafe in Vienna, Boris Buden was watching some photos from a projector, accompanied by rock music and much to his own surprise, he noticed briefly a writing on the wall "Krv i smrt" (Blood and Death) in Croatian-Serbian language.

This unutterable word, with no vowels in it, is not an association of any kind for the Austrians, however this word takes Buden to his South and he sadly remembers his Yugoslavia. Moreover, this association leads him to Kosovo – where at the exact moment Kosovo Albanians are going through very difficult situations – to the town Đakovica and at that time insignificant, Mëhalla e Gërës, where "genres of life and death, inadvertently

created high art and ritual got mixed up".

Namely, we are referring to the long article that Buden wrote in 1990, entitled "Inconscientia Iugoslavica" (Yugoslavian Uncon-scious)[1]. In this article, he analysed problems in Kosovo, as one of the more important factors of the Yugoslav problem. This article is certainly not the only one analysing the breakdown of Yugoslavia, from a standpoint of Kosovo syndrome; what is more, it is not our topic in this essay. It is more important to emphasize and state precisely how Buden represents Albanians during the demonstrations in the beginning of 1990, or the way he aestheticizes them.

Boris Buden is a symbol of Yugoslav solidarity and nostalgia of lost democracy. Not only as an analyst, but as a journalist, he has always stood up against narrow-minded nationalism and mafioso-provincialism. He has been one of the rare intellectuals, who clearly and loudly criticized Tudjman's fascist government during the war. Buden is a progressive anti-nationalist and left orientated critic. That is the reason why it is interesting to analyse how he represents Albanians in his essay.

At the very beginning of the text, Buden conceives these difficulties in Kosovo, quoting a journalist from *Start* magazine from Zagreb, as high artistic performances and ritual actions. It is not of much significance to him which national-class, economic-political and historical factors are at work here, but only those factors, which are symptoms of these demonstrations.

For Buden, these demonstrations are a *ritual*, taking place in prelinguistic state of consciousness.

Naturally, it is clear to everyone that Buden's real intention in this article is to analyse the conditions of exclusion of Albanians from the *public sphere* and *public discourse* in Kosovo.

As a remainder, those were the years of mass exclusion of Albanians from the modern public sphere and of ghettoization in parallel institutions. Buden is even very clear, when he explains that this exclusion was directly planned and introduced into practice by Serbian police policy (which are of etymologically same meaning).

Thus, "Kosovo Albanian, as a man, descended into the darkest depth of the Concrete" (page 10), and in this depth he lost his humanity (which begins with words and language) and started expressing himself in rituals (prelinguistic state).

Furthermore, the most important signifier in this ritual is "blood and death", which is associated with the image of "two Albanian demonstrators, two actual persons with first and last names, Fatmir Kaleshi and Xhevat Hoxha. This place of death, marked by the puddle of blood, their citizens surrounded with candles and in that circle they erected some sort of an altar, assembled from vases, candles, various objects thrown onto that were used by the deceased in their lifetime, their photographs, etc."

So, this is the image (Buden psychoanalytically-cinematographically calls it Dream Screen; without any irony we can read this as a hidden slip), which he comprehends ritualistically and artistically and that is the only historical fact he uses in the entire article.

Without delving into the discussion of this practice of necrosymbolism (which is a universal practice of symbolic alteration of political death across the world), we will continue with the explication of the image

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[1] Citations given in this essay are from: Boris Buden, *Kaptol Railway Station: political essays* (Kaptolski kolodvor: politički eseji), CSUb, Belgrade, 2002, pages 7-25

(man) of an Albanian in Buden's system.

This Albanian is no longer human, he can not speak, he is excluded from all public spheres and the only thing left for him is the practice called *ritual*. It is an African, it is the Other, a multitude, homo sacer (bare man), a primitive... It is Unconscious.

It is a Silent Albanian.

Even a slogan "Kosovo Republic" no longer belongs to the discursive plan of desires for ending of injustice, instead it is a "ritual staging of collective identity". Moreover, it is claimed that "this content speaks in the ghetto of prelingustic, sensual immediate symbol, it finds its expression on the deeper, unconscious level of meaning in the form of its bodily substrate" (page 12).

This bodily substrate of an Albanian is, according to Buden, visible even on the level of totally instrumental and rational practice, such as a strike.

The strike, which Albanian miners started in 1989 in the ninth horizon of Stari Trg mine (the most spectacular workers" strike of the post-war Yugoslavia) is also, according to Buden, pre-discursive and "immediately sensual". Let us continue: what an Albanian declared a year ago "by going down into the depth of mining underground, he is symbolically repeating now by descending to the "ninth horizon" of the unconscious, the place where desire speaks in the language of the body, where life merges with its own simulation, where fantasy becomes illusion and symbol turns into symptom" (p.15).

This anatomization and corporality of political discourse is actually one of the oldest and most popular methods of colonizer's representation. By maintaining this psychoanalytic symptomatology, Buden even reaches a conclusion that, as result of these repressions, an Albanian experiences complete expression (again bodily) of his total, superior body.

As Buden notices, "Serbianship drops like a shadow, while at its place Albanianship is rising gloriously as a substitute in all its bare, vibrant nature, in the identical situation of the ritual-mythical staging of collective identity'(p.19)

Albanian, who is silent in a psychoanalytic discourse, now is also in "its bare, vibrant nature" reduced to the level of pre-human and pre-civilized state. Now, he is a powerful animal.

This anatomic machoism, along with prediscoursive politics of ritual, is a *common* of almost all elite and *mainstream* discourses.

It is interesting that Buden, who would like to analyse the reasons of exclusion of Albanians from modern public space of ex-Yugoslavia, falls into the same semantic representation of an excluder (this illustrates that the exclusion of Kosovo was not just a problem of Serbia, but of whole Yugoslavia as well), which is evident in two motifs: man who can not speak and bare man in its nature, where the "Otherness" is formulated in pre-humanity, almost in animality.

The problem with Buden and large number of other pop-leftist theoreticians is that the potential for accepting of generally accepted representation always lies in their universal theories. The reasons for this are various – starting from insufficient information to ideological *a priori* neo-liberalism, which accepts Western culture as an absolute and the only cognitive culture and rejects all other political acts as pre-civilized and preverbal. Actually, the culturalization of politics, which Buden criticized on several occasions, is not even noticeable in this

case, as entirely different categories are in power and since this is a system, which has not reached its culturalization yet (words and cognitive discourse are still missing), thus everything is ritualized.

Economic-political state of Kosovo in comparison to other former Yugoslav republics is not of any relevance for Buden. Again here we are going to make a digression, as we have to point out that Buden is not the only critic falling into this anomaly of representation, but only serves as an example of cultural expert and humanist with problems of representation.

On the other hand, another Croat, Branka Magaš, is a rare example of writer, who, even though she analysed the breakdown of Yugoslavia, with Kosovo as a symptom, did not fall into these problems of (un)cultural representation.

Branka Magaš's article, written in 1989 for *New Left Review*, entitled "Yugoslavia: The Spectre of Balkanization", is an analysis from the aspect of class problem, from beginning to end.

The difference is visible right at the start, because in this case the problem is not formulated as "unconscious", but as "spectral". Starting from Marx to present moment, as we all know, spectre is a political other, not exotic otherness.

Magaš notices that Albanian miners created "the biggest workers" movement of post-war, revolutionary Yugoslavia" in 1989. What Buden commented on as psychoanalytic practice, is presented here in view of class movement of workers.

Throughout her entire report, Magaš presents with intensity how Kosovo always suffered from weak economy and how miners were primarily interested in their poor salaries and bad working and living conditions, more than in "ritual performances", which held so much attraction for the reporters of *Start* magazine and Buden. Magaš goes as far as to quote an old miner, who looked upon the demonstrations as "feast without meat" and real politics.

Besides, she sees these demonstrations as totally disciplined, with completely cognitive democratic and new political demands (we should bare in mind that this is the time of turmoil in whole of Yugoslavia).

Also, Magaš notices that out of thirty Yugoslav journalists in Kosovo, only three spoke Albanian. In the end it is logical that the whole story was based on non-cognitive and exotic scenario.

Nevertheless, this is not a story of Buden's Kosovo vs. Magaš's Kosovo, but the story about two politics of representation.

First is Buden's, which by trying to preserve local otherness in its totality and structure, wanders into absolute corporality. It is powerful, uncultured, exotic, incomprehensible, therefore impossible Other.

We dealt more with the former semantics of representation in this article, whereas the latter, developed by Branka Magaš – according to terminology, Marxist – is truly against any kind of representation. When she is analysing the reasons for exclusion, they relate solely to economic-political factors, while the representation is only a product or symptom of these factors. It is a method, which analyses, even otherness and localness from the position of universality of politics and compares culture, nation and discourse from the standpoint of class differences.

Naturally a whole complex of relationships between cultural by-products and economic policy was not developed in Branka Magaš's article, which is a sort of new-leftist report for an

international left magazine (*NLR*).

Yet, the position that Magaš defends is universal, methodological and critical, which is called Marxism and is different from sensual sentimentality of Buden's exotic essay writing.

Situation is going to get even more complicated, yet more interesting, if we analyse the concept of nation by employing a Marxist method, especially when it involves Kosovo and whole of the Balkans, where all problems have been reduced to nation or nationality. On the other hand, nation is connected with so many associations, so it is almost impossible to reduce to only one factor, in this case economic-political.

In its history, Marxism had many mistakes regarding nation: starting from Engels, who believed that Slavs are not capable of socialism (history proved the opposite) to Marx's catastrophic understanding of Asian way of manufacture, etc. Yet, Eric Hobsbawm's theory, which differs from Anderson's culturalization of national issue, explained the matter by developing the term of nation, as "an invented tradition", to the understanding of class difference between ethnical entities. To put it more simply, if colonialism is a matter of economy, than colonizer and colonized are two different economic classes.

Hobsbawm managed to explain the renaissance of nationality in 19th century by comparing this entire development to modernized economies of bourgeoisie. For example, new nations of 19th century were not just a product of Romantic thought, but an uprising against the minority of capitalist, colonizing oppressors, while all of it was popularized in national idealism

and "we together against ..." clichés.

According to this theory, national dialectic between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo is not induced by archaic motifs of unconsciousness, instead it is contemporary and historically understandable complex of structure of money, labour, productivity, standard, etc.

Due to all this reasons theatralizing, sensualizing, ritualizing of Albanianship by psychoanalysis is nothing more than hiding of above mentioned dialectic in the name of neoconservative politics of representation.

Mister Buden, obviously, fell into this trap.●

FROM STARI TRG TO STARI AERODROM AND BACK: ANSWER TO SEZGIN BOYNIK

Boris Buden

I DESERVE A CRITIQUE BUT SEZGIN BOYNIK hasn't made an effort to accomplish one. He hasn't even properly read my essay *Inconscientia Iugoslavica* published 1990 in Zagreb and Salzburg. Before I finish off the task he has left over for me, and do this critique by myself, let me explain briefly what is he actually accusing me of.

He argues that I wrote this text dealing with Albanian demonstrations in Kosovo in the beginning of 1990 from a colonial angle, that is from the perspective of universal theories, which he finds typical for "ideological a priori neo-liberalism". From this perspective, according to Boynik, I would present the Albanian as a nonhuman, as an animal, as "an African, (...) the Other, a multitude, homo sacer (bare man), a primitive, (...), Unconscious" as a man who cannot speak, as a "silent Albanian". By doing this I would hide economic and historical facts, which explain Albanian struggle for independence as class struggle. And finally I would do all this "in the name of neoconservative politics of representation."

Generally speaking I didn't write a text about unconscious and silent Albanians, as one gets the impression reading Boynik's accusations, but about "the unconscious logic of Yugoslav totalitarian system at the moment of its collapse." Already the title *Inconscientia Iugoslavica*[1] as well as the motto I owe to Slovenian philosopher Mladen Dolar ("Yugoslavia is European unconscious, or: the unconsciousness is structured like Yugoslavia"), stress clearly enough the actual topic and the real intention of my essay. Finally, in the conclusion I even explicitly say whom I consider to be really silent in the whole story – Austrians, Germans, that is, Europe. I actually blame Europe for not being able to apprehend the drama of Yugoslav collapse.

But Boynik has completely ignored the text he criticises. The funniest example of this is his mocking my use of psychoanalytic concepts. So he reads *dream screen* as "without any irony" my "hidden slip". Boynik didn't have to check some of psychoanalytic vocabularies to see that this is not my slip but a concept introduced by B.D. Lewin. The true irony is that I even wrote it explicitly in my text. But again, he didn't read it. It is Boynik himself who mocks his own credibility already at the level of an accurate reading and quoting of my essay from 1990.

So he accuses me – and this is the major point of his "critique" – of the "theatralizing, sensualizing, ritualizing of Albanianship", in short of "aesthetisation" of the political reality of Kosovo 1990.

The truth is, that I am not the one who did it. It was a journalist from Croatian magazine *Start*. Boynik several times quotes my quotations of the *Start*-article as though these were my own words. So it seems as though I would, for instance, argue that during the demonstrations in the town of Djakovica

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[1] "Inconstientia Iugoslavica", *Werkblatt*, Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse und Gesellschaftskritik, Nr. 22/23, Salzburg. 1990 and "Inconstientia Iugoslavica", *Quorum* br. 4, Zagreb 1990.

"genres of life and death, inadvertently created high art and ritual got mixed up." I didn't write these words, I only quoted them. What I did in my essay was to analyze where "the impression that political events in Kosovo have got an aesthetical character" comes from. I am not the one who theatralizes political events in Kosovo and I explicitly stress this: "But this is not a real theatre. (...) Kosovo "theatre" (Yes I write theatre with quotation marks) is born out of the bondage, as a result of the repression. This is why reality appears to us as in a theatre, that is, not in an aesthetic illusion, but in an illusion of the aesthetical..." I even openly accuse Serbian politics of making Kosovo a "theatre" referring to Serbian staging of 600 years anniversary of Kosovo battle in 1989 as well as to Serbian propaganda, which was presenting at that time "every form of Albanian mass-protest as staged, as directed and acted like in a theatre".

Let me be clear: I have never estheticized or theatralized Kosovo reality. On the contrary, I analyzed and criticized this practice.

In a similar way Boynik accuses me of presenting Albanians as "silent", as pre-discursive and therefore nonhuman. Yes, I really did it, I really argued that Albanians cannot speak, but I never ascribed it – as a sort of a property - to Albanian identity, as Boynik would like the audience to believe and therefore openly falsifies my words. So he writes: "The strike, which Albanian miners started in 1989 in the ninth horizon of Stari Trg mine (...) is also, according to Buden, pre-discursive and "immediately sensual'". Actually I wrote exactly the opposite: "At the beginning of 1989 Albanian miners went down to the ninth horizon of Stari Trg mine (...) to articulate their political claims, which at that moment represented the political claims of the majority of Albanian people in Kosovo. Albanians at that time still participate in the political discourse and although deep under the ground they affirm their identity on a conscious and discursive level."

If I nevertheless talk about the inability of Albanians to speak and to articulate discursively their political claims, I do it in strictly one sense: as a symptom of their oppression. For me

Albanians are not silent, they are made silent (I hope, the audience can understand the difference), and I am very clear about who and how made them silent: "The act of repression of Yugoslav/Serbian executive force in its most concrete form: so-called differentiation (exclusion of those who think differently), isolations, arrests, physical and police violence, killings." Without waiting for Vukovar, Sarajevo or Srebrenica to happen I recognize already 1990 the genocidal and fascist motivation of this repression which, as I write, "discloses a not realized and not realizable desire for the "final solution", for the physical liquidation of the enemy."

This point is crucial for understanding what I actually wrote in 1990. Far away from presenting Albanians as irrational barbarians, primitives, non-humans or animals, I try to show how the political situation (not only in Kosovo, but in former Yugoslavia as a whole) gets out of rational control and is being – as a result of the violent exclusion of one particular (Albanian) political claim – dehumanized, barbarized, naturalized, and if you like, animalized. It is in this context that Albanians, instead of articulating discursively their political claims, have to reconstruct their collective identity on a pre-discursive level, that is, using gestures instead of language. Otherwise they would get beaten, arrested or killed.

In the same context I don't present Albanians – from an allegedly universalistic (Western, European) perspective – as the irrational, unconscious Other, as "Africans, Multitude, homo sacer" (!?), etc. It is the oppressor – Serbian nationalistic politics of that time – whom I accuse of irrationality and of manipulation with universal claims. It is this politics, which presents its own particular political interest, based on an irrational right to a Holy Land, as universal and Albanian political claims as pathological.

Similarly, Boynik's accusation says that in my analysis, I ignore historical and economical facts. Again: I am not the one who ignores facts. I show and analyse by whom, why and how the facts are ignored: "The politics, which wants to achieve Serbian sovereignty in Kosovo is blind to these facts and will stay blind because its actual objective is not a juridical and

Sokol Beqiri, *Fuck You*, 2001

political sovereignty in Kosovo, but the reclaiming of the "lost" identity of Serbian nation." And about this Serbian politics I wrote already in 1990 that it is "in the last consequence doomed to repeat the defeat of which it is a phantasmatic compensation (I refer here to the defeat of Serbs in 1389). It necessarily loses Kosovo …" Could I have been more clear?

But Boynik chooses to ignore what I really wrote. Actually it is obvious that his "critique" hasn't targeted me, nor has the text I wrote in 1990. Instead he is kicking a body which is already dead: the role I was identified with in the nineties – the role of the so-called public intellectual: a person who critically intervenes in the public sphere making use of his intellectual capability in the name of social justice, suppressed truths, excluded minorities, etc. – this role has exhausted its historical justification and seized to have real effects. Boynik is right. The public intellectual is really dead. Not because intellectuals today are not able any more to use their intellect publicly (to repeat old good Kant's figure) but because the public sphere they are supposed to address doesn't exist any more, neither in the reality nor normatively. It has lost its most important functions together with its political cradle, the traditional nation state being today radically transformed by the processes of globalization; it has faded away together with the ideal of communicative rationality and pragmatic normativity, which had deeply influenced the democratic mind of late modernism. What we have got instead is a chaotic plurality of dispersed and fragmented audiences, which are informed temporarily around different clichés – the cliché of a common cultural, religious, ethnical or national identity, the cliché of a poor little minority suppressed by the colonial monster, the cliché of economic facts determining political superstructure, the cliché of an autonomous victim-perpetrator dialectics, the cliché of the evil universalism, etc.

In this parody of what once used to be public space every truth can be falsified and no lye punished. Why then read the text you criticize? If you are happily rooted in your own identitarian community, which you pretend to represent and if you strictly follow some common clichés, you will get your audience anyway, you will find people who believe you regardless of what rubbish you write.

Probably the most mean cliché Boynik (mis)uses is the one about the so-called Yugo-nostalgics: People, mostly not nationalistic and often left-wing-minded, who instead of accepting a new reality still believe in the "lost paradise" of former Yugoslavia.

So he ironically writes about me who "sadly remembers his Yugoslavia". Let me quote how I really do remember "my Yugoslavia": At the beginning of 1990 I wrote about the Yugoslav system, that "Blood, death and poisonings in Kosovo are the presentations of its truth. The authentic Yugoslavian–the Titoist has been petrified in the shape he had had in the time of Tito's death. Kosovo is his portrait on which he has continued to grow old and which discloses now his worn-out character, his ugliness, wickedness and open signs of his cadaveric dissolution. In reality he represents those forces (before all the JNA an the revived Serbianship/Yugoslavianship) who can only defend their particular interests by preserving the existing Yugoslavian system – a system whose truth is exactly the collapse of today's Yugoslavia."

Is this a description of the "lost democracy" I am, according to Boynik, nostalgic about? Is this the picture of my beloved Yugoslavia I sadly remember from Vienna?

Let me briefly repeat what I already know and openly say in early 1990, more than a year before the war started: that Yugoslavia is helplessly collapsing, that Europe has no answer to this challenge, that Serbian nationalism has fascist and genocidal motivation and that the politics based on this ideology will necessarily lose Kosovo.

It is true, today I don't believe in communicative rationality any more, in the key role of public space (free and independent media), I don't even believe in parliamentary democracy as I emphatically did 1990. But, was I really blind to the facts?

Again and for the last time: Boynik didn't write a critique of my essay from 1990. He hasn't even tried. What he actually wrote is an apologia of the post-war reality. For the actual purpose of his "critique" is to retroactively silence the voices, which opposed the Yugoslav communist system from a non-nationalistic perspective and to defame those who rose these voices as a bunch of lunatics completely out of touch with reality. As though there has never been any option other than the nationalist one.

In 1990 I intellectually intervened in what once was Yugoslavian public space praising striking Albanian miners in the Stari Trg mine for their moral dignity and justified political claims. I invite Sezgin Boynik to do something similar today: to write and publish in Kosovo an article – inspired by a trans-national class solidarity and based on the historical and economical facts – about Stari Aerodrom in Belgrade, a place where Roma lived under the most inhumane conditions, expelled from Kosovo in 1999 by the Albanian majority.

I admit it would be the act of an old fashioned public intellectual. But nevertheless we could then say the last goodbye to him together, having finally experienced both what it means to be at odds with the majority and to take alone an opposite way to what most people believe is historical necessity. ●

DISSIDENT ETHICS AND
THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM

Vladimir Marković

Among those scarce cultural values created in the second half of the twentieth century, which will, I'm of the belief, withstand the test of time, is the Zagreb philosophical journal Praxis *and the Korčula Summer School.*

THE WORDS THAT STAND AT THE BEGINNING of this critical review were written by Serbian sociologist Božidar Jakšić in his professional-emotional reminiscences on the existence and effect of a journal from the field of philosophy and of the summer philosophical-sociological seminar that took place on a picturesque Dalmatian island.[1] Perhaps it is redundant to mention that within the framework of philosophical-humanist thought in Yugosla-via starting with the mid 1960s, *Praxis*, with its seminar on Korčula, was the personification of dissident activity and intellectual criticism towards Tito's regime and socialism. It was precisely in the questioning of the potentials of Humanist-Marxist criticisms of socialism that a great attraction for the *Praxis*-school on the part of a left-oriented academic public in the West could be found. If truth be told, it was not only leftists who showed enthusiasm toward the sharpness of this criticism, but a more detailed look into this question belongs to the domain of considering bourgeois taste of Cold War weapon selection.

To see how Marxist-humanism of *Praxis* positioned itself in a given historical situation is best illustrated by the subsequent resolute formulation of one of the key actors of this orientation, Croatian philosopher Milan Kangrga. According to him, thanks to the efforts made by anti-dogmatic philosophers from Zagreb and Belgrade, with the founding of the *Praxis*-school "Marxism for the first time in Europe and the world was treated in a Marx's sense. [...] It should be said that that what we were doing was the only true renaissance of Marx in the world. [...] The works from the West were below the level of that what we had done. And that needs to be said."[2]

In order to complete the image of sharpness of this struggle for the legacy of "authentic Marxism", we continue with professor Kangrga's presentation: "I will show this through an incident that happened to us in 1965 when we were already working on the international issue of *Praxis*. We received a 50-page text by

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1 Božidar Jakšić, "*Praxis* i Korčulanska ljetna škola. Kritike, osporavanja, napadi" [*Praxis* and the Korčula summer school. Critiques, challenges, attacks], in: Nebojša Popov (ed.): *Sloboda i nasilje: Razgovor o časopisu* Praxis *i Korčulanskoj letnjoj školi* [Freedom and violence: Discussion on the *Praxis* journal and the Korčula Summer School], Res publica, Belgrade, 2003, pp. 170-171

2 See: Nebojša Popov (ed.): *Sloboda i nasilje: Razgovor o časopisu* Praxis *i Korčulanskoj letnjoj školi* [Freedom and violence: Discussion on the *Praxis* journal and the Korčula Summer School], Res publica, Belgrade, 2003, p. 29

Louis Althusser. Rudi Supek and I were to give a review of that text. Rudi wrote that the text was at the position of Stalinist positivism. And I wrote a scathing critique evaluating the work as being substandard, that it was Stalinist. We did not publish that text, but Althusser published it in the Communist paper *La Pensée* and became the star of Marxism in the West on the basis of that article."[3] Serbian sociologist Zagorka Golubović adds to this anecdote in the same tone: "At that time I was teaching in Sweden as I, along with my colleagues, had been expelled here from the university. This was many years after the termination of *Praxis*, but at that time Althusser was very popular so much so that they asked me if I was Althusserian. I would reply that for me his standpoint was positivistic Marxism, that it was Stalinism for me."[4]

The figure of Stalinism, as an empty signifier in the discourse of the Yugoslavian state ideological and repressive apparatus from 1948, was used here so that theoretical anti-humanism could be kept at a safe distance from the

coast of Korčula. Far from the coldness of a real or imaginary Gulag, this island had to maintain at all costs its status as a shelter of humanistic dissidents. "A dissident island of freedom in a sea of totalitarianism" is the dominant self-representation of the *Praxis*-school. According to Božidar Jakšić, "dissidents of our time are a manifestation of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, particularly of that "other Europe". They were constituted by individuals and groups who did not adhere to the idea of an "imprisoned mind"."[5] What gave further rise to the myth of the Korčula summer school was the presence at the seminar of distinguished names from the fields of philosophy and the humanities such as: Ernst Bloch, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, Lucien Goldmann, Eugen Fink, Leszek Kolakowski, Ágnes Heller, Karel Kosik, Jürgen Habermas and others. The mythologization continues, as can be seen,[6] even after the inglorious desertion of the theoretical *Kampfplatz* on the part of Yugoslavian dissidents of *Praxian* provenance, whose representatives parted

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[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid*, p. 30

[5] Božidar Jakšić, *Balkanski paradoksi* [Balkan Paradoxes], Beogradski krug, Belgrade, 2000, p. 186.

This para-definition was created, as can be seen, from the ritual reference to terms (titles) from the publicist writing of Polish-American writer and paradigmatic East European dissident Czeslaw Milosz.

[6] *Rečnik YU mitologije* [Lexicon of YU Mythology], a perfect mirror of every kind of mytholigizations of the SFRY epoch, gives us the following text under the term PRAXIS which Ranko Vukčević placed on the *www.leksikon-yu-mitologije.net* web site: "A philosophical journal concerned with relevant problems of the contemporary world. It was published for a full ten years (from 1964 to 1974) and gathered the most prominent theorists in the areas of philosophy and sociology of the time from the SFRY region, but also from many parts of Western and Eastern Europe. Founders: Branko Bošnjak, Danko Grlić, Milan Kangrga, Rudi Supek, Gajo Petrović, Predrag Vranicki, Danilo Pejović and Ivan Kuvačić. Texts in the journal cultivated a sharp critical standpoint toward Yugoslav Stalinist theory and praxis. It was because of this that the journal experienced heated public criticism and ban from the then regime, and its editors and authors were labelled "professional anti-communists" and "enemies of self-management socialism". The journal PRAXIS was also linked to the Korčula summer school; international meetings of philosophers and sociologists from the entire world. A unique place where the greatest theorists from the East and West gathered and discussed the contemporary world and its problems. Texts and papers that emerged during the two-week duration of the school were published in the PRAXIS journal. The school and the journal enjoyed immense popularity during the ten-year existence, up until their ban in 1974. Many theorists linked with this theoretical school were persecuted during the eighties".

ways on the issue of continuation of activities following the cancelling of the journal, some of them accepting the role of ideologues of Serbian nationalism (with an expressly non-humanistic demeanour during the Yugoslavian wars of 1991), and a great majority completely discarded their Marxist orientation.

As it does not seem significantly useful for us to analyse the ethnocentric contents that *Praxis* collaborators such as Serbian philosophers Mihailo Marković and Ljubomir Tadić used to fill the frameworks of their chauvinistic-humanistic activities from the second half of the 1980s, here we will examine one aspect of the left-oriented, cosmopolite-libertarian legacy of the *Praxis*-school. With the start of the

Yugoslav war, a small academic group (among whom were active Praxis members Miladin Životić, Zagorka Golubović, Božidar Jakšić, Nebojša Popov) stood apart from the euphoric mass of Serbian critical intellectuals who flew into nationalism. They believed that the status of an intellectual obligates one to public condemnation of the politics of chauvinism, war and crime. Presenting themselves as a consistent moral alternative to the dominant discourse in Serbia, this group appeared under the name "the Other Serbia". That "Other Serbia" had as its goal to promote liberal and anti-nationalistic values of an intellectually responsible "civil and European" Serbia.

This renewed attempt of taking over a

MILICA TOMIĆ AND RÓZA EL-HASSAN DRIVING IN THE PORSCHE AND THINKING ABOUT OVERPOPULATION

dissident position remained largely unnoticed among the masses and, in essence, depoliticised. Depoliticisation is the consequence of the moralizing relation of these intellectuals toward the appearance of nationalism and war in a given historical moment. It is a consequence of the absence of understanding that the civil society and a liberal state cannot have another legitimising framework except a nationalist one, and that the ancient question of state sovereignty is resolved through war conflicts at the same time creating a new class structure in the processes of "post-socialist transition".

That which, however, was left for the intellectual carriers and heirs of *Praxis* as real ground for theoretical-political discourse and in the current historical combination was their customary criticism of socialism, from a safe historical distance. Thus, for example, Croatian sociologist and at one time a prominent *Praxis* member, Ivan Kuvačić, bemoans the weakening intellectual influence which, he feels, is to a great extent "conditioned by the very blunders they made during the twentieth century" and of which the greatest is "their support of the communist utopia which was discredited in practice".[7] Meanwhile, Zagorka Golubović in her text entitled "Sociological-anthropological analysis of

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[7] Ivan Kuvačić, *Kako se raspao boljševizam. De-set eseja o problemima prijelaznog razdoblja* [How Bolshevism Fell Apart. Ten Essays on the Problems of the Transitory Period], Naprijed, Zagreb, 1997, p. 117

the legacy of "real socialism" and post-socialist societies" puts forth the claim which she finds valid for the situation at the end of the 1990s: "From the previous analysis it can be concluded that the seeds of totalitarian communism continue to grow in former Yugoslav republics".[8] Such an opinion doubts their earlier dedication to "the only real" Marxism and the emancipatory, leftist humanist ideas, and shows how non-criticalness towards capitalism grows with a dissident critique of socialism.

The kind of breadths the evolution of these kinds of standpoints during the past few years show, in the period of incredible acceleration of economic restructuring processes, privatisation, the closing down of a huge number of factories, mass layoffs of workers, participation of politicians in wide-ranging financial affairs and criminal amassments of enormous personal wealth, is once again explained to us by professor Golubović in the unmistakable emphasis on her own dissident history balance: "We will have to change our habits, our attitude to life. And of course we will have to change our attitude toward work. A large majority of people have broken out of the habit of work. Workers who were left without jobs and who were on "forced vacations" have turned to flea markets and are no longer interested in returning to factories. [...] I feel that we will have to struggle for some time to learn how to work. [...] People need to show initiative, readiness to collaborate, to be self-sacrificial and responsible in their work that they begin in order to succeed, in order to apply for loans and develop their own private business". [9]

Let us conclude this review in such a way so as to state that, just like the carrier of the Protestant movement in the XVI and XVII c., for Max Weber paradigmatic ascetic Protestantism which was developing in the fold of the Calvinist Church, did not directly and consciously aspire to the expanding of the capitalist spirit (but where the convulsive search for signs of God's mercy gradually turned into a virtue of professional engagement), so neither did Marxist humanism of the dissident *Praxis*-school directly produce an ideologically entwined matter for the transition processes of capitalist restoration along with the rise of nationalism and the disintegration of Yugoslavia, accompanied by war destruction. The legacy of *Praxis*, considering that it withstood the test of time, remains to figure as significant ideological capital of the social system which is stabilizing itself today, enriching the spectre of various forms of criticism against the revolutionary termination of capitalism.●

8 See: Zagorka Golubović, *Stranputice demo-kratizacije u postsocijalizmu* [The Byways of Democratization in Postsocialism], Beogradski krug, Belgrade, 1999, p. 23

9 Zagorka Golubović, "Bilans disidentkinje" [Dissident History Balance], *Bulevar*, no. 67, Novi Sad, 18 January 2002, pp. 6-9

NSK GARDA
PRIŠTINA

IRWIN in collaboration with Kosovo Army, November 8, 2002

IS IT POSSIBLE
TO BE A MARXIST
IN PHILOSOPHY?
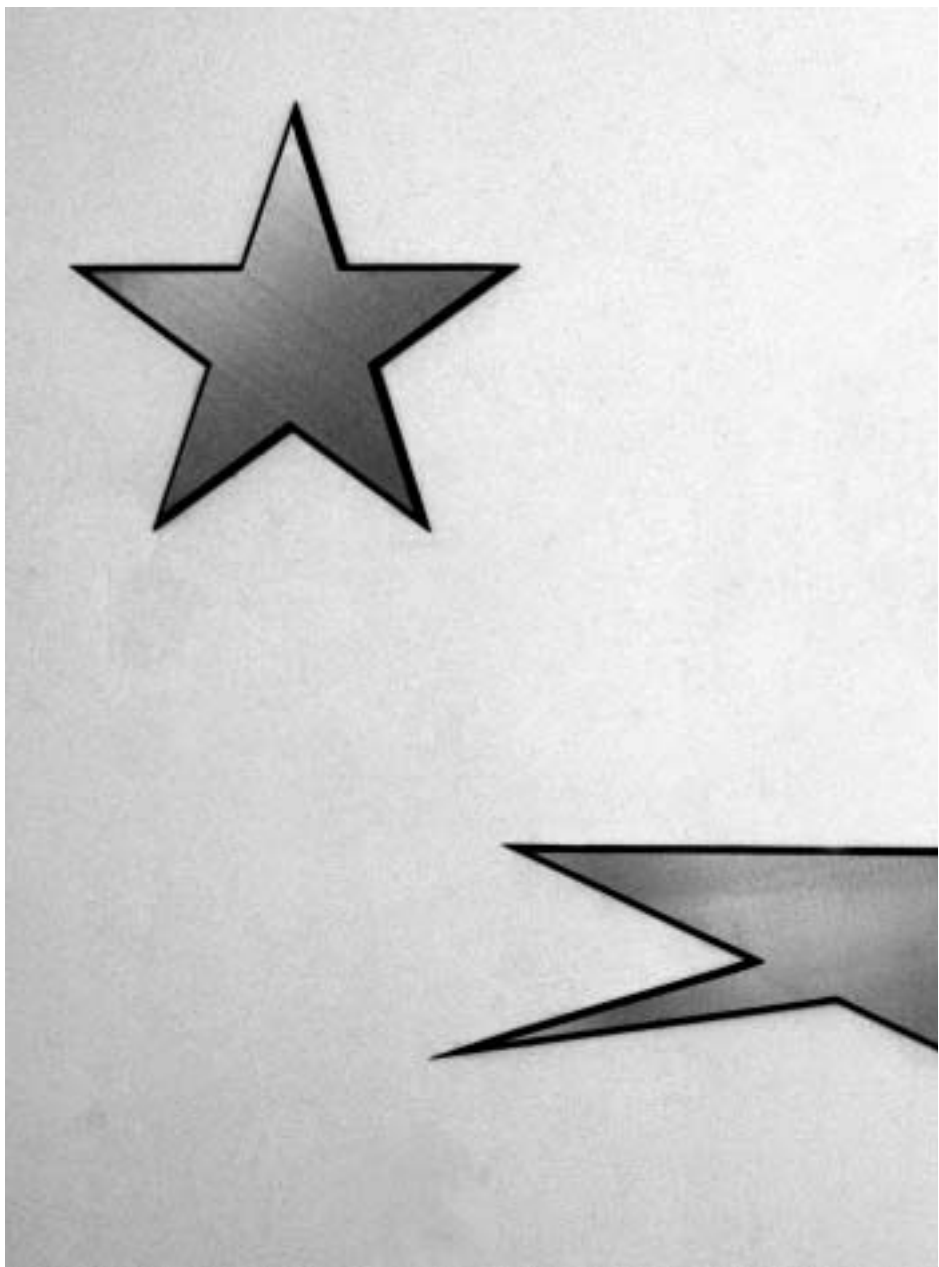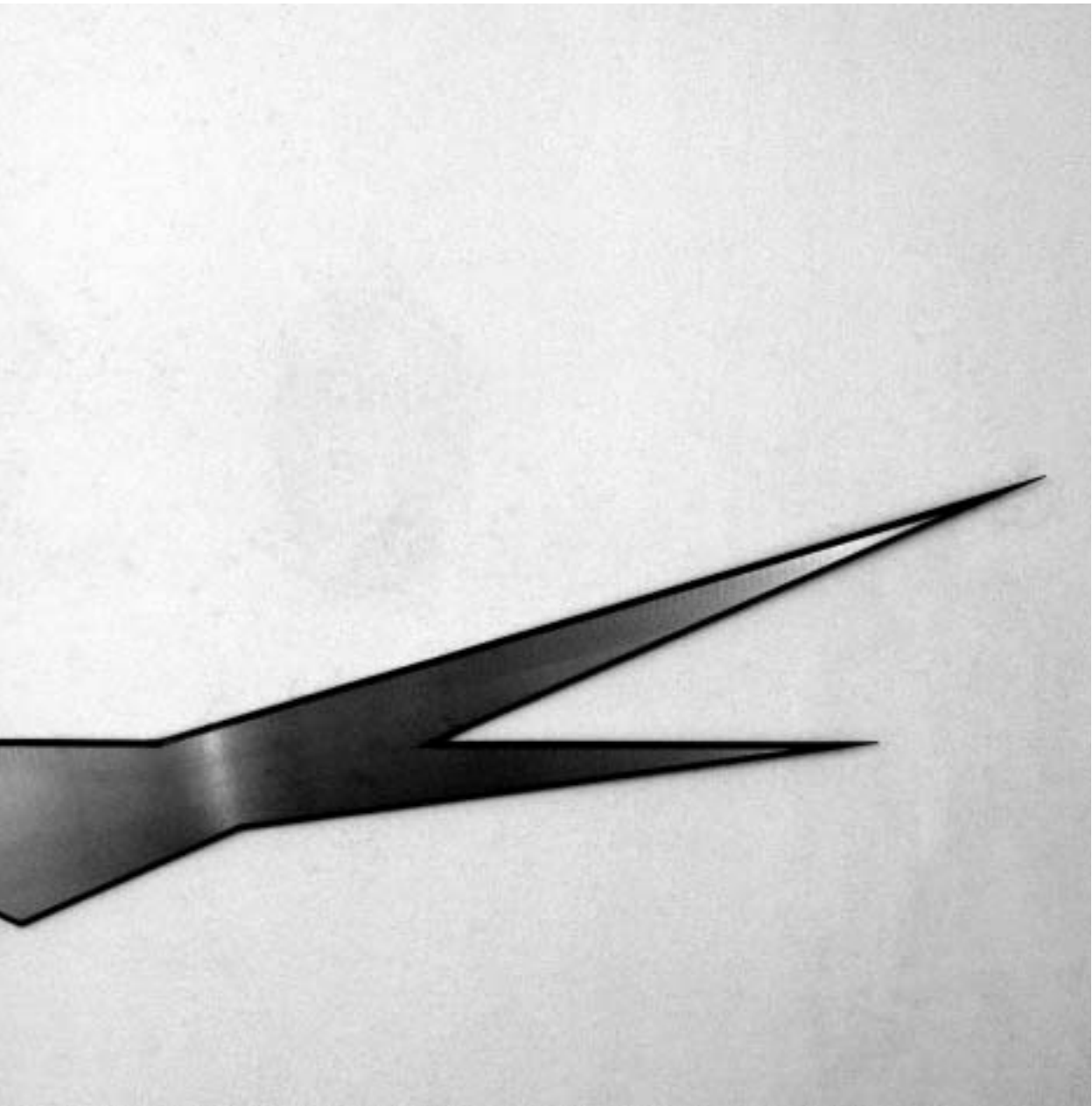
Posing the question "Is it possible to be a Marxist in Philosophy?" entails no less than the theoretical and practical re-commencing of Marxist-Leninist tendency in today's neo-liberal constellation of the omnipresent anti-Communist consensus. Rethinking the consequences of the question that Louis Althusser posed in 1976 – in the midst of crisis for both Marxist theory and the Communist movement – is crucial for the politics of theory of *Prelom*. The Prelom kolektiv organized a conference of the same name at the Centre for Cultural Decontamination (CZKD) in Belgrade on 29th of December 2004 with the participation of a number of colleagues from London. The following section contains essays from the conference and also contains two texts by Alain Badiou and an interview with him.

THE TERROR OF COLLECTIVITY: SARTRE'S THEORY OF POLITICAL GROUPS

Nina Power

Today it seems that we have moved beyond the very locus and form of the classical problematic that politics has always posed to philosophy. If we no longer ask the question: "what conception of humanity is presupposed by your politics?" it is not because we have answered this question, it is because the very possibility of posing it has been systematically destroyed. Everyone today is *somehow* antihumanist – Deleuzian, post-Heideggerian, post-Foucauldian, exploring a post-Levinasian ethics, etc. – but it is my claim that no one really *knows* what it means to be an antihumanist today. They do not take seriously the implications of structuralism, nor Foucault's claims regarding "Man" in *the Order of Things* – indeed, just as the humanism/anti-humanism (let's call it an) axis is deemed beneath discussion, so too the debate concerning the terms "history" and "structure" is declared even more obsolete. Everybody knows, for example, that Lévi-Strauss attacks Sartre in the last chapter of *The Savage Mind*. But nobody today is a Lévi-Straussian. It is as if all the questions at stake in these discussions of politics, history and science have been consigned to the dustbin of history, or at least to the dustbin of the history of ideas.

It seems to me that we feel we have transcended the debates, primarily French, surrounding the break with Sartre, whilst not taking either his later political project seriously, nor the criticisms that followed its publication in 1960: "Now that structuralism has followed existentialism into intellectual history", as Jameson puts it in his new introduction to the Verso reissue of the *Critique*.[1] It is my claim, however, that the "humanism/antihumanism" dyad has itself become both too humanised and too historicized. This is not just because nobody knows what they mean by antihumanism, but also partly because no one knows what it meant to be a humanist in the first place - and we have to admit that Sartre *is* a humanist. But his humanism is of a quite specific kind: it is profoundly anti-naturalistic, and absolutely anti-biological. It has

1 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Vol. 1, London: Verso, 1976 [1960], Foreword, p. XIII. Henceforth CDR.

nothing to say about our place in the universe as an organic being. It does not concern itself with what we might call a "dialectic of nature". On the contrary, Sartre's humanism has a peculiarly formal, and despite its historical reception, one might even say, structural, character. "We shall accept," he says, "that man is a material being among other material beings, and, as such, does not have a privileged statute".[2] For Sartre, every action aiming to transform the inhuman into the human must, in the first instance, interiorise a particular inhumanity. Man only humanises himself by assuming against the inhuman order his own subjective part of inhumanity. Similarly, man exists in the first place and in general for everyone as non-human man, as an alien species. "Everyone is a non-human man for all Others, and considers all Others as non-human men, and actually treats the Other without humanity," he writes.[3] Everyone is a threat to everyone else: this is Sartre's joyful starting point. You can see the parallels with his earlier work in *Being and Nothingness*.

What is thus at stake in Sartrean politics is the profoundly unnatural nature of man, and of history. He writes, "it is necessary that human history should be lived as non-human history". At the same time, he argues "Reason is neither a bone, nor an accident."[4] If dialectical reason is to be rationality, it must provide, from the outset, reason with its own reasons.

If the humanism/antihumanism debate seems closed today, I wager that it is not because the questions have disappeared. Both radical humanism and radical antihumanism arguably begin from the same point: man without God is pure possibility, whether it be politically, philosophically or scientifically. What we currently understand by the category "humanism", however, is little more than a substantialist commonplace: what Badiou calls an "animal humanism", a vague organicism whose fundamental imperative, he claims, is "Live without Ideas".[5] A Humanism that operates without thinking through the death of God – and we must admit there are many ways of framing this death. It is a representation of man reduced to his animality. This would be fine if this animality were understood as indifferent, but if it entails, as it appears to, a routine *valorisation* of this finite flesh, coupled with the denigration of thought, then philosophy runs the risk of becoming mere dietetics.

Despite the work of Sartre, Foucault and Etienne Balibar,[6] then, we are currently left with a "bad Darwin", as Badiou puts it.[7] It is this simultaneously plenitudinous and yet impoverished notion of the human that demands we look again at the common origins and strengths of the humanist controversies of the later 1950s and 1960s. We remain here too, of course, within the discussions of the early Marx. The Marx who in the "1844 Manuscripts", following Feuerbach, argues that "man is a species-being, not only because he

2 CDR, op. cit., p. 34.

3 CDR, op. cit., p. 130.

4 CDR, op. cit., pp. 30-31.

5 See the Postface to Alain Badiou's *The Century*, London: Polity, 2007.

6 Balibar attempts to "recast and resume" a form of philosophical anthropology through the categories of man, the subject and the citizen. See his two papers "Citizen Subject", *Who Comes After the Subject?*, edited by Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, Jean-Luc Nancy, London, Routledge: 1991), and "Subjection and Subjectivation", *Supposing the Subject*, ed. Joan Copjec, London: Verso, 1994.

7 Again, see the Postface to *The Century*, op. cit.

practically and theoretically makes the species – both his own and those of other things – his object, but also...because he looks upon himself as the present, living species, because he looks upon himself as a *universal* and therefore free being".[8]

Philosophy for this kind of radical humanism cannot but begin with a general anthropology – and we are all too aware, of course, of the problematic nature of this commencement.[9] Indeed, it's deemed quite abhorrent today. Who is this wretched ape that demands we ceaselessly study it? – to put it in quasi-Foucauldian terms. Nevertheless it is the question that Sartre begins with in *Search for a Method*: "Do we have today," he asks, "the means to constitute a structural, historical anthropology?"[10] In order to pose the radical split between this kind of philosophical anthropological humanism and the antihumanism that also proceeds from the conceptual break with divinity, we would also have to take seriously a primarily Nietzschean anti-anthropology (where anthropology is seen as the re-emergence of theology by another name). The death of God is the death of man. However, I'm not going to makes this argument here, other than to claim that this debate hinges, I think, on whether you start by understanding philosophy as something that humans practice, or whether "thought", in the first place, must remain impersonal, and indeed, inhuman.

I do, however, think that the questions posed by Sartre in his late work *are* currently being asked in some quarters, but without adequate attention being paid to the contributions of the *Critique* (and I am thinking here of at least some of the work of Negri, Žižek, Badiou). Firstly, how to think collective political action without economical or historical overdetermination (and I mean this latter term quite loosely). As Deleuze and Guattari comment in *Anti-Oedipus* from 1972: "Sartre's analysis in the *Critique* appears to us profoundly correct where he concludes that there does not exist any class spontaneity, but only a "group" spontaneity: whence the necessity for distinguishing "groups-in-fusion" from the class, which remains "serial," represented by the party or the State."[11] (As a side note, I think the language of the molar and the molecular in Deleuze and Guattari's work owes a lot to Sartre's analyses in the *Critique*). So, for Sartre, classes never constitute fused groups as a whole. They are always an unstable compound of collectives, groups and series – in which the latter will normally predominate.

Secondly, if our contemporary situation entails that we cannot escape the all-pervasive economic individualism that circulates around relations of debt, property and employment, how do we fight this supposedly inescapable, but historically contingent, standpoint on its own ground? If we have to begin with the sovereign individual, and Sartre believes we do, it is ultimately not to validate its atomization, but to attempt to draw out the historical and philosophical conclusions when,

8 Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, London: Penguin, 1975, p. 327.

9 See Caws's claim that ""anthropology" [in *Search for a Method*] does not mean Lévi-Strauss's discipline but rather what has some to be called "philosophical anthropology"." Peter Caws, "Sartrean Structuralism?" in *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 308.

10 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*, New York: Vintage Books, 1963 [1960], p. XXXIV.

11 Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, London: The Athlone Press, 1983 [1977], pp. 256-57.

however rarely, this atomization is dissolved in political praxis. We have no choice, I think, other than to begin with the "Totemism" of the individual, as Lévi-Strauss puts it, whereby "everything takes place as if in our civilization every individual's own personality were his totem".[12] Sartre's originality lies in his proposal of a formal framework in which two major terms, history and politics, are deployed on the basis of a single (minor) human principle: free individual praxis.

If Sartre's analysis of the ways in which political formations emerge, converge and disintegrate were borne out by the protests of May 1968, or in the retrospective analysis of the storming of the Bastille – and we must of course note that Sartre remains an eminently Western thinker – his investigations also seem relevant today, in an age where the potentialities of non-Statist political organisations seem over, where labour is increasingly immaterial (at least on one side of the world), and there seems to be no unifying principle behind myriad forms of public protest. No one any longer claims or can claim that History is unfolding in the direction of human emancipation. The fundamental dilemma of the *Critique*, and the basis of its continuing relevance, is instead whether collective or historical events can be thought to have the same transparency for understanding as do individual ones. In other words, how does the subject as *praxis* (the activity of organising conditions in the light of a particular end) come to understand itself in view of its historical situation?

For Sartre, these questions have to be posed in terms of group formations, the "apocalyptic" coming together of the "group in fusion" from out of everyday seriality. "The point is *to make the impossibility of change* the very object which has to be transcended if life is to continue" he argues.[13] How can we escape the idea that every historical and social reality is necessarily passive? To a certain extent, we cannot. We could argue that Sartre's most important contribution to historical materialism lies in addressing himself to the apparent paradox contained in Marx's dictum in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past."[14]

Sartre's version of this claim reads instead: "man is "mediated" by things to the same extent as things are "mediated" by man".[15] "My formalism," he states "which is inspired by that of Marx, consists simply in recognising that men make history to precisely the same extent that it makes them."[16] It is this paradoxical unity of freedom and necessity in history that concerns Sartre. In other words, how a plurality of seemingly random historical epicentres can have a single intelligibility.

Before arguing in more detail why the *Critique* is worth reading, I will address several reasons typically given since its publication in 1960 (*Search for a Method*, the introduction to the *Critique*, was published in 1957,

12 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, Hertfordshire: Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1966 [1962], p. 214.

13 CDR, op. cit., p. 350.

14 Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,* London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1984 [1851-52], p. 10.

15 CDR, op. cit, p. 79.

16 CDR, op. cit., p. 97.

and volume 2 was not published until 1986), as to why one *shouldn't* read the *Critique*. There are seven reasons. These range from the markedly superficial to the more trenchant:

1. Sartre was under the influence of drugs. There's no doubt that the writing of the *Critique* was aided, at least in part, by Corydrane, an over-the-counter amphetamine. In whichever way this contributed to the prose style or lack thereof, there's no disputing the fact that the *Critique* is an exceptionally hard book to read. Lack of editing is apparent throughout. Even writers convinced enough of its worth to dedicate entire monographs to the *Critique* have strong words to say in this respect. Wilfrid Desan states that "Sartre's book is badly constructed; indeed it is uselessly obscure and interminable".[17] Mark Poster also states plainly that "the *Critique* is extremely difficult to read."[18] It's true that there are obscure and seemingly random references scattered throughout – to Spanish gold and Chinese deforestation, amongst others. However, I do not think that it is an unintelligible work once some of the jargon is unpacked. How much of its obscurity is due to Sartre's chemical state is certainly not the most exciting question to ask, and certainly philosophy would be a much less interesting discipline if drugs were somehow deemed to be antithetical to thought.

But its poor style has lumbered the *Critique* with a lack of attention. As Jameson puts it: "It is the notorious stylistic difficulty of the *Critique* that offers the more fundamental reason why all those who ought to be most immediately concerned by it – they include political philosophers, sociologists, militants interested in the Laclau-Mouffe dynamics of action, as well as whatever Sartreans may have survived the deluge – have given it a wide berth."[19]

2. It was impossible to write positively about Marxism given its monstrous embodiment in existing Soviet Communism. This was Merleau-Ponty's position. He, of course, accused Sartre of "ultra-bolshevism" in *Adventures of the Dialectic* (from 1955) and they somewhat famously fell out. In retrospect, I think it is possible, especially in the second volume of the *Critique*, to see Sartre's relation to Communism in a more nuanced way: his question here is how to avoid both the exploitative dynamic of capitalism as well as the obvious repression of Stalinism (and if there is a Sartrean "third way", let us remark that we are a long way from contemporary versions of this notion). If Sartre's work on colonialism, and his writing alongside Frantz Fanon, is now deemed to be more trenchant and more relevant than his particular brand of Marxism, we should not forget that it was the *Critique* that Fanon read before writing *The Wretched of the Earth*, and it was this reading that lay behind his request for Sartre to write the preface.[20]

17 Wilfred Desan, *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre* New York: Doubleday & Co, 1965, p. VII.

18 Mark Poster, *Sartre's Marxism,* London: Pluto Press, 1979, p. 14.

19 Fredric Jameson, Foreword to the CDR, op. cit., p. XIII.

20 Robert Bernasconi, "Casting the Slough: Fanon's New Humanism for a New Humanity", from *Fanon: A Critical Reader*, edited by Lewis R Gordon, T. Denean Shapley-Whiting and Renée T. White, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996. op. cit., p. XIII.

~~3.~~ To discuss History (with a capital "H") deprives individuals of their sovereignty and leads to a terroristic understanding of politics. This - roughly - was Camus" position. On the contrary, I think Sartre retains his individualistic starting point from *Being and Nothingness*. Indeed, it is precisely his problem in the *Critique*, to think from within the atomisation of seriality. Rather than begin from some inchoate notion of the swarming masses, or the multitude, he is fighting the individualistic right on its own ground: "our analysis...must proceed from individuals and not from some kind of supra-individual ensemble."[21]

~~4.~~ The *Critique* is a horrific mixture of two or more incompatible doctrines, primarily existentialism and Marxism. Or Marx and Descartes. Or Marx, Hegel and Kant. Or even Marx and Kierkegaard. As Aron puts it: "One cannot at the same time be the heir of Hegel-Marx and the heir of Kierkegaard".[22] Foucault once famously described the *Critique* as "the magnificent and pathetic attempt by a 19th-century man to think the 20th century."[23] There is, of course, something quite correct about this. It all depends, however, on what you think the relative proportions of magnificence to pathos are.

~~5.~~ A related point: The language of the *Critique* is strictly outdated and its aims profoundly arrogant. To speak of "totalisation", to feel competent enough to discuss economics and history when there are experts on these things demonstrates an unjustifiable confidence in the capacities of philosophy. This is also undoubtedly true, though I should make it clear that "totalisation" should not be confused with totality (which for Sartre would be the inert sum of history, something akin to the in-itself of *Being and Nothingness*), nor with the notion of a totalizer (which would be an illegitimately contentful Subject of History). All Sartre wants to claim is "that there is a totalising temporalisation of our practical multiplicity and that it is intelligible, even though this totalisation does not involve a grand totaliser."[24]

~~6.~~ The entire period of Sartre's political involvement in praxis and in theory – from around 1952 to 1979 – was an unfortunate "detour" from his earlier individualistic existentialism. This is certainly borne out by the relative sales of *Being and Nothingness* and the *Critique*, and appears to be a common-place claim in reactionary circles. But I think we can in fact stress the continuities in Sartre's work: "many people" argues Jameson, again, "have wrongly assumed [the *Critique*] to mark a break with existentialism and to entail a philosophical as well as a political turn towards Marxism."[25] There is, he argues, instead a "fundamental continuity" and I think this is correct. For example, project becomes *praxis* in the later work, and there are various attempts to solve and move beyond some of the same dilemmas of *Being and Nothingness*, the problems regarding "concrete relations with the other" in particular.

21 CDR, op. cit., p. 36.

22 Raymond Aron, *Marxism and the Existentialists*, New York: Harper & Row, 1969, p. 30.

23 Michel Foucault, ""L'homme est-il mort?" Un entretien avec Michel Foucault", *Arts et Loisers*, 38, June 1966, p. 8.

24 CDR, op. cit., p. 64.

25 Fredric Jameson, Foreword to the CDR, op. cit., p. XVI

~~7.~~ The final reason why not to read the *Critique*: It's not finished. Well, no it's not, but given that there's already 1400 pages to deal with, perhaps this is for the best.

WHAT THEN ARE WE TO MAKE OF THIS WORK?

The title itself demands some explanation: clearly the two major references here are Kant and Hegel. Is then Sartre Marxism's Kantian, exploring the limits, the validity and the extent of dialectical reason? To some extent. Indeed he actually describes his project in the *Critique* as a quasi-Kantian "Prolegomena to any future anthropology".[26] It is precisely on this basis that Lefebvre criticises Sartre for remaining too transcendental a thinker of politics, even in the wake of Marx's critique of the ideology of philosophy itself. He argues, according to Michael Kelly, that Sartre "adopts a Kantian emphasis on the conditions of possibility of ideas, and seeks to give them a foundation in thought, rather than in practice". Furthermore, Sartre apparently hypostatises his ideas into absolutes – that he confuses totality with structure, and takes, as his starting point, scarcity, as an absolute rather than relative condition.[27] It is true that, for Sartre, scarcity *is* the "fundamental relation" and "condition of possibility" of human history, but it is also the *contingent* starting-point and the "passive motor" of all historical development.[28] Whilst this is not a particularly Marxist claim, and indeed, it is perhaps more appropriate to read it as a kind of extension of his idea of "nothingness" from his earlier work, scarcity as a contingent "fact" nevertheless allows Sartre to describe how scarcity as an initial structure of the world, or of being, is negated and transcended by human need. To begin with, scarcity is also to short-circuit and disqualify the whole false problem of human nature. This is because scarcity explains the fact of violence in a situational rather than essentialist way. There is no way of claiming that all would also be violence in a state of nature, because there is no state of nature outside of scarcity.

Despite the received history that Lévi-Strauss's "structuralist" attack (that can be summed up as the claim that "in theory, if not in practice, history is subordinated to system"[29]) struck at the heart of Sartre's system, it is actually the structuralist aspects of the *Critique* that are most successful – his "regressive" analyses of series, groups and collectives. By "regressive" we should understand the method and preliminary attempt that begins with the idea that the free activity of the individual is the only acceptable ground, the only guarantor of

26 CDR, op. cit., p. 66.

27 See Michael Kelly "Towards a Heuristic Method", *Sartre Studies International*, vol. 5, Issue 1, 1999, pp. 1-15.

28 Cf. Perry Anderson: "Sartre's system... is set by the Italian *philosophe* Galiani during the Enlightenment, who first formulated value as a ratio between utility and scarcity (*rarità*) in any economic system; this technical notion of scarcity passed marginally into Ricardo, was virtually ignored by Marx, and eventually re-emerged as a central category in neo-classical economics after him. Sartre's term, however, had virtually nothing in common with that of Galiani. For the latter believed that the original condition of mankind was one of abundance; the most useful objects were also the most plentiful in nature. Marx was more ambiguous in his allusions to the question. But while occasionally suggesting a primitive state of scarcity, he more usually implied an original profusion of nature relative to the paucity of human needs before the advent of civilization. Moreover, his theory of value contained no reference to scarcity whatever, unlike even the nominal mention of it by Ricardo", *Considerations on Western Marxism*, London: New Left Books, 1976, p. 85.

29 *The Savage Mind*, op. cit., p. 233.

historical experience. This free activity is no longer described as "consciousness", as the earlier Sartre conceived it, but as individual praxis. Praxis is simultaneously totalisation, that is to say the form of comprehension of the total historical movement. Sartre thus sets out to prove both that "man only exists in flashes", and that everyone is at the same time "centuries old". His notion of the "universal singular", discussed mainly in his late work on Flaubert, indicates this simultaneously synchronic and diachronic relation to history: the ensemble of the present and its recursive historical depth at the same time. This is a key quote from *the Family Idiot*:

> No man is ever an individual, it would be better to call him a universal singular: totalised and, thereby, universalised by his epoch, he retotalizes his epoch in the course of reproducing himself in his epoch as a singularity. Universal by the singular universality of human history, singular by the universalising singularity of his projects, he requires being studied from both ends.[30]

How does Sartre conceive the relation between singular and universal, if we must first of all begin with the individual as it conceives *itself* as "merely" individual?

Seriality is the name given to this first, passive formation. Here men are caught up in their own productions. The trace maintained here of Sartrean pessimism is that the series is the *fundamental* type of sociality. Sartre gives the word "collective" to this serial multiplicity of individuals whose unity is a passive synthesis. Nevertheless, even at this level, it is the individual who totalises the world. The reciprocal relation of praxis and matter entails that matter becomes "worked matter", and praxis the "practico-inert". The series (or collective), in other words, is the description given to individual praxis alienating itself in the practico-inert.

At the heart of this social passivity, however, is the latent possibility of group praxis, of a free unified activity which is also an immediate figure of reciprocity. The famous example Sartre gives is that of the bus queue. Here "The isolation of the organism, as the impossibility of uniting with Others in an organic totality, is revealed through the isolation which everyone lives as the provisional negation of their reciprocal relations with Others."[31]

The series is a gathering of people in which each one is alone because he or she is interchangeable with all the others. In the bus queue, each is there for the same thing, but this common interest gathers people together only *externally*. This exteriority is interiorised as the indifference of each for all: I do not speak to the others, I only wait as they do. In the series men are gathered together by the object. The unity of the gathering is constituted on the basis of the fact that the relationship of each one to the object is the same. But this exterior identity also becomes an interior alterity: If I am made the same as the other by the object, it is because I am other than myself. As Sartre puts it, "Everyone is the same as the Others in so far as he is Other than himself".[32]

30 Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Family Idiot*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 16.

31 CDR, op. cit., p. 256.

32 CDR, op. cit., p. 260.

For each member of the group waiting for the bus, it is the city (or whichever destination) that is in fact present as the practico-inert ensemble. It is within this common, yet singularised horizon, that there is a movement towards the interchangeability of men and of the instrumental ensemble. In this context, isolation is a project. Isolation, writes Sartre, "is a historical and social form of human behaviour in human gatherings".[33] Nevertheless, despite the icy-sounding nature of this scenario, the ensemble of *isolated* behaviour, in so far as it is conditioned by historical totalisation, also presupposes a *structure* of reciprocity at every level. Phenomena like radio broadcasting, assembly lines, and even public opinion work in a similar way to the bus queue. Sartre argues:

> The opinions of public opinion arise like the Great Fear, in that everyone makes himself Other by his opinion, that is to say by taking it from the Other because the Other believes it as Other, and makes himself the informer of Others. At this level the Idea is a process; it derives its invincible strength from the fact that nobody thinks it.[34]

Sartre has a similar analysis of racism, that renders racism a kind of perverse desire to think like the Other, in so far as we want to believe the Other thinks like, as he puts it, "a stone".

In the series, the Other is "everywhere". The group-in-fusion, on the other hand, presents a reorganisation of the existing bonds between people such that the interiority of freedom has become the exterior basis of common action: the people at the bus stop realise the bus company is terrible and march off together to go and protest at the local offices. This new and non-predictable group formation (that, we should remember, traverses class analysis) is hardly a social form on the basis of already existing social forms at all but, as Jameson argues, "rather an emergence and an event".[35] In the group-in-fusion, it is not the Other who is everywhere, but the Same.

Sartre needs to show how the group, in order to maintain itself and persevere in action, must interiorise the passivity of the practico-inert in activity (and also interiorise a certain kind of inhumanity). It is not freedom that threatens the newly formed group but its collapsing back into seriality. This is the path that leads the group-in-fusion to form what Sartre calls a "pledged-group", which develops from there into an organisation, and finally, into an institution. This process cannot be said to apply to all social unifications – the formal difference between the group-in-fusion and other collectives concerns the revelations of commonality and equality – the same is everywhere, coupled with what Sartre terms "the pressing revelation of a frightening common freedom":

> Obviously it is not under threat of mortal danger that anglers form their association or old ladies set up a system of swapping books: but these groups, which in any case respond to some very real exigencies and whose objective meaning relates to the total situation... are groups which are constituted in the general, permanent regroupment activity of collectives.[36]

33 CDR, op. cit., p. 258.

34 CDR, op. cit., p. 387.

35 Fredric Jameson, Foreword to the CDR, op. cit., p. xxvi.

36 CDR, op. cit., p. 350, fn. 2.

The conclusion we have to draw I think from this distinction is the following: If man is only truly human – that is to say capable of reciprocity with the Other – in revolt, which dissolves the series, then human unity emerges only in antagonism, in violence. Formed under conditions of scarcity – and recall that the series is in the first place founded on competitive, violent antagonism, the group-in-fusion manifests, on the other hand, a unity internal to itself and its members. Collective activity is the pure time of revolt. Everything else is an instance of the necessary inhumanity of man, which is passivity. But the formation of the group is always impermanent and unstable, hence the need for a kind of solidification of the aims of a group in what Sartre calls "the pledge". Sartre's pessimism reveals itself here (again) in the fact that the foundation of the organisational process is fear, the fear of treason. The pledge will necessarily be sustained by an ambience of terror. But why? Because each member of the group does not know whether the other is afraid enough of treason. In order to equalise fear, the group must establish in its midst a terroristic reciprocity. This "fear of fear" is what Sartre calls fraternity-terror. Sartre's optimism, then, lies in the fact that terror will be accompanied by the advent of this fraternity. Because the group decides itself in the pledge, everyone is bound by all the others by obligations of reciprocal help.

Treason will always threaten the group in fusion, however, because separation is the normal form of sociality. Against the return of the series, the group must exert a counter-pressure on itself within the crucial subjective element of the fear of treason – in others, but also in myself. The group-in-fusion is not only a dualistic group, however, the interiorisation of the Other in me and vice versa, but it operates under the threat of an external Third (*tiers*). Sartre writes: "duality is unified from outside through the *praxis* of the third party. The individual, as a third party, is connected, in the unity of a single *praxis*...with the unity of individuals as inseparable moments of a non-totalised totalisation and with each of them *as a* third party... through the mediation of the group."[37] This tripartite analysis, as dense as it is, overcomes some of the problems that plagued Sartre's earlier work. The practical call for action by the group is the mediation between each one and all the others. It is the true and probably only possible effectuation of the dissolution of the series. The group member who has the status of "third" that calls for action has no institutional or external status. He is literally *anyone* (from within the logic of the group), through whom each is the possible mediator of the reciprocity of all.

In the end, for Sartre, revolts will always crystallise. The fusion of the group will always reach a certain point and coalesce. Things fall apart, or rather, things slip back into seriality, often on a grander scale. The group becomes institution: "the institutional moment, in the group, corresponds to what might be called the systematic self-domestication of man by man."[38] On that basis, Sartre studies the process that allows one to understand organisation, and then institution. Each time, the share of inertia increases, the memory of fusion is stifled. Whilst this appears to be a wholly pessimistic conclusion, creeping inertia destroying all possibility of active change, nevertheless it is inescapable.

37 CDR, op. cit., p. 380.
38 CDR, op. cit., p. 566.

CONCLUSION

"It is conceivable", writes Sartre "that human thought is fundamentally the understanding of novelty".[39] This quote goes to the heart of the aims and ambitions of the *Critique*. If Sartre is an unfaithful Marxist, it is because of his adherence to such a conception of novelty. Indeed, we might more easily understand his work if we conceive of it as a dark, militant, Feuerbachianism rather than a Marxism in the mould of the analyses of *Capital*. In *Search for a Method*, he takes aim at what he sees as the mechanistic conception of history (or even the historical conception of machines) that he perceives in contemporary Marxism: "Existentialism," he argues, "can only affirm the specificity of the historical event... Marxists have tended not to attach much importance to the event. The outstanding event of the eighteenth century, they say, would not be the French Revolution but the appearance of the steam engine."[40]

Nevertheless, Sartre has indicated a novel way of viewing history, or indeed, what we might refer to as "historical novelty". Philosophically, this means that historical movement is not a homogeneous process. Nor does it fall under a unitary dialectic. There are moments which are anti-dialectical moments, (just as there are moments of the inhuman everywhere): Thus we have pure matter confronting individual praxis; or the institution which confronts the insurrectional group in fusion. Sartre endeavours to think, arguably against Hegel, dialectical discontinuity. It is thus important not to think that Sartre is proposing a cyclical view of history – in which groups incessantly form and then dissolve back into seriality, leaving an essentially dictatorial structure in place behind them. It is instead novelty and discontinuity that form the starting points of Sartre's conception of history, and if this entails that we should no longer refer to him as a Marxist, then so be it.

Ultimately, the Subject that Sartre wishes to restore to philosophy is a historical, rather than a political subject. And we return here to some of the points raised in the introduction about Sartre's contemporary significance: who is the subject in question? Is it a political or historical subject? Sartre's "mass subject" is not, in the first place, an organised subject. The group in fusion, from this point of view, *is* a historical, revolutionary concept, but it is not a political one. However, if "the point is *to make the impossibility of change* the very object which has to be transcended if life is to continue" (as quoted above) then it seems clear that Sartre may have more contemporary devotees than anyone has so far realised. I hope here to have argued, at least in part, that a reading of the *Critique* is of vital importance in understanding, not only what people think they mean by humanism and antihumanism, but also for filling in much of the background to the philosophical and political problematics of today.

39 CDR, op. cit., p. 61.
40 *Search for a Method*, op. cit., p. 124.

Ivana Jakšić, *Right Eye, Part of the Nose and Lips*, oil on canvas, 2000
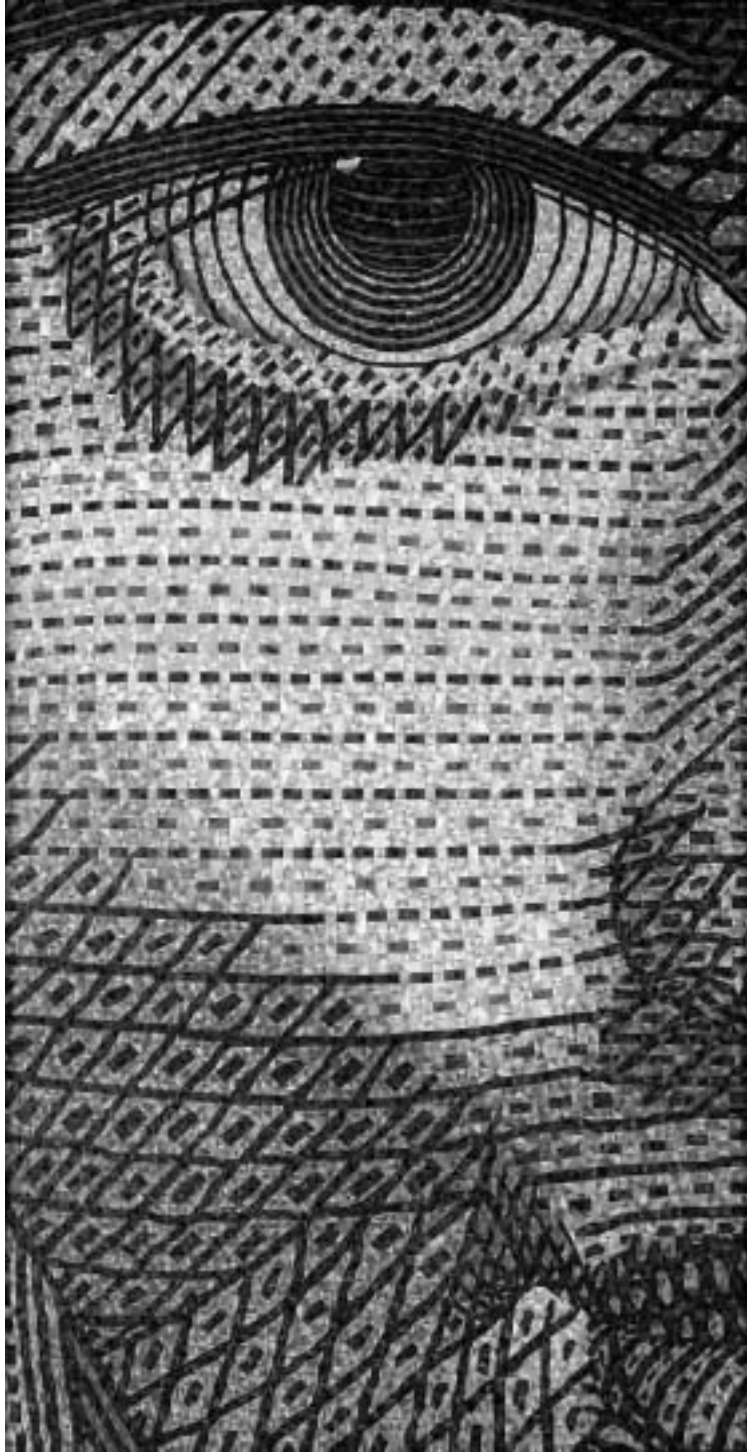
NOTHING PERSONAL: STATE
FROM THE
TO THE MASTER

Jason Barker

The question of whether it is possible to be a Marxist in philosophy is, in the later work of the philosopher who first posed it, answered in the affirmative. On condition that we think philosophy according to a certain *practice*, the *political* practice of classes and class struggle, then, yes, according to Louis Althusser, Marxist philosophy *is* possible. However, the question posed by the Prelom collective: "Is it possible to be a Marxist in philosophy?" is more provocative, since it demands a reappraisal of this founding axiom of post-Stalinist Marxism. The question being posed here – today [1] – is not simply one of whether it is or is not possible to be a Marxist in philosophy. The question's content is largely irrelevant. Instead, it is the form of the question, or its mode of address, that I want to try to unravel here. Let me therefore begin by reposing the question, thus: How does one account for the specific situation or *sociology* of where we find ourselves today, as thinkers and militants of politics, in relation to Althusser's original question?

Were one to respond to this question from a sociological point of view then one would be obliged to consider the intervening developments in the intellectual history of Marxism across Europe and further afield. It might involve, for example, a consideration of the decline of Theory in New Left circles during the 1970s and the 1980s and the corresponding rise of Gramscian concepts. The concept of the "national-popular", for example, might account for the shift from the ideology/science pairing to the culture/power pairing in the years when all politics felt obliged to respond to the "Thatcher revolution". Thatcherism forces a negative response to our question, written in the past tense: it is *no longer* possible to be a Marxist in philosophy; or: circumstances obliged us to give up on theoretical work in favour of a more representative, or more "critical" understanding of the desires of the masses.

Despite the negative fate of Marxist philosophy in institutional terms, theorists from Britain and elsewhere (notably France) have more recently established the conditions for a reinvigoration of Marxist politics, whereby a crisis-ridden Marxism is salvaged and may pass under alternative banners. I am thinking here of

1 The present paper was delivered at the Center for Cultural Decontamination in Belgrade on 29th of December 2004. Needless to say its philosophico-political relevance will have had a specific meaning in this context which may be untranslatable in other contexts.

Ernesto Laclau and his project of "radical democracy", which despite rejecting the objectivity of class struggle, seeks to contest the prevailing hegemony through the politics of counterculture. I shall henceforth use the term "post-Marxism" to refer more generally to those theoretical enterprises for which Marxist doctrine stands as an object either of (objective) destruction or (subjective) deconstruction. In the first case one encounters the "metapolitics" of Alain Badiou; in the second, Laclau's "radical politics" – with various other contemporary political theorists occupying positions in and around these two "extremes".

Rather than conduct a survey of the field of post-Marxism, in what follows I would like to concentrate on the conceptual problems posed by the signifier "post-Marxism" itself. My task here will not be to consider the relevance of post-Marxism for Marxist philosophy. Whether it is possible to remain a Marxist in philosophy seems secondary and somewhat incidental to the question of *why* Marxism should provide some sort of privileged access to radical or revolutionary politics – and by "revolutionary" I mean the capacity of politics to change the world or transform the conditions of life itself –, especially given the presumed destruction or deconstruction of Marxism. However, as we shall see, this qualification in turn rebounds, and generates a further *fundamental problem* of how *any* form of radical or revolutionary politics can exist in the absence of Marxist (political) concepts. The institutional decline of Marxist philosophy, or the socio-historical situation of post-Marxism in other words, appears to form the horizon of "revolutionary" politics today. The purpose of this essay will be to speculate on how and in what sense one might aim to overcome these (apparent) constraints.

I

The term "post-Marxism" raises some unusual questions. They are unusual since "post-Marxism" suggests that Marxism is dead or has entered a terminal phase of decline. Now, this is quite feasible, and isn't remotely unusual in itself. Marx never wanted to be a Marxist, and neither did Lenin. "Marxism" is only a makeshift word – an "overdetermined" word – the objective of which is a fully-fledged materialist philosophy of science. It stands to reason that the contribution of Marxism to such a philosophy (or to the *practice* of such a philosophy) must reach a threshold sooner or later. None of this is unusual or remotely controversial in itself.

Few people today would deny that the political aim of Marxism has been a form of revolutionary practice capable of leading the transition from a "democratic" State to communism. Marxism only has so much to give in this respect, and it is quite possible that it has given it already. However, what I find unusual, or at least perplexing about the word "post-Marxism" is this: if we are living through the decline, or the death, or the afterlife of Marxism; if this really is the post-Marxist phase we are in, then what becomes of the concepts generated by political theory "after Marx"? Whether we date the post-Marxist sequence sooner e.g. around the time of *What is to be Done?* (1902), or later e.g. "Why Can China's Red Political Power

Exist?" (1928), or even later still e.g. the "Decision of the | 2 See Alain Badiou, *La Révolution culturelle.*
CCP Central Committee Concerning the Great |
Proletarian Cultural Revolution" (1966) the question we are left with is this: what
becomes of the concepts of "State", "party", "revolution", "masses", "proletariat" and
so on during the post-Marxist phase, concepts which arguably cannot be thought
without recourse to Marxist politics or philosophy? Do they also decline? How do
they change? And what implications does their transformation have – for better or
worse – for the prospect of "revolutionary politics"?

Let me try to answer this question by focussing the discussion on the concept
of State. After all, it is the one that causes Marxists (who still adhere to the concept
of "revolutionary practice") and post-Marxists (who no longer do) the most difficulties
(in theory and practice) and the one that conditions our understanding of all the other
Marxist concepts.

Let us consider, for the sake of argument, May 1968 as the highpoint of
Marxist revolutionary practice in the world, or as the threshold of post-Marxism.
Admittedly the choice of this intellectual landmark over other possible beginnings
of the post-Marxist phase is somewhat arbitrary. However, it appears valid inasmuch
as it corresponds to the inauguration of a sequence through which the central role of
the State as a political signifier is placed in question. Let me propose that May 1968
marks the beginning of what I shall name the *de-personification of the State*.

Up until this point, Stalin and Mao had *personified* the figure of the State, they
were the person of the State in Hobbes's sense, (standing at) the head of (the) State
or inhabiting the body of the masses. In the case of Stalin, of course, we know that
he became the high priest of Marxism, and that in order to achieve this he had to
marry science with the party, or turn philosophy into a State religion. In the case of
Mao, the cult of personality, which reached its apex during the Cultural Revolution,
on the one hand involved saturating the political process with the deadly bureaucracy
of the State, while on the other hand it involved unleashing mass politics to the very limit
of what the party was able to tolerate. This is the contradiction that the State personifies:
a seemingly impulsive interchange – a "vacillation"? – between the necessity of
scientific processes on the one hand – "scientism" – and the autonomy of political
practice on the other.[2]

Of course, historically speaking, after May 1968 the cult of personality subsists,
both in the East (in the persons of Ceausescu and Hoxha) and in the West (in the
persons of Thatcher and Reagan). But the key point is this: By May 1968 revolutionary
practice no longer has the aim of incarnating the State with a new personality. Post-May
– and post-Marxism – there is no longer the State *and* revolution. Instead, the
State/revolution pairing marks a disjunction: the State *or* revolution. And this is
why today, with the benefit of hindsight, it would appear entirely symptomatic
that the French Communist Party (PCF) – for whatever reason – should have wanted
to remove the aim of "dictatorship of the proletariat" from its constitution in 1976.

After all, it *is* the case that the State in the so-called "narrow sense", or in
the sense of its "repressive apparatuses", does indeed remain indifferent to the

constitutional nature of government, or to the particular class in power. The State remains supremely indifferent to the "body" politic. As Etienne Balibar makes perfectly clear in his book *On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, Stalin's error lay in *domesticating* the Socialist State, of making the State a "friend" of the people, rather than treating it as the relentless, antagonistic figure of class struggle. And Balibar is right: nothing can abolish the dictatorship of the proletariat as a historical sequence *if we accept that the aim of dictatorship is not the institution of a new form of government, or the installation of an alternative State machine*. However, he is also wrong; because *even if we accept* that the dictatorship of the proletariat is not a coercive regime, and is not a seizure by force of existing State institutions, *it still conceives the personality that supposedly incarnates the State as a figure of antagonism*.

Balibar is right when he says that the masses "smash the State", not by brute force, but by insinuating themselves into its bureaucratic machinery by stealth. "Abolishing the bureaucracy at once," as Lenin confirms, "everywhere and completely, is out of the question. It is a utopia. But to *smash* the old bureaucratic machine at once and to begin immediately to construct a new one which will make possible the gradual abolition of all bureaucracy – this is *not* a utopia, it is... the direct and immediate task of the revolutionary proletariat".[3]

But Balibar is also wrong, because in so doing we merely replace one charismatic figure of the State, Stalin, with another one: the charismatic figure of the proletariat. Quoting Lenin again: "If it wants to overcome the bourgeoisie, the proletariat must train its own proletarian "class politicians", of a kind in no way *inferior* to bourgeois politicians" (my italics).[4]

Today the effects of this "antagonism" are somewhat farcical. For example, in no sense is the State an impediment to so-called "mass democracy". In fact the relentless "struggle" against the capitalist State is now multiform and endemic in society, operating at the most mundane level imaginable. Anti-statism, whether free market liberal or communist in nature, is simply the resentful impulse to undermine the *legitimacy* of the person of the State. But the person of the State, whether one is talking about an "individual" or a "multitude", cannot be the target of revolutionary political practice. It really must be said that showering insults at the leaders of the G8 from a distance of two kilometers is about as revolutionary today as a private investor speculating on the futures market; both actions are likely to be equally irreverent in terms of their underlying attitude towards the class in power.

I do not mean to trivialize the social democratic or reformist tendencies at work in contemporary mass politics, since some of them may be very important. What I want to say is that "revolutionary" modes of politics are no longer conditioned through undermining, either from within or without, the institutional legitimacy of the State – whether in terms of dismantling the existing ideological or repressive State apparatuses.

3 Lenin cited in Balibar, *On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, p. 104.

4 Lenin cited in Balibar, *On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, p. 106.

ii

The idea that the State is no longer a figure of political antagonism – or remains largely indifferent to any alleged "class struggle" – is a defining proposition of contemporary post-Marxism. We find it in the work of Ernesto Laclau, for whom the structural failure of political representation means that politics can no longer succeed in reconciling the particular and the universal. Instead, the plurality of politics blurs the boundary between the regime of signifier and signified, or of acts and statements, which results in the fact that a politics, in order to become hegemonic, must close the gap between a set of particular demands and the framework of their universal inclusion. Hegemony is a "constantly moving equilibrium", which means that the gap between particular and universal is constitutive of all politics, that politically speaking it cannot be closed once and for all, and that to close it completely would amount to an apology for the totalitarian State.[5] For Laclau, we might say that what counts as the subjective kernel of politics, or politics as "militant engagement", is the *deconstruction* of the (undecidable) point at which the set of particular demands and its universal inclusion through the figure of the State coincides. What the situation and the State share in common is always a matter of contest, redefinition and struggle.

Alain Badiou's metapolitics also corresponds to the general trend of post-Marxism in its conception of real-singular instances of politics withdrawn from any universal mode of enunciation, whether it be that of a party or State. For Badiou the State is not some *abstract* figure of representation, but manifests itself as a subjective limit on the (or, strictly speaking, a singular instance of) political process itself. In other words, the State "demonstrates" the point at which politics ceases. Badiou divorces the singular aims of politics from the authoritarian or bare administrative duties of State. Politics does indeed "seize" State power – but only in the sense of *paralyzing* the scope of such reactionary power. In this sense Badiou remarks how "a Maoist politics was able to experiment with an agrarian revolution in the liberated zones (those beyond the reach of the reactionary armies), or a Bolshevik politics was able to effect a partial transfer of certain statist operations into the hands of the Soviets..."[6] And yet politics must resist assuming the *role* of the State, or inhabiting the State's terrain, or even launching a rival political ideology "in opposition".

Equally, politics is not to be confused with counterculture, dissent or the politics of the multitude as is experienced, for example, through *alter-mondialisme*, since the politics of the multitude is an object of the State, or at least of its positive transformation ("another world is possible"). For Badiou politics strives for singularity, and is *relatively* autonomous only inasmuch as the superpower of the State is by its very nature errant and indeterminate. Indeed, unlike for Laclau, for Badiou there can be no tactical blurring of the boundary between situation and State. For example, the deconstruction, in the language of the situation, of the meaning of "freedom", which today stands as the dominant signifier in the

5 See Ernesto Laclau, "An Ethics of Militant Engagement" in *Think Again*, pp. 120-37.

6 Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, p. 150.

7 The reader would be advised to refer to Alain Badiou, "Politics as Truth Procedure" in *Metapolitics*, pp. 141-52.

8 Badiou, *Metapolitics*, p.144.

State's confrontation with "terrorism", but which nonetheless has been deployed in support of a raft of repressive and reactionary legislation, would make no political sense to Badiou. The repression and alienation we ordinarily associate with the State make no difference to the integrity and ingenuity of direct political action. Furthermore, militant politics is always in the process of preventing the State from trespassing on its strictly political terrain. Indeed, this is precisely what enables such ingenuity and invention to operate freely, "at a distance from the State".[7]

But Badiou's metapolitics raises the following question: is his definition of the State enough to de-personify the State, to de-Stalinize or de-Maoify the State, and so reduce the State to a mere instrument of coercion? In *Abrégé de métapolitique* we read the following:

We know that when politics exists, it immediately gives rise to a show of power by the State. This is obviously due to the fact that politics is collective, and hence universally concerns the parts of the situation, thereby encroaching upon the domain from which the state of the situation draws its existence. Politics summons the power of the State... The usual symptom of this summoning is the fact that politics invariably encounters repression. But repression, which is the empirical form of the errant superpower of the State, is not the essential point.[8]

If we take Badiou at his word here then my question is simply this: why bother retaining the concept of State at all?

If we are indeed living through the post-Marxist phase then this phase must involve, for Marxists, i.e. for those who still want to hold onto the possibility of calling themselves "revolutionaries", the de-personification of the State, the end of the statist definition of the field of politics. For Badiou, the State is either a socio-logical structure, aiming to organize human multiplicities; or, analogously, an onto-logical structure concerning the "state of the situation", which structures nondescript multiplicity. The State's association with repression, Badiou says, "is not the essential point". However, the question remains: in abandoning the idea that the fundamental task of politics is to take on the State and its personifications, are we *politically* or *subjectively* immune to the superpower of the State?

This is not an ethical question. I am not asking whether politics can maintain its links with the "good" State when it renounces the personifications of an "evil" State. This is not a question of how to maintain politics on the side of the good, or to deconstruct the (political?) proximity of "freedom" to "terrorism". I am asking, rather crudely perhaps, whether there is any political distinction to be made between politics and the State.

Let me try to rephrase the question slightly. Assuming the personifications of the State are politically finished, do we need a new figure of the State to take the place of the old one? Badiou thinks we do. He says that the "figure" of the State is *numerical*. In fact, there are three numerical figures – three infinite cardinal numbers – which correspond to the situation, its State, and to the political prescription which measures

the power of the State. "These numerical figures," Badiou declares, "are affected by each singular political sequence and do not have any sort of fixed determination, save for that of their mutual relations. More specifically, every politics proceeds to its own post-evental prescription vis-à-vis the power of the State..."[9]

So, in other words there is "nothing personal" about the State. Its alleged control of classes or collectives is simply subject to a political prescription that measures its power. Politics "fixes the power of the State" by extending the scope of its *own* activity into the ordinary affairs of State. However, the State cannot exert any political control over the subject because the subject is woven from infinite sets of relations that – despite being presented as "one" subject – cannot be represented or counted as one "whole" subject. Politics alone takes account of this multiplicity that is subtracted from the representation of the subject as one. In this sense, paradoxically, politics grasps the individual in its singularly, thus as unique one, thus enabling Badiou to say: "The 1 dis-figures every non-egalitarian claim".[10] Each "one" is a subject of politics, and as such is un-representable-as-one in the categorizations of the State – a State that can no longer effectively legislate for political practice, once politics is well and truly placed in command.

For Badiou, an immanent political process is constructed through such equality, a process unrestricted by law, while at the same time this process is constructed through fixing the power of the State, and therefore constructed in excess of the latter. Nonetheless, at the very heart of this political process a new figure of the State or a new political fixation emerges – the two are now identical – which I shall name here that of *the Master*.

iii

What is the figure of the Master? Let me propose the following definition:
The Master is that which presents itself every time the source and target of terror coincide.

"Terror" here is a nominal category, it is objectively meaningless, since once the State is de-personified and reduced to a mere coercive apparatus (i.e. once it has been evacuated from the political field) there are no longer any ethical grounds for defining its intervention in the field of politics as either "good" or "evil". Indeed, once the State is de-personified its repressive State apparatuses cease to have any relevance "for politics", occupying instead an indeterminate ideological terrain. This is *not* to say that politics will henceforth have nothing to do with such "repression", and that having eliminated the political function of the State *in toto* from the political field, politics can freely operate in the element of some benign anarchism. What it does mean, however, is that the classic, antagonistic figure of the State in the Marxist sense will henceforth be conceived, not as a deconstructible opposition of State/politics, but as a *singularity*. This singular pairing is what I mean by the Master, a figure no longer operating toward an external limit or

9 Badiou, *Metapolitics*, p. 148.
10 Badiou, *Metapolitics*, p. 150.

aiming to transcend the political field. There is no beyond of politics. The State "itself", despite being the Other of politics, is always already included in the latter. We might say that the Other of the political returns again to the Same of politics. The latter appears only as the *image* of the former.

It is worth noting that the figure of the Master – this "coincidence" of the source and target of terror – is a key component of the French Revolution and its Convention. Specifically, it is the Incorruptible, the one who walks through the city with impunity. But is it a *revolutionary* figure?

Firstly, to speak of a singular politics in the above sense, and thus of a world without the State; and thus without its ruling class; and thus of a world without classes... all of this is enough to convince us that, today, at least in setting out from the *socio-historical* perspective of post-Marxism, "revolution" is meaningless. Without the political *world* there is nothing to change, and without oppressed classes there are no conditions of life to transform. But is the "withering away of the State" – which for Marx would also mark the disappearance of politics and its replacement by "free association" – enough to invalidate the concept of revolution? Moreover, what aim would revolution really serve once the collective Mastery of necessities has replaced class struggle?

This is a huge question that on the one hand involves the (Marxist?) philosophical determination of the Concept, and, on the other, the nature of political singularities and their subjects. I shall confine my closing remarks to the latter, which merely serve to indicate the general direction in which the question of the Master's "revolutionary" status might be resolved.

In 1969, Jacques Lacan pre-figured the historical appearance of the Master in the political field in his seminar at the University of Vincennes, in the midst of a self-styled revolutionary *face-à-face*. This was the famous "impromptu" during which the audience forced Lacan into a critique of Maoism. He responded to the provocation simply in the following way:

What you aspire to, as revolutionaries, is a Master. You will have your Master... You are playing the role of the zealots of this regime. You don't know what that means? The regime will show you: It says: "Look at them wanking themselves off"...[11]

In other words, according to Lacan, excess enjoyment [*jouissance*] is the spectacle that the Master dangles in front of the masses, the semblance that seduces the revolutionaries. But Lacan's response can be interpreted in at least two ways.

Firstly, it might be taken to mean: revolution is only made possible through the Master discourse and in conformity with it. In "acting" politically, the May 68 "revolutionaries" are simply providing the rationale for a return to law and order. This is what the revolutionary fanatic cannot see, so taken by the "cause" that denies him any objective place from which to judge his own intimate relation to or responsibility for that part of *himself* which he despises, but which he mistakes for the Other.

11 Jacques Lacan, "L'impromptu de Vincennes" in *Le Magazine littéraire*, pp. 24-5.

However, Lacan's response might also be read (with the aid of a little imagination!) in the following sense: the revolutionaries have underestimated the implacability of the Master. Unless they change their behaviour it will all end in tears for them. This is the challenge facing the enthusiast, for whom revolution lies in forever transcending the limits of what is objectively possible. The enthusiast recognizes the Other to the extent that the latter is the object of thorough-going self-criticism in the relentless struggle to reach his goal – unlike the fanatic who is certain of having already reached it.[12]

12 This Kantian distinction between enthusiasm and fanaticism is favoured by Badiou in his *Théorie du sujet,* and is summarised by Ed Pluth and Dominiek Hoens in "What if the Other is Stupid? Lacan and Badiou on 'Logical Time'" in *Think Again,* pp. 182-90.

Here, then, we have an outline for a typology of post-Marxist "revolution". I offer it as part of an objective account of what I regard as the broad stakes and possibilities for a militant, transformational, "revolutionary" politics that aims to disfigure Master discourse. Critics might remark at the somewhat "anarchic" or "terrorist" implications of a theory of "revolution" from within which "society" is no longer deducible a priori (as Badiou might say, there is no longer "reason" to revolt apart from the fact that one *can* revolt). Whether this turns out to be a positive or negative criticism is unclear from within the terms of the present essay. But it would at least seem uncontroversial to conclude that both the State and class have well and truly been eclipsed as political signifiers, and that today the collective Mastery of necessities is already a brutal reality for the majority of the world's population.

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Ivana Jakšić, *Part of the Face, the Neck
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SPRINGTIME FOR HEGEMONY: LACLAU AND MOUFFE WITH JANEZ JANŠA

Ozren Pupovac

In the autumn of 1987, the Slovenian journal *Mladina* published a large interview with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, under the heading: "Once Was a Revolution: Large Interview with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe".[1]

At some point in this interview, we can find Mouffe stating:

We cannot think of socialism anymore in mere terms of the socialisation of the means of production, because all of this is too much related to the struggle against only one form of social inequality – that of class – whilst at the same time, all other forms of inequality, which have no class basis, but are nevertheless as important, are overlooked. The project of radical democracy attempts, on the one hand, to recognise this extension of social conflictuality; on the other hand, it aims to pose the question of politics in a non-essentialist way. This means that it does not presuppose some sort of a "human nature", whose essence would be the struggle against subordination, but rather conceives each antagonism as discursively constructed... This is why we placed such an emphasis on the significance of the "democratic revolution" in our book. Because it is the democratic revolution that offers the language through which effectively more relations of subordination can be translated into relations of oppression. Plurality also brings about the realisation that the idea of a total, homogeneous collective will is something extremely dangerous – it leads to totalitarianism.[2]

These statements are interesting. Not because they represent a condensed recapitulation of the most important theses of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, which Mouffe had co-written with Laclau. They are interesting in relation to the context in which they appear and thus also in terms of their meaning in this context. And although the interview in question was conducted at the time when the educated public in Slovenia was expecting to see the light of the day of the translation of *Hegemony* into Slovene language, one cannot say that this context was simply a matter of intellectual exchanges. The significance of these statements cannot be confined to the level of theory alone.

1 Cf. "Once Was a Revolution: Large Interview with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe", *Mladina*, (1987), No. 39, ZSMS: Ljubljana.

2 Ibid., p. 25.

3 *Mladina* (*Youth*) is a political weekly which had the role of being the chief organ of the "alternative" political scene in Slovenia throughout the eighties. Published by the Socialist Youth Alliance of Slovenia, *Mladina* provided the key intellectual role in the arena of the social and political movements united under the label of "the Alternative". It also had a very strong impact on the wider Slovenian public. At its peak, the magazine had a print run of around 80,000 copies per week, in a republic of about 1.7 million inhabitants.

In fact, the very appearance of Laclau and Mouffe (from hereafter L/M) in *Mladina*,[3] a Slovenian weekly standing at the forefront of those political forces which were announcing, from the inside, so to speak, the historical transformations of the "real socialist regimes" at the end of the 1980s, should tell us something important about their theoretical propositions, about the concepts of "hegemony" and "radical democracy". This appearance invites us to look for the reach of the latter beyond the realm of pure theory, it invites us to explore the actual involvement of these theoretical concepts in political and historical struggles. If it is without doubt that Mouffe's statements in *Mladina* exhibit a high degree of analytical force – especially in terms of the relation between socialism and democracy which they put forward – from today's perspective, we might rather consider them as being programmatical. Indeed, we could even go as far as saying that if the theoretical propositions of L/M had ever seen their materialisation in concrete politics, if they ever had a grip on history, not simply in terms conceptual adequation, but in terms of real, practical effects, than we have to search for these in the historical episode of the so-called "Slovenian Spring".

The analysis that follows here is an attempt to understand this practical involvement of a theory, and to draw some consequences from it. In a sense, this would presume that we take the L/M theory in a consequential way. For as we know, one of the fundamental presuppositions of their theorisation – and in this sense, their post-Marxism has clear Marxist roots – is the idea of the unity of theory and practice, a unity which L/M attempt to conceptualise in a unmediated manner (which is quite at a remote from some of the most important theoretical approaches of Marxism, but that is another matter).

But the consequences of this excursion into practice, however, seem to reverse the normal order of things here. The point of the historical appearance of L/M in Slovenia is not the point at which we can learn from the theoretical enrichment of practice, but quite the opposite, the point at which practice teaches us important lessons about theoretical constructions. Because the entire drama of "Slovenian Spring", in all its paradoxical dimensions, seems to lay bare, in a particularly graphic way, the theoretical failures of L/M. What it reveals is that entire post-Marxist construction of L/M is nothing but a theoretical symptom of that tragic politics of post-socialism.

1. "THE ALTERNATIVE", DEMOCRACY AND SOCIALISM

Of course, the themes that L/M were discussing in this 1987 interview – themes such as socialism and democracy, political pluralism, new social movements and civic liberties – were nothing less then veritable signs of the times. These

themes were at the forefront of those political strivings that characterised the decades of the 1970s and the 1980s in the East of Europe, where the structural pinnacles of the so-called "socialist bloc" were experiencing a compelling drive for transformation, both from "above"

4 Cf. Szelény, Iván "Socialist Opposition in Eastern Europe: Dilemmas and Prospects", in: Tökés, Rudolf L. (1979) *Opposition in Eastern Europe,* London: McMillan Press, p. 201.

and from "below". If the entire conceptual construction of "radical democracy" proposed by L/M cannot be seen as direct theoretical expression of this historical moment – as this would involve some slight political and historical stretching – the approach that they sketched definitely shared the spirit of this moment.

In general terms, what perhaps best characterises this historical transformation is the shift in the topography of the dialectic, occurring at the very heart of Marxism. One of the decisive consequences of the 1970s and the 1980s, in this sense, was that the entire theoretical field – or, rather, a battlefield, a *Kampflatz* in the Kantian sense, as one philosopher noted – which included the dichotomous and indeed antagonistic figures of class struggle, of capitalism, socialism and communism, of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, of reform and revolution, was to be replaced by a rather more pacifying doublet: the dialectics of democracy and socialism. The problem of social or human emancipation – as young Marx put it – is "taken a step back" in order to rethink the questions of political emancipation.

In the midst of the theoretical and political crisis that the post-War period had uncovered, the parlance of "democracy" re-emerges as a crucial ideological *topos*. It becomes the beacon of new times for the entire socialist world. From the East to the West, from the "official" to "unofficial" spheres, amongst the intellectuals and in the party structures, "democracy" surfaces an indicator of a momentous change, a dramatic shift of direction, but also of expectation and enthusiasm. One can think of all those names inscribed in the history of "democratization of Marxism': from Dubček to Berlinguer, from Marchais to Bahro, from Bobbio to Hobsbawm, from Kuroň to Carillo, from Korčula to Budapest, from KOR to Charter 77, from *compromeso storico* to the *New Left*.

The discourse of "democracy" provided the opposition to the repressive nature of the apparatuses of State socialism: it was seen as a necessary "corrective" which could measure the excesses of the party-States (and the State-parties). But at the same time it was also a ground for new utopian hope – as some saw in it the possibilities for a rebirth of the subject of history and politics – that one which was reduced to frostbite by the brutal realities of the Cold War. The Hungarian Marxist, Iván Szelény, could still write in 1979:

> The issue of human rights, democratic freedoms, freedom of speech, assembly and association, crosscuts ideological divisions amongst the dissidents and it offers a basis for a broad "national front" into which all democratic forces of Eastern Europe can be integrated and from which socialists just cannot isolate themselves. The idea of "democratic socialism" is the most appealing one. This is why Eurocommunism attracts much attention.[4]

The result, nevertheless, was nothing but an alarming pacification of that radical political subjectivity that Marxism inspired: as the dissident intellectuals and reformist communists in the East started openly embracing the formalism of equality and liberty, their counterparts in the West were hastily getting rid of the Marxist-Leninist conceptions of politics,[5] whilst at the same time fully adopting the terrain of liberal democracy, in both its political and economic aspects.

Whilst Marxist politics was steadily loosing the ground underneath it, it also seemed that Marxism as a theory, in its official version at least, was out of sync with the movement of history. This is why the *parole* of the students of May 1968, in Paris and in Prague, in Belgrade and in Rome, in Budapest and in Ljubljana, would come up with a witty inversion of Lenin's sarcastic remark: Communism as a geriatric deviation.

With this political and theoretical decentering of Marxism and the intrusion and recognition of other theoretical and political forms of critique, it seemed increasingly more difficult to pose the question of emancipation in the singular. Instead, a whole range of particular and plural social concerns, such as those embodies in the struggles of women, of sexual minorities, of students, of and youth and alternative cultures, were being articulating into political dissent and demands for social change.

It is in this political and historical context that we can locate the episode of the "Slovenian Spring". As elsewhere in the East, the 1970s and the 1980s in Slovenia unfolded primarily under the banners of democracy and pluralism. But at the same time, and this is something which perhaps points to the particularity of the Slovenian case while at the same time making it a somewhat paradigmatic, this episode drew its strength directly from the paradigm of new social movements, which characterised the post-1968 political scene in the West. What came to stand self-consciously under the name of "the Alternative" originated in the "new" social and political movements which were gaining momentum in this Yugoslav republic from the late 1970s onwards. Indeed, the "Slovenian Spring" began in various forms of student activism, in different artistic and subcultural expressions, as for example the punk movement, in forms of political consciousness oriented around the issues of gender and sexual inequalities, around the issues of demilitarisation and nuclear disarmament, as well as ecological concerns. As to its initial forms of self-consciousness, "the Alternative" represented its own practices in terms of the creation and protection of niches of difference, the production of plural and autonomous social fields, in the sense of the politicisation of everyday life, of issues and problems arising from concrete and particular "lived relations", in the sense of responses to different "blockades" and "attacks" rooted in the multifarious web of social practices. And coupled with an "internal" critique of socialism and Marxism which was also being put forward by these same actors, critique framed in terms of demands for democracy projected, demands for the institutionalisation of formal equality and liberty, for the freedom of press and freedom of association, the 'alternative sphere" in Slovenia in the 1980s was definitely saying "farewell to the proletariat".

5 As one commentator remarked with regard to the French Communist Party in the 1970s: The Party which was slowest to de-Stalinize, was now fastest to de-Leninize.

It is not surprising that within this peculiar conjunction of the NSM political paradigm and the immanent attempts at overcoming Marxism in both theory and practice, the theoretical and political propositions of L/M would leave particularly strong resonances. The entire conceptual baggage which supported the notion "radical and plural democracy" was readily absorbed by the theoreticians associated with "the Alternative" - especially by those philosophers and intellectuals who were seeking new theoretical positions beyond the official, or officially consecrated texts, and in particular, by those Slovenian theoreticians who were attempting to reconstruct a productive exchange between Marxism, structuralism and psychoanalysis. Indeed, the theoretical consciousness of "the Alternative", at least in its "vanguardist" moment, versed itself extensively in the terminology of "hegemony" and "articulation", of 'floating signifiers" and "chains of equivalence".[6] This is why one is not mistaken in claiming that the concept which was offering itself as the most powerful means of incorporating and representing the practices of "the Alternative" as a whole, and in this sense also formulating its political strategy, was precisely the concept of "radical and plural democracy".

However, this concept had to compete with another political notion, a notion which did not originate so much from theoretical adventures, such as the L/M attempt to "complement" Marxist thought with (post)structuralist theoretical models, but which had much more direct political import: the notion of civil society. Civil society, a concept which the East of Europe had resurrected from the dustbin of the history of liberal political thought, emerged, as in Hungary, Poland and Czeschoslovakia, as the crucial political term in Slovenia in the 1980s. Propounded by the pioneers of "the Alternative", this concept was particularly important inasmuch as it allowed these movements to politicise their actions in a strong sense, which meant abandoning a position of isolation and self-containment vis-à-vis the public sphere as a whole.[7] The notion of civil society did not only expand the field of engagements of "the Alternative", but also the ensemble of actors involved in it, whilst gradually becoming the central motif of the entire "oppositional" politics in the 1980s. In fact, it is in and through the discourse of "civil society" that "the Alternative" was able to impose itself at the centre of the political field in the Slovenia, determining the very spirit of political struggles in the latter part of the 1980s. This is why Tomaž Mastnak could write: "It is possible to say that the new social movements were those who have not only intrigued, but also by the mid-1980s hegemonised the social consciousness".[8]

6 It is hard to overestimate the impact of L/M theory in the Slovenian theoretical and intellectual circles. A number of the most important theoretical journals in Slovenia, and especially those which were closely connected with the alternative movements – such as *Problemi, Razpol, Vestnik* and *Časopis za kritiko znanosti* – were discussing the theoretical propositions of L/M at length, and at times producing not only original and critical interpretations of them, but also quite forceful proposals for a theoretical reconstruction. During this theoretical debate, L/M also made two very important appearances in Slovenia. In 1986, the Institute for Marxist Studies of the Slovenian Academy of the Sciences, organised a round table with L/M. The proceedings of the two lectures, and the discussion which ensued were published in several theoretical journals (*Problemi* and *Vestnik*), whilst the audio recording of the entire event was broadcast on Ljubljana's radio *Student*. In 1987, about the time when the Slovenian translation of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* was in preparation, the Institute for Marxist studies organised a large conference entitled *New Social Movements as the Political Extension of the Metaphor*, where L/M were the keynote speakers. The papers from this event are collected in the first issue of *Vestnik* from 1988.

7 Cf. Mastnak, Tomaž (1992) *Vzhodno od Raja (East of Eden)*, Ljubljana: DZS.

8 Cf. Mastnak, Ibid., p. 57.

But does this prominence and importance of the notion of "civil society" mean that there was a disjunction between the political consciousness of "the Alternative" and its theoretical consciousness? In which way could Marxist and post-Marxist theorisations, enriched as they were by Lacan, Hegel, Derrida and many others, coexist side by side with a rather conventional set of liberal dogmas?

The proper question that we should pose here, however, is whether we are dealing with a disjunction in the first place. When speaking about the notions of "radical democracy" and "civil society", are we dealing at all with two significantly different political conceptions?

2. THE HEGEMONY OF CIVIL SOCIETY

If we take the immediate sense of history – that is, of the historical trajectories which we outlined a moment ago – it should not be surprising that the notions of "radical democracy" and "civil society" appear together in the first place. Both notions, in fact, have a definite place within the development of that what we called the dialectics of democracy and socialism. And in this sense, both are being formulated at the meeting ground between Marxist theory and the liberal tradition. In the case of "radical democracy", it was a matter of re-examining, and indeed of revalorising liberalism, of fundamental liberal political concepts, such as formal liberty and equality, with regard to Marxist political theory, and thus also, with regards to the political strategy of socialism in the West. In the case of "civil society", it was a matter of domesticating a classical liberal concept - the dichotomy of state/civil society - in the ideological and political context of the socialist States in the East. If the former appropriation of liberalism appears as a peculiar leftist reaction to the impasses of Western Marxism in the face of the transformations of socio-political struggles from "below", but also of the rise of the neo-conservative and neo-liberal Right, the latter notion surfaces as an (equally leftist) "corrective" to the contradictions of Marxist politics, as it was embodied in repressive State apparatuses. Both of these conceptions, however, are also were implicated in the specific "resolution" of the dialectic of democracy and socialism, a resolution without *Aufhebung* proper, when the former term backlashed against the latter, when the very idea of socialism began to dissipate in front of the "ideals" of democracy. Thus, if we can take the post-Marxism of L/M as the first conscious attempt, in the West, of an immanent overcoming and dissolution of Marxist theory amidst the political and historical crises of the 1970s and the 1980s, then the theorisation of "civil society" provided the cornerstone for a specifically Eastern variant of "post-Marxism", that is, for the attempt of decomposing the scientific and ideological foundations of Marxism from within the forms of their institutionalisation in "really existing" socialisms. As Mastnak would note, with reference to Eastern Europe, and Slovenia in particular: "Theorising civil society was an alternative to Marxism. It had, through "post-Marxism", opened an intellectual exit from the then dominant social and political theory, and thus also from the socialist (and especially "self-management') ideology".[9]

9 Ibid., p. 55.

However, the establishment of this general historical homology still falls short of the remarkable correspondence of themes and operations that one can discern with regards to these two conceptions. Notwithstanding the differences in their respective genealogies and their theoretical composition (which includes also their expectations), if we look at the essential political characteristics of the propositions for both "civil society" and "radical democracy", if we look at the fundamental conceptual structure of these two political ideas, in the sense in which they are defined in the 1980s, the resemblances are striking.

The initial point at which we can find these two approaches intersecting concerns the problem of formalism. Both of these conceptions are, in fact, formalist conception of politics, or, more exactly, both imply a formal notion of democracy. The crux of the project of reconstruction, or rather a reapplication of the nineteenth century liberal dichotomy civil society/the State, propelled both by the "dissidents" in the East, as well as Western theoreticians, such as John Keane,[10] was as attempt to conceive of formal conditions of politics, that is, the formal conditions of democracy. The idea of civil society, in this sense, is supposed to provide a guarantee for a permanent reinvention of the democratic subject, or rather, of democratic subjects. In its separation from the State, the space of civil society is the space political freedom, a space where the subjects of democracy are born and where they mature. The source of political power, of the public sphere, continuously emanates from a realm formally separated from the institutions which embody it: from the spaces of the free association and participation, from different expressions of social life and of humanity in civil society. This brings out, in fact, the classical liberal *topoi* of legitimacy and legality of the State, the idea of necessary societal control of the exercise of power. But the space of civil society is also the space of diversity and heterogeneity, which means that questions of power are to be posed in the plural. This latter qualification is sought as an expansion of the critical potential of the notion, which is now represented as a permanent warrant against the excesses of the substantiality of the democratic subject – of something that the discourse of the Cold War denoted by the term totalitarianism. The important thing, nevertheless, is that the space of liberty inherent to civil society is only possible by a procedure of formal separation, which lies at the heart of the modern State. The moment of formalism, in other words, is the moment at which the State folds back into civil society. Because the freedom inherent in civil society, its capacity for the production of autonomous subjects of democracy, is inseparable from "formal democracy", from the legal and political institutions of modernity, from the bourgeois sphere of citizenship, rights and duties.

This formalisation of politics and of democracy is also at the heart of the political project of L/M. The scenario of political life represented in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is a striking resemblance of the above conception. In general, the questions L/M are asking at the root of their political conception

10 The most elementary elaborations of the "reinvented" civil society are probably to be found in Keane, John (ed.) (1988a) *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives*, London: Verso, and also: Keane, John (1988b) *Democracy and Civil Society: On the Predicaments of European Socialism, the Prospects for Democracy, and the Problem of Controlling Social and Political Power*, London: Verso.

are the questions of the conditions of possibility for the autonomous production of social and political life, for association, organisation and cohesion in "civil society". In this sense, L/M would depict the substance of politics in terms of the opening of the space, or rather, the spaces of freedom in society, from without the official sphere of authority. This, in fact, is what "radical democracy" means: "The project for a radical and plural democracy, *in a primary sense,* is nothing other than the struggle for a maximum autonomization of spheres on the basis of the generalization of the equivalential-egalitarian logic."[11] But at the same time, the freedom of these spaces, and thus political life as such, depend upon very specific conditions. The fundamental problem of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, lies precisely in locating, defining and formalising these conditions: "Our central problem is to identify the discursive conditions for the emergence of a collective action, directed towards struggling against inequalities and challenging relations of subordination".[12] It is at this point that the project for a "radical democracy" of L/M brings us forcefully back to the entire problematic of "formal democracy".[13] We shall deal with the problems of this return in a moment.

What is important to stress beforehand is that the purpose of the "reinvention" of this political formalism is seen, in both cases, in terms of a critique of the "substantialism" of Marxist politics. If the project of "civil society" was in this sense perceived as a reaction to the repressive and "subjectivist" nature of the real socialist regimes, a reaction to the growing discrepancy between the official sphere and its popular support, the notion of "radical democracy" was a response to the post-68 world, where the struggle of workers for emancipation was seen as only one

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11 Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) *Hegemony &Social Strategy Tawards a Radical Democratic Politics,* London: Verso, p.167.

12 Ibid., p. 153.

13 It is interesting that L/M want to dissociate themselves from "civil society': they reject the separation of civil society and the State as being too rigid in political terms, and as politically inappropriate today, especially for the Western political context (Cf. interview in *Mladina,* p. 24). And yet, their theoretical construction, by itself, seems impossible without this dichotomy. Because this dichotomy was at the core of the work of Gramsci, from whom L/M derive the substance for their theoretical enterprise. Hegemony, for Gramsci, pertains to civil society, and denotes precisely the politics of consent of social and political subjects. But we have to be careful here: if the Italian communist militant saw in "civil society" the strategic potential for the victory of the proletarian party, for the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the dissolution of the bourgeois State, in the hands of L/M, the Gramscian conception would be stripped of its revolutionary credentials. In L/M, Gramsci's "overturning of Hegel" is itself overturned: if Gramsci's idea of civil society represented a direct inversion of Hegel - inasmuch as he conceived of civil society as the "idea" or the "truth" of the State, inasmuch as he thought that the autonomous production of social life in civil society provided the "ethical content" of the State, in L/M what we find is Gramsci inverted himself. Because now it is the State, or rather its formal political aspect, which becomes, once again, the "truth" of civil society, the "truth" of society's self-organisation and political expression. This latter overturning, however, implies a quite substantial shift of terrain: whereas for Hegel and for Gramsci the distinction between the state and civil society represents an absolute distinction, an irresolvable contradiction which ultimately leads to the suppression of one term by the other – for Hegel, the State is the *Aufhebung* of the egoism and atomism of civil society; whereas for Gramsci, civil society marks the beginning of an "end of the State". What we have in L/M, and also amongst the theoreticians of "civil society", is a relativisation of this distinction. In other words, from a dialectical conception we move to a reflective one: civil society is not conceived as the absolute other of the State, rather, both are involved in as a specific game of mirroring. Again, we are back to a purely formalist conception of politics: political democracy in civil society is ultimately guaranteed by the formal mechanisms of the political State – by the sphere of law and rights, by the abstract figures of man and citizen, meaning, by formal equality and liberty. Civil society cannot be fully separated from the State, as it fundamentally presumes it, as it is ultimately grounded upon it, as it depends on the materiality of the *Rechtsstaat.*

amongst many others. If the former was pointing to the danger of the excesses in State power and its forms of representation in the East, the latter was seeking an answer to the empirical pluralisation of social and political conflicts in the West. Both of them converge around the critique and rejection of the Marxist theory of politics, and the centrality of the notion of class struggle inherent to it. From within their own particular empirical or historical problems, both seek to reject *in toto* the theoretical dimension of class struggle and class politics. The concept of class struggle, as the argument goes, and this is an old argument indeed, is not only excessively particularistic, but also overly "reductionist", indifferent to the plurality of social spaces, groups, demands and identity. By contrast, a formalist perspective, and in particular, "formal democracy" as such, allows one not only to recover political pluralism, but also to attain universality in a strong sense, the sense in which we reach the questions of the conditions of possibility of political life. In practical terms, however, this would most often amount to the simple acknowledgement of liberal-democracy as "the only game in town", as we can see from that timeless eruption of political enthusiasm in the writings of T.G. Ash: "When it comes to politics, all Eastereuropeans claim: there is no socialist democracy, but only democracy. And with democracy, they understand multiparty parliamentary democracy, as practised in contemporary Western, Northern and Southern Europe. Everybody is saying: there is no "socialist legality", just legality. And with this they understand the rule of law, which is guaranteed by the constitutionally determined independence of the judiciary. Everybody is saying, and this is perhaps the most important viewpoint for the Left: there is no "socialist economy", there is just economy. And economy does not mean socialist market economy, but social market economy".[14]

What is less immediately visible here, however, is that with this embrace of formalism politics ultimately lapses into being conceived and structured around legalistic terms. Because what these "conditions of possibility" and indeed the very form of universality of "formal democracy" unmistakably point to is nothing other but the sphere of bourgeois law in all its ramifications: the sphere of civic and human rights, the sphere of modern citizenship. Thus, whilst the theorists and activists of "civil society" in Eastern Europe are trying to reinvent the liberal question of legality and legitimacy, to resurrect the problem of the *Rechtsstaat,* whilst they are uncovering all the classical liberal *topoi* of politics such constitutional rights, civil liberties, mechanisms of political representation, principles of contract, L/M are engaged in rethinking at large the implications of the bourgeois revolutions and of their universalistic legal propositions. In both cases, the centre stage is occupied by the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*. This foundational text of the juridico-political modernity acquires new life as it resurfaces in the shape of a formal guarantee of the conditions of possibility of the autonomisation of social spaces and the politicisation of various issues and concerns. In other words, the other side of the political pluralism of the "new social

14 Cf. Ash, T.G. (1990) *We the people*, London: Granta, p. 151.

movements", the other side of the hetero-geneity of "civil initiatives" and "democratic oppositions" in Eastern Europe is legal universality. L/M truly go far in this direction: what the authors of *Hegemony* are (re)discovering in the abstract personae of "man" and "citizen" who are both "free" and "equal", are nothing less but the conditions of possibility of the politics of emancipation. In their fervent attempt to provide an answer to the questions of politicisation of spheres of social difference and plurality in "civil society" L/M would end up fetishising the symbolic framework of the *Declaration*: anybody can claim to be the subject of freedom and equality, at any time, anywhere, there are no social relations or locations which could not be a matter of the discourse of civic liberties and human rights. Politics ultimately finds its beginning, its *perpetuum mobile* in juridical consciousness. And this is true even, and perhaps above all, for questions of social emancipation. In this sense, we can find Laclau asserting: "The nature and degree of the resistance against capitalist relations of production will crucially depend on the consciousness of their rights that people have in a certain historical moment".[15] Translated to more traditional terms, the L/M concept of negativity thus amounts to nothing more than that which Marx criticised under the rubric of a partial, political emancipation: its the object of politics is not social or human equality, but simple equality before the law, equality in rights.[16]

To bring out the last aspect of comparison, we should also take note of an according philosophical position, or a philosophical shift, which links the two political conceptions. The shift in question is the one which occurs under the slogan of the "return to the concrete". Return to the concrete: what is implied here is not only the rejection of utopian dimensions of thought, but also the absence of any "abstract" philosophical and theoretical statements on history, society and politics. This was the primary medium through which the political perspectives of the 1970s and the 1980s sought to oppose themselves to Marxism as a theory of history. Against the centrality of the Marxian Two of the class struggle, and, accordingly, against the very notion of dialectics, we now witness the emergence of a very particular notion of the "concrete analysis of the concrete situation", quite at odds with Lenin. The question of the consciousness of politics becomes a question of the

15 Cf. Laclau, Ernesto (1988) "Political Significance of the Concept of Negativity", in *Vestnik* No. 1, 1988, p. 78.

16 This legalistic orientation of politics implies something more: its importance should be measured not solely from the fact that it brought back political questions under the rule of juridical notions, but also from its capacity to dissipate political objects before the Law. The paradox of the legalism inherent to the political conceptions of 'radical democracy" and "civil society" resides in the permanent peril of the evacuation of politics: if questions of law become ends in themselves, are we not effectively displacing the entire substance of political concerns? Instead of substantial political demands for liberation and emancipation, the essence of politics is reduced to a demand for the 'symbolic" or "discursive" legal framework which would retroactively allow for politics and politicisation. The most excessive examples of this evacuation were surely the "apolitical manifestos" which the architects of the Eastern European Springs and the pioneers of "civil society" elaborated in the 1970s and the 1980s. But we can equally consider that if we drive some of the propositions of L/M to their logical conclusions, if we follow their fetishism of liberal rights and duties to the end, we would not be far away from these paradoxical positions. Because when Laclau, at some moment, retorts that "when we are speaking about the importance of new social movements ... the point to be emphasised is that we need to extend a conception of rights, equality, etc. to larger and larger areas of social relations, instead of conceiving them as the result of struggles which take place in a limited sphere of the social fabric", (Laclau, ibid.) it is clear that he, whether consciously or not, displaces the very substance of these struggles, their critical social thrust, in favour of the question of the juridico-political framework, and reduces and dispels politics into Law.

concrete given – of the immediate "living problems", of empirically visible and tangible issues and demands, of particular social and historical forces, of strategic and tactical orientations, of pragmatic problems, all of which need to be recognised, both *de facto* and *de jure.*[17]

This attempt to dispose of the terms "abstract" and the "speculative" with regard to politics was, of course, prominent amongst many East Europan "dissident" authors, such as Havel or Vajda, but the theory of L/M seems to represent the theoretical apex of this entire endeavour. Whilst rejecting what they see as "essentialist apriorism", L/M would at the same time espouse a peculiar discursive "realism", where the attributes are the matter of the essence. The L/M version of the "return to the concrete" would depict a social and historical space composed of a plurality of languages, each of which is irreducible in its givenness and immediacy. The ruling principle in this space, which is also the ruling principle of politics, is rhetorical construction: there are no fixed terms or positions in the social and political world, the objects and the subjects of politics are absolutely malleable, and ultimately determined by the contingency of the linguistic and rhetorical combinatory.

It is not hard to realise that a corollary of this position is also the collapse of all fundamental modern political concepts and forms, the evacuation of not only the "classical" questions of power and sovereignty, of the State and the historical forms of politics, but also of the substance all modern political distinctions, such as Left/Right, Revolution/Reform, liberalism vs. conservativism vs. socialism, etc. Inasmuch as the combinatory potential of discursive elements is infinite, politics, for L/M, becomes the sole matter of the pragmatics of attribution. This, in turn, means that political concepts, even, and perhaps above all, the most fundamental ones, such as liberty, equality, property and security, become "contested signifiers".

Indeed, what seems to be radical in "radical democracy" is its combination of idealism and relativism: the insistence of L/M on the recognition of the actual pluralism of discourses, of the subjective expressions of political positions, of demands and revendications, all of which are, at the same time, absolutely malleable, context specific, contingent. Politics, for L/M, begins at the level of discursive immediacy, and quite at a remote from all the "grand narratives" of political modernity, such as the State, the Nation, the Party, the Revolution, it finds its climax in finite acts of *bricolage*. This is why L/M would, when discussing the question of the universality of politics, speak of a "symbolic overdetermination".

Of course, we should not forget to mention that this discursive relativism had another side to it, that the irreducible pluralism of discourses, the fact of the

17 A particularly illustrative case here is the theoretical testimony of Mihaly Vajda, who was elaborating post-Marxism *avant la letter,* so to speak: "If I give up this reductionism, there is no capitalism and socialism *inabstracto* any more. There are societies determined by concrete, special historical traditions and special historical... endowments. If I give up this reductionism, the class division of society ceases to be the only important and decisive factor in the constitution of social groups... If there are other factors of group-constitution as well, either subordinated to class differences, or equal to them, sometimes even playing a more essential role than such differences (if they exist at all), then in order to comprehend a society, I have to see first of all the rather heterogeneous factors of social group-constitution, the interest-relations, the dependencies of the existing and constantly changing social groups which also intersect with each other." Cf. Vajda, Mihaly (1981) *The State and Socialism: Political essays,* London: Allison & Busby, p. 6.

recognition and acknowledgement of the multiplicity of linguistic particulars presumed, as its condition of possibility, the idea of legal universality, and thus also the materiality of democratic rights. Philosophical questions of relativism and pluralism folded upon the formal, that is, juridical framework of democracy. If L/M would not go as far as offering a strict theoretical admission of this fact, it is amongst the theorists of "civil society" that we can find its explicit articulation. For John Keane relativism thus precisely "implies the need for democracy, for institutional arrangements and procedures which guarantee that protagonists of similar or different forms of language games can openly and continuously articulate their respective forms of life".[18] Or, as Keane would also put it: "A pluralist and self-organizing civil society is an implied condition of relativism".[19]

3. JANEZ JANŠA, THE EMPTY SIGNIFIER

If these analogies, or indeed, historical homologies show us that the perspective of "radical democracy" shares not simply the same history, but also the same political substance with the notion of "civil society", the proper question that we should ask is does it also participate in the tragic political fate of the latter's materialisations? Or to put this another way: to which extent is the conceptual apparatus of L/M theoretically and practically involved in the historical paradoxes of the year 1989, the paradoxes the so-called revolutions of "civil society'? To which extent does their post-Marxism reflect, from the inside so to speak, the vagaries of those initial reflexes of post-socialism? The importance of the historical episode of the Slovenian Spring lies in the fact that that it offers us a practical illustration of the answer to this question. This answer is both precise and alarming. Precise: because in the social and political struggles which have characterised the Slovenian Spring we can find the practical historical fusion of the two perspectives, and do so with empirical precision.[20] Alarming: because inasmuch as the politics which culminates in Slovenian Spring represents the realisation of the theoretical propositions of L/M,

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18 Cf. Keane (1988b), p. 237.

19 Ibid.

20 What we should also mention, although this is slightly out of bounds here, is the fact of a theoretical fusion of the theory of L/M and the conception of "civil society", which we can find amongst the theorists associated in "the Alternative". It was probably Tomaž Mastnak who attempted to extend this conjunction furthest: "If we designated the system in Eastern Europe as inverted post-structuralism, with the help of Laclau and Mouffe – post-*Marxists* will understand: we have put in back on its feet. We have gained civil society, which it is possible – although partially, to include in the scenario of radical democracy". Cf. Mastnak, Tomaž (1988) "Implozija družbenega" (The Implosion of the Social), in: *Problemi: Eseji,* 26, 7, p. 67. But we can equally look at the early texts of Rado Riha, for example, in order to find an attempt to theorise, following the propositions of L/M, the positivity of "democratic rights': "What is more in democratic equivalence than itself is for L/M contained in the demand from freedom, understood as a recognition, that (all) the others also have the right to equality and in this the right to shape political spaces ... Freedom, whose condition is the act of mutuality, the reciprocal recognition of the right to equality, is transformed from the principle of irreducible heterogeneity into a principle of unification. Negativity which subverts every social objectivity is "aufgehoben", suppressed/transcended into something which acts as a point of identification for all different struggles, as a point, from which all these struggles can look at themselves, as if they are all alike in their plurality and autonomy". Cf. Riha, Rado (1988) "Radikalna demokracija in nova družbena gibanja" ("Radical Democracy and New Social Movements"), in: *Vestnik* No. 2, 1988, p. 40.

then the paradoxical resolution of this historical episode, its dramatic shift into nationalism and the struggle for Slovenian independence from Yugoslavia, provides us with an extraordinary historical lesson.

Let us turn our attention to one moment in this regard, one moment which represents not simply the culmination of the political consciousness of the struggles which have marked the 1980s in Slovenia, but also the beginning of their end: the events of the spring of 1988, the trial of Janez Janša.

On 31 May 1988, Janez Janša, then a peace activist and a journalist of *Mladina,* was arrested, together with two other journalists and an officer of the Yugoslav National Army. The four were arrested and put on trial on the allegation of disclosing confidential State documents to the public. What the journalists of *Mladina* came in possession of were transcripts from a closed meeting of the Federal Presidency of Yugoslavia, where there were discussions about possible military involvement in Slovenia, in order to curb what was perceived as increasing signs of political instability. Amidst the political turmoil of the end of the 1980s not only in Slovenia, but also in Yugoslavia as a whole, this was, of course, a matter of tremendous controversy. But tremendously controversial was also the reaction by the Yugoslav military to this journalistic scoop: Janša and others were being tried and sentenced by a military and not a civilian court, which violated a number of republican legal codes, as it also went against the pleas and the demands of the Slovenian political authority.

The most important thing about the trial of Janša and others – otherwise known as the JBTZ process – were, nevertheless, its immediate social and political consequences. Already after the first arrests, "the Alternative" would take the leading role in the politicisation of this event. Their urgent response was the creation of a body named the Committee for the Defence of the Rights of Janez Janša, which was soon renamed into the Committee for the Protection of Human Rights. The Committee swiftly imposed itself as a crucial political actor in Slovenia. It organised public debates and channelled public criticism, it prepared demonstrations and helped to coordinate mass intellectual and political mobilisations. But it also detonated the political implications of the JBTZ process, transforming the arrests and the trials into symbols of opposition not only to the structures of military and political authority but to the socialist system as such, to its political, juridical and ideological underpinnings.

If we look at the political demands of the Committee, they were indeed minimal: human rights and civic freedoms of the defendants. Its politics, however, was explosive: it represented the explosion and culmination of all the political struggles of the 1980s. The trial of Janez Janša and others personified the trial of the entire span of struggles for democracy, liberty and pluralism, the trial of a whole set of revendications posed by the new social movements, by "Alternative" political groupings and conceptions. It personified the trial of "civil society" as such. This is why the political force of the Committee was so momentous. This is why the events of May of 1988 would indeed mark the beginning of drastic political and historical

Slovenian Minister of Defence Janez Janša (left) and Slovenian Minister of Internal Affairs Igor Bačvar (right) at the time of fight for the independence of Slovenia, 1991 (photo by Nace Bizilj)

transformations in Slovenia, transformations in which the political institutions of Yugoslav socialism were imploding both from "below" and from "above".

> This instantaneous and remarkable political success of the Committee seemed to confirm the political force of the conceptual propositions of L/M. Indeed, it is exactly in the Committee, that is, in both the form and the contents of its politics, that the notion of "radical democracy", together with its ideological twin, "civil society", would attain the moment of its "truth". The Committee was the moment in which both of these political conceptions could look at themselves and say "I am I".

We can follow this through a couple of remarks of Slavoj Žižek, then an enthusiastic witness and participant:

> [The Committee for the Defence of Rights of Janez Janša is] an organ which safeguards and opens the very space of possible political and social pluralism, an organ which expresses the interest of a widest democratic front.[21]

Or, as Žižek would add:

> [The Committee is] a political body, which is not organised corporatively... but transcorporatively: it consists of a multitude of individuals and "corporations" (editorial boards, associations, social groups and organised groups of labour), which are extremely diverse not only in terms of their organisational structure and their status, but also in terms of their ideational orientations: we can find there theologians communists... the representatives of "traditional" and "alternative" culture, individuals and socio-political organisations. What unites them is neither a common ideological project nor a specific political vision (with regards to this, the differences between them are enormous), but a fundamental political consensus on the need to defend the public space of democracy.[22]

Žižek was certainly right to locate this essential political heterogeneity at the heart of the politics of the Committee. Because the Committee *in itself*, in terms of its own political and organisational constitution, and not only by its political demands, was marked by diversity, plurality, even contradictory. And in this sense, it truly represented the practical achievement of the political proposition of "radical democracy". What was formed on the backbone of the Committee was a massive and heterogeneous democratic subject which was extending throughout Slovenian society, a subject capable of overcoming the all the political, ideological and social differences. It united a plurality of actors, of diverse and even opposed orientations, without collapsing this diversity and plurality. New social movements, the "Alternative culture", liberal "dissidents", Marxist and post-Marxist theorists, the nationalist intelligentsia, socialist and post-socialist political cadres, the Catholic Church, workers" organisations, the associations of Slovenian peasants, socialist youth groups … In other words, what we find here is precisely the universality of the politics of what L/M would call "chains of equivalence", of unity in heterogeneity. Here, Janez Janša would provide a symbolic reference point, an "empty signifier" in Laclau's sense,[23] which could reach out to the

most diverse of positions, which could overdetermine an entire ensemble of social differences and diversities.

But inasmuch as the signifier Janša was empty in a horizontal sense, in the sense of its political and social extension, it was also empty in its intention. The Committee did not profess any specific political or ideological position. Its sole political content was a demand for political and legal forms, for human and civic rights.

This is why Žižek would also remark:

The Committee is not a political body, it does not represent any determinate political orientation ... rather, it consciously limits itself to a "common denominator" of the democratic public: the defence of human rights.[24]

However, it is precisely in this emptiness and this formalism that we can find the entire political thrust of the Committee. Behind this scarcity in the formulation of demands was, in fact, the entire strength of the formal opposition between the "State" and "civil society': in other words, the demand for human and civic rights of the detainees was a demand for the institutionalisation of political pluralism, for a "radical and plural democracy". And, as Žižek would rightly note, this demand was particularly neuralgic with regard to the apparatuses of the socialist State:

Exactly as such, as "apolitical", the Committee places the Slovenian state institutions in front of an inexorable ordeal: faced with the demands of the Committee the latter need to prove not whose are they in the struggle for power, but more simply and more radically, are they still legitimate institutions.[25]

In fact, it was not only neuralgic, but immensely effective. The trial of Janša truly represented a turning point in the political dramas at the end of the 1980s in Slovenia, as well as in Yugoslavia as a whole. It marked the formal beginning of a proper post-socialist political sequence. The actual event of arrest, trial and detention was rather short-lived: although sentenced for much longer, Janša and other journalists were released from imprisonment already by August 1989. But a decisive point of no return had already been reached. Because the demands for human and civic rights, demands for "formal democracy" and the rule of law were rapidly finding their way from "civil society" to the official politics of the socialist State, encroaching upon and subverting the very foundations of the latter. The political success of the Committee brought with itself a dramatic resolution of the dialectic of democracy and socialism. On 28th February 1989, a mass protest in support of the miners" strike in Stari Trg, Kosovo, united the Slovene Communist Party leadership with the organisations of "civil society". Milan Kučan, the president of the Slovenian League of Communists, would speak openly there about the need to defend human rights, pluralism and the rule of law. And it would take only a couple of months before the Slovenian Assembly would propose and then adopt, in September 1989, constitutional amendments in order to institutionalise the "rights and freedoms of man and citizen", "democracy and the principles of the *Rechtsstaat*" in the republic.

However, it is precisely at this point that the tragedy of the entire episode of Slovenian Spring is revealed in its all its paradoxical dimensions. This political success of the Committee, the very realisation of its demand for

24 Ibid, p. 75.
25 Ibid, p. 76.

"formal democracy", was, in fact, a proper historical disaster. Why? Because the moment in which the concepts of democracy and liberty acquire their properly formal shape in the Slovenian context is far from unequivocal. It is also, and primarily so, a moment in where there is a crucial "external" mediation: it is a moment in which Slovenia is seeking independence from the Yugoslav federation. What is taking shape on the backbone of the political subjectivities and spaces carved out on the terrain of "civil society", is, paradoxically, a nationalist politics of state-building.

The trial of Janša, in fact, brought out one more issue, an issue which was already the principle site and the stake in the struggles over the legacy of the Yugoslav federation: the issue of national sovereignty. Since the mid-1980s at least politics in Slovenia had been completely absorbed in questions of sovereignty, as its "political class", the "reformist" leadership of the Communist Party of Slovenia, was increasingly clamouring and quarrelling about the socio-economic, the fiscal, the redistributionist, the constitutional and the political constructions of federal life. The trial further exploded the problem of sovereignty: was it the freedom of individual citizens which was put on trial, or was the entire process staged by the army a trial of sovereignty of the Slovenian state? The "political class" acted swiftly upon this montage: the constitutional amendments which the Slovenian parliament adopted in September 1989, were not only epitomes of liberty and democracy, they were also the first formal announcements of dissociation from Yugoslavia.

But it could not have done so without the pathos of the "civil society" struggles which was already hegemonised and homogenised into a nationalist genre. The display was truly paradoxical: the entire drama of the birth of the heterogeneous political subjectivity in "civil society" being resolved in terms of a homogenous nationalist consciousness; the very fulfilment of the "apolitical" demand for formal democracy, of the demand for the abstract framework liberty and equality, taking the form of a substantial politics of national sovereignty; and the democratic and pluralistic essence of the social movements in Slovenia coming to symbolise, in the light of the conflicts over the legacy of Yugoslav socialism, the very necessity for a sovereign Slovenian State.[26]

How come this paradoxical resolution? Why did civil society, in its very realisation, end up representing, as Tonči Kuzmanić put it, the "eve of the nationalist-democratic revolutions"?

There is no space here to account for all the bizarre transformations of the Slovenian "alternative" political scene at the end of the 1980s, transformations

26 This last paradox was perhaps most strongly and most tragically expressed in the writings of Tomaž Mastnak, who ended up theorising the necessary link between "civil society" and Slovenian independence. In an essay "Nacionalna država in nacionalizacija civilne družbe" ("National State and the Nationalisation of Civil Society"), published in the special issue of *Nova Revija* dedicated to *Independent Slovenia* No. 95, 9, 1990, Mastnak would first state that "there are no more positive reasons for the existence of Yugoslavia", and then go on arguing that "democracy in Slovenia cannot exist without a sovereign Slovenian state. The national state as such, nevertheless, does not assure either complete sovereignty or democracy. The Slovenian State can only be sovereign, that is, the demand for the sovereign national State can only be successful, on the condition that its citizens are sovereign. Not simply when the internally homogeneous Slovenian State would limit the sovereignty (that is, the aggressiveness and terrorism) of the Yugoslav State, but only when the pluralistic civil society would limit its own State as a sovereign" (p. 456.)

through which the massive and pluralistic subject of democracy and liberty constituted around the trial of Janez Janša provided not only the space and the momentum, but also the political contents for the emergence of the so-called DEMOS, a similarly heterogeneous coalition, this time of political parties,[27] which would form the first post-communist government in Slovenia, and do so in strikingly conservative, nationalist and exclusionist terms, transformations in which the Socialist Youth Alliance, the publisher of *Mladina,* and the intellectual and political backbone in many regards of the anti-systemic struggles of the "civil society" would transform itself into the Liberal Party when entering this post-communist struggle for power (where it would loose dramatically), transformations through which issues of human rights and civic freedoms which the Committee emphasised and defended with such unvarying enthusiasm with regards to the detainees, would come to stand for the problems of cultural autonomy and sovereignty of the Slovene nation,[28] and finally, and perhaps most dramatically, transformations where the principal *dramatis personae* of "the Alternative", the delegates of its "apolitical" politics, would themselves become the pioneers of the new political caste at the moment of the formation of the sovereign Slovenian state out of the crumbling body of the Yugoslav federation (the two most striking examples: Janez Janša, a peace activist and a symbol of political pluralism, liberty and democracy, and Igor Bavčar, the founding member and the president of the Committee for the Protection of Human Rights, would become, in 1991, respectively, the minister of defence and the minister of the interior).

In fact, the problem that interests us in terms of this elaboration is not whether this paradoxical transformation of "civil society" into nationalism was necessary or not (although there do exist good grounds for asserting such a necessity),[29] but whether it was conceivable or predictable for those who were engaged in this historical moment. The "internal" aspects of this historical drama, aspects relating to the self-conception, and indeed, self-consciousness of the "Slovenian Spring", are revealing

27 Analogously (or in fact homologously) to the Committee, DEMOS, or the "Democratic Opposition of Slovenia", was also the embodiment of a plurality of political orientations – nationalist, liberal, social-democratic, ecological, etc. The parties which formed it were: SDZ (Slovenian Democratic Association), SDSS (Social-Democratic Party of Slovenia), SKD (Slovenian Christian-Democrats), SKZ (Slovenian Peasant Association), the Green Party, and SOS (Slovenian Craftsmen Party).

28 The immediate empirical object of nationalism with regard to the JBTZ process was the problem of language. The military trial held in the centre of Ljubljana was conducted in Serbo-Croatian and not in Slovenian, which brought out the problem of cultural sovereignty of the Slovenian republic. The first to have voiced problems of national sovereignty and independence around this issue, and as well as around the trial in general were the intellectuals of *Nova Revija.* See the texts of Spomenka and Tine Hribar, respectively, "Self-defence as Defeat" and "Slovenian Spring" in the July 1988 issue *Nova Revija* No. 77.

29 It should be mentioned that one of the most notable attempts is Mastnak's apologetic book *East of Eden.* And yet, despite the conceptual and historical scope of his analysis, Mastnak still falls short of an adequate historical explanation. At most we get a deferral of the problem: in order to account for the paradox of the lapse of civil society into nationalism, the paradox of the forced homogenisation of a heterogeneous political reality, Mastnak offers us the term of "totalitarianism of civil society". But this means nothing but repeating the abstractness of the conceptual schema which is the problem itself: from the abstract dichotomy State/civil society, we move into another hopelessly abstract dichotomy, democracy vs. totalitarianism. The true questions start taking shape only when we leave these false dualities of the "political", and introduce a "third terrain". But then we are already speaking about Capital.

in themselves, even in, or precisely because of their limited scope. Because if these twists and ironies of history point something out, then, in the first place, they point out that limitedness was at the root of the theoretical conceptions which oriented the episode of "Slovenian Spring". Indeed, what made "the Alternative" susceptible to the paradoxes of history, what made it prone to this recuperation by nationalism, was a definite lack in its theoretical consciousness: its incapacity to grasp the extent and the depth of the historical situation in which it was involved. At the very point of its realisation in practice, the entire theoretical montage of L/M shows to be practically useless.

30 Cf. Močnik, Rastko (1998) *Koliko fašizma? (How much Fascism?)*, Zagreb: Bastard, p. 32-33.

4. THINKING PETITE

To be sure, what needs to be stressed is the proper extent of theoretical failure implicated in the adventure of "Slovenian Spring". Because what we are speaking of here are not simply theoretical omissions or miscalculations, but fundamental theoretical flaws, which pertain to the entire political consciousness of this episode, and thus by the same token, to the entire construction of the political programme of L/M. It was probably Rastko Močnik who, in one of the powerful moments of self-criticism, located the fundamental philosophical source of this theoretical debility with all precision:

"Because it is not possible to think "small" without a wider frame, and local thought thus especially demands a global consciousness, the rejection of "grand narratives" is suspiciously close to the rejection of thinking as such. Prohibition embraces the alternative stories and in fact prohibits thinking itself: the issue is not simply that one is not allowed to think in long terms, in big moves, and perhaps even to lurk beyond the nearby fence. The issue is that the omission of these "big" proportions releases those small illusions of various forms of control, critique and refutation, illusions on which the biggest possible system lives".[30]

These "small illusions" that *Močnik* refers to are nothing but the structural shortcomings of the philosophical orientation which sought a "return to the concrete". Thinking in small, thinking in concrete: the neuralgic point of the consciousness of "Slovenian Spring" was precisely the rejection of the dimension of the "abstract", of global processes and relations. And here the entire construction of the political programme of L/M receives a determinant lesson of history.

In both its analyses and its practices, "the Alternative" was unable to see beyond the direct discursive realm, beyond particular issues and tangible problems. It thought that it is located in a space without abstractions, it was not particularly interested in questions of State power, of class struggle and its historical forms, it could not envisage historical and political realities of global extent. It only wanted to catch sight of the multiplicity of particulars, to recognise the immediate wealth of discursive expressions and articulations, to appropriate, politicise and universalise the "concrete". But exactly in this fascination with

concreteness, "the Alternative" was irremediably abstract. It was incapable of conceptualising or even recognising political and historical processes of less immediate shape, processes which were nevertheless dominating its own development. This entire allure of the "concrete" left "the Alternative" structurally blind: and this is what also made it particularly predisposed to the paradoxes of recuperation, this is what made its expectations, its aspirations and its demands all the more prone to twists, disfigurations and displacements.

And indeed it is not difficult to show that from the point of view of "return to the concrete" the "abstract" phenomenon of nationalism, and more generally of the nation-State form in its different dimensions, appears an inaccessible problem, out of sight and out of reach, unthinkable in its historical and political magnitude.

In the first place, we can note this with regard to the formal conception of politics which lies at the root of the political project of L/M. Because, as we know, the entire obsession with the empirically concrete, with the multiplicity of manifestions of political freedom in civil society, with all those small expressions of political life which one can see, hear and touch, this obsession takes place in the background of the transcendental positing of juridico-political forms, of the legal figures of the bourgeois revolutions. But between this transcendental grounding in law and legal ideology and its fixation upon the concrete world of discourses, the approach of L/M remains what it is: a purely formal, that is, an inescapably abstract approach. Even if it incessantly seeks to uncover new empirically concrete instances, even if is predicated upon the recognition of the most minute discursive acts and practices, this approach remains blind for some fundamental substantial dimensions of politics and political forms, it is unable to account for the substance of neither the State, nor of society in their properly modern shape. Because what remains out of sight for the entire formal scenario of politics in "civil society" is not simply the fact that the essence of this set-up is statist, that "civil society" is necessarily determined by the State, that its conditions of possibility reside in the juridico-political institutions of the bourgeois State. What remains obscured is the historical and political substance of this determination: the brute materiality of the State institution which necessarily escapes any formalistic rendering. And was not this materiality precisely what was on open display in the paradoxical culmination of the drama of "Slovenian Spring" (as well as in entire historical tragedy which ensued)? Was it truly possible to separate the demand for "formal democracy" as it was projected against the socialist State, the demand for the institutionalisation of the sphere of liberal rights and freedoms, from the materiality and the violence of the project of State building? And indeed, which ideological force is more predisposed for to support this dramatic process of transformation and foundation than nationalism?

But beyond the discontents of formalism, we can notice this structural loss of sight taking even more disastrous proportions if we examine it in strict conjunction with the dimension of "hegemony" which L/M put at the centre of their theoretical endeavour. For, as we know, despite their formalist theoretical

construction, L/M are still trying to think a certain substantial level of political universality. The notion of "radical democracy", constructed from the vestiges of Gramsci's concept of hegemony is not simply coextensive with the idea of the recognition of social and discursive particulars, it does not exhaust itself in the identification and the acceptance of political differences through a formalistic institution of the political sphere. It also attempts to point towards something more: towards the emergence of a collective political subject, a body of universality which takes shape from within and through this fragmented and heterogeneous social space. Social and political particulars are able to attain the form (or rather the appearance) of the universal through their mutual determination, through their amalgamation into chains, and ultimately in and through their unification and fusion. This is why L/M would use the term "overdetermination" when speaking about politics (which in this case implies, we must add, a fair misuse of the Althusserian if not also the Freudian concept). But again what is important is that in this short circuit between a discursive pluralism and an empty formalism, even if, or precisely because it is predicated upon producing the appearance of the One, the most fundamental political realities of modernity remain completely obscured. For L/M, the universality of the political community, this body of the One, has no consistency or substance of its own, prior to, or outside of the endless process of the accumulation and multiplication of particulars. This is where they ultimately start from: from the immediate discursive realm, from the terrain of particularity and literality, which, through rhetorical shifts and tropes, through metaphorical condensations and displacements may produce an appearance of the substance of the Universal.

But can one truly account for the substantial dimensions of modern politics and political forms in this way? Can we think of phenomena like nationalism from within this terrain of discursive immanence? According to the formalist and relativist conception presented in *Hegemony,* nationalism would simply represent one of the many discursive particularities, indeterminate and absolutely malleable in itself. And yet, what we know even from Gramsci himself is that the logic of hegemony as such is inseparable from the nation-form, and in fact, coextensive to it. Nationalism cannot simply represent an element within the immanent discursive space of social particularities, because it corresponds to the very "abstract" logic of the constitution of this space.[31] Indeed, which modern

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31 The paradox of this adventure in political formalism is, in fact, directly reflected in certain theoretical acrobatics associated with the paradoxical resolution of "Slovenian Spring". In the same essay, already mentioned above, in which he would defend the entire project of Slovenian secession, in which he would establish a necessary relationship between civil society and the Slovenian national cause, Tomaž Mastnak still attempts to salvage the conceptual consistency of "radical and plural democracy': "Democracy does not exist without national rights. And yet, democracy cannot be founded upon the national. Democracy is without origins and in democracy there are no rights which are more important than others. The rights of lesbians are not less important than the right to use one's own language; national identity is one amongst many identities and in principle it is not more important than the sexual identity, or any other". See Mastnak (1990), p. 456. The problem here is evident: you cannot assert at the same time that nationalism is one of the preconditions and one of the consequences of the democratic order.

political ideology is more predicated upon providing the substance of the symbolic fusion of society than nationalism?

We can thus understand the dimension of disaster in the post-Marxism of L/M: playing upon the problem of the formal construction of political community out of a plurality of diverse elements, the perspective of "radical democracy" is totally blind for the fact that the One of the modern political community, the form of mass representation of society proper to modernity, already has a substantial symbolic body – that of nation-form. No wonder that the plural and heterogeneous face of the subject of "radical democracy" in "Slovenian Spring" would acquire, with such fascinating simplicity, a grim expression of national homogeneity. No wonder Laclau and Mouffe would reach the truth of their political adventures in a post-socialist figure as paradoxical and ill-fated as Janez Janša.[32]

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32 What is symptomatic for this theoretical bankruptcy is, of course, the recent attempt of Laclau to revise and substantialise the political conception presented in *Hegemony*. Cf. Laclau, Ernesto (2005) *On Populist Reason,* London: Verso. When the vision of politics and "radical democracy" constructed simply out of the conjunction of legalistic forms and identitary representations of social groups exhibits its radical lack of a political substance, of a determinate universal reference, one turns to the figure of populism, and by the same token, to the nationalist ideological spectrum. The multiplicity of particular social identities now fuse decisively into the identitary One of the community. But this is where the tragic development of Laclau's theoretical and political endeavours comes full circle: from the initial fascination with Peronist nationalism, to the uneasy excursions into the liberal dogmas, Laclau resurrects himself as a theorist of the *populus*. Not the theorist of the *plebs*, of the people as the undifferentiated mass of exploited and oppressed classes, of the "vulgar", the "common" and the "underdog", but a theorist of the people corresponding to its institutional representation in the State, of the people as the site of the reconciliation of class antagonisms. We can only remember that old syntagm here, by which the revolutionary tradition sought to dismiss thought as being "petty-bourgeois".

ALAIN BADIOU AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A POLITICAL WRITING:
THE CASE OF THE LABOUR NEW LEFT IN BRITAIN

Tim Appleton

One of the most interesting post-Marxist (for want of a better term) authors working today is the French philosopher Alain Badiou. It should be added, however, that my reading of Badiou's work is from a political, rather than philosophical, point of view. I mention this not only because it will situate my argument in relation to this symposium but also because it has implications for the argument itself.

It should be noted that one aspect of Badiou's theory – as I understand it – is explicitly to rule out the "study" of politics in the conventional sense. This follows from his description of philosophy as that which is retroactively conditioned by "truth-procedures" – art, politics, science and love – that subsist *outside* its domain.[1] The task of philosophy is therefore to gather together the singular truths yielded in each of these conditions and then to produce a concept relevant to this moment of "consubstantiality".

Now this formulation assigns to philosophy *various* characteristics. It means, for example, that philosophy will respond to the prevailing truths of its time. It also means, however, that philosophical concepts will not suffer being "sutured" to one of their conditions. Badiou describes such an outcome as "disastrous", and gives examples such as the suturing of philosophy to science, in "logical" philosophy, and the suturing of philosophy to politics (and science), in parts of the Marxist-Leninist tradition.[2] In other words, a certain *separation* is installed, in Badiou, between philosophy and its conditions, one further effect of which is that philosophical concepts will not ever experience the supposed indignity of "application" (which, after all, lies at the heart of Badiou's critique of the "political philosophers'[3]). And it is this, I take it, which debars one from undertaking a traditional mode of "political study".

Now I should say that all of this is perfectly acceptable to me. And yet it equally presents me with a dilemma. For my own first encounter with Badiou was the book *Ethics*, which is rich in what I would describe basically as political description – an attack on the

1 Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, New York: SUNY Press, 1999, pp.33-9.

2 Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, pp.61-7.

3 Badiou, *Metapolitics*, London: Verso, 2005, chapter one.

hegemonic contemporary doctrine of human rights, for example (not to mention the explicitly political prescriptions with which the English edition of the book opens).[4] Indeed, the book seemed particularly appealing for its political radicalism in this regard (which – it is true - one is not used to hearing from students of politics). Here there appeared to be a theory that could genuinely break with the prevailing trends: there was the unashamed attempt to refound the category of the universal, along with celebrations of novelty, exceptionality, and – even more unusually – *truth*. One also had the – highly unfashionable – valorisation of the figure of the political militant, and the latter's pursuit of *the Good*. *Ethics* even seemed to hint at a new critique of Capital (although in other moments Badiou has been much more modest on that subject).[5]

Is it true, then, that the condition for the expression of such refreshingly radical political opinions is indeed the ruination of the very disciplines of political philosophy and political theory, and the "study of politics" so defined? To put it another way – is it true that the only way to affirm politics" capacity for novelty is to refuse to submit it to any mode of prior conceptual capture, however provisional? Possibly it *is* true. Yet does this therefore rule out the possibility of a Badiouian -inflected political writing? The very nature of the material dealt with in *Ethics* would imply not. The real question that arises here, then, has to do with the relationship between a political writing of this kind (such as one finds in *Ethics*) and Badiou's ontology, which is elaborated elsewhere.[6]

Now given the austerity of that ontology, along with the theory of the condition (already mentioned), one answer to this question would be that the relationship can only be a highly contingent one. Does the identification of this contingent dimension itself go against the theory of the condition? Perhaps it reinforces it. After all, if the only possible "relation" between philosophy and politics is *one-way* - i.e., that the former be conditioned by the latter (with its creative capacity), to the exclusion of any movement "in the other direction" – then it must be concluded that to affirm a radical contingency in the passage from philosophical concept *to* political analysis would at least avoid a *direct* transmission in that respect. It is even possible that to bring philosophy and politics into tension with one another in this way avoids the potential ossification of the relevant philosophical concepts, thereby somehow insuring the efficacy of the process of conditioning (although this would not conform strictly to Badiou's theory).

I shall leave these matters open for now, however, and instead attempt to capitalise, in what follows, upon the very *existence* of such ambiguities. All I really hope to demonstrate here is that if a political writing along Badiouian lines *is* (however ambiguously) possible, then it will certainly be very different to anything else that currently exists in the relevant field – at least in the British context (which is the site upon which my own analysis will build).

4 Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward, London: Verso, 2001, pp. lv-lvi.

5 See "Radical Politics: An Interview with Alain Badiou" in this issue of Prelom pp. 180-194.

6 Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, London: Continuum, 2006.

With all this in mind, allow me now to introduce the so-called "object" of my current studies, which is that of the groups that were associated with the attempt to "democratise" the British Labour Party during the late 1970s and early 1980s. These I shall henceforth refer to under the title of "Labour New Left", a term that is taken from Panitch and Leys' almost unique study of the relevant movement.[7] I will now summarise that movement's biographical details.

7 Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, *The End of Parliamentary Democracy – From New Left to New Labour*, London: Verso, 2001. I choose this title mainly for convenience "Labour's left-wing of the 1970s and 1980s" being obviously unwieldy. However, it seems opportune, at the same time, to pay tribute to Panitch and Leys' extensive study. I nevertheless harbour reservations regarding the term, as the rest of the argument will make clear.

1. THE LABOUR NEW LEFT

The "Labour New Left" was effectively inaugurated by one group in particular – the *Campaign for Labour Party Democracy* (CLPD). The CLPD was set up in 1973, as a direct result of party leader Harold Wilson's sudden announcement that he would personally veto, should Labour come to power, the policy that had just been proposed by the party's National Executive Committee (NEC), namely the nationalisation (with unspecified levels of compensation) of Britain's top twenty-five firms. The group went on to formulate three key demands, all of which were intended to shift power from the parliamentary section of the Labour Party to its grass-roots membership. First, it called for the mandatory reselection of Labour MPs by their respective constituency parties, at least once during the lifetime of every parliament. Second, it called for the election of the party leader to be carried out by the whole of the party (rather than by the parliamentary party alone, as had previously been the case). Finally, it called for the task of writing the party's general election manifesto to be delegated to the aforementioned NEC - a body made up of officials elected by the party conference.

During the following eight years, the first two of these three reforms were passed by the party, whilst the third was rejected by a narrow margin. Along the way, however, the CLPD brought various other leftist rank-and-file groups under its mandate. As is indexed in the make-up of the *Rank-and-File Mobilising Committee* (RFMC), a left coalition set up in 1980 in order to agitate on behalf of the very reforms mentioned above. It included - besides the CLPD – such groups as the *Militant* tendency, the *Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory* (both of whom were avowedly Trotskyist) and the *Institute for Workers" Control* (which had Trotskyist origins).

At this point, however, another factor should be added. For the rise of the Labour New Left coincided with the emergence on the British political scene of an obvious choice for leader of such a movement: Tony Benn.

Benn had been a Cabinet Minister in the Wilson governments of the 1960s, and later in the Wilson and Callaghan governments of the 1970s. By 1970, however, he had begun openly to question the Labour Party's political direction, whilst at the

8 See, for example, Badiou, *Ethics*, p.95.

same time predicting an imminent political crisis, and setting out an alternative path for the future. In the period that followed, Benn came to be one of the most popular members of the Parliamentary Labour Party (at least as far as the rank-and-file were concerned). The RFMC, for example, was largely taken up, throughout most of its effective life, with work in relation to Benn's campaign to become Deputy Leader of the party (a campaign which was widely seen as an attempt to test the newly-founded "electoral college" - the final outcome of the second CLPD reform mentioned above). However, it also seems astonishing to consider, in retrospect, that Benn was only defeated in the closing ballot of that campaign by a margin of only 0.426 percent. This was especially true when one remembers that his final-round opponent – Denis Healey – had the entire weighty apparatus of the British State on his side (insofar as it cared about such things – which it did).

Following the Deputy Leadership contest of 1981, however, the Labour New Left began to lose momentum – eventually splitting into (effectively) two factions, usually referred to as the "hard left" and the "soft left". The second of these, moreover, gradually became indistinguishable from the party's social democratic right, whose main agenda was the pursuit of electoral victory at all costs (an agenda which of course culminated in the creation of *New Labour*).

Aside from a general biography, however, it could be asked: *from the contemporary perspective, where lies the significance of the movement in question*? I would say that the Labour New Left was the last "revolutionary" political movement in Britain of any note. Two implications arise from this. The first is the sense of the term *revolutionary*. The second is the nature of the movement's "notability". I shall deal with these in order.

For the moment, I shall simply assume that the movement was revolutionary to the extent that it sought the overthrow of the British State. It could be added that this revolutionary attitude was born of a general Marxist-Leninist orientation, not least due to the close (and sometimes direct) association between the Labour New Left and Trotskyist Fourth-Internationalism. The movement also had a dimension of non-liturgical Protestantism, however, which was mainly (although not completely) associated with the views of the movement's "unofficial leader" – Tony Benn. Nevertheless, and as will be shown later on, there was little of the political compromise about the Labour New Left's religious elements.

It can already be seen how only a theory that emphasises militancy, universality, emancipation and a radical critique of the *status quo* – a theory such as Badiou's, for example – might warrant a contemporary re-evaluation of the Labour New Left movement, of its successes and failures. Yet if the relevant aspects of the movement were somehow associated with labour politics, then are Badiou's recent theories *really* relevant? For Badiou has been lead to advocate a "politics without party".[8] Indeed, he has even proved himself hostile to a "politics of representation" in general. And does not the Labour Party in Britain represent little more than a basically fantasmatic commitment to the plenitude of the British social order?

Indeed, not only is the Labour Party organised around British Parliamentary procedures, but it has arguably even been its task, at particular times during the twentieth century, to "police" the workers on behalf of a British State that was no longer up to the job.[9]

The Labour New Left, however, was in fact a much more complex movement than my description so far has been able to show. There were various groups within the movement, each of which had different aims. This, moreover, is one reason why a re-evaluation of them is interesting from the point of view of the contemporary political situation, and particularly on the basis of the contingency between Badiou's theory (metaontology) and his "political writing" (which in *Ethics* occasionally approaches a sophisticated mode of pamphleteering). To reiterate: my hope is to show that a political writing is in fact *only* possible on this basis (without which it would simply fall into tautology). It could be noted, however, that there is not *such* a discrepancy between Badiou's political perspective and the brief interpretation of the Labour New Left that I will undertake here. After all, one of my conclusions is that the movement's engagement with the Labour Party is, in the end, inhibitive of its fundamental political desire (to break, precisely, with the logic of the British State).

A crucial datum in my decision to engage in a radical political writing on the Labour New Left is the status of the latter movement *vis-à-vis* the contemporary subjectivity in Britain. What I have in mind here is the peculiar absence/presence of the Labour New Left *vis-à-vis* public discourse in Britain today – the fact, that is, that the movement is that which must not be mentioned, and yet *is* mentioned, *over and over again*. Examples of this reticence are almost too numerous to mention, although one could cite the endless comparisons between the Labour New Left (at least twenty years after the fact) and the Conservative Party, during the General Election campaign of 2005 in Britain.[10]

Now perhaps one could say that even this factor is irrelevant to the work of Badiou. For *who cares* how the British subjectivity works, if it is Statist from the outset? Why not instead emphasise something like the invisibility of the *immigrant* from the perspective of the contemporary British situation, rather than that of Labour's left-wing, with its ultimately compromise character? In other words, is not the lesson of Badiou's work that one should be *indifferent* to the Statist subjectivity, rather than directly critical of it (for fear of incorporation *by* it)? Yet I cite the

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9 Consider the National Government of 1932, for example, along with the continual refusal – prior to the Second World War – to permit the affiliation of the Communist Party of Great Britain. After the war, one could cite the continual industrial settlements between Labour Governments and various trade unions, up to Wilson's accommodation with striking coal miners following the election victory of 1974.

10 To give just one example, taken almost at random – the leading article on *The Guardian*'s webpage the day after the election included two (albeit - again - indirect) references to Labour's recent history (assuming one does not include the mention of Labour's "unprecedented third term in power"). First: "Speaking in Sedgefield this morning the Prime Minister defended New Labour's achievements - 'we can be very, very proud of what we have done' - and called it a 'huge rebirth of our party'". Second: "Two dramatic blows to Mr. Blair's authority were delivered by ex-Labour critics from the left. Peter Law easily defeated the Blairite Maggie Jones in the historic Welsh heartland seat of Blaenau Gwent previously held by Nye Bevan and Michael Foot. 'This is what happens when you don't listen to people,' said Mr. Law shortly before George Galloway, Mr Blair's most relentless anti-war critic beat loyalist Oona King in the bitter contest for Bethnal Green and Bow in East London." See: http://politics.guardian.co.uk/election/story/0,15803,1477710,00.html.

commonplace "unthinkability" of the Labour New Left not in order to critique *that* attitude, but rather in order to pave the way to a critique of *left-wing* re-appropriations of the movement (*other* types of political writing). For I believe they equally partake of this unthinkability. How so?

2. TREATMENTS OF THE LABOUR NEW LEFT

Here I shall refer to the writings of Panitch and Leys (mentioned previously), along with the few other "radical left" reviews of the sequence in question - those of David Powell, or the "Signs of the Times" collective, for example.[11] For all of these commentaries have attempted to challenge the prevailing (if opaque) view of the Labour New Left by making of it a movement that was forward-thinking, politically pragmatic, democratic-minded, anti-Communist, and non-revolutionary. In short, they have converted the members of the relevant groups into our contemporaries (i.e., in line with current political vogues). Yet can such descriptions really be correct?

In order to answer, it should first be noted that the right-wing *contemporaries* of the movement did not think any of these things. *They* thought that the Labour New Left simply consisted of mindless Communist revolutionaries. Moreover, this has even become a "sedimented" definition. It is well represented, for example, in the writings of various New Labour luminaries, who take their ideological bearings on most matters from the recent right-wing tradition in Britain.[12] The view also stretches, however (although perhaps unsurprisingly), to what might be called the "mainstream" British left. Thus from the reformist writings – at the time – of Barry Hindess, via the anti-Labour New Left (and even anti-*revolutionary*) message of a substantial section of the Communist Party of the period (represented, for example, in the journal – *Marxism Today*), up to the – more recent – "definitive" summary of the era given by Donald Sassoon, the Labour New Left has all the time been castigated for its "conservative" way of thinking about politics – its vanguardism, its vulgar Marxism, its basically anti-democratic viewpoint.[13]

11 David Powell, *What's Left? - Labour Britain and the Socialist Tradition*, London: Peter Owen, 1998; Anne Coddington and Mark Perryman (eds.), *The Moderniser's Dilemma - Radical Politics in the Age of Blair*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1998.

12 See, for example, Peter Mandelson and Roger Liddle, *The Blair Revolution: Can New Labour Deliver?* London: Faber and Faber, 1996; David Blunkett, *Politics and Progress – Renewing Democracy and Civil Society*, London: Politico's, 2001; David Marquand, *The Progressive Dilemma: from Lloyd George to Blair*, 2nd ed. London & Phoenix: Giant, 1999; Philip Gould, *The Unfinished Revolution – How the Modernisers Saved the Labour Party*, London: Little Brown, 1998.

13 Barry Hindess, *Parliamentary Democracy and Socialist Politics*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983; Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: the West European Left in the Twentieth Century*, London, I.B. Tauris, 1996; also see almost any edition of *Marxism Today* after 1977, for a critique of vanguardist politics in Britain.

Now Panitch and Leys, for example, tend to see this account as nothing more than a retroactive justification on the part of a hegemonic (and regressive) political order. Yet it could be argued that Panitch and Leys et al. are *equally* held captive by the terms of this hegemony. For in order to challenge its terms, therewith promoting their hypothesis as to the "progressive" nature of the Labour New Left, they end up asserting that there were *two* Labour New Lefts. One of them (basically – the CLPD) was entirely trustworthy, soft, open-hearted, with great democratic sensibilities.

The other, by contrast, was indeed made up, they say, of *mindless communist revolutionaries* (i.e., the Trotskyists). And thus the right-wing designation of the Trotskyists as *the* political enemy of any right-thinking Briton is duplicated. One wants to ask whether it is *normal* to challenge the arguments of one's political opponents by saying that their argument is basically just, but errs on the details. Would one extend the same courtesy to a *racist*, for example? Thus what would be more accurate in relation to the argument of left-wing analysts such as Panitch and Leys would be to say that it is *they* who have reconstructed the past in line with the altogether less radical politics of the present. The right, for its part, has simply held its (albeit perhaps politically unfortunate) ground.

By contrast, I wish to affirm – as I have already said - that the Labour New Left was an unapologetically *emancipatory*, not to say "*revolutionary*" movement. Yet I have still not fleshed out the details of what I mean by this. For whilst it is true that the Labour New Left *considered* itself to be revolutionary, according to its own conception of the term, in reality it can only be said to have failed in its aims! A new term is thus required. To clarify matters – what I will attempt to discern here is the beginning of an appropriate *form* for a contemporary radical politics, via a study of the British case.

In what precise sense might the New Left movement conform to Badiou's schema? As I have already stated, the only Badiouian "schema" of relevance to the present argument is that which is found in the book *Ethics*. Therein, Badiou sketches out the nature of the ethical subject *per se*, and the way in which this type of subjectivity is *forfeited*. Badiou's schema here somewhat reflects the internal diversity of the Labour New Left movement. It can already be predicted that, as is usual when "applying" a theory in this way, new information is often produced on both sides (theory and case). Yet before launching into the discussion of ethics, the following theoretical details should be borne in mind.

Badiou's ethics is correlative to one of his central philosophical categories: the subject. What yields such a subject is an "event", which is Badiou's name for a glimpse of the "void" of a given situation (defined as a set of established knowledges). The operation of the subject is therefore to extrapolate – via its fidelity to an event – a "truth-procedure" that *marks* this void. As was said before, however, this fidelity may also be *forfeited*, and this is where Badiou's ethical schema comes in.

3. ETHICS

In the book *Ethics* Badiou formulates three basic ethical principles. The first of these is that the subject should *not give up*; the second is that the subject should *show reserve*; the third is that the subject should *discern*. It is necessary to say a little more on each.

The injunction that the subject should not give up obviously rests upon the idea that the subject – whether of politics, art, science or love – *is* the singular operator of one of those "conditions" to the extent that its very being is indissociable

from the emergence of truth-ful productions within them. In other words, *to continue* here means nothing more than to continue to be the subject that you already are.

The injunction that the subject should show reserve has to do with the idea that the subject must not get carried away, and assume that there is a simple transition from truth-ful production to changing "the world" (from which truth – in Badiou's theory - may only ever in fact be *subtracted*).

Finally, the injunction that the subject should discern covers the fact that such a subject may confuse a radical ('*re-*')investment in the established order (what Badiou refers to as the "State') with an investment in a sequence that constitutes a *rupture* vis-à-vis that order.

Badiou names the subjects that *fail* to adhere to each of the above principles: *the subject of betrayal* (i.e., that which "gives up'), *the subject of disaster* (i.e., that which "goes too far'), and *the subject of terror* (i.e., that which "lacks discernment'). It could be added that the above represent three of the four possible subjective dispositions which might be sustained in relation to an event. The fourth, of course, is simply that of the subject who manages to *avoid* all of these pitfalls, thereby becoming the "support" for a political procedure *proper*.

What has struck me about this schema is that one appears to find examples of all these different types of subject in *the Labour New Left*, with the exception of the subject of *betrayal*, which, since it is incapable of any *concrete* action, is barely relevant to a political study of the present type. By way of "ethical subjects", that is, one has - Tony Benn and the Institute for Workers" Control; by way of "subjects of *disaster*" - *Militant* and the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory (later: the Socialist Organiser); and by way of the "subject of *terror*", one has - the CLPD (and early Labour Co-ordinating Committee). Do these parallels constitute mere coincidences? Once again, the more general implications of the question will have to be put aside. More importantly, however, to make the comparison between the two regions arguably allows one to learn (as I said previously) more about each.

4. THE LABOUR NEW LEFT AS ETHICAL SUBJECT?

i) THE CLPD

It is traditional to connect the CLPD with a "new" kind of politics. Panitch and Leys" famous study, for example, associates the group with a "*New Left*" politics. It is, as I said earlier on, considered to be the mainstream of the movement in this sense. The crux here seems to be its *plural* conception of political struggle, after the fashion of the era. The rhetorical gesture in question, moreover, is seen to involve a supposedly innovative articulation between the signifiers "socialism" and "democracy" (since democracy is considered to equate to pluralisation, in this context). Indeed, the very circumstances in which the group had emerged – those of the response to the Wilson veto – seem to indicate precisely this: a "balance" between the question of the nationalisation of industry and the complex constitutional circumstances (democratic conditions, in other words) in which it might take place. It is most surprising, then, when

one finds in CLPD pamphlets continual allusion to the "event" of 1917 – which I assume would constitute a "fidelity" in Badiou's sense. Yet how does one *know* that a fidelity of this kind was operative?

Various types of evidence could be brought in order to support the argument. The first is the previously-mentioned comments of the group regarding 1917. The second is (*contra* the previous formulations) its thoroughgoing subordination of democracy to socialism in its discourse. The third is the group's Trotskyist origins.[14] Yet perhaps it could be said that all these "proofs" remain circumstantial. Here I want to take a small detour in order to explain why I think that Badiou's theory (as incorporated in his discussion of ethics) is not only facilitative of a political analysis of the present kind, but can even yield a related *method*.

I shall stay with the example of the CLPD. In my view this group most closely approximated to what Badiou has described as the "subject of terror" which engages – following its emergence as a subject – in a reinforcement of the very system with which it is "destined" (*qua* subject) to break. In psychoanalytic theory, moreover, this is surely comparable with the "compromise" character of the subject of *neurosis*. (One could go further and say that one is in fact dealing here with a perverse, or "fetishistic", subject. I think that this would have unhelpful implications, however.) I also think that this comparison between Badiou's ethics and the ethics of psychoanalysis is hardly opportunistic, given Badiou's own Lacanian influence.[15] Yet the defining feature of the neurotic subjective structure, in psychoanalysis, is to produce *symptoms*. What might be the meaning of the term "symptom" in the present context?

The answer, I think, is provided by Slavoj Žižek, who clarifies that the symptom, in the socio-political field, is something embodied in a political adversary – archetypally, the figure of the Jew.[16] What this assertion additionally allows one to do, however, is to consider the way in which the "symptom" - *beyond* its mere (embodied) "existence" - is "nurtured" (or "*enjoyed*", to use the proper psychoanalytic term). As Žižek himself says: "(the) logic of metaphoric-metonymic displacement [i.e., the signifier "Jew" as such – T.A.] is not sufficient to explain how the figure of the Jew captures our desire; to penetrate its fascinating force, we must take into account the way "Jew" enters the framework of fantasy structuring our enjoyment. Fantasy is basically a scenario filling out the empty space of a fundamental impossibility, a screen masking the void."[17]

I therefore think that the decisive evidence as to the CLPD's "fidelity" gone awry is its symptomatic behaviour, in the above sense. Now if one wished, I think that one could refer to such an analytics of enjoyment as a "symptomatic reading" (in this case, of the texts produced by the CLPD). One could do so as long as one acknowledged that this would not be exactly the same as the symptomatic reading described by the "inventor" of that method - Louis Althusser - who relied more upon the *form* of the textual lapsus, rather than its *content*.[18] The latter, then, will

14 It grew out of the Socialist Charter group, which held the British franchise of the Fourth International for a while.

15 See Badiou, *Ethics*, p.121-2.

16 See Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, London: Verso, 1990, p.127.

17 Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p.126.

18 For examples and rationale, see Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster, London: New Left Books, 1975.

constitute the form of the "symptomatic reading" to be used in my analysis given that the type of symptoms described above will not in the first instance be present in a mere textual *form*. This also explains why the preliminary evidence as to the CLPD's "symptomatic behaviour" is *structural*.

For one could indeed adduce evidence to the effect that the subjective tension experienced by the CLPD, in its compromise between its fundamental desire (generically put - that *things be radically other than they are*) and its hope for the transformation of the Labour party, led it to convert itself into the *true defender* of that party. This to the exclusion of other pretenders – the Labour Party leadership, for example, who always took an ironic distance from the Party, and were perfectly ready to brief against it. To take just one example: in an article entitled "The Glamour of Rebellion" they say: "(r)ebellions against the whip are often perceived, not least of all by the rebels themselves, as glamorous affairs." But then: "[T]he rank and file of the Labour Party (and those who elected a Labour government) want Labour policies carried out – and only a Labour government can do this. Any action, therefore, which is likely to force a Labour government out of office will dismay and alienate Labour Party members and supporters."[19] In other words, one has here the (probably unedifying) spectacle of a radical socialist group criticising government ministers for standing down on points of political principle, thereby weakening an administration that anyway does not, if they are to be believed, even represent them.

The more *obviously* symptomatic aspects of all this, however, are the various ways in which the CLPD treated its enemies (or - to use the Lacanian formula - in which it "enjoyed" its symptom). Three categories emerge in this regard: paranoia (e.g.: "The limited time available is likely to be used as an excuse for excluding subjects Labour's establishment finds particularly inconvenient"[20]), mockery (e.g.: "One might note how Jim Callaghan's face appeared to fall at the enthusiasm with which Conference carried the resolution against the cuts (NUPE), and *for* the nationalisation of the banks and insurance companies"[21]), and disillusionment (e.g.: "[H]ow long can shaky procedural arguments be allowed to stop conference from discussing what it wants?"[22]). All of these, moreover, I would categorise as various types of narcissistic enjoyment, which is clearly inhibitive of a genuine truth -procedure of the type described by Badiou.

Yet is it *true* that these types of behaviour are "inhibitive" of a truth-procedure – substitutive of it, that is? For Badiou never suggests that the ethical subject proper should "tolerate" its enemy (as in the contemporary ethical trend). Yet this is not what is being suggested here. I am not suggesting that these types of behaviour are wrong "in themselves". What I am instead saying is that these types of behaviour are to be avoided because they are the epiphenomenal marks of a political fidelity gone wrong. Most importantly of all, however, is that it is, I think, possible to avoid behaviour of this kind in an "authentic" fidelity. I shall now give an example of what I mean.

19 Both quotes from CLPD Newsletter No.8, January-February 1977.

20 CLPD Bulletin No.4, September 1982.

21 CLPD Newsletter No.8, January-February 1977, Pete Willsman.

22 CLPD Newsletter No.8, January-February 1977, Pete Willsman.

ii) TONY BENN AND THE IWC

It should be reiterated that I consider Tony Benn and the IWC to be examples of the ethical subject proper, which I outlined previously. I should add, however, that I think they only qualify as such when they are considered *together*. For the figure of Benn is split between his subjectivity in the Badiouian sense and his subject position as Member of the British Parliament. Certainly I think it would be an error to refuse to consider his exceptional contribution to the political situation in Britain simply because he *is* split along these lines. For such a split, as Badiou himself makes clear, is in fact characteristic of the ethical subject as such (without which, in fact, it would not be definable in terms of its "subtractive" dimension).[23] What is most emblematic of this radical split in Benn's sympathies, however (and what equally – in that sense – distinguishes him from the CLPD), is his near-anonymous association with the IWC, which was directly involved with the many factory occupations in Britain during the early 1970s.

Once again, one could cite here circumstantial evidence, to the effect that most of the pamphlets written by Benn during the 1970s were published by the IWC, not to mention the fact that he used to visit the work-ins on constituency visits, and tried to help them as much as he could from the position of his role as Secretary of State for Industry, saying: "[A] Labour Cabinet, even if composed entirely of members qualified to win the approval of the Institute for Worker's Control, could not, alone, do one fraction of the things that have to be done. If the Labour Movement is to play its proper role in the period of slump and depression that lies ahead, then I think we will have to be sure that the impetus for change comes continually from the movement itself."[24] Or, more strongly: "[M]en at Meriden or the *Scottish Daily News* or Kirkby were transformed not by anything that was done by government, but by their readiness to take responsibility."[25] Attached to such considerations in Benn's mind, moreover, was a *political* benefit. That: "If you open up an escape from the ordinary mechanism of market discipline which gives to the owners the ultimate power to sack, you have undermined the whole basis of capitalist discipline."[26]

Indeed, this split even sometimes appears to stretch – in Benn's discourse – to the very function of the British Parliament itself. This is closely connected to the national question, which was considered highly important on the left in Britain at that time, as in Benn's controversial: "I adhere to the view that we need a national liberation struggle".[27] This, as far as he was concerned, in light of the development of the market-logic of the EEC and the increasing territorial independence of the multinational corporations. In another sense, however, this view is arguably once again little more than the acknowledgement that politics may only take place by way of a subtraction from a concrete "situation" (in Badiou's terms). Twisting the Badiouian schema even further, one could note that Benn even identifies the most progressive aspect of the British Parliament along

23 Badiou, *Ethics*, p.83-5.

24 Tony Benn, *Arguments for Socialism*, London: Penguin, 1979, p.73.

25 Benn, *Arguments for Socialism*, p.158-9.

26 Benn, *Arguments for Socialism*, p.159.

27 Tony Benn, *Parliament, People and Power – Agenda for a Free Society*, London: Verso, 1982, p.108.

these lines – that its very existence is almost the condition for its interruption by the British workers in their revolutionary guise (and Benn is certainly comfortable with the use of the word "revolutionary" to describe the occupations, etc.).[28]

So far, however – because only one person is being discussed – I have (perhaps misguidedly) allowed a so-called ethical subject to testify to his own ethicality. A symptomatic reading must therefore again enter the picture. Yet if I have already equated the structure of the subject of terror (the CLPD) with that of the neurotic in psychoanalytic theory, then what happens to the symptom in the case of – first of all – Benn?

Remember that Lacan, for his part, has defined the end of analysis (which is the essential ethical implication of the clinic) as involving an "identification with the symptom", as opposed to its impossible suppression (as in neurosis). Extrapolating from the symptomatic reading as defined previously, then, it can be said that it is the magnanimous, if critical, gesture towards one's opponent that links up to the enjoyment of the ethical subject. It could be reiterated, however, that this is not a virtue *in itself*, but is rather epiphenomenal to a certain (ethical) subjective structure.

As when Benn says: "[I]n searching for the reasons why our society is now experiencing a crisis we should not look for individual scapegoats upon whom all the blame for our troubles can be heaped. To seek out a group of supposedly guilty men and women and demand their replacement by others would not get to the root of the problem."[29] Or: "[I]t would be a great mistake if we were to pretend at this meeting that this is just a matter of allocating blame and then going home again and starting all over again."[30] Or: "I cite all this, not because of the personalities which are not important".[31] Or again: "[T]his lecture is solely concerned with the powers of Labour Prime Ministers and Party Leaders and is not about any individual who has held these offices."[32] Now these *could* come across merely as frivolous pleas for tolerance. In light of the "righteous anger" expressed in the rest of Benn's discourse, however, as well as his continual calls for "revolution", this strikes me instead as an example of (what Badiou calls) "indifference" (in the best possible sense).[33] It should be acknowledged that Benn has once again here

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28 As in: "[T]he best of the Christian tradition of social action has always been revolutionary, democratic and humane, in challenging wealth, power, privilege and injustice, whether under kings, conquerors or commissars" (Tony Benn, *Arguments for Democracy*, London: Penguin, p.141). Or (in relation to the phrase: "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"): "[A]ny student of the teachings of the historical Jesus – and I lay claim to be a student and no more – must take that passage as his starting point in the search for their revolutionary consequences. Few would question the use of the word "revolutionary" to describe the effect upon an individual when he or she interprets this commandment in a social sense" (Benn, *Arguments for Democracy*, p.123).

29 Benn, *Arguments for Democracy*, p.XI.

30 Benn in Peter Hain ed.,*The Crisis and Future of the Left - Debate of the Decade*, London: Pluto, 1980, p.46.

31 Tony Benn, *The Case for Party Democracy*, Nottingham: Institute for Workers' Control, 1980, p.11.

32 Tony Benn, "The Case for a Constitutional Premiership", Nottingham: Institute for Workers' Control, 1979, p. 5.

33 "[I]ndifferent to differences", Badiou says in *Ethics*, p. 27.

testified to his own ethicality, although now – at least – in an oblique way.

The occupations that Benn so wished to promote constituted the very business of the Institute for Workers" Control (IWC), as was said earlier. They called them "worker co-operatives".[34] Ken Coates – a leading member of the group – framed the question thus: "[D]emocracy itself will not survive if it does not extend its roots into our factories: without developing and stimulating the active interest of workpeople in the goals, as well as the detailed processes, of work no Government will be able to solve the crisis of political economy which needs radical enthusiasm as well as dutiful effort, and which at the present time inspires neither."[35] It can now be said, then, that it was the indeterminate (i.e., non-programmatic, and therefore properly "productive') transition from "sit-ins" to industrial democracy that most interested the IWC. Yet it is precisely this moment of indeterminacy that allowed them also to conclude that the factory occupations were somehow *self-authorising*. This in contrast with the wider revolutionary left, which missed this point, and ended up condemning the occupations.

The Socialist Workers" Party, for example, officially commented (on factory occupation) that: "[Y]ou cannot build islands of socialism in a sea of capitalism".[36] And the Trotskyist Ernest Mandel (from the official IMG) put the same point thus: "[I]t is…to deceive the workers to lead them to believe that they can manage their affairs at the level of the factory. In the present economic system, a whole series of decisions are inevitably taken at higher levels than the factory, and if these decisions are not consciously made by the working class as a whole, then they will be made by other forces in society behind the workers" backs".[37]

The IWC *response* to such attacks, moreover, is interesting: "[T]he question is not, and cannot be posed as, a problem of class action versus group action. Social classes are composed of groups."[38] Thus: "[I]n the context of modern Britain, new co-operatives raise trade union self-confidence, and stimulate the demand for democratisation of public sector industries at the same time that they undermine the assumption of the inevitable rectitude of managerial prerogatives."[39] Or: "The argument must still continuously expand and develop if it is to create the climate of trade union and public opinion which can make the whole movement irreversible."[40] Or, again: Those socialists who say wryly that it is not possible to build socialism in one factory are… very wide of the mark. Of course it is not. It is not possible to build socialism in one country either. But if the social revolution breaks out in one country, one tries to defend it there. And if we can defend a transformation

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[34] The most famous of these was the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders work-in, which took place in 1971. In the words of Ken Coates (perhaps the most famous member of the IWC), however: "[B]etween July 1971 and March 1974 one researcher was able to count 102 distinct occupations, a large proportion of which were initiated in defence of employment" (Ken Coates ed., *The New Worker Co-operatives*, Nottingham: Spokesman, 1976, p.11). Beyond the UCS, other notable examples of work-ins etc., were: the Norton Villiers Triumph factory at Meriden, the Fisher-Bendix factory on Merseyside, and the *Scottish Daily Express* office, in Glasgow.

[35] Coates ed., *The New Worker Co-operatives*, p.219.

[36] Coates ed., *The New Worker Co-operatives*, p.17.

[37] Coates ed., *The New Worker Co-operatives*, p.19.

[38] Coates ed., *The New Worker Co-operatives*, p.23.

[39] Coates ed., *The New Worker Co-operatives*.

[40] Ken Coates, "Introduction", in Tony Benn, *Industrial Democracy - Tony Benn at the IWC Debate*, Nottingham: Institute for Workers' Control, 1975, p.7.

of the power structure within an individual plant, of course we should try to do so. Such a transformation will have far less social consequences for being a partial one: but it will still provide inducement to thought for people outside its immediate range.[41]

Now it is perhaps possible to highlight a point of convergence between these and the more "doctrinal" left arguments, cited previously. This has to do with the apparent moment of "transcendence" in both (which would place them on the terrain of the 'subject of disaster' i.e., attempting to make the *world* Good). That is, that the IWC *equally* wished for the move towards a harmonious socialist society (which is antithetical to the Badiouian schema). The difference, however, is that – from the IWC side - this is expected to yield no active political principle in the situation at hand (as Badiou would put it[42]). For indeed, the very language used above – "raise self-confidence", "inducement to thought", "create a climate" - marks this moment of indeterminacy. This along with the even more resounding affirmation of the *pure multiple* (as in Badiou's reading of the philosophical category of the void): "social classes are composed of groups". For according to such a statement, a moment of *infinity* is touched upon, in accordance with which no doctrinal explanation of the current state of affairs is even *possible*. All one can do is *act* (regardless of future gains, and the supposed amenability of the socialist utopia)! Indeed, the IWC even sometimes opted out of the very *dispute* over the politico-theoretical status of the occupations. One member of the group - Ken Fleet - for example, contrasted, in the case of the Triumph factory, "the arid dogma of the left", with "the workers enthusiasm for motor cycles"[43] (which could be reactionary, but in this context is simply taken to represent a superbly materialist proposition).

To put it in "symptomatic" terms, moreover – it is the very *tone* of these engagements that appears to underline their ethical status. First of all – as has been said - the IWC eschewed doctrine. What the previous quotes make equally clear, however (through – again - their lack of "aggression", which applies generally to the IWC literature), is that the group did not make this "eschewal" the basis for a doctrinal dispute! They had other things to get on with – like supporting, politically, the workers in the factories. Like Benn, then, the IWC's "indifference" towards the *existence* of its so-called political adversaries is plain.

Yet what of the *final* Badiouian category – the subject of *disaster*? I shall deal with this next.

iii) THE MILITANT TENDENCY AND THE SOCIALIST ORGANISER

Here things become a little more complicated. For with this subject there *also* appears to be a moment of ethicality, in the sense that the relevant actors hold no illusion as to the reformability of the State. Nevertheless, a "substitute" for an authentically novel "truth-procedure" seems to remain in the case of the subject of disaster, which therefore also leads to various kinds of *symptomatic behaviour*.

Thus the relevant examples: the Trotskyists i.e., *Militant* and Socialist Organiser begin from the point of

41 Tony Benn, *Industrial Democracy - Tony Benn at the IWC Debate*, Nottingham: Institute for Workers' Control, 1975, p.23.

42 Badiou, *Ethics*, p.104.

43 Coates ed., *The New Worker Co-operatives*, p.93.

view of a radical critique of the *status quo*, along with a designation of a privileged interruptive subject – the figure of the worker – which is invisible (i.e., void) from the point of view of the capitalist "situation". Moreover, they are fully prepared to *organise*, politically, out of solidarity with this "subject". And again, neither of these two factors, of course, is in any way inhibitive of an "authentic" fidelity. Following this, however, is where the problems arise.

For these groups move on to dub the "void" subject: "*the working class*" (predictably enough). More importantly, however, certain (very mundane) "sociological" characteristics are even attributed to this "class". Additionally, the relevant political "organisation" – the "Bolshevik" Party – is soon converted into the destinal (i.e., *objective*) historical "representative" of this class. And thus the related party doctrine even manages to be objectified; specifically – in the writings of Leon Trotsky (whose "Transitional Programme" of 1938 is invoked, at least in the core texts of the groups). And indeed, this moment of "objectification" in the doctrine even has an effect upon the writing of the groups" pamphlets *themselves*. For each article, therein, almost always begins in the same way - with the quoting of some economic statistics – before moving on to a "Marxist analysis", and closing with a prediction of world revolution. All these references to the object, moreover, inhibit – according to Badiou's theory – the very *subjectivity* of the subject.

What complicates things further, however, is that the aforementioned objectification does not simply take place in accordance with the categories of "knowledge" i.e., those of the situation. The major complication here is therefore that the *nature* of this objectivity is unclear – since objectivity in Badiou is usually associated with the existing knowledges. Perhaps this is why Badiou has recently considered dropping (or at least radically modifying) this category of subjectivity. I shall not go into this problem here, except to affirm that this type of subject *exists* in the relevant case (the Labour New Left), and also to note that it raises problems for a conceptual definition of the *symptomatic reading*, since there is also no *psychoanalytic* equivalent of this type of subject. Nevertheless, it does *have* symptoms, as well as displaying symptomatic *enjoyment* (mockery and paranoia). Further theoretical work is therefore required in order to clarify the schematic status of this type of subject.

CONCLUSION

The wager of this brief overview has been that in light of Badiou's theory of the condition (that philosophy be retroactively conditioned by politics), the only level at which a text like *Ethics* can be presumed to work is if one supposes a degree of contingency between its theoretical presuppositions and its political prescriptions. This means that – in spite of Badiou's own equivocations – its irrelevance to a *strictly* philosophical schema might be affirmed. What this equally means, however, is that to explore further the arguments presented in *Ethics* – and in relation to a concrete political case, moreover – is now permissible, without violating the singularity of

politics" conditioning of philosophy. In such circumstances, moreover, a certain kind of Badiouian political writing becomes possible.

The only additional question in this regard might be the following. If any conclusions yielded by such an analysis are, of necessity, radically dissociated from a fundamental theoretical schema, then what kind of political truth is *ever* in a position to condition philosophy, so defined? Optimistically, the application of Badiou's ethical schema to a given case (here the Labour New Left) could be said to be a mere regional exercise that touches upon no *real* (in the Lacanian sense), something which would instead require the emergence of an evental sequence *proper*. Less optimistically (from the point of view of Badiou's meta-philosophical theory of the condition), it could be said that it is only through rigorous political analysis of this kind that a philosophical schema such as Badiou's can avoid ossification – the unadventurous and isomorphic association of concepts with data (»Here is an example of an event"), that is. Which of these is actually the case, i.e., the extent to which political analyses of this kind can generally be said to be inhibitive of authentic political sequences, seems to me to remain moot.

Artur Klinov, *Karl Marx "Das Kapital"*, 1997

MARXISM EXPATRIATED

Alberto Toscano

Today's radical political (or metapolitical) theory is the offspring of a contorted dialectic of defeat and reinvention.[1] Though it is common to take contemporary ideas on emancipation and political subjectivity at face value, many of the defining characteristics of these recent writings are obscured if we fail to address how they emerged out of a reckoning with the failure or distortion of Marxist politics, and, moreover, if we disregard the extent to which they maintain an underlying commitment to the Marxist impulse whence they arose.

The mode of separation, as it were, from the organisational and theoretical tenets of Marxism (in whichever guise) can tell us a lot about the present resources and limitations of theoretical contributions to the contemporary thinking of politics which drew initial sustenance from that tradition, even if they are now allegedly "beyond" Marx and Marxism. This is certainly the case with the work of Alain Badiou, whose knotty relationship to his own Marxist-Leninist militancy and to Marxist theory has recently become the object of rich and detailed investigation, above all in several essays by Bruno Bosteels. Bosteels" characterisation of Badiou's metapolitical trajectory in terms of "post-Maoism'[2]

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1 It is worth noting from the outset that Badiou – who does not seem to hold much truck with the term nowadays – put his work in the mid-1980s under the aegis of "radicalism", often in terms redolent of a certain Kantian atmosphere that suffused the French debate on the retreat of the political and political judgment: "What is a radical politics, which goes to the root, which refuses the administration of the necessary, which reflects on ends, upholding and practicing justice and equality, and which nevertheless assumes the time of peace, and is not like the empty wait for a cataclysm? What is a radicalism that is at the same time an infinite task?" (Alain Badiou, *Peut-on penser la politique?*, Paris, Seuil, 1985, p. 106). Showing the momentary influence of Lyotard, Badiou even links his notion of an axiomatic politics to Kant's treatment of aesthetic judgment in terms of "reflective universality" (which, we could hazard, also affects the temporality of the future perfect, which is still at work in the concept of the generic). See *Peut-on penser la politique?*, p. 76. It should also not be forgotten that *Peut-on penser la politique?*, like Lyotard's *L'enthousiasme*, was occasioned by an invitation from Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's *Centre d'étude philosophique du politique*, and is in (polemical) dialogue with the problems identified by these philosophers.

2 Bruno Bosteels, "Post-Maoism: Badiou and Politics", *positions: east asia cultures critique* vol. 13, No. 3, 2005, pp. 575-634. This is arguably the most thorough engagement with Badiou's politics to date.

already suggests that what makes Badiou's theoretical biography distinctive is at a considerable remove from the entire "post-Marxist" tendency, chiefly encapsulated in Laclau and Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, and persuasively dismantled in Ellen Meiksins Wood's *The Retreat from Class*.[3] Having said that, the echoes of a common "post-structuralist" theoretical conjuncture, and a critique of (or separation from) "thick" Hegelian-Marxist versions of dialectics and social ontology, might make one suspect that "the theoretical edifices of Laclau and Badiou are united by a deep homology".[4] This "deep homology", which Žižek identifies in the notion of a contingent, subjective rupture of ontological closure, is nevertheless offset, still according to Žižek, by a fundamental divergence, inasmuch as, in the last instance, Badiou's "post-Marxism" has nothing whatsoever to do with the fashionable deconstructionist dismissal of the alleged Marxist "essentialism"; on the contrary, he is unique in radically rejecting the deconstructionist doxa as a new form of pseudo-thought, as a contemporary version of sophism".[5] Rather than either homology, or frontal opposition, it might be more precise to argue that Badiou's post-Maoism and the post-Marxism of Laclau et al. intersect in manners that generate, from the peculiar perspective of contemporary radical thought, a kind of "family resemblance" effect, but that, when push comes to shove, they are really indifferent to one another, born of divergent assessments of the end or crisis of Marxism. To a certain extent, they connect the same dots but the resulting pictures differ radically. In order better to delineate the specific difference of Badiou's project, and of the problems that generated it, it is of considerable interest to examine the period between the highest speculative product of Badiou's heterodox Maoism, *Théorie du sujet* (1982), and *L'être et l'événement* (1988), in particular the book *Peut-on penser la politique?*, published in 1985, which is to say contemporaneously with Laclau and Mouffe's *Hegemony*.

3 Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, London, Verso, 1985; Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Retreat from Class: A New "True" Socialism*, 2nd ed. London: Verso, 1998. As a future task, it would be very interesting indeed to gauge how well Badiou's own post-Leninist turn would fare under Wood's criticism – especially insofar as Wood, rather than simply rehashing "orthodox" criticism, is able, in a Marxian spirit, really to bring out the importance of the Marxian critique of political economy to a definition of such crucial concepts as freedom and equality.

4 Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, London: Verso, 1999, p. 172.

5 Slavoj Žižek, "Psychoanalysis in Post-Marxism: The Case of Alain Badiou", *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 97, 2, 1998, pp. 235-61.

6 "La figure du (re)commencement", *Le Perroquet* 42, 1984, p. 8 or Alain Badiou, *Peut-on penser la politique?*, p. 61.

Like many post-Marxists, and indeed anti-communists, Badiou attacks the "metaphysics" that contaminate Marxist politics. In a Heideggerian pastiche, he even describes Marxism-Leninism as the "metaphysical epoch of Marxist political ontology".[6] Most "deconstructions" of the Marxist canon have looked for this metaphysics in Marx's supposed reductionist "economism" or in what they take to be an imaginary constitution of the social, and of class structure in particular, whose correlate is the putative transparency of the post-revolutionary social bond. While some of these points may be registered in Badiou's texts from the mid-eighties, the emphasis is firmly on a conceptual dyad that persists even in more recent works like *Metapolitics*. This is the distinction between *politics* and *the political*. The thesis that lies at the core of Badiou's call to counter

the supposed "crisis" of Marxism through its "destruction" and "recomposition", is that Marxism has succumbed to the homogenising *political* fiction that imagines the possibility of measuring, anticipating and representing political action. According to this framework, "*the political* has never been anything but the fiction which *politics* punctures through the hole of the event".[7] One's first impression is of a substantial overlap with Laclau in terms of the notions of working class, proletariat or people as fictions of the social bond, signifying fictions in which political action could find its guarantee. Indeed, the fundamental political fiction for Badiou is that of the "alliance of the social relation and its measure" (where, as the treatment of the concept of "state" in *Being and Event* suggests, measure is equivalent to representation). However, from the idea whereby the crisis of the political reveals that (in his vocabulary) *all sets are inconsistent*,[8] Badiou does not draw the customary post-Marxist lessons regarding the transcendental horizon of discursively generated identities and the a priori of antagonism as an intractable impediment to social revolution. In other words, he does not espouse the post-Marxist mix of strategic populism, sociological description, discursive ontology and cynical liberalism. Rather, the assault on the fiction of the social, and on Marxism's foundational commitment to a critique of political economy, is viewed by Badiou as the occasion for a renovation, and a kind of *purification*, of the *politics* of emancipation. Marxism, according to *Peut-on penser la politique?*, is unable to critique its own critique of political economy,[9] leaving its original political impetus cloaked and perverted, binding it to the mediations, however antagonistic, of economic and social relations. The maintenance of categories of totality and system within this approach is what imprisons the encounter and creation of a politics in the *fiction* of the *political*, which always comes down to "the alliance of the social relation and its measure".[10] Marxism – this is Badiou's verdict – was destroyed by its history, the subordination of politics to the fiction of a social measure. The political is a kind of metaphorical cloaking of the hiatus between state and civil society, representation and presentation. The aim of an emancipatory politics should not lie in the creation of a new bond; the inconsistency of the social does not open onto ever-renegotiated (and formally identical) disputes over its content, but on the idea of an autonomy and heterogeneity of politics, which occurs at a remove from any *relational* dialectic: "What is dissipated is the thesis of an essence of the relations internal to the city, an essence representable in the exercise of a sovereignty, be it the dictatorship of the slaves, even if the relation is that of civil war within the class structure".[11] So, while there is a convergence or homology around a certain anti-essentialism, what follows from Badiou's own attack on essential relations is a link between inconsistency and event, which still maintains an emancipatory, rationalist reference to transmissible decision and a communist reference to the generic (in the axiom of equality) – rather than a generalised undecidability oscillating between a sociologistic account of discursive

7 *Peut-on penser la politique?*, p. 12.

8 *Peut-on penser la politique?*, p. 13.

9 *Peut-on penser la politique?*, p. 14.

10 Ibid.

11 *Peut-on penser la politique?*, p. 13. See also the Mallarmé quote that Badiou adduces for this stance: "le rapport social et sa mesure momentanée, qu'on la serre ou l'allonge en vue de gouverner, est une fiction."

plurality and a political ontology of fundamental antagonisms. In other words, the "destruction" of the political fiction that Badiou diagnoses within metaphysical Marxism is not an opportunity to affirm the *pluralism* of political struggles, but rather to argue simultaneously for their *singularity* and their prescriptive homogeneity. Badiou insists, during this period, in writing of the *recomposition* of Marxism, in putting his work under the aegis of "Marxist politics" because of the unsurpassable character of the Marxist hypothesis, the hypothesis of a politics of non-domination which is not reducible to the state. Rescinding the fiction of the political, from within Marxism, is presented as a kind of prolegomenon to the emancipation of a (Marxist) politics. In *Peut-on penser la politique?* we can thus observe, in a quasi-deductive manner, the passage from an internal dislocation of Marxism to a metapolitical thinking of the event: "the determination of the essence of politics, unable to find a guarantee either in structure (inconsistency of sets, unbinding), nor sense (History does not make a whole), has no other benchmark than the event". Note that it is through this "ultra-one" of the event, that Badiou *maintains* "the essence of politics': "The firmness of essentialisation rests on the precariousness of what happens.'[12]

Keeping this move in mind, we can elucidate a number of supplementary differences with the ideological attitude of post-Marxism, as well as shed some light on the direction taken by Badiou's further work. A particularly significant issue in this regard involves the difference between an ontology of the multiple and the kind of pluralist notion of hegemony put forward in post-Marxism. Whilst in both instances the undermining of unity (at the level of class identity and of party leadership, for instance, as well as in terms of the category of social totality) is used to articulate a movement beyond the supposedly Hegelian or totalising character of Marxist theory, Badiou's set-theoretical meontology of the multiple is of a wholly different order than the discursive pluralism of Laclau et al. – indeed, the theme of the *generic*, running (explicitly or otherwise) through the whole of Badiou's work from the 1980s onwards, can be understood in terms of the need to maintain *communism* as an intrinsic property of truth and subjective fidelity. This is not an immanent critique of Marxism as a science of capitalism and revolution, but a displacement to a dissimilar practical and theoretical framework (one in which politics and philosophy are de-sutured, as Badiou's 1989 *Manifesto for Philosophy* proposes) in order to sustain the retention of a minimal Marxism conjoining the hypothesis of non-domination with the rational identification of the sites of subversion, without trapping politics in a teleological, revolutionary or programmatic framework. We will return to the question of whether maintaining the name Marxism is tenable once these theoretical options have been taken – especially bidding farewell to the concept of revolution. For the time being, it is worth noting that the emphasis on the subjective element in Marxist politics – already a prominent trait in Badiou's Maoism and still present in the 1980s concern with political "forms of consciousness'[13] – is fully at odds with the post-Marxist concern with "subject-positions" and the hegemonic negotiations of "identity". This anti-essentialist

12 *Peut-on penser la politique?*, p. 67. On the event as "ultra-one", see Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham, London: Continuum, 2006, pp. 178-83.

13 See Paul Sandevince (a.k.a. Sylvain Lazarus), "Les formes de conscience" (Octobre 1980), *Le Perroquet* 42, 1984.

discursive ontology of the (empty) social is absent from Badiou, whose concern, as demonstrated quite consistently even in more recent books like the *Ethics*, is not with the political interplay between identity and difference. Rather, Badiou's thought works at the interface between, on the one hand, the fact of identity-and-difference as a feature of the encyclopaedia of knowledges,[14] and, on the other hand, the production of the Same.[15]

Despite the deceptive resonance, this is not to be confused with the two logics of Laclau and Mouffe, differential and equivalential. Why? Because in the latter these two logics remain transitive to one another and map out the transcendental horizon of political dispute, whilst in Badiou the production of sameness in the political field is a real production of truth which does not involve the strategic rearrangement and occupation of the language of the situation, but an organised subtraction from its very terms.

Instead of shifting the terrain from that of (the taking of) political power, of classical revolutionary politics, to the domain of discourse (the post-Marxist strategy whose fundamental "electoralism" is persuasively ferreted out by Wood), the shift made by Badiou and his political comrades is marked by the attempt, in order to maintain the hypothesis of non-domination, to consolidate and purify the subject of politics. In a distinction that would obviously strike the likes of Wood as spurious, inasmuch as it characteristically bypasses the level of *class*, for Badiou it is not the state but proletarian capacity which lies at the heart of Marxist politics. Regarding the question of class struggle and antagonism as a crucial node in the so-called crisis of Marxism, and the possibility of a "party of a new type", Paul Sandevince (a.k.a. Sylvain Lazarus) writes in *Le Perroquet* (the publication of Badiou's group, the UCFML), that: "For Lenin, the essential is not struggle, but "antagonism against the entirety of the existent political and social order"." This is read fundamentally as a warning against the logic of the absorption of the party into the state, whilst the "other path" involves assigning "the process of politics to the masses/State contradiction grasped in terms of consciousness [*conscience*]".[16] This is one of the sources of Badiou's own insistence on politics viewed not as strategy for power, or a way of ordering the social, but as an organised practice of *thought* (a "truth procedure", in the later work). The link between the hypothesis of non-domination, the egalitarian and organised capacity for thought, and a separation from the state thus appears as one of the key tenets of this self-avowed "Marxist politics". This gives us an inkling as to why the appellations post-Maoism or post-Leninism (the one favoured by the various authors in *Le Perroquet*[17]) are more appropriate

14 *Being and Event*, pp. 327-43.

15 Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, trans. Peter Hallward, London: Verso, 2001, pp. 25-7.

16 "Les formes de conscience", p. 5. UCFML refers to the "Groupe pour la formation d'une Union des communistes de France marxiste-leniniste". In 1985, the UCFML disbanded and was succeeded by L'Organisation politique, a non-party organisation. See Hallward's *Badiou* and Bosteels's "Post-Maoism" for more detailed information.

17 This is argued in particular in Sandevince's "La politique sous condition", *Le Perroquet* 42, pp. 1-3. According to him, there is no positive meaning of Marxism-Leninism after the termination of the Cultural Revolution, and in the end "one cannot extirpate Marxism-Leninism from its Stalinist matrix". But the line taken by *Le Perroquet* is that it is necessary to maintain the Leninist break or division between social being and political consciousness. Thus, while moving beyond Lenin in terms of organisation (and indeed in terms of the link between class and revolution) there is a fidelity to a kind of Leninism of capacities, of thought. Politics under condition, in Sandevince-Lazarus' definition, is politics separated from the social. Can a certain Leninism be maintained beyond the party-form? Is the party-form a restraint on the virtuosity of political subjectivity? This of course raises the question of how political capacity can be fostered and rendered efficacious outside of the party-form.

than post-Marxism. Having already decided that Marxist politics is not the consequence of a critical analysis of capitalism, but is rather the means, within capitalist conditions, for the production of communism (so that the critique of political economy is wholly subsidiary to the project of emancipation), the direction taken in the 1980s by Badiou and his comrades is primarily born out of the crisis of the Marxist political subject (i.e. the party), and not, as with "traditional" post-Marxism, out of a critique of the metaphysical tenets and sociological shortcomings of Marxism as a science of capitalism. If Badiou's *Théorie du sujet* had declared that the every subject is political and that subject equals party, what is at stake in this period (1982-88) which oscillates between the option for a "party of a new type" and that of "politics without a party'? Jameson contends that Marxism qua science of capitalism gives rise to post-Marxism at moments of systemic crisis. Whatever the links between such crises and forms of political organisation, it is clear that for Badiou it is the party qua subject which is the focus of the crisis, not the ability of "Marxism" to cope with social and economic transformations, or the shifts and turns in class composition. Indeed, Badiou is generally rather sanguine about the Marxist understanding of capitalism, and does not seem to think that Marx has really been surpassed in this domain. In any instance, Badiou is immunised against the stance according to which the failure of social ontology or economic analysis would debilitate Marxist politics. Indeed, he mocks this very possibility in a vicious piece caricaturing the "old Marxist", the one who waits for the proper study of "social formations" before acting, who thinks that "one of these days the "workers" movement" will give us something to talk about".[18] To the contrary:

> Marx starts, absolutely, not from the architecture of the social, in which he will, after the fact, deploy his assurance and his guarantee, but from the interpretation-cut of a symptom of social hysteria, uprisings and workers' parties. (...) For the symptom that hystericises the social to be thus grasped, without pinning it to the fiction of the political, proletarian political capacity – as a radical hypothesis of truth and a reduction to fiction of every foregoing notion of the political – must be excepted from any approach via the communitarian and the social.[19]

By now, Badiou's philosophy is renowned as a philosophy of the event. But, in terms of what I referred to above as the dialectic of defeat and reinvention, could we

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18 Georges Peyrol (a.k.a. Alain Badiou), "30 moyens de reconnaître à coup sûr un vieux-marxiste", *Le Perroquet* 29-30, 1983, p. 5. in *Peut-on penser la politique?*, Badiou puts the point as follows: "Communist politics must be wagered: you will never deduce it from Capital" (p. 87). Of course, it could be argued that far from signalling a caesura, this "long wager" (p. 90) is a feature of Marx's own original thought, which never held to such a chimerical "deduction". See Stathis Kouvelakis, "Marx et sa critique de la politique. Des révolutions de 1848 à la Commune de Paris, ou le travail de la rectification", available at: < http://semimarx.free.fr/article.php3?id|article=8>. The idea of Marxism as promoting a "deduction" of politics from the critique of Capital runs the risk of converging with the "straw-Marxism" denounced by Wood. See *The Retreat from Class*, p. 187.

19 *Peut-on penser la politique?*, p. 20. This rethinking of the notion of capacity, it should be noted, is "eventually" bound to the Polish workers' movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s. See the section of *Peut-on penser la politique?* precisely entitled "Universal meaning of the Polish workers" movement", pp. 45-8, as well as Renée Lebovici, "Shangaï et Gdansk", *Le Perroquet* 29-30, and many other pieces in the same publication throughout the 1980s.

also say that there are events of closure, failure, saturation? Without entering into doctrinal details, Badiou does overtly mark his treatment of the "destruction and recomposition" of Marxism in terms of what he terms "the end of referents", a position presaged by an article of the same name in *Le Perroquet*, penned by Sandevince-Lazarus.[20] This passage through history is inexorable, inasmuch as "Marxism alone presented itself as a revolutionary political doctrine which, if not historically confirmed, was at least historically active".[21] If Marxist politics, in its Marxist-Leninist phase, was crystallised around the figure of the party as subject, and suffused by an essential historicity, then this figure is seen to suffer from the collapse of its three primary referents: (1) *the statist referent*: the actual existence of Marxist states, as emblems of the possible victory of a Marxist politics, and of "the domination of non-domination'[22]; (2) *wars of national liberation* as an other emblem of actually victorious Marxist politics, and the "fusion of the national principle and the popular principle'[23] in the invention of new ways of linking politics and war; (3) *the workers" movement*, especially in its incarnation in "working class parties" with an explicit Marxist reference, "mixed figures of a distant revolutionary Idea and the proximity of an oppositional activity".[24] Once again, it is not the analytical force of Marxism qua science of capital that is paramount for Badiou, but the collapse of its singularity as a revolutionary thinking and a politics that was fundamentally "self-referential" (its instances were, to various degrees, homogeneous with its theory) and massively historically inscribed. Though Badiou will always maintain (as he does in *D'un désastre obscur*) the "eternity of communism", what is at stake here is the historicity of Marxism and the impossibility, in his view, for Marxism to continue to draw any value from its actual history in the present. As Badiou puts it, "its credit has run out".[25] Note that, contrary to all specimens of post-Marxism, this has nothing to do with the explanatory capacity of Marxism (Badiou treats it strictly as a politics, not a doctrine, and only secondarily and strategically as an analysis of the social).

20 However, Sandevince-Lazarus' way of posing the crisis is slightly more theoretical than historical. In fact he too designates three referents, but substitutes Marxism-Leninism itself for Badiou's focus on anti-imperialist wars: "The referents are principally of three orders", he writes, "the socialist State, the worker capacity to practice and formulate a revolutionary politics, and finally Marxism-Leninism". Marxism-Leninism is also defined here as a "precarious political amalgam", and there is a sense in some of the work in *Le Perroquet* of a political "return to Marx", a (re)commencement of Marx that would sublate the Leninist experience. Moreover, Sandevince-Lazarus also emphasises that this is a *political* crisis: "Marxism is in its nature a politics – as Marx himself clearly specifies in his letter to Weydemeyer – communist politics (for communism, the abolition of the wage, the reduction of great differences, the extinction of the State and political parties), a communist politics that is irreducibly antagonistic to bourgeois politics (for capitalism, imperialism, and the State). If there is a crisis of Marxism, it is the crisis of a politics, of a politics for communism, what we call, strictly speaking, Marxist politics." "La fin des références" (May 1982), *Le Perroquet* 42, 1984, p. 10. But see especially "Le Marxisme comme politique, Interview, par *Le Perroquet*, du Sécretariat central de l'U.C.F.", *Le Perroquet* 29-30, 1983, pp. 1-3. The whole issue, under the heading "Un Perroquet-Marx", marking the hundredth anniversary of Marx's death, is devoted to these questions.

21 *Peut-on penser la politique?*, p. 26.

22 *Peut-on penser la politique?*, p. 27. Post-Leninism is thus defined by the break with "reason of state" in all its forms, a break that draws its sustenance from the founding drive of Marxism itself: "It is not the State which is the principle of universality of Marxist politics, but rather the communist process in the deployment of class struggles and revolutions". "La fin des références", p. 10.

23 *Peut-on penser la politique?*, p. 28.

24 *Peut-on penser la politique?*, p. 29.

25 Ibid.

The "crisis of Marxism" is to be located in the collapse of its real referents: it is an immanent, and thoroughly political crisis, for which the analytical force of the critique of political economy remains of little import. Along with this collapse of referents, this political death, which seems to suggest the separation of a communist hypothesis from moribund Marxist politics, Badiou also points to certain symptoms – larval and obscure political subjects which indicate that if a Marxist politics is to be "recomposed", it can no longer be so in terms of political processes that take it as an explicit reference-point. Marxism has not only lost its historical foothold, it is no longer an internal referent for nascent forms of emancipatory politics. This is what is meant by the *expatriation* of Marxism, as the key aspect of the crisis that we must destructively traverse (let us not forget that for the Badiou of *Théorie du sujet*, the becoming of a subject, and of a proletarian subject especially, is intimately linked to its own destruction, so that the call to be heeded here is for Marxism to truly subjectivise itself, after having gone through the "subjective destitution" of its referents). In a piece from 1983, Badiou declares:

> Today, the referents of Marxist politics are not Marxist. There is a fundamental delocalisation of Marxism. Previously, there was a kind of self-reference, because Marxism drew its general credit from States that called themselves Marxist, from wars of national liberation under the direction of Marxist parties, from workers' movements framed by Marxist unionists. But this referential apparatus is gone. The great mass historical pulsations no longer refer to Marxism, after, at least, the end of the cultural revolution in China: see Poland, or Iran. Therefore, there is an expatriation of Marxism. Its historical territoriality is no longer transitive to it. The era of self-reference is closed. Marxism no longer has a historical home. All the political referents endowed with a worker and popular life are, with regard to Marxism, atypical, delocalised, errant. Any orthodox Marxist today will object that the Polish movement is national and religious, that the Iranian movement is religious and fanatical, that there is nothing there that fundamentally matters for Marxism. And this orthodox Marxism will be nothing but an empty object in the process of the destruction of Marxism.[26]

This theme of expatriation thus allows Badiou to maintain, albeit in a problematic register, the reference to "worker and popular life", as well as the crucial (communist) hypothesis of non-domination, in the face of some of the very events that served as grist to the post-Marxist mill. By thinking in terms of the dislocation of Marxist politics and the tentative invention of new forms of consciousness, rather than in terms of the analytic and ideological failure of Marxism, Badiou can turn the political conjuncture of the 1980s – the death throes of historical communism

26 "La figure du (re)commencement", p. 1. Badiou also refers to this issue in terms of the separation of Marxism from the history of the "marxisation" of the workers' movement, now that it is no longer "a power of structuration of real history", meaning that politics may be freed from "the marxed [*marxisée*] form of the political philosopheme". Hence the radical caesura vis-à-vis the previous periodisation of Marxist politics, and the proposal of the figure of (re)commencement. See *Peut-on penser la politique?*, pp. 58-59.

and the birth of heterogeneous political forms – into an opportunity for the recomposition of a politics of emancipation.[27] Crucially, this is not done in relation to a return to logics of electoral alliance or the articulation of group demands outside of the working class referent, but in terms of the possibility of a new workers" politics at a distance from the State, a non-classist, non-systemic experience of proletarian capacity. Rather than seeing the "crisis of Marxism" as a chance for singing the praises of political plurality, Badiou seems to grasp in it the possibility of a further singularisation of emancipatory politics. The wager then, is to look for the traits of a new politics of anti-statist emancipation in these mass symptoms, these hysterias of the social. Though it transcends the limits of this paper, it would be fruitful to follow the attempts – ultimately frustrated by the religious and populist sclerosis of the Polish and Iranian situations – made in *Le Perroquet* to track moments of organisational invention and worker capacity in non-Marxist political scenarios. Contrary to post-Marxism, which sees in the rise of "new social movements" a radical-democratic pluralism beyond universalist[28] and communist hypotheses, Badiou's post-Leninism is committed, from the 1980s onwards, to producing a metapolitical framework for thinking the persistence of communism as a minimal, universalising hypothesis even in political scenarios where the name "communism" is anathema.

The requirement that the destruction and recomposition of Marxist politics be internal – which is to say not dictated by its supposed explanatory shortcomings, its political disasters, or novel sociological facts – is motivated by an appraisal of the subjectivity that dominates the post-revolutionary Restoration of the virtues of liberalism and parliamentary democracy.[29] The peculiarity of the reactive (or renegade) subjects that, from the mid-seventies onwards, publicised the return to liberty on the basis of their own failures lies instead in the fact that they perceived the "crisis of Marxism" simply as the subjective discovery of an objective fact (crystallised by Badiou in the typical utterances: "we tried, it was a catastrophe" and "I fail, therefore I am'): the fact of the impossibility of emancipation. But for Badiou all that these failures and disasters prove is that the opposition to existent society is a "difficult" problem. Just like a mathematician who fails in a proof does not thereby declare as inexistent the problem that proof stemmed from, so a political militant does not make failure into either a necessity or a virtue: "So that what is presented to us as a conjoined progress of morality (liberating us from the totalitarian phantasm) and of realism (seeing the objective virtues of the existent state of things) is in fact a confession of

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27 Another crucial moment is of course to be registered in the death-knell of the sequence begun in the Cultural Revolution. See Bosteels's "Post-Maoism" and Badiou's *Le Monde* editorial on the trial of the Gang of Four, "The Triumphant Restoration", trans. Alberto Toscano, *positions: east asia cultures critique* vol. 13, No. 3, 2005, pp. 659-62.

28 See, for instance, this characteristic pronouncement: "The discourse of radical democracy is no longer the discourse of the universal; the epistemological niche from which "universal" classes and subjects spoke had been eradicated, and it has been replaced by a polyphony of voices, each of which constructs its own irreducible discursive identity. This point is decisive: there is no radical and plural democracy without renouncing the discourse of the universal and its implicit assumption of a privileged point of access to "the truth", which can be reached only by a limited number of subjects." *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 191.

29 Badiou's condemnation of the past two decades as a new post-revolutionary "Restoration" is summed up in *Le siécle*, Paris: Seuil, 2005.

incapacity. The essence of reneging is incompetence".[30] Badiou here intervenes directly in the anti-Marxist philosophy of the Restoration, which sees the defence of the "negative liberties" at the heart of parliamentary democracy (or capitalist parliamentarianism, as he will later dub it). He repeats the idea of a termination of the Marxist-Leninist sequence, of its arrangement of certain political factors,[31] but, crucially, contends that we cannot disregard the fact that antagonism to the status quo is still at the heart of any politics of emancipation and that a return to the Enlightenment thematic of liberty is simply insufficient, since the question of equality, which determines "a *current* stage of the political question", cannot be evaded.

The question, in the legacy and destruction of what he dubs the Marxist/Leninist "montage", is how to practice, under the conditions of a non-despotic State, a politics whose axiom is equality: a contemporary politics beyond the modern debate between the State of right and law (parliamentary constitutional liberal democracy) and tyranny. We cannot turn away from "contemporary" politics, initially marked by the entrance of the signifier "worker" into the political field, for the sake of a merely "modern" anti-despotic politics of democracy. Following Badiou's hazardous "de-socialisation" of Marxism, however, equality must not be thought in terms of equality of "material positions" ('economistically'), but in strictly political terms. The maxim of equality becomes the following: "what must the world be such that an inegalitarian statement is impossible within it?" Badiou here draws a crucial difference between the *modern* politics of liberty, which, ever since Saint-Just, functions in a symbolic register, as a form of non-prohibition, and a *contemporary* politics of equality, whose aim is to really make impossible the production of inegalitarian statements (this will remain the chief characteristic of Badiou's later concept of the generic). What is surprising here, especially in terms of the earlier commitment to a communist dialectic of destruction, is the idea of a complementarity between the politics of liberty and the politics of equality, along with the stipulation of the general problem of equality in "times of peace", as detached from the revolutionary problematic of power, war and the state: "under the general conditions of a non-despotic State, how can one think and practice a politics whose overarching philosophical category is equality?'[32] A politics of equality, in this framework, works within the symbolic politics of prohibition for the sake of real-impossible equality. It is as if, albeit "at a distance", Badiou sees the project of emancipation as conditioned to some extent by the apolitical horizon of a liberal polity. This bears two interesting, and problematic consequences. The first is that politics cannot be primarily or directly concerned with the betterment of the polity itself, since "politics must be thinkable as a conjoined excess over the State and civil

30 Alain Badiou, "À bas la société existante! (1)", *Le Perroquet* 69, 1987, p. 2. See also the section in *Peut-on penser la politique?* entitled "The reactive meaning of contemporary anti-Marxism", pp. 48-51.

31 "It is certain that [the Marxist] montage is exhausted. There are no longer socio-political subjects, the revolutionary theme is desubjectivated, History has no objective meaning. All of a sudden, the antagonism of two camps is no longer the right projection for global hostility to existing society". "À bas la société existante! (1)", p. 3.

32 Ibid.

society, even if these are good or excellent".[33]
But the second consequence lies in the implicit suggestion that the politics of emancipation, having rescinded the project of power (in short, the dictatorship of the proletariat) is externally conditioned ('in times of peace') by a kind of liberal frame. Here lies the entire ambiguity of Badiou's later problematic of "politics at a distance from the State'[34] – which both maintains the antagonism against "existing society" and, to an extent, the problem of how to change it, but (perhaps in a simply provisional way) combines this seemingly stark antagonism with the toleration of the symbolic framework provided by the very same society: "We therefore continue to demand modern freedom (symbolic according to non-prohibition) from within which we work towards contemporary equality (real, according to the impossible)".[35] Is this to say that Marxist politics can only persist from within a liberal envelope? Can we "reformulate *from within politics* the synthetic vision of the backwards and nefarious character of our society and its representations" and maintain the "difficult" problem of "changing existing society", if we do not unequivocally pose the problem of the tension between liberty (in the state) and equality (in politics), together with their mediation by issues of power and authority? To put it otherwise, can a post-Leninist radical politics of equality afford to be entirely post-revolutionary?

At times, Badiou's 1980s "expatriation" of Marxism, which already presupposes a distance between Marxist politics and the Marxist critique of political economy, seems entirely to dissolve any consistency characterising the Marxist project, casting doubt on the very possibility of holding onto the term Marxism. After all, won't Badiou, in *Metapolitics*, peremptorily declare that "*Marxism doesn't exist*",[36] in the sense that its political instances – its "historical modes" to use Sylvain Lazarus's terminology – are absolutely inconsistent? And yet, throughout the 1980s, prior to the publication of *Being and Event*, Badiou seems to maintain the liminal validity of the notion of "Marxist politics", at least in the sense that it is only by rigorously undergoing its destruction (and not its ironic deconstruction) that a new politics of emancipation will be "recomposed". What is at stake in this retention, *in extremis*, of the name of Marxism (or of "Marxist politics')? If anything, the Anglophone vogue for post-Marxism was driven by a rejection of the articulation between social class and revolutionary politics, which reduced the idea

3 3 *Peut-on penser la politique?*, p. 20.

3 4 *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Barker, London: Verso, 2005, pp. 150-1. It is worth noting that Badiou does maintain that this thematic of distance is not simply placed "after" historical communism, but is intrinsically post-Leninist. In an interview following the publication of *Being and Event*, he declares that his "horizon remains that of the withering away of the State" and is driven by the attempt to generate an "intra-popular democratic process". See Alain Badiou, "L'être, l'événement, la militance" (interview with Nicole-Édith Thévenin), *Futur Antérieur* 8, 1991, available at: <http://multitudes.samizdat.net/L-etre-l-evenement-la-militance.html>. But this withering away is detached from the question of taking power, as the state is transformed into a non-political referent in the field of politics, so that an intra-popular process does not issue into a Leninist notion of proletarian democracy, which would require not a distance from, but the *smashing* of the State.

3 5 "À bas la société existante! (1)", p. 3. In the French revolutionary triad, equality always maintains precedence for Badiou. As "the authority of the Same", it trumps freedom (which is too close to opinion) and fraternity (which flirts too much with the substance of community). In brief, the virtue of equality lies in its abstraction – the very abstraction that Badiou will describe in terms of a prescriptive axiom of equality. See "Philosophie et politique", in *Conditions*, Paris: Seuil, 1991, p. 248.

3 6 *Metapolitics*, p. 58.

of the proletariat to a mere contested and hegemonically posited identity among others. Once again, despite surface similarities, the move beyond class operated by Badiou and his cohorts is based on an intra-political and historical judgment, i.e. on the idea of a lost efficacy of the "classist" mode of politics (dominated by the category of contradiction, and the transitivity between society and politics).[37] This also why Badiou declares that there are more things in the crisis of Marxism than anti-Marxism can dream of – in the main because anti-Marxism merely registers an objective crisis without being able to think through its primary, subjective aspect.[38] This means, on the one hand, that an orthodox defence of Marxism comes down to repeating the old refutation of old objections, therefore remaining on the terrain of anti-Marxism, and, on the other, that the crisis must be experienced not as a way of merely pluralising or dissolving Marxism, but as an opportunity to radicalise its emancipatory, egalitarian core.[39] This radicalisation or purification of Marxism into a minimal, heterodox Marxist politics (what Badiou has elsewhere referred to as a communism of singularities), is all the more interesting to us inasmuch as it explicitly wards off the possibility of a post-Marxist turn. For whilst Badiou and his comrades appear definite about the end of the working class as a *socio-political* class (making no such claims for the end of social class per se), they are equally definite that no emancipatory politics can bypass workers.

This plea for a minimal Marxism can be observed in two steps. The first involves what Badiou, explicitly harking back to the Kant of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, calls a "refutation of idealism". If Marxist politics is detached from the social as the "places of bonds" [*les lieux des liens*], what prevents the kind of idealist pluralism according to which any site and any subject, unbound from the requirements of transitivity with an ordered and ontologically grounded social structure, can be the locus of emancipation? Badiou is very aware that having abandoned a dialectics of social latency and political subjectivation he cannot depend on the "substantial presupposition" of a political privilege of workers. And yet, he knows that a "maximal" interpretation of his political axiomatic could lead to declaring the emergence of a political subject to be possible at any point. To counter this prospect, Badiou engages in a minimal inscription of the egalitarian wager-intervention on an event, in what he calls "pre-political situations".[40] Whilst this minimal, anticipatory interregnum between the social and politics does not allow a pre-emptive *construction* of political subjectivity (e.g. the party of the working class), it allows, by analogy with Kant, a merely negative *reductio ad absurdum* of the maximal claim of political contingency (any subjects, anywhere). Forbidding himself any substantive resort to

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37 See Sylvain Lazarus, "Dans quel temps de la politique sommes nous? (éditorial)", *Le Journal Politique* 2, March 2005, available at: <http://www.orgapoli.net/article.php3?id|article=5 7>. This theme of "classism" is dealt with in numerous interventions in *Le Perroquet*, its successor publication *La Distance politique*, and now in *Le Journal politique*.

38 *Peut-on penser la politique?*, p. 51.

39 Which is why Badiou declares, paradoxically, that "the contemporary being of what will articulate the new figure of politics, and which will still be able to call itself "Marxism" in being able to continue the emancipatory hypothesis, is nothing other than the complete thinking of its destruction" (ibid.). Badiou can say this to the extent that Marxism has always been for him synonymous with political militancy and not social analysis; it is not a doctrine, but "the life of a hypothesis", and this life can take the form of a protracted process of destruction and recomposition.

40 "I call *pre-political situation* a complex of facts and statements in which the collective involvement of worker and popular singularities is felt, and in which the failure of the regime of the One is discernable". *Peut-on penser la politique?*, p. 76.

social ontology, Badiou nevertheless wants to argue that to elude "worker singularities" in the formation of a political subject would be to suppose that a politics of emancipation could deploy itself without including in its trajectory any of the places or points where the *dominated* are the majority of the inhabitants. Whence the following "theorem":

> Political intervention under current conditions, i.e. modern politics, cannot strategically avoid being faithful to events, whose site is worker or popular. Let us suppose that it can. Since the axiomatic hypothesis is that of a politics of emancipation, that is, of a non-statist subjective politics under the aegis of non-domination, it would follow that this politics could deploy itself without ever including in its immediate field places where the mass (whatever its number) of the dominated – in modern conditions – materially exists, i.e. in factories, in the estates in the banlieues, in immigrant housing, in the offices of repetitive IT work. Especially if we consider factories, the exception would be radical, since we can easily establish that factories are separated from civil society and from the moderating laws that sustain its social relations. According to this supposition, the politics of non-domination would only exist, for the dominated themselves, in the form of representation, since no event giving rise to an intervention would include them in terms of its site.[41]

The point is not simply that an emancipatory politics must include the lowest rungs, the excluded, the oppressed, but that they and their "site" must be directly involved – in other words "presented" – by the emergent political subject. Otherwise, we remain at the level of the State, or, in Badiou's politico-philosophical terms, of representation. So this refutation of idealism does not simply attack (or literally reduce to absurdity) the "new social movements" ideology according to which emancipation may take place anywhere, anytime, by anyone. It also undermines any Left (or even Marxist) notion that the dominated may be *represented* in a political *programme* without partaking of political action themselves.[42]

It is moving from this idea of a pre-political "site", and warding off both an idealist pluralism and any kind of "speculative leftism",[43] that Badiou will give a

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41 *Peut-on penser la politique?*, pp. 81-2.

42 In this sense, though Wood's arguments, levied against post-Marxism, regarding the evacuation of power and exploitation from its political horizon might be thrown at Badiou, the latter is certainly immune to the devastating conjunctural charge made by Wood against the post-Marxists, or new "true" socialists, to wit: that their "deconstruction" of Marxist metaphysics is functional to an option for ideological battles and alliances focalised around electoral contests, and "the logic of their argument is an electoralist logic" (*The Retreat from Class*, p. 190). While post-Marxism, with its open sympathies for Austro-Marxism and the second International, signals a definite, if particularly elliptical, option for reform over revolution, Badiou's "Marxist politics" of the 1980s – and, we could argue, his current thinking and practice – appears entirely indifferent to this alternative. However, such a stance is founded on a drastic separation from the idea of a political "programme" (as a mediation between subjective will and objective transformation) which would render his position deeply inimical to the likes of Wood.

43 See Bruno Bosteels, "The Speculative Left", *South Atlantic Quarterly* 104, 4, 2005, pp. 751-67. All of Bosteels' work, and especially his forthcoming book *Badiou and Politics* (Duke University Press), should be consulted for further insights into the questions sketched out in this paper. See also, for background and analysis, Peter Hallward's chapter on politics in *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004, as well as his important article on "The Politics of Prescription" in the same issue of SAQ.

metaontological solution to these problems of Marxist politics in *Being and Event*. Starting from the intuition of a *reductio ad absurdum* of anti-worker political idealism, Badiou initially develops his theory of the event-site – a crucial component of his mature philosophy – in terms of the *factory* and of the worker as the subjective figure of politics. This is the second step, as it were, in the argument for a Marxist politics that would be capable of following its own metaphysical destruction. In "The Factory as Event-Site", a text published in *Le Perroquet* in 1987 and originally intended for inclusion in *Being and Event*, we encounter both a potent distillate of Badiou's overall doctrine and his last explicit attempt to defend, in however minimal a fashion, a notion of Marxist politics.[44] That article's argument is philosophically far more intricate and challenging than the prescriptive and axiomatic positions rehearsed hitherto, showing a speculative daring far greater than the clever repetition of Kant's refutation. In a sense, what my own presentation has sought to do is to demonstrate the internal theoretical and political necessity leading to this work on the event-site and, in so doing, to show how Badiou's intimate confrontation with Marxism is at the very foundation (albeit a vanishing one, since he eventually chose to omit this "example') of the project crystallised in *Being and Event*. A closer investigation of the links between "The Factory as Event-Site" and Badiou's further work should of course be carried out, but for the purposes of this paper, I would simply like to indicate the work that the concept of the event-site does in Badiou's attempt to maintain a minimal, liminal Marxism.

Far more than any of the other texts in *Le Perroquet*, this excised fragment of *Being and Event* pleads for a return to Marx (and Engels) that would even seem to bypass the post-Leninist reference. In "The Factory as Event-Site" Badiou puts his metaontological and metapolitical investigation under the aegis of two conceptual inheritances of the Marxian thinking of worker politics, which the attempt to "recompose" a Marxist politics seeks to weave together. These are *the void*, which in the Marxist apparatus is connected to the peculiarity of the proletarian (having nothing to sell but his labour-power, the proletarian is the bearer of a generic capacity), and *the site*, which Badiou links to Engels's inquiries into the localised conditions whereby exploitation is organised and countered. In a pithy declaration, Badiou will define his philosophical undertaking precisely in terms of a different articulation, a different dialectic, of these two terms, one that moves beyond the "fictions" of orthodox Marxism: "at the very heart of the objectivist version of the necessity of a worker reference, we encounter two terms, the void and the site, which as we will see only acquire their full meaning once we decentre toward the subjective the vision of politics".[45] Without entering into the details of Badiou's exposition, we should note that in asserting that a political event can only take place if it takes into account the factory as event-site, Badiou aims to provide a kind of minimal objectivity (i.e. another refutation of idealism) *without* making the intervention of politics and of political subjectivation transitive to a socio-economic datum. As he puts it: "The paradoxical statement I am

44   "L'usine comme site événementiel", *Le Perroquet* 62-63, pp. 1 and 4-6.

45 Ibid.

defending is finally that the factory, by which I mean the factory as a workers" place, belongs without doubt to the socio-historical presentation (it is counted-as-one within it), but not the workers, to the extent that they belong to the factory. So that the factory – as a workers" place – is not *included* in society, and the workers (of a factory) do not form a pertinent "part", available for State counting.'[46] This is the sense in which the factory is not the hidden abode of a production that could be reappropriated and disalienated, but a pre-political site "at the edge of the void" (of the unpresented fact of domination), into which politics can intervene. The correlate of this notion is that the (proletarian) void itself is detached from an expressive logic of (dis)alienation and rearticulated to the notion of a production of the Same, a production of communism no longer immanently bound to a communism of production.[47] It is on the basis of the speculative trajectory laid out in "The Factory as Event-Site" that Badiou can then reassert his (contorted, heterodox, errant) fidelity to Marxism:

> Reduced to its bare bones, Marxism is jointly the hypothesis of a politics of non-domination – a politics subtracted from the statist count of the count – and the designation of the most significant event sites of modernity, those whose singularity is maximal, which are worker sites. From this twofold gesture there follows that the intervening and organised experimentation of the hypothesis must ceaselessly prepare itself for the consideration of these sites, and that the worker reference is a feature of politics, without which one has already given up subtracting oneself from the State count. That is the reason why it remains legitimate to call oneself a Marxist, if one maintains that politics is possible.[48]

To the extent that Badiou's subsequent work remains more or less wholly consistent with the research programme of this 1987 article, we could consequently hazard to read it as an attempt to think Marxism "reduced to its bare bones".

Inasmuch as the above has added some intelligibility to the vicissitudes of Badiou's (meta)political thinking, its leave-taking from Marxism-Leninism and its (re)commencement of Marxism, I hope it has also given rise to certain perplexities which can be made to resonate with the rest of Badiou's work and its ongoing political interpretations. Simply by way of conclusion, I would like to touch on two problems that are especially acute in this phase of Badiou's production.

The first concerns the manner in which Badiou remains faithful to a certain intuition of Marx's about proletarian subjectivity and its political dynamics. Badiou, after all, defines the continuity-in-separation between the Marxian legacy and his (re)commencement as follows: "we (re)formulate the hypothesis of a proletarian political capacity".[49] However, the refutation of idealism and maintenance of the "worker reference" in other texts seems to demand the evacuation of any pre-political subjective privilege to workers per se (politics must touch on their sites, but they are

4 6 Ibid.

4 7 On these terms, and many of the issues having to do with the shifts in Badiou's thinking, see my article in *Prelom* No. 6/7.

4 8 "L'usine comme site événementiel".

4 9 "La figure du (re)commencement", p. 8.

not latent political subjects qua workers). Can the void of the situation be equated with a political capacity? And if this capacity is only the retroactive effect of a post-evental intervention (the politicisation of the factory axiomatically determines that "workers think') is the term "capacity" really viable, considering its inescapable links to notions of disposition and potential and to the theory of (dis)alienation? I would suggest that Badiou's philosophical conceptualisation of the concept of the generic in *Being and Event* may be read as an attempt to transcend what appear to be tensions in his earlier "Marxist politics" by maintaining the link between the void, equality and the subject without relying on any latency whatsoever.[50]

The second problem is connected to the sources, as it were, of emancipatory politics. Badiou obviously wishes to purify and politicise the concept of equality, sever its dependence on merely material criteria. But, in his allergy to the socialising fictions of orthodox Marxism, he seems to step back from contemporary criteria of politics to merely modern ones by framing his entire vision of Marxist politics in terms of the politico-philosophical concepts of exclusion, domination and representation. In a manner which is perhaps most obvious in the section on the "ontology of the site" in "The Factory as Event-Site", Badiou seems to deny the possibility that the concept of *exploitation* may be an uncircumventable touchstone of any *contemporary* politics. As I've suggested elsewhere, the difference between a politics at a distance from the state and a politics against capital might lie in the fact that the latter cannot be encompassed by the question of representation, inasmuch as capitalist power, while reliant on mechanisms of representation, also works "directly" on singularities themselves, in ways that cannot be easily mapped in terms of exclusion, invisibility or domination.[51] This is precisely what is at stake in the vicissitudes of the concept of value in the critique of political economy, a concept which I would suggest cannot be easily harnessed by the logic of re/presentation. The resulting (and rather formidable) challenge would be to combine the immediate politicisation of exploitation that characterises Marx's own work,[52] with some of the metaontological and metapolitical tools provided by texts such as "The Factory as Event-Site". A traversal of the logic of exploitation and its effects on our thinking of political subjectivity would also allow us to ward off the possibility of an "aristocratic" solution, distantly reminiscent of Hannah Arendt's republican and councilist advocacy of the autonomy of politics against the disastrous impingements of the "social question".[53] This would of course force us to face head on one of the

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50 At the same time, I think that Badiou's farewell to political anthropology may be somewhat premature. For an initial statement of this problem, see Nina Power and Alberto Toscano, "Think, Pig!: An Introduction to Badiou's Beckett", in Alain Badiou, *On Beckett*, Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2003. See also Nina Power, "What is Generic Humanity?: Badiou and Feuerbach", *Subject Matters* vol. 2, No. 1, 2005, pp. 35-46.

51 See "From the State to the World?: Badiou and Anti-capitalism", *Communication and Cognition* vol. 37, No. 3/4, 2004, pp. 199-224, also available at: <http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/csisp/papers/toscano|stateToWorld.pdf>.

52 See Kouvelakis, op. cit., as well as Massimiliano Tomba's "Differentials of Surplus-Value", *Historical Materialism* (forthcoming).

53 Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, London: Penguin, 1963, chapter 6: "The Revolutionary Tradition and its Lost Treasure".

most arresting questions raised by Badiou's "expatriation" of Marxism: is contemporary politics (the politics of positive equality) compatible with the continuation of modern, statist politics (the politics of negative freedom)? Or must it risk being "anti-modern", and work on equality not just at a distance from, but *against* the State? This is not to suggest that Marx, like a political Odysseus, may soon be repatriated, and that we, faithful Penelopes warding off our post-Marxist suitors, can finally recognise him under unfamiliar garb. More modestly, let us suggest that Badiou's connection between the expatriation of Marxism and the (re)commencement of a Marxist politics is a salutary alternative to the quarrels between the antiquarians and the renegades, as well as a unique philosophical platform from which to (re)think Marx's politics.

KAPITAL

THE FACTORY AS EVENT SITE

Alain Badiou

The analytical and objective conception determines the necessity of this reference through the compactness of the social bond, which is inferred in turn from the position of the exploited. But the approach is more convoluted than may at first appear. A subtle analytic (that of Marx himself, for example) clearly shows that from the mechanism of exploitation – the extortion of surplus-value – one can at first only draw the competition of workers on the market of labour-power, and by no means an immediately representable bond. Now, were this unbinding of competition stable, it would align – for those who think politics in the form of the bond and social consistencies, of "objective subjects" – the workers with the peasants, whose multiple-juxtaposition and egotism led Marx, as we know, to deem them incapable of generating an independent political force. What destabilises the competition between workers and unifies the class under a possible political representation? Truth be told, there are two responses to this question. The first (that of the *1844 Manuscripts*) draws its argument from the *void*, directly subsumed by the generic being of workers, since the latter possess nothing but a saleable abstraction, labour-power. The second (the one belonging, rather, to Engels) argues on the basis of the characteristics of industrial labour: concentration of human masses, military discipline, and so on. This time it's the constrained bond, the organisation of labour, that is the mode in which "the dead (the mechanical and despotic arrangement) grasps the living (worker's labour)" that is inverted into a bond which is simultaneously free and rigorous: the syndicalism of demands, followed by the representative party.

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Kapital, edited by Eda Čufer and Irwin, 1991

If the first response draw its authority from the abstract characteristics of workers" alienation, and thus refers back to the Great Logic of the socio-historical presentation of capitalism, the second is instead a empirical description of a characteristic place internal to this situation, that is *the factory*. Marxism thus joins a global representation of workers" political positivity – it is because they are *nothing* that they are capable of organising *everything* – to a local register – it is because there exists within the social presentation this singular and separated multiple that is the factory, that there is the possibility of the workers" one in politics.

Thus, at the very heart of the objectivist version of the necessity of a worker reference, we encounter two terms, the void and the site, which as we will see only find their full sense once we decentre toward the subjective the vision of politics.

A THESIS

Letting myself be guided by these two finds of classical Marxism, the void and the factory, I propose the following thesis: in modern historical presentation, *the factory is the event par excellence, the paradigm of the multiple at the edge of the void.*

Before making this thesis explicit, allow me some remarks on its status.

1. The thesis is in a certain regard *objective*, since it characterises the factory, not as the privileged place of a subjective political activity, but as a site, that is a as a particular form of the multiple in situation.

2. It is a thesis that affects the global signification of the worker reference (politics cannot disentangle itself from factories), and which thus avoids passing through the constitution of a global subject (the class).

3. It is a thesis that does not directly link workers to politics. In fact, to say that the factory is an event site in no way prescribes that there necessarily, or predictably, are factory events. One simply says that there *can* be. And, even more importantly, an event is not as such political: it is only qualified as such through the retroaction of a conditioned intervention.

4. Therefore, it is a thesis that says the following: the factory and the workers delimit, within our situations, a possibility that there arise that on the basis of which politics can exist.

5. The maximal form of the thesis is instead its converse: there can only be politics to the extent that is capable of intervening on the – uncertain but possible – events of which the factory is the site.

6. The thesis does not in any sense say that workers are "political". It says that they are *inevitable for politics*.

A site is, in a situation, a multiple "at the edge of the void" in the sense that, though it is presented and counted as one in the situation, none of its terms is, itself, presented in a separate manner. Such a multiple is therefore absolutely singular, because it is impossible to consider it as a *part* and, consequently, the State does not count it as one.

The paradoxical statement I am defending is finally that the factory, by which I mean the factory as a workers" place, belongs without doubt to the socio-historical presentation (it is counted-as-one within it), but not the workers, to the extent that they belong to the factory. So that the factory – as a workers" place – is not *included* in society, and the workers (of a factory) do not form a pertinent "part", available for State counting.

EXCRESCENCES: COMPANY AND UNIONISM, VERSUS FACTORIES AND WORKERS

This fact – as I will argue below – is masked today, for two main reasons.

The first is that if the factory is not counted by the State, its unification, that is, the multiple of which the factory is the sole element, is, itself, perfectly counted. There is even, in order to designate this singleton of the worker-multiple that is the factory, a special name, which is the *company*. In our view, however, it is the case that this term *serves to hide a singularity beneath an excrescence*. That's because if the factory is effectively presented, though its workers are not as such, the "company" isn't: it is a pure re-presentation, a term of the State. In this excrescence, the workers, which the factory still presents, albeit at the edge of the void, are absolutely unpresented. That's because the company has *only one* element, which is the factory, and this unification is accomplished when, in the final analysis, the designation by the State of the one of this unicity, takes the explicit form of the "company head". The "company head" is less a person than that by which the State, which does not designate, as a part, the multiples presented by the one-multiple that is the factory, re-presents their unpresentation in the guise of a singleton.

The second modern dissimulation of what the factory presents of unpresentable workers is unionism.

Unionism presents itself specifically as a worker *representation* in the place of work. It is through unionism that the fact that workers are unpresentable is occulted, since unionism associates the fiction of a bond to the factory-multiple. For the State, and in the collective representation it induces, the worker-multiple that the factory counts as one is presented, *because it is represented* by the unions. This is to forget that representation does not necessarily induce presentation, since there are parts which are not elements, inclusion being in excess over appearance. The union bond is without doubt that of a part, to with the wage demand of which the union negotiators are the bearers guaranteed by the state meta-structure. However, there is no reason to consider this part, in other words the totalisation of demands ('legitimate demands'), as a presentation of the real terms of the worker multiple of the factory. Even if *all* the workers were unionised it would not follow that thus represented, they are presented *as workers*, that is in the effectivity of their belonging to the factory. Between the representational theme of union freedom within the factory and the presentational theme which is that of workers" freedom, there is an abyss – that of the separation of the State – an abyss that no matter what workers" revolt immediately elicits, through the conflict that it inevitably engenders between itself and the union apparatuses.

In truth, unionism, as a particular piece of the dispositif of the parliamentary State count, that is of the count in the "Western" historical presentation, is an excrescence. Its link to the factory is that of the artifice of a representation, which comes to complete the one designate, as a singleton, by the company head. The absolutely singular character of workers" belonging to the factory is rendered invisible through the legal superimposition of a representative excrescence.

The bulk of "politicians" who refer to workers hold that the factory is disposed *for* politics by union representation. To which classic reactionaries object that unions must not be "politicised". This debate becomes obsolete as soon as one shows that unionism cannot politically designate the worker reference because it is of the order of the State – of the counting of parts – and therefore it *operates* the disappearance of the factory as event site, that is of worker unpresentation as the feature of the factory-multiple. Neither in the version of unionism as "political education", nor in that of unionism as the pure instrument of wage negotiation can one find the least index of a political reference to the factory. The dispute bears entirely on the State, the ones wishing to deploy within it their own personnel (that it may be socially composed of workers doesn't change a thing), the others wanting to maintain the representative monopoly of the company head. The parliamentary rule is to cut the pear in half. But since in any case the State is itself by no means a political reality – even if it plays an important role in the field of politics – the conflict under consideration will never involve the workers in their articulation to politics.

Thus the included-singleton of the company, like the multiple-inclusion of unionism occult, in accordance with representation, the enigma of workers" presentation.

ONTOLOGY OF THE SITE

Let us then come back to the site itself.

1. In the factory, workers are not considered as subjects, but as forces. Consequently, they are not presented as such, but only in accordance with their abstract articulation to the productive assemblage. Labour-power is not a presentation, it is a particular piece of the one-of-the-factory. It *subtracts* the presentation of the worker-multiple to the profit of the factory as a productive unit. Thus, the only criterion which globally qualifies labour-power, which is productivity, is entirely extrinsic to the worker-multiple, because it only designates him – at the edge of the void – according to the presentation of the term factory, as an non-decomposable unit in presentation.

2. Every worker is substitutable, or dispensable, which would not be the case were he presented. The layoff, a characteristic operation of the factory, even when it does not take place, designates worker unpresentation from the vantage of the one of the factory. A man has squandered his life and health on the assembly line, he is forty years old

and is thrown out with no other requisite other than that of productive modernisation. How is this possible? It is obviously because, from the point of view of the situation such as it presents the factory, this worker *does not exist*. In particular, modernisation, a phenomenon which affects in general the presented existence of the factory in the situation, is not concerned with him in the least. What is re-presented is at most the *singleton* of the worker – himself as unicity, that this the non-consideration of the *multiple* that he is (his life, his family, his country, and so on). This abstract set (this excrescence) which is represented but not presented, enters into statistics: a certain quantity of layoffs are necessary. What is numbered here is not a presented worker multiple, it is a collection of undifferentiated unifications.

3. Whomsoever is in civil society is presented, since presentation defines sociality as such. But the factory is precisely separated from society, by walls, security guards, hierarchies, schedules, machinic assemblages. That is because its norm, productivity, is entirely different from general social presentation. The similarity between the factory order and the military order has long been highlighted. The profound reason for this is that in both cases presentation is annulled through the sole count of substitutable singletons. A soldier is always unknown, because he is a recruit of death. Equally, to enter into the factory is to enter into unpresentation. From the point of view of the factory, a worker too is always unknown.

4. The very idea of workers" political capacity is contrary to the essence of the factory. The factory is *essentially* a non-political place, whether its workers are politicised or not. That is because politics is in complete and utter contradiction to the regime of productivity. Politics is the opposite of industrial work, precisely because it is itself work, a refined creation that requires the interruption of the other work. Politics is the work of presentation, and cannot be satisfied with the unpresentable but to the extent that the presentation of this unpresentable avers the void as the being of the situation.

But at this point what is required is the interruptive capacity of the event.

THE FACTORY EVENT

Let us say it plainly: if the factory is the paradigmatic event site of our societies, it is because the event within it is strictly speaking impossible without the collapse of the site as one. The factory event, since it makes exist the very thing whose inexistence sustains the one-of-the-factory, that is the workers. The factory is this exceptional place in which the charge of singularity is such that to even partially deploy it within presentation one ravages the count, in the irruption of the void which the count exiled and whose errancy it simultaneously concentrated.

A factory event is, in a particularly blunt manner, the supernumerary multiple which is composed, beyond itself, as an incalculable trait-of-the-one, of these unknown multiples which before it only stood as indifferent unifications: the workers.

The fact that modern politics cannot avoid the worker reference is grounded neither on the working class as a structural term, nor even on the workers" movement as a historic term. It is simply a question of acknowledging that the factory is an event site, and that by ignoring it, any politics would thereby allow to subsist a zone of complete unpresentation, thus reproducing in its own terms the general regime of the State.

The only place from which can originate a consistency subtracted from the reign of State re-assurance are singular, or absolutely singular, multiplicities, and therefore the site, because it is only there that the presented term, not being *included* in the situation, does not see its *belonging* over-determined by the count of the count, by the State meta-structure. What's more, the intervening capacity of politics can only sound out and interpret the unpresentable, and hold itself on the edge of the void, to the extent that the event disposes, as a trait-of-the-one, as an illegal and supernumerary signifier, the multiple of the terms of its site. It is therefore excluded that a politics can target the subtractive character of modern situations while excluding from its field these major event sites which are factories. That is no where the origin of politics lies, but it is certainly its testing ground. And factory events, being that through which workers are averred *in their unpresentation*, are necessarily mediators of contemporary political consistency.

Now, I maintain that this is what Marx was the first to perceive, at a time when factories were in fact seldom counted in the general historical presentation. The vast analytic constructions of *Capital* are the retroactive foundation of what for him was a pre-predicative evidence: that modern politics could not be formulated, even as a hypothesis, otherwise than by proposing an interpretation-in-subject of these astounding hysterias of the social in which workers named the hidden void of the capitalist situation, by naming their own unpresentation.

Reduced to its bare bones, Marxism is jointly the hypothesis of a politics of non-domination – a politics subtracted from the statist count of the count – and the designation of the most significant event sites of modernity, those whose singularity is maximal, which are worker sites. From this twofold gesture there follows that the intervening and organised experimentation of the hypothesis must ceaselessly prepare itself for the consideration of these sites, and that the worker reference is a characteristic of politics, without which one has *already* given up subtracting oneself from the State count.

That is the reason why it remains legitimate to call oneself a Marxist, if one maintains that politics is possible.

THIRTY WAYS OF EASILY RECOGNISING an OLD-MARXIST

Georges Peyrol
(a.k.a. Alain Badiou)

1. An old-Marxist never speaks of countries, but of "social formations". He does not say "China", or "Senegal" but: "the Chinese social formation, "the Senegalese social formation". Everything is formed, everything is social.

2. The old-Marxist often pronounces this sentence: "the study of the Soviet social formation remains to be undertaken". He thus suspends his judgement about Russian imperialism. The wisdom of doubt.

3. The old-Marxist is painfully tormented by the "social composition" of the working class. It is a study that remains to be undertaken.

4. There is no doubt, however, as to the existence of the "workers" movement". Perhaps it is currently rather discrete. But the old-Marxist is certain: one of these days the "workers' movement" will give us something to talk about.

5. The old-Marxist fears "the stranglehold of the multinationals". The extent of this stranglehold is a study which, in great part, remains to be undertaken.

6. The old-Marxist supports the left against the right. He knows that the left is not perfect: Capital and business put up fierce resistance to it. But "there is nothing else". Besides, with the left, the "workers' movement" has better chances of giving us something to talk about.

7. The old-Marxist is prudent concerning the PCF, its politics, its character. It seems that the PCF is, nevertheless, a "workers' party", or a class party, or a part of the class party, or an opportunistic tendency, but a "well-established" one, of the class, or the class itself, or a class bureaucracy. Its study, obviously, remains to be undertaken.

8. One thing is certain: if the PCF were more democratic, everything would be a lot better.

9. The old-Marxist is often persuaded that if the PCF resembled the (Italian) PCI, the "workers' movement" would be doing a lot better.

10. The old-Marxist knows the (bureaucratic) failings of the unions, but he knows they are indispensable, that they constitute the armature of the "workers' movement". The unions are the organs of the "economic struggle", the first stage of the class struggle, which is in turn the antechamber of the "political struggle", the supreme stage of the class struggle, which is in turn consolidated by the "ideological struggle", which is the hyper-supreme stage of the class struggle, with which the old-Marxist is occupied.

11. The old-Marxist wages the ideological class struggle by defending, in conferences and journals, old-Marxist positions.

12. The old-Marxist studies and edits *Capital* with ceaselessly renewed ardour.

13. The old-Marxist studies factories in terms of the organisation of work. His study leads him to the conclusion that the "workers' movement" must change this organisation, which is outdated. The ageing bosses do not know what to do with this change. Let the unions enlighten them!

14. The old-Marxist is very interested in the CFDT. Firstly, there reigns within it a supremely democratic ambience. Secondly, it accepts as worthy interlocutors some old-Marxists. Thirdly, it is "realist". Fourthly, it venerates above all the "workers' movement", which they call "the movement of the workers", but it could be worse.

15. The old-Marxist thinks there is a "rise in racism". Faced with it, he constructs a clever dam: to make immigrants – at least the good ones, the well-established ones – vote for the left.

16. For the old-Marxist, the University is a very important question. He accepts the heavy burden of its management (in committees and other organs), in order to wage within it the ideological class struggle.

17. For the old-Marxist the key Marxist-concept is "mode of production". Several articulated modes of production make up a social formation. The place in the process of production defines the type of belonging to the social formation. Thus, the old-Marxist is a professor, and he announces it with the modesty of the materialist. One must know what one is talking about, and not extrapolate. The harsh constraint of science.

18. Another study remains to be undertaken: one of the axioms of the old-Marxist is that Marxism does not have a "theory of the modern State". This is a very important cause behind the tribulations of Marxism. Something should be done about it.

19. The old-Marxist has a passion for the Italian "workers' movement" and its thinkers. Italy is his second conceptual homeland.

20. The old-Marxist despises Hegel. He venerates Spinoza.

21. The old-Marxist thinks that in the *Little Red Book* there is 90% of morality and at most, 10% of Marxism.

22. The old-Marxist infinitely analyses "the plans of the bourgeoisie". And equally, the plans of imperialism. He hopes to oppose to them a counter-

plan of the "workers' movement".

~~23.~~ An old-Marxist serenely vituperates the "new philosophers". "Neither new, nor philosophers" says the old-Marxist, he who is a (materialist) philosopher and does not ask himself the question of the new or the old, because scientific Marxism has no wrinkles. At most, some lacunae.

~~24.~~ The old-Marxist has never seen a worker other than a minor union clerk.

~~25.~~ The old-Marxist accords all the required importance to the following point: "the workers' movement" must not cut itself from the petit bourgeoisie. After all, aren't petit bourgeois also "workers"?

~~26.~~ The old-Marxist does not make a song and dance out of the fact that France is an imperialist country, since it pales besides monstrous American imperialism.

~~27.~~ The old-Marxist sets a suspicious eye on the plans of the German bourgeoisie. He uncovers the threat of a "German-American model". He has a lot more tenderness for German pacifists.

~~28.~~ The old-Marxist has a strong tendency to consider that in Poland, one must above all study "the influence of the church".

~~29.~~ The old-Marxist thinks that he is a leftist intellectual, in the sub-section "critical communists".

~~30.~~ The old-Marxist is between thirty and fifty years old. The old-Marxist is rather young.

AFTER THE EVENT:
RATIONALITY AND THE POLITICS OF INVENTION
AN INTERVIEW WITH ALAIN BADIOU

by Radical Politics[1]

RADICAL POLITICS: *Let us begin the interview with a question on the nature of the event in your work. You have vehemently denounced in your work anti-philosophy and its main thesis: the "impenetrability of God's design", and the fundamental "inaccessibility that opens the way to an infinite hermeneutics".[2] On the contrary, a philosophical project needs to be anchored within the intelligible. However, you maintain in your Saint Paul that "The Resurrection ... is not of the historical order, is not demonstrable; it is a pure event, an opening of an epoch, a change in the relations between the possible and the impossible."[3]; in Ethics you declare that what interests you in the figure of Saint Paul, "is the idea that the becoming of a truth, the becoming of a subject, depend entirely on a pure event, which is itself beyond all the predictions and calculations that our understanding is capable of".[4] Could we not say that the event, because it lies beyond our understanding, beyond the order of the demonstrable, is unintelligible? And that our commitment to it, because it requires a "certain kind of special passivity" and a "total abandonment", is, dare we say, religious?*

1 The Radical Politics is a group of students in political theory, based at the University of Essex, UK, whose aim is to carve out a space and a forum in which to talk about politics. It serves as a space defined by a relation of "equality", and is predicated upon a commitment to the creation of this space. It is also a way of coming to terms with contemporary political thought, and of building up an archive of texts and responses produced by students and then disseminated.

2 Quoted in Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, p.28.

3 Badiou, *Saint Paul: La fondation de l'universalisme*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999, p.49.

4 Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward, London: Verson, 2001, p.123.

ALAIN BADIOU: It is imperative to understand that an event is always relative to a situation; it is an event *for* the situation, and not above or outside it. Consequently, when I say that an event is beyond calculation, beyond prediction, this is naturally beyond prediction within the situation of which the event is the supplement, or the added singularity. As such, the event is not in itself unintelligible: it is unintelligible in regard to the means of prediction, of forecast, or of continuity that are those of the situation. But the intelligibility of the event is created in the fidelity to the event. Obviously for the revolutionaries, in the end, the event of "revolution" is intelligible. It is neither a mystery nor is it impenetrable. It is impenetrable only for the conservatism of the previous situation.

What needs to be said, to be more precise on this point, is that an event *creates* the conditions of intelligibility of its situation, and these new conditions of intelligibility are applied, in particular, to itself. Hence, the intelligibility of the event is neither prospective nor calculative; it is rather retroactive. Therefore, even if I sometimes compare the event to a miracle, a grace, etc., these are only metaphors. Undoubtedly, I remain rationalist in my appreciation of the event, and convinced that it is intelligible. Yet, precisely because it is an event, it is only intelligible afterwards, its conditions of intelligibility can never be anticipated.

Consequently, one cannot say that an event is religious, because "religious" always means that something remains unintelligible, that something is *definitely* mysterious: there is something in God's design that remains forever inaccessible. This is not the case of the event. There is an intelligibility of the event, but one that is created, and in many ways this constitutes one of the definitions of fidelity: fidelity is the creation in the future tense of the intelligibility of the event. This is the reason why thinking the intelligibility of the event takes a lot of time and is done in successive sequences. For instance, everybody knows that the true understanding of the Revolution of 1917 took much time – perhaps it is still not complete – but this does not imply that it is a mystery. In sum, when events are constituted, they were not calculable, predictable, and were not part of the previous rationality. One must understand that an event is also the creation of new instruments of rationality.

RP**:** *In this same line of thought, does the event of conversion, itself the product of a certain revelation – even if this should be the revelation of the truthfulness of an event – retain a religious dimension? Is it not, in its essence, somewhat mysterious?*

AB**:** There is certainly a mysterious element that remains present as long as the new conditions of rationality have not been completely deployed. However, this deployment is, in a certain way, infinite. Hence, one can always say that the deployment of these new conditions of rationality is never absolutely complete, and that there subsists in the event, and in our rallying to it, something that is never quite reducible to rationality. This, however, is not *de jure*, but *de facto*. To put it otherwise, *de jure*, nothing is unintelligible; *de facto*, the creation of the rationality can be long and complicated. Especially considering that one does not know the paths of fidelity. Thus building the rationality of an event is itself often obscure and complex.

RP**:** *How unique is the event? We ask this, because there seems to be a tension between the historical examples which you give of evental sequences (1871, 1917, 1968), and your apparent call for a more localized, interventionist politics.*

AB**:** There is indeed a tension here. I think the problem is the following: what goes on when we are in the saturation or the end of a clearly determined political sequence? For instance, I think that the political sequence opened up by the Bolshevik Revolution is now saturated, and that we are not faithful to this event anymore, even though we still refer to it and that we do not reject it. What is going on here? I believe

there are two orientations. The first way is that we remain faithful in an abstract, general way, since the event no longer has a generic reality. In sum, we seek to maintain its principle, which leads to some sort of dogmatic nostalgia.

The other way is to seek a new activation in a way that is extraordinarily local, in extremely precise circumstances, hoping that this filter, that this localisation will allow us to work much more acutely within the perspective of novelty. We will not create novelty, but we will nevertheless disturb things by working locally. In other words, I truly believe that when we are short of events, when we are short of what the events provide us with – during intermediary situations such as we are experiencing nowadays – it is necessary to focus our thoughts and efforts on local experiences, because really, at a global level, we have only lifeless, obsolete ideas; we have ideas that are not sufficiently activated.

> RP : *So on the one hand, we can think the event through its uniqueness; but this would suggest that we cannot be political all the time – that, in following Jacques Rancičre, politics only happens occasionally. On the other, we may say that events are everywhere (as you have sometimes suggested). But does this second option not mean that the exceptionality of our militancy is undermined? Is there not a risk in advancing the idea that we can be militant all the time?*

AB : This is also a tension, this is also a problem. On the one hand, I think that a political sequence is a sequence that creates its rationality from an event, and once this sequence is unable to create this rationality – either because it doesn't know how or because it simply cannot do it – it is empty. We can thus say that when the political fidelity is exhausted, there isn't really a militant figure anymore. On the other hand, when and how do we decide that it is *over*? For in a way, because the process is infinite, it is therefore never over! Thus it can be over, generally over, but not absolutely over. So it is true that on the one hand there is something exceptional in a political commitment; but on the other, there is also a demand to continue; and, granted, this is a tension.

In the end, this is a matter of personal decision, a matter of ethics (as I define it in my book *Ethics*). If I take for example my generation, the complete renunciation to politics always carried with it reactionary consequences. It was not only the cessation of politics, but also the rallying to another politics, the rallying to the politics of the State. This is why I do not want to stop, because I know that if I do this I will be like the others. Now the problem for you is much different. The problem is the following: what experience are you committing yourselves to? What is your experience? This leads to a new form of the creation of rationality.

This is typically an ethical problem in the proper sense of the word. Between the imperative to "keep going!", which is the only categorical imperative of truth, and the conviction that something might truly be over or destitute, there is really a contradiction, and one must decide within this contradiction. There is no general formula. One cannot say: "We can always militate", nor can it be said: "We must always stop when it is over". This is a contradiction that needs to be dealt with in concrete situations, and so there is no general answer to this question.

SIMON CRITCHLEY: *It would be interesting to highlight the differences between your thought and that of Rancičre.*

AB: It seems to me that Rancičre's thought is much more historical than mine. He suggests that there are political and historical moments, and moments that aren't. In the end, he does not determine what the subjects of these moments really are. There is the moment, and the historical analysis of this moment; there is the militant possibility of the moment, and the disappearance of it. All this leads back to a historical objectivity. My conception is quite different since it is subjective, not historical. The important question is that of the creation of a political subject. However, what interests my good friend Rancičre, with whom I always discuss actively but amicably, is the historical conditions of equality. I, on the other hand, ask myself: what is a political truth? So the point of entry into the problem is quite different. Obviously, we sometimes agree. We agree on the central character of the notion of equality, for instance. But the way of treating the issue is not the same. Deep down, the link between history and politics is much more tightly knit in Rancičre than in my own thought.

RP: *Is there not a suggestion of an "initial baptism" – that our first experience of an evental irruption, which forces us radically to reconfigure our whole way of being, remains primary? And if so, would this not compromise the unique and singular character of any subsequent evental sequence? In sum, is not the force of one's later "subjectivations" subordinate to one's original encounter with an event?*

AB: This refers to what I have called, in a recent development of my thought, the *bodies* (*les corps*). I call "bodies" the possible supports of a procedure. Until now I have not developed a theory of bodies, but I am in the process of doing so. This notion of bodies is fairly complicated; it is not only a biological body (a body can be biological, collective, etc.); it is, rather, a set of *possibilities*. The question is the following: can a *single* body support many sequences? Can it be the support of many sequences? Perhaps of many sequences within the same procedure? Surely it is possible for a body to commit itself to both love and politics, but it is not the same body that does so. The bodies are different according to the procedures, so there is no true problem of supporting many procedures simultaneously. But can a body uphold many political events or sequences?

You ask whether there is a first mark, a "birthmark", and if the body is then fixed in this mark. I have no answer to this either, no dogmatic answer at least. I would say however that this is linked to the fact that there is a variability of bodies, that is, all bodies are not identical. To put this in another way, specific political sequences correspond to specific bodies. Let us give an example. In the post-Bolshevik sequence, the fundamental body is the body of the Party. However the body of the Party is not the same body that exists in other political sequences. If we take the French Revolution, the bodies are individual bodies; there are no "Party bodies". This is why it is precisely these individual bodies that we kill, that we execute. The execution symbolises the fact that the political agent – the support – is truly a body.

The question of a body being capable of supporting many sequences is a very complicated one. Personally, I have no demonstration to this effect, although I would tend to answer negatively. In sum, a body can support a determined procedure of truth, and once the body abandons this procedure, it comes undone. Hence, if he begins a new experience, it will be under a new form and with a new body, if I may say so. But the same body is, I believe, *profoundly marked by the baptism of his first event.*

> RP: *Saint Paul tried to "win people over" to the event. But if we have understood you correctly, he was not engaging in what Ernesto Laclau calls a "hegemonic operation". Rather his only aim is to convince people that he speaks in the name of the universality of the event. However, can we say that there is any difference at all between his subjectivation by the event, and the subjectivation of those who hear his words and convert subsequently?*

AB: In principle, there should not be any difference. This is precisely what Saint Paul himself says. Granted that from time to time he claims to be "exceptional". I mention this in my book on Saint Paul. But this is not the true logic. The true logic is: whoever disposes of his body in the new conviction becomes similar, in a certain sense, to everyone else. This is actually the reason why Saint Paul immediately contests hierarchies: he does not go to see the historical apostles, he declares that each and everyone is equal before God, and for him there are no chieftains. In terms of bodies, this means that if a body enters the procedure it is not qualitatively different from others. It is because of this fundamental reason that the operation cannot be described as hegemonic. There truly is an effort made for other bodies to be disposed within the procedure. This is what is sought.

Of course, hierarchies and organisations inevitably follow, but this is the empirical destiny of things. Destiny, in principle, is new bodies having to submit themselves to the procedure in such a way that their submission makes them all the same. We work with this "sameness". If Saint Paul gives much importance to saying that in the end, there are no men or women, no Jews or Greeks, it is for this reason. It is to say: no one, no predicate, no characteristic determines in a differentiated fashion which bodies must enter the procedure. Thus Paul's words have no privilege in reality (there are no privileges in terms of "right"), and this is what I have myself expressed when I say: there is no hero of the event. Obviously, in the imaginary construct, in the narrative, we do encounter a hero of the event. But this is the imaginary, it is not the procedure.

> RP: *You seem to be saying that: "There is no super subject (...). There is a particularity of the situation and the subject is a particular subject". Is this the necessary particularity of the generic? Or can there be more than one subject in a genre? And if so, will we have to prioritise our various intra-generic subjectivities (for example, the tension between one's fidelity to 1917 and 1968)?*

AB: The problem is perhaps the following: fidelity is a sequence, but it also always refers back to representations of previous sequences. So the example you give is very good. There is certainly a very important tension between fidelity to May "68 and fidelity to the Bolshevik Revolution, and perhaps even also to Spartacus and the slave revolt or whatever. So every sequence is recalled from within a determined sequence. Thus you have a tension because the sequence needs to invent its own rationality, it cannot literally copy the previous one. At the same time, it evokes the previous situations and uses them precisely to create its own rationality.

Hence, one cannot be a body for two different sequences, but we are still always using the representations of previous situations. This path is always complicated. In particular, in politics, it is absolutely clear that any new sequence is also, in the creation of its rationality, giving a new meaning to previous sequences. This is practically inevitable. All political sequences simultaneously give a new meaning to previous ones. The most typical example is of course Lenin who, during the Bolshevik Revolution, gives an entirely new meaning to the Paris Commune. The meaning of the Commune was somewhat wavering, so to speak, and at this moment there is a break which opens the possibility for a new meaning. The true contradiction is *between* the impossibility of being a body for two completely different sequences *and* the need to use other sequences.

RP: *Can we ask how we are to think the relation between set theory and language? There seem to be three logical possibilities here: i) that set theoretical categories can be directly expressed in language, ii) that set theoretical categories can be expressed in language, but always only imperfectly so, or iii) that set theoretical categories cannot be expressed in language in any way. We presume that you would reject the last option, but which of the first two is the most accurate, from your perspective? And how does this help us to understand the category of the obscure event?*

AB: I think that the practical hypothesis is the second one. That is to say, it is certainly possible to use or make appear the categories of set theory in virtual language. I think that an indirect use – a use that is metaphorical, natural, but in the end undoubtedly useful and appropriate – is possible. So without a doubt, the second hypothesis. Does this have anything to do with the notion of the obscure event? Absolutely! The question of the obscure event is that of an event that, in a certain way, has yet to have really deployed its retroactive rationality. An obscure event is an event that occurs, that has a sequence, but whose sequence is, for whatever reason, stopped prematurely, saturated too early, or that has been the victim of imperfections of language: the system of names, of "nominating", was not truly efficient. Hence the event remains obscure, and this is certainly linked to the fact that the ontology of the event was never truly realised.

RP: *What is the status of Capitalism in your project? Can we speak of it in terms of an imaginary formation, or do you see it as, in Slavoj Žižek's terms, the real?*

That is to say, is there any connection between what you call, in Saint Paul, the "general equivalent of capitalism" and what you elsewhere call "animality"?

AB: Capitalism is a situation. It is therefore a situation in the double sense of being a certain type of multiplicity, and also a certain type of appearance and of relation, a certain "being-there". In the end, I do not apply to the notion of situation Lacan's fundamental distinctions between the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real. I think they are inadequate. One might say that a situation is imaginary because it contains representations; that it is real because it is a "multiplicity" (in the end, actually, it has a true ontology); you can say that it is symbolic because there is always a state of the situation that presides over the laws of this situation.

So a situation does not fall as such in one of Lacan's categories. I would not say that capitalism is imaginary nor would I say that it is real, and finally, I also would not say that it is symbolic, which could also be a hypothesis. (Capitalism could be the symbolic regime of circulation; this is, after all, a hypothesis that has been advanced.) Rather, I would say that it is a situation, and that from the interior of that situation you can have *relations* to capitalism that are either in the realm of the imaginary, of the real, or of the symbolic.

This situation, at the moment, is more and more considered to be a natural one. This is a very important point, one that Marx had already noticed: although it is a situation, capitalism has a tendency to present itself as natural. This is the connection with the problem of animality: what is the naturality of capitalism? Why does capitalism present itself as natural? In my opinion, it presents itself as natural in a logic that, finally, is the logic of Darwin, that is, the logic of the species. There is no other naturality in capitalism than the naturality of the species, that is to say the logic of competition, of the struggle for life, of accumulation, of power, etc. Hence if capitalism says that it is natural, very well, but *what* nature is this? Capitalism's nature is, evidently, nature in the sense of competition, concentration, of the fact that the weak must disappear, and that they have no particular rights.

It is true that I say that certain capitalistic subjectivities can be animal subjectivities, simply because they present themselves as natural in this sense. What is natural is the fact of exploitation, and that one is the cause of his own weakness. This is not a biological animality; it is an animality in the sense of a certain conception of nature that, in my opinion, is the conception of the struggle for life and unbarred competition. Actually, capitalists agree on this point. When they say that it is natural, they say that, finally, human beings naturally seek profit, competitiveness, rivalry, etc. This is not even polemical. If capitalism is a natural situation, then it is, in the end, a situation that does not truly distinguish between humanity and animality. This is actually one of the reasons why there is extensive discussion, not only on the rights of man, but on the rights of the animal, and that in the end they are equated: we will all be in the same legal space, and this space is in reality the right of exploitation. This space is the right to live, but this right to live is taken in itself in a competitive sense. So you are correct: there is a link between the naturality of capitalism as a situation and the question of animality.

RP**:** *Would you not accept that there is a capitulation, even in your self-consciously anti-capitalistic project, to Jameson's "cultural logic" of late capitalism? This is not simply a question about, for example, one's ontological assumptions, but also about the nature of one's political commitments, embodied, for example, in your prescriptions against, rather than the overthrowing of, the State. (It would be the question that Peter Hallward sometimes refers to, in relation to maintaining the State apparatus in order to make prescriptions against it rather than overthrowing it.)*

AB**:** This question seems to pertain to the withering away of the State; it is thus a question of situation. What can we do today? What must we do today? This is not an ontological question. Fundamentally, I remain convinced, ideally and strategically, that the existence of the State is a limitation of human existence. More precisely, we are speaking of the State in a political sense. There will always be the state of the situation: "state" in the true sense of the situation is not necessarily a State in the sense of "State bureaucracy" – here, I refer to the State in terms of State bureaucracy, in the sense of the monopoly of the police, the army, etc. I continue to think (and so remain a Marxist on this issue) that the State is a limitation of human existence; it is not a positive production – it is perhaps necessary, but it is not positive. At the moment, this idea has no political efficiency because its efficiency in the previous sequence was entirely linked to the idea of revolution. It was the couplet "State and revolution" that mattered. Revolution was a clear concept; it was the concentration of the political forces on the problem of power, on the problem of the State.

Thus you have a coherent set: State, revolution, class; state of class, the organisation of the struggle – especially around the question of the power –, the destruction of the State in power, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and, finally, moving towards the disappearance of the State. It is this set of elements that is saturated. None of the elements of this set is really clear today: neither class in the political sense of the term (class in the social sense certainly remains obvious), nor dictatorship of the proletariat, class, party, etc. Thus the problem is that we cannot think the end of the State. I am all for its disappearance, but we have no political avenues leading us to this outcome because this set is not clear anymore.

Consequently, we must work at a distance from the State. We must make politics independent from it. Basically, this is to emphasise that we cannot work within the logic of the State anymore. With this in mind, we will see what new relations can be thought of in regard to the State itself, its destiny, its disappearance, etc. It truly is a question of situation. I do not believe that the theme of the end of the State is politically active today. I am favourable to such an outcome, but it is an ideology. The most difficult point is to already be in a political subjective independence towards the State. This can be accomplished through local, singular experiences. It cannot be done in a global way anymore.

RP**:** *By distancing ourselves from the State, are we not conceding to the right a space that they may appropriate for themselves?*

AB: Right? Left? Is this distinction still relevant? The first question is what is the Left? Blair? Jospin? Mitterand? When you have to create something political that is not in the space of the State, it is purely a question of the existence of new politics; it is not a question of left or right. In my opinion there is today no politics at all, generally speaking. So it is a question of creation, of invention. And we have to start at the beginning, and the beginning is not within the old politics. What is the old politics? It is a politics about the State, "within" the State, and so on. Left? Right? If we have to struggle against something like the extreme right, we do it naturally. So for the space you speak of, you need to fight. But not within the State itself, because within the State itself there are rules, the rules of the old politics. We know perfectly well that France has a long tradition of treason by the Left. Not only now but for a very long time now. The question is to find a new political axiomatic, not only in abstract terms but as concrete experimentation.

RP: *What is so interesting about your work, is your tireless struggle against the State apparatus(es). Indeed, you have remarked that one of your main aims has been to "outline in the world an imperative that is able to subtract us from the grip of the State." With this in mind, can we connect this to the contradictions constitutive of the "Anti-globalisation" movement? We mention this because the issue of the "State" has been displaced. No longer is it the case that the State is the site of an irreducible antagonism between the "masses" and the "ruling order". Instead, one will often speak of a weak State that either needs to be fully transcended (such is the case with left liberal cosmopolitans, who talk about a "global civil society'), or to be strengthened (pertaining to some nostalgia for "social welfarism'). In light of these remarks, what are your views of existing global struggles against the logic of late capitalism framed under this banner of Anti-globalisation? These discussions are duplicated at the political level. You have reformist groups who would say that there is a need for the restructuring of the IMF and the World Bank. You also have some political demonstrators who are vehemently opposed to globalisation and the prescription, for them, would be to strengthen the State.*

AB: Indeed. We have such movements in France as well. One that seeks to strengthen the State, the national State against globalisation, against European apparatuses and so forth. It is a very old politics; there is nothing new with that. It is very difficult to distinguish between that and LePen, for instance. LePen is also against globalisation, he is a great militant against globalisation!

This is a difficult question. We must start with the contemporary definition of the State. This definition must include the economic apparatus. We must not immediately separate State from economic globalisation. Such a dialectic is wrong. In fact, in the definitions of the different States – that is to say the hegemonic States (American), the intermediary States (European), and the emerging States (Brazil, China) – in the definition of all States, the economic space is present. So there is no true opposition between, on the one side, the autonomy of the State, the reinforcing of the State or the weak State, etc., and on the other economic globalisation. Each

State, therefore, is interior to a general situation. This is not completely new. Even in the past, States were always confronted internally to the question of the *other* States. There were no global politics, and then State politics. Each State was also a very complex system of relations with other States. Beforehand, for instance, the general form was inter-imperialistic competition. Take France and England in the 19th century, we see that there was globalisation. Obviously, the French strategic and colonial policies were completely articulated on the question of the British Empire.

In reality, we need to take the modern definition of the State as being in itself marked by the global development of capitalism, that is, by the existence of a global market. A great prediction by Marx! Marx's observation is much more relevant today than it was in his own life-time. This is a typical example of a scientific prediction that is absolutely remarkable. So I do not think that the problem is at the State and/or globalisation level, but rather in terms of a new form of the State that is situated in an economic set that is part of the State, and that defines certain strategies. More particularly, the strategy of the dominant States (American), or of emerging States that are virtually powerful – such as China, India, and Brazil – and the strategy of intermediary States (the European States), are different strategies. The discussion is open as to how the different States can take strategic decisions in their own context.

An important point is that every State uses propaganda to convince us that all the decisions they take are necessary. Let us take for instance the French government (although the same could be said about the British government). What is the French government saying to us? As the British government before, it is destroying public hospitals, public schools, etc. It follows the British, and follow it will! What is the State explaining? It is explaining that specific policies *must* be implemented. It cannot claim that all this is acceptable, that it is right. So, instead, they claim that such policies are mandatory. But is this truly the case? It is his policy to say that it is necessary, it is the State policy. This is the government's way of situating this State policy in an economical context that is part of State decisions. Therefore, I think that there isn't an opposition at all between the struggle against the capitalist system and the well-defined political struggle against a well-defined State. In my view, it is the same thing.

I find that it is much more efficient to concentrate your forces on concrete State decisions that we know to be decisions taken by people that are *there*, that we can denounce and attack, against whom we have a political space to manoeuvre, rather than organising protests where the great economic leaders are meeting. I am an old Maoist in this respect, and I have retained from Mao this idea: we must control the area from which we are fighting; never go where the adversary gathers. So I have never been interested in going to Seattle, or elsewhere, simply because the economic leaders were present. It is almost as if as soon as the opponent waves his flag somewhere you must immediately meet them. On the contrary, we need a strategy that allows us to create our own space, to develop our own strategies and political decisions. The question of space is fundamental to politics. For example, who decides where to send the forces? Where do you concentrate your forces? And political independence is to be able to choose your own space.

One of the aspects of the anti-globalisation movement that I denounce is its dependency towards the State – if "State" can also be understood as the general economy. This movement depends on the State because it gathers where States gather. This is useless. And to ask for what? What is it going to ask the G8? Here we can organise a protest to demand from Chirac that he changes the law on the *sans-papiers*. But from the G8? What do we demand from them? To change global economic policies? To change capitalism? If this is the case, then it is nothing more than reformism! There is actually a whole branch of this movement that asks for reforms regarding international commerce. This avenue is of no interest at all to me; it is not my problem.

To summarise, I would answer in two ways. Firstly, I believe that opposing local State situations *contra* globalisation is misguided. This is not the true problem; it is not the right direction. Secondly, I think that, today especially, we need to focus our strength precisely on State decisions, because we can measure what is created in this way. At the level of the reformation of global capitalism, on the other hand, we have no real power.

SC: *Isn't there, actually, a difference in the political strategy adopted by the Organisation politique and the anti-globalisation movement? Precisely regarding the question of the locality of the action?*

AB: Absolutely. Just as there is a theoretical contradiction between Negri and Hardt's conceptions and my own work. Their conceptions are, in my view, systemic, and in the end they replace the vitality of the political singularities by a systemic consideration. Why are they systemic? Because in reality, what Negri has always been thinking is that there is a unique constituting power, and that this unique constituting power, that the creativity of capitalism, has the same origin as the creativity of communism. This is why he is the philosophical inheritor of Spinoza. There is only one substance! There is truly only one substance! The substance that creates the capitalist novelties is the same substance that creates resistance to the novelties of capitalism. This is thus an anti-dialectical thought in a very important way; and this is why he attempts to find the point of constituting unity between the figures of oppression and the figures of the resistance.

I am completely alien to this kind of thinking. I am convinced that there are constituted dualities, that a true political strength is absolutely heterogeneous to the militant space. This political strength is not the reverse of the militant space; it is its constituting principle, not its hidden secret. From this point of view I think it is quite important to break with this type of inheritance, and consequently with a certain Foucault – after all, they draw quite a lot from Foucault's work. Foucault is a very complicated thinker, especially in politics, where very few risks were taken. But it is possible to interpret Foucault as someone who says: finally, power and resistance are the same thing. I think this is not the case at all. I think that we only have resistance to the State when it is constituted elsewhere, when it is heterogeneous to the nature of the power. I really believe in the "power of the two", in the power of difference, but a true difference, not false difference, such as thinking that we have a single twisted space, as if resistance was the torsion of power. I am not favourable to this idea. I think that on

this point, between a certain Foucault, Négri, a certain interpretation of Deleuze (even though Deleuze was quite prudent in politics), and the anti-globalisation movement, all of this is a set that, in my opinion, will not create any real political renewal.

In the end, although this movement claims to be radical, I think it is nothing more than reformist. It has no other option than to be reformist, than to ask for a capitalism that is not as fierce. This doesn't create any politics! It creates movements. But it is not the case that if we have movements, we also have politics. This is a very important point. There are innumerable movements that constantly occur; some movements are renewals of political thought, but this is not the same as simply being a movement and nothing more. Negri always speaks of the great creativity of the multitudes (multitude is the new name for masses, let us admit to this), but where have we seen this creativity? It is not because you're protesting at Genoa that there is a creativity of the multitude. I have seen hundreds of these type of protests over the years and can honestly say that there isn't an ounce of creativity in all of this.

Hence, the problem of creativity at this stage is a problem of knowing what creates a political heterogeneity. But to create a political heterogeneity supposes very complicated and very novel principles of rupture. I am not saying that all this is easy, on the contrary. But at least we have this idea: we have this experimental idea of seeing how, on a certain number of issues, in a certain number of spaces, we can finally create political heterogeneity. Here, there is an empirical rule: I think that we can finally create political heterogeneity in continuity only with popular components that are themselves heterogeneous, and that the little civil *bourgeoisie* is not the one that will create by itself such political heterogeneity. The important question of the "ordinary people", the "ordinary workers", the *proletariat*, remains; this is an empirical question, but it is also more than empirical. The anti-globalisation movement is also a movement that is – in old Marxist terms – *bourgeois*. Let us put aside this old vocabulary, but let us also admit that anti-globalisation is not a popular movement. This at least is clear! It is perhaps an ideological movement, which is interesting, but all in all, I think that it remains confined within the categories that are not those of the heterogeneous.

My difference with Negri on this point is almost ontological; it is truly fundamental. It is really the attempt to create from scratch a substantialist, vitalist, and political – homogenous, finally – vision, whose practical form is in fact the movement itself. There is no other practical form than the movement. But the movement does not resolve by itself the questions of politics. Politics is first and foremost the creation of spaces: you must create your space. This, you have well understood.

> RP**:** *In the Manifesto for Philosophy, there is a moment where you say, "philosophy has a responsibility to maintain its sophistic double rather than to remove it". Presumably, there is a connection between that and the ethical injunction to show reserve. Is this a reserve which is relative to a truth procedure, that when one is engaged in a truth procedure one shows reserve? This is no concession to the ethical ideologies, which you criticise.*

AB : The reserve is not a formal reserve, naturally. It is a reserve immanent to a truth procedure. And it is something like the struggle against "ultra-leftists" that is always a sort of radical fidelity, a radical fidelity without any consideration for the situation. So, here there is always the possibility of disaster. Hence, reserve is not a formal principle; it is only a sort of rule for the continuation of the process.

RP : *Recently, you described democracy as something like a prohibition on thought. At other moments however (in last year's Political Theory Conference at the University of Essex for example), you seemed to leave open the possibility of a "true democracy" whose exceptionality we might compare with that of a truth-procedure. One obviously thinks, in this connection, of Jacques Rancičre, for whom the essence of democracy is its interruptive character. Now, in this sense, could we not say that militancy is the bearer of the democratic sensibility?*

AB : I can simply answer: Yes! Fundamentally. Exactly. The question of democracy is a complex one, because in fact there is an anti-democratic tradition which is completely reactionary. So when you are in a sort of connection with reaction and tradition it is a problem. In fact, it is imperative that we criticise the democratic fetish today, rather than capitalism. Let's be honest: nobody really loves capitalism. The subjective propaganda of capitalism is not... capitalism! Capitalism is a so-called "natural necessity", but everybody knows that there is something wrong with it: inequalities, inequities, and so on. So there is no propaganda which is directly about capitalism. It is rather always about democracy. So politically speaking, the question of democracy is much more important. You have to go *from* democracy *to* capitalism and not from capitalism to democracy. And what exactly is a critique of capitalism? Concretely, political intervention is about decisions that are taken in a democratic framework, the legitimacy of which is the true question.

But you have to be really clear about the distinction between your critique of democracy and the critique of reactionary political democracies, the Fascist critique of democracies, and so on. The Communist movement was not at all democratic; it was a movement for the dictatorship of the proletariat, for a new form of State, and cannot be confused with democracy.

The critique of democracy is something rather complicated. It is why sometimes I think that we must distinguish between true democracies and false ones. This is an old problem. I think that finally, in the text about democracy in *Metapolitics*, I say something like democracies are militancy in itself. Democracies are the "real" of politics (*true* democracies). There is nothing political about party politics. You can say that the development of a new political field, the creation of something new, is democratic.

RP : *This question touches on a comment you made earlier in the interview, when you asked "The Left? What Left?" Returning to this issue – one could perhaps say that at the moment, a renaissance of militant political thought seems to be taking place. It is easy for the student to be struck, for example, by the related sets of concerns that play between your work and that of, say,*

Rancičre, Laclau, Žižek, Balibar, etc. In your view, however, is this an accurate depiction of the contemporary intellectual scene, and if so, is this factor of any interest to you? Also, how do you relate to the work of these other authors?

AB: There is certainly a new situation concerning the political question. Let us leave the word "Left" aside for the moment. I think this new situation concerns you much more than it concerns us. Because you know, Rancičre, Laclau, Žižek, Balibar... we are not very young! None of us! All of us are from the Sixties. So the new point is the transmission to the new generation. Here, there is something new. All of us, we can say: there are some people that are asking for something different in political thought, in your generation. Ten, fifteen years ago, there was... nothing. But this is over. Thanks to you! We have continued. But it is true that there is a new situation that is your situation, and your invention. Naturally, you are looking for a transmission of this experience; naturally, in terms of this new situation, we have discussions with those you have quoted. Actually, I think we are like a circus! The political circus! Žižek as the acrobat, Balibar as *Monsieur Loyal*. When I go to Los Angeles, I see there Žižek and Balibar, and I'm in Switzerland with Žižek and Agamben, and so on. We are a small group and quite different one from another, but finally with time we are also in the same process. The differences are always interesting, but it is like the difference between Marx and Feuerbach. In fact, the difference between Rousseau and, after that, Lenin and Trotsky.

Differences are very important, but let us not forget about the value of community. Currently, my relation to these others is one of friendship, of fraternity, and of very intense discussions – discussions, I might add, that are more and more orientated towards you, towards the new generation, in order to transmit both what is common in our work and what is different.

SC: *Who is the intellectual enemy today?*

AB: There is a hierarchy! But for me, the intellectual enemy is certainly not Žižek, Balibar and Rancičre. Discussions are always more heated with your neighbour than with the one who is far away. So there are intense discussions with Rancičre, for example, but I would never say that Rancičre is the enemy, obviously not. Rather, I would say that the enemy is an *ensemble* that is the conservative political philosophy of today, a political philosophy that is pro-parliamentary, pro-capitalist, pro-occidental. In other words, an academic philosophy. There are no clear enemies.

RP: *It is really interesting that you should mention Balibar and Rancičre and yourself because the thread of continuity that binds you together is the Althusserian legacy. In the Sixties, you were all involved in the Althusserian problematic and yet you have taken the project in three different directions. For instance, in Rancičre, Althusser is present in his very absence; there is a complete rejection of the Althusserian legacy. Whereas with Balibar and you there is still something retained from that whole discourse.*

AB: There are different points that I have in common with Althusser. For instance, the question of the definition of philosophy. When Althusser says that

philosophy is without an object, among other things, my definition of philosophy retains something of this. In particular the fact that there is no proper object of philosophy; that philosophy is an act is really something that comes from Althusser. Secondly, despite everything, the importance of science. I have never abandoned science. Rancičre, for example, is not interested at all in science; it is absent from his thought. Althusser however gave a lot of importance to science – not in the same way I did, but he gave it importance, and I have stayed faithful to this. Althusser was also somebody who has asked himself whether there is or is not a political subject. This is a great question of Althuser's. Generally speaking, he has answered in a rather complicated fashion. In his view, there is no historical subject. He did not exactly say that there are no political subjects since there is the subject of the class struggle, and politics is precisely class struggle. However the question of whether there is or is not a political subject is a question that I find very interesting, but not one that interests Rancičre, for instance; and it is one about which Balibar remains somewhat sceptical.

So I have retained many things from Althusser, whom I have also vehemently contested – but for explicit political reasons.

> This interview took place at the University of Essex on 10th of September 2003.
> Along with Professor Alain Badiou, three members of the Radical Politics group were present
> (Tim Appleton, David Payne, and Joël Madore)
> as well as Simon Critchley, Professor at the University of Essex.

Mladen Stilinović, *HE - HE - HE*, 2006

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STATE AND CONTEMPORARY ART

Branimir Stojanović

When deciding on the title of my today's intervention "State and Contemporary Art"[1], I – of course – referred to "State and Revolution", a famous book by Lenin. As you know, "State and Revolution" marked the end of the era of politics. If Lenin's 1913 book "What Is to Be Done" inaugurated the era of political thinking, then "State and Revolution" marked its closure. How did it do that? "State and Revolution" was written at the moment of demise of the Soviet democracy. The Soviet democracy or the system of soviets was an exclusive and today almost completely forgotten episode in the history of politics, a moment when industrial democracy took the center stage. What did this mean? This meant that inside the industry and inside the factories existed organized, parliamentary units which waged political battle over issues of the state's political and industrial progress, and so on. The system of the soviets collapsed. All political groups and parties, including the Bolsheviks, participated in the soviets. The moment of the writing of "State and Revolution" coincides with the end of the soviet era, which is now filed ad acta, and thrown away in the junkyard of history. A true Bolshevik discourse appears for the first time. What is the Bolshevik discourse? It is the majority discourse. The Bolsheviks are, in fact, the majority. Lenin then analyzes the consequences, very grave consequences, of the Bolshevik discourse. If we agree not to understand Bolshevism only within the imaginary of the proletarian revolution, but instead understand it in its literal meaning of majority, we arrive at the conclusion that Lenin understood the entire epoch as the epoch of majorities. And Lenin said, from now on we will live in a discourse of a majority and of terror imposed by the representatives of the majoritarian discourse. We are living in the discourse of the party-state and we know that every party usurps the state. The state is the property of the ruling class and its representatives, and by that it leads the party discourse to its conclusion, be it a one party system or multiparty parliamentarism, the state is the property of the party or parties. The ownership of the state-party or the state of several parties is all the same because Lenin defined the consequences of partism at the beginning of that epoch. And, offering the Bolsheviks as an example, he in fact

discovered the mechanism of usurpation of the state by the party, and took the party discourse to its conclusion. So, here we have the Bolsheviks and the Bolshevik discourse in power. This is a classical modernist discourse. We have all the forms of majority, therefore the discourse of universalism of the majority is in power... be it a majority party or the majority nation, majority universalism is the prevailing discourse in the 20th century, it is terrorist-like, violent and creates segregation and conflict along the rift universalism of the majority – particularism of the minority.

The 1960s are the years of the universalism of the majority. So, sixty years after "State and Revolution", there is a shift. In 1981, when the Kosovo Albanians step onto Yugoslavia's political scene, serious global changes took place, the paradigm has altered, a new discourse takes over, a Menshevik discourse of the power or the discourse of the minorities, no less terrorist-like and violent than the previous one, but it does not use the language of violence and terror, but rather the language of cultural racism, of tolerance, respect for the rights of the Other... Therefore, we are still living in the epoch of Menshevism, of minorities.

Let us go back in 1919, the time of the writing of "State and Revolution". Where were the Albanians then? The Kosovo Albanians? In the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians. Which means that they had no representation, they were excluded like many other minorities in those days. However, the Albanians did not even constitute a minority back then, they had no identity, they lived in an apartheid which excluded any possibility of representation. And then, what happens between 1919 and 1921? The same thing that happened sixty years later – military and police intervention of the state, then the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, against something that did not exist and was denied any visibility through apartheid. But this non-existing nothing on the level of representation still existed in the form of a mere presence. More than 50,000 Albanians were killed. The doctrine of one-day-one- village was launched. Cleansing, mass killings, we see today the Hague Tribunal ascribing this doctrine to Šainović in its modern version, but it was, in fact, invented in 1919. From 1919 to 1921, there were mass killings, 50,000 Albanians were killed. For the first time the newly founded Carnegie Commission went there to monitor the situation and find out what had happened, since the propaganda of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians claimed that nothing had happened and many years later the Carnegie Commission concluded that mass crime took place there. The dominant intellectual political discourse of the day designed the state policy, and this has not changed. It was an interesting political amalgam of the orthodox Christianity and anticommunism, personified by Nikolaj Velimirović. We have his text from 1924, when the Carnegie Commission irrevocably concluded that there had been mass crimes, that there had been a massacre. In his response to that, Nikolaj says, Europe, let us be, we know who we are dealing with. We ought to cut off ears, chop off heads, we ought to kill, because you do not know who our adversary really is, and so on. Sixty, seventy years on, nothing has changed.

But there was an intellectual who reflected this situation. His name was Radovan Zogović. I do not know if the name Radovan Zogović means anything to you.

Yes. Next to Oskar Davičo, Zogović is probably the greatest poet of the Serbian language. He is the greatest. He wrote a poem called "The Songs of Albinak". It is a cycle of poems about the massacre and the system of apartheid imposed upon the Albanian population by the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians. A very disturbing cycle of poems unknown to the Serbian culture. Completely unknown. And why? In 1933, the year of their publication, the poems were censored, copies withdrawn and they never reached bookstores. For those who do not know, apart from being a great poet of the Serbian language, Zogović was also a member of the Communist Party since its foundation, and he knew what was going on and what that massacre meant and what its consequences were in a dictator state that the Kingdom was slowly turning into, first as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, and then the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, i.e. all the consequences of a total revoke of politics in the space of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. We are talking 1933. After the Second World War, when the new government acknowledged political and territorial rights of the Albanians for the first time, Radovan Zogović got punished for the sins of his brother, a supporter of the Soviet Russia after Yugoslavia's split with the Soviet bloc, and again comes under the attack of the government, this time the government whose dedicated member he had been, and gets expelled from all forums and moved to a "three-yet-two-bedroom flat", as his wife Vera, whom I spoke with, called it. So, he gets kicked out of Dedinje and confined to this three-yet-two-bedroom flat. This means that they got to use two rooms, while the third was used by a secret police officer, who scrutinized their every step. Zogović lived like that for four long years. He was banned from publishing, he was banned from translating, he was banned from everything. In 1954, he was restored the right to translate. He translated Yesenin and used his fee to do what? He had the "Poems of Albinak" reprinted. On his own, without a publisher, using the Yesenin translation money, he took the books to the stores and two hours later, they were gone, the secret police got all the copies, letting none reach the readers. If I tell you that Radovan Zogović does not exist in the Serbian culture, that he disappeared completely, that the purge against communist intellectuals in the early 1960s by the nationalists erased completely his existence, and not just his, that of Oskar Davičo, Miroslav Krleža... The greatest intellectuals of the 20th century.

Of course, 30 years later, the events of 1981 began. It is around that time that I locate the beginning of my political consciousness, it is associated with the mass revolt of the Albanian population and their demand for a separate republic. A philosophy student in those days, I joined an ultra leftist dissident group... My first assignment was to distribute – and I was not quite sure what that meant, but I did distribute and I did it with the current president of Serbia Boris Tadić – so my first assignment was to distribute a petition demanding the release of a 14-year-old Albanian schoolboy, legally a minor, who had been arrested during a rally. We

offered the petition for signing at the faculty, that was my assignment, my duty, I was not completely clear about what it was all about, I had some pretty vague ideas about the national question, being a Yugoslav, and I remain a political Yugoslav to this day, but it is clear now that the human-rights discourse was inaugurated by the ultra left.

My ultra leftist dissident engagement lasted for about a year. My group also included Pavluško Imširević, Jelica Imširević... it was a radical left wing of the dissident movement, in the days when the Belgrade dissident scene was characterized by sharp divisions into the ultra left, left, center and right wings. Everyone had political identity. This lasted until 1982, when another petition appeared and its distribution through student channels attempted. Its content was completely opposite to the previous one – the protection of the Serbian population in Kosovo – and signed by everybody, from an Australian orthodox priest to Dr Mihailo Marković. So, a rather wide range of dissident options had been homogenized by the Albanian question. All differences between dissident policies were erased. This is when I attained my political consciousness. The united Serbian opposition was born in those days, the same one that is now in power. It is the same program, the same people. Milošević did not come in until 1986. The discourse was formed between 1982 and 1986. Milošević is its consequence.

Of course, this is neither the time nor the place to go into details of many other events that occurred in those days. What happened next? What happened is that nothing happened, nothing changed in the Serbian culture, on the intellectual and political scene. There is no mercy for the Albanians, no mercy at all. There are no political reflections. No space for opening the Albanian question, the question of Kosovo. In a way, Serbs spent the entire 20th century failing to understand the Albanians. If we tried to describe the Serbian political defeat in the 20th century in just one word it would be – Albanian. This is what the Serbian political elites failed to understand, the emancipation of Albanians is the emancipation of Serbs, and vice versa.

The big breakup of SFR Yugoslavia is next in line. It started with the violent events of 1989. It first started with the suspension of Kosovo's constitutional and political rights. This was the first violence in the territory of SFRY and decisive for its breakup, as it turned out later. In just one day in 1989, 33 protesters were killed in the streets of Kosovo towns. Of course, this was never reported in the Serbian media. They celebrated the constitution, they celebrated a united Serbia, and this was really the first act of secession, the unilateral declaration of constitution is the first act of separatism within the SFRY. A new war begins in 1995. Mass civic protests begin in Serbia in 1996/97. You may have heard of them. Of course, there is confusion about this 1996/97 civic protest and about what really happened then. The protest was massive and called itself civic, but I never took part in it because from the beginning it seemed rather non-civic to me. In my view, it boiled down to the masses of urban population protesting in the streets because of their disappointment with the Serbian military defeat, and they were looking for some

kind of payback, which became obvious towards the end of the protest when, during clashes with the police, the protesters yelled at them, Go to Kosovo. Another request from the people, Serbian citizens, to solve the conflict with Milošević by sending the police to Kosovo to get things sorted out, which indeed happened a year or two later.

An interesting thing happened then, and that is what I would like to talk about and what I think this gathering is dedicated to – and that is how to create institutions in Kosovo that would serve an extremely interesting scene which was taking shape in the nineties, a contemporary art scene in Kosovo, which I think has been one of the most interesting in Europe, and which at the moment Kosovo gains independence… will disappear. Now we have this truly interesting paradox – the state erasing contemporary art. Why? State equals culture, and what does culture really do? The State culturalizes art, the State culturalizes politics. My thesis really is that the only event of the entire 1996/97 protest and despite it is the work created by here present artist Milica Tomić, entitled "XY – ungelöst", the work which opened the field of contemporary art in Serbia and initiated something that later grew into the School of History and Theory of Art, which produced results and, in a way, functioned until the demise of Slobodan Miloševi's criminal regime, when after the democratic changes the contemporary art way of thinking disappeared from the field of vision and, in general, ceased to exist.

In 1996, Milica Tomić, who, unlike me, participated in the civic protest until hearing the protesters chanting "Go to Kosovo", when she radically distanced herself from the Serbian political space and culture. Her work "XY – ungelöst" marked the moment of absolute separation of an entire scene from the Serbian culture and state and an act of absolute breakup, whose only continuity is that with a forgotten and erased Radovan Zogović and his "Poems of Albinak". In the beginning, Milica had an entirely different idea. She did want to produce a video work about violence and situated in an entirely different imaginarium, an entirely different problem. But when ultimately a civic majority in the streets of Belgrade declared to be in favor of the police going to Kosovo for a thousandth time instead of molesting decent Serbian citizens, Milica made a decision with far-reaching consequences for contemporary art in Serbia. She decided to make a reconstruction of the 1989 murders of 33 protesters, to in a way make a genealogical reconstruction of violence against Albanians, to name the original violence, the beginning of violence and the mark of violence, the original violence, the first violence in ex-Yugoslavia. I believe she will show her work tomorrow, you will have the opportunity, for the first time I think, I do not know if it has ever been shown here before.

But, this is the context. In a sense, this work opened what we call the field of contemporary art. What I refer to when saying contemporary art is very specifically that: contemporary art in the sense Lenin used it in "State and Revolution", the art which replaced revolution but has been filed ad acta by this book… Up until now, contemporary art has been the privilege only of highly developed countries. Lately, we have this paradox that it has become possible

where it is really not possible, in Serbia and in Kosovo, in Azerbaijan, in Kurdistan and, interestingly, this is where the most interesting works come from, in fact, those which are already spontaneously counting on politicizing culture rather than being accomplices in the cultural appropriation of art. The School we started was in a way a continuation of Milica's act of opening space for contemporary art as a way of thinking current politics and resisting the culturalization of art and politics. In a way, when today we look for space for political invention, we always look in the field of art. This is very interesting. Contemporary art opens spaces. It does not exist, as Lacan said about women, it does not exist and yet it is there. In other words, it insists, but does not exist. It has no existence whatsoever, because every attempt to put it in the context of culture, museums, fails, culturalizes it in a way and puts it in the virtualization of collecting, gathering... Contemporary art, at least in the field we explored in our school, always consisted in mapping out a strategy of how to politicize culture through art and, on the other hand, putting at risk the act of colonization of art and politics by art. And culture, you know, just open the newspapers and you will see the many cultures there are, from bacterial culture to military culture, to war culture. All is culture.


Milica Tomić, xy ungelöst – reconstruction of the crime, 1996-97

"INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE" AND THE INSTITUTION OF CRITIQUE
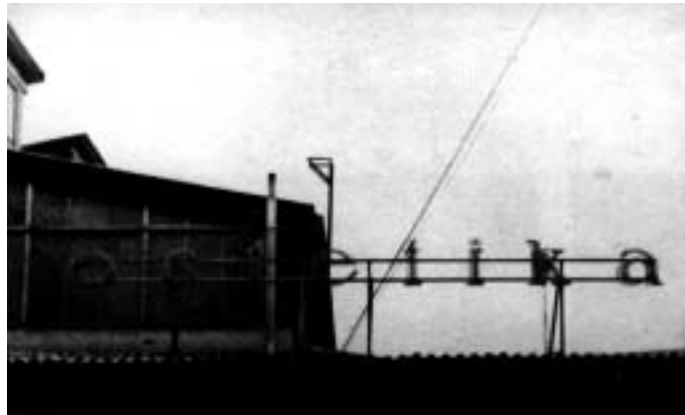
The following section aims to present and to initiate debates on some crucial issues of art and "cultural production". The Viennese European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies (EIPCP) addressed the recently re-opened problematic of "institutional critique" at the conference "Do you remember institutional critique" held in Linz in 2005. One of its projects entitled *transform* presents an effort to re-consider the political effects of contemporary art practices in their diverse relations with the "cultural" institutions.
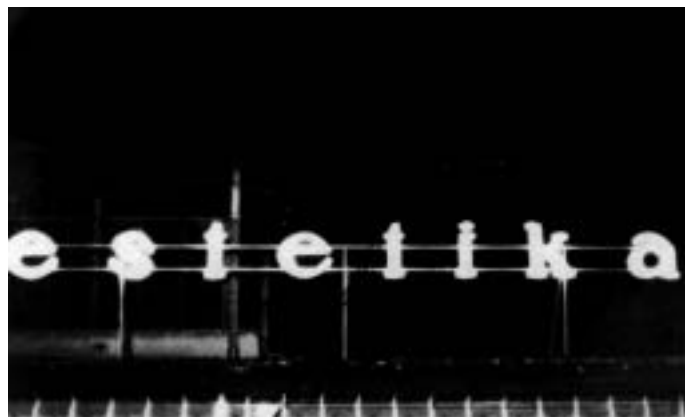
The term "institutional critique", within the discourse of art history, denotes particular conceptual art practices, which radically challenge the idea of "an artwork as representing the object of perceptual experience and aesthetic pleasure". Those practices were consequently challenging not only the status of the art object (its material form, commodity status and forms of distribution), but the (art) institutions themselves, through criticizing their ideological-representative social functions. The critique was mainly directed against the authoritarian role of national-state institutions of culture (museums, galleries and the art system in general), and their material, as well as symbolically, their grip on the representation and canonization of art. Such an activity is encompassed by the work of the so-called "first generation" of critical conceptual artists which, as Benjamin Buchloh noticed, have in fact introduced, a "new legalistic language and administrative style of material presentation" as a contrast to the traditional forms of appearance and the (social) function of art.

Conceptual art projects are formulated, on the wider level, as tactical replacements of the marketable art product by taking critical attitudes towards art, that is, the replacement of the "object" with the "idea". From the contemporary cultural and political perspective, this project should rather be observed as a contribution to the formal radicalization of art rather than to a real change of its social function. Its emancipatory attempt ended up using the "methods" of self-reflexivity and self-referentiality within the enclosed disciplinary field of art. In other words, the replacement of the "object" with the "idea" remained internal to the discourse of the "institution of art" on the one hand and well-situated in the logic of post-Fordist (re-) production and what is referred to as "cognitive capitalism" on the other hand. It follows the obligatory "social awareness" and "pro-active" attitude of art towards dominant cultural policies and current political events, together with paradoxical constraint for the production of criticism within the contemporary neo-liberal setting.

Perhaps the Ex-Yugoslav perspective of the post-Socialist tycoon, neo-liberalism, makes more evident that critique has to reach well beyond the contemporary "multitudist imaginary" and established forms of Deleuzeanism or Foucaultianism, in order to produce significant political effects. The acuteness of the unclothed (non-) functioning of the institutions in this peripheral space instructs the practices of critique to break out of the institutional plane of immanence and to become, using Marx's expression, *the real movement that abolishes the present state of things*. If critique remains confined only to expressing critical attitudes and to "immanent" criticism of institutions it stands a good chance of yielding to its "systemic tasks" instead of becoming the weapon of struggle for a radical change.

TRANSVERSALISM
AND INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE
AN INTERVIEW WITH GERALD RAUNIG[1]

PRELOM: *We would like to start with your views on trajectories and effects of critical art practices in the last decades within crucial transformations of contemporary capitalism. There is a certain paradoxical constraint for the production of criticism in the contemporary politico-cultural setting of neoliberalism. It is almost a "systemic requirement" that artistic production has to be "socially aware", i.e. to be pro-active in respect of dominant cultural policy, consistent with various contemporary relationalist theories. Substantial professionalism and expertise are required to be competitive on the intellectual market...*

GERALD RAUNIG: You touch a crucial point, but I would conceptualize the relation between power and resistance, between critique and its appropriation, between political art practices and their spectacularization in a more complex way. When in 1999 I wrote the book *Charon* as a critique of the autonomy of art, and right after that an essay entitled the "Grandparents of Interventionist Art", I argued mainly along the lines of the critical texts that accompanied the political art practices of the 1990s. This included the observation that, in certain community art practices, political inequalities were concealed rather than attacked and in their concern for the "real people, the real neighborhoods" they continuously needed to construct the "Other". Hinting at certain parallels between the art discourse of the 1920s and the 1990s, I took up Walter Benjamin's critique of a certain position of the artist/intellectual as "*Geistiger*" and in this tradition argued that the position of the artist toward his or her "object" (a political subject, community or neighborhood) is

an impossible one: "His communitarian reply is basically an appeal for humanity, tolerance, and solidarity amongst human beings. Due to his lack of reflection on his own position in the production process, he commits the same error as the contemporary tradition of the politics of identity. This tradition is dedicated to helping and supporting so-called 'disadvantaged social groups' and to empowering communities. In these examples of community art gone bad, the squalor, the inequalities have been successfully revealed and turned into an object of pleasure and of consumption by presenting community art in a fashionable way."

Now, with the radical development of official cultural policies during the last years, especially but not only of the Blairist/British kind, openly instrumentalizing creativity for economic development, art for social integration, this critique of the 1990s becomes all the more urgent. But at the same time in all my texts – and that also takes up the tradition of Benjamin referring to Brecht and Tretyakov – I felt the need to stress that there are certain practices of immanent transgression, certain strategies of autonomous self-instrumentalization and transversal concatenations of arts and politics that try to thwart the logics of neo-liberal social and cultural policies. This is important, because I am afraid that, without considering this other side of the coin, the type of discourses such as those occuring in your introduction ("art is *forced* to be political, socially engaged") in my oppinion represents the cry against the loss of autonomy that art is supposed to have and therefore, in fact (etc., it loses its autonomy") tends to re-affirm a reactionary structure. All too often *undifferentiating* critics repeat the old figure of art being instrumentalized by politics and quickly equate certain problematic relational and community art practices the with very different practices of intervention art, communication guerrilla and activist approaches that apply fundamentally different methods. One could explain the enormous difference of these art practices in terms of the relationship of sociality and spatiality; whereas the former impel identitarian and communitarian strategies, seeking to redistribute and appropriate space, the latter tend to distribute *themselves* in space without fixing the space as antecedent, stable and hierarchical.

When these two completely different policies are blurred, whether out of ignorance or maliciousness, this lays the foundation for carrying out an all-encompassing criticism of *every* form of activist art, whether it is soft or hard, structure- or machine-like, striating the space or producing it. On the basis of this reduction and confusion, it becomes easy to criticize activist art practices on the whole and revoke a (re-)turn from the process to the object, from the performative to the pictorial – very similar to Greenberg and Fried some decades ago. Today this comes with the rehashed conceptual tools of the aesthetics of the 18th and 19th centuries (autonomy, beauty, aesthetic experience, etc.). In the cases of *documenta 10* and *11*, for instance, many commentaries denounced their allegedly exaggerated austerity and excessive emphasis on politics and discourse. And as an effect of this discursive shift in the art field you can experience the return of autonomy and beauty also in some of the talks and interviews of *documenta12* (director Roger Buergel).

PRELOM: *Quite often the complex question of institution is reduced to a simple opposition of an anarchistic full-frontal negation of any institutional framework and of intellectualist resignation over the all-pervasiveness of the institutions. This implies that the boundaries of an institution – in the narrow sense of "state apparatuses" – are easily detectable and unproblematic, and that, at the same time, institutions – in the broader sense of "socially organized and normatively regulated behavior" – are embedded deep in our everyday practices. Questions of abolishing the strict dichotomization of institutional (the "inside" which is state-administered) and non-institutional (the "outside" which is spontaneous or self-organized) were a significant part of the discussion during the workshop in October 2005 that launched transform, the project dedicated to new forms of institutional critique. How do you see the "arts of governing" and the methods of social transformation within this setting?*

GERALD RAUNIG: I think it is not sufficient to attack the various state apparatuses in an abstract negation, to regard social movements as the absolute Other of institutions (whether they are state bureaucracies, independent NGOs or autonomous self-organizations). Instead, it is crucial to conceptualize institutions and the critique of institutions on the same plane of immanence: so at the most general level it is not a question of imagining an absolute outside of institutions, but a question of the mutual interrelationship of institution and movement, machines and state apparatuses, and a question of how this relationship can be made productive in the sense of emancipatory policies and beyond the abrupt demarcation between the two poles.

On the level of institutional critique as a practice the main topic is how to avoid closure and structuralization: If institutional critique is not to be fixed and paralyzed as something established in the art field and confined within its rules, then it has to continue to develop along with changes in society and especially to tie into other forms of critique both within and outside the art field, such as those arising in opposition to the respective conditions or even prior to their formations. Against the background of this kind of transversal exchange of forms of critique, but also beyond the imagination of spaces free from domination and institutions, institutional critique is to be reformulated as a critical attitude and as an instituent practice. In his lecture entitled "Qu'est-ce que la critique?" in 1978, Michel Foucault claimed that along with the governmentalization of all possible areas of life and finally of the self (all of this he calls "the art of governing"), critique also developed as the art not to be governed *like that*. Even without going into more depth here on the continuities and breaks between the historical forms of developing liberal governmentality and the current forms of neo-liberal governmentality, it may be said that the relationship between *government* and *not to be governed like that* is still a prerequisite today for reflecting on the contemporary relationship between institution and critique. There is a shift from *not to be governed at all* to *not to be governed like that*, from a phantom battle for a *big other* to a constant struggle in the plane of immanence, which is not (solely) actualized as a fundamental critique of institutions, but also as a permanent process of instituting.

This does of course not mean cynically to refrain from any political action or just get back to a plain politics of reformism. But instead of sticking to this phantom battle for an exteriority beyond any process of institutionalization, we should start to create ways of escaping from the arts of governing, lines of flight, which are not at all to be taken as harmless or individualistic or escapist and esoteric – even if they no longer allow dreaming of an entirely different exteriority. "Nothing is more active than fleeing!", as Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet write.

Ligna, *Radioballet*, Hamburg, 2002.

PRELOM: *The essay that was recently discussed in different context engaged with the relations of critique and institution, including the transform workshop in Linz, was Andrea Fraser's "From the Critique of Institutions to the Institution of Critique" published in Artforum in 2005. Trying to articulate critical operations in art through the dichotomy of its externalization and internalization, Andrea Fraser recalls two modes of opposition of art and institution: the first relates to the attempts to "operate outside traditional institutions, with fiscal independence, beyond the legislative control of art experts" (which she connects to the so called first generation of conceptual artist Daniel Buren, Michael Asher, Hans Haacke, Marcel Broodthaers etc.), and the second one which meets its (im-)possibility to escape processes of incorporation in the institutions and historical canonization. It is so, because the "institutionalized sites" are not only part of the governmental-administrative-institutional sphere, but the institution is performed by individuals and embodied in people who produce discourses and practices, recognize, interpret and evaluate – art as art. Therefore, she draws the conclusion that "institutional critique" has always been institutionalized because it emerged within art, within the institution of art actively or retroactively, and she illustrates this conclusion with the example of "the failure of avant-garde movements which didn't destroy the institution of art, but extended it beyond the traditional boundaries of specifically artistic objects and aesthetic criteria. Andrea Fraser's essay offers some important points because it precisely describes the mechanisms of misappropriation of the notion of critique in contemporary art (especially neo-Fuluxus, relational and "socially conscious" art), represented as a site of resistance and symbolic revolution and at the same time readily integrated in power structures and institutionalized criteria of success. On the other side, her question: Has institutional critique been institutionalized? can be posed only from the ideological position of modern expert society and enclosed disciplinary fields. It reduces and encloses process of governmentality in the art field, art world, or if you want, in the imaginary state of art. It is precisely this enclosure that poses itself as the central problem.*

GERALD RAUNIG: This was a challenge for art practices since the 19th century, and with the German sociologist Ulf Wuggenig you could also argue that institutional critique has been a practice in the art field since then. On the other hand, these effects of power were never all-encompassing, and it has been tackled effectively over and over again. Fraser denies that: although there seems to be an echo of Foucault's concept of self-government in her text, there is no indication of forms of escaping, shifting, transforming. Whereas for Foucault the critical attitude appears simultaneously as "partner" and as "adversary" of the arts of governing, the second part of this specific ambivalence vanishes in Fraser's depiction, yielding to a discursive self-limitation, which only just allows reflecting on one's own enclosure. Contrary to all the evidence of the manifold effectivity of critical art practices throughout the entire 20th century, she plays a worn-out record: art is and remains autonomous, its function limited to the art field.

In my opinion Fraser conducts a practice of offensive self-historization and self-canonization, even trying to establish herself not only as a leading figure of the "second generation" of institutional critique, but also post-*factum* in a certain relation to the first. As Simon Sheikh wrote in his *transversal*-article "Notes on Institutional Critique"[2], it is not therefore interesting to engage in the diverse battlegrounds writing art historical canons, and we had better "leave that endeavor for the *Texte zur Kunst* and *October* magazines of this world". Beyond such a logic of raising one's symbolic capital (not via the supposed idea of an art practice reappropriating the political, but simply by staying in the art discourse and constructing your legacy and filiations) I see an urgent need for something I call (with reference to Antonio Negri's concept of "constituent power") *instituent practices*; practices that conduct radical social criticism, yet which do not fancy themselves in an imagined distance to institutions; at the same time, practices that are self-critical and yet do not cling to their own involvement, their complicity, their imprisoned existence in the art field, their fixation on institutions and the institution, their own being-institution (like Fraser's position). Instituent practices that conjoin the advantages of both "generations" of institutional critique will impel a linking of social criticism, institutional critique and self-criticism. This link will develop, most of all, from the direct and indirect concatenation with political practices and social movements, but without dispensing with artistic competences and strategies, without dispensing with resources of and effects in the art field.

> PRELOM: *Different Avant-garde, Situationist, Conceptualist or Interventionist art practices were extensively based on the strategies of cutting the distance between "art and life", "performer and audience", "gallery and street". Instead of representing the world they were active in the world. They replaced the principle of searching for new modes of "depiction" with the principle of searching for the change in the production apparatus itself. In that sense Duchamp's question "How do we make a work of art that is not a work of art?" still can be used to describe this shift.*

> GERALD RAUNIG: I do not really care for Duchamp's question that also in its negation sticks to something like an essence of art. My question would be more of the kind: "What are the preconditions for art machines and revolutionary machines intertwining and forming transversal concatenations?" That also means – and I tried to show that by analyzing the examples of Richard Wagner's and Anatoli Lunacharsky's texts on art and revolution – that I am not into the game of dissolving the difference between art and life (not even as conceptualized by Joseph Beuys). Art that tends to lose itself in life usually ends up being a bit too grand. In the relevant main currents in the 1910s/20s and in the 1960s/70s it is evident that the general "vitalization" of art came to no good end: de-politicized drifting into hermetic pseudo-autonomies and the total heteronomization of art are only two sides of the same coin. In cultural-political endeavors that have ended up being too large and too abstract, the ideals of the inseparability of art and life, instead of questioning rigid boundaries between aesthetic and political practice, absolutized these boundaries or made them reoccur somewhere else.

Contrary to models of totally diffusing and confusing art and life, I suggested to investigate other practices, those emerging in neighboring zones, in which transitions, overlaps and concatenations of art and revolution become possible for a limited time, but without synthesis and identification. Beyond de-differentiating and overloading art with the revolutionary pathos, questions can still be raised about the appropriate form of concatenation, which focus on more limited and more modest overlaps of art and revolution: How can this kind of overlapping be understood as a temporary alliance and exchange, and yet constantly and conflictually impel attacks on social power relations and internal structuralization at the same time? Instead of seeking to abolish representation in pure action and in abundant life, how can a critique of representation and an expansion of orgiastic representation be developed? Instead of the promises of salvation from an art that saves "life", how can revolutionary becoming occur in a situation of the mutual overlapping of art and revolution that is limited in space and time?

One of the most important concepts in this context is transversality. The term had already been introduced into the critical psychiatry discussion by Félix Guattari in 1964 and seeped into the French politics and theory scenes around 1968, primarily through smaller articles by Guattari and Foucault. Transversality – as Guattari explained in 1964 – is intended to overcome both dead ends: both the verticality of the hierarchical pyramid and the horizontality of compulsory communication and adaptation. Both the old command structure in top-down mode and the logic of horizontal control networks that later prevailed in post-Fordist frameworks were thus to be thwarted by the transversal line. According to Guattari, the new dimension of transversality moves and accelerates the spatial regulation of the geometrical concepts of horizontal and vertical. Unlike centralist forms of organization *and* polycentric networks, transversal lines develop constellations that are *a-centric*, which do not move on the basis of predetermined strands and channels from one point to another, but right through the points in new directions. In other words, transversals are not at all intended to be connections between multiple centers or points, simple connections or additions of existing art and political practices, but rather lines that do not necessarily even cross, lines of flight, ruptures, which continuously elude the systems of points and their coordinates. My interest is to find such a kind of transversality in the overlaps of art machines and revolutionary machines.

> PRÉLOM**:** *Is it possible to talk about radical aesthetics and radical art through the lens of aesthetics and form? This question may seem contradictory, but it is on one hand historically rooted in radical avant-garde movements, implied by the motto "New art for new society", and on the other hand incorporated in the more recent interpretations of art-activism and "interventionist art". The act of "art" in activist-art theory – where your book* Art and Revolution *plays an important role – is closely linked to the act of "invention" and nonrepresentational imaginative processes. Creative or art production is explained as experimental territory for examination of new tactics, innovation of tools or invention of new skills for participation in the process of social transformation.*

In that sense, artistic strategies of cultural and political rupture and processes of conceptualized instrumentalization and utilitarization of art for political goals are developing in parallel with the invention of new aesthetic forms (rather than changing the forms of expression for art's own sake!) and this strategy was extensively researched by Proletcult and LEF in post-revolutionary Russia and theoretized by Eisenstein, Tretyakov, Brecht and many others. In your book Art and Revolution you talk about examples such as the "Theater of Attractions" in the 1920's that involved a montage of aggressive and physical effects as a strategy for disrupting the mechanisms of illusion and empathy, or Debord's techniques of montage and distortion that thwart the fixation of the relationships between the stage and the audience and break with the total management of emotions in the classic cinema. Can we see these strategies as breaking points with bourgeois representational mechanisms, which reproduce the division of spheres of production and consumption and existing power relations?

GERALD RAUNIG: Well, it is not so easy to answer this briefly, but I will try to extract some thoughts out of *Art and Revolution*, mainly the question of how to shift from representing situations to constructing them. Guy Debord and the Situationist International were not the first to introduce the concept of the situation into the debate on art and politics. In the 1820s Hegel had taken the situation concept from the theatre discourse of the 18th century and introduced it in his *Lectures on Aesthetics* as a generalized key term applying to all art forms. What was specific about Hegel's use of the situation concept was that he opened it up, initiating a movement with enough verve that the situation, based on its quality as an aesthetic category in Hegel's use, enabling it to go beyond Hegel and beyond the framework of conventional aesthetics. The questions that Hegel raised on the relationship between representation and action *led in the* heterogenesis of concrete art practices in the 20th century from representing situations through various stations of expanding representation to its limits to constructing situations. The last phase is the most interesting (here Tretyakov, Eisenstein, Brecht and the S.I. are equally important), where the situation becomes orgiastic: Hegel's *Ungeheuer der Entzweiung* (*monster of disruption*) slumbering in the general state of the world and dozing off again in the subsequent sublation of differences is to be treated here only in a waking state, or rather: as though it had never gone to sleep at all. Disruptive monsters do not emerge from the sleep of reason, they do not know the sleep of reason nor its dominion. On the contrary, the monsters permanently move in the concatenations of all possible experiences in between desire and reason. They do not stop moving and do not come from dreaming. Disruptive monsters – as Hegel recognizes with his choice of terms – are monstrous precisely because there is danger in permanent disruption, in the moving relation of different to different, something explosive that eludes determination, description, representation. And that is where – even in the field of aesthetics – aspects of resistance and insurrection, the revolutionary machine, come into play...

Just to give one example that I analyzed in *Art and Revolution*: The "Theater of Attractions" practiced and theoretized by Eisenstein and Tretyakov around 1923 involved aggressive and physical moments of theater, the effects of which were intended to disrupt the mechanism of illusion and empathy in bourgeois theater. The montage of attractions did not mean accumulating tricks and artifices designed for effect, but rather developing circus and vaudeville elements for a materialist, "natural science" theater. What the Proletkult theater took over from the circus was the approach of the artiste, but also the fragmentation of its structure of numbers, the sequencing of "single attractions not conjoined by a subject matter": with Eisenstein and Tretyakov, this seemingly deficient disconnectedness became a weapon against empathy. To counter the totality of the subject matter they mounted and molecularized the piece as a piecework of single attractions. The attraction is thus more than just a circus number, it is a situation that, as a "molecular unit", contains conflicts. Contrary to the Hegelian treatment of the collision as a transitional status of the situation to be resolved, Eisenstein and Tretyakov intended not to *represent* conflicts, but rather to create a collision *with the audience*.

> PRELOM: *If we perceive liberalism as a governmental technique based on the economy of means, then contemporary post-welfare state capitalism, with its trend of cutting down state administration and its competencies has to put much more emphasis on the self-discipline of populations. Foucault's concept of governmentality could be useful for an analysis of the organization of power-relations in contemporary capitalist society, with its thesis on interconnectedness of the disciplinary power and the bio-political, i.e. "state" power and various practices of self-care in the constitution of the subject (in both senses). How do you envision the practice of critique that escapes its adoption as a part of governmental technique? Moreover, how can it add to revolutionary practices of radical change?*

GERALD RAUNIG: In his above mentioned essay about critique Foucault did not stop by conceptualizing governmentality as a dead end, an inescapable trap, but also put up a specific proposal concerning the concept of critique, of the critical attitude within the immanence of governmentality: instead of inducing the closure of the field with theoretical arguments and promoting this practically, thus carrying out the art of governing, a different form of art should be pushed at the same time which leads to escaping the arts of governing. And Foucault is not the only one to introduce these new non-escapist terms of escape. Figures of flight, of dropping out, of betrayal, of desertion, of exodus, these are the figures proposed – especially against cynical or conservative invocations of inescapability and hopelessness – by several authors as poststructuralist, non-dialectical forms of resistance. With these kinds of concepts Gilles Deleuze, Paolo Virno and other philosophers attempt to propose new models of non-representationist politics that can equally be turned against different problematic models of transformation of the past and the present – against Leninist concepts of revolution as taking over the state (instead of radically evading all forms of state apparatus), against naive anarchist positions imagining an absolute outside of institutions, as well as against concepts of

transformation and transition in the sense of a successive homogenization in the direction of neo-liberal globalization. In terms of their new concept of resistance, the aim is to thwart a dialectical idea of power and resistance: to create a positive form of dropping out, a flight that is simultaneously an instituent practice. Instead of presupposing conditions of domination as immutable horizons or insurmountable walls and yet running against them, this flight changes the conditions under which the presupposition takes place.

> PRELOM: *Parrhesia appears as one of the essential concepts within Foucault's researches at the beginning of the 1980s. It is in the center of his attempts to focus his work around what he called "techniques of the self" – differentiated and divergent hermeneutic practices of one's own self that began to constitute themselves from classical and late Antiquity on. There is always a game of rhetorical and discursive negotiation that involves an almost obligatory duplicity in relationships between art-institutions and (activist) artists, or foundations and trustees. In that kind of situation, which most certainly plays a significant role in the reproduction of institutional authorities and hierarchies, parrhesia could be taken in its colloquial meaning – being imprudent or even reckless in conversation. Could you tell us a bit more about the strategies and effects of what you call "the double criticism of parrhesia"?*

> GERALD RAUNIG: "Double criticism of *parrhesia*" means that here we are not only talking about the old idea of *parrhesia* as publicly (in the Greek agora) speaking about everything, even or just when it is dangerous. This kind of *parrhesia* as a public, political practice is joined by a personal practice that becomes actualized in a specific form of relationship: Foucault developed this personal form of *parrhesia* as a concept of self-technique that does not serve as a catholic confession or examination of conscience nor as a prototype of Maoist self-criticism, but rather to establish a relationship between rational discourse and the lifestyle of the interlocutor or the self-questioning person. Contrary to any individualistic interpretation especially of later Foucault texts (imputing a "return to subject philosophy", etc.), here *parrhesia* is not the competency of a subject, but rather a movement between the position that queries the concordance of *logos* and *bios*, and the position that exercises self-criticism in light of this query.

Being imprudent or reckless in communication, like say Alexander Brener and Barbara Schurz today, remains within the dialectics of the institution and its negation. Personally I am not very interested in these strategies of challenging museums or other art institutions. But when founding new institutions or experimenting on instituent practices, I would insist on what I wrote about the two faces of *parrhesia*, about the necessary intertwining of *parrhesia* as both radical social criticism and self-criticism. Critique is not exhausted in denouncing abuses, nor in withdrawing into more or less radical self-questioning. In terms of art practices, this means that neither the belligerent strategies of the institutional critique of the 1970s nor art as a service to the institution in the 1990s promise effective interventions into the governmentality of the present, but maybe it makes sense to think of combining both methods into the double criticism of *parrhesia*.

PRELOM: *Speaking of questioning the concordance of logos and bios as an essential operation of parrhesia, how do you perceive your double involvement in IG Kultur Österreich as a network of independent cultural initiatives and in a sort of "classic" institution such as EIPCP? Do you find yourself able to situate yourself both inside and outside of the institutional setting?*

GERALD RAUNIG: Let's look at the *bios*. *Biografically* this was not a double involvement, but a development, one after the other. Funnily enough for me you call the EIPCP a "classic" institution. Well, its name may sound quite impressive and of course it *is* an institute – in contrast to the seemingly more contemporary term "network" that is attributed to IG Kultur. The history, though, is inverse. IG Kultur was founded in the early 1990s as a lobbying organization for cultural initiatives, a quite traditional process of post-1968 groups that successfully struggled for their acknowledgement, for establishing their funding structures and becoming a factor of official cultural policies. From the mid-1990s onwards we – and "we" does not mean a collective identity limited, for example, to the employees, members of the board or a general assembly, but a much more open arrangement of actors in this field – were trying to "re-politicize" the field with the help of conferences, the magazine *Kulturrisse* (founded in 1996) and by introducing new cultural-political practices (art collectives, free radios and new media culture initiatives) into the field. In my eyes, these "parallel cultural politics" were quite successful during the 1990s, but from about 1999/2000 on, when the Freedom Party of Jörg Haider was also able to realize their radical right-wing programme in the Austrian government, there had to be new strategies and new organizational forms of resistance.

The broad social movement against the government was assisted by structures like IG Kultur (and many others), but it was mainly an arrangement of machines, a spontaneous movement of people protesting and resisting "being governed like that". On the other hand, in a setting of increasing radical populist cultural policies, which is of course a much broader process than the Austrian case, organizations like IG Kultur tend to lose the objects of lobbying, the vanishing institutions and actors of representative democracy. So when we thought about transnationalizing our activities, this new situation in cultural politics was one reason why we did not found a network of progressive cultural initiatives on the European level – we considered that for some time and also researched about it -, but decided to concentrate on a less traditional strategy. Ironically, echoing the many European networks with impressing names we put up this monster of a name, European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies, and instituted something which is neither pretending to represent somebody nor to speak for a certain field, but rather tries to create discursive lines of flight.

Its strength does not lie in its value of representation or in a membership structure, as a "civil society initiative" demanding to be heard by European officials, but in a loose arrangement of correspondents developing transnational discourses in the neighboring zones of artist practices, theory and activism. You can interpret this development as a slow movement from the paradigm of representation and

representational politics to the paradigm of the event, from some small steps concerning the struggle for hegemony to another politics that is not focused on hegemony, but on micro-political experiments of molecular revolution. But of course, these paradigms are never pure, you will find elements of non-representationist actions in our strategies of the 1990s and sort of reformist elements in our actual projects. In any case it is a matter of producing discursive and activist ruptures that cut through the devices of governmentality. The point is to find forms that escape from the dualistic rituals of special interest groups in "civil society" and their opponents in national and supranational politics, and to promote political contents that at least temporarily resist becoming overcoded by mainstream art institutions or other state apparatuses.

This interview was conducted by Jelena Vesić and Dušan Grlja

Ligna, *Radioballet*, Hamburg, 2002.

NOTES ON
INSTITUTIONAL
CRITIQUE

Simon Sheikh

The very term "institutional critique" seems to indicate a direct connection between a method and an object: the method being the critique and the object the institution. In the first wave of institutional critique from the late 1960s and early 1970s – long since celebrated and relegated by art history – these terms could apparently be even more concretely and narrowly defined; the critical method was an artistic practice, and the institution in question was the art institution, mainly the art museum, but also galleries and collections. Institutional critique thus took on many forms, such as artistic works and interventions, critical writings or (art)political activism. However, in the so-called second wave, from the 1980s, the institutional framework became somewhat expanded to include the artist's role (the subject performing the critique) as institutionalized, as well as an investigation into other institutional spaces (and practices) besides the art space.[1] Both waves are today themselves part of the art instititution, in the form of art history and education as much as in the general de-materialized and post-conceptual art practice of contemporary art. It shall not be my purpose here, however, to discuss or access the meaning of institutional critique as an art historical canon, or to engage in the writing of such a canon (I shall respectfully leave that endeavor for the Texte zur Kunst and October magazines of this world). Instead, though, I would like to point out a convergence between the two waves, that seems to have drastically changed in the current "return" of institutional critique that may or may not constitute a third wave. In either of its historical emergences, institutional critique was a practice mainly, if not exclusively, conducted by artists, and directed against the (art) institutions, as a critique of their ideological and representative social function(s). Art's institutions, that may or may not contain the artists' work, were seen, in the words of Robert Smithson, as spaces of "cultural confinement" and circumscription, and thus as something to attack aesthetically, politically and theoretically. The institution was posed as a problem (for artists). In contrast, the

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1 See James Meyer's essay "Whatever Happened to Institutional Critique?", which tries to establish a genealogy rather than (art) history proper of institutional critique. Reprinted in Peter Weibel, *Kontext Kunst*, 1993.

current institutional-critical discussions seem predominantly propagated by curators and directors of the very same institutions, and they are usually opting for rather than against them. That is, they are not an effort to oppose or even destroy the institution, but rather to modify and solidify it. The institution is not only a problem, but also a solution!

There has been a shift, then, in the placement of institutional critique, not only in historical time, but also in terms of the subjects who direct and perform the critique – it has moved from an outside to an inside. Interestingly, Benjamin Buchloh has described the historical moment of conceptual art as a movement from institutional critique and "the aesthetic of administration to the critique of institutions", in a famous and controversial essay entitled, tellingly, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions". While Buchloh focuses on the emergence of conceptualism, his suggestive distinction is perhaps even more pertinent now that institutional critique is literally being performed by administrative aestheticians, i.e. museum directors, curators etc.[2] Taking her cue from Buchloh, Andrea Fraser goes a step further in her recent essay "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique", where she claims that a movement between an inside and an outside of the institution is no longer possible, since the structures of the institution have become totally internalized. "We are the institution", Fraser writes, and thus concludes that it is rather a question of creating critical institutions – what she termes "an institution of critique", established through self-questioning and self-reflection.[3] Fraser also writes that the institutions of art should not be seen as an autonomous field, separate from the rest of the world, the same way that "we" are not separate from the institution. While I would certainly agree with any attempt to view art institutions as part of a larger ensemble of socio-economic and disciplinary spaces, I am nonetheless confused by the simultaneous attempt to integrate the art world into the current (politico-economic) world system and the upholding of a "we" of the artworld itself. Who exactly is this "we"? If the art world is seen as part of a generalized institutionalization of social subjects (that in turn internalizes the institutionalization), what and where are the demarcation lines for entry, for visibility and representation? If one of the criteria for institutions is given in the exclusions performed by them (as inherent in any collection), the question which subjects fall outside institutionalization, not due to a willful act or exodus as certain artistic movements thought and desired, but through the expulsions at the very center of institutions that allow them to institutionalize? Obviously, this would require a very expanded notion of institutional critique, that lies somewhat outside the history of institutional critique as discussed here.

So, to return to the object at hand, institutional critique as an art practice: what does it mean when the practice of institutional critique and analysis has shifted from artists to curators

2 See Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions", *October 55*, 1990, pp. 105–143.

3 Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique", *Artforum*, September 2005, XLIV, No. 1, pp. 278–283.

and critics, and when the institution has become internalized in artists and curators alike (through education, through art historical canon, through daily praxis)? Analyzed in terms of negative dialectics, this would seem to indicate the total co-optation of institutional critique by the institutions (and by implication and extension, the co-optation of resistance by power), and thus make institutional critique as a critical method completely obsolete. Institutional critique, as co-opted, would be like a bacteria that may have temporarily weakened the patient – the institution – but only in order to strengthen the immune system of that patient in the long run. However, such a conclusion would hinge around notions of subjectivities, agencies and spatialities that institutional critique, arguably, tried to deconstruct. It would imply that the historical institutional critique was somehow "original" and "pure", thus confirming the authenticity of the artist-subjects performing it (as opposed to the current "institutional" subjects), and consequently reaffirming one of the ideas that institutional critique set out to circumvent, namely the notion of authentic subjects per se (as represented by the artist, reified by the institution). If institutional critique was indeed a discourse of disclosure and demystification of how the artistic subject as well as object was staged and reified by the institution, then any narrative that (again) posits certain voices and subjects as authentic, as possible incarnations of certain politics and criticalities, must be said to be not only counter to the very project of institutional critique, but perhaps also the ultimate co-optation, or more accurately, hostile take-over of it. Institutional critique is, after all, not primarily about the intentionalities and identities of subjects, but rather about the politics and inscriptions of institutions (and, thus, about how subjects are always already threaded through specific and specifiable institutional spaces).

4 See Julia Bryan-Wilson, "A Curriculum of Institutional Critique", in: Jonas Ekeberg (ed.), *New Institutionalism*, Oslo: OCA/verksted, 2003, pp. 89–109.

Rather, one must try to historize the moments of institutional critique and look at how it has been successful, in terms of being integrated into the education of artists and curators, that is of what Julia Bryan-Wilson has termed "the curriculum of institutional critique".[4] One can then see institutional critique not as a historical period and/or genre within art history, but rather as an analytical tool, a method of spatial and political criticism and articulation that can be applied not only to the artworld, but to disciplinary spaces and institutions in general. An institutional critique of institutional critique, what can be termed "institutionalized critique", has then to question the role of education, historization and how institutional auto-critique not only leads to a questioning of the institution and what it institutes, but also becomes a mechanism of control within new modes of governmentality, precisely through its very act of internalization. And this is the expanded notion of institutional critique that I briefly mentioned above, and which could become the legacy of the historical movements as much as an orientation for what so-called "critical art institutions" claim to be.

source: http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0106/sheikh/en

THE INSTITUTION OF
CRITIQUE

Hito Steyerl

In speaking about the critique of institution, the problem we ought to consider is the opposite one: the institution of critique. Is there anything like an institution of critique and what does it mean? Isn't it pretty absurd to argue that something like this exists, at a moment, when critical cultural institutions are undoubtedly being dismantled, underfunded, subjected to the demands of a neoliberal event economy and so on? However, I would like to pose the question on a much more fundamental level. The question is: what is the internal relationship between critique and institution? What sort of relation exists between the institution and its critique or on the other hand – the institutionalisation of critique? And what is the historical and political background for this relationship?

To get a clearer picture of this relationship we must first consider the function of criticism in general. On a very general level, certain political, social or individual subjects are formed through the critique of institution. The bourgeois subjectivity as such was formed through such a process of critique, and encouraged to exit the self-inflicted immaturity, to quote Kant's famous aphorism. This critical subjectivity was of course ambivalent, since it entailed the use of reason only in those situations we would consider as apolitical today, namely in the deliberation of abstract problems, but not the criticism of authority. Critique produces a subject which should make use of his reason in public circumstances, but not in private ones. While this sounds emancipatory, the opposite is the case. The criticism of authority is according to Kant futile and private. Freedom consists in accepting that authority should not be questioned. Thus, this form of criticism produces a very ambivalent and governable subject, it is in fact a tool of governance just as much as it is the tool of resistance as which it is often understood. But the bourgeois subjectivity which was thus created was very efficient. And in a certain sense, institutional criticism is integrated into that subjectivity, something which Marx and Engels explicitly refer to in their Communist manifesto, namely as the capacity of the bourgeoisie to abolish and to melt down outdated institutions, everything useless and petrified, as long as the general form of authority itself isn't threatened. The bourgeois class had formed through a limited, so to speak institutionalised critique and also maintained and reproduced itself through this form of institutional critique. And thus, critique had become an institution in itself, a governmental tool which produces streamlined subjects.

But there is also another form of subjectivity which is produced by criticism and also institutional criticism. For example, most obviously the political subject of French citizens was formed through an institutional critique of the French monarchy. This institution was eventually abolished and even beheaded. In this process, an appeal was already realised that Karl Marx was to launch much later: the weapons of critique should be replaced by the critique of weapons. In this vein one could say that the proletariat as a political subject was produced through the criticism of the bourgeoisie as an institution. This second form produces probably just as ambivalent subjectivites, but there is a crucial difference: it abolishes the institution which it criticises instead of reforming or improving it.

So in this sense institutional critique serves as a tool of subjectivation of certain social groups or political subjects. And which sort of different subjects does it produce? Let's take a look at different modes of institutional critique within the art field of the last decades.

To simplify a complex development: the first wave of institutional criticism in the art sphere in the 1970s questioned the authoritarian role of the cultural institution. It challenged the authority which had accumulated in cultural institutions within the framework of the nation state. Cultural institutions such as museums had taken on a complex governmental function. This role has been brilliantly described by Benedict Anderson in his seminal work Imagined Communities, when he analyzes the role of the museum in the formation of colonial nation states. In his view, the museum, in creating a national past, retroactively also created the origin and foundation of the nation and that was its main function. But this colonial situation, as in many other cases, points at the structure of the cultural institution within the nation state in general. And this situation, the authoritarian legitimation of the nation state by the cultural institution through the construction of a history, a patrimony, a heritage, a canon and so on, was the one that the first waves of institutional critique set out to criticize in the 1970s.

Their legitimation in doing so was an ultimately political one. Most nation states considered themselves as democracies which were founded on the political mandate of the people or the citizens. In that sense, it was easy to argue that any national cultural institution should reflect this self-definition and that any national cultural institution should thus be founded on similar mechanisms. If the political national sphere was – at least in theory – based on democratic participation, why should the cultural national sphere and it´s construction of histories and canons be any different? Why shouldn't the cultural institution be at least as representative as parliamentary democracy? Why shouldn't it include for example women in its canon, if women were at least in theory accepted in parliament? In that sense the claims that the first wave of institutional critique voiced were of course founded in contemporary theories of the public sphere, and based on an interpretation of the cultural institution as a potential public sphere. But implicitly they relied on two fundamental assumptions: First, this public sphere was implicitly a national one because it was modeled after the model of representative parliamentarism. The legitimation of institutional critique was based precisely on this point. Since the political system of the nation state is at least in theory representative of its citizens, why shouldn't a national cultural institution be? Their legitimation rested

on this analogy which was also more often than not rooted in material circumstances, since most cultural institutions were funded by the state. Thus, this form of institutional critique relied on a model based on the structure of political participation within the nation state and a Fordist economy, in which taxes could be collected for such purposes.

Institutional critique of this period related to these phenomena in different ways. Either by radically negating institutions altogether, by trying to build alternative institutions or by trying to be included into mainstream ones. Just as in the political arena, the most effective strategy was a combination of the second and third model, which claimed for example the inclusion into the cultural institution of minorities or disadvantaged majorities such as women. In that sense institutional critique functioned like the related paradigms of multiculturalism, reformist feminism, ecological movements and so on. It was a new social movement within the arts scene.

But during the next wave of institutional criticism which happened in the 1990s, the situation was a bit different. It wasn't so much different from the point of view of the artists or those who tried to challenge and criticize the institutions which, in their view, were still authoritarian. Rather, the main problem was that they had been overtaken by a right-wing form of bourgeois institutional criticism, precisely the one which Marx and Engels described and which melts down everything which is solid. Thus, the claim that the cultural institution ought to be a public sphere was no longer unchallenged. The bourgeoisie had sort of decided that in their view a cultural institution was primarily an economic one and as such had to be subjected to the laws of the market. The belief that cultural institutions ought to provide a representative public sphere broke down with Fordism, and it is not by chance that, in a sense, institutions which still adhere to the ideal to create a public sphere have been in place for a much longer time in places where Fordism is still hanging on. Thus, the second wave of institutional critique was in a sense unilateral since claims were made which at that time had at least partially lost their legitimative power.

The next factor was the relative transformation of the national cultural sphere which mirrored the transformation of the political cultural sphere. First of all, the nation state is no longer the only framework of cultural representation – there are also supranational bodies like the EU. And secondly, their mode of political representation is very complicated and only partly representative. It represents is constituencies rather symbolically than materially. To use a German differentiation of the word representation: Sie stellen sie eher dar, als sie sie vertreten. Thus, why should a cultural institution materially represent its constituency? Isn't it somehow sufficient to symbolically represent it? And although the production of a national cultural identity and heritage is still important, it is not only important for the interior or social cohesion of the nation, but also very much to provide it with international selling points in an increasingly globalised cultural economy. Thus, in a sense, a process was initiated which is still going on today. That is the process of the cultural or symbolic integration of critique into the institution or rather on the surface of the institution without any material consequences within the institution itself or its organisation. This mirrors a similar process on the political level: the symbolic integration, for example of minorities, while keeping up political and social

inequality, the symbolic representation of constituencies into supranational political bodies and so on. In this sense the bond of material representation was broken and replaced with a more symbolic one.

This shift in representational techniques by the cultural institution also mirrored a trend in criticism itself, namely the shift from a critique of institution towards a critique of representation. This trend, which was informed by Cultural Studies, feminist and postcolonial epistemologies, somehow continued in the vein of the previous institutional critique by comprehending the whole sphere of representation as a public sphere, where material representation ought to be implemented, for example in form of the unbiased and proportional display of images of black persons or women. This claim somehow mirrors the confusion about representation on the political plane, since the realm of visual representation is even less representative in the material sense than a supranational political body. It doesn't represent constituencies or subjectivities but creates them, it articulates bodies, affects and desires. But this is not exactly how it was comprehended, since it was rather taken for a sphere where one has to achieve a hegemony, a so to speak majority on the level of symbolic representation, in order to achieve an improvement of a diffuse area, which hovers between politics and economy, between the state and the market, between the subject as citizen and the subject as consumer, and between representation and representation. Since criticism could no longer establish clear antagonisms in this sphere, it started to fragment and to atomize it and to support a politics of identity which led to the fragmentation of public spheres, markets, to the culturalisation of identity and so on.

This representational critique pointed at another aspect, namely the unmooring of the seemingly stable relation between the cultural institution and the nation state. Unfortunately for institutional critics of that period, a model of purely symbolic representation gained legitimacy in this field as well. Institutions no longer claimed to materially represent the nation state and its constituency, but only claimed to represent it symbolically. And thus, while one could say that the former institutional critics were either integrated into the institution or not, the second wave of institutional criticism was integrated not into the institution but into representation as such. Thus, again, a Janus-faced subject was formed. This subject was interested in more diversity in representation, less homogeneous than its predecessor. But in trying to create this diversity, it also created niche markets, specialised consumer profiles, and an overall spectacle of „difference" – without effectuating much structural change.

But which conditions are prevailing today, during what might tentatively be called an extension of the second wave of institutional critique? Artistic strategies of institutional critique have become increasingly complex. They have fortunately developed far beyond the the ethnographic urge to indiscriminately drag underprivileged or unusual constituencies into museums, even against their will – just for the sake of „representation". They include detailed investigations, such as for example Allan Sekula's Fish Story, which connects a phenomenology of new cultural industries, like the Bilbao Guggenheim, with documents of other institutional constraints, such as those imposed by the WTO or other global economic organisations. They have learned to

walk the tightrope between the local and the global without becoming either indigenist and ethnographic, or else unspecific and snobbish. Unfortunately this cannot be said of most cultural institutions which would have to react to the same challenge of having to perform both within a national cultural sphere and an increasingly globalising market.

If you look at them from one side, then you will see that they are under pressure from indigenist, nationalist and nativist claims. If you look from the other side, then you will see that they are under pressure from neoliberal institutional critique, that is under the pressure of the market. Now the problem is – and this is indeed a very widespread attitude – that when a cultural institution comes under pressure from the market, it tries to retreat into a position which claims that it is the duty of the nation state to fund it and to keep it alive. The problem with that position is that it is an ultimately protectionist one, that it ultimately reinforces the construction of national public spheres and that under this perspective the cultural institution can only be defended in the framework of a new leftist attitude which tries to retreat into the ruins of a demolished national welfare state and its cultural shells and to defend them against all intruders. That is – it tends to defend itself ultimately from the perspective of its other enemies, namely the nativist and indigenist critics of institution, who want to transform it into a sort of sacralised ethno park. But there is no going back to the old fordist nation state protectionism with its cultural nationalism, at least not in any emancipatory perspective.

On the other hand, when the cultural institution is attacked from this nativist, indigenist perspective, it also tries to defend itself by appealing to universal values like freedom of speech or the cosmopolitanism of the arts, which are so utterly commodified as either shock effects or the display of enjoyable cultural difference that they hardly exist beyond this form of commodification. Or it might even earnestly try to reconstruct a public sphere within market conditions, for example with the massive temporary spectacles of criticism funded let's say by the German Bundeskulturstiftung. But under the ruling economic circumstances, the main effect achieved is to integrate the critics into precarity, into flexibilised working structures within temporary project structures and freelancer work within cultural industries. And in the worst cases, those spectacles of criticism are the decoration of large enterprises of economic colonialism such as in the colonisation of Eastern Europe by the same institutions which are producing the conceptual art in these regions.

If the first wave of institutional critique, criticism produced integration into the institution, the second one only achieved integration into representation. But in the third phase the only integration which seems to be easily achieved is the one into precarity. And in this sense we can nowadays answer the question concerning the function of the institution of critique as follows: while critical institutions are being dismantled by neoliberal institutional criticism, this produces an ambivalent subject which develops multiple strategies for dealing with its dislocation. It is on the one side being adapted to the needs of ever more precarious living conditions. On the other, there seems to have hardly ever been more need for institutions which could cater to the new needs and desires that this constituency will create.

source: http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0106/steyerl/en

THE ARCHIVE OF LOST OBJECTS

Hito Steyerl

I wrote a paper[1], which tried to deal with art institutions and institutional criticism. While I was writing it, I looked out of the window and started asking myself: what the hell am I talking about here? Because I was living in Sarajevo at that moment, and what I saw from my window was on, one side of the street, a long queue of people waiting for visas in front of the Swiss embassy, and on the other side a house which had been hit by two grenades and had not been rebuilt yet (the building was home to Sarajevo's film museum). And then I got the feeling that what I was writing about – art institutions like, this museum – was something completely unreal. And from the 'point of view' of this window in Sarajevo, I started to ask myself: which institutions I am talking about? What institutions? There are evidently not many cultural institutions left standing here which could be criticised. They have been criticised so radically during the last 15 years that many of them simply ceased to exist and the rest of them are still in ruins. This is the angle from which I intend to approach this topic: analyzing destroyed and barely functional institutions, the rubble of institutions – in connection with a project I am working on right now. At the same time, I would like to think the possiblity of imagining something new from this rubble. I am not saying we should rebuild or reconstruct the institution, but to invent a new one.

Anyway, at the very beginning of writing this paper, there was one thing which really struck me. I realized that the most radical and successful form of institutional critique in the 1980s and 1990s was neither artistic, nor progressive. The dominant form of Institutional critique during this period was, on the contrary, a reactionary one. It was either neoliberal or nationalist, racist, fundamentalist, and so on, usually both at the same time. Either it criticized the institution because it was not adapted to the needs of the market, or because it was not local and indigenous enough. Both of these forms of institutional critique were infinitely more successful in this era than the liberal or radical democratic critique of the institution, which was also being articulated during this time, and whose effects are much – let us say – harder to identify than the ones which the onslaught of reactionary

institutional critique has brought with it, and which simply demolished and destroyed large parts of modernist cultural institutions with their belief in education and participation, as unrealized as these aspirations might have been.

I would like to present here a few cases of this reactionary critique of the institution in its most radical form. These drastic examples are symptoms of an overall trend which has affected cultural institutions also in western welfare states, but in much more moderate form. I will collect those examples from the project I am working on now in Sarajevo, under the working title *Archive of Lost Objects*. This project is an investigation into the paradoxes of documentary forms.

What does this project have to do with cultural institutions? While working on this project we encountered over and over again the disappearance of modernist, multi-ethnic, empowering and participatory forms of cultural institutions in the 1980s and most radically during the war in the 1990s throughout the ex-Yugoslavia. Let me give the first example of a cultural institution subjected to radical institutional critique, as for example the Film museum in Sarajevo which was militarily criticised in the latter period. In a sort of bitter twist of Marx's famous statement, one could say that in this case the weapons of critique were replaced by the critique of weapons. The Film museum is a classical ex-socialist municipal institution, which preserves all film productions made in Bosnia and Herzegovina which promotes art film, and operates in extremely poor funding conditions. Actually, it is quite underfunded, but still functioning. During the war, it was hit twice by grenades and a big part of the filmstock was lost either during those attacks or was used for heating during the war, since the filmstock burned well. Due to the heroic efforts of the staff and great support of the Yugoslav film museum in Belgrade, almost all of the prints could have been retrieved and the collection restored after the war. But they are still screening films, although sometimes under quite unusual conditions. When we arrived there in the middle of the day, a famous partisan film called *The Battle of the Neretva* was being shown in a completely empty cinema. The projectionist said that he would screen all the films once a year, even without the audience, in order to ventilate them and prevent their further decay.

But let's come back to the institution. Despite all conservation efforts, a few films from the collection remained missing and were irretrievably lost during the war. These are some of the first monthly film journals made in Bosnia and Herzegovina after WWII. The *Film Journals* numbers 1, 2 and 20 are missing. They were usually shown before cinema screenings and presented a selection of news about the socialist production efforts, the construction of tractors, the inauguration of new factories and so on.

How have they disappeared? The journals were shot on nitrate stock which burns very easily, and for this reason they had to be stored in a bunker, that is, in a safe place that was located in a filmstudio in the suburbs. But in the first phase of the siege of Sarajevo in 1992, this filmstudio had already been located in a no-mans land between the two frontlines. Since the studio has two entrances, it could be accessed from both the Serbian and Bosnian sides. People from the Serbian side were

obviously informed about the prints and evacuated them to a house close by, on the Serbian side, owned by a guy called Đokić. But this act of retrieval had been witnessed by someone on the Bosnian frontline and the house of Đokić was hit by a grenade and went up in flames.

But anyway, when we asked the person from the film museum which scene from this lost film she would like to reconstruct in the framework of our project, which deals with the reconstruction of those lost objects, her answer was absolutely clear: she chose a scene which deals with the alphabetization of illiterate women shortly after WWII, with, so to speak, literacy classes. This scene shows how classes were organised for elderly rural people, mostly Muslim women, to learn how to read and write. The teacher was usually very young and she stood in front of a blackboard and taught the traditionally dressed, that is, veiled women how to read and write. And this was the scene she and her collegue wanted to reconstruct for the project. They had very strong memories and also an obvious emotional attachment to this scene.

So, basically, the scene which was destroyed during the bombing is a scene which shows a cultural institution which is strongly imbued with modernist and democratic values, an institution which educates and empowers women, which is deeply secular, and at least theoretically universalist or non-discriminating in terms of culture. And of course not only this film has disappeared, but also many of the cultural values which went along with it. The grenade which destroyed this film also symbolically destroyed the socialist modernist ideal of education and empowerment of women and people as such in secular cultural institutions, as imperfect as they may have been. It was symbolically the beginning of segregated cultural institutions along religious and, so called, ethnic lines which also concerns the institution of the film museum itself. To confirm the story of the disappearance of the film, we went to Pale, one of the administrative seats of the Bosnian Serbs, which in the meantime have established their own film museum. Both Film museums, the one from Sarajevo and the one from Pale, which are located about 20km apart, were in contact for the very first time. The irony is that now not only society is being segregated, but that this segregation produces new institutions such as the Film museum in Pale, which has neither a screening facility nor any films in stock.

Thus, we can see here on several levels a radical institutional critique from nationalist, segregationist and indigenous forces, which literally destroys the old cultural institutions with their ideals of secularism, education and participation. Replacing the old ideals of empowering women, represents the growing domestication of women either by religious or so-called cultural means or through capitalist mechanisms like the commodification of women, as Bosnia has become one of the pivotal points for trafficking women.

And this example of reactionary instituional critique can be used as a symbol for a similar trend concerning many cultural and educational institutions in the 1980s and 1990s. The destruction of a publicly funded cultural sphere, which at least in theory adhered to modernist or more broadly enlightenment values like education, equality, empowerment of disadvantaged groups, and so on, also

occurred in Western welfare states, only in a much more moderate manner. As I pointed out at the beginning, they were under attack from two sides – one of neo-liberalism which aimed at their transformation into free market enterprizes, and the other of nationalist indigenisms, aiming at the restriction of artistic freedom, the implementation of religious values and the construction of new national cultures.

Let me give you another example of such a destruction of a public sphere, another case of radical institutional critique. Another significant location in Sarajevo is a memorial park in a part of town called Vrača. It is a small fortress from the Ottoman period, which was also in use during the Austro-Hungarian reign. After WWII it was transformed into the museum for liberation fighters, that is the partisans who had been killed during the war. The names of more than 10.000 people were written down in plaster letters on the walls of the two courtyards. As people told us, it also had a somewhat necrophilic appeal.

But apart from this, it was also a museum of liberation – multifunctional space with projection facilities where one could organize conferences, screenings, and so on. This place is now located precisely on the border between the Federation and the Serbian Republic where cigarette smugglers are hanging around. It was completely devastated during the war. In fact, it was the first location from which an attack on Sarajevo was launched since it is situated on a hill overlooking the city. Also during the war, the soldiers stationed there erased the partisan names on the walls by shooting at them with machine guns. So, most of those letters have fallen down to the ground, irretrievably shattered. Only a few remained forming a strange text, which is illegible and has become a hieroglyph for liberation from fascism which is no longer intelligible and has literally lost its meaning.

Actually, I picked up some of these shattered letters and brought them here. Of course when I look at them as partisans' names, I start asking myself what kind of story lies behind each of them. On the other hand, I try to resist the temptation to reconstruct their original meaning. It's not about the restoration of some sort of

Gorana Matić, photo series: *Softly Does the Sutjeska Flow*, 2003-2004.

original text, or the mourning of its disappearance or some nostalgia around a lost story. In my opinion these letters do mean something completely different.

As for Vrača, we can see it as another form of radical institutional critique. The main value under attack here is an anti-fascist consensus which was reached – at least declaratively – in the whole of Europe after WWII. We can say that this consensus has been shattered throughout Europe during the 1990s, with the right wing populist parties coming to power not only here in Austria, with the rise of neofascist organisations, but also with the new paradigms of totalitarianism particularly in the new Europe, which claim that Stalinism and Fascism are basically the same. The destruction of Vrača and the 11,000 names written on the walls there, is just a symbol of the breakdown of the antifascist consensus in Europe. This is another example of the right-wing criticism of the institution by nationalist and nativist forces. The interesting news is that despite the desperate lack of funds in Bosnia, this institution is going to be reconstructed next year, and this process of reconstruction poses in my opinion yet another problem.

Those were some examples of the radical institutional critique of the 1990s, a critique which is not conservative, since it doesn't conserve anything but it is revolutionary, since it destroys or radically transforms. In light of these examples, one in a sense see how helpless and weak any form of liberal or radical democratic institutional critique in the 1990s was, since it was dealing with institutions, faced with much bigger threats. The liberal critique had not only been overtaken by nationalists and nativists, but it was also used through the form of bourgeois institutional criticism – the one which Marx and Engels described in the *Communist Manifesto* – a criticism which melts down everything which is solid into thin air, for example institutionalised public spheres, museums, cultural centres, and so on, in order to subject them to the force of the market.

What is the solution to this problem? How should we then conceptualize the production of new public spheres and thus ultimately the institutions which give

them material support and continuity? At this point, several problems arise. The first fact is that it is no longer possible to go back to the old form of institution. We can neither reconstruct the literacy classes, nor even the memorial park of Vrača. Of course it is physically possible to reconstruct it. Vrača can be rebuilt. In a political context most of the values for which those partisans fought – like a multi-ethnical secular socialist society – are becoming more and more irrelevant, and are even considered crazy and dangerous. The people who believe in it are nowadays marginalised and considered as freaks, which makes reconstruction of Vrača an empty shell without contents. In a society where most cultural instutions, including schools, are segregated along ethnic and religious lines, Vrača has lost its meaning. A similar problem arises with the renewing of the literacy classes. In the present context where women can probably read and write, but are being commodified and turned into properties by traffickers, a literacy class misses the point. You can still have them, but if women are using their literacy skills to sign a contract which forces them into debt bondage, the emancipation which literacy promised is quite far away.

And this problem of reconstructing the lost institution, the impossiblity of its rebuilding, is the problem we are dealing with in our project. Yes, it is impossible to recreate this institution. But this impossibility doesn't have to lead to mourning, melancholy or nostalgia. Let me try to explain this by using the example from the project we are working on. In this project we try to create very accurate documents about these lost institutions from the memories of two witnesses. How is it possible for the director of the film museum in Sarajevo and the projectionist to produce a documentary reconstruction of the scene of the literacy classes for women? How would they reconstruct this scene? A police artist draws this scene based on their descriptions from memory.

According to the laws of producing documentary evidence, it had to be two witnesses, because one witness is no witness as they say. You need two witnesses in order to produce evidence, everything else is hearsay. This was of course also the

Gorana Matić, photo series: *Softly Does the Sutjeska Flow*, 2003-2004.

method used by Bosnian authorities to issue new documents to the people who lost them during the war. They needed two witnesses to prove their identities. But the paradox is if you have two witnesses you also have two quite different memories.

You see, both witnesses remember different things, and at the moment when the document becomes, so to speak, objective, because it is confirmed by two witnesses, it also becomes contradictory. To put it simply: at the precise moment when a document becomes a document, it also becomes a fiction. And those lost objects we are reconstructing are both objective and fictional, both true and confabulated. They become documents only through this constitutive difference.

At this point the process of reconstruciton becomes interesting. It is not anymore about uncovering the lost truth from the past. Instead it becomes a creative process of inventing the new truth which is coming from the future. We realised that those memories were only partly based on the lost film – in fact, the projectionist flatly stated that he had never seen the film in the first place, but that it was being made from personal memories and fiction films. Generally speaking, they were less about what the scene was really like, but more about what the scene should have been like. This becomes completely clear in the video tape we made from the process of drawing, which documents this process of creative confabulation.

In fact, the witnesses had invented not the literacy class they had seen in the past, but the literacy class they wanted to have in the future, which would be in a way opposed to the reactionary processes of the present. So in a way something interesting had happened: precisely by using all standard truth procedures for making the documentary up to the point of overidentifiying with it – even by using, for example, forensic means to reconstruct this object – a sort of creative fictionalization was produced. The result of insisting on the objective picture of the past was in fact the fictitional imagination of something located in the future.

What does this all mean for the future of the institution? As I have mentioned before, it doesn't make sense to reconstruct the literacy class from the film journal in

its orignial form, because its social context is lost. But, what about inventing a new literacy class, which would no longer try to restore the original meaning of, for instance, those broken letters from Vrača? Or to reconstruct the names and stories which were originally represented by those letters? This literacy class would have to be about learning to read the text as it is in its fragmented and shattered form, therefore inventing a language which would make sense of this new form of writing. There is no lost meaning to reconstruct in those letters, because the meaning is already accomplished in the fact of their fragmentation, only we don't know how to read these new letters yet. We first have to invent a language which invests these fragments with a new meaning. In this literacy class, we cannot identify with the teacher anymore, but with the students instead. The task is to invent a new language, which will teach us how to read the letters precisely in their state of fragmentation. Those broken letters from Vrača represent the handwriting of the total fragmentation of all spheres of life in late capitalism, a fragmentation which is often equivalent to destruction. This fragmentation has at once to be acknowledged and affirmed, because there is no way back to original unity, and at the same time it has to be opposed, since we can only decipher it in a new common language. We have to learn to read those letters – not by restoring their original meaning, but by inventing a new one, and with it, a new language of emancipation. The task of the institution today is not to become a teacher in this process, but a very, very humble student.
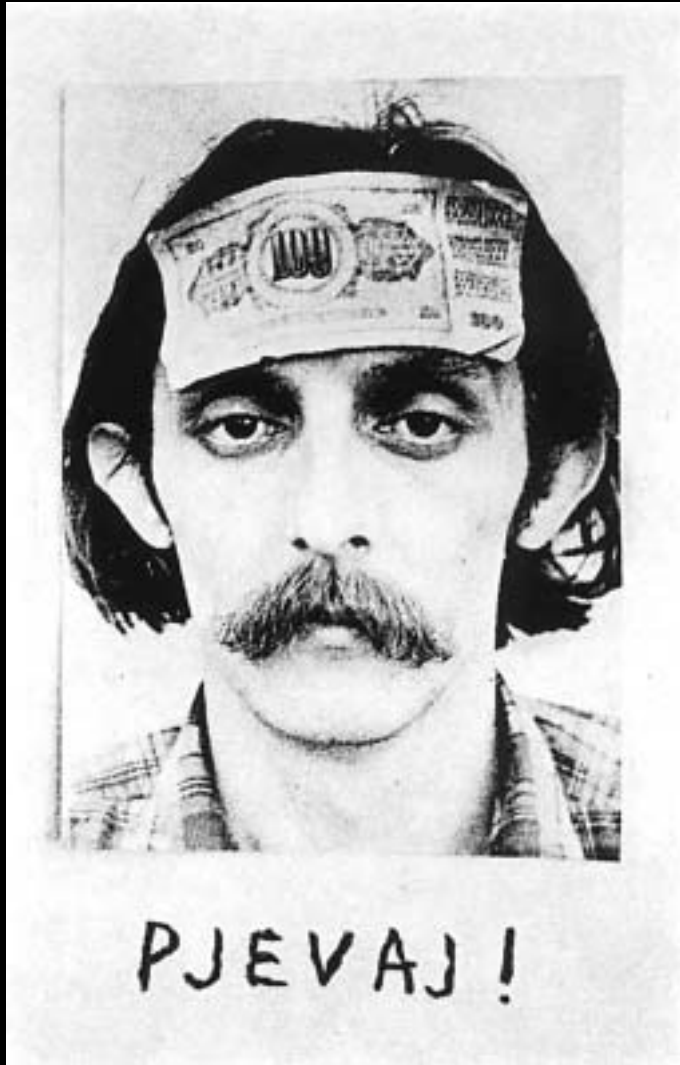
Mladen Stilinović, *Sing!, Reflections on Money*, 1980

WHO IS "GORAN ĐORĐEVIĆ"

Artists, Art Critics, Photographers and Friends, SKC, 1972

This photograph of a group of people leaning against the wall of the Belgrade Students' Cultural Center Gallery includes the circle of protagonists of the so-called "new artistic practice", and represents one of the emblematic images of 1970s alternative culture in Yugoslavia. The mythologization of this photo-document forms a part of the ambivalent processes of the institutionalization of the Belgrade conceptual art scene. Having become a cultural-historical reference in this way, it was used in the 1990s as a canon and etalon for critical discourses and practices of contemporary art in Serbia. On the other hand, the cultural practices in question have never actually become an integral part of the cultural establishment and are still used as a kind of necessary and interminable alternative to the official art system.

It is this problematic that re-actualizes the work of Goran Đorđević, former student of electrical engineering, artist in the period between 1974 and 1985, and later doorman of the Salon De Fleurus in New York and the Kunsthistorishe Mausoleum in Belgrade. He played an active part in the cultural life of the Belgrade Students' Cultural Center in the 1970s, marked by leftist political charge and radical artistic practices, where he pointed out the problems in the theoretical grounding of those practices. His work is based on performative critique of the concept of the "idea" – as the emancipatory substance of conceptual art – as opposed to the concept of "appearance" – as the key concept of traditional conceptions of art.

The insight he articulated during the 1970s and 1980s is still relevant today as it reveals some aspects of the neo-liberal transformation of the market from buying and selling objects to producing and exchanging ideas, submitting the latter to the logic of the post-welfare state system. Introducing new perspectives on the issue of authorship into the narrative of art and adopting anti-professionalist, amateur and enthusiast creative tactics he has managed to create a position from which it is possible to produce art and reflect the material exteriority of art production at the same time. In 1979 Đorđević attempted to organize an International Artists' Strike as a "protest against the ongoing repression of the art system and the alienation of artists from the results of their work". Awhen this failed, he entered a new and final phase of his work in which he began to use copy as a means to fight against art by using art itself, this way confronting the logic of repetition and naivety with the logic of newness and criticality as constitutive elements of the dominant episteme in contemporary art production.

ON THE CLASS CHARACTER OF ART

Goran Đorđević

> *The wretchedness of religion is at once an expression of and a protest against real wretchedness. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is a demand for their true happiness.*
>
> K. Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*

The known history of human society is principally a history of class relations. The ruling class, controlling the existing productive forces and relations of production, also seek to control the existing relations in other spheres of human activity. The presence of organizes religious consciousness is quite understandable in those forms of social organization in which direct control (above all, economic) of the few over majority of the members of society is allowed.

The existence of religious consciousness was basically always manifested by the acknowledgement and acceptance of the existence of the following concepts: Absolute, Universal, Ideal, Eternal: which leads to a spontaneous assertion of one of its elementary concepts usually known under the name of God. These concepts represent attributes that primarily relate to the concept of God. I feel that it is also necessary to name another very important divine attribute and that is the concept of creation "from nothing" *(ex nihilo).* By the present knowledge of relations in nature (including man and society as forms of its expression), it seems there is not just *one* phenomenon with which we could relate the concept of creation. This bring us also to the conclusion that this concept only has any sense if the concept 'God' has. Put simply. A being that exists as a result without a cause is the only being that can create. (The human being is certainly not that being).

It is understandable why the appearance of early capitalism corresponds roughly to the decrease of the authority of God. The social consciousness then current placed man in a particularly inferior (humiliating) position in respect to God and did not correspond to the then new productive forces. The still young bourgeoisie encouraged the view of strong, powerful and exceptional men who are above the other members of society. These men have gained their position in society thanks, above all, to "exceptional" qualities. It is interesting that during this period there appears a definite consciousness of the Artist and of Art. The Artist is an

exceptional, particularly gifted and talented man who, thanks to his capability for creating has to accede to Ideal, Eternal, Universal, absolute values (i.e. to attain God).

The renaissance of Antique Gods, bearing human qualities is necessary for the making of the model of an exceptional man with divine characteristics (superman). So, art as "creative" activity (by of course "exceptional" men), serves as yet one more "proof" for the justifiability of given class relations. On the one hand we have the human being biologically, economically, sociologically, psychologically, profoundly conditioned; on the other stands his spiritual opposite and (unfortunately) his ideal, the being possessing the absolute qualities of- God.

Especially in past centuries, art represents a specific document on the primeval struggle in man between the aspiration to reach the supernatural and natural possibilities - the divine and the human. This process was conditioned by the degree of development of productive forces and the relations of production, and the results of this process were used to justify and confirm these relations. Thus: art in its real and practical function was *and remains* one of the instruments of the ruling class in the process of the forming of consciousness and in the process of governing the majority. Revolutionary change of the social order is primarily conditioned by qualitative changes in the relations of production. This the control over labour and its fruits would be fundamentally altered.

The decentralization of society and the possibility of direct decision making over the results of one's own work, offers conditions for the establishment of more humane relations between people and between man and his environment, thereby permitting a greater degree of liberty for each member of society as well as for the community in general. I feel that supporting and producing art that is a result of class relations (in the service of the ruling class) is a way of expressing reactionary consciousness in a society which is working on building new interpersonal relations (e.g. as in our society).

Take the character and role of art in a totalitarian society: it does not represent art's degradation, on the contrary it shows art's true face which in other circumstances is more or less successfully masked. In capitalist society, since the functioning and organization of art are based on the interests of the ruling class the demand for the abolishment of support for such an activity and the demand for its overcoming, as consciousness as well as activity, are conditioned by the demand for a qualitative change, of relations of production and of the positions of those forces in society to which art is necessary. This is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. Apart from the qualitative change in the relations of production, it is indispensable to clearly determine the reactionary character of the artistic consciousness and activity, this provides conditions for the overcoming of that consciousness and that activity on the level of society- achieved primarily by denying material support to the parasitic mechanism and system of institutions that seek and have the right to possess these alienated means thanks to the existence of the results (products) of artistic activity- the work of art- and thanks to the very affirmative, existing, relation of socialist society towards art. In countries that are building socialist relations in

society, not only is the class character of the artistic consciousness not understood , on the contrary this consciousness is upheld and asserted through corresponding activities that in fact mean permitting the existence of those forces and mechanisms which by their nature have very little in common with the true endeavours for better, more humane relations in society and for a greater degree of freedom for every human being in that society. I believe that the decision about accepting or rejecting art, considered as consciousness as well as activity on an individual level, is an inalienable right of every human being that should not be questioned, as is also the case with the individual right to expression of the other forms of religious consciousness in socialist society.

That which is indispensable to our society at this moment is a truly critical analysis of the whole cultural inheritance, from the point of view of the essential need of our community. (I'm thinking here of the educational system in particular). At the same time, we must seek new forms of activity, new ways of thought, that would be the result of a consciousness of the real, natural possibilities and tendencies of the human being in the sense of augmenting the degree of individual and collective freedom.

(Art is primarily the results of an illusion of freedom, and not a way of expressing the liberties of the human being. Every activity of which the goal is the assertion of an artistic consciousness represents at the same time the prolongation of that illusion).

It is necessary to free ourselves from the primeval fear of the Unknown (which is really a function of economic, sociological, psychological and other factors) for fear of the Unknown is the basic precondition for the appearance of any form of religious consciousness. We must understand and truly accept that the Unknown is also nature. In a certain way, it is our own nature.

The call to abandon illusions about their conditions is the call to abandon a condition which requires illusions.

K. Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*

Belgrade, Yugoslavia

source: Goran Đorđević, *On the Class Character of Art,* The Fox, New York, 1976, p. 163-165
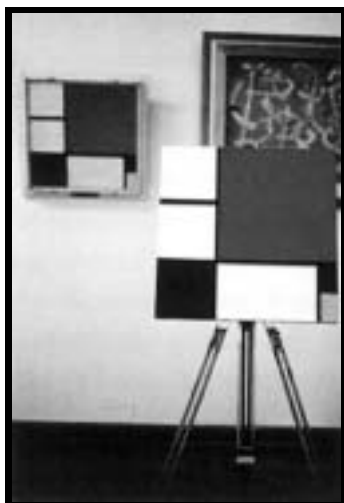
Copying Mondrian in National Museum, Belgrade, (or How to Copy), 1983

Walter Benjamin, *Mondrian 1963-1996*, Belgrade, 1987

ALTERED IDENTITIES:
GORAN ĐORĐEVIĆ AS AN ARTIST,
SKC AS AN INSTITUTION

Branislav Dimitrijević

In October 1972, at the Students' Cultural Centre (SKC) in Belgrade, an exhibition entitled *October '72* took place. This exhibition registered the activities of the new generation of artists (Marina Abramović, Gergely Urkom, Neša Paripović, Zoran Popović, Era Milivojević and Raša Todosijević) who have been identified with conceptualism, dematerialization of the artwork, post-68 politics and institutional critique in accordance with international currents of the time. However the most iconic result of this exhibition has been one documentary photograph in which we can see all the main protagonists of the so-called "New artistic practice"[1], from Slavko Timotijević on the left to Neša Paripović on the right[2], leaning against the white wall of the gallery. The situation and postures are quite similar to the famous photograph of Huebler, Barry, Kosuth and Weiner leaning against the wall in Seth Sigelaub's gallery. Both photographs played an important role in establishing for future generations of neo-conceptualists a certain "cult" of the artists involved.

Two years later, on the occasion of the SKC event, entitled *October '74*, an electrical engineering student who frequented the gallery, Goran Đorđević, reproduced this photograph on the transparency slide and projected it on the same wall where the photographed artists had previously stood. The only written text about this work can be found on the invitation card: "This photograph contains all participants and organizers of the exhibition *October '72*. A certain Zeitgeist, as well as the relations among members of this group at that moment, are inscribed there. By projecting this image two years later at the same spot where it was shot, I want to indicate the changes which occurred in the meantime. The time which has passed became the immediate motive and medium of my action." In one of his previous works, *Two times of one wall* (1974), one segment of that same white wall was photographed and subsequently projected on the same square area. Both pieces did not provoke any reaction at that time, and what is argued here is that they

1 The term was coined by the leading art critic in Belgrade, Jerko Denegri, in order to avoid a more limiting term "conceptual art" which could exclude a certain variety of artistic actions that could not be incorporated in the strictest sense of the word "conceptualism".

2 From left to right: S. Timotijević, J. Vinterhalter, M. Jozić, M. Kraus, J. Tijardović, Z. Popović, M. Abramović, R. Todosijević, G. Matić, D. Blažević, G. Urkom, N. Vizner, E. Milivojević i N. Paripović

showed the first instance of a certain "self-critical" and sceptical thinking in relation to the proverbial revolutionary impact of the art of the time: particularly the fact that this practice did not recognize a distance from the object of critical research (Art) but a full identification with that object, including its mystification. A belief in the idea of art as *process* rather than in the form of a materialized object was one of the fundamental signs of the revolutionary move in art during the 1960s and 1970s. Yet every attempt at the historization of this artistic practice (which is now, in a rather traditional way, demanded by the very protagonists of this practice) introduces new mystifications which prevent critical distance. It was Djordevic's intervention for the *October '74* exhibition, which treated different institutional and ideological consequences of the overlapping of the representation and the referent, that stressed for the first time the grim prospect of the impossibility of saving an artistic event from the passing of time which tends to turn new artistic phenomena into old ones, revolution into tradition, and ambition into mannerism.

In the international context of conceptual art one can recognize similarities – but no direct influence – between Đorđević's early works and, for instance, the piece *Photopath* by Victor Burgin, which "came out of Burgin's reflections on those passages in the Philosophical Investigations where Wittgenstein explores how we can simultaneously look at something and think about it".[3] Đorđević's early works surpassed analytical conceptualism and introduced reflection as the category of experience rather than purely as the category of artistic decision. In other words, as Joseph Kosuth put it, "a proposition is analytic when its validity depends solely on the definitions of the symbols it contains, and synthetic when its validity is determined by the facts of experience".[4] Therefore, if the notion of *process*, as well as the very everyday life of the protagonists of the "new artistic practice", were the focus of artistic reflection, then Đorđević recognized the "facts of experience" as relevant for the understanding of the artistic event at stake. However, in the rather scarce literature about conceptual art in Belgrade in the 1970s, these two works were not referred to.[5] Đorđević is mentioned only as an artist of "analytical conceptualism", even close to some ideas which characterized the SKC after the change of the editorial/curatorial team in 1976,[6] but there are no specific interpretations of any of his works. The same applies to his works from the early 1980s when Đorđević introduced the painted *copy* as a means of conceptual manoeuvring in the midst of

3 Tony Godfrey, *Conceptual Art*, Phaidon, London, 1998, p. 205

4 Quoted in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, A. Alberro, B. Stimson (eds.), The MIT Press, Cambridge: Mass, p. XXXI

5 The main source of information about this period is still the catalogue published by the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade in 1983: *Nova umetnost u Srbiji*. In this publication an essay by Goran Đorđević was published ("On the use of scientific terminology and formalism in a work of art") but in the introductory texts (with the exception of Jasna Tijardović who discussed artists' texts) he was not mentioned. In the catalogue *Nova umjetnicka praksa* (Galerija suvremene umjetnosti, Zagreb, 1978) there is only one text, by Jerko Denegri, which more thoroughly discussed the work of Đorđević in the 1970s, but only through the specter of his "analytical work". In a few publications surveying the program of SKC only the name of Goran Đorđević is mentioned, and only one photo, from his last exhibition in 1985, is reproduced, although wrongly dated 1979.

6 According to statements of "witnesses" (including Đorđević himself) it seems that the change in the team running the gallery up until 1976 (when some participants, including Đorđević, were allegedly removed from the decision-making process regarding the program and policy of the gallery) was the moment when a radical political position of critique of culture and art as ideology was abandoned which led to a certain de-politicization of artistic practice in SKC.

the declared end of "new artistic practice" under the vogue of the "new image", with its local responses to German neo-expressionism, Italian *transavanguardia*, and similar themes. It seems that Đorđević was an artist who has never attuned himself to artistic trends because the very ideological consequences of these trends were the target of his research and criticism. This position would condition and strengthen the integrity of his work, which would influence the final withdrawal of Đorđević from the art scene in 1985. Since then, Đorđević's name was mentioned occasionally in the context of some art projects (for instance, the International Exhibition of Modern Art in Belgrade and Ljubljana in 1986, or in his capacity of the "doorman" at the Salon de Fleurus in New York[7]) but these projects are beyond the interest of this article.

7 Salon is located at 41 Spring Street in New York. *Village Voice* wrote about it in the following terms: "A ground floor apartment behind a rather Parisian courtyard slightly east of Soho has metastasised into something that is unabashedly about the intersection of life, history, fiction and art: a re-creation of Gertrude Stein's salon on Rue de Fleurus. (...) When systems – whether the local art market or the whole modern era – collapse, freak events such as these rise through the cracks. Some artists hold on for dear life, erecting airtight bulwarks and artificial life-support systems to maintain the old order against the onslaught of disintegration. Others go with a more molecular vision, rearranging the subatomic particles of the old history to shake things up". Kim Levin, "Salon de Fleurus" (first published in *Village Voice*), reprinted in *New Moment*, 9/10, Belgrade, 1998, p. 102

8 See G. Đorđević, "Umetnost kao oblik religiozne svesti", *OKTOBAR 75*, SKC, 1975 (the text was published with the title "On the Class Character of Art" in *The Fox*, New York, 1976). In it Đorđević writes the following: "I argue that the support and the affirmation of art as a consequence of class relations is a means to demonstrate reactionary consciousness in a society which tries to build new social relations".

In the 1970s Đorđević developed radical attitudes in relation to ideology and the art institution, i.e. in relation to art-as-ideology, or more specifically, to the ideology of *new* art. Đorđević's works of the 1970s are accompanied by texts written from the position of dialectical materialism in which a certain resignation towards the course of "new artistic practice" may be located.[8] This course was not manifested by some particular hegemony but by the clash of three tendencies which, in an attempt to fight one another, lost any clear articulation or attitude. The first tendency was oriented towards the idea of SKC as a "meeting point" of radical youth culture and the political establishment, especially those progressive and younger communist officials who tried to be sensitive to the idea that the "new society" should bring up "new art" too. Let us call this tendency emancipatory or pragmatic, depending on the perspective we choose. This most serious tendency may be personified by Dunja Blažević, the first curator at the SKC gallery. The second tendency expected SKC to be the free venue of autonomous artistic processes, in accordance with a certain nomadic/hippie culture of the time. It varied from a quite relevant non-institutional enthusiasm for "new art" to autistic self-ghettoisation and *white kitsch*, and may be personified by the curatorial and editorial work of Biljana Tomić. Finally, the third tendency aimed at establishing the role of SKC as a lively site of urban life exceeding the autonomy of "high art" towards a lively pop-cultural environment. However, this tendency was inclined to become yet another manifestation of a local "crypto-bohemianism"; it may be personified by Slavko Timotijević, the curator at the other gallery of SKC (Happy New Gallery). Although present at some shows and activities of all three tendencies, Đorđević was left out as some kind of unwanted surplus.

9   G. Đorđević, "Letter to De Appel; Reaction to the invitation to participate in Works and Words", *Works and Words*, De Appel, Amsterdam, 1979.

10 *The International Strike of Artists?*, *3+4(b)*, Beograd, 1980.

11 "Original i kopija", a conversation with Slobodan Mijušković, *Moment*, 2, Beograd, 1985.

Simultaneously, in his participations at international art events, Đorđević posed questions which are relevant today when addressing the issue of the relation of the developed Western art system towards different economically unsupported aspects of contemporary art in, for example, countries of "real-socialism" in Eastern Europe. In his reply to the invitation to participate in the *Works and Words* exhibition at De Appel in Amsterdam in 1979 he wrote: "It is a common practice that the artists invited to the exhibitions of East European artists are those that have no recognized status of the artist in their own environment, which practically deprives their work of elementary forms of social support. Such social status and the lack of knowledge of other cultural/artistic environments does not give them the possibility to choose when invited to any art manifestation abroad. They are practically forced to accept any offer since these are rare occasions when their work has recognized artistic status..."[9]

In trying to resolve his position, Đorđević made an attempt to organize the *International Strike of Artists* in 1979 as a "protest against the ongoing repression of the art system and the alienation of artists from the results of their work". Đorđević mailed his invitation to a large number of artists around the world in order to organize a boycott of the art system. Although the strike was unrealizable, and although he received quite restrained reactions from those artists he wrote to (a Belgrade art magazine published 39 letters from artists including Acconci, Buren, Haacke, LeWitt, Marioni, Ramsden, etc.[10]), this action was a significant document about a complex relation between radical artists and the system. After his failed attempt to organize the strike, Đorđević entered the new and final phase of his work in which he began to use the *copy* as *a means to fight against art by using art itself*, if we can try to define in such a way his theoretical, ideological and artistic tactics. In the only interview with Đorđević published in Serbia, in 1984, he declared: "It happened that the term "conceptual art" started being used by those artists I did not want to be associated with. Simply, I felt that the difference between Tradition and Avant-garde became minimal. Then I started to think about works to be realized in traditional materials."[11]

In 1980 he held an exhibition in the gallery of the Student Cultural Centre that consisted of ten "identical" copies of his own painting from the 1960s, *The Harbingers of the Apocalypse*. He stressed both the *non-sense* of this act, as well as the impression that these new copies carry more significance as an artistic gesture then his hilariously bad high-school painting (meaning that the copy became artistically more worthy than the original). In the following few years, Đorđević continued working with copies, but moved to copying "masters" of Modern Art as well as inserting these copies in "inappropriate" combinations. All his projects reveal possibilities of radical artistic gestures at the time when the radicalism of the 70s reached an impasse through aesthetisation, inflation and institutionalisation. The "new" conceptualism has become, in the words of Victor Burgin, "the mirror image of the old – nothing but

commodity, nothing but style", and Đorđević tried to maintain the position of radical conceptualism but without a particular type of aesthetic association. By observing also the early 1980s trend of the return to the convention of painting as signifying "art", and by working on an "un-artistic use of a traditional artistic medium", as Slobodan Mijušković put it, Goran Đorđević created a vacillating cultural subversion: "If my attitudes may seem radical to some, I must say that they are first of all an expression of sympathy with intellectual anarchism that is unfortunately not far away from the utopian, keeping in mind that the true power of Tradition and Institution is incongruously and discouragingly big".[12] As Đorđević claims, conceptual art in Belgrade ended in "white kitsch" and in reaction to that he made a project in 1980 entitled *The Exhibition* in which he combines the old kitsch of "pompičre art" (the term by Rasa Todosijevic) with the new kitsch of minimal art. On the invitation card Đorđević wrote: "Works at this exhibition are not works of art. They are just attitudes to art. Or, to put it more precisely, they are attitudes against art. I think this is the last moment to unequivocally tear down from art its mask of freedom and humanism and to reveal its real face, the face of loyal and humble servant."

It seems that it was exactly this position of combat against art by means of art itself, as well as his research into the ideological servitude of "new artistic practice", which encountered a total misunderstanding and denial in the local art scene. With the exception of Slobodan Mijušković who thoroughly discussed issues of anonymity, originality and the status of the Copy[13], there were no other reactions that would try to disclose why these projects were so much ignored in Belgrade. As opposed to Belgrade, a significant interest in Đorđević's work was raised in Ljubljana where the representatives of IRWIN group (notably Dušan Mandić), as well as the theoretician Marina Grzinic, regarded Đorđević (as well as Raša Todosijević) as crucial for the development of their concept of the *Retroavantgarde*. In the case of Gržinić, her interpretation of Đorđević, as well as of some later anonymous project associated with him, was made with the intention to "help us explain specificities of 'Post-Socialism' and the 'Eastern European condition', and to 'develop the theory of aesthetics and politics, and to re-philosophise the Eastern European region'"[14] It may be noted that the theoretically charged discourse on the aforementioned art practices appearing in Yugoslavia in the 1980s focuses on the alleged capacity of these practices to connote the political and philosophical "edge" of the Eastern European identity, i.e. to convey the constitutive cultural and political tissue of this construct irrespective of its appearance in the field of marginality. The sense of "belonging" to a cultural identity was a quintessential ideological ploy of the NSK and its theorists, and it was apparently important to stress the role of Ljubljana (as a culturally "advanced" site in

12 Slobodan Mijušković, "Goran Đorđević. Original i kopija" (interview), *Moment*, no.2, Belgrade, 1985, pp. 9-11.

13 "These almost infantile simulations, simplified renderings of modernist models are in fact documents, objectified notes of post-conceptual mental operations addressing problems of the charismatic status of the subject and the original, and of the despotism of the new and the creative." Slobodan Mijušković, "Govor u neodredjenom licu", *Moment*, no. 8, Autumn 1987, pp. 27-30.

14 Marina Gržinić, *Fiction Reconstructed: Eastern Europe, Post-socialism & The Retro-Avantgarde*, Edition Selene, Vienna, 2000, p. 11.

relation to, say, Belgrade) in recognizing Đorđević. This even led to slightly "cultural-racist" conclusions which claimed that Đorđević's projects were "devoid of any detectable connections with Serbia"[15].

Yet it seems that Đorđević was not only ignored in Belgrade, but also in New York (and no one would be surprised to hear that) where he went unrecognized as one unlikely pioneer of "appropriation art". Đorđević exhibited his works in the US in 1983 and 198 and, in accordance with his political beliefs, participated in a show ("Artists' Call" against the US policy in Central America, in the Judson Memorial Church in New York, 1984[16]) where also those who were to become the main protagonists of "appropriation art" also exhibited their work, namely Sherrie Levine and Mike Bidlo. His five cardboard copies of Malevich were mounted on a wall opposite the place where Levine's re-photographs of Walker Evans were hung. Levine painted her first copies (of Malevich) a few months afterwards, but this coincidence doesn't warrant any further speculation. However, it is clear that as soon as "appropriation art" gained its theoretical support and visibility within the art system, Goran Đorđević simply disappeared from the art scene and there has been no evidence of any work or art-project bearing his name ever since. He has never produced any statement explaining this decision and maybe the only clue we can detect is to be found in the letter from the Dutch artist Joep Bertrams responding to Đorđević's call for the aforementioned *International strike of artists* in 1979. This letter contained only one sentence: "Anonymous is the answer".[17]

Works by Sherrie Levine or Mike Bidlo were effectively associated with the emerging theoretical trends inspired by French post-structuralist theory. Keywords like "simulation", "pastiche", and "appropriation" were employed to describe new artistic trends, and the myth of originality was dismantled within the epistemological break of postmodernist criticism. The theoretical appeal of appropriation art was specifically significant among the writers who explored the critical space opened up by conceptualist art practices, the field of *institutional critique*. Appropriation art seemed to challenge the institution of art in its foundation. Artists like Levine were seen as abolishing all the rules of the game, and in the words of one of the most influential critics of the time, Craig Owens, "in all her work Levine has assumed the functions of the dealer, the curator, the critic – everything but the creative artist.[18]" The central figure of criticism was the author; the author as a gendered subject, the author as a myth concealing real social and cultural conditions, the author as an almost irrelevant category in discussing the cultural text. Sherrie Levine's work was explicitly interpreted as her refusal of authorship, refusal of the role of creator as "father" – and of paternal rights in general – assigned to the author by law[19]. It was the selection of works copied by her that supported this

15 See Aleš Erjavec, "Neue Slowenische Kunst", in A. Erjavec (ed.), *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition*, University of California Press, 2003, p. 158.

16 On this show, see Jamey Gambrell, "Art against Intervention", *Art in America*, May 1984, pp. 9-12.

17 *The International Strike of Artists?*, *3+4(b)*, Beograd, 1980

18 As quoted in Gerald Marzorati, "Art in the (Re)Making", *Art in America*, May 1986, p. 97.

19 See Craig Owens, "The discourse of others: Feminists and Postmodernism", in H. Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Bay Press, Port Townsend, 1983, p. 73.

interpretation (works by male artists showing images of the Other: women, the poor, insane, children...), rather then the act of copying itself. Levine started re-photographing Weston and Ewans, and only later (in 1984) made her first painted copies of Malevich, Monet and others. She did challenge the role of the author-creator but one cannot say that she rejected authorship since she signed her works with her own name, and that name, and her identity as a woman, is quite an important element in interpreting her criticism of "paternal rights". The subject who appropriates retains the identity that provides us with the clues to interpret her/his intentions.

As Michel Foucault suggested, we can think about the author as a function of discourse. But he also suggested that "discourse was not originally a thing, a product, or a possession, but an action situated in a bipolar field of sacred and profane, lawful and unlawful, religious and blasphemous. It was a gesture charged with risks long before it became a possession caught in the circuit of property values"[20]. Appropriation art was instantly "caught in the circuit of property values" because it was located within the developed art system of New York art circulation. Simultaneously, some anonymous projects like *International Exhibition of Modern Art* (along with the project *Last Futurist Exhibition* in 1985) occurred in an environment unaffected by market logic. There were hardly any private galleries at the time in Belgrade, and a public gallery had only a symbolic status of verifying selected art projects. The appearance of copies did not upset any lawyers, neither did anyone attempt to sell them. The exhibition of copies, as a discourse, operated as an action situated within the tensions and oppositions in the symbolic field of art. And finally, no one claimed authorship, since the question that remains is: *can a copy have an author at all?* The main characteristic of the art project like *International Exhibition of Modern Art*[21] is then embedded in the Hegelian end-of-art environment that consists not in "creating art again" but in creating "art explicitly for the purposes of knowing philosophically what art is".[22] If this project mimics pre-existing structures of self-referentiality, if it produces sameness, is there any *differentia specifica* of this project? If appropriation is justifiable only when it serves to "establish a new signifying system", and to "open up a dimension of critical interpretation of the present moment in history and in art"[23], then these dimensions of the "new" and the "critical" somehow cannot be located here. If this project is presented, as it is, within the scope of contemporary art (its historical condition) then it refuses the "newness" and "criticality" that make contemporary art justifiable. Even the usual mantra about the "critique of the institution" that is identified within the appropriationist rhetoric may not be so characteristic of this project. The institution at stake here is art itself and artists themselves.

20 Michel Foucault, "What is an author?", in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1980, p. 124.

21 For a detailed account on this project and other anonymous projects that used the copy as a conceptual artistic "medium" see Branislav Dimitrijevic, "Too much – O my God – Art here", in *International Exhibition of Modern Art featuring Alfred Barr's Museum of Modern Art, New York*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Beograd, 2003.

22 Arthur Danto, *After the End of Art – Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 31.

23 Nena Dimitrijevic, "Alice in Culturescapes", *Flash Art*, no. 129, Summer 1986, pp. 50-54.

1. *Idea*, adopted from L, itself borrowed from Gr *idea* (idéā), a concept, derives from Gr *idein* (ɪ *id*-), to see, for *widein*. L *idea* has derivative LL adj *idealis*, archetypal, ideal, whence EF-F *idéal* and E *ideal*, whence resp F *idéalisme* and E *idealism*, also resp *idéaliser* and *idealist*, and, further, *idéaliser* and *idealize*. L *idea* becomes MF-F *idée*, with cpd *idée fixe*, a fixed idea, adopted by E Francophiles; it also has ML derivative *ideare*, pp *ideatus*, whence the Phil n *ideatum*, a thing that, in the fact, answers to the idea of it, whence 'to *ideate*', to form in, or as an, idea.

STORY ON COPY
AN INTERVIEW WITH GORAN ĐORĐEVIĆ

PRELOM: *In the documentation encompassing your work, from the mid-1970s until the mid-1980s* [1]*, two pieces are mentioned, both from 1974, entitled Two Times of One Wall (Dva vremena jednog zida). So, let us start with the interview by discussing this. We are talking about two projections: one is the projection of an image of the front wall of the gallery of the Student Cultural Centre (SKC) on that same wall with a certain "time delay", while the other is the projection of the now legendary photograph showing the protagonists of New Art Practice. This photograph, taken in 1972, has been frequently reproduced and bears unavoidable references to art history narrative in the Belgrade conceptual art scene. How do you perceive your early works?*

GORAN ĐORĐEVIĆ: Basically, those were two simple artworks. In the first one, the front wall of a big SKC gallery has been photographed, then later projected on the same section of the wall that was photographed – "a white photograph" on "a white wall". It is a wall, a lighter surface, nothing special ... yet, this wall has its own time which, so to speak, passes. The photograph captured a fixed moment of this wall that somehow, by means of projection, returned to the same spot. The same way as if something stopped aging, while everything else around it continued to live and change. The second artwork with the group photography of artists, gathered around the SKC gallery, shot in 1972, is similar to the previous work, except that now the content of the photography is different, therefore, its meaning is different. I believe that this photograph was projected in the SKC gallery in October 1974, under the title October '72, on the same front wall against which this group posed. It showed the people I knew then and with whom I was friends with. It is interesting that all people gathered around SKC gallery also appear on this projected photo in "life size".

PRELOM: *You are not in this photograph?*

GĐ: No. At the time this photograph was taken, I had not come yet to SKC. I think it was shot in autumn 1972, whereas I came to SKC immediately afterwards.

1 The documentation was compiled by Slobodan Mijušković, lecturer in the Faculty of Philosophy and a friend of Goran Đorđević.

PRELOM: *How does it all seem to you today, since at this moment we are aware of the fact that art criticism at the time and later art history made some sort of fetish out of this photo. In the statement about this piece you said that the photograph fixed a certain Zeitgeist, as well as the relations within that group of people at the time. Looking back, do you think that there is something else there?*

ĐORĐEVIĆ: There is nothing new I can say about that. This piece is located exactly in that time and is a part of that period, or that "Zeitgeist".

PRELOM: *What would that "Zeitgeist" be?*

GĐ: From today's perspective that was, at least for me, the time of youthful naivety and learning. The time when I believed in the idea of this new art, which was later termed "New Artistic Practice"; the idea that this art could change everything, that everything would be different, better, new, etc. However, for me, a few years later, this idea did not seem so optimistic anymore, which can be seen in the articles I published at the time. For example, in the article "New Tradition", which I think was published in Kultura magazine, the basic thesis "New Art = New Tradition" can be directly grasped from the headline. Anyway, SKC was for me a sort of "university", both theoretical and practical, where I spent more time then in my faculty. It was not only the case for me, but for many people hanging out there: artists, art historians, people involved in art, etc. Besides a gallery, SKC had a film programme, various avant-garde theatre groups performed and there were many interesting lectures and discussions. Once a year, all of that would culminate during April Meetings - Festival of Expanded Media (Aprilski Susreti – Festval proširenih medija), when interesting people from the country and abroad would gather in the same place with their works and ideas.

PRELOM: *At that time, you studied at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering. Protagonists of the New Artistic Practice, despite its radicalism at the time, were students of the Academy of Fine Arts or art historians. How did someone coming from a completely different context get involved? Some of your critics highlighted the fact that you are some sort of amateur. How did you deal with that?*

GĐ: The term "amateur" doesn't bother me and in that sense I would totally support people, who see me as such. However, I did not ponder much on this fact then. I had my first exhibition in 1971 in JNA Hall in Priština, which was an exhibition of drawings and paintings. At that time, I was living in Priština, studying electrical engineering with an intention to transfer to Belgrade, after finishing my first year. Still, I took a break for a year, as I didn't pass all the exams. Since I was literally on a break, I started working more seriously on art together with my childhood friend Vojislav Radulović. We would meet in the café regularly, each with our own drawing pad, we would draw, drink coffee and spend days in that way. Then suddenly we got an idea to do an exhibition! Immediately, we started the preparations and two or three months later, we did the exhibition that was, as I remember, a real cultural event for Priština. It was held in the lobby of JNA Hall, which was the only place we found, since

there was no gallery in Priština. As exhibitions were rare in that town, several thousand people came, including organized tours of school children. The exhibition showed something I would provisionally call SF surrealist works on paper. Artworks I produced at the time probably mean something to me only, yet I would not be embarrassed to show them today, if it would make any sense. Anyhow, I would not be embarrassed about these works the way I would be embarrassed about The Harbingers of the Apocalypse (Glasnici apokalipse), my first and unsuccessful painting. It was exhibited for the first time in 1980, but in a different context.

PRELOM: *What was the year in which you made your first and unsuccessful painting?*
GĐ: 1969. It was when I decided to become an artist, I took an easel and started working "seriously". Nonetheless, I was very disappointed with my first work. I continued my studies in Belgrade, as well as my work on art. After a while, I was no longer creating wholesome paintings, but something resembling sketches – studies of visual structures. Finally, they became the piece entitled The Examples of Process in the Square System (Primeri procesa u kvadratnom sistemu). It coincided with my coming to SKC and this work, in its form, could fit very easily into the so-called conceptual story that was already unfolding in Belgrade; then this piece was exhibited in the SKC Gallery in 1974. I participated in Paris Biennial in 1975 with similar works, only to continue with their exhibition until 1978.

PRELOM: *This means that you came via SKC to "conceptual story" and "New Art Practice". At the moment you came there, as you said yourself, you were not acquainted with art history and not aware of what was going on in the international scene. It is obvious that in that period, in the sphere of culture, there was an enormous accumulation or incredible energy resulting from events in 1968. Was there any institutional procedure in SKC?*
GĐ: There was no procedure in a formal sense. I simply came, carrying a folder with my works. Dunja Blažević, who was in charge of Big Gallery in SKC instantly called me in, I think Slavko Timotijević happened to be there, who would later run Happy Gallery. Naturally, they had asked me what was I studying, so Slavko started calling me "Atomski", which I recently have found in some of the minutes from the editorial staff meetings he was in charge of. Clearly, I was Atomski, since I studied at the Department for Atomic Physics. Slavko with his group A3 – Group for Action and Anonymous Attraction (Grupa za akciju i anonimnu atrakciju) – was working on a performance with "anti-light" or "black light". I recall that he was interested in certain "professional issues" from the field of atomic physics, regarding light and its nature. Even though all of this, from the standpoint of physics, seemed vague and naïve to me, I now realize that this was an important moment for me. Shortly thereafter I met the others. A couple of months after I came, Jasna Tijardović, who was running Small Gallery invited me to participate in a group show. I brought the works I already had and for the first time I exhibited in SKC. It seemed to me that everything was happening in a spontaneous and natural way. Then April Meetings in 1973 took place, the constant spending of time

together, talks and similar things. Those few years were exciting, interesting and important for me. Interesting people always gathered around SKC: various artists visited, experimental theatres, film programmes were organized ... Yet, in time I started noticing things I did not like. They concerned both our mutual relations, as well as a particular conceptual and political polarization. Recently, I laughed when I saw again the headline of an article Slavko published sometime in 1982 "Portrait of An Avant-Garde Artist: Alone Against Everyone – Goran Đordjević". Despite disagreements that spontaneously occur in dynamic situations that I remember from back then, as I already said, the period during the 1970's in SKC was exceptionally important. Which is why I would like to mention the names of people I knew then and with whom I was friends with for shorter or longer periods of time in SKC: Gergelj Urkom, Zoran Popović, Dunja Blaževic, Ješa Denegri, Raša Todosijević, Slavko Timotijević, Milica Kraus, Nikola Vizner, Dragica Vukadinović, Goranka Matić, Biljana Tomić, Jasna Tijardović, Jadranka Vinterhalter, Marina Abramović, Boba Mijušković, Neša Paripović, Era Milivojević, Rajko Damjanović, Bojana Pejić, Miško Šuvaković, Jovan Èekić, Dragan Stojanovski, Miša Savić, Kosta Bogdanović, Seka Stanivuk.

> PRELOM: *How would you comment on the newly created polarization in political terms? In the period from 1972 to 1976, you, Raša Todosijević and Zoran Popović were publishing a series of articles in which you refer to key terms of Communist vocabulary, such as "art and revolution" or "class struggle in art", while the organizing of "artist strike" is also a particular form of Left activism. This is when the ideology of anti-bureaucratic revolution was created, which the Student Cultural Centre distributed as a huge ideological, Maoist topos. How do you see the relation between art and Left activism of the times?*

GĐ: Perhaps it would be interesting to mention the exhibition October '75 in this context, which had political content; namely, the general topic of the show was the relationship between art and politics, with a clear Leftist approach. It was an echo of everything that was going on at the time for example on New York scene, most of all among conceptual artists. Various questions were posed: the role of galleries and museums in art practice, the role of money, capital, the question of liberties, etc. At that time, three members of the New York group Art&Language came to SKC, which had already radicalized its position, hence it transformed from a conceptual group to a political-art group, the one that published its positions and discussions in The Fox magazine. On this occasion, lectures, discussions and talks were organized in the course of several days on the topics of art-politics, art-institutions, art-society. Very soon "the exhibition" was opened – an exhibition of articles – of us from SKC, entitled October '75. Dunja Blažević was the Director of the gallery and was very engaged on that project. It is possible that she perceived this direction as the realization of the idea of engaged art and reconciliation of contradictions, inherent in the relationship of politics, power and art. A little later, I came to the conclusion that there was an implicit possibility that this engagement would be associated with the new political establishment that was forming at the time, hence this "new art" that is us, and "new

artists" would become their cultural milieu. For me, this option was quite unexpected and on the other hand, as an idea, totally unacceptable. We should bear in mind that everything taking place in SKC was marginalized in relation to the position of the political and cultural establishment of Belgrade. SKC was de facto a kind of cultural ghetto. Information on its activities were either ironic or malicious or disdainful, or there was no information at all. The Belgrade art scene was primarily formed out of 'dissident' artists: Mića Popović, Peđa Milosavljević, Milić od Mačve, Olja Ivanjicki and others, so that all things concerned, looking from the objective standpoint at the time there was no possibility of establishing "New Artistic Practice". I remember that in 1975, Marina Abramović and I participated on Paris Biennial, as the only artists from Yugoslavia. None of the media in Belgrade wanted to publish information on it, even though Marina personally took the information to the editorial staff of Politika daily. In spite of that, or precisely because of the fact that Paris then was still the center of the art world to everyone in Belgrade, they did not want to publish this. Most probably because the artists in question were those so-called "conceptual artists" from SKC, I suppose it was difficult for them to explain to the readers that it was them and not some local eminences, who were exhibiting in Paris in the Museum of Modern Art.

> PRELOM: *How do you account for mainstream art being made out of civil dissident artists, such as the already mentioned Mića Popović, or even Peđa Milosavljević and that they are widely accepted by the public, even though from an ideological standpoint, they don't correspond to the model that was favored politically at the time, while art that spoke from the positions of Marxist discourse, which was then a governing rhetoric and ruling ideology, was discarded and publicly marginalized?*
>
> GĐ: Traditional artwork, that is, traditional academic techniques such as painting, sculpture, graphics were generally accepted, as they were "understandable" in a way, whatever that meant. The problem occurred with this new way of expression, new media that opened the way for reflective and critical thought. This did not suit the establishment in any way.

> PRELOM: *Are you saying that the state cultural apparatus was conservative and that they could not recognize the ideological substance of culture?*
>
> GĐ: Well, you know for yourself that they have always been conservative, except in rare and exceptional situations and then only during short periods of time. There were no illusions about the revolutionary spirit of bureaucracy. They always follow the path of least resistance, so this does not seem contradictory in any way to me. Change bothers bureaucracy. The ruling party was conservative, the same way that its bureaucracy was conservative. Actually, at the time Party and Bureaucracy were the same thing. Therefore, I find no contradictions there, even though at one moment there seemed to have been an opportunity of an ideological convergence between engaged members of "New Art Practice" and the new political establishment. To be objective, due to the very substance of what "New Art" was, it could not have happened.

PRELOM: *Let's return to your own work. Artists' Strike (Štrajk umetnika) is a breakthrough event for you, by means of which you are leaving SKC, perhaps not only in a physical way, but also conceptually. Can we speak about the substance of your work, as the process of radical separation within the radical group?*

GĐ: It seems that since before, probably "since forever", there has been a tradition whereby the political establishment chooses the most suitable cultural group, "their" artists, directors, writers, critics, etc. "Their art", in other words. The presumed existence, even only as a possibility, of the idea that this new generation of "new politicians" could be associated with the group of "new artists" to which I belonged, represented the key moment, leading to my distancing from this work. Artists' Strike was a logical conclusion of this story to me. Speaking of Artists' Strike and the exhibition in SKC afterwards, entitled Against Art (Protiv umetnosti), I would like to point out that, for me art was only what was called "conceptual art" or "new art" and in retrospect historical Modernism. Hence, those were not paintings by Mića Popović or Peđa Milosavljević and the strike did not refer to them. The strike referred to "New Art Practice" and what was going on with it and within it. As far as I am concerned, it was a sort of epilogue to this explicit critical-activist work in SKC. Immediately after the Artists' Strike, actually during that same year 1979, I started creating works that for me bore a new dimension. In a way, I tried to find the furthest possible point in relation to everything that was the most radical and most avant-garde in art. I tried to find a completely opposite position to everything modern art deemed valuable. As though I was trying to go as far as possible from "New Art", but at the same time to remain in the field of art. That is how the pieces-copies of The Harbingers of the Apocalypse (Glasnici apokalipse) - my first painting that I was ashamed of for many years, as I said - were created. During that time I made approximately 50 copies. Naturally, I experienced these copies as something utterly pointless, something bordering on the absurd. I wondered: "Is there anything that would be pointless to do in art today?" Copying The Harbingers, or copying of something that is, according to all standards, a completely worthless work seemed to me like a possible answer to this question. I had kept that painting, only because it was my first work, which subsequently became a sort of "measure for stupidity". The exhibition of The Harbingers of the Apocalypse was shown in my apartment in Novi Belgrade, lasting from March till October 1980. In this period, other artists that would visit me also made their copies, which I instantly hung on a wall, so that the exhibition was in constant process. The significance of this exhibition, among other things, is in the fact that it was held in a private space, not in a gallery.

PRELOM: *However, another exhibition at SKC precedes this act of total separation and radicalization of practice that would continue. This exhibition was advertised in Politika daily, under the title Against Art (Protiv umetnosti). On the invitation card you wrote: "Along with other things, the artwork expresses certain attitudes to art. Works at this exhibition are not works of art. They are just attitudes to art. Or, to put it more precisely, they are attitudes against art. I think this is the final*

moment to unequivocally tear down the mask of freedom and humanism from art and reveal its real face, the face of loyal and humble servant." Are you inclined to perceive this exhibition also as crucial to your subsequent direction?

GĐ: Certainly. Once I think about it now, it was my last solo exhibition at the SKC gallery. I exhibited the work, which was very important to me, entitled Short History of Art (Kratka istorija umetnosti), a series of twenty drawings, of the same format representing well-known icons of art history from the pre-historic period – the hand print in the cave – all the way to conceptual art, i.e. drawings of one of Kosut's Definitions. This work shows conceptual art as part of a renowned tradition, called "art history", which starts from cave drawings and ends today. This work ought to have demonstrated that there is no discontinuity, termination or break-up with the past. It is all still the same story. I remember that Mel Ramsden, a member of the group Art & Language, whom Zoran Popović and I visited after the London Film Festival in 1979, said that iconoclasm stood for the most significant achievement of conceptual art. Even though at the time I could have agreed with this estimate, this thought remained with me, as I felt that something was not quite right there. Most likely an iconic appearance – drawing on the paper of one of Kosuth's Definitions, which I made, had something to do with it. Between the cave painting and Kosuth, there were drawings-copies of Malevich, Duchamp, Manzoni, Biren, the whole art history, including conceptual art, all "translated" onto a traditional medium – drawing on paper. These works establish some kind of connection between "high" art and what is termed "kitsch". My experience with conceptual art is that I would meet and get to know many artists who, in my opinion, produced bigger kitsch than this exhibition. Somewhere I used the term "white kitsch" for these type of minimalist works.

PRELOM: *We were talking about the end of 1970's, beginning of 1980's, when minimal art, as well as conceptual art became yet another style - you called it "white kitsch". These directions, roused by events we previously discussed, will bring about a sort of break-up with New Art Practice and the idea of the "new" in contemporary art. You would withdraw from the scene and start acting from an 'anonymous' space, continuing the art strike, yet this strike will not result in the retreat, but on the contrary with your entrance on the wider art scene. And all of that started with The Harbingers of the Apocalypse ....*

GĐ: Straight after the exhibition Against Art, held in January of 1980 in the SKC gallery, where the copies from the history of art and for the first time the painting The Harbingers of the Apocalypse were exhibited, that is the original with subsequently drawn sketches, I made an exhibition of copies of The Harbingers of the Apocalypse in my apartment. I suggested to other artists whom I knew, or was in contact with to make copies and some of them responded: for example the previously mentioned Mel Ramsden, then Raša Todosijević, Zoran Popović, Braco Dimitrijević, Lawrence Weiner and others. The works I received, though, were not identical copies, but rather some kind of interpretation. Kristin Koenigs from Holland made a 20-minute film Hommage. Actually, she threw a dinner party, honouring The Harbingers, which

were projected onto a wall, above the table. If I remember correctly, Marina and Ulay were guests at dinner. During this period I made 50 copies, faithful copies, because I was concerned that the deviation from the original should be as slight as possible. It seems that for many this task was complicated from the conceptual point of view. A copy is an uneasy terrain, because the literal copy really appears as something utterly pointless. Nevertheless, soon it turned out that it was not possible to make something entirely worthless. I sensed that the copy is a very complicated, interesting and unexplored territory, so that still in a certain way I remain to master it. Based on the copies of The Harbingers of Apocalypse that I made, the book Treatise on Meaninglessness (Traktat o besmislu) was written. This small book had ten pages of text, with photographs of originals and ten copies. The images were accompanied by the short text, comprising two sentences: "When I was 19 years old, I made this painting. 11 years later I started making its copies". I sent this work to the editorial staff of Theoria magazine, with an idea to publish it as a philosophical piece. The magazine was a part of Society of Philosophy of Serbia and the decision-making process took a very long time. The work was published in 1984, under the title Philosophical Treatise on Meaninglessness. The editorial staff added the term "philosophical" to the original name. In this way the work was published also as a philosophical text. This is just about everything that can be said about the copies of The Harbingers of the Apocalypse right now.

The Harbingers of the Apocalypse, **from 1960s to 1980s**

PRELOM: *Copies of The Harbingers were exhibited in Berlin, Zagreb, Belgrade, Ljubljana and Sarajevo. How did the public react to the copies?*

GĐ: I remember, for example, that not many people came to the exhibition in Ljubljana. One of the visitors came in and instantaneously stood in front of the first painting, he did not even look at what else was being exhibited. He looked at the painting for a while, analysed it carefully, and then went on to the next painting and began to analyse that one. When he realised that they were the same, he turned towards the third one and then all puzzled, started looking around him. Realizing that all the paintings were the same, he hurriedly left the gallery. It was obvious to him that what he had seen was something utterly different from the conventional painting, or exhibition. Because the moment the spectator starts analyzing the copy as a painting, which has all the painting elements: technique, composition, motive and a story, he is on the wrong path. This is the paradox of the copy, which I perceived then. It still contains the original within, it is its essence. A copy needs to be materialized, even though the meaning of the copy is outside the material in which it was made. The copy needs to be made, it has to exist, both as an image, an object, or the material; and as a representation – while actually the very image, its content, its representation in principle does not have any significance for the interpretation of the copy.

PRELOM: *At the end of 19th century the idea of the modern painter was born, the painter of modern life, someone who was completely involved in the contemporary and in painting it. Nonetheless, in the formal sense, it is still an artist, educated in the academic tradition, founded on the copying of old masters. Your copying has a different source altogether.*

GĐ: Copying as learning of craft, as improving of the technique of painting is different to the copying that raises the question of its own process. I remember when once, quite some time ago, I saw a book on the programme of the French Academy in the 19th century and in it a copy of one of Rembrandt's self-portraits. I wondered: "Did the artist who made it think at all about what exactly he was doing?" To paint a self-portrait is a very intimate thing, a self-reflection of the artist. And now someone is making a copy of that? It seemed totally absurd to me. On the other hand, I found abstract modernist paintings the most challenging for copying. Among other things because in this case all customary reasons or motives for making copies are totally meaningless. When I was copying a Mondrian in public in the National Museum in 1983, I brought an easel, put it in front of the painting, and started to copy it. From the aspect of the usual reasons for copying - learning the painting technique - this was completely idiotic. Even the guard in the museum came up to me and asked me why I had not chosen a more complex painting. As we are speaking about the copy from the current position, it is perhaps interesting to pick out two moments in passing. One is, as Benjamin would say, the turning of the known into the unknown. For example, I will mention what Benjamin wrote: Mondrian's painting and its copy. The question would be: Is the copy of Mondrian's abstract painting also abstract, or is it maybe realistic? Probably the answer would be that it is both. All of a sudden, from something that was entirely clear to us, from the original, we get something that becomes indistinct, ambivalent and unclear. Secondly, there is a possibility that a copy, as an expressive means today has the importance and potential that collage and readymade, as its borderline case, had at the beginning of the 20th century. Somehow, it is possible to find parallels between a copy and a collage, i.e. readymade. While in regard to a certain field of art the readymade is open toward the outside, the copy is turned towards the inside. The copy deals with the very substance of art, while readymade deals with what is art's exterior. The task of modern art was to turn the known into the unknown. The whole of modernity and all those adventures, discovering new laws, climbing Mount Everest, or travelling into the jungles of the Amazon and the discovery of new civilisations - all of that was discovery of the other, the unknown, taming the wild, the primitive and dangerous – turning of unknown into known, creating a nicely organised garden in which we can recognise everything, and in which we feel comfortable. The copy turns our nicely organised garden back into the dark and dangerous jungle, yet the jungle in which everything is seemingly familiar.

PRELOM: *At the end of 1982, you went to America, where you attended the Department for Visual Studies at MIT. You had the opportunity of getting acquainted with the New York scene and later exhibited with well-known and*

successful appropriation artists Mike Bidlo and Sherrie Levine. How do you interpret the difference between the act of copying, present in your work and the work of New York appropriation artists?

GĐ: It is difficult to come up with a simple answer to such a question. For instance, the difference between appropriation and copy is in the fact that appropriation is basically an extension of Pop Art, where icons from the history of art have been understood solely as yet another segment in the specter of the icons of consumer society. In this case, copying of other paintings is used primarily on the level of pop iconography – multiplication of pop icons – the process of copying is accepted quite shyly, as though there is no consideration of what the copy brings on the level of meaning. Appropriation artists used the process of copying in an implicit manner, it could be said, whereby they did not notice, or did not want to notice, the real potential of the copy and what is essentially its revolutionary potential.

PRELOM: *Sherrie Levine herself said in an interview that she never wanted to be outside the market system and that it bothered her that her work sold badly.*

GĐ: I understand her completely [laughs]. Even so this shows the key difference between what they did and how they comprehended what they did and what I was doing at the time and thought that I was doing. It is not just the problem of the functioning of a copy within the market and its subversion in this field, but the problem of misunderstanding a series of essential questions the copy opens up within art itself. The fact that they used almost the coy term appropriation art for what they did, while for me it always was copies, or copying, is illustrative enough.

PRELOM: *Along with this, Sherrie Levine frequently pointed out that she "keeps" her name intentionally, that she is signing her work with her name, so that the very fact that a woman is making the copies of male painters, who one after another are canonical names of modern art, seemed subversive in the field of dominant artistic discourses.*

GĐ: I understand that concept and it makes sense as long as we are in the space in which the identity of an author is clearly defined and valued. What is to be said about works signed with a pseudonym or not signed at all? For example, I can make copies and take a female pseudonym. If Levine had taken a male pseudonym, how would her work be interpreted? The issue of the gender of the author is the issue of an identity or a part of the identity of the author. Copying makes all the rules we apply in the analysis and interpretation of works suddenly disintegrate. One of the issues the copy raises regarding the identity of an author is the question of where the author stands in relation to all that, not only who the author is. Also, whether the term "author" is applicable at all to someone making copies.

PRELOM: *New theories of art claim that the subject producing an art work is always an anonymous X who by mere chance has a name. The subject is impossible to identify. The fact that it carries a name, located in the field of*

the context of appointing names, customs and the ethnological situation of an epoch is totally accidental.

GĐ: I do not know whether we are talking about an author and what kind of an author we are talking about. It is a definition. How to define an "author"? It might happen that the term "author" belongs to a specific narrative we call "art history". I am saying this now as a doorman of Salon de Fleurus, who read Benjamin's text On Copies. Let me try to articulate this based on a parallel situation in the past, for example, that of Christian images and relics. The relics that were made in Christian times were the object of adoration in a world that was completely permeated by Christianity, as a material proof of the authenticity of the Christian story. People lived entirely immersed in this Christian story, every day, all year, from birth till death. It is obvious that these relics had exceptional significance, exceptional power in this context. When, with the Enlightenment, another narrative was established, a story which we now call "history" (and the history of art is only a part of that story) all of a sudden some other objects became important, and the objects that used to be important prior to that – for example, Christian images, icons and other relics – acquired new meanings. Prehistoric figures and cave paintings become prehistoric art, ancient temples and sculptures become ancient art, Christian icons and frescoes become Christian art. In this way sacred objects are no longer sacred, but artefacts of an epoch with a specific artistic significance or sometimes only with a particular value of craftsmanship. What we can infer today is that we too, as were the people of the Christian world then, are immersed in something that is a historic story; but we are not capable, not equipped, to see that when we talk about history we are actually talking about the story of the past, and not about the past itself. We are all permeated by that historical story, and thus we are not capable of experiencing ourselves differently and thinking about the world in a different way. If we could distance ourselves from all this, change to a different position, then, from there, this historical story would probably be seen from the outside. From this new place an image with a Christian theme can be seen both as a Christian relic within the Christian story and as a work of art within the history of art and as an object with a still undefined meaning. There is a possibility that the works, which have art history as their topic, are defining this new space, this new position, this meta-narrative of the higher order. It is hard to predict at this moment what will be this "meta-narrative of the other order" and what shape it will take. I assume that it will be based on some "artefacts" and that the past will be a part of this story in some way. Yet not even this is certain. It might be a structure that does not involve time. Probably it would include a spectator, i.e. the position from which the narrative is told. For now, these are only assumptions, some guesses. It is possible to imagine that works, such as Museum of Modern Art, which have art history as their backdrop, will help define this position. What also should be mentioned here is the significance of the copy as a means for the production of artefacts. It is discussed in the aforementioned article of Walter Benjamin. I could sense this significance of a copy with the copies of The Harbingers of the Apocalypse, when I realized that in this specific case, the copy can be more important than the original. Reading Benjamin and based on all the works discussed, I could imagine a possibility which would allow for a copy of a Mondrian to become more important than the original,

in the sense that the story to which the copy of the Mondrian belongs becomes more important than the story of art history to which the original belongs. In the same way that all significant "Christian sacred objects" became less significant "historic artefacts from the Christian period", or in the same way in which the clay figurines or tools of prehistoric man (that don't even exist in the "Christian narrative") became very important to our "historical narrative". It was exactly this modernist approach that turned the unknown into known, where linearity of historical narrative was extended with the introduction of "new" artefacts, to the farthest possible point in the past.

> PRELOM: *During the 1960s and 1970s conceptual art has proclaimed the end of art, that is the end of a certain type of narrative. For example, one of the most indicative statements of Douglas Hubler, the American conceptual artist, says that the world is filled with paintings and objects, therefore he does not want to add anything to it. This is the lack we are talking about. All of a sudden the copy appears as a surplus in the breaking of this political subject of conceptual art. Can we read this surplus as the materialization of the deficiency of conceptual art?*
>
> GĐ: Correct. However there is something that can be called the "triviality of the

copy", similar to the readymade. The same way that it's simple to declare something as readymade, it is also equally simple to make a copy. Particularly the copy of Malevich or Mondrian. In the sense of the procedure, both of these works are trivial, what complicates the thing further is the story in which they appear.

> PRELOM: *Do you think that certain specific local aspects are of relevance for your copying experience? For instance, art history students in Belgrade University are educated exclusively on copies, experiencing art works visually by means of catalogues and book reproductions, which most likely conditions a totally different relation towards art, as well as the copy. In addition to this, artist Nikola Pilipović, who made monochrome paintings for a while, once said that he was inspired by the monochrome paintings of Robert Ryman, but not with originals, but with bad black and white copies. He was making his monochromes based on bad black and white reproductions.*
>
> GĐ: The position of the people from this region is very interesting, since in some

way we do not represent a part of general history, at least not a part of its "main course". Especially concerning art history. We are generally always outside of the story that we call the "history of art". Up until now, it was certainly considered a sort of fault, a drawback. Nevertheless, it is very possible that now, when we start looking for this place outside the narrative of history, that might become an advantage. Perhaps something should be said here about historical narrative and colonialism. During the time of Rationalism and Enlightenment, whatever those terms mean, Western Europe established the historic narrative as a certain way of overcoming and taming the past. This narrative was later transferred to other nations and cultures through the process of colonisation. On the other hand, Europe was simultaneously colonising its own past with that story. I have a feeling that somewhere I came across the idea of "historic" and "non-historic" nations and

cultures, which has its origin in Hegel's works. For example the following question might be interesting: If Cameroon, as a country in which good football is played, beat England, which, as we know invented football, whose victory would it be? Would it be Cameroon's or England's? At a certain level, it is naturally Cameroon's victory; on another level it is England's victory, and on a third level, it could be both Cameroon's and England's victory. I would say that it is still England's victory, even if it was beaten by Cameroon. I think that we could find ourselves in the similar situation if we beat the American basketball team or if we "really tried hard" to become a serious "historical culture", even better and "more historical" than well-known "historical nations and cultures". The second example I thought about is a painting from the 19th century that I recently saw: the work of the French painter Gerome who was known as an "Orientalist", which referred to the Balkans as well. In the painting, which is entitled Chef Arnaut faisant la sieste we see a person in a Turkish-oriental dress sitting relaxed on a sofa and smoking from a long cigarette holder. Looking at this painting, I thought about who I would be, that is, where my position lies in relation to this painting. Am I on this or that side? Am I Gerome, or am I the "Arnaut"? Or am I maybe both at the same time? For Gerome there was obviously no doubt as to which side he stands on, just as his "Arnaut" probably was not aware that such a question could be raised. I think that it is necessary to find a position outside of the historic narrative, from where both Gerome and the "Arnaut" can be seen at the same time. There is an example relating to the story of modern art in the 20th century, which we call History of Modern Art. It usually begins with Cubism somewhere around 1907, it was actually only created in the thirties, as recounted by Alfred Bar, Director of MoMA at the time of the exhibition Cubism and Abstract Art in 1936. Picasso's painting Les Demoiselles d'Avignon was placed at the beginning of that story for the first time. We actually never were, and never will be capable of seeing that painting without seeing it through the eyes of Alfred Bar, even when we stand in front of the original. That painting has been mediated so many times that I do not know what am I seeing when I am standing in front of it. It only became apparent that we will never be able to see it or experience it in any direct and unmediated way. When, recently, I went to see the MoMA exhibition in Queens, I noticed a couple who were looking at the painting from a distance with an expression of awe. While I watched them I wondered what they were actually looking at. What do they see or imagine they are seeing?

PRELOM**:** *They see their own admiration in front of this object.*

GĐ**:** Their own admiration in front of something that is called "an original" and in this case the greatest "masterpiece" of modern art in the 20th century, according to many. This will go on, as long as this historical narrative is dominant, until it is relativized and questioned. In that moment, everything "disintegrates", in other words changes the meaning essentially – an author, original and historical values. We should think about the position from which you can simultaneously see both Alfred Bar and Les Demoiselles d'Avignon, i.e. we should think about this story in which both would be certain protagonists, characters called "Alfred Bar" and "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon", in other words, the work that would represent the reflection of both at the same time.

PRELOM: *When did you stop being an artist?*

GÐ: I return now to my initial role in this conversation, which is "the person trying to remember what he used to do and what he thought about". Subsequent to my return from America, in the autumn of 1984, I started working on paintings whose origin was in caricatures from a modern setting, a room for example with an abstract painting on the wall. Actually, those were surrogates of abstract paintings, whose function was to depict

АДРИАН КОВАЧ

СУПРЕМАТИЗМ (8 КРАСНЫХ ПРЯМОУГОЛЬНИКОВ). 1939.

ТАБЛИЦА II

Adrian Kovacs, *Suprematism (8 red rectangulars)*, 1989
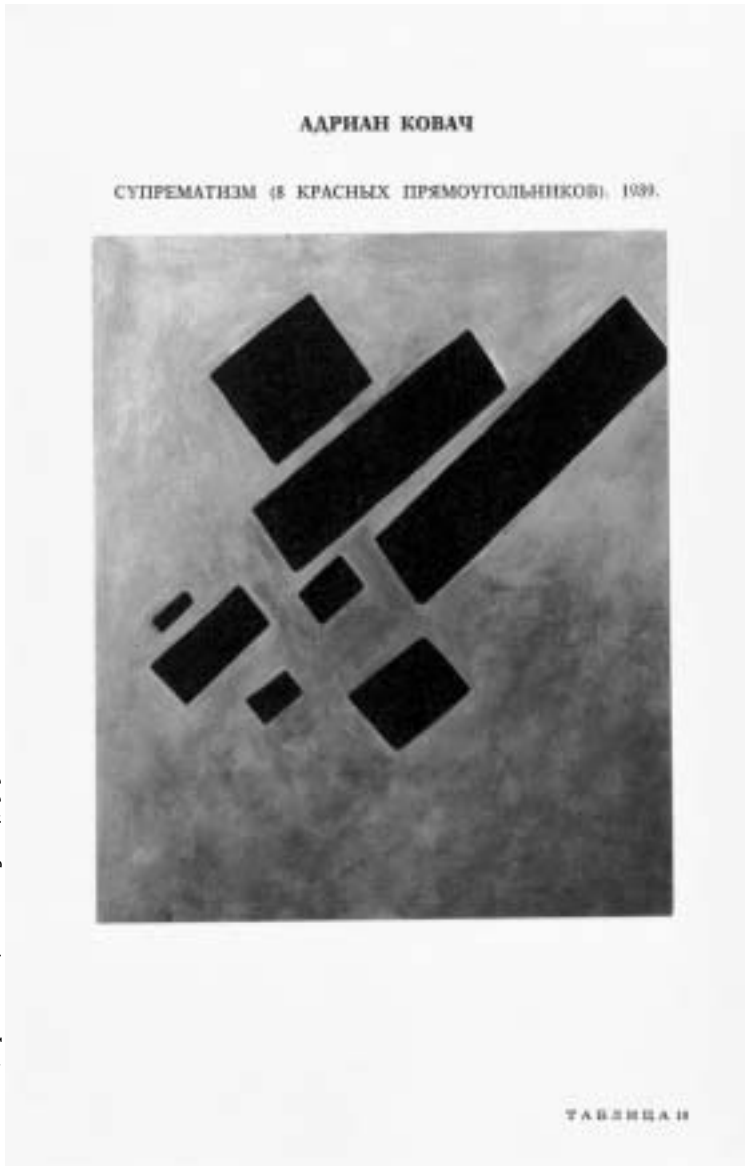
a scene from contemporary life for the spectator. Those "paintings" within caricatures had the role of "abstract painting". I thought that it would be interesting to make large format paintings from these surrogates and turn them into real paintings. This series of paintings was named The Scenes of Modern Art (Prizori moderne umetnosti) and it was exhibited in 1985 in Happy Gallery, then in ŠKUC. Following the exhibition The Scenes of Modern Art, which was the last exhibition whose author was Goran Đorđević, this story about copies seems to go in two directions. Occurrences such as Last Futurist Show (Poslednja futuristička izložba) of Kazimir Malevich, lecture of Walter Benjamin on Mondrian's paintings from 1963 to 1996, and the Armory Show could represent one direction. It is well-known that I had something to do with it. I will repeat once again for those who do not know or ignore this fact, that I participated in the realization of these happenings exclusively in a technical sense, as someone who helped these exhibitions and lectures to appear in public. It is vital to say for these works that they contain their context within, hence it is completely unnecessary, I also believe completely wrong, to try to read them through the biography of "an author" or several authors, whoever they were and whatever this meant in cases like these.

PRELOM**:** *Is Malevich your pseudonym?*
GĐ**:** No.

PRELOM**:** *Like Adrian Kovač is?*
GĐ**:** Adrijan Kovač is my pseudonym, but Malevich is not. It is not my other name. Not a part of my biography. More importantly, I believe that there is no Malevich as a person. It resembles more a character of a story, as Benjamin would say. Under the pseudonym Adrijan Kovač, I became a member of the amateur cultural and art society "Jedinstvo" in 1988. Being a member of the society, I participated in various exhibitions celebrating annual events: March 8th, May 1st, New Year. Back then, I painted black and white copies of Cezanne, landscapes, still lives and a series of self portraits. I continued to be the member until my departure for New York in 1991. To me membership in this amateur group represented yet another attempt to search for a new bottom line, a new border, while still remaining in the area of art. I regularly attended meetings of the group which were held on Wednesdays at 7 o'clock. It is interesting that the pseudonym "Adrian Kovač" enabled me to create several works on the topic of the self-portrait. In January 1989 I travelled to Moscow, with Boba Mijušković where a retrospective exhibition of Kazimir Malevich had been organised after many decades. Walking down Arbat Street after visiting the exhibition, I noticed several street artists who offered to do portraits for passers-by. It was winter, quite cold, and there were no people posing. I decided to sit for a portrait. Since Boba was carrying the catalogue for the Malevich exhibition which had the Eight Red Rectangles on the cover and an enlarged Malevich signature, I decided to pose with this catalogue, so that the street artist would be making a copy of a Malevich together with my portrait. On my lapel, I had a badge with the image of the contemporary Russian Artist Ilya Glazunov, who is probably the best known kitsch painter over

there and who hated the Russian avant-garde. As I liked that first portrait, I decided to sit for another five portraits during the course of the remaining five days, every time for a different artist. I came to Belgrade with six portraits. After returning from Moscow, I asked six of my colleagues from "Jedinstvo" to make copies of Malevich's painting Eight Red Rectangles. This way I got a set of 12 amateur paintings: six portraits and six copies of Malevich. Afterwards I, as Adrijan Kovač, made black and white copies of all twelve paintings. This way these portraits became self-portraits. I suggested to IRWIN to do artworks on the topic of these portraits, which was how an idea for the exhibition called Moscow Portraits (Moskovski portreti) came into being, in which authors from Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana participated. I think that this is the final thing I did in Yugoslavia, before going to New York in September 1991. In the meantime, living in Belgrade got increasingly more anxious, primarily due to the growing nationalism, which was already dominating everyday life, hence my leaving came as an inevitable event. This is where the second line of the story on my past ends, which forks somewhere around 1985. Maybe something should be said in passing about Ljubljana. Everything I was working on all these years basically had very little reverberation in Belgrade. On the other hand, by chance, this work had much wider support in Ljubljana. I have to say that if it were not for Ljubljana, that is the people there, most of all my friends in Laibach and IRWIN and Marina Gržinić, generally people around the ŠKUC gallery, it is difficult to suppose what would have happened with this work then and what direction it would have taken.

PRELOM: *Do the projects in which you participated after you stopped being an artist necessarily anticipate a naïve subject which believes?*

GĐ: Yes, but I am talking about another type of naivety. I am talking about conscious, intentional naivety. Naivety that does not shy away from signing "Kazimir Malevich" on the work The Last Futurist Exhibition in 1985, the way Art in America or Kunstforum did, and not what our renowned art historian did, when he put my name there, even though neither before, nor after my name has been signed on this work. It is a sort of "wisdom", just as if a well- intentioned theatre goer, realising that it was not "real people" on stage, but actors, stood up in the middle of the play and started to explain this to the audience. In other words, whoever tries to analyse a story, a play, not through its characters, but through the actors who are playing the characters, is on the wrong track. One of the characteristics of the new space created by the copy is also that sometimes a lie can be truer than the truth. Sometimes it is necessary to accept the logic of a fairy tale, or a myth, in order to arrive at a place where rationalism, common sense, or logic never could. Which is exactly what the copy does.

PRELOM: *You participated in the exhibition Armory Show, together with Slobodan Mijušković. Where does Armory Show stands in relation to the building of the position of trust, or naivety?*

GĐ: The original title of this exhibition is International Exhibition of Modern Art (Međunarodna izložba moderne umetnosti). It was an exhibition of European and

American art, held in 1913 in New York. It was set in an armory and later it was named this way. The exhibition is significant for introducing for the first time, on a large scale, European modern art onto the American scene. It is regarded as one of the most significant exhibitions in the past century. The exhibition held in the Salon of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade was also called International Exhibition of Modern Art, since it included authors and artworks from international backgrounds. Even to the very naïve spectator, once he came to the exhibition, it becomes obvious that those are not "those paintings", but "some other paintings", purely on the basis of the unusual years written on them. The names of the authors and works corresponded to the works in the way we commonly understand them from the history of art. We are aware that there is a painting like that, with the name of the author and the title in the books and museums, etc. Only the date revealed that everything was not what it seemed. This exemplifies how all elements in a work participate in defining the meaning of the work. The meaning changes as any of these elements changes. On one artwork, we can change any of these parameters and constantly get different works, albeit the object itself never changes. This just shows that actually everything else is also a part of an artwork, not just the piece itself, the painting. In the case of this exhibition the dating is not accidental, but it is done in a way opposite to the chronology of history the way we know it. The works that are newer, like Kosuth or Andre were dated to the beginning of the century (1905), so that the chronological story starts with these works and ends with Picasso and Matisse, which were dated in the years close to the end of 20th century. The exhibition itself, which was held in 1986 in Belgrade, was dated 1993. and "located" in New York.

PRELOM: *Well, someone now can assume that the exhibition took place in 1993...*

GĐ: Yes, but then when you look through the articles in 1986 in which the exhibition was reported on, the confusion sets in. What have we got in front of us? What are the facts? How is the truth constituted? There is no intention here to deceive the spectator and plant copies as originals. It is immediately clear that those are not originals, as soon as years are noticed. Among other things, this inversion of chronology questions relations of cause and effect, in other words who influenced whom. To me it seems like a film played backwards. In this context, we should mention the lecture of Walter Benjamin, entitled Mondrian'63-96. This lecture was held in Ljubljana in 1986 and the similar principle of dating can be observed. The lecture was held in 1986, while the works are dated from 1963 to 1996. Whereas we know that Mondrian died in 1944 and that Benjamin committed suicide I think in 1941.

PRELOM: *What is the position from which you are speaking now: well-informed doorman of Salon de Fleurus, amateur theoretician or something else?*

GĐ: For me, this becomes more and more of a problem that I should be aware of in situations like this conversation. For instance, in this moment, I am no longer sure about the position from which I am speaking. Is it me talking about how I remember the times from 1980's, without including everything that happened ever

since? Or is it me speaking about what was happening in those days, albeit with all of my experience and knowledge from that point up until now. Mostly, I have been trying to reconstruct the way everything that I did took place, the way I thought in those days, like nothing has happened to me in between. This would be the closest to the situation in which I would find myself, if my memory returned following a twenty-year amnesia. I have noticed that this is no longer my position, as I have been talking. When I talk about it from today's position, I do not only speak about what used to be, but include my complete experience from that point on. Today, I observe and understand these works from the past, not in a completely different way, yet very differently from how I used to observe and understand them then. During this conversation, I tried to be careful, as much as possible, to speak from the position of someone trying to remember and to recount, in a conventional way, what he once was and what he used to do. However, the fact is that the copy questions, not just the uniqueness and singularity of an artwork, but the singularity of individual identity, that is the uniqueness and unrepeatitiveness of the subject itself.

PRELOM: *Do you think that is possible to reconstruct and reflect in general on this situation today?*

GĐ: Not in an absolute sense. However, it is possible in a way, only then it is necessary to define who "I" am at this moment, what my role is in the story for each particular discourse. I think it is not possible to believe that there is some universal, unique "I". For example, I am now a former artist Goran Đorđević, who remembers something that he did as an artist. But I could also speak as Goran Đorđević, the doorman in the Salon de Fleurus in New York. Those are two different roles. On the other hand, my whole story about the past is a kind of invention, a creation of stories. We are talking about something that does not exist anymore. There are some memories and some artefacts. I am not a theoretician, but could talk now about the theory of historical memory for example, or personal memory and then again I would have to keep an eye on who I am in both of these cases. I could try to reconstruct my history in a different way, and then I would be someone else, some other "I". Essentially, these are always stories in which we think we believe and on the basis of which we make new stories. And this now, our "conversation", is a sort of making, a construction of a past or some pasts based on stories or "memories" of "one" or "more" storytellers, which was/were doing something at the time and for whose work there was an interest. This is how what we have talked about seems to me, here and now. Perhaps we should ask this in conclusion: With whom have I been speaking all along? Who really is *Prelom*?

НЕИЗВЕСТНЫЙ ХУДОЖНИК

ПОРТРЕТ С КНИГОЙ.

ТАБЛИЦА II

Unknown artist, *Portrait with the book*

FROM ANAESTHETIZATION

One of the most visible processes in contemporary capitalism is the fierce struggle for expanding the dominion at the level of its subject's body. Unlike the "phase" of industrial capitalism that disciplined the body for factory work and the rhythms of the assembly lines or the welfare-state capitalism that sought to administrate the corporal practices of "everyday life", today's capitalist mechanisms of post-Fordist production are seizing upon the very flesh of its subjects. From the visual aesthetics of plastic surgery and silicone implants to the practical aesthetics of the healthy body and from the mental aesthetics of narcissistic de-centered subjectivity to the sensory aesthetics of media images, deodorizing products and "food cultures" we witness a neo-liberal offensive in the realm of the material functioning of dominant ideology. Ideological mechanisms of misrecognition (*méconnaissance*) operating through material rituals of "everyday life" facilitate the "adequate" sensory perception of capitalist reality by its subjects, pacifying and neutralizing the multifarious and heterogeneous practices of resistance. The following part presents two possible ways of countering this constant process of capitalist anaesthetization by un-aesthetizing either the public image of the artist "in flesh" or the permissive images of drug-like experiences.

TO UN-AESTHETIZATION

JOHNNY RACKOWITZCH

Nenad Racković is a Belgrade-based artist. He has no officially registered status as an artist and he is not the member of any organization of artistic or other type. His art is himself, as the existence of a body struggling to break-out of the strait-jacket of unsolvable contradictions posed by the official social norms. It is a living proof that the neo-liberal "normalization" requires the abnormalization of one's self. He is the symptom of a "transitional" society and his flesh is the site of inscription of the dominant ideology as his text is the site of its description. Therefore, Johnny Rackowitzch or Nenad Racković is *social plastic art* in flesh.

NENAD RACKOVIĆ...?

Branko Dimitrijević

The front page of Belgrade cultural guide *Beorama*, 1996

Otto Muhl, one of the Viennese Actionists, said once, rather didactically, that "Actionism was not just a form of art; it was primarily an existential stand". There is no doubt that one of the numerous claimants to being a successor of the Viennese Actionists – as well as of their agonizing duels with their own psyches and bodies and the bastard products of the collective manufacturing of the ideology of bourgeois prosperity – is a Belgrade artist, writer, actor, freak, performer, psychophil and sociopath, the ultimate defender of infantilism, and grown-up irritant Nenad Racković.

The artist merges with the discourse he is made of, so that he himself becomes a work of art. He himself becomes his own self-portrait, painted with bruises and fractures. To create images and to be created as an image, to write compulsively and to be written compulsively – these are not forms of artistic activity for Nenad Racković, just the horrific melting pot of his "existential stand".

Racković is not the only author of his own project for he also lets the cleric-fascist, homophobic and xenophobic Slavic community be the author of the "co-project" called "Nenad Racković". In addition, it is just a short path leading from the sighs "God forbid!" at a Serbian Slava, to the shrieks of "Die faggot!" on the street when Racković shows up. This is because everybody would like to find out whether that freak is just a fag or the Devil himself. On the other hand, there are also numerous things that a society either does not want to see or know about itself. Racković supplies us with such material – in the same way in which he could easily shock an art historian with his painting exhibits, for they are primarily art trash, unclassifiable art trash.

an extract from the catalogue of Nenad Racković's retrospective exhibition in 2003
translated by Dejan D. Marković

There was a huge number of police officers in Belgrade. All those macho-men eager to sacrifice their lives for Greater Serbia. Their number still constantly increasing because, wars never really end here. They come for fun and drinks, maybe to fuck some transvestite as there are no such people in their villages. Taking up their education bats each morning they commence the vital task of re-educating the masses all over again. No one knows how long they have been here in Belgrade, disillusioned and hopelessly lost. No one can say how big the number of policemen was that died for this Serbian Galaxy.

It doesn't matter. We all heard the sirens screaming. Each one of us faced our own policeman. We were the same mass, the same density, dead or alive... The price for peace is certainly not the number of bodies eaten by the fish in the river Sava or the Drina. Each price is covered in gold bullions or in golden teeth torn from the mouths of civil war victims. The pig that I'm staring at – eating a hamburger of its reconstituted parts, covered in mayonnaise and mustard – is certainly well aware of that...

In spite of all this, I still hadn't left the country. I don't even know if there is something left for me out there. But, on the other hand, who will stay here if I am one of the last. And I'm not a coward. I'm the Artist, which here definitively means that you have to be a tough guy, used to the constant ID checking, cold showers from a hoses, heavy beatings while being sodomized during police interrogations... All that because you gave a bundle of weed to some editor of the local literary magazine, hoping that he might publish some of your stuff.

I just want to make it clear that my intention was to make an original of the forgery – *Made in Serbia*. A bad classic Serbian piece as the outcome of my rotten life, crooked parents and friends, lousy politics, isolation and sanctions, flat beer and stale hamburgers, and Devil knows what else...

an extract from Nenad Racković, *Knjiga recepata* (*The Book of Recipes*), Reč, 2002
translated by Dušan Grlja

Aleksandar Davić, *Poslednja dadaistička predstava (The Last Dada Show)*, video, 1992

JOHNNY'S VOICE FROM THE OFF:

"For example, I'm quite capable of playing a monster dressed up as a priest or a worn-out faggot, same as some paedophile or junkie on his divine task of raising money for re-building Serbian monasteries. But I could never play the role of a Serbian artist from Nark-Park. Still, I can clearly hear the voice saying: Just take it easy and enjoy the ride. I can even hear the Park kids cheering: John-ny, John-ny, John-ny... Quite contented with this outcome I find myself in the *Question Mark* bar near the headquarters of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The figure of the waitress in the back-lit, hazy bar atmosphere looked like some kind of pagan Venus idol. She flashed phony plastic teeth out of the carmine gap of her mouth and offered me a seat. I refused. She has no teeth but she still chews. She has no brain but she still votes... Actually, my mind is preoccupied with only one question: What if this is just a delirium tremens and, if that is so, should I commit myself?"

an extract from Nenad Racković, *Nesavladiva priča (The Unbreakable Story)*, Fabrika knjiga, 2006
translated by Dušan Grlja

Riding on a toy-train that my dad bought me for my sixth birthday, I begin to day-dream: The land I'm travelling through is called Yugoslavia. But all I see looking out of the window are decor sets from some B-rated horror movies. One of them takes place in Belgrade. The set is a big retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art – "Art in Serbia 1989-2001". It presents us with the opportunity to see the work of the artist dedicated to systematic destruction in his quest for the answer to the ultimate riddle: What's the fuckin' point? Surviving the cross-fire of sex and ideologies, of drugs and (self-) destruction? I'm not saying that this is something that surpasses the abilities of the average human being. But you just can't simply lay back and calmly observe how everything gets twisted out of the shape you were forced to become accustomed to. You simply can't fully understand the events of your immediate past exhibited as the relics of long forgotten times. They still swirl in the unstoppable hurricane of your mind. I let the exhibition catalogue drop out of my hands as I get up to leave the compartment. There is only the sparkling of glossy pages left behind in the semi-gloom of dirty train floor.

And the run-away train leaves... Oh, yes! Let it be remembered that I woke up in May 1996 just before facing the void I tried to jump across. Bare naked. With no shoes. The pigs put me on the midnight express to the outskirts of town, shouting: Drive on and make no stops! I'm telling you this with full confidence in the stated facts, as I was the only one to survive the events. I was an extremist in all respects, rocking like a pendulum from one side of the pit to the other. Now, I'm obsessed with the fact that I can do without all that. The last decade – as my friend once told me – was a "long and painful road out of hell". I'll crucify myself! If it takes that, I'll do it. I already signed the contract, no matter with whom: the Museum of Contemporary Art or the ANLAVE clinic. And, as I fly down the staircase leading up to a higher level, I'm not gonna be wielding twenty one centimetre long rusted nails, but a Fender Stratocaster. All in the name of the countless horror-movie graveyards and Heavy Metal, too.

an extract from Nenad Racković, *Nesavladiva priča* (*The Unbreakable Story*), Fabrika knjiga, 2006
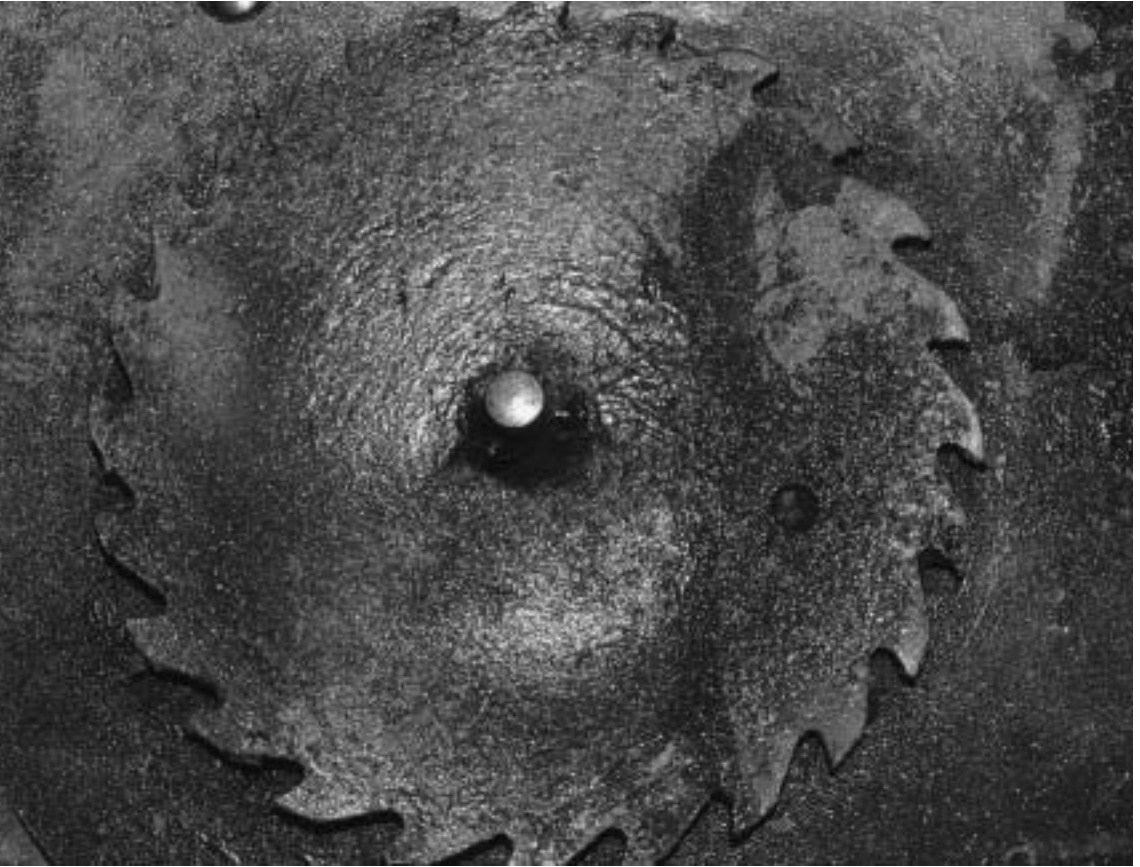translated by Dušan Grlja

IN THE PRESENCE OF ART

HEAVY METAL

I still clearly remember the exhibition entitled "The Genocide of Serbs" in the Museum of the Applied Arts. Its planned duration of couple a months was several times prolonged. The unforgettable images from this gallery will haunt me forever on. The tours were organized once a week for elementary school kids – and I wouldn't be suppressed if they were bringing kindergarten kids too. Actually I've never entered the Nauseum during the exhibition, but the images I kept seeing passing by were just enough for anyone to get the picture. Photographs printed in huge formats depicted burnt faces of the dead and mutilated corpses of the people killed in numerous unimaginable ways. The curators even made "conceptual installations" out of them – five photographs placed in the form of cross! All this brings back the same old fear. It is the fear of getting lost in the labyrinth of nauseous spectacles.

an extract from Nenad Racković, *Nesavladiva priča* (*The Unbreakable Story*), Fabrika knjiga, 2006

translated by Dušan Grlja
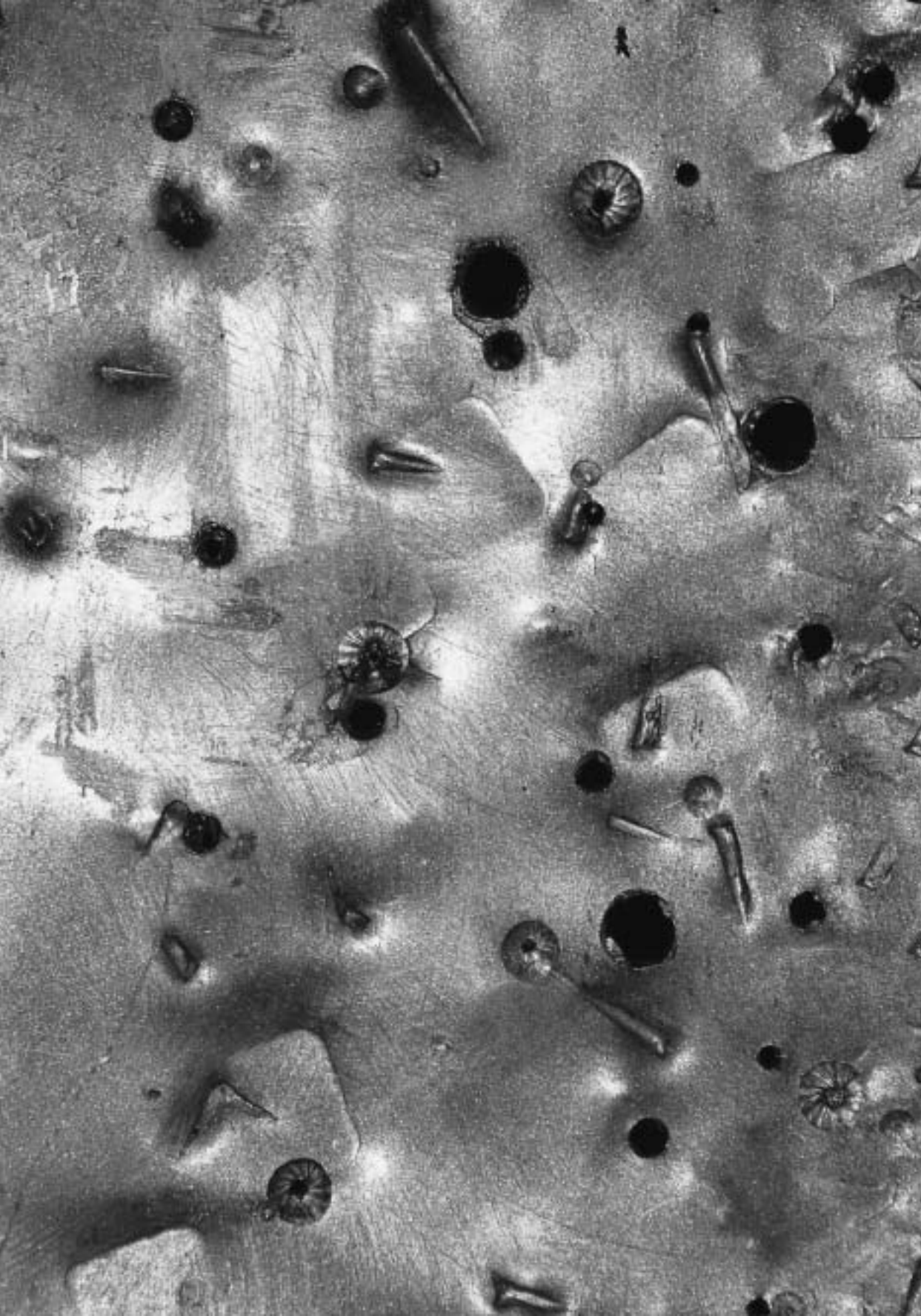
NO CHANGE, PLEASE, WE ARE POST-STUDENTS: THE ANAESTHETIZATION OF ART AND SOCIETY

Vesna Madžoski

There is a secret protocol between the generations
of the past and that of our own.
For we have been expected upon this earth.
Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, 1940

Let us imagine the following picture: the year is 1968. The whole world is engulfed by students' protests. Although with regional differences depending on the specific contexts in which they emerged, the protestors have the same demand from those in power: immediate and fundamental changes of the functioning of the existing institutions.

Now the year is 2006. Again, Parisian students are protesting. The news shows images similar to the ones from 1968: again students are out on the streets, frequently clashing with the police and fighting with an energy resembling that in '68. But this time, the only demand coming from the students is: no change, please. For some, this might seem as a legitimate demand directed against the proposed changes in the labor system, advertised as the last attempt to save the national economy. Nevertheless, when put in the perspective of the unrests and protests of the Others who were destroying this proud country's myths of democracy and human rights in the "banelieus" just a few months before, the difference between the youth of the same generation becomes visible. The Others were demanding changes, the unrests were their last cry for help. The burned cars in their own neighborhoods resemble the Indian smoke signals carrying the only message: get us out of here! These two parallel worlds - the youths from the suburbs, and the young students – reveal the existing break in their communication, but unmistakably convey a similar message: there is something rotten in the system. Preferring this paralyzed state of affairs instead of change, the elite of tomorrow seems to have no other option for its own future. As it seems, dreams about changing the world are forgotten and abandoned.

The year is 1974. Marina Abramovic performs her piece "Rhythm 0" in an art gallery in Naples. In it, she stood passively in a museum for six hours with 72 items around her, inviting the audience to use them on her the way they wanted to. In a situation that could easily get out of control, an obviously "disturbed" man has chosen his tool: a loaded gun. He made her put it up to her head, trying to force her

1 Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, London: Pimlico, 1999. p. 58.

2 Ibid., p. 59.

to pull the trigger. She did not resist, but luckily, the other members of the audience intervened and prevented blood from being spilt.

The year is 2005 and in a group show in a gallery in the heart of Amsterdam, a young artist performs his piece. He is dressed in a clean, white, protective suit, and asks the visitors to shoot at him from a plastic gun with bullets filled with different colors. The situation is completely under control and there is not the slightest risk that somebody might get hurt.

Without going into a deeper analysis of different strategies used by these two artists, instead I would like to pose these two different historical moments as a parallel to the ones of the students' protests in order to define the changes that happened in the forty years in between. At first, it seems that compared to the legendary generation of '68, this new generation has lost its sting, its courage to take risks, courage to be willing to sacrifice one's life for the "higher cause", whether it be art or politics. However, this paralyzed position could also be read as a product of the legacy of the same brave '68: confronted with the failure of the preceding generations that tested all possible methods to produce social change, the new generation feels devoid of any possibility to define new tactics. It seems that all hope is being run over by the galloping force of the global disease called liberal capitalism.

The story that follows is not aimed to be a melancholic reflection on the things past and what has been happening in the meantime, for melancholy is a product of the specific empathic procedure of historians that, according to Walter Benjamin, actually indicates empathy with the victor: "Those who currently rule are however the heirs of all those who have ever been victorious. Empathy with the victors thus comes to benefit the current rulers every time."[1] Rather, I would like to put these two distant periods opposite one other, as two mirrors able to reflect each other's image. The generation of the Sixties had "us" in mind; their every action was directed towards the changes of the present that will bring peace and happiness to the next generations. "We" are this future and we are constantly reminded of the times when "we" were conceived. My aim is not to create an antagonistic situation in which "we" are put in opposition to "them" from the past nor evaluate one period as better than the other, one generation as more courageous than the other, but to test if it is possible to get to know "us" better after seeing our reflection in the mirror of the past and vice versa. Or, coming back to Benjamin, "To articulate what is past does not mean to recognize 'how it really was'. It means to take control of memory, as it flashes in the moment of danger."[2] The moments of danger can be found in every present that comes, and the focus on those who control the memory of past times should be permanent.

[FRAMING] THE PERFECT HUMAN

The prefect human has to eat and drink. We are going to watch a meal. Wine looks great in the glass. And onto the plate – lovely fish, with rice, onions, lemon, and a green sauce. With it, a bottle of Chablis. How does the perfect human eat?

The fish is a beautiful sight on a table. It deserves to lie on silver. Dinner is served. Now the meal must go, piece by piece into the mouth. It tastes good and its consistency is good. Bon Appetit! Why is joy so whimsical? Happiness so brief? Why did you leave me? Why did you go away? Very, very, very tasty. (...) Also today I experienced something that I hope to understand in a few days.

Jørgen Leth*, The Perfect Human* (1967)

One of the concepts that seems to have been rediscovered by the art world at the beginning of 2000 is that of reenactments. This concept was expressed not only in numerous artworks but also through a series of exhibitions with repetitions of performances of the 1960s and 1970s. Berlin in 2001, Paris and London in 2003, Amsterdam in 2004, Rotterdam in 2005, New York in 2006[3]: all offered their own versions of this sudden urge to repeat certain artistic practices in new contexts, almost 40 years after they originally happened. In an interesting visual experiment, one of the leading contemporary filmmakers, Lars von Trier, set a specific experiment in his documentary THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS (2003): he invited his teacher and idol, Jørgen Leth, to remake his old movie THE PERFECT HUMAN (1967) five times. As the one who controls the experiment, von Trier was allowed to set the limitations within which Leth had to work. As the end reveals, the purpose of this special experiment was to "save Jørgen Leth" and bring him out of long-term depression using repetition as a method combined with confrontations with the limitations set by somebody else. Maybe not surprisingly, the method worked and, as a result, we see Leth reviving the strength of his creative potential.[4]

In spite of the many layers of this film-experiment, I would like to focus on a specific scene or image created in the remake that was most striking for me[5]. THE PERFECT HUMAN is a movie that seems to be completely under the control of its director: set in the perfect and highly aesthetic "white cube" space, it shows a perfect human practising his perfect rituals in a perfect world. This perfect human is perfectly clean, has a perfect beautiful woman next to him, spends his time in hard preparations for his hard task of maintaining his perfection, eats a perfect dinner, listens to beautiful music, asks himself difficult questions about the meaning of love and life, but does not look at all worried when his perfect woman leaves him.

The meal scene in the original movie is its final scene and the closure of the previously depicted narrative. After

3 *A Little Bit of History Repeated* at Kunst-Werke in Berlin, *A Short History of Performance* at Whitechapel Art Gallery London, performance event *Re-enact* organized by Casco and Mediamatic in Amsterdam, and *Life, Once More: Forms of Reenactment in Contemporary Art* in Witte de With, Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, and the most recent, a series of seven re-enactments of famous performances by Marina Abramovic, *Seven Easy Pieces* in the Guggenheim Museum in New York.

4 In his book *Ulysses Unbound*, Jon Elster writes about the positive effect of limitations on the creative process. Nevertheless, inspired by the words of his mentor Jens Arup Seip who said that "In politics, people never try to bind themselves, only to bind others" Elster warns us about the danger of applying the same rule on the level of social and political relations. In other words, "Fasting is not like starving". See Jon Elster, *Ulysses Unbound, Studies in Rationality, Precommitment, and Constraints*, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

5 When I saw *Five Obstructions* for the first time, as the movie was in Danish with Dutch subtitles, my limited knowledge of both languages also restricted my understanding of the spoken and written parts. Nevertheless, there was still enough space for me to follow the "action": my full attention was on the visual aspects of the movie, and it turned out that there were enough interesting visual elements to keep my attention alive.

working hard on their "perfectness", this couple is ready for dinner. This meal is a highly aesthetic one; the empty white space will be filled with a table covered with food on silver plates. This extreme aesthetization of everyday life does not provide us with any knowledge about how this meal was prepared and where it comes from: in this perfect world, things just "happen". Lovely boiled salmon, potatoes, sauce hollandaise, and a bottle of Chablis will end up in these perfect stomachs. With this perfect meal, our perfect man will not be too disturbed when he realizes that his perfect woman has left him. His questions are rhetorical; his concern as to why fortune is so capricious does not really matter; the food is very, very delicious.

In the second obstruction set for Leth, von Trier has formulated the following rules: it has to be filmed in a miserable place, but the place cannot be shown; Leth has to play the role of the perfect human in the scene of eating the perfect dinner. Leth decides to go to the red light district in Bombay, as a place he previously experienced as "hell on Earth". We follow him while preparing for his role in a Bombay hotel room where he practices falling as a perfect human would, trying to stay calm and under control preparing his table and perfect dinner in probably the poorest place he could go today, but having pills of valium in his pocket "just to be on the safe side". The result is impressive: we see Leth in his perfect tuxedo eating a perfect meal, drinking perfect wine from the perfect glass, but also figures of Indian women and children curiously standing behind a semi-transparent screen behind him[6]. In this situation, Leth has decided to be a professional; he is capable of playing this role and eating his expensive dinner in front of any background, not believing in von Trier's romantic idea that there is such a limit, such a situation that could break the human. Cruelty and cold-bloodiness of any military "professional" able to perform whatever he was ordered to do, but having to suffer through similar never-ending nightmares is a good example of how far humans are able to go[7].

When these two versions of the same story are compared, the scene from Bombay underlines one thing: the change of context or, perhaps more accurately, the changed status of the background. In the course of the movie, Leth described how he sees the function of the transparent screen:

> *The transparent screen we stretched out provided an image area, a framing of reality, which was both concrete and incredibly subtle and artful. It was a very elegant response to the whole idea of the project, which involved the distance that had been introduced and which we wanted to minimize during this particular obstruction. We wanted to minimize the distance between the perfect and the human.*

6 Even though the strict rules set by von Trier were aimed at depicting the same white background, this time with the sounds of the "real" world, Leth decided to accept the suggestion of his collaborator Dan Holmberg to make the screen transparent and make these people visible.

7 Also one of the interesting works at the exhibition *Life, Once More* was a video made by Rod Dickinson, *The Milgram Re-enactment* (2002). This video shows a staged reenactment of the "obedient to authority", Dr Stanley Milgram's infamous 1961 social psychology experiment. In the original experiment, participants were asked to give apparently lethal electric shocks to an unwilling victim to test how far they would be prepared to obey an authoritative scientist and inflict pain on a protesting person: 2/3 of the subjects obediently continued to administer the maximum 450 volt shock until they were told to stop.

If the movie had been made strictly in accordance with von Trier's rules, we may have seen Leth with a cold expression on his face, and against a white background. We would be informed that this scene was filmed in a horrible place, but it would mean nothing at all. The scene would be the repetition of the original one with the sole purpose of gauging the expression of shock on Leth's face, purely serving the private desire of the producer/master – von Trier. Deciding to open up the perspective to show this magnificent live painting behind his back, Leth has given us one of the strongest critiques of the contemporary state of affairs depicting the (non)existing relationship between the richest and the poorest. If the perfect humans of the 1960s used to be protected from the real humans in their beautiful, limitless white cubes, today they can allow themselves to watch misery because in the meantime this misery has become highly photogenic. The constant flow of these "miserable" images produced and reproduced in various media and contexts makes the "perfect ones" aware and respectful toward the miserable humans, but allows them to remain behind this new protective semi-transparent screen. The food is still very, very tasty.

In his analysis of the Dogma phenomenon, Jack Stevenson interprets Leth's "lab experiment" as a representation of the ideals of the generation that this attractive couple belongs to, hence using them to criticize the new consumerist society: "It's a biting sociological satire on the shallowness of life among the Danish middle-class of 1967, as well as an ironic comment on the tendency of documentary filmmakers to blindly worship the gospel of objectivity."[8] If the first version on its second level gave the ironic comment on the objectivity of documentary making, than the second one can be seen as a way of commenting on the new normalized practice of the non-ethical use of refugee camps and similar horrible places in creating highly popular journalistic "reality shows" that actually have the effect of making the misery photogenic. The white cube is not pleasant scenery anymore – the perfect human knows he is perfect enough, but likes to rediscover his humanness every morning when he turns on the TV news.

Although THE PERFECT HUMAN can be seen as a highly formalistic and aesthetic anthropological essay about human nature, the other elements (language, music, habits, relations and food) demonstrate that it is deeply embedded within the Danish context: it allows Leth to express his ironic position towards the social and political circumstances of that moment. Although pretending to be pure and perfect, every detail is filled with political meaning, expressing the new ideology of the consumerist society. The danger of the pure formalistic position (the doctrine of pure form) is that it is actually just one of the faces of an unchanging totalitarian statehood: the unchanging Soul produces the unchanging State and both of them are "the expressions of the Ideal Order."[9] Being aware of this fact, Leth does not let the "pure form" speak for itself; his film is filled with sketches of meaning on many levels. His black-and-white

8 Jack Stevenson, *Dogme Uncut: Lars von Trier, Thomas Vinterberg, and the Gang That Took on Hollywood*, Santa Monica Press, 2003, p. 203.

9 Thomas McEvilly, *Art and Discontent: Theory at the Millennium,* New York: Documentext McPherson & Co., 1991, p. 65.

essay shows both how the subject is constructed both by the specific social context and by the "objective" film language. It is not Leth who is the pervert attempting to maintain a distance, as alleged by von Trier. Rather, we are all surrounded by a world of global perversion and forced to perform the role in front of the world he usually keeps hidden behind the impermeable and protective screen, the perfect human needs valium pills as a security blanket.

THE SYNAESTHETIC HUMAN

One of the important skills Leth's perfect human successfully mastered through such insensitivity is that even when the love of his life left him, he felt nothing. He just kept on eating his perfect dinner hoping to understand things at some point in the future. In her essay "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered", Susan Buck-Morss offers a different and very valuable reading of Benjamin's famous essay. Buck-Morss' interpretation is based on the last few paragraphs in which, according to Morss, a dark cloud seems to have covered Benjamin's optimism concerning the positive influence of technological development on humanity. Here Benjamin warns his readers about the upcoming danger of fascism that succeeded in using the recently developed sensory alienation of people as its tool for domination through the aesthetization of politics: "Mankind, which in Homer's time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order."[10] The final conclusion, according to Buck-Morss, is the fact that both alienation and aestheticized politics as sensual conditions have outlived fascism, and therefore "the enjoyment taken in viewing our own destruction."[11] Maybe fascism was successfully defeated after the Second World War, but the basis for its reemergence was not.

In her exploration of the cultural interpretations of the aesthetic experience, Buck-Morss takes us first to ancient Greece to look for the hidden meaning in the root of the word aesthetics: "*Aisthitikos* is ancient Greek for that which is "perceptive by feeling." *Aisthitikos* is the sensory experience of perception. The original field of aesthetics is not art but reality – corporeal, material nature."[12] Hence, the aesthetic experience is being born in the connection between the external stimuli and neural stimuli that are transmitted through senses disciplined by culture[13]. Nevertheless, although senses are culturally disciplined and the differences between individual perceptions are erased, Buck-Morss sees the possibility of change in the fact that most of the senses still "maintain an uncivilized and incivilizable trace" creating the "core of resistance to cultural domestication."[14]

10 Benjamin, *Illuminations,* p. 242.

11 Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered", *October,* Vol. 62, Autumn, 1992, p. 4.

12 Ibid., p. 6.

13 "The nervous system is not contained within the body's limits. The circuit from sense-perception to motor response begins and ends in the world. (...) As the source of stimuli and the arena for motor response, the external world must be included to complete the sensory circuit." Ibid., p. 12.

14 Ibid., p. 6.

Buck-Morss rejects the division on binary oppositions "inside vs. outside" of the "traditional conception of the human nervous system which artificially isolates human biology from its environment". Instead she offers a new model that she names a synaesthetic system. A synaesthetic system is:

> *[an] aesthetic system of sense-consciousness, decentered from the classical subject, wherein external sense-perceptions come together with the internal images of memory and anticipation (...) This synaesthetic system is "open" in the extreme sense. Not only is it open through the world through the sensory organs, but the nerve cells within the body form a network that is in itself discontinuous.*[15]

In its extreme form, in its complete openness and total synaesthesia, our perfect human would not be able to survive the shock of reality. Therefore, s/he has created a system of different buffers and protections, ranging from his ego, as noticed by Freud, to phantasmagoric interiors and arcades, as formulated by Benjamin. The overstimulation of the senses by our modern surroundings has produced its counter effect: the numbing of the senses, transforming the original synaesthetic experience into the anaesthetic one. The danger of this process lies in the fact that this "dialectical reversal... destroys the human organism's power to respond politically even when self-preservation is at stake."[16]

How did humanity loose the touch with reality? According to Benjamin, the main alienation happened with the invention of phantasmagoria that, for him, became a synonym of the interiors of the bourgeois home in the nineteenth century. Their goal is "manipulation of the synaesthetic system by control of environmental stimuli. It has the effect of anaesthetizing the organism, not through numbing, but through flooding the senses."[17]

This human being is constructed as being autogenetic, its own beginning and end, and in effect is entirely self-contained. "If it has any body at all, it must be one impervious to the senses, hence safe from external control. Its potency is in its lack of corporeal response (...) Such an asensual, *an*aesthetic protuberance is this artifact: modern man."[18] It has placed itself in a paradoxical position of believing in its invincibility and being in control of its own destiny, but at the same time it finds itself in a vicious circle of having to protect its vulnerability over and over again from the real and invented dangers.[19]

The opposite concept of a human being to this autogenetic senseless body is the synaesthetic one, but today it is still seen as a deformation and anomaly. Although official medicine had diagnosed a synaesthetic condition in the late nineteenth century, until recently it was a highly neglected field[20]. Seemingly the official system of

15 Ibid., p. 13

16 Ibid., p. 17.

17 Ibid., p. 22.

18 Ibid., p. 8.

19 There are many proofs for the political exploitation of this position: people in power are given a right to control the majority based on this belief that they are the ones able to protect us from all the "evils".

20 The first one to document this was Gallon in 1880. See V. S. Ramachandran and E. M. Hubbard, "Synaesthesia – A Window into Perception, Thought and Language", *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 8, No. 12, 2001, pp. 3–34

medicine did not have the right discourse in which to include a notion of the existence of differences of individual perception. Synaesthesia is defined as:

> *a curious condition in which an otherwise normal person experiences sensations in one modality when a second modality is stimulated. For example, a synaesthete may experience a specific colour whenever she encounters a particular tone (e.g., C-sharp may be blue) or may see any given number as always tinged with a certain colour (e.g., "5" may be green and "6" may be red).*[21]

In professional circles, the possibility of multisensory perception is dismissed using different excuses and overall can be read as cultural constructions around synaesthetes:

> 1) *They are just crazy. The phenomenon is simply the result of a hyperactive imagination. Or maybe they are trying to draw attention to themselves by claiming to be special or different in some way.*
> 2) *They are just remembering childhood memories such as seeing coloured numbers in books or playing with coloured refrigerator magnets.*
> 3) *They are just engaging in vague tangential speech or just being metaphorical just as you and I might say "bitter cold" or "sharp cheese". Cheese is soft to touch, not sharp, so why do we say "sharp"? Obviously, one means that the taste is sharp but why is a tactile adjective being applied to taste?*
> 4) *They are "potheads" or "acid junkies" who have been on drugs. This idea is not entirely without substance since LSD users often do report synaesthesia both during the high as well as long after.*[22]

Hence, the official narrative does not allow us to even think about the possibility of individuals having different patterns of perceiving reality, seeing this ability as abnormal or, in its milder form, as having an excessively vivid imagination.

In the next part, I would like to bring into this discussion a specific cultural myth that was used as a tool for the political defeat of those who were thinking differently, a myth that was created around a substance that has an effect on the human body in producing induced synaesthesia. In other words, it is a story about how the synaesthetic condition has been constructed not only as medically but also as socially dangerous.

LSD: FROM MIRACULOUS CURE TO HOFMANN'S PROBLEM CHILD

Analyzing the context of the Sixties, it is possible to recognize a difference between the left-wing movements that originated in the United States from those that originated in other countries. In the United States, the left-wing anti-war movement was inseparable from the use of LSD and marihuana, while in Europe, with some exceptions, this was not so

21 Ibid., p. 4.
22 Ibid.

much the case. Maybe the reason for this lies in the fact that European leftists still had the option of believing in communist and Marxist ideas, while their US post-McCarthy contemporaries had to find another way out – a revolution based on the individual change in the perception of reality.

23 "Kernels infested with this fungus develop into light-brown to violet-brown curved pegs that push forth from the husk in place of normal grains." Albert Hofmann, *LSD my problem child*, McGraw-Hill Book Complany, 1980, p. 7; available online at <http://www.flashback.se/archive/my|problem|child/>

One of the interesting anniversaries that was widely broadcasted by different media in January 2006 was that of the 100th birthday of Albert Hofmann, the chemist who discovered LSD. In the presence of (a still very active) Hofmann himself, the celebration in Basel was followed by the biggest psychedelic conference ever, with over 2000 visitors from 37 countries. Through reading various reports and impressions by numerous doctors, scientists, engineers, artists, etc. one has the impression of a serious party taking place, followed by serious discussions by experts.

The celebration of Mr. Hoffman's birthday shows the importance this man had in the process of realizing the potential of this incredibly strong substance for individual personal development. As a young chemist in the Basel laboratory of Sandoz pharmaceutics, Albert Hofmann was researching different substances that could be extracted from the ergot, produced by a lower fungus that grows parasitically on rye and, to a lesser extent, on other species of grain and on wild grasses.[23] Its medical use was known from the Middle Ages, especially in childbirth, and Hofmann's scientific curiosity took him further in discovering the medical efficiency of ergot in curing migraine. In 1938, Hofmann produced the twenty-fifth substance in his series of lysergic acid derivatives: lysergic acid diethylamide, abbreviated LSD-25, at this point only for laboratory use. As the first experiments on animals showed no significant effects of this substance, he abandoned any further research. Nevertheless, in 1943 he decided to come back to it and try to test it again, a practice that is not common in the chemical laboratories where, usually, if the first tests show no significant effect of the newly produced substances, research is stopped. It is still a mystery how his body came in touch with LSD, and his presumption is that a drop of it fell on his skin while working in the laboratory, a dose whose absorption was enough to produce a strong change of his perception and feelings similar to some mystic revelations he remembered from his childhood. This personal understanding of mystical experiences became a key element in Hofmann's appreciations of the newly invented substance. As he stated himself in his book *LSD – My Problem Child*

> In studying the literature connected with my work, I became aware of the great universal significance of visionary experience. It plays a dominant role, not only in mysticism and the history of religion, but also in the creative process in art, literature, and science. More recent investigations have shown that many persons also have visionary experiences in daily life, though most of us fail to recognize their meaning and value. Mystical experiences, like those that marked my childhood, are apparently far from rare (…) I share the belief of many of my contemporaries that the spiritual crisis pervading all spheres of

Western industrial society can be remedied only by a change in our world-view. We shall have to shift from the materialistic, dualistic belief that people and their environment are separate, toward a new consciousness of an all-encompassing reality, which embraces the experiencing ego, a reality in which people feel their oneness with animate nature and all of creation.[24]

After this first experience and several more of Hofmann's self-tests, Sandoz pharmaceutics started distribution of LSD to psychiatric clinics where its treatment became very efficient not only in curing alcoholism, but also in speeding up the treatments in psychotherapy.[25]

Many of the participants at the conference in Basel openly recalled their reticence about the events in which they had participated, which they had previously maintained for fear of being ridiculed. Although LSD had become an illegal substance in 1968, this didn't prevent the many generations that followed from experiencing its effects over and over again. After the sixties there was a constant campaign of demonization of this substance, one of the physically least harmful substances for the human body, according to the results of numerous medical experiments, Interestingly, it was only demonized after attempts to use it as a means to change the perception of the existing political and economic systems of control.[26] In the case of LSD, the body in danger was the body of capitalism itself.

It seems that the biggest discoveries of our civilization cannot be seen without their connection to the army, since the military industry is the one most capable of providing the means for research and the necessary tests, and the civil sector is allowed to use these discoveries only after the system is sure that it cannot be used against it. Nevertheless, the story about LSD tells us the story about the invention that escaped the control of the military power.[27]

THE AMERICAN TRIP

Ironically enough, LSD was brought to the United States by the CIA at the beginning of the 1960s. In their constant search for a "truth drug", the CIA started experiments with LSD at first among their own employees, and after that by establishing secret – and some would say illegal – laboratories in San Francisco's red light district where they observed the changed behavior of prostitutes' customers. At the same time, two important persons came into contact with this substance: one of them was Dr Timothy Leary, a distinguished professor of psychology at Harvard University, and the other was Ken Kesey, a student of literature at Stanford University. The former was soon to lose his teaching position and became a "high priest of LSD" from the East Cost, and the latter a famous author of *One Flew Over the*

24 Ibid., p. 4.

25 Discovered at the time of the most horrible war humankind has ever seen, LSD is interpreted by some as a spiritual antidote to the atomic bomb.

26 LSD has received a status of such a dangerous substance that even laboratory experiments were and still are strictly forbidden.

27 All records on tests on soldiers register one predominant effect LSD had on them: a desire to drop the guns and leave the battlefield.

Cuckoo's Nest and a populist activist who traveled with his magic bus full of his Merry Pranksters, distributing LSD to everyone on the road.

If we compare the three approaches propagated by Hofmann, Leary and Kesey, we are able to see three different ideologies as well. In the case of Dr. Hofmann, we could see his position as the most elitist one, believing that LSD should be used and experienced in the strictly controlled settings of medical institutions, while Leary spreads this to a wider intellectual elite; in the case of Kesey, we can say that he went the furthest in propagating the psychedelic experience of LSD to any human being, without paying attention to one's hierarchical position in the existing system of relations. As Kesey stated himself, "The purpose of psychedelics is to learn the conditioned response of people and then to prank them. That's the only way to get people to ask questions, and until they ask questions they're going to remain conditioned robots."[28]

Kesey's approach was seen as "the revolt of guinea pigs" – he had taken LSD out of the laboratory and away from the white smocks and any notion of medically sanitized control of the psychedelic experience. As a result, a newly established Kesey's "scene" attracted a number of people who started the Free Speech Movement, a groundbreaking group of students that decided to organize politically. In their search for political and economic justice, personal authenticity and individual freedom went hand in hand. As Lee and Shalin state in their thorough study *Acid Dreams: CIA, LSD and the Sixties rebellion*:

> *Smoking dope was thus an important political catalyst, for it enabled many a budding radical to begin questioning the official mythology of the governing class (...) If any single theme dominated young people in the 1960s, it was the search for a new way of seeing, a new relation to the world.*[29]

Precisely this desire to find new ways of seeing brings us back to synaesthesia and, at this point, I would like to introduce Walter Benjamin's concept of profane illumination.

THE QUEST(ION) OF PROFANE ILLUMINATIONS

Being one of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century, Walter Benjamin has become one of the first *psychonauts* as well. He tried to formulate the importance of the states of changed perception as a way to fight against the dominant capitalistic way of life and production.[30] His voluntarily self-experiments have even more relevance when seen in the context of the birth of new

28 Lee, M. and Schlain, B., *Acid Dreams: The CIA, LSD and the Sixties Rebellion,* New York: Grove Press, 1985, p.121.

29 Ibid., p. 131.

30 Benjamin had performed numerous experiments with hashish, opium and mescaline for a few decades together with his close friends, leading a thorough record of each session, which was recently published in the form of a book "On Hashish".

aesthetics and politics of bodies under the Third Reich: this new body was not only perfect by its genetic predispositions, but also had to stay clean and healthy through the constant practice of its (an)aesthetization.

German Superman was especially engineered to avoid the seduction of the hyper-animal and hypersexual bodies of Jewish women.[31] The example of the cartoon depicting two male bodies – the German one and the Jewish one – shows the dominant ideological message of that time. The perfect Arian man is opposed to the fat, ugly, and greedy Jewish man with a cigarette.[32] We all know the end of the story when this dirty and carcinogen Jewish body was "cleaned off" from the healthy body of the German nation. Together with the prohibition of the substances that could biologically damage this imaginary body, the Nazis had publicly rejected as "degenerate art" all art produced by Dadaists, surrealists, and expressionists who had introduced the aesthetics of the changed perception of the senses.

[31] "By August 1944, over 7 million foreigners were living in the "Greater German Reich." The majority, which included 1.9 million prisoners of war and 5.7 million forced laborers, had been brought to Germany against their will." Since November 1939, the Nazis have issued numerous decrees forbidding contacts between Germans and foreigners, especially between German women and foreign prisoners of war. See Kundrus, Birthe, "Forbidden Company: Romantic Relationships between Germans and Foreigners, 1939 to 1945", *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 11, Nos. 1/2, January/ April 2002, 201-222.

[32] The rhetoric of Nazi war on tobacco was supported by "racial hygienists fearing the corruption of the German germ plasm, by industrial hygienists fearing a reduction of work capacity, by nurses and midwives fearing harm to the "maternal organism". Tobacco was said to be "a corrupting force in a rotting civilization that has become lazy" (...) He [Hitler] also claimed that Germany might never have achieved its present glory if he had continued to smoke." See Robert Proctor, "The Nazi War on Tobacco: Ideology, Evidence, and Possible Cancer Consequences", *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* Vol. 71, No.3, 1997, 435-488.

In her book *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, Buck-Morss underlines the fact that Benjamin didn't use only dreams as inspiration for his work, but went further and "experimented with consciousness-transforming drugs, hashish primarily, but also opium and mescaline". Her interpretation is that even though Benjamin recognized drug-taking as a liberating act, he considered its relationship to political liberation problematic:

> *The true, creative transcendence of religious illumination ... does not really lie in narcotics... The most passionate examination of hash-smoking will certainly not teach half as much about thinking (which is an imminent narcotic) as the profane illumination of thinking about hash smoking (...)*[33]

Nevertheless, she continues to say that Benjamin believed that hashish, opium and whatever else could provide the introductory course for profane illumination.[34]

On the other hand, in his essay "From '*Rausch*' to Rebellion", Scott J. Thompson expresses his disagreement with Buck-Morss interpretation and states that profane illumination does not have to happen *after* the "rausch" experience but can take place within the inebriated voyage itself:

> *If rausch is analogous to being adrift in a turbulent sea, then "profane illumination" is like suddenly awakening in the midst of a dream, seizing the helm, and becoming the pilot of one's inner voyage (...) The autoworkers who smoked pot, dropped acid, and instead of "tuning out" shut down auto-factories in wildcat strikes, understand what Walter Benjamin was describing whether they read them or not.*[35]

This sentence brings us back to the Sixties and the USA. Realizing that LSD had become a powerful weapon in social liberation movements, the governing elite has decided to turn the tables and use it as a weapon for their destruction. It was enough to criminalize LSD and make its use illegal together with the consumption of marihuana, and then start police arrests of the main actors of those movements that happened to be, as a rule, the consumers of these substances as well.

Nevertheless, in light of these two interpretations, maybe the solution lies somewhere in between, or even in the combination of both: the thinker who gets inspired by his changed state of consciousness and the worker who stops his work and starts to question the system of exploitation are somehow equal to an understanding of the transformation of existing social relations. But Benjamin's emphasis on the importance of thinking about hash smoking than the act of smoking

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33 Benjamin, *Über Haschisch*, p. 202 as quoted in Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics,* p. 126.

34 Ibid.

35 Scott J. Thompson, "From '*Rausch*' to Rebellion: Walter Benjamin's *On Hashish* & The Aesthetic Dimensions of Prohibitionist Realism, In *The Journal of Cognitive Liberties*, Vol. 2, Issue No. 1, pages 21-42 (Spring/Summer 2000), pp.9; available online at: <http:// www.wbenjamin.org/rausch.html>

itself may contain the secret solution that political movements of the Sixties weren't aware of. If the system had regained its power through the prohibition of illuminating substances, it still did not make thinking about alternative states of consciousness illegal. In the present era of the constant disinfection of the Western world, which begins with *rausch* and *rausch*-free areas, continues with the limitation of the "un-aesthetic" and the placing of "dirty" posters in the public space, and which might end up in sweeping away everyone who senses differently, it is our task to re-examine and re-evaluate what we define as narcotics before it is too late.[36]

THE AESTHETICS AND POLITICS OF THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

In the current phase of capitalism, it is possible to notice the increase of the elements absorbed by phantasmagoria that create addiction: "narcotics, blogs, sex, work, exercise, love, food, prescription drugs, religion, gambling, shoplifting, stardom, television and videogames crammed in-between."[37] When compared to drug intoxication:

the phantasmagoria assumes the position of objective fact. Whereas drug addicts confront a society that challenges the reality of their altered perception, the intoxication of phantasmagoria itself becomes the social norm. Sensory addiction to a compensatory reality becomes a means of social control.[38]

The "secret" history of LSD reveals the truth that the only drug "on the market" that does not produce either physical or psychological addiction had to become strictly prohibited. The benefits humanity gained through individual experiments with LSD surpasses the usual stereotypes of hippy-rock'n'roll bends.[39] In his 1998 autobiography *Dancing Naked in the Mind Field*, one of the most important scientists of today and a Nobel Prize winner, Kary Mullis revealed the story of how he invented a Polymerase Chain Reaction that amplified specific DNA sequences.[40] Like many of his colleagues at UC Berkley, Mullis engaged himself in serious experiments with hallucinogenic substances:

PCR's another place where I was down there with the molecules when I discovered it and I wasn't stoned on LSD, but my mind by then had learned how to get down there. I could sit on a DNA molecule and watch the go by (sic) and I didn't feel dumb about that, I felt I could, I mean that's just the way I think is I put myself in all different kind of spots and I've learned that partially I would think, and this is

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36 "The experience of intoxication is not limited to drug-induced, biochemical transformations. Beginning in the nineteenth century, a narcotic was made of reality itself." Buck-Morss, ibid., p. 21.

37 Alina Clej, "High Anxieties: Cultural Studies in Addiction (review)", *Modernism/modernity*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2004, pp. 361

38 Buck-Morss, ibid., p. 23

39 Among some of those who had recently "come out of the closet", we find, for instance, Douglas Englebart, the inventor of the computer mouse and Steve Jobs, Apple-cofounder.

40 Another Nobel-Prize-winner, Francis Crick, a discoverer of the double helical structure of DNA also told his friends he received inspiration for his ideas from LSD. See Ann Harrison, "LSD – The Geek's Wonder Drug?" in *Wired News*, www.wired.com/news/technology/1,70015-0.html.

again my opinion, through psychedelic drugs. If you have to think of bizarre things PCR was a bizarre thing. It changed an entire generation of molecular biologists in terms of how they thought about DNA. [41]

Many LSD psychonauts who claim that the LSD experience allowed them to see the world "as it really is" do not need a better illustration nor confirmation than these words coming from a man who discovered one of the secrets of organic life itself. At this moment, my aim is not to propagate the use of certain substances as opposed to the ones I do not mention, but to invite re-examination and re-evaluation of real and culturally defined dangers and addictions. [42] In these times of the rise of new body politics or the new tyranny of aesthetics maybe it could be relevant to take a look at what happened to Benjamin's and Buck-Morss's surgeon. [43]

Within this newly established medical practice in the nineteenth century, it was not uncommon "for the surgeons to become drug addicts." [44] It seems that having to perform operations on bodies that could feel contributed to their need to etherize themselves during the parties which at that time were known as "ether frolics". During these parties, young students noticed that the bruises gained during the intoxication did not hurt, and this is how the medical use of anesthetics started. In this new phase, the surgeon was free again: he was able to easily cut the bodies whose pain was not registered anymore.

The operating procedure has gone through fundamental changes as well. It started as a theatrical performance in amphitheaters but after the discovery of germs and bacteria the procedure had to be transferred into a disinfected space, into an operation room far from the eyes of the public. Nevertheless, in the last couple of years, we are witnessing a new phase in this development: the body on the operating table returns through numerous medical reality shows and makeovers, testing whether we can still feel something.

As Susan Buck-Morss remarks, the important shift that happened in perception after the introduction of anesthetics in medicine was a "tripartite splitting of experience: agency (the operating surgeon), the object as hyle (the docile body of the patient), and the observer (who perceives and acknowledges the accomplished result)." [45] Translated into political terms, "it was the genius of fascist propaganda to

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41 British Broadcasting Corporation, 1997 (27 February). "Psychedelic Science' Programme Notes." Transcript available at www.bbc.co.uk/science/horizon/psychetran.shtml. For more details also see Richard Doyle, "LSDNA: Rhetoric, Consciousness Expansion, and the Emergence of Biotechnology", *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 2002, 153-174.

42 It is possible to notice the proliferation of the drugs that stimulate labor performance and intensity and give the fake image of omnipotent self and total condemnation of the "irrational" impulses. For some more insight on the cultural function of heroine and cocaine see Bonnie Blackwell, "The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Narrative", *College Literature Vol.31, No.1, Winter 2004*, 1-26, or John Barker, "Intensities of Labour: from Amphetamine to Cocaine", Mute magazine – Culture and politics after the net, 07/03/2006, <http://www.metamute.org/?q=en/Intensities-of-Labour-from-Amphetamine-to-Cocaine>

43 This new tyranny of "plastic" aesthetics perhaps not by chance coincides with the recently defined War on Terror and War on Drugs led by George W. Bush.

44 Buck-Morss, ibid., p. 21

45 Ibid., p. 30

give the masses a double role, to be observer as well as the inert mass being formed and shaped."[46] With this in mind, if one of the effects of this recent proliferation of images of human bodies on the screens is the numbness of the viewers, the other danger is to mistake our own body for that on the screen that needs intervention.

The surgeon as the hero of this story is transformed from the ether-frolic, through the function of having to piece together the causalities of imperialism and industrialization - "fixing" wounded soldiers and factory workers - and has reached his new highly aesthetic role: plastic surgery. His task is not anymore to stitch what is ripped off, but to provide us with a new, perfect body as the key to our eternal happiness. This new shift prolongs the dream of the possibility of the eternal youth and promotes the aesthetic categories of beauty. Nevertheless, it also serves as a cover-up for something else. Offering us the illusion of the bodies of today as complete and homogenized, these images hide the ones of the mutilated bodies of the workers and soldiers of today. With only the first version of reality in view, paradise seems to be just around the corner.

This new media system of buffers for the shocks of reality is expected to contribute further to the process of dehumanization of the perfect human. Or, as Slavoj Žižek formulated it:

> Human is not simply thrilled by the effect of the traumatic encounter – as Hegel said, he/she is able to "live with the negative", to react on its destabilizing effects with weaving complicated symbolic spider webs. (...) specific human activity is not based on the development of human inherited potentials (...); it is conditioned by the external, traumatic encounter, the encounter with the unreachable desire of the Other (...) there is no inborn "language instinct". There are, of course, genetic predispositions necessary for the human being to start to speak; but the person actually starts to speak, to enter into the universe of symbols, by reacting on the traumatic strokes – and the way it will react, or the way to overcome trauma through symbolization, CANNOT BE FOUND "in our genes".[47]

The potential Benjamin saw in filmmaking was based on his notion of a film director as a surgeon, as someone who cuts without anesthesia and produces shocks. Fearing that most of the artworks enter into the phantasmagoric field as entertainment, as part of the commodity world, he put the higher demand on art: "... to *undo* the alienation of the corporeal sensorium, to *restore the instinctual power of the human bodily senses for the sake of humanity's self-preservation,* and to do this, not by avoiding the new technologies, but by *passing through* them."[48] In switching from his role of being a neutral observer in the shape of a director to the active role of the actor, Jørgen Leth needed a bottle of Valium. Maybe the same tranquilizer will be needed when the surgeons of today exchange the place with the *hyle* bodies on operating tables. The only fear that remains is that the observer of this shift will not have any senses left to perceive the change.

46 Ibid., p. 38.

47 Žižek, Slavoj, *No Sex Please, We are Posthumans*, *Prelom* No.1, 2001, p.158.

48 Buck-Morss, ibid., p. 5.

DECISIVE
ENCOUNTERS

The debate about the relationship between film and history is almost as old as the inquiry into the basic relation of film to reality. The encounters of film, history and reality have always revealed an uneasy co-existence of rival claims between scientific demonstration and specificity of the visual "wonder". Such claims, still persisting in present day, demand new critical articulation of the transformative nature of film mediation and representation.

The following words on film – form, matter, history – are not primarily aimed at finding an exhaustive answer to the question of what historical value can be attributed to film representation of the past. Rather, they tend to demonstrate that films do not "contain" history, but that it is their "meaning" which is constantly historical, examining thereby the extent to which film can challenge conventional methodological concepts of its own history.

Man Ray, *The Object to be Destroyed*, 1923

WHAT`S WRONG WITH A COWBOY IN BELGRADE?[1]
CONVERSATION WITH WIM WENDERS

by Dragana Kitanović

DRAGANA KITANOVIĆ: *In your review of Sergio Leone's Once Upon a Time in the West, you warned against the dangers of exploiting a genre like the Western, even accusing Leone for "killing the genre", and suggesting an intricate connection between an (over)determination of film images and the increasing control of the film industry. It seems that your belief that "only film can redeem the real" has found its most suitable diegetic form in your last film when the main protagonist – Hollywood cowboy actor, Howard – literally runs away from the world of fiction "to save the real life" and find the ontological bond between representation and what it represents. Did he succeed "to revive" mythologically-charged images of the Western by finding a genetic link between the image and its lost reference in the real world?*

WIM WENDERS: Not really. You could say that Howard is way too self-absorbed to ever remotely achieve anything like the task you describe. He doesn't have eyes or ears, either for the world or for the "real". Only towards the end, when he is really broken and at the end of his rope, he starts listening. If anything, it is the other way around: the landscape that he crosses (and doesn't notice) is watching *him*, like in the opening shot when the mountains literally have eyes. Those places of the West, including the city of Butte where Howard finally faces the life he never had, those places represent the only "truth" left of that mythological landscape. They are utterly real, and sort of indestructible, at least by any effort of fiction. Howard returns to the only business (and craft) he ever mastered, the fake promise of movies. And he rides again into the sunset. He is not even a cowboy, he's only a cowboy actor, a pretender. And even as a father, he's just that. You see, a lot has changed ever since I wrote that review, more than 30 years ago. The Western has become an obsolete and empty form, and it was not Sergio Leone who killed the genre. It died of its own perversion. Cowboys have long since become Marlboro men. The West is largely an adventure theme park.

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1 "What's wrong with a cowboy in Hamburg?" is a sentence from Wenders's film *The American Friend*: It is pronounced by the title character, Tom Ripley, when questioned about his cowboy hat.

D.K.: *A lot has been said about the fundamental "conflict between image and story" that informs your themes, production methods and critical writings, constituting a kind of unifying factor in your diverse work in film and other media. You, nevertheless, seem to successfully thematize and problematize that "conflict" in most of your films, transforming it to fit into your own aesthetic purposes. Where do you see its critical and dialectical potential? Do you think the "conflict" is worth resolving at all?*

W.W.: I don't think it can be solved, either by me or by anybody else. It is just there, and by knowing about it, or by being aware of it, we can live with that paradoxical "conflict". We will always need words to name things and stories to make sense of them, and we will always need images and representation to appropriate things and possess them in different ways. We look for comfort in fiction and we want to dream away in imagery. Our own lives seldom amount to anything that can be called a "story", in the sense that things we experience rarely have that narrative structure of beginning, middle and end that movies and novels offer. And our own images are ephemeral, evasive, often futile. Images in films, and certainly in paintings or photography, seem so much more lasting, and "valid" than the ones we encounter in life. So given that we have that longing and need for both, we have to live with some of their contradictions. They often just don't live well together.

D.K.: *In his famous essay about "art in the age of its mechanical reproduction", Walter Benjamin used the term "aura" in order to point out the absolute unique existence of nonreproduced works of art. Paradoxically, this "aural dimension" can nowadays be observed as "image" in the field of some mass-produced consumer goods. In what way does your concept of film as "pure seeing" and your project of the "recovery of vision" contribute to the ideological critique of popular culture, having in mind your rather ambivalent stance toward both classical high art and popular (American) culture?*

W.W.: Walter Benjamin would have been flabbergasted and utterly surprised to see what has happened to his theories, and how much the notion of unreproducability has been annihilated. In the digital age, the very idea of an "original" has become obsolete. Of course, Benjamin didn't even know that word "digital", and the idea of splitting up every image and sound into its atoms was still totally inconceivable for him. Yesterday, I saw a painter in her studio, and she proudly showed me her oil paintings together with the digital copies that had multiplied them into series. The eye could not detect any difference. Even the thickness of the color and the paint strokes were exactly reproduced, in China, as I heard to my surprise. Not enough that they copy and pirate all our music and films in Asia, soon they will also deliver us Rembrandts and Vermeers and Klees and Kandinskis including their "auras". (The funniest detail in that painter's calculation was that the most expensive element of her fake art was now the frame. It had become more expensive for her to produce valuable frames than the digital Chinese copies of her paintings.)

So it is no wonder that people get confused and lose the ability to sense the real aura. Most of them prefer second-hand reality to first-hand, anyway. The "pure seeing" or the immediate and unmediated exposure to the world itself are becoming experiences for a few nostalgic dreamers. This way, films and commercials and billboards and even magazine covers can now carry an "aura". Simply because there are only a few people left (an "elitist minority"), who would bother with any differentiation. In that light, my own romantic visions that you are referring to seem rather outdated, if not obsolete. Extrapolate our visual culture for another twenty years, and your question above will also be obsolete again... and so on.

> D.K.: *It seems that your filmmaking contrasts strongly with an ideologically critical cinema, and that your understanding of critique is set more firmly within the film as a medium, inviting the viewers to understand the very origins of the images. To what extent could your constant search for such "post-ideological space" be taken as a politically correct position that deals with representations, but one which carries the danger of making your viewers passive, preventing them from a critical understanding of the power of representations?*

W.W.: There is ample space for a critical discourse in all sorts of intellectual domains, in journalism, in philosophy, in sociology, certainly in literature and even in theatre. But I never felt that cinema was an appropriate field for ideology of any kind. Sure, the history of cinema is full of examples that tried to prove the opposite. In my book, they were just never convincing, not even Eisenstein. It seems to me that films always want to be something else, that they dream of another existence than being the carrier of ideas. The realm of images is based more in emotion and motion. That's why they were called "Motion Pictures" to begin with. As you might have guessed by now, or know already, I'm not at all interested in ideologically-based criticism, neither in movies, nor in reviews. I just don't believe that a cinema (and a critical opinion of it) based upon explicitly political or ideological thinking amounts to much insight, fresh understanding or even pleasure. Such films (and reviews) only confirm their own ideology, they are mostly "self-fulfilling prophecies", so to speak. Which doesn't mean that I want to expel any critical capability from movies. I just feel they can be more specific, effective, useful, entertaining and revelatory by questioning existing structures through their very form, or their spirit. In my eyes it is much more *how* movies say something than *what* they say that affects the viewer. To me, their outspoken messages are boring, but their subtle, subliminal, often purely visual and even subconscious meanings are what movies are all about. Some movies function as "closed systems". What you see is what you get. Everything you are supposed to think or feel is laid out for you, you just have to consume it. Blockbusters are made like this, most "entertainment" today functions this way, and of course all propaganda. Other films, mine included, are "open systems".

I like films – and I try to make my own this way – which promote the idea that *change* (of any kind, personal or general, psychological or political) is always

possible. WE are in charge of our lives, not "others", not "a system", nor "fashion" nor "ideology". The latent readiness (and need) for change is in itself the most political message. Only if the idea of change itself is alive, we can then make up our minds and think politically, for instance. Everything is possible, as long as we don't fall into the trap which most entertainment (and certainly 99% of television) is constantly opening for us, when it lulls us into that fatalistic state of mind of accepting the world as it is. Now films can promote the idea of change in explicitly political terms, as their outspoken message, while their form (their in-built message) and their aesthetics say the opposite. That is propaganda, or counter-propaganda. I couldn't care less. And I'm convinced that these movies have very little effect. On the contrary, they drown the longing for change. Other films however can tell stories, even love stories that seem to have no critical bearing whatsoever, while their immanent structures wake us up and thereby create a more profound *need* for change.

> D.K.: *Bearing in mind the massive importance of film festivals as forms of exhibition and your continued presence at them, should we say that your films inevitably reflect on what we might call "their place in the global distribution of cultural power". How do you assess the social positioning of your work at the moment of full entry of film art in the world of commodity production?*
> W.W.: "Cultural power" is a very euphemistic term in a world where culture only exists and survives if it is sponsored by commercial entities. The presence in festivals helps movies less and less to be successful in the real world. In the real world of exhibition, neither cultural credentials nor good reviews get you anywhere. What counts is the amount of advertising and of public relations invested in a film. Seen this way, my films (and not only mine) are an endangered species, maybe already in the process of disappearing.

> D.K.: *Where do you see a possibility for taking an independent perspective in order to criticize the dominant hegemonic forms of film production, or for a cultural politics which would fundamentally intervene in the economic realm at a time when cultural/film production seems to be fully integrated into economic production?*
> W.W.: I see that possibility, right now at this day and age, only in tiny, "cheap" and "dirty" productions, digitally shot, that place themselves entirely outside of the established ways of production and distribution. These films will be more often documentary in nature than "fictional", I assume, but they do not exclude story-driven feature-length productions. Everything that "integrates" itself will in fact be integrated. That is a rather painful realization I have just come to.

> D.K.: *Am I correct in believing that so-called "independent" cinema and the filmmakers who attempt to distance themselves from the Hollywood products actually mimic the formal, economic and political strategies of its mainstream*

cousin. Do you think that the opposition of "mainstream" and "alternative" cinematic production and reception is still a tenable designation for reactionary and revolutionary practices?

W.W.: Not really anymore. In our consumer world (that tries to make us forget those who are excluded from the domain of consumption) the differences between those two categories have become pretty much obsolete. The last brave effort to break out of that vicious circle was the "Dogma" idea. But even those films have run into a dead end, by eventually ending up in all the same circuits and the same structures of distribution and exploitation as any blockbuster. I disagree slightly with your opening remarks. Historically, it is rather the other way around, that the big Hollywood studios (starting in the twenties) have hired European and "independent" talent to mimic inventive and innovative cinematographic expressions. They still do that today and buy up any new idea and any production rights, just as they still make lucrative offers to any talent to work for them instead of staying in the "independent world".

D.K.: *During the 1970s, the New German Cinema functioned in West Germany primarily as a public sphere – a forum for debating relevant contemporary issues. Do you believe there is a necessity for similar movements and conceptual endeavors within the German contemporary film scene and its distance from market values of both Hollywood and the commercial German Cinema?*

W.W.: Sure, there is that necessity, just like anywhere else. But the "New German Cinema" was developed in a very different audiovisual and cultural and political world than, let's say, the "Independent Cinema" today. Film criticism was still intact. Art House Cinemas and Repertoire Cinemas were still powerful enough to sustain such debates. All that is gone. Film journalism has largely become a helping hand to the film industry, so that the word "criticism" doesn't really apply anymore. And most of the "art houses" desperately try to play any current product, whatever it is, parallel to the cineplexes, to stay alive.

D.K.: *A lot has been said about American colonization of German subconsciousness. It seems that you don't find such colonization particularly problematic despite the blurring and final confusion of the cultural identities of most of your characters. Bearing in mind that the roots of the new global culture lay equally in the European modernist assault, particularly in the modernist refusal to honor the traditional boundaries between high and low culture, can we say that the "clichés" about American cultural hegemony make it difficult for most people to recognize that modern global culture is hardly a monolithic entity and that it is not only the American mass culture that transformed the world into a replica of the United States, but that America's dependence on foreign culture has made the United States a replica of the world?*

W.W.: That is quite a funny (and possibly provocative) idea that you have here: America is only exporting what they have previously imported from Europe or the rest of the world. In a way you're totally right. "The American Dream" was

always an illusion that was dreamt all over the planet, more than in America itself. You might say that it has been a giant projection. A lot of people from all countries, races and religions have for centuries projected their desires and hopes onto that one country that was big enough to cope with all of these dreams. You might say it was "collective wishful thinking" that is now haunting us and coming back to us in the disguise of American culture...

> D.K.: *In your recent films you are increasingly replacing "place" by "space". Or even more precisely, you are replacing "space" with "time", defining your characters by temporal locatedness. The speed of environmental change is gradually approaching a point where identity would lack a reference, a precedence with which to identify oneself, being increasingly shrunken by technology-magic. What do you see as the "final shelter" for identity after the decline of space?*
>
> W.W.: Language. Love. Courage. Reduction. Resisting the continuous

acceleration and rediscovering the beauty of slowness...

Wim Wenders, Flammable, Terlingua, Texas, 1983.

D.K.: *Wings of Desire fitted the pattern of your quest, in the 1980s, for a viable German identity. The film proclaimed to be, at least in some sense, a new Zero Hour, forty years after the Nazi era ended, and as such could have been made only in Berlin. Today, when our identities are being multiply defined, multiply experienced, and can be multiply assigned to us to the point where the very notion of national identity fades from our vocabulary to be replaced by other kinds of belonging, relating and being – is nationalism becoming rather a cultural question and what would be the consequences? Are you ready for a new beginning, a new Zero Hour in your filmmaking?*

W.W.: I hope I find that angle. I'm more than ready. I'm searching, that's for sure. I'm uncertain, though, about how to approach this question today. For instance, I feel that nationalism is coming back in a big way. As if people were scared by the prospect of having to replace that idea with something else. They seem to be inclined to rather turn back into the past. I feel that very strongly in America. Americans look at themselves with a heightened sense of narcissism, and they have rediscovered patriotism, in the wake of 9/11 and all the confusion that struck them afterwards. Who would have thought that fundamentalism could actually govern that big liberal country, and that right-wing propaganda could hijack Christianity and its major ideas? And Europeans have largely lost an interest in a "European identity" which for so long seemed like the only valid alternative to nationalistic thinking. And the Germans, too, after reunification, are so self-absorbed that even here a "new German self-esteem" and a public discussion about the priority of "German values" are big issues these days, especially concerning the assimilation of the big Turkish population. So I'm at a loss, right now, to continue my quest for a different definition of "identity", as it seems that so many people are turning to the past for answers. My visit to Belgrade, too, didn't make me feel so optimistic for that region. There seemed to be very strong nationalistic tendencies. (Or whatever is hiding under that label. You never know too well. Also in my own country all sorts of interests claim they want the best "for Germany".) One night I was in the middle of a heated discussion about politics in the former Yugoslavia, and the jovial gentleman who was introduced to me as the Minister of Culture turned out to be a member of the royalist party. Royalist? I was quite confused. Were we not in 2006?

March-April 2006, in Belgrade, Butte and Berlin.

After I had jumped,
everything was clear:

Wim Wenders, *Square with Cut-Out Figures in Butte, Montana*, 2000.

RETHINKING (FiLM) HISTORY THROUGH CINEMAS OF WIM WENDERS

Dragana Kitanović

*As long as we live, we have no meaning...
death effects an instantaneous montage of our lives.*
(Pier Paolo Pasolini)

This Pasolini's "postmodern" take on death as a *montage,* elegantly invites the comparison to Benjamin's concept of a storyteller who "borrows his authority from death". By relating death to a *narrative*, Benjamin seems to be in perfect "modernistic" opposition to Pasolini. In both statements though, "death" can be a seductive but useful metaphor for revealing the "dark side" of writing history, especially film history; or better to say, conceptual twilight zone of their relation. The first implication that comes to mind is that – since an event is significant in light of other posterior events, its own possibility of being considered the cause of another can take place only *after* the new event. Thus, a history of present time does not exist, as the historical description, in its quixotic recovery of "objective" historical facts, becomes nothing but a retroactive readjustment of the past. And if this is so, no definite description of a past event can be articulated, no history can be written, but only rewritten.

In a similar vein, if we are to accept the existence of what institutional practice has defined as "film history", we should also accept the fact that such institutionalization has never been a way for recovering the past. Moreover, asserting that film history is instituted as a discipline, suggests nothing related to the *desire* of accounting for what happened in the realm of movies. Paradoxically, it seems that film history is just a way for finding the explicative principles that would erase from film practice the very traces of its historicity,

and hence, for constitution of an uncritical glance over the world. In other words, film history is institutionalized not to recover the past, but help create and justify the present. There is a lot of evidence to support this. Just look at the criteria for including or excluding works and authors in/from film history, as well as the periodisation and classification of the material. It was not based on external truth, i.e. one that can be proved, but with the intention to produce a manageable referent and "discipline" the very discipline. Certain films are marked as worth mentioning for the reasons of influence, aesthetic significance or typicality, and this occurs not only for historiographical purposes, where every explanation invariably privileges particular linkages or conjunctions, but for practical reasons as well. The very acceptance of what Noel Burch has defined as Institutional Mode of Representation, that is, the search for essentiality which is con-substantial to film discourse, suggests nothing but reducing the film to a-historical, erasing from film *practice* its historicity. So, whether the criteria for making institutionalized film history are articulated around the *tradition*, or the conception of film history as an *artistic correlative* of a national political history, or around the film practice which takes as a reference the notion of *authorship*, we notice the same neglecting the historical and ideological implications that made possible the rise of such a methodology.

Where lies the possibility for making epistemological change in terms of analyzing the gear that makes it work out? The possibility for film history to take on a self-reflective awareness of its own discursive practice? As Fredric Jameson has remarked, there are always two historicity, two paths of historical inquiry ⁻ the path of the object and the path of the subject, the historical origins of the things themselves and that more intangible historicity of the concepts and categories by which we attempt to understand those things. The difference between these two historicities in film studies is perhaps best described as the difference between a *formal* history of filmic conventions and institutions and a *cultural* history of film reception and spectatorship. In what way then can the very films and their filmmakers reflect, correspond or correct such a methodology which has obviously produced not only a canon (what to study, from what critical perspective, for what purposes, etc.), but also a critical habit to accept it as natural, a habit hard but possible to question. I suggest accentuating, for the purpose of this text, that even the *filmmakers* are involved in canon formation as the films chosen to be reworked, given homage or rebelled against, alluded to, or satirized by referential practice of filmmakers, also become nothing but the privileged points of reference, pulled out from the rest of cinema's predecessors.

I would like to argue that cinemas of Wim Wenders, by their consistent concerns with the questions of history, which symptomatically end in the history of representations, that is, film history, are being paradigmatic of what I would call "practising film history" in a way that reflects upon the very edifice of both historiographic discipline (with its field of conceptual references such as "testimony", "inquiry" and "knowledge") and the film

history as a discipline (with its politics of canonizing). They are points of interrogating the relation of film history to the so-called "general history", which is precisely something that has not been questioned with enough intensity by historians. Indeed, the practice and writing of film history are bound irreducibly to our current consciousness of "history" and its representations in general, and it is precisely that consciousness, becoming complicated in a culture of pervasive mass-mediation, that the films of Wenders call for. Wim Wenders has stated so bluntly that his essay [1] or diary films *are* his film theory and that grasping his films means grasping his theory, or the other way around. The way he refers to the other films and directors, the way he "films" that relation by constant blurring two basic tendencies of cinema (realistic and formative), the way he accentuates history's always-constructed and representational nature and manifests a desire for authorship beyond the establishing notions of authorism, brings his filmmaking to the level of a project – a project of rethinking, reclaiming or even reconstituting film history from within the institution he belongs.

1 The term *filmessay* was supposed to express the need for expanding documentary in order to film problems, thoughts and even *ideas*. It was used for the first time in 1940, by German avant-garde filmmaker Hans Richter, who collaborated with both Eisenstein and French Surrealists.

WRITING HISTORY/WRITING FILM HISTORY

> *Is History not simply that time when we were not born?... History is hysterical...it is constituted only if we consider it, only if we look at it – and in order to look at it, we must be excluded from it.*
>
> Roland Barthes

To speak of "testimony", "inquiry" and "knowledge", which any etymology of the word "history" places us before, pre-supposes a distinction that is established between the object of knowledge and a method to produce that knowledge, or "the facts" that occurred in the past and the narration of that past. Being the witnesses of narrated facts, the pioneers of historical reflection did not conceive of any history than the immediate one. When history, as science, began to deal with past as a past, there emerged a new paradigm that focused on making invisible "visible". In both cases however, we were dealing with positivistic histories which contemplated the past as fixed and made up of events independent of the description that could be made of the events themselves. There was no doubt that the conceptual inversion had to come exactly with the assault on "event" which was overflowed underneath, ending with final "eclipse of event" (as Paul Ricoeur would dramatically put it). So, "the fact" has become less important in comparison to the vital labour of tracking, researching, putting in relation, establishing inferential hypotheses etc, in other words ‾ shaping the history as a *construction*. Such assault on the event has

been completed by recent reevaluation of the apparently insignificant event. By studying "involuntary symptoms" and apparently negligible details, following the model of Sigmund Freud or Sherlock Holmes, by taking into consideration the utilization of documents considered marginal, it is possible to reconstruct fragments of some happenings that are very often buried under official ideologies. As Foucault himself underlines, history has altered its position in relation to the document, as it has taken as its primary task not the interpretation of the document, nor deciding whether it is a true or expressive one, but to work on it form within and so develop it.

It is precisely here that film history, being a "special history", runs into the field of problems, as it needs to define its relation to the so-called "general history". If the very writing of history is not something exterior to history itself, but is, on the contrary, the basic element of its configuration, what would be the basic elements of writing film history? And what are we talking about then when we talk about film history if not about narration, about the articulated disposition of plot, characters and events (or *quasi* plot), about the establishment of an order of a meaning? If casualty may be history itself, than the famous phrase of "mastering the past" must have changed its connotation. As Thomas Elssaeser observes: "Today, cinema and television will master the past for us, if necessary by (digitally) re-mastering its sound and image archive footage, as in Woody Allen's *Zelig*, Oliver Stone's *JFK* or Robert Zemeckis' *Forrest Gump*".[2]

At the same time, privileging film as a technological medium must not separate the study of an institutional discourse from the framework in which it could make sense, that is – from a "history of visual representations", and a "history of vision" or "history of scopic regimes" as well. So, film history should explain – what are the causes that turn Hollywood mode of representation into a hegemonic (institutional) one, not only for the Western audiences, and why it can be transgressed and inverted, but by no means discussed. And why Wim Wenders occupies a virtually unique position regarding that institution, bridging European and American film, and being the only German filmmaker of stature able to work with a degree of independence from the main American studios....

* * *

It could generally be said that film history is written because it is decided that cinema is an *art*, – the art worthy of *memory*. So, the first film historical writings, as much as general historical writings, had to be dominated by the guiding criteria of chronology and linearity and written from their proximity to the facts they relate, displaying so a decisive bias toward what might be called accumulative character of history. As such, they were on the fringes of theoretical reflection, as if the field of the facts (films, authors) was on one side and the empirical field

2 Thomas Elsaesser, "One Train May be Hiding Another: Private History, Memory and National Identity", in: *The Low Countries: Arts and Society in Flanders and the Netherlands*, Josef Delau et al (eds), 1996-1997.

of ideas on the other. In dealing with ideal objects, they demonstrated the unfolding of diachrony against the statism of a theory. I would like to accentuate that all these histories have been constructed in the flagrant absence of art history, and permanently contaminated with value judgements. As opposed to such the will of totality and globalizing aims, there came the tendency for retroactive re-thinking, the evolution of filmic language by Andre Bazin, who built his ontology of cinema by discovering cert-ain aspects and moments (neorealism for instance) in film history by means of which a global and oriented vision of the historical panorama could be obtained. Being model that permanently oscillates between how things have to be done (the normative) and how things have been done (history), Bazin's attitude becomes deeply teleological in its mobilizing a hidden casuality, so becoming the proclamation of an idealist and oriented history in which works are inscribed in a predetermined diachrony. Traditional film history was followed by revisionist history (early 1970s) with Jean-Louis Comolli who argued that the former was both empiricist in method and idealist in concept. Employing Marxist theories of historical determination, Comolli called for "materialistic" historiography and so, the Bazinian "myth of total cinema" gave way to the sound, colour and greater realism. Comolli rejected the concept of linear casuality, arguing for uneven development and greater dependence of cinema on technological, economic and ideological forces.

The important shift came with Godard, a filmmaker himself, and his introduction of the notion of "true" history – true in the sense of audiovisual history, made of images and sounds of cinema and opposed to the traditional histories printed on paper. He demonstrated a completely different kind of logic ⁻ relational, and not mediated by traditional notion of casuality, linearity, but aimed at production of the *vision* of films. What Godard pointed out was that – before producing a history of cinema, one would have to produce the vision of films and that means ⁻ knowing how to see. Rather than searching for a film's dependence on previous models, the models themselves are re-cast from the perspective of the present, thus reversing the sense in which one habitually speaks of influences. Godard was not intent on pointing out those works that supposedly influenced his own film and work, but on the contrary, to use his own work to illuminate the past *retroactively*. He put into play a "variable" eye, which in its oscillation, focused on different, individualized aspects of the multi-form body that constitutes cinema's past. According to him, the history of cinema must not be told only in a chronological way, but perhaps, in a more archeo-logical or biological fashion.

We are approaching here, although from quite a different direction, the way Wim Wenders uses cinema for the purpose of authenticating imaginary, the very desire of imagination which finds its object in the history of film.

FILMMAKING FILM HISTORY,
OR, ALLOWING THE IMAGE TO THINK (FILM) HISTORY

> *After I had jumped, everything was clear...*
> Tom Tom, in *The Million Dollar Hotel*

The paradoxical thing is that films begin with words, and that words would determine whether the images are allowed to be born. The words are like the headland that a film has to steer round to reach the image. Film history is like an iceberg: you only ever see 10 per cent of completed films, the liberated image; the majority of them remain imprisoned in the ice, for ever below the surface. (...) It could be the beginning of a history of imaginary films, parallel to the history of all lost films.

> Wim Wenders in his: "A History of Imaginary Films, Letter to the Editors of Cahiers du Cinema"

What is striking about the evolution of Wenders filmmaking are the inter-relatedness of individual films and his working from the principle of linkage. He links not only each film with its predecessor and successor, but the audience's perceptions of the character, the structure of the character himself, the other filmmakers with his own life experience... Through unique cinematic historical reflection, by citing the theorists like Bela Balazs, Andre Bazin, Siegfreid Kracauer, by filming his interviews with other directors (Werner Herzog and Chris Marker in *Tokyo-Ga*), by provoking other contemporary filmmakers to deliver monologues about future of cinema (Godard, Antonioni, Spielberg, Herzog, Fassbinder in *Chambre 666*), by documenting the speech of a dying one (Nicholas Ray in *Lightening Over Water*), by (re)searching the work of the dead one (Yasujiro Ozu in *Tokyo-Ga*), by problematizing the very relation between the Nazi German history and modes of its representations (*Der Himmel Uber Berlin*), Wenders cinematically validates not only the history of his own films but also, by thinking it from within, the film history as a discipline.

His film *Tokyo-Ga* (1985) is specially paradigmatic for the complex field of intersecting problems haunting Wenders himself and film history in general. The very subject of the film is the exploration of the work of a Japanese filmmaker, Yasujiro Ozu (died in 1963). Wenders shoots his film in Tokyo in 1983, on the twentieth anniversary of Ozu's death, in the imagery of the town which is all representation and obsession with the simulacra of Western life. Beside representing one of the most important filmmakers for Wenders, in official film histories, Ozu and his fifty-four films were noted for encapsulating most of the formal and technical evolution of cinema. Thus, metonymicaly, exploring of Ozu's art becomes a *par excellence* exploration of previous visual technology – an archeology of its past and its basic potential. Ozu's use of a 50mm camera lens led Wenders directly to shoot the same street in Shinjuku, which often appears in Ozu's films. He refilms the same street with Ozu's 50mm lens allowing the street to burst

into special life, by "distorting" the "normal" vision and reducing the field of depth to an almost photographical two-dimensional plane through which he "discovers" Ozu. However, what Wenders sadly notes is that the new and vital image is neither street's, nor his own, but belongs to Ozu. In other words, the very document (the reconstruction of Ozu's filming the street), for a historian (Wenders), stops to be an inert material through which Wenders is able to reconstitute what Ozu has done or said. It is not even creatively mis-appropriated, as it simultaneously resists narration and yet requires it; it is rather being worked from within and developed through the process of cinematic historical reflection, finally suggesting a loss of something like the possibility of an unmediated vision of meaning. In this sense, *Tokyo Ga* problematizes the very distinction between "document" and "construction", or more precisely, turns document into a space of dispersion, giving rise to the idea of discontinuity, despite Wenders's intention to achieve continuity. As a filmed narrative, Wenders's film was trying to document and test the truth of another filmed narrative (that of Ozu), but in search for documental history of Ozu's films, in which facts pre-exists the description that one makes of them, it ends in conjectural history, in which the object of study is being constructed through research, so transforming Wenders's "wrong move" into a renewed wish of/for images and sounds. Thus, if we could say that Wenders had succeeded to establish any continuity, it was a continuity of desire for vision and desire of vision.

In the same film, he meets Werner Herzog atop the *Tokyo Tower*, a simulacrum of the Eiffel Tower. While Hercog complains of the lack of pure images, that would correspond with the images inside, Wenders does not stop searching them, panning over various images of Tokyo, as if there is no reflection on images outside the very images; as if there is no history outside the film history. For Herzog, who represents the cinema of purity, Wenders, who represents the cinema of immersion, presents an obvious insertion of synhrony into diachrony, problematizing the search for authenticity in a resolutely post-modernist condition. The other day, Wenders meets with French documentarist Chris Marker, in a bar bearing the name of one of Marker's best known films *La jetee*, a feature film consisting of still photographs. At the beginning of *Tokyo Ga,* Wenders alludes to Marker's film *Sans Soleil*, (itself an effort to capture the essence of Japan) and Marker's replacing memories with images and remembering Tokyo only through the recorded images. Marker's words, and Wenders's reflection on them, one can push further and so recognize the process of cinema becoming the memory of a filmmaker, the image becoming the world and the world becoming its own image.

Wenders's stated purpose of making *Tokyo Ga* was to see whether he could still detect any traces of the time, whether anything was left of that work, images and people or whether too much had changed in Tokyo and in Japan, the twenty years after Ozu's death. By using the frozen images from the text of Ozu's films and his handwritten screenplay, that is non-moving images, Wenders opens up a space for the reflection. As he himself says, by creating distance and another time, the photograph allows him to *think* of cinema. It is also the way of

allowing an image to think *itself*, to reflect its position within a particular film and film as a medium.

Like in Benjamin's interpretation of *Angelus Novus*, whose face is turned towards the past, Wenders's face is turned towards film history and its "archival activity"[3]. So, film history makes for him an alternative memory of the past. His search for a new narrative in *Der Himmel uber Berlin*, his struggle to find the stories that would give the film images a new meaning over and against dominant, media-induced ways of seeing them, paradoxically ends up in the history of representations. Like angels themselves, film has the same capability to hold a record of past events that change or disappear over time; the events or objects that would be available for viewing in the future. Like film camera, the angels are invisible to the observers. Wenders views the past moments of film history as if they were the present, without the temptation to explode into violence, perversion, fetishism or pastiche when thinking them, but, on the contrary, highly aware that the present is not an empty point of transition, such as the fictional point of view of the angels in *Der Himmel*, but rather an active force that constructs out of past experience a picture for the future. As the storm irresistably propels him into the future (of film), he is ready for the "tiger leap" into film history, into that particular moment serving the needs of the present. For Wenders (historian), the reference point in the past is – the picture of Philip Marlow feeding a cat, or more precisely, the emotional strength of classical Hollywood cinema. It might not seem enough for correcting the misconceptions in a historian's view on (film) history, but it certainly is enough to problematize the concept of historical perspective itself. Of course, as it often happens in all Wenders' films, it is the viewer who is required to realize it.

* * *

Wenders comes from the generation of filmmakers who, as Phillip Kolker and Peter Beicken[4] observe, was born into a state of historical and culturally supported amnesia, "with a past too frightful to remember and a present eagerly offering the means to forget". Like other young German intellectuals of the sixties, he had to re-create himself and his history, invent images, and develop such representations for a past and a present that resisted the very work he was undertaking. His romantic concept of a filmmaker as a redeemer who would put the cinema on the way to salvation, finally put his cinematic imaginary in a state of tension, filled with a desire to resolve contradictions and find the guiding figures who would authorize his images. So, the very cinema has become father to him and film history the place for rethinking history. And there he stands, in an unstable and shifting site of the old, ruined house of historiography... moving into the road... or a vaster landscape, aware of the fact that an enterprise of excavating film history becomes not only an actual enterprise, but an allegorical one as well. By filming the last days of Nicholas Ray, who was dying of cancer in a hospital, he hoped to correct the history of film

6 Timothy Corrigan, *A Cinema Without Walls*, Rutgers University Press, 1991.

and rethink Ray's place within the history. The last recorded word of Ray was symptomatically "CUT", as if only the *death* of image could have given the whole film the meaning Wenders was looking for. As much as Tom Tom's, suicidal plunge from the roof of the Hotel (which recalls the plummet of an angel from the top of the Siegessaule in *Der Himmel*) was a necessary condition for "fall into history" and narrating the story in *The Million Dollar Hotel*.

However, unlike Herzog, who was trying to visualize an historical struggle through the signifiers of romantic mysticism, using the power of parable and allegory, we would suggest that Wenders is more concerned with fascism's *absence* than its presence, or more precisely, the absence of historical memory of a German past, as well as absence of personal memory too. His characters remain unanchored in history, place or knowledgeable stable milieu. Sometimes, they display a hysterical relation to history, as Timothy Corrigan argues when speaking about *Paris Texas* where the aura of image becomes "the waste of historical reality" whose ultimate significance for Travis lies in the possession of it as a *material* image[6]. Sometimes, idealized and recorded in its purity and innocence, as by the angels in *Der Himmel*. Most often, just "lost" in an infinitely receding distance, vanishing through non-referential *motion* pictures of his road movies... in sheer ecstasy and aesthetic of disappearance.

In all cases though, we are faced with a transcendental displacement in the way of conceiving history, which no longer presents itself (only) as a casualty of a positivist history, nor as oriented history, but as much more rigorous "history of the possibilities" In that sense, reducing Wenders's films to ahistorical erasing of any kind – whether it be the proclamation of a mythologized self and solipsism, or postmodern perceptual phantasmagoria – ... is to miss the most *revolutionary* part of them, and deny the creation of films the possibility to think, rethink and trans-form its own history.

photo by Dragana Kitanović, 2006

"INEVITABLE WARS":
ON FILM FORM AND INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS
IN POST-YUGOSLAV CINEMA

Pavle Levi

Stupidity is always contemporary
Gyorgy Konrad

It is hardly surprisingly that among the 1990s films from the former Yugoslavia – films emerging during and in the immediate aftermath of the bloody Balkan wars – the portrayal of issues involving national identity and inter-ethnic relations tend to differ. In analyzing a number of aesthetically engaging and theoretically inspiring examples of their – often radically opposed – positions, the present essay will seek to avoid getting entangled in the categories of "national" cinema (Bosnian, Serbian, Croatian, …) as the primary criteria of (qualitative) differentiation among the chosen works. Instead, serving as my conceptual point of departure will be a rather simple, yet crucial, dichotomy underlying the post-Yugoslav cinematic practice and cultural production at large. On one side of this dichotomy one finds a plurality of narrow and rigid, but dominant, ethnocentric perspectives on the break-up of the Yugoslav federation, the wars ensuing from it, and the future organization of life in the region. Opposed to these stand such approaches to the same issues, which engage what may be designated as the force of *ethno-efference* – the force of movement away from and beyond the essentialist and exclusivist conceptions of identity. Denying the ethno-collectivist menace the right to determine the character and the tone of one's discourse, the latter approaches work toward blurring distinctions – toward suggesting the impossibility of maintaining the artificially imposed lines of separation – among the various ethnic groups in the region.

* * *

During the first winter of the Bosnian war, a group of Serb soldiers was trapped by Bosnian forces in a deserted tunnel in the vicinity of the town of Višegrad. A sensationalist report of this event – written for the openly nationalist magazine *Duga*, by the yellow-press journalist Vanja Bulić – provided the narrative basis for Srđan Dragojević's *Lepa sela lepo gore* (Pretty Village, Pretty Flame, 1996), an internationally successful production, and locally one of the most-watched Serbian films of all time. The chronology of the film's central storyline – evolving in a fragmentary manner through the flashbacks of a wounded, hospitalized Serb soldier, Milan – can be summarized as follows. First, Milan's platoon storms through Bosnia burning Muslim villages. Then, Milan and six other soldiers, survivors of a surprise night-attack, find themselves trapped inside an abandoned tunnel surrounded by the

enemy. Thus begins what the promotional material for the film describes as "the ten day long hell... in which there were no winners – those inside the tunnel could not escape, and those above it could not enter, or drive the trapped ones out."[1]

In addition to relating this central war-narrative, Milan's flashbacks also provide a series of insights into his childhood friendship with Halil, a Muslim boy with whom he grew up during the peaceful times of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

The tunnel in which the Serb fighters are trapped represents more than just the central site of *Pretty Village*'s diegetic action. In the film's quasi-documentary opening, set in 1971 and reminiscent of the socialist regime-sponsored "Film News," this tunnel is inaugurated as a "Tunnel of Brotherhood and Unity." However, Milan recalls that, as children, he and Halil used to be terrified of the tunnel, as an Ogre was said to inhabit it. Fulfilling the role of the central metaphor in the film, the tunnel thus functions as a sort of black hole that during Yugoslavia's communist years apparently stored everything that was repressed from the surface of the socio-political reality so that the country could maintain its image of popular solidarity. The somehow timeless inter-ethnic animosity (the Ogre) was also, supposedly, growing beneath the surface of multi-ethnic happiness, and erupted in the most violent manner with the collapse of the Yugoslav federation. Thus, as regrettable as the war in Bosnia may have been, in *Pretty Village*'s ethno-essentialist perspective it also seems to have been inevitable.[2]

As a metaphoric expression of the causes behind the reality of ethnic hatred in the former Yugoslavia, Dragojević's Ogre is but one among the many similarly teleological explanations offered throughout the 1990s by the local culture industries. Approaching the South Slavs' fratricide from a variety of angles, these explanations range from the most vulgar, quasi-scientific ones (the Serb extremist thesis that Croats are "genetically genocidal"; or, its Croat counterpart, that Serbs are "collectively frustrated" and committed to killing); to the mythomanic ones (the notion that these conflicts represent a transtemporal struggle of mythic proportions, grounded in the irrationality of the people inhabiting the region); to the historicist-determinist ones (Serbs and Croats, Serbs and Albanians, etc., have always fought each other and they always will – the current wars are just the latest installment of a never-ending process) ...

With often strikingly different levels of aesthetic sophistication, many of these "historiographies" have also been given a distinctly cinematic form. Thus, for instance, in the visually lavish, internationally acclaimed Macedonian production, *Pre kiše* (Before the Rain, 1994), director Milčo Mančevski finds ethnic tension between the

1 *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame: Press Kit,* Belgrade: Cobra Film, 1996

2 Commenting on this metaphoric function of the tunnel in his film, Dragojević is quite explicit about its intended meaning: "I believe that the hatred and the intolerance that used to spark below the surface caused the cruelty of the later events. Communism served as a fertile ground for our Balkan intolerance. In the past, whenever I used to go to Bosnia I somehow felt that this would happen to them – I am thinking of all sides and all nationalities – because their main characteristic was some kind of terrible anti-democracy in all areas of social life. I never believed that a multicultural model could be implemented in Bosnia without some kind of repression, whether by the communists, or – as is now the case – by the international community." (unpublished interview with Srđan Dragojević, March 1997)

Albanians and the Macedonians to be almost trans-historical, driven by the "ancient" Balkan passions. As the filmmaker himself put it: "If you take out the machine guns, the leather jackets, the Nike shoes, and the Adidas shirts, this same clash could be taking place 200 years ago."[3]

The mythical dimension of the conflict is particularly accentuated by the film's sophisticated circular narrative structure, and by its juxtaposition of the secluded, traditional village life in the hills of Macedonia, with the economically developed and stable, but dull and emotionally unfulfilling Western world.

In a similarly Balkanist fashion, Emir Kusturica's *Podzemlje* (Underground, 1995) puts forth the view of the Yugoslav inter-ethnic conflicts as some sort of natural and regular "socio-tectonic" disaster, and promotes a crudely relativizing ("all sides are equally guilty") approach to the crimes committed during the Bosnian bloodshed. In addition, Kusturica's masterpiece of film-form aligns its complex choreographies of excessive enjoyment and ceaseless expenditure of energy with a rampant spirit of ethnic self-indulgence, thus endorsing an atmosphere of nationalist euphoria in Serbia.

Neven Hitrec's *Bogorodica* (Virgin Mary, 1999), a work coming out of the wave of Young Croatian Cinema, offers a collective portrait of the entire Serb ethnos as drunken wild beasts who, under favorable conditions, do not fail to turn to their primal desire to slaughter and rape. On the other hand, in Miroslav Lekić's *Nož* (Knife, 1999), one finds a cinematic monument to one of the classics of the 1980s current of Serbian populist literature: Vuk Drašković's ethno-phobic, hatred-provoking historical novel by the same title. Serbs are here portrayed as martyrs who, throughout history, stoically withstand the grizzly exercises in torture by the blood-thirsty Bosnian Muslims (whose cultural and religious identity are, additionally, denied any autonomy through an over-insistence upon the fact that they are merely the islamicized descendants of the Serbs). Finally, Bogdan Žižić's 1994 film *Cijena života* (The Price of Life), opts for a "Griffithian" condemnation of ethnic miscegenation, as something bound to end in tragedy. Not only does its central protagonist, Ivan (a Croat escaped from a Serb work-camp in the vicinity of the city of Vukovar), kill the sadistic Serb paramilitary whose Croat wife has been helping him in hiding; Ivan also becomes the surrogate father to the woman's son, thus securing the "proper" paternal authority for the child of a mixed – that is "troublesome" – ethnic origin (Croat mother and Serb father).

Despite their numerous contentual and stylistic differences, in all the above examples one discerns a tendency to succumb to "political hysteria" (Gyorgy Konrad), and to assert the current ethnic strife as *inevitable*, as something that could not but have taken place. In so doing, these films either downplay, deliberately obfuscate, or, at the very least, overlook a key aspect of the contemporary nationalism's onto-genesis: the extent to which the 1980s and 1990s ethnic intolerance in the region started out as a tool, as an instrument of power in the hands of the political and cultural elites – an ideological-discursive framework introduced into the everyday reality of the peoples whose lives it then began to govern. In other words, the proper causes of ethnic hatred in the formerly

Yugoslav lands lie, above all else, in successful *naturalization* and *legitimization* of the political artifact that this hatred initially was (naturalization accomplished, among other things, by recourse to teleological historicism and various mythic narratives of origin).[4]

In this light, one of the most peculiar cinematic treatments of the ideological mechanisms operative behind the South Slavs's ethnic warfare, is found in Stjepan Sabljak's 1999 film *U okruženju* (Surrounded). Properly speaking, this amateur video-production – made for a mere 10,000 German Marks, by an entirely non-professional crew and cast, comprised of the veterans of the Croatian war (a number of them, including director Sabljak himself, were also invalids) – is in fact characterized by a complete *absence* of interest in the causes of ethnic hatred. *Surrounded* tells the story of four Croat prisoners of war who escape from the Serb work-camp "Pješčara", and fight their way through the enemy territory. It is a combat film concerned only with fulfilling its generic responsibility: that of being, as its advertising slogan put it, "the first Croatian amateur action film!" So deep is its investment in the numerous action sequences that, despite its clear allegiance with the protagonists – whereas their Serb opponents are presented (literally) as bloodthirsty imbeciles – the film's rudimentary, underdeveloped narrative seems at times entirely content with the "enlightened" nationalist vulgarism according to which Croats, "Serbs" and "Chetniks" (Serb nationalist extremists) are practically interchangeable terms (in the same way that all Croats probably seem like Ustashas – Croat nationalist extremists – to the Serbs). Unlike *Before the Rain*, or *Pretty Village*, or even *Virgin Mary*, all of which in various ways find relevance in at least hinting at the causes of ethnic hatred in the region, *Surrounded* adopts this hatred as an unquestionable, natural fact; something that is, quite simply, a given.

However, what complicates matters in this respect, and ultimately de-legitimizes the film's axiomatic endorsement of nationalist intolerance, is its self-acknowledged *amateurism* (which, nonetheless, did not prevent it from receiving the Croatian film critics' "Oktavijan" award). This amateurism, both technical and stylistic, has as its major consequence the film's hilariously comical inability to conceal the evidence of its own production process. Costumes and make-up are over-exaggerated (for the trademark long, unkempt hair, Chetnik characters wear what are unmistakably cheap wigs), characters are one-dimensional, and performances by the non-professional cast are painfully self-conscious and un-natural. Dialogues sound artificial, and their primary function is to clarify to the viewer the characters' often incoherent actions. Most interestingly, performers deliver their lines as if they also need to explain their own decisions and actions to themselves. In short, far from being self-effacing, *Surrounded*'s narrational mode is so obviously dilettantish that it cannot hide the traces of its own construction, and is thus unable to naturalize its diegesis about the escaped Croat soldiers. Instead, it enriches the film with a dimension of reflexivity. A fictional narrative about the battles between

4 For an excellent argument following this line of thinking, see: Dubravka Ugrešić, *The Culture of Lies*, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998, pp.192-193.

Petra Mrzyk & Jean-Francois Moriceau, *Untitled*, 2004

the Croats and the Serbs, Sabljak's work is simultaneously a "documentary" about the making, about the coming-into-being, of its own diegesis. In other words, the film's reflexive turn consists in persistently making the viewer aware that the story does not merely evolve "by itself," but only because someone – namely, the film's performers/characters – has taken it upon himself to make this story happen, to realize it. In this sense, it can even be said that *Surrounded* articulates a unique cinematic equivalent of the theoretical insight described by Slavoj Žižek as follows: "Whatever we do, we always situate it in a larger symbolic context which is charged with conferring meaning upon our acts." However, "such narratives are always retroactive reconstructions for which we are in a way responsible; they are never simple given facts: we can never refer to them as a found condition, context, or presupposition of our activity. Precisely as presuppositions, such narratives are always-already 'posited' by us."[5]

This reflexive insight also has a profound impact on the way the film's nationalist ideology comes across on the screen. In so far as ethnic hatred is a crucial component of *Surrounded*'s diegetic world,

5 Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, Duke: Duke University Press, 1993, p.127.

6 Alenka Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan,* London: Verso, 2000, p.163.

when passed through the film's prism of reflexivity it, paradoxically, reveals itself as an aspect of the content premeditated, and then performed and enacted, by the very protagonists/performers who are themselves also part of this content. In other words, what was initially conceived by Sabljak's film as an unquestionable, pre-existing social framework, a "law" of intolerance between the Croats and the Serbs, has – in the process of its imperfect/amateur cinematic realization – been made to yield a valuable critical by-product. For an ideology (ethno-nationalist, or any other for that matter) to be operative, it has to conceal the fact that, as Alenka Zupančić succinctly put it, "the law is not always-already there, waiting for the subject to submit herself to it: it is this very submission... which constitutes the law..."[6]

And yet, it is exactly this "constitution-through-submission" of nationalist ideology that various ogres, ethno-earthquakes, historico-genetically determined national types, and other retroactively discovered "pre-existing causes" of the Yugoslav break-up tend to obliterate. In contrast to those films in which such and similar explanations are found, and despite – or rather because of its shamelessly ethno-phobic attitude – *Surrounded* incites one to contemplate the contemporary outbreak of nationalism in the region in different terms: perhaps there is no agency behind these conflicts *other than the ideological force of nationalism itself* – other than nationalism as a present-day social event, orchestrated and lived by its perpetrators, propagators, actors, executioners, and fellow travelers.

* * *

Although dominated by the rampaging ethnic euphorias, the 1990s also gave rise to a number of rationally founded cinematic analyses of the widespread social, economic, and cultural deterioration in the region. In *Tetoviranje* (Tatooing, 1991), veteran Macedonian director Stole Popov explores the institutional breakdown of the Yugoslav socialist system through a veristic depiction of the hardships of prison life. Large-scale corruption and legalization of economic crime in Croatia are exposed in Zrinko Ogresta's *Crvena prašina* (Red Dust, 1999), a film concerned with the phenomenon of "tycoonization" – appropriation of the formerly national and state-owned businesses and industrial plants by war-profiteers and gangsters. And, in a manner rarely seen in films from the region, Želimir Žilnik's *Marble Ass* (1995) deconstructs the established homophobic paradigms of the Serb "national being" by viewing it through the prism of gender and sexuality. Freely mixing video-documentaricity and "trash" aesthetic, Žilnik depicts the daily adventures of two actual transvestite-prostitutes, Merlyn and Sanela, two Serbs who do not conform to the prevailing patriarchal ideal of the macho male, but who, nonetheless, emerge as the sole guardians of sanity, humanity, and sensitivity – in short, of normalcy – in the sea of lawlessness, violence, and severe economic frustration.

A refreshingly sober approach to inter-ethnic tensions is found in Andrej Košak's *Autsajder* (The Outsider, 1996), the most popular Slovenian film of the 1990s. At its center is an aspect of the Yugoslav "southern question": the problem

of ethnic and class elitism, of cultural and even physical violence leveled against the Bosnian migrants in Slovenia (the topic perceptively dealt with a decade earlier by another talented filmmaker, Filip Robar-Dorin; his 1985 production, *Rams and Mammoths*, even featured some "Sartrean" observations, such as: "If there were no Bosnians we [Slovenes] would have to invent them.") *The Outsider* tells the story of Sead, a Bosnian youth whose family moves to the Slovenian capital, Ljubljana, in the early 1980s (his father is an officer in the Yugoslav People's Army). Košak criticizes *both* the state-propagated forms of Yugoslav "brotherhood and unity" which, by the late 1970s, have deteriorated into rigid, dogmatic ideol-ogical clichés, *as well as* actual distortions of this ideal of inter-ethnic amity in the practice of everyday living. Seeking to preserve the ideal, *The Outsider* relocates it in the realm of youth subculture. There, unaffected by the official ideological "rules of conduct," trans-ethnic solidarity acquires a new vitality and flourishes in a most spontaneous fashion.

New and alone in Ljubljana, Sead – the child from a mixed marriage (Slovene mother and Muslim father), and the film's principal "outsider" – immediately finds friendship and understanding among the local punk-rockers, whose expressions of teenage angst include shouting curses and singing protest songs about the Yugoslav People's Army and the Communist Party. The manner in which Košak asserts the supra-national character of this underground youth scene, of which Sead becomes a member, is truly original. Besides elements of the punk movement – which developed a strong, long-lasting tradition in Slovenia – the Ljubljana counter-cultural scene, as envisioned by the film, also includes elements of the distinctly Bosnian 1980s youth culture. For instance, the music for *The Outsider* was composed by Saša Lošić, a Bosnian pop-musician whose band, *Plavi orkestar* (The Blue Orchestra), was associated with the Bosnian subcultural movement known as New Primitivism. A number of the film's musical motifs are, in fact, clearly recognizable as slightly modified versions of some old, popular tunes by *Plavi orkestar*. But the most direct reference to New Primitivism comes in they key protest song performed by Sead and his band: "Anarchy All Over Slovenia." This punk tune (diegetically imagined as a local equivalent of *The Sex Pistols*' anthem "Anarchy in the UK"), represents an open paraphrase of one of the biggest New Primitivist hits, "Anarchy All Over Baščaršija" – a paraphrase so functionally incorporated into the film's narrative, that even the song's original refrain, "Sejo feels great today!," seems perfectly logical within the context of Sead's story (since "Sejo" is the nickname commonly used for Sead).

The Outsider ends tragically. Unable to cope any longer with his father's strict, army-like disciplinary methods, faced with the deterioration of his amorous relationship with Metka, a Slovenian girl, and with the prospect of having, once again, to move to a different town (his father is being relocated to a new military garrison), Sead commits suicide. Significantly, his final act takes place on May 4th, 1980, at the very moment when the television anchor is announcing the passing of Yugoslav president Josip Broz Tito. With this symbolic link established between the

death of Sead, an ethnic Yugoslav, and the death of the supreme representative of the country's socialist system, *The Outsider* makes it clear that, even as it endorses resistance to Titoist ideological dogmatism and authoritarianism, in the final assessment it views the ending of Broz's era *not* as the beginning of the collapse of the Yugoslav "prison-house of nations," but rather as the prequel to the savage murder of authentic inter-ethnic fraternity among its peoples.

* * *

In order to further expand our analysis of ways in which film-form may serve ethno-national ideological functions, let us now return to the tunnel in which we have left the trapped protagonists of *Pretty Village*. Like everything else in the film, the standstill between the two sides involved in this conflict is presented entirely from the perspective of the Serb fighters. The filmmaker deliberately chose not at all to concern himself with what goes on on the other side – the "Muslim side." (The reader ought to keep in mind, however, that the "Muslim" side in the Bosnian war was, in fact, ethnically less homogeneous – especially during the first years of the conflict – than is usually recognized by those seeking to interpret this war as "merely" an inter-ethnic struggle between the competing chauvinist visions of pure nation-states. Besides Muslims, the Bosnian side also included a notable number of Croats, Serbs, and ethnic Yugoslavs.[7]) Since they are unable to see much of what goes on outside the tunnel, the Serb soldiers' knowledge of the Muslim enemy's presence is dependent primarily upon the voices they hear. More precisely, it is dependent upon the *acousmatic* voices heard inside the tunnel – voices that, as Michel Chion would have it, are "heard without [their]... source being seen;" voices that seem to be "wandering along the surface (of the image, or screen), *at once inside and outside*, seeking a place to settle."[8] Although they presumably belong to the Ethnic Enemy outside, these voices are never really embodied, but rather seem source-less as they echo across the tunnel, and are heard on the trapped soldiers' walkie-talkies. Even in those rare instances when it seems that these spectral voices will finally be visually identified – connected, that is, to their physical sources – instead of the enemy's bodily presence, the film spectator is offered the fast-moving and disappearing shadows, the visually de-saturated apparition-like figures.

Potentially, there is something quite subversive about such a construction of the Ethnic Enemy as *acousmetre*,[9] for it seems to suggest the possibility of a dis-alignment between the voice assigned to the ethnic other,

7 Here it also needs to be kept in mind, as Renata Salecl points out, "that in this case [the Bosnian war] we don't have the usual fantasy construction regarding the nation. At the beginning of the war, Muslims still organized their fantasy scenario of the homeland around the idea of Yugoslavia: they were the only ones who took literally the transnationality of the Yugoslav federation and believed in the notion of 'brotherhood and unity.' The whole existence of Bosnia and Herzegovina was, in a way, a realization of the socialist aim to erase the element of the nation from social organization. The Muslims persisted in this transnational attitude even after their towns had been bombed; they did not want to call the attacker by his name, they did not want to give him a national connotation. Thus at the beginning of the war, the aggressors were referred to as 'criminals, hooligans,' and only much later were they named Chetniks or Serbian nationalists." See: Salecl, *The Spoils of Freedom*, London: Routledge, 1994, p.16.

8 Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, New York: Columbia University Press; 1999, p.18.

9 Chion, *The Voice*, pp.17-31.

and the symbolic reality of the "actually existing" ethnic groups (Muslims, Serbs, etc.). The voice of the Enemy might eventually connect with its source in the inter-subjective physical reality, but it also might not. Equivocation seems to resonate where one would expect to find confirmation of a standard genre-assumption about combat films: that both sides involved in the depicted conflict exist as fully constituted in the external material reality. There is no guarantee that the point of origin of the acousmatic voices heard inside the tunnel is not, say, in the Serb soldiers themselves,

10 Rick Altman defines "sound hermeneutic" thus: "Cinema sound typically asks the question: 'Where (does this sound come from)?' Visually identifying the source of the sound, the image usually responds: 'Here!' The sound hermeneutic is the full question and answer process, as followed by the film spectator/auditor." Rick Altman, "Afterword: A Baker's Dozen of New Terms for Sound Analysis," *Sound Theory Sound Practice*, ed. Altman, New York: Routledge; 1992, p.252.

11 Chion, *The Voice*, p.34.

12 Chion, *The Voice*, p.23.

13 See, for instance: Rastko Močnik, "Subjekt za koji se pretpostavlja da veruje i nacija kao nulta institucija," *Alterkacije*, Beograd: xx vek; 1998, pp.163-221.

14 unpublished interview with Srđan Dragojević

rather than in those apparitions presumably waiting outside the tunnel. Could it be, perhaps, that the spectral voices and the apparition-like figures perceived as the Ethnic Enemy outside the tunnel, actually belong to the *dead* inhabitants of the burning villages – those whom the soldiers must have killed on their rampage through Bosnia, yet whose deaths were never represented in the film, never properly acknowledged by the cinematic apparatus?

Whatever the case may be, this hermeneutic uncertainty[10] pertaining to the acousmatic voice seems to imply that, ultimately, the only assurance that the *acousmetre does* have a positive existence – that his voice *does* have a source identifiable in the symbolic reality – lies, as Chion would have it, in one's desire to believe that this is so, in one's "voluntary blindness"[11] for the acousmatic properties of a voice. It lies in what amounts to the film-auditor's/viewer's *self-imposed*, *self-accomplished* "de-acousmatization."[12] In other words, it is the "subject supposed to believe" (as Lacanian psychoanalysis would have it[13]), or rather, the "spectator supposed to believe" in the *acousmetre*'s positive existence, that is required as an active contributor to the production of the film's meaning, if *Pretty Village*'s signification of the threatening ethnic otherness is to be prevented from functioning as an *exposé* of the mechanisms underlying nationalist ideological interpellation, and asserted instead as a form of *mimesis* of the external, experiential reality.

Here it is particularly interesting to note that, according to Dragojević himself, around the time of *Pretty Village*'s release a significant number of Serb soldiers who actually fought in the Bosnian war found the film to be very "realistic" (in the sense of accurately corresponding to their own experiences of the war).[14] Not only does this seem to suggest that an empirical, historical subject who *does* (already) believe in the "ethnic thing" – a subject interpellated by ethno-nationalism – is perfectly pre-disposed to assume the place of the film's model "spectator supposed to believe." More than that, these soldiers' reaction to the film also points to the extent to which, in a certain way (and for some of those involved

in it), the entire Bosnian war in fact represented a materialization-through-enactment of its own underlying fundamental fantasy about the threatening ethnic otherness: a fantasy *already* involving, as its structural function, the subject who, like *Pretty Village*'s model spectator, is "supposed to believe" in the conflict between the Serbs and the Muslims as a conflict between the tangible and visually accessible Ethnic Bodies.[15]

The narrative resolution of the film effectively undercuts all potential dilemmas about the nature and origin of the trapped Serb soldiers' Ethnic Enemy: this enemy, the film ultimately asserts, *is* very actual, and the threat he poses *is* very real. The film's central protagonist Milan is not the sole Serb survivor of the conflict in the tunnel, but he is the only one to remain conscious until the drama is fully resolved. Upon exiting the tunnel, he witnesses and experiences the enemy's appearance as fully constituted in reality: Milan's former best friend Halil, now a commander in the Bosnian army, is standing atop the tunnel. Halil, a Muslim, is the embodiment of the ethnic antagonist whose presence was felt and heard all the time, but who was never "anthropomorphically validated," much less individualized – his appearance visualizes the acousmetre.[16]

However, at the same time that it establishes the Ethnic Enemy's objective existence in the intersubjective reality, Halil's appearance atop the tunnel seems also capable of challenging, perhaps even dissolving, the hatred ascribed to the other's dis-embodied voice.[17] For Halil is not just any individual whose body de-acousmatizes this voice, but rather Milan's former best friend. During the entire course of its narrative, the film has evoked (by way of Milan's flash-backs) scenes of this exemplary friendship. It has also implied a symmetry between the Serbs' depicted war deeds, and the mostly non-represented, but suggested, activities of their enemy. Halil's appearance marks the two friends' first encounter during the war, and a brief scopic and verbal exchange between them establishes that neither did Halil kill Milan's mother (as the latter was lead to believe by Slobo, a nationalist instigator whose name is a clear reference to Slobodan Milošević), nor did Milan burn Halil's store (an earlier flashback has already informed the viewer that the opposite is, in fact, the case – he tried to protect the store from the unrestrained soldiers who set it on fire.) The purity of their friendship is thus preserved, and the possibility arises – with Halil's body allocated to the acousmetre – that this solidarity might override the recently instated ethnic enmity.

15 One is here reminded of the manner in which Petar Luković once characterized the *pre-war* nationalist campaign in Serbia: "I think you have to start with the idea that all the evils in this country now [1993] – millions of refugees, millions getting killed, ... – all this evil started six years ago... as a state project, as an ideological project. ... [E]verything we are witnessing today we have tested before in softer, smaller ways, through television, through media wars, political wars, all kinds of discussions and dialogues – *simulations without arms* – before these wars. So we were prepared for this kind of war. ... It's obvious we are talking about a propaganda plan that started in 1987 when Milosevic started his nationalist campaign here." (italics added) Quoted fro Florence Hamlish Levinsohn, *Belgrade: Among the Serbs,* Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1994, pp.113-114.

16 In this respect, it may be said that *Pretty Village*'s ethno-ideological limitation does *not* consist, as one may have thought, in failing to visually represent enough of the Serb soldiers' Ethnic Enemy (for this threatening otherness is always, to begin with, fantasized); rather, it resides in the fact that, with Halil atop the tunnel, the film has actually visually identified *too much* of this (fantasmatic) enemy.

17 I draw here upon Chion, *The Voice*, p.23.

Nevertheless, the film soon undermines this possibility as well, by concluding the two friends' brief encounter with an explosion near the tunnel, which kills Halil. As if death itself has intervened, *deus ex machina*, in order to seal off Milan and Halil's friendship, and to confirm the primacy of the unbridgeable ethnic gap between a Serb and a Muslim.[18] For what is asserted by means of Halil's death is the continued functioning of the acousmatic threat posed by the Ethnic Enemy. If this enemy cannot be construed as the "complete acousmetre"[19] – the one who is *never* visually identified – because this might give rise to the question whether he exists in reality at all, neither can he be fully de-acousmatized, and his (singular) body successfully brought into the light, for then he might forever lose the terrifying powers he possesses as the body-less voice. The Ethnic Enemy, therefore, has to be simultaneously an *already visualized acousmetre*, and a *to be visualized acousmetre*: an acousmetre whose omnipotence remains unaffected by the continuous attempts at revealing his (multiple) bodily appearances, because these revelations are always *a priori* condemned to remain incomplete and insufficient.

In the light of *Pretty Village Pretty Flame*'s "national economy," it is perhaps not too excessive to suggest that Halil died so that Milan's animosity toward the ethnic other (more precisely, toward the sourceless voice of ethnic otherness) could continue. And it is precisely this ethno-phobic "resolution" of the conflict in the tunnel that makes one question the effectiveness of the film's ultimate condemnation of nationalist madness, in the visually and dramaturgically accomplished final scene, set in a Belgrade hospital to which the few survivors of the siege have been transported. As Milan, overwhelmed by his hatred of Muslims, crawls across the floor determined to murder an enemy fighter lying in the same hospital, the film makes it clear that only in a violent nationalist delirium can this wounded soldier – helpless and harmless, rather than dangerous and threatening – appear as an incarnation of the evil ethnic antagonist.[20] Ultimately, Milan himself seems to realize this and he gives up on his murderous intentions, thus setting the tone of pathos for the symbolic, high-angle tracking shot, in which the countless dead bodies covering the floor of the tunnel are observed by Milan and Halil as young boys.

18   Throughout the film, Milan's childhood recollections emphasize his relationship with Halil as one of total equality (the two boys even look so much alike that it is sometimes difficult to differentiate between them). By contrast, his last flashback, *immediately preceding* Halil's death, confirms (rather than downplays) the two friends' ethnic difference. In this flashback, Milan asks Halil why he did not come to play soccer the day before. Halil responds that he had to be circumcised. Afterwards, as the two boys are competing in who can pee further, the local postman comments on their game: "The longer weenie gets the telegram." As Branislava Anđelković perceptively points out, what this scene implies is that "[n]o equality, no unity really exists; differences ought to be emphasized early on, so that one can avoid recognizing them when they have already become painfully obvious. It looks as if the postman is reacting to what the boys should have been able to realize themselves: that no 'choice based on affinity,' after Goethe, applies here, but only the choice based on belonging to that which the member of an ethnic community believes to be the National Thing. If our nation is not the one that requires men to be circumcised, then we must view this as something 'deviant,' wrong, and alien..." Branislava Anđelković, "*Lepa sela lepo gore*: popularni diskursi rata," *Pop Vision*, ed. Branko Dimitrijević, Vršac and Belgrade: Umetnička radionica *Aurora*, Fond za otvoreno društvo & Centar za savremenu umetnost, 1996, pp.132-133.

19 Chion's term. See *The Voice*, p.21.

20 Like Milan's memories of the war, events taking place in the hospital are presented in a fragmentary manner, so that their dramatic climax – Milan coming face to face with the wounded enemy fighter whom he wishes to kill – takes place immediately after the resolution of the drama in the tunnel. Interestingly, the Bosnian soldier's *silent bodily presence* functions as a correlative of the threatening dis-embodied voice(s) heard inside the tunnel.

21   A classic theoretical study of this problematic is Jean-Paul Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew* (New York: Schocken Books; 1946). Sartre famously claims: "If the Jew did not exist, the anti-Semite would invent him." (p.13) Elsewhere he also writes: "The Jew is one whom other men consider a Jew: that is the simple truth from which we must start." (p.69) More recently, Žižek has developed a strictly psychoanalytic approach to the same set of issues. See his book *Metastaze uživanja*, Beograd: XX vek; 1997.

In the end, can some Ogre be blamed for all the horrors of the Bosnian carnage? Insofar as one might wish to answer this question affirmatively, one would also be obliged to ask whether, after all, this Ogre is *not* merely a "given," objectively insurmountable ethnic antagonism (bound to, sooner or later, run amok), but rather a stubborn conviction, a paralyzing *belief*, in the ethno-essentialist *myth* of the "objective insurmountability" of national differences. Halil himself seems to voice the film's awareness of this when, outside the tunnel, he sarcastically asks Milan: "And who did [all these evil deeds]? Was it the Ogre from the tunnel, huh? Was it the Ogre, Milan?" Unfortunately, the "stroke of fate" – the sudden death that subsequently befalls Halil – remains the sole response the film offers to his disturbing question.

A purely visual counterpoint to *Pretty Village*'s sonorous construction of the ethnic other is staged in the finale of Muhamed Hadžimehmedović's video-drama, *Poslije bitke* (After the Battle), produced in 1997 for Bosnian television. A Muslim and a badly wounded Serb, fighters in the opposed armies and each on the run from his enemy, cross paths somewhere in the hills of Bosnia. Despite their enmity, the Muslim helps the Serb, who reveals that he is also a deserter. As the two slowly move on together, *After the Battle* uses parallel editing to show a sniper unit closing in on them, unaware that the Muslim soldier whom they are pursuing now has company. The last scene in the film depicts the Muslim burying his Serb companion, who died along the way, and marking his grave with an improvised cross. At precisely this point, the Serb unit catches up with him: as the sniper observes the soldier through the view-finder of his gun, he hesitates to shoot him for he is not certain what side he belongs to. His uniform is bloody, making his military identifications impossible to make out. If the soldier is a Muslim, why is he marking the grave with a cross?

What the viewer witnesses in this scene is the alignment of the sniper's perspective – visually conveyed by means of the cinematic point of view structure – with the gaze of ethnic hatred, directed at the "other." And, as the sniper's puzzlement with what he sees suggests, the object of this hatred is first of all a fantasized other – an idea, a notion, mapped across the empirical reality, "superimposed" over the actual individuals existing in it.[21]

The economy of ethnic hatred is, in other words, grounded in the transferrential operation whereby the evil, negative traits for which "we" hate "them" are *projected onto*, *attributed to*, the ethnic other. The danger from and the repulsiveness of the other's ethnicity, represent an excess generated by the very agent casting the look at the other. In this sense, the look precedes, and as such qualifies – ideologically colors – its own object.

Another illustrative instance of this transferential relationship between the self and the other may also be found in *Pretty Village*, in the scene in which a trapped Serb soldier loads his gun while addressing each individual bullet by a different

Muslim name. By means of this naming procedure, the soldier seeks to reassure himself that the acousmatic voices he hears inside the tunnel *do* indeed originate with concrete Ethnic Bodies outside. However, by contrast with Dragojević's film, in *After the Battle* it is the very visibility of the enemy/other, his final appearance and entrapment in the sniper's field of vision, that introduces *uncertainty* about his identity. And if, on the immediate narrative level, the film's ending leaves unresolved the fate of the Muslim fighter who has just buried his Serb companion (one never finds out if the sniper does or does not shoot him), then it may be said that on a deeper, conceptual level, even before the trigger on the gun is/isn't pulled, Hadžimehmedović clarifies another, arguably much more pressing issue: no sniper, however piercingly accurate and far-reaching, will ever detect with absolute certainty, or properly capture inside its gaze, the evil Ethnic Enemy himself. As the real object of ethnic hatred, obsessively sought out by the sniper, this Enemy resides on the other side of the gun's view-finder: in the "eye of the beholder."

I MYSELF AM WAR!

Georges Bataille

Irwin, *Rekapitulacija*, mixed media, 2000

FiLM MATTER

Pavle Levi

What is it that makes Marcel Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* (1913) and Man Ray's *Gift* (1921) quintessential Dada objects? What is their smallest common denominator? In an all-out attack on reason and logic, on the bourgeois conceptions of art and ethics, of artistic genius and good taste, Dadaists opted for randomness, chance, and for what Duchamp – reflecting on the manner in which he chose his ready-mades (*Bottlerack*, *Fountain*, etc.) – refered to as "visual indifference." It is signification itself that, ultimately, constituted the object of the Dadaist strategies of negation. This negation, however, persistently took place in the shadow of its own negation – against the background of a profound awareness of the impossibility of ever entirely foreclosing meaning. Thus the Dadaists' "negation of negation" frequently assumed the form of an insistence upon the *irreducible materiality of the auto-denotative signifier*. The objects they made – an iron "enriched" with a line of tacks (*Gift*), or a coat rack nailed to the floor (Duchamp's *Trap* of 1917) – function as exclusive referents of themselves qua signifiers; signifiers that are also their own, sole signified.

It is precisely due to such an unqualified engagement with the irreducible materiality of the photographically-based image, that Man Ray's *Return to Reason* (1923) strikes one as a "pure" Dada film. It releases onto the screen a series (a barrage, really) of radically indexical images, and succeeds in presenting itself as, first and foremost, an almost tangible, plastic object. Towards this end it employs two notable techniques, both of which had initially been developed by Man Ray within the framework of his photographic practice: rayography (production of photograms), and the use of the disorienting or de-familiarizing close-up.

MAN RAY, RETURN TO REASON (1923)

1. *Rayographs*. In *Return to Reason*, the moving images obtained through the so-called rayographic process include tacks, nails, and the opening shot of a stunning "field of shimmering dots" (grains of salt spilled across the photosensitive surface). They are all photographic indices in which the existential link between the object and its image is radicalized by being made literal: the light linking the two – bouncing off of the object and passing through the lens of the camera, onto the strip of film – is replaced by the object actually touching the photosensitive surface. Thus in a rayograph, the representation of the object, its image, becomes auto-referential, an auto-icon of sorts.

2. *Close ups*. As they isolate an object or a portion of it from its surroundings, Man Ray's close-ups tend to estrange the depicted object. However, in doing so these close-ups *do not* merely push towards abstraction, but rather seem to charge the object with an intensified dose, a surplus, of materiality acquired at the expense of meaning. In other words, extreme close-ups in *Return to Reason* (as in the artist's photographic works, such as *Untitled* below) may be designated as "hyper-realist" images, in so far as they transform the represented object into *pure dynamic matter*: matter without a symbolic valence, not (yet) charged with meaning; matter before "the fall" into the cycle of spectatorial consumption.

MAN RAY, UNTITLED (C.1923)

In light of the above, it is worth recalling the explanation Man Ray gave for his eventual *abandonment* of the medium of film, in the wake of an aborted collaboration with Andre Breton and Paul Eluard on a cinematographic experiment intended as an "Essay on the Simulation of the Cinematic Dellirium":

A book, a painting, a sculpture, a drawing, a photograph, and any concrete object are always at one's disposition, to be appreciated or ignored, whereas a

1 Man Ray, *Self Portrait*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company; 1963, p.232

2 See: Louis Aragon, "On Décor," p.50-54, Andre Breton, "As in a Wood," pp.72-77, and Robert Desnos, "Eroticism," pp.195-196.

3 Stephen Kovacs, *From Enchantment to Rage*, Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; 1980, p.151.

4 Deke Susinberre, "La Retour a la raison: Hidden Meanings" in *Unseen Cinema*, ed. Bruce Posner, New York: Anthology Film Archives, 2005, p.67.

spectacle before an assemblage insists on the general attention, limited to the period of presentation. ... I prefer the permanent immobility of a static work which allows me to make my deductions at my leisure, without being distracted by attending circumstances. And so, the last few years before the war, in between my professional photographic activities, I concentrated on painting, drawing, and the making of Surrealist objects – a substitute for sculpture – which figured in magazines and exhibitions sponsored by the group.[1]

Here is a distinctly Dadaist concern, all the more striking for manifesting itself around 1935, in the midst of the age of surrealism. Man Ray's observation seems indicative of a conception of the cinema that is the diametrical opposite of Louis Aragon's praise of its power to "transport" the viewer and to "transform" the objects it depicts; or, of Breton's enthusiasm about its potential for "deracination"; or, of Robert Desno's celebration of film's "cerebral eroticism."[2] The surrealists seized upon the psychic delirium triggered by the cinematic apparatus – its imaginary, oneiric, and hallucinatory effects – above and beyond its material properties. By contrast, Man Ray's abandonment of filmmaking may (somewhat speculatively perhaps) be understood as symptomatic of an anxiety over the fact that by the mid-1930s his own engagement with the cinema had in fact gone in a direction too far removed from that announced by *Return to Reason* some years earlier. As Stephen Kovacs aptly put it: "Unlike the poets, who saw film as a perfect vehicle of Surrealism, Man Ray was rather interested in its plastic possibilities. Fundamentally a Dadaist painter, Man Ray never became more than a fellow traveler of Surrealism. Characteristically, the abandonment of his last film project with Breton and Eluard meant more to them than it did to him. The ephemeral quality of film that had endeared it to them made Man Ray feel uncomfortable with it."[3]

Indeed, a discovery made not too long ago revealed that the rayographic content of *Return to Reason* includes some "photographic negatives of a nude woman (presumably Kiki of Montparnasse) stretched out on a bed in a lascivious pose. Laid lengthwise along the filmstrip, these images are irrevocably indecipherable when viewed through the mechanism of a projector... even when projected at a frame-by-frame speed. The crystal-clear imprint of the substrate is physically invisible to the mechanical eye and can be seized *only by the human eye when the filmstrip is held in the hand* rather than projected."[4] Materiality of the cinematic signifier is here made literal, as the possibility of signification is rendered thoroughly dependent upon a return to the static, tactile materiality of the filmstrip itself. And it is thus that Man Ray's film directly anticipates a specific type of inquiry that, in the 1960s and 1970s, came to characterize some of the "structural-materialist" works of Paul Sharits, Brigit and Wilhelm Hein, Malcolm LeGrice, and others. As Peter Gidal pointed out, most frequently "[t]he assertion of film as material is, in fact, predicated upon representation, in as much as 'pure' empty acetate running through the projector gate

without image (for example) merely sets off another level of abstract (or non-abstract) associations. Those associations, when instigated by such a device, are no more materialist or nonillusionist than any other associations. Thus the film event is by no means, through such a usage, necessarily demystified. 'Empty screen' is no less significatory than 'carefree happy smile.' There are myriad possibilities for co/optation and integration of filmic procedures into the repertoire of meaning."[5] Taking it to its logical limits, these authors, therefore, pushed the envelope of materialist film practice in two principal directions:

a) Asserting the *haptic* nature of cinema, the tactility of the film image, by foregrounding its primary state of existence on/as the filmstrip. For instance, Paul Sharits directly exhibited, instead of projecting, some of his films: as object-strips placed between the sheets of plexi-glass. In Hollis Frampton's *nostalgia* (1971), on the other hand, the viewer experiences a distinctly cinematic version of the principle of conversion of matter into energy: as individual still photographs burn in real time, the materiality of the printed image decays into a "felt duration," the length of time consumed in the process.

b) Relocating the awareness of the materiality of cinema from the celluloid strip to the technological conditions of its projection, as William Rabaan did in his 1973 performance *Take Measure*, and Le Grice did in works such as *Castle 1*(1966). In the former, the distance between the projector and the screen – the "throw" of the beam of light – is measured by the length of the filmstrip stretched between the two. In the latter, an added piece of technology called "the winker" (a hanging light-bulb, flashing at regular intervals), eliminates the darkness of the screening room, making visible the texture of the screen/surface upon which the images are projected, as well as the physical space of the theatre (viewers, rows of seats, walls, the distance between the screen and the audience, and, of course, the "winker" itself).

THE SEQUENCE/THE INTERSTICE

Too much contemplative involvement and too little self-sufficient kinetic frenzy; too much stimulation of desire through the apparatus, and too little attention paid to the film-machine as a basic circulator – a material-distillator, one might say – of the mind-less drives. Such was, Man Ray pointed out, the general direction in which the surrealists took the cinema, pushing too far into the background its physiological and corporeal character, its status as an alternative to (rather than an extension of, or an improvement upon) the representational theater and the "retinal vision" (as Duchamp would have it).

Of course, in so far as it is projected film can never be the same as a singular static object, such as a photograph. Film is a sequence, a flow of images. In fact, as the Letterist leader Jean-Isidore Isou noted, film is by its

5 Peter Gidal, "Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film" in *Structural Film Anthology*, ed. Gidal, Lonodn: BFI, 1976, pp.2-3.

very nature a time-bound flow, even if its content is reduced to a single, motionless image. Duration – a function of projection – precedes the movement, or the lack thereof, associated with the content of the image. From this perspective, perhaps the early 20th century experimentations with "telegraphed photography" (Shelford Bidwell, Arthur Korn, and others) represent just as significant a point of reference for the movies, as does their "serial" photographic ancestor practiced by Eadweard Muybridge. For what differentiates a telegraphed from an "ordinary" photograph is precisely the fact that the former involves an additional dimension: that of the image becoming, of coming into being, at a place where it is telegraphically received (however brief, even instantaneous, the time of generating the image at the receiving end may have become, initially it was easily measurable and clearly "felt.")

Most commonly, film is images replacing each other – a montage. But techniques of montage can – and in *Return to Reason* they do, most effectively – articulate a commitment to the laws of *chance*. When chance is made to preside over montage, the relationship between images A and B extends, it further affirms rather than undermines, the irreducible materiality of each individual signifier: A is related to B in a manner that is non-dialectical, absolutely non-hierarchical, driven by the principle of total equalization of all elements involved. Perhaps one can even detect in this type of film montage, enthusiastically endorsed by the Dadaists, a (strictly) structural antecedent of what, searching through the history of cinema, Gilles Deleuze recognized in Jean-Luc Godard's post-1968 radicalization of the cut:

[T]he question is no longer that of the association or attraction of images. What counts is on the contrary the *interstice* between images, between two images... Given one image, another image has to be chosen which will induce an interstice *between* the two. This is not an operation of association, but of differentiation, as mathematicians say, or of disappearance, as physicists say: given one potential, another one has to be chosen, not any whatever, but in such a way that a difference of potential is established between the two, which will be productive of a third or of something new. ... It is not a matter of following a chain of images, even across voids, but of getting out of the chain or the association. ... It is the method of BETWEEN, 'between two images'... It is the method of AND, 'this and then that,' which does away with all the cinema of Being=is.

Deleuze is thinking primarily of *Here and Elsewhere* (Ici et ailleurs), a piece of radical film praxis in which the Revolutionary propaedeutic (considered in the context of the Palestinian revolution) is presented as a superimposition of, on the one hand, historical materialism, and, on the one hand, semiotic and linguistic analysis of cinema. The cut is the interstice – the zero, the void, the marker of difference. This essential feature of film is, in turn, posited by Godard as persistently concealed by the movement, by the actual flow of images. The director's voice-over declares early on in the film: "Death is represented in this film by a flow of images. ... A flow of images and sounds that hide silence. ... A silence that becomes deadly because it is prevented from coming out alive." Thus, it is only in the realm of the proto-cinematic – when immersed in the visual economy of static images "wishing to be more" – that one finds the tools with which to adequately render the "BETWEEN" separating one

image from the next. Three slide-viewers are lined up by Godard: each lights up when an image is inserted into it. The pattern of insertion, constituting the movement from one static image to the next, is arbitrary:

1-2-3	1-3-1	1-1-(complete elimination of the 2nd image)-3
1-3-2	1-3-3	…
1-3-3	1-2-3	

Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin, *Ici et ailleurs* (1976)

The darkness and the emptiness of the space separating the three viewers coincide with the emptiness of the time required to accomplish the transition from one image to the next – the time required to *perform the interstice.*

Some thirty years later, in *Notre musique*, the relationship between matter and meaning still appears crucial for Godard. Now, however, he locates the key to productively moving beyond the (painful but necessary) recognition of the cinematic cut as an interstice, in the successful rebuilding of the Old Bridge in the town of Mostar. Destroyed during the 1990s Bosnian war, the Bridge (built in 1566, under the Ottoman Empire) gave way to a void between the two banks of the Neretva river. But the work on rebuilding it, piece by piece, stone by stone, began in the late 1990s. Each stone was retrieved and then labeled, according to the position it once occupied in the overall structure of the bridge. Instead of the dismantling movement of *Here and Elsewhere*, a re-constitutive pattern is now sought: how to put all the pieces of the puzzle together again?

Jean-Luc Godard, *Notre musique* (2004)

The set of stones/numbers is:
37… 40… 42… 7-8… 48… 52… 54… 50… 44… 47… 7… 19… 31-32… 42-43… 45-46-47-48, etc.

6 Ivo Andrić, *Znakovi pored puta*, p.303.

How to complete the sequence? How to order it into a meaningful whole? A voice laments over the visual matter Godard's camera encountered in Mostar:

It's not a question of re-establishing tourism between the banks of the Neretva. We must at once restore the past and make the future possible. Combine the pain and the guilt. Two faces and one truth: the bridge. ... The stones were salvaged in two phases. In June 1997 and August 1999. Each stone was identified on a card on which each detail was noted. Its position in the water, its position in the structure, and a description of each face on which clamps were attached. It was like rediscovering the origin of language. You know that before writing was invented at Sumer, they spoke of the past using the word 'after' and for the future the word 'before.'"

The Bridge *is* notre musique. As Ivo Andrić claimed: "Music makes the time stop. Better yet, it is in the highest degree responsible for the illusion of time brought to a standstill. Besides, the awakening – that terrible awakening accompanying every illusion – is here least painful or rough. In this respect, music is above all other arts."[6] But Andrić also knew that "(i)n the end, of course, it [music] does betray us." Thus the profound ambivalence of his: "Sound is weakness. Music is a disease. Or, perhaps, it is liberation?" Whatever the case may be, war is, without a doubt, the worst medicine.

* * *

But we have steered too far away from our exploration of Dadaist cinema. In *Return to Reason*, the "montage interstice" is firmly on the side of material decomposition. In this respect, Man Ray's film is perhaps best thought of as a cinematic equivalent of some of Kurt Schwitters's Merz structures, or of certain assemblages by Jean Arp (such as his 1920-21 work, *Trousse d'un Da*). In both cases there is a system, a set of relations, established, or at least hinted at, between the particular elements (such as the deformed matter collected by Schwitters). But this system is a system without a recognizable code: its laws are difficult to determine or follow, it hardly seems productive (in a rational economistic sense), but more like an elaborate potlatch in which the principle of non-utilitarian expenditure finds its discharge in the preservation of the self-sufficient materiality of each component-part.

Kurt Schwitters, *Merz Construction* (1921)

Hans Arp, *Trousse d'un Da* (1920-21)

LIBIDINAL FORMATIONS

Insistence upon the irreducible materiality of an auto-denotative signifier may, to some extent, be equated with signification of non-sense: in the place of meaning, one now encounters enjoyment (as psychoanalysis would have it); knowledge becomes libidinal, as libido is materialized in the space extending beyond the (human) body. If it is ever permitted to return to the artwork, meaning becomes equated with the dynamics of charting its libidinal currents. The work itself is posited as a *libidinal machine*.

Jean-Francois Lyotard defines a *libidinal apparatus* as "ebbing intensities stabiliz[ing] themselves into configurations," as "affects distributed according to the vast matrix-*dispositifs*... into voluminous bodies..."[7] He asserts the fundamental operation which underlies the production of any libidinal formation thus:

Why and how is there a capture and inscription of this wandering energy in a formation or figure? Why? Because everything that is given as an object (thing, painting, text, body...) is a product, that is to say, a result of the metamorphosis of this energy from one form into other forms. Each object is energy at rest, quiescent, provisionally conserved, inscribed. The apparatus or figure is only a metaphoric operator. It is itself composed of stabilized and conserved energy.[8]

Since, according to this view, "there is no notable difference between a libidinal formation and a discursive formation,"[9] works of art may, as Allen S. Weiss asserts, also be said to function as libidinal apparatii, insofar as they come across as artifacts articulating the processes of forming, trans-forming, and de-forming the libidinal energy/substance.

Written in 1913, Valentine de Saint-Point's "Futurist Manifesto of Lust" is one of the earliest programmatic statements by a 20th century European avant-gardist, intent on positing a direct link between the eruptions of human psycho-sexual energy and the creative currents of technological modernity: "Lust, when viewed without moral preconceptions and as an essential part of life's dynamism, is a force. ...Lust is the expression of a being projected beyond itself. ... LUST EXCITES ENERGY AND RELEASES STRENGTH."[10] Probably the most famous manifestation of such creating by means of a sheer energetic release emerged a few years later in the surrealist practice of automatism. In Andre Masson's drawings, for example, the line of the pen first aspires to escape, to assert itself faster than the thought accompanying it. Then, the artist begins to take into consideration the contours of the shape he produced. Masson explains: "I begin without an image or plan in mind, but just draw or paint rapidly according to my impulses. Gradually, in the marks I make, I see suggestions of figures or objects. I encourage these to emerge, trying to bring out their implications even as I now consciously try to give order to the composition."[11]

7 Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974, p.26.

8 Lyotard quoted from Allen S. Weiss, *Perverse Desire and the Ambiguous Icon,* Albany: SUNY Press, 1994, pp.64-65.

9 Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, p.25.

10 Valentine de Saint-Point in *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. Umbro Apollonio, Boston: MFA, 1973, p.71.

11 Dawn Ades, *Dada and Surrealism,* Woodbury, NY: Barron's, 1978, p.37.

There is, of course, no reason why this psycho-physically grounded line of inquiry should be limited to Masson and the Surrealist's exercises in automatism. As it temporarily contains, fixates, the pulsating libido, the emerging shape/form always also introduces the promise of a new energetic disequilibrium. The forming of an object thus becomes the process whereby the object is simultaneously hinting at the potential for "un-doing" itself (Bataille's operation of "informe," or "formlessing"). This is the case, for instance, with some of the ailing, decaying bodies painted by Egon Schiele – contorted bodies in the state of tension, caused by the intensity of sickness, or desire, or sickness *qua* desire.

EGON SCHIELE, BOXER (1913)

Although Schiele often used models when painting (including himself), his works are more than mere products of an artist's amplified, "expressionist" vision of the actual human figures (posing for him). His paintings do not only *represent* the body with a higher or lesser degree of distortion. They do not merely externalize, make visible on the outside, on the skin, the torment, the pain, the passion, of the psycho-physiological organism that is the human being. Rather, Schiele's bodies seem to confront the viewer with oscillations (quantitative as well as qualitative) of the primary force of life in the process of being materialized – *thus* the "deformed" appearance of these figures (but could they possibly look otherwise?). The body strikes one here not as a stable, pre-given ground upon which the artist has chosen to "inscribe himself." Instead, a tense, vulnerable corporeality is what is offered as, first and foremost, a testimony to that which lies "underneath" (or "within") it: libidinal energy splattered across the canvas, substantialized in the line, the paint, and the gesture/act of painting itself.

One could go even further and posit libidinal splatter as the proper ground upon which to rest Marshall McLuhan's famous thesis that – in the beginning, and in the end – "the medium is the message": the fundamental content of the message that is transmitted is always (at least, it has historically been, prior to the digital revolution) the materiality of the medium itself. This is perhaps nowhere more obvious than in the instances of automatic engagement with language – automatic writing and speech. It was, of course, Andre Breton, the leader of the Surrealists, who, in his first "Surrealist Manifesto" (1924), claimed the practice of linguistic automatism as the defining feature of his movement.

However, the most radically materialist examples of this practice are probably to be sought not in Surrealism, but in the Dadaist phonetic and opto-phonetic poetry. The reason for this is that in Breton's model, liberation of language through automatism always in the end remains poetic – it takes place under the elevated credo of "words making love." On the other hand, Dadaist phonetic poetry (Hugo Ball, Kurt Schwitters, Raoul Hausmann) more thoroughly demonstrates ways in which language, that foremost guardian of reason and the socio-symbolic order, may itself be transformed into a purely debased libidinal medium, an instrument of *direct* libidinal expression/satisfaction. Consider, for example, this excerpt from TABA CIKLON II, a sound poem by Dragan Aleksić, the leader of Belgrade Dadaists:

12 Lacan, *Seminar XX*, p.49. In her essay "De Stijl, Its Other Face: Abstraction and Cacaphony, or What Was the Matter with Hegel?," Annette Michelson famously termed sound and phonetic poetry "cacaphony" (after "caca," the word a small child uses to refer to excrement, waste).

13 Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks*, p.212.

> AbU TABUATA AUBATAUBA
> taba
> re re re RE RE
> Rn Rn Rn Rn
> Reb en en Rn
> Ren RN Ren ErNReN
> abu tabu abua u tabu abuaaa
> abu tabu abaata
> babaata tabu tabauuuta
> taba Rn
> tabaren
> tabararararan
> tabaren ENEN tabarerenn /parlevufranse/

With the exception of the final, bracketed phrase ("parles vous francais" spelled phonetically in Serbo-Croatian), each word, each sound, is here an entirely self-sufficient articulation not bound by meaning. For Aleksić, as for all Dadaists, language is, at its root, no more and no less than its own *phonetic body*, enjoyed by the body of the poet/performer in whose mouth it is being devoured. Sound poetry employs the type of "meaningless" language which Lacan referred to as *lalangue:* its primary objective, like that of a child's babble, is not merely communication with another, but (at least simultaneously) a nonsensical, narcissistic enjoyment – "satisfaction of blah-blah."[12]

The procedure of *writing* sound poetry explicates still another interesting feature of the "materiality of blah-blah." As Friedrich Kittler authoritatively points out in his analysis of Christian Morgenstern's "The Great Lalula," before this authors "1905 collection *Gallows Songs*, no poem had existed as a small discourse network. Literary historians have sought classical-romantic models for these poems and have found some nonsense verse here and there. But even the 'Wien ung quatsch, Ba nu, Ba nu n'am tsche fatsch'... is at least speakable. No voice, however, can speak [(;)] the parentheses that enclose a semicolon (as specified in 'The Great Lalula') or even – to demonstrate once and for all what media are – brackets that surround an empty space [()]."[13]

Opto-phonetic poetry – originating with Morgenstern, and subsequently actively pursued by the Dadaists – is, then, a type of practice in which meaning is "bracketed off," while the bracket itself is what is communicated in the process of infinite conversion of sounds into images and vice versa. But opto-phony – this grand metaphor for "the universal convertibility of the senses, an extended sensoriality in direct contact with the continuous movement of vibratory space"[14] – may also be said to demonstrate that the image is, in fact, no more than the failure of sound, and, likewise, that sound is nothing but the failure of the image. In extremis, the body, the human organism, may itself be posited as such an opto-phonetic medium. This is the case, for instance, with the human body reading/performing Man Ray's "Dumb Poem."
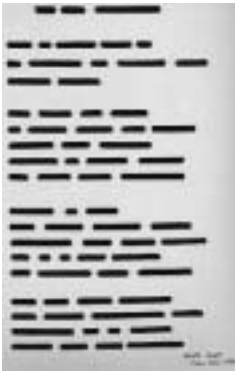
MAN RAY, DUMB POEM

Not only is this an example of a work resting upon the principle of the circular feedback, characteristic of all opto-phonetic poetry: *sounds imaged* and/or images given to be *auralized*. More than that, the materiality of the signifier is here explicitly captured in the body's failure to articulate it, to "emit" it. For how else can one possibly "read out loud" the blank, entirely content-less lines of Man Ray's poem, but as purely corporeal manifestations of *mute sounds*. In other words, the body, the conductor and the converter between images and sounds, can only perform the "Dumb Poem" by acting itself out (through movements, contortions and, eventually, spasms, originating in the area of the mouth) after having been caught in the situation of not being able to discharge. Deprived of the possibility of a properly sonorous energetic/libidinal release, the body dynamically materializes what forever remain the "not-yet sounds": sounds that *ought to be* articulated, but at the same time *cannot* be articulated for they remain unknown, unspecified by the poem. To perform Man Ray's "Dumb Poem" is, then, more than anything else, to trap the body in the interregnum caused by a double imperfection: after the "failure" of both the sound and the image as containers of meaning, all that is left is the libidinally fueled corporeal hardware.

At its most elementary, every medium – every means of expression and/or communication – is, like the human body, a switchboard grounding

14 Marcella Lista, "Raoul Hausmann's Optophone: 'Universal language' and the Intermedia" in *The Dada Seminars*, ed. Leah Dickerman with Matthew S. Witkovsky, Washington: The national Gallery of Art, 2005, p.93.

a network of libidinal currents. The cinematograph is, in this respect, no exception. In Félix Guattari's words, film is an "a-signifying semiotic chain of intensities, movements and multiplicities," anterior to the "signifying grid that intervenes only at a second stage, through the filmic syntagmatic that fixes genres, crystallizes characters and behavioral stereotypes homogeneous to the dominant semantic field."[15] The movement of matter and the flow of time – inherent in the film medium – make it, indeed, an unprecedented conductor of energetic/libidinal currents. This is, precisely, what attracted various early 20th century avant-gardists to it, most notably the Dadaists. But the question has to be asked: can the cinematograph ever really function exclusively as a generator of an "a-signifying chain of intensities"? Not only does the "signifying grid" never seem to fail to intervene; it is also doubtful that its intervention can ever be said to take place only "at a second stage." It seems, rather, that the condition of film practice is that of an *impossible a-signification*, of a *thwarted* universal convertibility of the senses. The film signifier does not lend itself to complete de-petrification or transmutability. At its most advanced, the cinematograph allows for sounds to be *almost* seen (the work of Jean-Marie Straub), and for images to be *almost* heard (Robert Bresson), thus approximating the opto-phonic ideal of a "sound camera" that is also a "visual microphone."[16] But the conversion of sounds into images and vice versa is here never total, complete. Instead, the process of conversion is arrested mid-way, on the level of sound and image's *significatory coexistence* (or mutual denial). The cinematographic signifier is (still) a hyphenated signifier: it is audio-visual. Film is an instrument of libidinal *congestion* – its sounds and images are "thrombotic."

15 Félix Guattari in *Soft Subversions*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, New York: Semiotext(e); 1996, p.161.

16 For Romanian Dadaists, Victor Brauner and Ilarie Voronca, the universal convertibility of the senses motivating opto-phonetic poetry – or, as they called it, "pictopoetry" – inevitably leads to tautology as the only sufficient definition of this medium of expression/communication. In the first and only issue of Voronca's journal *75HP*, the two artists proclaimed: "PICTOPOETRY IS NOT PAINTING; PICTOPOETRY IS NOT POETRY; PICTOPOETRY IS PICTOPOETRY." See: Tom Sandqvist, *Dada East*, Cambridge: The MIT Press; 2006, pp.360-361.

CODA: FROM LIBIDO TO LINDA BLAIR

In the 1910s and the 1920s nothing seemed to stand in the way of the psycho-physiological revolution driven by the radical kinetic potential of the cinema, the youngest and the most promising of the libidinal machines. However, in the second half of the 20th century, the aforementioned "libidinal congestion" itself increasingly became a central concern of the neo-dadaist avant-garde, providing the impetus for some morbidly dystopic visions of the cinematograph, as a diseased medium marked by an "epilepsy of meaning." Amidst the 1970s context of the reigning consumer culture and "the society of the spectacle" (in Guy Debord's famous formulation), an ex-surrealist poet and filmmaker from Yugoslavia, Ljubiša Jocić, wrote a profoundly disturbing assessment of the commodified cinematograph: the poem *Horror is a Bestseller*. Taking as his point of departure William Friedkin's 1973 horror film *The Exorcist* – in which the combined rampage of the libido, the Unholy spirit, and the corporeal fluids, turns the body of a pubescent girl (played by Linda Blair) into a diabolically malfunctioning Opto-phone – Jocić embarks on a detailed depiction of

the film-machine as a perverse and vulgar assemblage of libidinal protuberances connecting disparate fragments of significatory junk:

> Linda Blair L'Espresso reports it has become
> some sort of a ritual every night
> between an ssesment of the Watergate Affair
> and Henry Kissinger's travels all
> American television networks bring
> the latest on the film
> "The Exorcist"

In a technological nightmare who can count the horrors

> You play with stringed ears
> tucked to a belt you rape and set on fire
> you watch as it burns and folds in a cramp
> the naked and bloody body of a girl
> and you vomit

Television viewers the press reports have seen
> the audiences running out of the theatre
> before the film's end firmly holding hands
> on their mouths and the theatre manager
> distributing heaving bags the oral-anal tube
> for gulping down fresh blood puss and vomited vomit
> has been unclogged

> Extended senses stuck in the tools of intercourse
> at the door of the mortuary

the devil has claimed the burnt land
sterile from napalm priests and doctors
civilized exorcise the devil from Linda Blair
> they exorcise the souls of countless victims
> to induce the viewers's vomit lying
> in the fields are girls whose blood is spilled
> and puss covers their faces Linda Blair is lying
> with *help* written across her belly
> and a crucifix between her legs

the underage Linda Blair masturbates with the crucifix
> for thousands of viewers vomiting is a masturbatory

stimulans at the price of 50 dollars
the oral-anal tube is jerking still thirsty for horrors

The restless libido has found a host in the body of L.B. Film, in turn, has become the matter of writing – a ready-made substance of poetry.