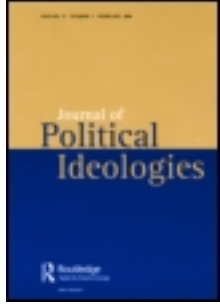


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For a leftist appropriation of the European legacy

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For a leftist appropriation of the European legacy

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ABSTRACT *This article focuses on Jacques Rancière's opposition between the two facets of the political: the 'police' (maintaining social order) and politicization proper (in which an excluded element—demos, 'le troisième état', a dissident Forum—asserts itself as the immediate embodiment of the Whole of Society). After analysing different modalities of the 'repression' of this gesture of politicization (from arch-politics to today's postmodern post-political 'identity-politics'), the article proposes a reading of the disintegration of Eastern European Socialism as a moment of authentic politicization, and then proceeds to oppose globalization and universalization: universalization is the key moment of the political 'short-circuit' between the Whole and its excluded Part, while globalization (the newly emerging 'post-political' global order) presents perhaps the strongest threat to politics proper yet.*

Introduction

Schelling's statement according to which, 'the beginning is the negation of that which begins with it', fits perfectly the itinerary of Jacques Rancière who began as a strict Althusserian (with a contribution to *Lire le Capital*) and, then, after a violent gesture of distancing (*La leçon d'Althusser*), followed his own path, which focuses on what he perceived as the main negative aspect of Althusser's thought: his theoreticist élitism, his insistence on the gap which forever separates the universe of scientific cognition from that of ideological (mis)recognition into which the common masses are immersed. Against this stance, which allows theoreticians to 'speak for' the masses of people, to know the truth about them, Rancière endeavours again and again to elaborate the contours of those magic, violently poetic moments of political subjectivization in which the excluded ('lower classes') put forward their claim to speak for themselves, to effectuate the change in the global perception of the social space, so that their claims would have a legitimate place in it. Rancière's last book, *La mesentente*,¹ provides a definite formulation of this endeavour.

Politics and its repressions

How, for Rancière, did politics proper begin? With the emergence of *demos* as an active agent within the Greek *polis*: of a group which, although without any fixed place in the social edifice (or, at best, occupying a subordinated place), demanded to be included in the public sphere, to be heard on equal footing with the ruling oligarchy or aristocracy, i.e. recognized as a partner in political dialogue and power exercise. As Rancière emphasizes against Habermas, the political struggle proper is therefore not a rational debate between multiple interests, but, simultaneously, the struggle for one's voice to be heard and recognized as the voice of a legitimate partner: when the 'excluded', from the Greek *demos* to Polish workers, protested against the ruling élite (aristocracy or *nomenklatura*), the true stakes were not only their explicit demands (for higher wages, work conditions, etc.), but their very right to be heard and recognized as an equal partner in the debate—in Poland, the *nomenklatura* lost the moment it had to accept Solidarity as an equal partner. Furthermore, in protesting the wrong (*le tort*) they suffered, they also presented themselves as the immediate embodiment of *society as such*, as the stand-in for the Whole of Society in its universality, against the particular power-interests of aristocracy or oligarchy ('we—the 'nothing', not counted in the order—are the people, we are All against others who stand only for their particular privileged interests'). Politics proper thus always involves a kind of short-circuit between the Universal and the Particular: the paradox of a singular which appears as a stand-in for the Universal, destabilizing the 'natural' functional order of relations in the social body. The political conflict resides in the tension between the structured social body where each part has its place—what Rancière calls politics as *police* in the most elementary sense of maintaining social order—and 'the part with no-part' which unsettles this order on account of the empty principle of universality, of what Etienne Balibar calls *égalité*,² the principled equality-in-freedom of all man *qua* speaking beings. This identification of the non-part with the Whole, of the part of society with no properly defined place within it (or resisting the allocated subordinated place within it) with the Universal, is the elementary gesture of politicization, discernible in all great democratic events, from the French Revolution (in which *le troisième état* proclaimed itself identical to the Nation as such against aristocracy and clergy) to the demise of ex-European Socialism (in which the dissident Forum proclaimed itself representative of the entire society against the Party *nomenklatura*). In this precise sense, politics and democracy are synonymous: the basic aim of antidemocratic politics always and by definition is and was depoliticization, i.e. the unconditional demand that 'things should return to normal', with each individual doing his or her particular job. Rancière, of course, emphasizes how the line of separation between police and politics proper is always blurred and contested; say, in the Marxist tradition, 'proletariat' can be read as the subjectivization of the 'part of no-part' elevating its injustice into the ultimate test of universality, and, simultaneously, as the operator which will bring about the establishment of a post-political rational society.³

Let us take an example from the opposite part of the world, from Japan, where the caste of the untouchables is called the *burakumin*: those who are involved in the contact with dead flesh (butchers, leatherworkers, grave-diggers, and who are sometimes even referred to as *eta*, 'much filth'). Even now, in the 'enlightened' present when they are no longer openly despised, they are silently ignored—not only do companies still avoid hiring them or parents refuse to allow their children to marry them, but, under the 'politically correct' pretence not to offend them, one prefers to ignore the issue. The recently dead Sue Sumii, in her great series of novels *The River with No Bridge*, used the reference to *burakumin* to expose the meaninglessness of the entire Japanese caste hierarchy—significantly, her primordial traumatic experience was a shock when, as a child, she witnessed how, in order to honour the emperor, one of her relatives scraped the toilet used by the visiting emperor to preserve a piece of his shit as a sacred relic. This excremental identification of the *burakumin* is crucial: when Sue Sumii saw her relative cherishing the Emperor's excrement, her conclusion was that, in the same way, following the tradition of 'king's two bodies', i.e. of the king's body standing for the social body as such, the *burakumin* as the excrement of the social body should also be cherished. In other words, what Sue Sumii did was to take the structural homology between the two Emperor's bodies more literally and further than usual: even the lowest part (excrement) of the Emperor's body has to be reduplicated in his other, sublime body which stands for the body of society. Her predicament was similar to that of Plato's who, in *Parmenides*, bravely confronts the embarrassing problem of the exact scope of the relationship between eternal forms/ideas and their material copies: which material objects are 'ontologically covered' by eternal ideas as their models? Is there also an eternal idea of 'low' objects such as mud, filth or excrement? However, the crucial point and the proof of the non-political 'corporate' functioning of the Japanese society is the fact that, although voices like that of Sue Sumii are heard on their behalf, the *burakumin* did not actively politicize their destiny, did not constitute their position as that of *singulier universel*, claiming that, precisely as the 'part with no part', they stand for the true universality of Japanese society—in our European tradition itself, there is a series of disavowals of this political moment, of the proper logic of political conflict:

- *arch-politics*: the 'communitarian' attempts to define a traditional close organically structured homogeneous social space which allows for no void in which the political moment-event can emerge;
- *para-politics*: the attempt to depoliticize politics (to translate it into the police-logic): one accepts the political conflict, but reformulates it into a competition, within the representational space, between acknowledged parties/agents, for the (temporary) occupation of the place of executive power. This para-politics, of course, has a series of different successive versions: the main rupture is that between its classical and modern Hobbesian formulation, which focuses on the problem of social contract, of the alienation of individual rights

in the emergence of sovereign power. (Habermasian or Rawlsian ethics are perhaps the last philosophical vestiges of this attitude: the attempt to de-antagonize politics by way of formulating the clear rules to be obeyed so that the agonic procedure of litigation does not explode into politics proper);

- the Marxist (or Utopian Socialist) *meta-politics*: the political conflict is fully asserted, as a shadow-theatre on which processes—whose proper place is on Another Scene (of the economic infrastructure)—are played out; the ultimate goal of ‘true’ politics is thus its self-cancellation, the transformation of ‘administration of people’ into ‘administration of things’ within a fully self-transparent rational order of collective Will.⁴
- the most cunning and radical version, *ultra-politics*: the attempt to depoliticize the conflict by way of bringing it to an extreme, via the direct militarization of politics: the ‘foreclosed’ political returns in the real, in the guise of the attempt to resolve the deadlock of the political conflict, of *mesentente*, by its false radicalization, i.e. by way of reformulating it as a *war* between ‘Us’ and ‘Them’, our Enemy, where there is no common ground for symbolic conflict (Schmitt *et al.*⁵).

Appearance versus simulacrum

Crucial here is Rancière’s critical distance towards Marxist meta-politics. The key feature of meta-politics is that, to put it in the terms of Jacques Lacan’s matrix of four discourses,⁶ the place of the ‘agent’ is occupied in it by *knowledge*: Marx presented his position as that of ‘scientific materialism’, i.e. meta-politics is a politics which legitimizes itself by means of a direct reference to the scientific status of its knowledge (it is this knowledge which enables meta-politics to draw a line of distinction between those immersed in politico-ideological illusions and the Party which grounds its historical intervention in the knowledge about effective socio-economic processes). This knowledge (about class society and relations of production in Marxism) suspends the classic opposition of *Sein* and *Sollen*, of Being and Ought, of that which Is and the ethical Ideal: the ethical Ideal towards which the revolutionary subject strives is directly grounded in (or coincides with) the ‘objective,’ ‘disinterested’ scientific knowledge of social processes—this coincidence opens up a space for ‘totalitarian’ violence, since, in this way, acts which run against the elementary norms of ethical decency can be legitimized as grounded in the (insight into the) historical Necessity (say, the mass killing of the members of the ‘bourgeois class’ is grounded in the scientific insight that this class is already in itself ‘condemned to disappear’, past its ‘progressive role’, etc.). Therein resides the difference between the standard destructive, even murderous, dimension of strictly adhering to the ethical Ideal, and modern totalitarianism: the terrorism of the Jacobins in the French Revolution, grounded in their strict adherence to the ideal of *égalité*, i.e. in their attempt to realize directly this ideal, to impose it onto reality, this coincidence of the purest idealism with the most destructive

violence already analysed by Hegel in the famous chapter of his *Phenomenology* on absolute terror, is not enough to explain contemporary, 20th century totalitarianism: what the Jacobins lacked was the reference to an objective/neutral 'scientific' knowledge of history legitimizing their exercise of unconditional power. It is only the Leninist revolutionary, not yet the Jacobin, who thus occupies the properly perverse position of the pure instrument of historical Necessity made accessible by means of scientific knowledge.

Rancière follows here Claude Lefort's insight into how the space for (Communist) totalitarianism was opened by the very 'democratic invention': totalitarianism is an inherent perversion of democratic logic. First, we have the traditional Master who grounds his authority in some transcendent reason (divine right, etc.); what then becomes visible with the 'democratic invention' is the gap which separates the positive person of the Master from the place he occupies in the symbolic network. With the 'democratic invention', the place of Power is posited as originally *empty*, occupied only temporarily and contingently by different subjects. In other words, it now becomes visible that (to quote Marx) people do not treat somebody as a King because he is in himself a King—he is a King *because* and *as long as* people treat him as a King. Totalitarianism takes into account this rupture accomplished by the 'democratic invention': the totalitarian Master fully accepts the logic of 'I am a Master only insofar as you treat me as one', i.e. his position involves no reference to some transcendent ground—on the contrary, he emphatically tells his followers 'In myself, I am nothing, my whole strength derives from you, I am only the embodiment of your deepest strivings; the moment I lose my roots in you, I am lost ...'. His entire legitimacy derives from his position of a pure servant of the People: the more he 'modestly' diminishes and instrumentalizes his role, the more he emphasizes that he merely expresses and realizes the strivings of the People themselves who are the true Master, the more all-powerful and untouchable he becomes, since, in this case, any attack on him is effectively an attack on the People themselves, on their innermost longings. The People is thus split into actual individuals (prone to treason and all kinds of human weaknesses) and *the* People embodied in the Master. Perhaps, then, these three logics (that of the traditional Master; of the democratic regulated fight for the empty place of Power; of the totalitarian Master) fit the three modes of the disavowal of politics conceptualized by Rancière: the traditional Master functions within the space of arch-politics; democracy involves para-politics, i.e. the gentrification of politics proper in regulated agonism (the rules of elections and representative democracy, etc.); the totalitarian Master is only possible within the space of meta-politics.⁷

Rancière is thus right to emphasize the radical ambiguity of the Marxist notion of the 'gap' between formal democracy (the rights of man, political freedom, etc.) and the economic reality of exploitation and domination. One can read this gap between the 'appearance' of *égalité* and the social reality of economic, cultural, etc. differences either in the standard meta-political 'symptomatic' way (the form of universal rights, equality, freedom and democ-

racy, is just a necessary, but illusory, form of expression of its concrete social content, the universe of exploitation and class domination), or in the much more subversive sense of a tension in which the 'appearance' of *égalité*, precisely, is not a 'mere appearance', but evinces an effectivity of its own that allows it to set in motion the process of the rearticulation of actual socio-economic relations by way of their progressive 'politicization' (Why should women also not vote? Why should conditions at the work place not also be of public political concern?, etc.) One is tempted to use here the old Lévi-Straussian term of 'symbolic efficiency': the appearance of *égalité* is a symbolic fiction which, as such, possesses actual efficiency of its own—one should resist the properly cynical temptation of reducing it to a mere illusion which conceals a different actuality.

Crucial here is the distinction between appearance and the post-modern notion of 'simulacrum' as no longer clearly distinguishable from the real.⁸ The notion of the political as the domain of appearance (opposed to the social reality of class and other distinctions, i.e. of society as the articulated social body) has nothing in common with the postmodern notion that we are entering the era of universalized simulacra in which reality itself becomes indistinguishable from its simulated double. The nostalgic longing for the authentic experience of being lost in the deluge of simulacra (detectable in Virilio), as well as the postmodern assertion of the Brave New World of universalized simulacra as the sign that we are finally getting rid of the metaphysical obsession with authentic Being (detectable in Vattimo), both miss the distinction between simulacrum and appearance: what gets lost in today's 'plague of simulations' is not the firm, true, non-simulated real, but *appearance itself*. To put it in Lacanian terms: simulacrum is imaginary (illusion), while appearance is symbolic (fiction); when the specific dimension of symbolic appearance starts to disintegrate, imaginary and real become more and more indistinguishable. The key to today's universe of simulacra in which real is less and less distinguishable from its imaginary simulation resides in the retreat of 'symbolic efficiency'. And, in socio-political terms, this domain of appearance (of symbolic fiction) is none other than that of politics as distinguished from the social body subdivided into parts. There is 'appearance' insofar as we are dealing with a 'part of the no-part', insofar as a part not included in the Whole of the Social Body (or included/excluded in a way against which it resists) protests against its position, against its allocated place, and symbolizes its position as that of a *tort*, of injustice, claiming that, against other parts, it stands for the universality of *égalité*: we are dealing here with appearance in contrast with the 'reality' of the structured social body. The old conservative motto of 'preserving appearances' thus obtains today a new twist: it no longer stands for the 'wisdom' according to which it is better not to disturb too much the rules of social etiquette, since social chaos might ensue. Today, the effort to 'preserve appearances' stands rather for the effort to preserve properly political space against the onslaught of a postmodern all-embracing social-body with a multitude of particular identities.⁹

This is also how one has to read Hegel's famous dictum from his *Pheno-*

menology, according to which 'the Suprasensible is appearance *qua* appearance.' In a sentimental answer to a child asking him how does God's face look, a priest answered that, whenever the child encounters a human face irradiating benevolence and goodness, whomever this face belongs, he gets a glimpse of His face. The truth of this sentimental platitude is that the Suprasensible (God's face) is discernible as a momentary, fleeting appearance, a 'grimace', of an ordinary face. It is this dimension of 'appearance' which transubstantiates a piece of reality into something which, for a brief moment, irradiates the suprasensible Eternity, that is missing in the logic of simulacrum: in a simulacrum which becomes indistinguishable from the real, everything is here, so that no other, transcendent dimension effectively 'appears' in/through it. We are back at the Kantian problematic of the sublime here: in Kant's famous reading of the enthusiasm evoked by the French Revolution among the enlightened public around Europe, the revolutionary events functioned as a sign through which the dimension of transphenomenal Freedom, of a free society, *appeared*. 'Appearance' is thus not simply the domain of phenomena, but those 'magic moments' in which the other, noumenal, dimension momentarily 'appears' in ('shines through') some empirical/contingent phenomenon. So, back to Hegel, 'the Suprasensible is appearance *qua* appearance' does not simply mean that the Suprasensible is not a positive entity *beyond* the phenomena, but the inherent power of negativity which makes appearance 'merely an appearance', i.e. something that is not in itself fully actual, but condemned to perish in the process of self-sublation. It also means that the Suprasensible comes to exist only in the guise of an appearance of Another Dimension, which interrupts the standard normal order of phenomena.

The post-political regime

What we have in all the four cases—arch, para-, meta- and ultra-politics—is thus an attempt to gentrify the properly traumatic dimension of the political: something emerged in ancient Greece under the name of *polis* demanding its rights, and, from the very beginning (i.e. from Plato's *Republic*) to the recent revival of liberal political thought, 'political philosophy' was an attempt to suspend the destabilizing potential of the political, to disavow and/or regulate it in one way or another: bringing about a return to a pre-political social body, fixing the rules of political competition, etc. 'Political philosophy' is thus, in all its different shapes, a kind of 'defence-formation', and, perhaps, its typology could be established via reference to the different modalities of defence against some traumatic experience in psychoanalysis.¹⁰ Its four versions form a kind of Greimasian logical square in which arch- and ultra- are the two faces of the traditionalist attitude (self-enclosed community versus its war with external enemies), and para- and meta- the two versions of modern politics (democratic formal rules versus the notion that this field of the democratic game just expresses and/or distorts another level of pre-political socio-economic processes at which 'things really happen'), while, on the other axis, both meta- and

ultra-politics involve the notion of insurpassable struggle, conflict, antagonism, against the assertion of a harmonious collaboration in arch- and para-politics. In contrast to these four versions, today's 'postmodern' *post-politics* opens up a new field which involves a stronger negation of politics: it no longer merely 'represses' it, trying to contain it and to pacify the 'returns of the repressed', but much more effectively 'forecloses' it, so that the postmodern forms of ethnic violence, with their 'irrational' excessive character, are no longer simple 'returns of the repressed', but rather present the case of the foreclosed (from the Symbolic) which, as we know from Lacan, returns in the Real.

In post-politics, the conflict of global ideological visions embodied in different parties who compete for power is replaced by a collaboration of enlightened technocrats (economists, public opinion specialists ...) and liberal multiculturalists; via the process of negotiation of interests, a compromise is reached in the guise of a more or less universal consensus. The political (the space of litigation in which the excluded can protest the wrong/injustice done to them), foreclosed from the symbolic then returns in the real, in the form of racism. It is crucial to perceive how 'postmodern racism' emerges as the ultimate consequence of the post-political suspension of the political in the reduction of the state to a mere police agent servicing the (consensually established) needs of the market forces and multiculturalist tolerant humanitarianism: the 'foreigner' whose status is never properly regulated is the *indivisible remainder* of the transformation of democratic political struggle into the post-political procedure of negotiation and multiculturalist policing. Instead of the *political* subject 'working class' demanding its universal rights, we get, on the one hand, the multiplicity of particular social strata or groups, each with its problems (the dwindling need for manual workers, etc.), and, on the other hand, the immigrant, more and more prevented from *politicizing* his predicament of exclusion.¹¹

Here one should oppose *globalization* to *universalization*. Globalization (not only in the sense of global capitalism, the establishment of a global world market, but also in the sense of the assertion of 'humanity' as the global point of reference of human rights, legitimizing the violation of State sovereignty, of police interventions, from trade restrictions to direct military interventions, in parts of the world where global human rights are violated) is precisely the name for the emerging post-political logic which progressively precludes the dimension of universality which appears in politicization proper. The paradox is that there is no *universality* proper without the process of political litigation, of the 'part of no-part', of an out-of-joint entity presenting/manifesting itself as the stand-in for the universal.

Rancière is right to emphasize how it is against this background that one should interpret the fascination of 'public opinion' by the unique event of *holocaust*: the reference to *holocaust* as the ultimate, unthinkable, apolitical crime, as the Evil so radical that it cannot be politicized (accounted for by a political dynamics), serves as the operator which allows us to depoliticize the social sphere, to warn against the presumption of politicization. *Holocaust* is the name for the unthinkable apolitical excess of politics itself: it compels us to

subordinate politics to some more fundamental *ethics*. The Otherness excluded from the consensual domain of tolerant/rational post-political negotiation and administration returns in the guise of inexplicable pure Evil. What defines postmodern 'post-politics' is thus the secret solidarity between its two opposed Janus faces: on the one hand, the replacement of politics proper by depoliticized 'humanitarian' operations (the humanitarian protection of human and civil rights and aid to Bosnia, Somalia, Ruanda, North Korea ...); on the other hand, the violent emergences of depoliticized 'pure Evil' in the guise of 'excessive' ethnic or religious fundamentalist violence. In short, what Rancière proposes here is a new version of the old Hegelian motto 'Evil resides in the gaze itself which perceives the object as Evil': the contemporary figure of Evil, too 'strong' to be accessible to political analysis (holocaust, etc.), appears as such only to the gaze which constitutes it as such (as depoliticized). To put it in Hegel's terms, what is crucial is their speculative identity, i.e. the 'infinite judgement', 'Humanitarian depoliticized compassion is the excess of Evil over its political forms'.

From the sublime to the ridiculous

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

The hero of Dashiell Hammett's *Maltese Falcon*, the private detective Sam Spade, narrates the story of his being hired to find a man who had suddenly left his settled job and family and vanished. Spade is unable to track him down, but, a few years later, he accidentally encounters the man in a bar in another city. There, under an assumed name, the man leads a life remarkably similar to the one he fled from (a regular boring job, a new wife and

children)—however, in spite of this similarity, the man is convinced that his beginning again was not in vain, that it was well worth the trouble to cut his ties and start a new life. Perhaps the same goes for the passage from really existing Socialism to really existing capitalism in ex-Communist East European countries: in spite of betrayed enthusiastic expectations, something did take place in between, in the passage itself, and it is in this Event which took place in between, this ‘vanishing mediator’, in this moment of democratic enthusiasm, that we should locate the crucial dimension obfuscated by later renormalization.

It is clear that the protesting crowds in the DDR, in Poland and the Czech Republic ‘wanted something else’, a utopian object of impossible Fullness designated by a multiplicity of names (‘solidarity’, ‘human rights’, etc.), *not* what they effectively got. There are two reactions possible towards this gap between expectations and reality; the best way to capture them is via the reference to the well-known opposition between *fool* and *knave*. The fool is a simpleton, a court jester who is allowed to tell the truth, precisely because the ‘performative power’ (the socio-political efficiency) of his speech is suspended; the knave is the cynic who openly states the truth, a crook who tries to sell as honesty the open admission of his crookedness, a scoundrel who admits the need for illegitimate repression in order to maintain social stability. This opposition has a clear political connotation: today’s Right-wing intellectual is a knave, a conformist who refers to the mere existence of the given order as an argument for it and mocks the Left on account of its ‘utopian’ plans, which necessarily lead to totalitarian or anarchic catastrophe, while the Left-wing intellectual is a fool, a court jester who publicly displays the lie of the existing order, but in a way which suspends the socio-political efficiency of his speech. After the fall of Socialism, the knave is a neoconservative advocate of the free market, who cruelly rejects all forms of social solidarity as counter-productive sentimentalism, while the fool is a multiculturalist ‘radical’ social criticist who, by means of his ludic procedures destined to ‘subvert’ the existing order, actually serves as its supplement. With regard to Eastern Europe, a knave dismisses the ‘third way’ project of *Neues Forum* in ex-DDR as hopelessly outdated utopia and exhorts us to accept the cruel market reality, while a fool insists that the collapse of Socialism effectively opened up a Third Way, a possibility left unexploited by the Western re-colonization of the East.

This cruel reversal of the sublime into the ridiculous was, of course, grounded in the fact that there was a double misunderstanding at work in the public (self)perception of the social protest movements in the last years of Eastern European Socialism (from Solidarity to *Neues Forum*). On the one hand, there were the attempts of the ruling *nomenklatura* to reinscribe these events in their police/political framework, by way of distinguishing between ‘honest critics’ with whom one should debate, but in a calm, rational, depoliticized atmosphere, and a bunch of extremist provocateurs who serve foreign interests. (This logic was brought to its absurd extreme in ex-Yugoslavia, in which the very notion of a worker’s strike was incomprehensible, since, according to the ruling ideological space, workers already rule in self-management of

their companies—against whom, then, could they strike?) The battle was thus not only for higher wages and better conditions, but also and above all for the workers to be acknowledged as legitimate partners in negotiating with the representative of the regime—the moment the powers were forced to accept this, the battle was in a way already won. The interesting point here is how, in this struggle within Socialism in decay, the very term ‘political’ functioned in an inverted way: it was the Communist Party (standing for the police logic) which ‘politicized’ the situation (speaking of ‘counter-revolutionary tendencies’, etc.), while the opposition movement insisted on its fundamentally ‘apolitical’, civic–ethical character: they just stood for ‘simple values’ of dignity, freedom, etc.—no wonder that their main signifier was the ‘apolitical’ notion of solidarity.

On the other hand, when these movements exploded in a broad mass phenomenon, their demands for freedom and democracy (and solidarity and ...) were also misperceived by Western commentators. They saw in them the confirmation that the people of the East also want what the people in the West already have, i.e. they automatically translated these demands into the Western liberal-democratic notion of freedom (a multiparty representational political game cum global market economy). Emblematic to the level of caricature here was the figure of Dan Rather, the American news reporter, on Tien An Mien Square in 1989, standing in front of the copy of the Liberty Statue and claiming how this statue says it all about what the protesting students demand (in short, if you scratch the yellow skin of a Chinese, you find an American ...). What this Statue effectively stood for was a utopian longing which had nothing to do with the actual USA (incidentally, it was the same with the original immigrants to America for whom the view of the Statue stood for a utopian longing, soon crushed down). The perception of the American media thus offered another example of the reinscription of the explosion of what Etienne Balibar called *égaliberté* (the unconditional demand for freedom—equality which explodes any positive order) within the confines of a given order.

A tertium datur

Are we then condemned to the debilitating alternative of choosing between a knave or a fool, or is there a *tertium datur*? Perhaps the contours of this *tertium datur* can be discerned via the reference to the fundamental European legacy. When one says ‘European legacy’, every self-respectful Leftist intellectual has the same reaction as Joseph Goebbels had to culture as such—he reaches for his gun and starts to shoot out accusations of proto-Fascist Eurocentrist cultural imperialism. However, is it possible to imagine a Leftist appropriation of the European political tradition? Was it not *politicization* in a specific Greek sense which re-emerged violently in the disintegration of Eastern European Socialism? From my own political past, I remember how, after four journalists were arrested and brought to trial by the Yugoslav Army in Slovenia in 1988, I participated in the ‘Committee for the protection of the human rights of the

four accused'. Officially, the goal of the Committee was just to guarantee fair treatment for the four accused; however, the Committee turned into the major oppositional political force, practically the Slovene version of the Czech Civic Forum or East German *Neues Forum*, the body which coordinated democratic opposition, a *de facto* representative of civil society. The program of the Committee was set up in four items; the first three directly concerned the accused, while the 'devil which resides in the detail', of course, was the fourth item, which said that the Committee wanted to clarify the entire background of the arrest of the four accused and thus contribute to creating the circumstances in which such arrests would no longer be possible—a coded way to say that we wanted the abolishment of the existing Socialist regime. Our demand 'Justice for the accused four!' started to function as the metaphoric condensation of the demand for the global overthrow of the Socialist regime. For that reason, in almost daily negotiations with the Committee, the Communist Party officials were always accusing us of a 'hidden agenda', claiming that the liberation of the accused four was not our true goal, i.e. that we were 'exploiting and manipulating the arrest and trial for other, darker political goals'. In short, the Communists wanted to play the 'rational' depoliticized game: they wanted to deprive the slogan 'Justice for the accused four!' of its explosive general connotation, and to reduce it to its literal meaning which concerned just a minor legal matter; they cynically claimed that it was us, the Committee, who were behaving 'non-democratically' and manipulating the fate of the accused, coming up with global pressure and blackmailing strategies instead of focusing on the particular problem of the plight of the accused.

This is politics proper: this moment in which a particular demand is not simply part of the negotiation of interests, but aims at something more, i.e. starts to function as the metaphoric condensation of the global restructuring of the entire social space. The contrast is clear between this subjectivization of a part of the social body which rejects its subordinated place in the social police edifice and demands to be heard at the level of *égalité*, and today's proliferation of postmodern 'identity-politics' whose goal is the exact opposite, i.e. precisely the assertion of one's particular identity, of one's proper place within the social structure. The postmodern identity-politics of particular (ethnic, sexual, etc.) life-styles fits perfectly the depoliticized notion of society in which every particular group is 'accounted for', has its specific status (of a victim) acknowledged through affirmative action or other measures destined to guarantee social justice. The fact that this kind of justice rendered to victimized minorities requires an intricate police apparatus (for identifying the group in question, for punishing the offenders against its rights—how legally to define sexual harassment or racial injury, etc.—for providing the preferential treatment which should outweigh the wrong this group suffered) is deeply significant. The postmodern 'identity politics' involves the logic of *ressentiment*, of proclaiming oneself a victim and expecting the social big Other to 'pay for the damage', while *égalité* breaks out of the vicious cycle of *ressentiment*. What is usually praised as 'postmodern politics' (the pursuit of particular issues whose resolution

is to be negotiated within the 'rational' global order allocating to its particular component its proper place) is thus effectively the end of politics proper.

Two interconnected traps are to be avoided at all costs apropos of the fashionable topic of the 'end of ideology' brought about by the present process of globalization: first, the commonplace according to which today's main antagonism is between global liberal capitalism and different forms of ethnic/religious fundamentalism; second, the hasty identification of globalization (the contemporary transnational functioning of capital) with universalization. As we have already seen, the true opposition today is rather between globalization (the emerging global market New World Order) and universalism (the properly political domain of universalization of one's particular fate as representative of global injustice). This difference between globalization and universalism becomes more and more palpable today, when capital, on behalf of penetrating new markets, quickly renounces requests for democracy in order not to lose access to new trading partners. This shameful retreat is then, of course, legitimized as 'respect of cultural difference', as the right of the (ethnic-religious-cultural) Other to choose the way of life it suits it best—as long as it does not disturb the free circulation of Capital.

This opposition between universalism and globalization is best exemplified by two names: France and the USA. French republican ideology is the epitome of modernist universalism: of democracy, based on a universal notion of citizenship. In clear contrast to it, the USA is a global society, a society in which the global market and legal system serve as the container (rather than the proverbial 'melting pot') for the endless proliferation of particular group identities. So, the paradox is that the proper roles seem to be reversed: France, in its republican universalism, is more and more perceived as a *particular* phenomenon threatened by the process of globalization, while the USA, with its multitude of groups demanding recognition of their particular, specific identity, more and more emerges as the 'universal' model.

So why shouldn't we simply *accept* this post- (political, ideological ...) universe and just strive for a comfortable niche in it? The problem with this easy way out is, as we have already seen, that re-emerging populist fundamentalism, far from being a simple remainder of a primitive ideological past, is the inherent product of globalization, the living proof of the failure of the post-modern abolition of politics, in which the basic economic logic is accepted as the depoliticized Real (a neutral expert knowledge which defines the parameters within which the different strata of population and political subjects are expected to reach a compromise and formulate their common goals). Within this space, the political returns in two guises: Rightist populism; the 'wild' demands for social justice, for security of employment, etc., which are then denounced by 'neutral' economic specialists as 'irrational', 'out of touch' with the new reality of the demise of the welfare state, as the remainders of 'old ideological battles'. The (potential) partner is also neutralized here, not acknowledged as a partner at all: the position from which he speaks is disqualified in advance.

Multiculturalist openness versus new fundamentalism is thus a false dilemma: they are the two faces of today's *post-political* universe. In this universe, the conflict of global ideological visions embodied in different parties who compete for power is replaced by the collaboration of enlightened technocrats (economists, public opinion specialists, etc.) and liberal multiculturalists; via the process of negotiation of interests, a compromise is reached in the guise of a more or less universal consensus. This late-capitalist solution is best epitomized by the name 'Singapore', designating the paradoxical combination of capitalist economic logic with a corporate communitarian ethics which precludes any politicization of social life. It is deeply significant that, in the last years of his life, the late Deng himself, the 'father of Chinese reforms', expressed his admiration for Singapore as the model to be followed in China. The motto of the 'wise' Asian rulers like Singapore's Lee Kwan Yew—the combination of the full inclusion of their economies into global capitalism with the traditional Asian values of discipline, respect for tradition, etc.—points precisely towards *globalization without universalism*, i.e. with a suspended political dimension. In a different way, the model towards which the USA seems to move—the permissive co-existence of the multitude of ways of life within the global capitalist framework—approaches in another way the same result of depoliticization.

The opposition of globalization to particular cultural identity embodied in a specific way of life is thus misleading: what is effectively threatened by globalization is not the *cosa nostra* (our private secret way of life from which others are excluded, which others want to steal from us), but its exact opposite: universality itself in its eminently political dimension. One of the common wisdoms today is that we are entering a new Medieval society in the guise of the New World Order—the grain of truth in this comparison is that, like Medieval times, the New World Order is global, but not universal, since it strives for a new global *order* with each part at its allocated place.

The predominant perception of the tension which threatens the realization of the project of the European Union ('Brussels bureaucrats' with their alienated regulations which pose a threat to national sovereignty as the only safeguard of the *cosa nostra* of our way of life) is thus also misleading: what both poles of this tension exclude is the space for politicization proper. A typical advocate of liberalism today throws together worker's protests against curtailing their rights and right-wing insistence on fidelity to the Western cultural heritage: he perceives both as pitiful reminders of the 'age of ideology' which have nothing to do with today's post-ideological universe. However, the two resistances to globalization follow totally incompatible logics: the Right insists on *particular* communal identity (*ethnos* or *habitat*) threatened by the onslaught of globalization, while for the Left, the dimension under threat is that of politicization, of articulating 'impossible' *universal* demands ('impossible' from within the existing space of World Order).

Therein resides the ambiguity of the process symbolized by the name 'Maastricht': is this (anti-)politics of consensus, of 'post-ideological' administration and creation of the ideal conditions for the capital, supplemented by empty

pep-talk about safeguarding specific cultural identities against Americanization, enough? From the sublime heights of Habermas' theory to vulgar market ideologists, we are bombarded by different versions of depoliticization: no longer struggle but dialogic negotiation, regulated competition, etc. If the European Union is to be only this, only a more efficient and multiculturally tolerant centre of power able to compete with the USA and Eastern Asia as the three nodal points of the New World Order, then this goal, although quite legitimate and worthwhile, involves renouncing the fundamental European democratic legacy. No wonder that border controls emerge as one of the main points of the European Union's administrative negotiations—a clear indication that we are dealing with anti-politics, with the reduction of politics to social *Polizei*. Against this 'end of ideology' politics, one should insist on the potential of democratic politicization as the true European legacy from ancient Greece onwards. *Will Europe be able to invent a new model of repoliticization questioning the undisputed reign of global capital?* Only such a repoliticization of our predicament can break the vicious cycle of liberal globalization destined to engender the most regressive forms of fundamentalist hatred.

Notes and references

1. J. Rancière, *La mesentente* (Paris: Galilee, 1995).
2. See E. Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas* (New York: Routledge, 1994).
3. Sometimes, the shift from politics proper to police can only be a matter of the change from the definite to the indefinite article, like the East German crowds demonstrating against the Communist regime in the last days of the GDR: first they shouted 'We are the people!' ('*Wir sind das Volk!*'), thereby performing the gesture of politicization at its purest—they, the excluded counter-revolutionary 'scum' of the official Whole of the People, with no proper place in the official space (or, more precisely, only with titles such as 'counter-revolutionaries', 'hooligans', or, at best, 'victims of the bourgeois propaganda', reserved for their designation), claimed to stand for the people, for 'all'. However, a couple of days later, the slogan changed into 'We are *a*one people!' ('*Wir sind ein Volk!*'), clearly signalling the closure of the momentary authentic political opening, the reappropriation of the democratic impetus by the thrust towards the reunification of Germany, which meant rejoining Western Germany's liberal-capitalist police/political order.
4. More precisely, Marxism is ambiguous here, since the very term 'political economy' also opens up the space for the opposite gesture of introducing politics into the very heart of economy, i.e. of denouncing the 'apolitical' character of the economic processes as the supreme ideological illusion: class struggle does not 'express' some objective economic contradiction, it is the very form of existence of this contradiction.
5. It is deeply symptomatic that, instead of class *struggle*, the radical Right speaks of class (or sexual) *warfare*.
6. See J. Lacan, *Le séminaire, livre XVII: L'envers de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1991).
7. Perhaps the distinction between Communist and Fascist Master resides in the fact that—in spite of all the talk about racial science, etc.—the innermost logic of Fascism is not meta-political, but ultra-political: the Fascist Master is a warrior in politics.
8. See J. Rancière, *op. cit.*, Ref. 1, pp. 144–146.
9. This crucial distinction between simulacrum (overlapping with the real) and appearance is also easily discernible in the domain of sexuality, as the distinction between pornography and seduction: pornography 'shows it all', 'real sex', and for that very reason produces the mere simulacrum of sexuality, while the process of seduction consists entirely in the play of appearances, hints and promises, and thereby evokes the elusive domain of the suprasensible sublime Thing. For a more detailed analysis of the libidinal impact of pornography, see Appendix 1 to S. Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997).
10. The metaphoric frame which we use in order to account for the political process is thus never innocent and neutral: it 'schematizes' the concrete meaning of politics. Ultra-politics has recourse to the model of *warfare*: politics is conceived as a form of social warfare, as the relationship to 'Them', to an Enemy.

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Arch-politics today usually has recourse to the *medical* model: society is a corporate body, an organism, social divisions are like illnesses of this organism, i.e. what we should fight, our enemy, is a cancerous intruder, a pest, a foreign parasite to be exterminated if the health of the social body is to be re-established. Para-politics uses the model of *agonistic competition*, which follows some commonly accepted strictly established rules, like a sporting event. Post-politics involves the model of business *negotiation* and strategic compromise.

11. See J. Rancière, *op. cit.*, Ref. 1, p. 162.