

# Filozofski vestnik

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POLITICS, AFFECTS, WRITING  
THE AESTHETICS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

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2016

Filozofski vestnik



ISSN 0353 4510  
Letnik / Volume XXXVII  
Številka / Number 1  
Ljubljana 2016

# Filozofski vestnik

ISSN 0353-4510

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fi@zrc-sazu.si | <http://fi2.zrc-sazu.si/sl/publikacije/filozofski-vestnik#v>

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Revija izhaja trikrat letno. | *The journal is published three times annually.*

Letna naročnina: 21 €. Letna naročnina za študente in dijake: 12,50 €.

Cena posamezne številke: 10 €. | *Annual subscription: €21 for individuals, €40 for institutions. Single issues: €10 for individuals, €20 for institutions. Back issues are available.*

## Naročila sprejema

Založba ZRC  
p. p. 306, 1001 Ljubljana  
Tel.: (01) 470 64 64  
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Oblikovanje / *Design*: Phant&Puntza

Tisk / *Printed by*: Cicero Begunje

Naklada / *Print run*: 460

# Filozofski vestnik

XXXVII | 1/2016

**Izdaja | Published by**

Filozofski inštitut ZRC SAZU  
Institute of Philosophy at SRC SASA

**Ljubljana 2016**

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# **Politics, Affects, Writing**

Edited by Jelica Šumič Riha

Guillaume Sibertin-Blanc\*

## « Psychanalyse, différences anthropologiques et formes politiques : pour introduire la différence intensive »

« On est toujours stupéfait par la répétition de la même histoire : la modestie des revendications de minorités, au début, jointe à l'impuissance de l'axiomatique à résoudre le moindre problème correspondant. »<sup>1</sup>

Le titre de ce texte ne désigne qu'approximativement son contenu, en reliant son point de départ à ce qui reste pour l'instant l'horizon d'une recherche<sup>2</sup>. Ce point de départ, c'est une interrogation sur les « différences anthropologiques », sur la façon dont les formations discursives de la politique moderne, « bourgeoise » et « révolutionnaire » à la fois, en ont changé le statut et les enjeux, et sur la force de déstabilisation critique que la psychanalyse a eu, peut avoir, pourrait regagner (tout dépend du diagnostic que l'on en fait aujourd'hui), dans les investissements politiques des différences anthropologiques. De cette interrogation, j'emprunterai les grandes lignes de problématisation à celle proposée depuis la fin des années 1980 par Étienne Balibar, pour des raisons qui apparaîtront rapidement<sup>3</sup>. Mais l'hypothèse vers laquelle je voudrais cheminer – quitte à la lancer au devant de cette esquisse qui n'en posera finalement que quelques bornes – est que la pensée psychanalytique ne peut prendre une efficacité critique qu'à la condition de se laisser travailler par *des* anthropologies *autres*, ou pour le dire autrement, à la condition que la pensée psychanalytique mène jusqu'au bout ce qui fait son tranchant – tirer toutes les conséquences de l'hétéronomie de

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<sup>1</sup> G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, Paris, Minuit, 1980, p. 588.

<sup>2</sup> Ce texte est tiré d'une communication prononcée lors du VIII<sup>e</sup> colloque de la Société Internationale de Psychanalyse et de Philosophie : « *Psychoanalysis and the Forms of the Political* », à l'USP de Sao Paulo, le 23 novembre 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Ses premières formulations remontent à l'analyse de ce qu'il a appelé « la proposition d'égaliberté », occasionnée en 1989 par le bicentenaire de la révolution française, et rééditée il y a quelques années dans *La Proposition d'égaliberté* (Paris, PUF, 2010) ; on en suivra des jalons ultérieurs au fil des textes regroupés plus récemment dans *Citoyen-sujet et autres essais d'anthropologie philosophique* (Paris, PUF, 2011).

la pensée –, en s’enseignant à des pensées non moins *étrangères* que celles du désir inconscient. Ce serait donc se référer ici à une *deuxième* problématisation des différences anthropologiques, celle dont témoignent certaines recherches (sur la même séquence des dernières décennies que celles de Balibar – bien que les unes et les autres ne se croisent pas) en anthropologie disciplinaire, comme celles initiées par Marilyn Strathern dans sa vaste entreprise de repotentialisation réciproque de la lutte féministe et de la contre-anthropologie mélanésienne de nos catégories de personne, de chose et d’échange, et celles développées par Viveiros de Castro depuis son ethnographie des Araweté. Le fait que Balibar d’un côté, Viveiros de Castro de l’autre, puissent être lus aujourd’hui sur le plan philosophique comme les continuateurs de deux des critiques les plus radicales de « l’humanisme théorique » des années 1960-1970 – celle d’Althusser, celle de Deleuze et Guattari –, ne rend que d’autant plus intéressante la façon dont, *à travers cet anti-humanisme*, s’est trouvée désormais reposée la question anthropologique, aussi bien du point de vue d’une logique de l’inconscient que du point de vue des langages dans lesquels nous pensons et affrontons des problèmes « politiques ».

Mais ce serait là plutôt l’horizon de ce que je proposerai ici en prenant un autre point d’entrée, afin de réviser une tentative entreprise il y a quelques années<sup>4</sup> : celle d’une topique du sujet de la politique, ou d’une forme d’écriture de la politique « moderne » et des apories typiques qui travaillent ses régimes discursifs, qui permettrait de corréliser la question de la subjectivation politique à celle de l’inconscient, mais qui permettrait de le faire, non pas au niveau d’une « psychanalyse appliquée », ni au niveau d’une « psychologie politique », mais sur le plan d’une problématisation de ce qui se répète dans la politique, et de ce qui fait « symptôme » dans cette répétition. Sans doute il y a bien des manières différentes de concevoir la modernité politique, de la définir, et donc d’en mettre en question non seulement l’ouverture mais du même coup, fût-ce hypothéti-

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<sup>4</sup> G. Sibertin-Blanc, « Généalogie, topique, symptomatologie de la subjectivation politique : questions-programme pour un concept politique de minorité », *Dissensus. Revue de philosophie politique de l’Université de Liège*, n° 5, mai 2013, p. 102-122 ; *Causes mineures. Essai sur le sujet politique*, Thèse d’habilitation, Université Toulouse-Jean Jaurès, juillet 2013 ; « Le peuple qui manque, des symptômes au sujet : pour une écriture topologique des “trois concepts de la politique” de Balibar », conférence à l’Institut de Philosophie et de Théorie Sociale de Belgrade, 23 octobre 2013, URL : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JbwGsgYrD9E>.



quement, la clôture. Celle que je proposerai consisterait à la relier à trois composantes : *a/* la modernité politique se caractérise par l'instauration d'un ordre de *répétition*, dont il faut comprendre la logique pour en saisir le jeu *contraignant* ; *b/* elle se caractérise par *l'équivocité* de son sujet, ou l'équivocité des figures de la subjectivation politique, qui n'est pas seulement l'envers de cette répétition mais surtout la seule manière de la rendre productive subjectivement et politiquement ; *c/* elle se caractérise enfin par un rapport contradictoire entre l'*universalité* de son discours et sa *limite*, ou encore, par la contradiction entre une formation discursive dans laquelle « tout est politique » au moins virtuellement (ou au sein de laquelle aucune exclusion du champ politique n'est à l'abri d'être politisée à son tour), et une limite qu'elle affronte moins comme la frontière qui la sépare « extensivement » de son autre (comme « *non-politique* »), que sous la forme *intensive* de son abolition interne (comme « *impolitique* »). Ce sont les trois points que j'aborderai successivement, en tâchant de pointer simplement au fil du propos les déplacements du problème des différences anthropologiques.

### **1. Une répétition sans essence : la déclaration révolutionnaire de la politique, son universalité intensive, sa contradiction anthropologico-politique**

Si la « modernité politique » se caractérise par la répétition, c'est en un sens dont la singularité peut s'approcher d'abord négativement. C'est une répétition qui n'est pas le résultat d'une conception préexistante de l'histoire, par exemple celle qui, courbant le temps sur un mouvement cyclique, rendrait compte du retour du même. Mais ce n'est pas non plus une répétition résultant du seul caractère structurel de certains types de rapports de pouvoir, de domination ou d'exploitation, qui fonderait la valeur objective des analogies que l'on peut établir par la comparaison des situations, des formes et institutions de la conflictualité sociale, des « styles » de lutte, des logiques de mobilisation et d'organisation etc., et qui renverraient en dernière analyse à la reproduction historique de ces structures dans la longue durée. C'est au contraire la répétition d'une singularité, qui est d'abord la singularité d'un événement de discours, un énoncé corrélé à un acte d'énonciation inventant un type de position subjective elle-même inédite. Balibar en a analysé la structure en revenant à la Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen proclamée au début de la révolution française en 1789. Le site historico-politique en question est, non sans importance évidemment, mais secondaire, précisément parce que cette Déclaration, dans la matérialité

même de son énoncé, fut immédiatement en *excès* par rapport aux acteurs qui l'inventaient. Ce pour quoi elle put être aussitôt reprise par d'autres agents qui, au moins dans l'esprit de certains de ses rédacteurs, n'y étaient pas comptés. À commencer par les femmes, et par les esclaves haïtiens.

L'interprétation balibarienne de la *Déclaration* de 1789 se distingue de deux autres plus usuelles : l'interprétation qui y voit la première institutionnalisation de l'idée moderne de *droit naturel*, qu'elle réaliserait sous sa forme radicale en *fondant* la citoyenneté dans les droits imprescriptibles d'une nature humaine ; l'interprétation critique dont Marx a fixé dans *La Question juive* la structure argumentative, démasquant sous la distinction des deux termes, « l'homme » et le « citoyen », la mystification juridico-politique universalisant sous les traits autonomes d'une citoyenneté « formelle » les rapports « égoïstes » et aliénants de la société civile où s'affaire, sous le masque idéalisé de « l'homme », l'individu « réel », c'est-à-dire le bourgeois. Ce sur quoi Balibar attire l'attention, au contraire, c'est le fait qu'il est *impossible*, dans les 17 articles originaux de la Déclaration, de tracer la moindre distinction entre le *contenu* des « droits de l'homme » et celui les « droits du citoyen ». Impossible, en particulier, de répartir les principes de liberté et d'égalité dans un ordre de primauté, de fondement ou de hiérarchie de normes.

De cette observation simple, les conséquences sont extrêmes, dans tous les sens du terme : radicales et excessives. Elle implique d'abord que les concepts d'égalité et de liberté énoncent moins des principes distincts ou même des valeurs complémentaires, que des qualificatifs immédiatement réciproques : ce qui est égal, c'est la liberté de tous (contre l'inégale liberté des privilèges de la noblesse) ; ce qui est libre, c'est l'affirmation d'égalité par ceux qui se reconnaissent réciproquement tels (contre l'égalité dans un commun assujettissement au pouvoir monarchique). D'où le mot-valise forgé par Balibar sur la base de la formule latine *aequa libertas* : une déclaration d'égaliberté, dont aucun des deux éléments ne peut être retranché sans détruire l'autre. Elle implique aussi que les droits de l'homme et les droits du citoyen sont rigoureusement coextensifs, et, partant, que leurs sujets respectifs (« l'homme », « le citoyen ») sont *indiscernables*. Ce n'est pas une identité stricte, mais *presque* ; c'est donc une contiguïté-limite, c'est-à-dire une *identification intensive*, en deçà de tout seuil d'une différence minimale assignable. Et cette identification intensive suffit à bouleverser à la fois l'ontologie du sujet politique (ou ce que signifie

exister politiquement) et le type d'universalité politique instituée par la Déclaration révolutionnaire. Elle a pour effet de produire un universel que Balibar qualifie à son tour d'intensif, cette fois au sens d'une universalité qui ne définit aucun ensemble en extension, qui ni ne quantifie un « genre » ni ne s'attribue en vertu d'une essence positive aux individus qui le composent : son sujet est moins un « tous » ou un « tout le monde », qu'un « *quiconque* » ou *n'importe qui*. D'où la coupure qu'elle opère par rapport aux institutions de la citoyenneté de l'Antiquité, de la Renaissance, ou de la ville libre de l'âge classique européen. Ces dernières faisaient de la citoyenneté le corrélat d'une *appartenance* (*polis* ou *civitas*) préalablement déterminée par un titre, un statut, une capacité ou une condition. L'universalité « civique-bourgeoise » ne définit ni ne se réfère à aucune appartenance déterminée. Elle définit au contraire un droit à la politique dont *aucun être humain* ne peut être légitimement exclu *quel que soit son statut ou sa condition*. Son idéalité a ceci de singulier de *ne définir théoriquement aucun ensemble extensif*, et pour conséquence d'*ouvrir pratiquement un champ indéfini* de contestation de toute frontière délimitant une communauté politique dont certains pourraient être exclus<sup>5</sup>.

Concluons ces brefs rappels en retenant encore de l'analyse de Balibar deux implications, l'une concernant le registre de répétition logée au cœur de la « modernité » politique, l'autre touchant à la question des différences anthropologiques évoquée pour commencer.

- 1) S'éclaire d'abord le lien entre la matérialité de l'énoncé de la Déclaration révolutionnaire et la structure contraignante de sa répétition. Balibar souligne lui-même que ce qu'il appelle l'universalité intensive de la déclaration d'égalité, est à l'évidence le pendant de « *son indétermination absolue* »<sup>6</sup>. L'effet de structure de la répétition, c'est d'abord l'écart entre la façon dont cette indétermination marque l'énoncé révolutionnaire, et la façon dont elle affecte le plan de son *énonciation*, et donc son éventuelle incidence performative. D'un côté, sur le plan de l'énoncé, son indétermination est précisément ce qui fait toute sa force : elle lui assure son ouverture indéfinie, où s'inscriront aussi bien, et ce dès la période révolutionnaire, « la revendication de droit des salariés ou des dépendants que celle des femmes ou celle des esclaves,

<sup>5</sup> Voir É. Balibar, *La Proposition d'égalité*, op. cit., p. 60-63.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

plus tard celle des colonisés »<sup>7</sup>. Mais sur l'autre face, cette indétermination fait aussi toute « la faiblesse pratique de l'énonciation » ; ou elle laisse ses conséquences entièrement sous la dépendance « de rapports de forces, et de leur évolution dans la conjoncture, où il faudra bien *construire pratiquement des référents* individuels et collectifs pour l'égaliberté, avec plus ou moins de prudence et de justesse, mais aussi d'audace et d'insolence contre les pouvoirs établis. *Il y aura tension permanente* entre les conditions qui déterminent historiquement la construction d'institutions conformes à la proposition d'égaliberté, et l'universalité excessive, hyperbolique de l'énoncé. Pourtant, il faudra toujours que celle-ci soit répétée, et *répétée à l'identique*, sans changement, pour que se reproduise l'effet de vérité sans lequel il n'y a pas de politique révolutionnaire »<sup>8</sup>.

- 2) Avant de tirer une nouvelle série de conséquences de cet écart et de cette tension entre la *matérialité* de cet énoncé hyperbolique, et l'*indétermination* du sujet et du référent de son énonciation, soulignons la contradiction qui se trouve immédiatement logée dans cette forme discursive. Pour en résumer sèchement le noyau, il suffit de remarquer ceci : l'universalité civique ne peut manquer de rencontrer la question des « différences anthropologiques »<sup>9</sup>, et cette rencontre ne peut manquer de se répéter incessamment du fait que cette universalité civique n'a pu être définie dans sa radicalité révolutionnaire qu'en étant immédiatement une universalité anthropologico-politique. Cela veut dire d'un côté que là où citoyenneté et humanité, existence politiquement affirmée et existence anthropologiquement qualifiée, deviennent rigoureusement coextensives en droit, l'universel égalitaire devient lui-même appropriable par tout mouvement d'émancipation luttant contre des inégalités *quelle que soit* la « différence », ou la « catégorie », au nom de laquelle ou depuis laquelle on s'approprie la déclaration politique. Mais en fusionnant ainsi l'anthropologique et le politique, cette universalité a pour revers que toute exclusion du champ politique devra nécessairement

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72-73.

<sup>9</sup> Voir É. Balibar, *Citoyen sujet et autres essais d'anthropologie philosophique*, Paris, PUF, 2012, p. 466-515, « Fermeture : *Malêtre du sujet* : universalité bourgeoise et différences anthropologiques » ; repris modifiée dans « L'introuvable humanité du sujet moderne : l'universalité "civique-bourgeoise" et la question des différences anthropologiques », *L'Homme*, n° 203-204, 2012, p. 19-50.

se justifier d'une exclusion du champ même de l'humain (introduisant une contradiction dans l'universel anthropologique), et inversement, que toute différence anthropologique invoquée comme une inégalité interne à l'humain se prolongera dans, et justifiera un déni de « droit aux droits », c'est-à-dire d'accès à la politique (introduisant une contradiction dans l'universel égalitaire). Les différences anthropologiques, quelles qu'elles soient (et elles sont par définition aussi variables que non dénombrables *a priori*), entre les sexes, entre les générations, entre le corporel et le spirituel, ou entre le manuel et l'intellectuel, entre le normal et le pathologique, entre le vivant et le mort, etc., ne pourront être pensées comme des possibilités alternatives, complémentaires ou antithétiques de l'humain, *sans être aussi* inscrites, au moins potentiellement, non seulement dans des rapports d'inégalité et de servitude, mais dans des productions de *sous-humanités*, ou d'« humanité "défective" en race, en sexe, en déviance, en pathologie etc. ». Le terme même de différence, conclut Balibar, n'étant alors bien souvent que « l'euphémisme de cette exclusion et de ces discriminations, avant de devenir aussi, par un "renversement performatif", le mot d'ordre d'une revendication de droits, de dignité ou de reconnaissance dont la modalité politique demeure par définition problématique »<sup>10</sup>. Ce qui revient à dire que la répétition de la déclaration d'égaliberté est inextricablement liée à la répétition de cette contradiction anthropologico-politique elle-même, qui en est l'envers.

## 2. Divisions du concept de la politique, équivocité de son sujet, topique de sa cause

J'en viens à mon second moment, touchant à l'équivocité du sujet de la politique qui découle de cette construction. Je n'entends pas par là une équivocité empirique, qui va de soi au regard de la diversité des sites sociohistoriques, mais une équivocité conceptuelle, nécessaire, et irréductible tant que la politique se pratiquera et s'énoncera sous l'idéalité de l'universalité intensive et de la déclaration d'égaliberté. Elle doit en ce sens pouvoir faire l'objet d'une *déduction*, qui part de la « tension permanente » dont il vient d'être question entre la matérialité hyperbolique de son énoncé (en excès sur ses appropriations particulières) et l'indétermination de son énonciation (en défaut par rapport aux conditions particulières de son efficacité historique), et qui en suit les conséquences théoriques

<sup>10</sup> É. Balibar, *Citoyen sujet et autres essais d'anthropologie philosophique*, op. cit., p. 467.

pour le concept de la politique elle-même, et pour l'écriture des problèmes de la subjectivation politique que ce concept commande.

Il me semble que cette tension ne peut être transcrite conceptuellement, *a minima*, qu'au prix d'une division entre *plusieurs concepts de la politique*, et entre plusieurs figures de la subjectivation politique, entre lesquels il n'est pas question de « choisir » dans l'abstrait, mais qu'il ne s'agit pas davantage de projeter dans une complémentarité réconciliante ou une harmonie finale. Donc ni refouler la tension de la déclaration politique, ni lui chercher une résolution intellectuellement satisfaisante peut-être, mais perdant aussi la problématique même du champ politique. Autrement dit encore, et je me référerai à présent à un autre pan du travail de Balibar, celui initié par un texte de 1995 intitulé « Trois concepts de la politique : émancipation, transformation, civilité »<sup>11</sup>, si la politique est d'abord un champ *problématique*, et non un espace d'« application » d'une théorie, ou même de « vérification d'une supposition » (Rancière), ou de validation d'une « hypothèse » (Badiou), c'est en raison de l'incomplétude de chacun de ses concepts, et donc de l'impossibilité de tenir pour autosuffisante la subjectivation politique que chacun permet de définir. Aucun ne peut se définir sans une référence différentielle ou négative aux autres, de sorte que les apories propres à chacun ne peuvent être repérées et analysées qu'en étant déplacées dans le système d'inscription d'un autre concept, qui les problématise théoriquement et pratiquement sous ses présupposés propres. Cela signifie en somme que la tension interne de la Déclaration révolutionnaire ne peut être analysée dans ses effets qu'au moyen de ce qu'il faut bien appeler en termes freudiens – mais ils sont en l'occurrence aussi althussériens – une *topique de la subjectivité politique*, servant d'analyseur de ces apories et de ces déplacements. On pourrait y voir en ce sens le dispositif minimal d'une *psychanalyse politique*, à la condition d'entendre par là, non pas une psychanalyse *de* la politique (du type *Massenpsychologie* des identifications collectives et des ressorts de la soumission à l'autorité), ni une psychanalyse *interprétative de* la politique (du type psychanalyse « appliquée »), mais un abord de la politique qui, en prenant en compte la matérialité de ses énoncés et les effets de subjectivation de ses signifiants, puisse soutenir le problème d'un maniement transférentiel de leur répétition. Ou encore : rendant possible un transfert des problèmes pris en impasse dans une écriture déterminée de la politique, par une translation ou une

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<sup>11</sup> Repris deux ans plus tard en ouverture de *La Crainte des masses*, Paris, Galilée, 1997.

traduction vers une autre surface d'écriture qui les reformule – donc qui répète ses problèmes *autrement*, en répétant différemment leur répétition –, et partant qui les rende affrontables, politiquement et subjectivement.

Une *déduction*, donc...

- 1) Un premier concept de la politique serait déterminable par « l'universalité excessive [et] hyperbolique » de la déclaration d'égaliberté, et par la question de savoir comment cette universalité peut *en tant que telle* être subjectivée. Donc comment construire le sujet d'énonciation capable de se soutenir de son idéalité spécifique. Ce qui suppose une figure subjective déterminée par l'autonomie. Ou plus exactement, la politique se définit comme pratique d'« émancipation », dès lors qu'elle mobilise l'axiome d'un rapport circulaire, de présupposition réciproque, entre l'autonomie de la politique et l'autonomie de son sujet, dans la figure générique du *dèmos* comme multiple d'égalé liberté. Le contenu de ce premier concept de la politique comme émancipation, c'est la *répétition de la déclaration égalitaire pour elle-même* : c'est sa réitération par celles et ceux qui, chaque fois, se déclarent égaux, et qui ce faisant démontrent l'effet de vérité de cette déclaration. L'autonomie du sujet censé se subjectiver dans cette répétition a dès lors un statut logique ambivalent : cette autonomie doit être à la fois postulée comme un donné, ou du moins comme une disponibilité toujours réactivable, et performativement produite par les actes qui la démontrent à travers les luttes qui se font en son nom<sup>12</sup>. Les deux énoncés canoniques de l'émancipation en découlent : pas d'émancipation possible qui serait octroyée par un tiers ; pas d'émancipation possible qui ne se fasse au détriment d'un tiers, par l'instauration d'un nouvel asservissement<sup>13</sup>. De là aussi le caractère circulaire de la sortie de l'état de minorité, qui doit toujours se présupposer elle-même : elle ne peut démontrer sa propre possibilité que par son effectuation même, mais ne peut s'effectuer sans faire de son effectuation la démonstration par récurrence de sa possibilité supposée (*il ne dépendait donc, il n'aura dépen-*

<sup>12</sup> D'où la thèse de Balibar suivant laquelle toute politique d'émancipation, même inscrite dans une constitution et un ordre sociopolitique de pouvoirs constitués, renvoie toujours à une dimension insurrectionnelle, même symbolique, mais qui doit aussi s'actualiser périodiquement, marquant un moment d'anarchie au cœur de l'ordre institué de la loi, et que celle-ci doit refouler en permanence par un supplément de pouvoir et de violence.

<sup>13</sup> J. Rancière, *Aux bords du politique*, Paris, La Fabrique, 1998, p. 66-67.

du *que de nous...*<sup>14</sup>). Ce cercle est précisément le tour logique de la subjectivation d'un universel intensif, sous la figure d'une « communauté des égaux », comme dit Rancière, qui « ne saurait prendre consistance sous forme d'institution sociale », dont le trait égalitaire ne fonde ni n'organise aucune extension communautaire, et qui reste comme telle « suspendue à l'acte toujours à refaire de sa vérification »<sup>15</sup>.

- 2) Mais en second lieu, la tâche pratique de reconstruire en permanence, à travers la lutte et le conflit, des référents pour la déclaration d'égaliberté, ou pour l'inscrire matériellement dans la transformation des institutions et des rapports sociaux, renvoie à une *tout autre* figure de la subjectivation politique, en même temps qu'à un autre concept de la politique. Celui que Balibar désigne du terme de « politique de transformation » fait fonds, en effet, sur le présupposé matérialiste que la politique ne consiste en rien d'autre qu'en ses rapports contradictoires avec ses propres conditions. Conditions qui lui sont toujours hétéronomes, « données » ou imposées par l'histoire, et qu'elle vise à transformer, mais sans lesquelles elle n'existerait tout simplement pas. Autre cercle, donc. Ce second concept fait ainsi appel à une autre conception de la subjectivation politique. Il ne s'oppose pas à la politique d'émancipation ; mais il rapporte l'autonomie que cette dernière postule et affirme performativement aux conditions conflictuelles qui la rendent possible ou impossible, selon les pratiques et organisations matérielles de ses agents, selon les rapports de pouvoir, de dépendance et de solidarité dans lesquels ils sont pris, et selon les régimes d'énoncés et les registres symbolico-imaginaires dans lesquels ils se construisent des identités, mais qu'ils ne « choisissent » pas, et dont les dynamiques déterminent *les limites* qui confèrent à leur politique son effectivité. Le concept de la politique comme transformation implique ainsi une conception du sujet divisé par les conditions hétéronomes qui le constituent comme effet et support des luttes à travers lesquels il se construit et se déconstruit ; mais il implique corrélativement une dialectique de l'universel intensif de la déclaration et de l'extension que lui confèrent matériellement

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<sup>14</sup> C'est la raison pour laquelle Kant disait de la sortie de l'état de minorité qu'elle est une question de courage et de lâcheté. Nous ne sommes pas responsables d'être ou de ne pas être autonomes, mais nous sommes nécessairement responsables de ce devenir-actif de l'autonomie, qui ne peut nous advenir d'un autre. Chez Rancière, c'est le rôle de l'affect démocratique par excellence qu'est la *confiance*.

<sup>15</sup> J. Rancière, *La Méésentente*, Galilée, 1995, p. 119.



des rapports sociaux, auxquels les signifiants de liberté et d'égalité à présent s'attribuent comme des qualités ou des privations dans des états de choses plus ou moins inadéquats à leurs « principes ».

- 3) Enfin un troisième concept, celui que Balibar dénomme une politique de « civilité », et qu'il réfère à une « hétéronomie de l'hétéronomie », tente d'enregistrer dans ce redoublement le fait que « les conditions auxquelles se rapporte une politique ne sont jamais une dernière instance : au contraire, ce qui les rend déterminantes est la façon dont elles portent des sujets ou sont portées par eux. Or les sujets agissent conformément à l'identité qui leur est imposée, ou qu'ils se créent. L'imaginaire des identités, des appartenances et des ruptures, est donc la condition des conditions, il est comme l'autre scène sur laquelle se machinent les effets de l'autonomie et de l'hétéronomie de la politique. À quoi correspond aussi une politique, irréductible à l'émancipation autant qu'à la transformation, et dont je caractériserai l'horizon éthique comme *civilité* »<sup>16</sup>. Évidemment le registre imaginaire dans lequel les individus sont « interpellés en sujet », traverse déjà de part en part la subjectivité émancipatrice non moins que les conditions hétéronomes dans lesquelles se subjectivise une politique de transformation. Si se distingue cependant ici un « lieu » spécifique de la pratique politique, si donc se pose le problème de son articulation aux deux autres, c'est en fonction de l'idée que les dialectisations de l'émancipation et de la transformation, les modes de subjectivation qui y opèrent, enveloppent également des lignes d'ascension aux extrêmes où les circuits des identifications et des désidentifications collectives cessent d'être « maniables », tendent plutôt à devenir *intraitables*, comme si faisait intrusion dans le champ des pratiques politiques une « autre scène » imposant de faire place à de l'impolitisable. S'y indiquerait à *la limite* quelque chose de l'ordre d'une causalité en rupture par rapport aux dialectiques de l'hétéronomie et de l'autonomie, de l'institutionnalisation et de la désinstitutionnalisation des rapports de forces, sinon en rupture par rapport à toute représentation d'une causalité historique<sup>17</sup>. C'est éminemment le cas de situations d'« extrême-violence », ou de violence « ultra-objective », lorsque fusionnent l'oppression, la surexploitation, l'expropriation des conditions

<sup>16</sup> É. Balibar, *La Crainte des masses*, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. F. Guattari, « La causalité, la subjectivité, l'histoire » (1966/1968), Paris, François Maspero, 1972.

d'existence jusqu'à la destruction des ressources symboliques et imaginaires qui permettraient de maintenir ne serait-ce que les semblants d'un monde. Mais aussi de violence « ultra-subjective », lorsque l'on paraît confronté « au sein de la subjectivité (...) à un point où l'intentionnalité [qui] devient si équivoque qu'il est impossible de décider si nous avons affaire à une *volonté*, même perverse, maligne, ou bien au surgissement, dans le "soi" lui-même, de cet élément pulsionnel obscur que Lacan après Freud appelait "la Chose" (*das Ding*), l'*irreprésentable* qui, au sein du sujet, est plus "réel" que la réalité des objets eux-mêmes (c'est-à-dire moins disponible, plus intraitable) »<sup>18</sup>. Ce qui paraît alors s'effondrer, résume Balibar,

[c']est la possibilité pour des sujets collectifs d'imaginer leurs objectifs historiques autrement que comme un anéantissement de l'autre, et de construire des stratégies institutionnelles, des représentations du temps, des solidarités, pour transformer les conditions d'existence des individus. C'est donc aussi, corrélativement, la possibilité pour ceux-ci de s'inscrire par conviction ou par condition sociale dans l'horizon d'une lutte organisée qui fait à chaque instant la différence entre les objectifs immédiats et ultimes, les contradictions principales et secondaires, les alliés potentiels et les adversaires. Ne semblent plus subsister que les absolus vertigineux de l'identité et de l'environnement hostile, les objets de l'angoisse ou de la menace...<sup>19</sup>

Ce troisième concept de la politique de démocratisation semble bien soutenir les deux autres, mais au sens seulement où il leur ouvre un espace de possibles, qu'il ne détermine pas lui-même, mais dont il empêche simplement la clôture ou la destruction. Et lui correspond une figure subjective spécifique, mais des plus paradoxales, puisqu'elle est ici située au point aveugle où un sujet collectif se trouve forclos du champ de ses propres actions possibles, est détruit ou se détruit lui-même en même temps que ce champ. Soulignons que la reprise de l'expression freudienne d'*autre scène*, le terme bataillien de *cruauté* choisi pour nommer l'instance ou le moment de cette « hétéronomie de l'hétéronomie », ne vont pas sans ambiguïté, puisqu'ils semblent vouloir indiquer quelque chose comme un *inconscient de la politique* tout en le référant à des situations de destitution subjective radicale, et même de destruction de toute élaboration

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<sup>18</sup> É. Balibar, *Violence et civilité*, Paris, Galilée, 2010, p. 92-93.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145-146.

de symptôme, de fantasme ou de désir capable de soutenir tant bien que mal la position d'un sujet. Peut-être peut-on interpréter cette torsion en y indexant à la fois le lieu politique où l'inconscient psychanalytique est éminemment concerné, et le lieu impolitique où est mis à nu l'absence de fondement de la politique, c'est-à-dire la politique elle-même comme *institution sans fondement*. C'est pourquoi, soit dit en passant, il n'y a aucun motif à demander à la psychanalyse de lui en fournir un, en l'espèce d'une anthropologie méta-politique. Bien plus, c'est précisément parce qu'il n'y a d'anthropologie que toujours-déjà supportée par une politique, et que la politique est une institution sans fondement, qu'elle est constamment traversée par l'insu des sujets qui y opèrent. Mais c'est aussi la raison pour laquelle rien de ce qui soutient les sujets dans l'ordre du symptôme, de leur étayage pulsionnel et fantasmatique, bref de la singularité de leur montage désirant, n'est jamais à l'abri du champ sociopolitique (*schizoanalyse*). Mais cette thèse a immédiatement pour corrélat pratique que rien *sauf la politique* – ou une certaine pratique politique, ou un certain moment de cette pratique dont il faudrait parvenir à définir à la fois l'objet et les stratégies – ne peut affronter cette limite « impolitique », sous une modalité une fois encore circulaire : la politique n'a de lieu, ou simplement n'a lieu, que si elle parvient à produire ce lieu, et par là se présuppose elle-même. Seulement que ce lieu et ce présupposé soient infondables, signifie que ce lieu est non seulement contingent, mais *précaire* : rendu précaire par les pratiques politiques elles-mêmes, et ce diversement selon les concepts de la politique sous lesquels elles se pensent.

Ce qu'il faudrait alors faire, idéalement, c'est reparcourir ces trois figures du sujet de la politique et s'arrêter sur les points d'impasse où se manifestent les limites de chacun des trois concepts correspondants, là où s'aiguise le problème – la tâche – du transfert de l'un vers l'autre. Je n'en retiendrai pour le moment que certaines butées qui peuvent apparaître lorsqu'on repart de la déclaration d'égalité et de la contradiction anthropologico-politique évoquée précédemment. Ce sont chaque fois des points auquel la surdétermination politique des différences anthropologiques donne un relief et une urgence politique particulière.

### **3. Formes politiques, extensions de l'universalité intensive, diagramme de transformation**

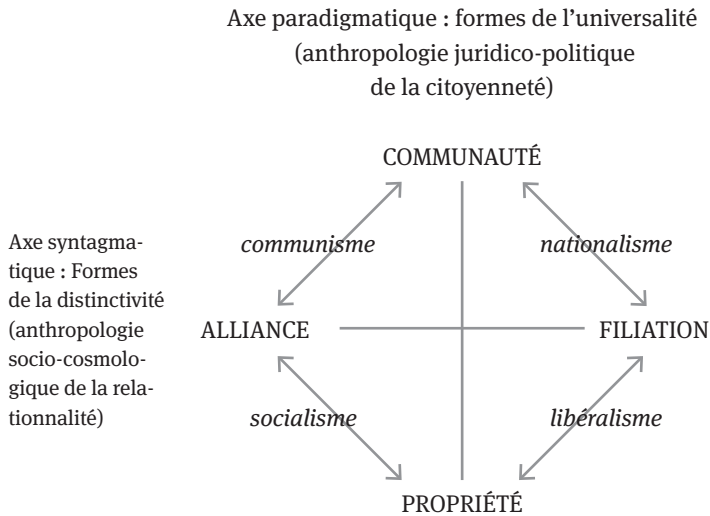
Repardons donc du noyau de la contradiction : là où l'humain et le politique sont coextensifs en droit, aucun humain ne peut être légitimement exclu, non

seulement de tel ou tel droit, mais de la politique elle-même comme droit de revendiquer des droits ; mais alors aucune exclusion politique « en fait » ne peut s'exercer sans mettre en œuvre des figures de sous-humanité, d'humanité déficiente, et sans se justifier par la représentation de « déficiences », « infériorités » ou « incapacités » anthropologiquement caractérisées. De là vient que la modernité s'ouvre par une déclaration politique qui dés-essentialise radicalement, dans leur principe même, toutes les représentations de la nature humaine et de ses différences internes, et qu'elle ouvre en même temps un espace de production inédit de « savoirs-pouvoirs » reconstruisant des figures de l'humain (essentialisées en « nature » ou en « culture », qu'importe), et une prolifération sans précédent des catégorisations différentielles permettant de les inégaliser.

Il est clair ici que cette contradiction n'a jamais cessé de faire elle-même l'objet de développements historiques et politiques hétérogènes. Ce sur quoi il faut alors insister au préalable, c'est que l'espace idéologico-politique dans lequel s'est inscrite la déclaration d'égalité, les médiations discursives et institutionnelles dans lesquelles elle s'est elle-même matérialisée, loin de résoudre la contradiction anthropologico-politique, n'ont cessé de la complexifier, et de la reconflictualiser en multipliant à la fois les effets « pervers » et les possibilités de résistance et de renversement antagonique.

Balibar propose ici un diagramme suggestif, visant d'abord à montrer que la puissance d'insurrection de la déclaration d'égalité est en même temps ce qui la rend comme telle impossible à institutionnaliser. Sauf à la faire entrer dans des disjonctions exclusives qui en ont aussitôt divisé l'énoncé, donc qui ont re-disjoint « égalité » et « liberté » en deux signifiants distincts de façon à les médiatiser, en les réduisant à deux « expressions » dérivées d'un principe premier qui les fonderait tout en permettant de les rapporter l'un à l'autre, de les mesurer l'un à l'autre, le cas échéant de les hiérarchiser en faisant de la liberté le préalable de l'égalité, ou inversement en faisant de l'égalité la condition de la liberté. Cherchant à diagrammatiser les grandes lignes de forces idéologico-politiques des deux derniers siècles, on peut alors identifier dans la communauté d'une part, dans la propriété d'autre part, les deux signifiants-maîtres organisant cette dialectique historico-conceptuelle, où ils fonctionnent à la fois comme des catégories politiques (idéologiques, juridiques, morales, anthropologiques etc.), comme des opérateurs symboliques, et comme des systèmes matériels de pratiques et d'institutions. Ce diagramme permet ainsi de situer

## Diagramme idéologico-politique (médiations catégorielles-institutionnelles de la Déclaration d'égaliberté)



la double antithèse entre traditions socialistes et libérales (s'opposant sur la question de la propriété, sa répartition et sa circulation, et en dernière instance sa privatisation ou sa collectivisation, suivant la différence conditionnant l'application de la norme juridique entre sphère privée et sphère publique), et entre traditions communistes et nationalistes (s'opposant sur le Nom et la forme d'individuation historique de la communauté, la Classe ou la Nation), – double antithèse recoupée par la question de savoir ce qui est « premier » entre la liberté (libéralisme, nationalisme) ou l'égalité (socialisme, communisme).

On peut tirer de ce schéma plusieurs conséquences, quitte à lui apporter des compléments qui en infléchiront progressivement la lecture :

1/ Un mot d'abord sur la raison du schéma lui-même, son opération de figuration graphique et spatialisée. J'ai parlé de diagramme : précisément au sens où un diagramme est un mode de spatialisation de processus intensifs, de dynamismes de potentialisation et de dépotentialisation<sup>20</sup>. Non seulement un espace d'inscription, mais un espace d'extension, qui retient encore la trace des

<sup>20</sup> Cf. le beau livre de Gilles Châtelet, *Les Enjeux du mobile*, Paris, Seuil, 1993.

tenseurs, gestes ou valeurs intensifs qui ont présidé à son engendrement tout à s'y effaçant. Il n'y a pas de schématisation possible de la déclaration révolutionnaire considérée en elle-même ; il n'y a pas de diagrammatisation possible de la répétition de son universalité intensive pour elle-même ; mais sa matérialisation dans le corps de rapports sociaux, idéologiques, politiques, économiques, discursivo-institutionnels, consiste précisément en une extensivisation de cette universalité intensive dans des relations qu'il faut dire à leur tour extensives pour autant qu'elles discernabilisent des individus et des groupes tout en les mettant en rapport, et qu'elles rendent significables et qualifiables leurs rapports comme l'espace d'ensemble des procès d'institutionnalisation et de matérialisation conflictuelle de la déclaration politique. Le diagramme des formes politiques se lit donc d'abord en ce sens : la liberté et l'égalité deviennent les signifiants litigieux animant les conflits idéologico-politiques qui se développent dans les quatre formes de la relationnalité extensive ouvertes par (et recouvrant) la déclaration révolutionnaire : dans les relations de communauté, les relations de propriété, les relations d'alliance, les relations de filiation.

2/ Quelques précisions alors, en second lieu, sur le principal élément que ce diagramme adjoint au graphe de Balibar. Il me semble en effet que le système de médiations catégorielles permettant de cartographier les modes d'institutionnalisation de la déclaration d'égaliberté (sous le concept de la politique comme émancipation) et corrélativement les lignes de forces des affrontements politiques et idéologiques (sous le concept de la politique comme transformation), doit ici compléter l'axe Communauté-Propriété par un autre : un axe Alliance-Filiation. Pourquoi ? Ce complément fait bien sûr référence au grand couple catégoriel des institutions de la *parenté* manié par l'anthropologie culturelle depuis Lewis Morgan, et dont la réinterprétation constituera l'un des fils conducteurs des *Structures élémentaires de la parenté* de Lévi-Strauss. Ajoutons que, au moment où ces catégories d'alliance et de filiation tendent à devenir de simples outils conventionnels de l'anthropologie disciplinaire, c'est leur repotentialisation conceptuelle qui s'observe dans les travaux des amazonistes (brésiliens notamment, Viveiros de Castro au premier chef), à travers la formation d'un concept d'« affinité potentielle », marquant l'extraversion de la théorie de l'alliance hors du cadre des sociologies de la parenté primitive, et déterminant simultanément l'un des points d'articulations décisifs de l'anthropologie viveirosienne sur le concept guattaro-deleuzien d'une « alliance contre-nature », alliance intensive par « synthèse disjonctive » ou par « devenir » développée

dans *Mille plateaux* (renversant le schéma qui prédominait dans *L'Anti-Œdipe*, qui cherchait au contraire, en croisant la clinique des délires et la mythologie Dogon, à définir une filiation intensive ou un maniement intensif, disjonctif-inclusif, des signifiants généalogiques).

Je ne peux développer davantage maintenant les implications de ce point : notons simplement qu'il permet de reporter sur cet axe le contraste intensif-extensif utilisé par Balibar au niveau de la caractérisation de l'universalité politique « moderne » ou post-révolutionnaire. L'universalité intensive, comme universalité hyperbolique, inconditionnée, et négative par rapport à toute appartenance ou à toute identification à un tout de la communauté, a de ce point de vue son pendant anthropologique dans la singularité intensive de ce que Viveiros de Castro (précipitant de nombreux travaux d'américanistes des trente dernières années consacrés à la façon dont l'axe traditionnel de la sociologie de la parenté filiation-alliance se trouve surdéterminé en contexte amérindien par la polarité consanguinité/affinité) a appelé « l'affinité potentielle » (ou « virtuelle ») : soit la dimension d'une alliance qui ne découle pas « analytiquement » des schémas prescriptifs ou préférentiels de l'alliance matrimoniale et plus généralement de l'échange social (suivant le modèle systématisé par Lévi-Strauss dans les *Structures élémentaires*), mais qui au contraire produit une synthèse disjonctive – une « relation qui sépare », comme le dit Strathern pour un autre contexte – entre un sujet et un être avec lequel il ne *se mariera jamais*, avec lequel il *n'échangera jamais* de femme et de sœur, avec lequel il ne se « conjuguera » ou ne se « conjugaliserà » jamais. L'affin potentiel est ainsi le terme d'une alliance improductive et anti-reproductive, anti-parentélique et socialement inactualisable, intensive ou perspectiviste et non représentationnelle et identificatoire. Ce pourquoi cette alliance-limite trouve son schématisation caractéristique dans des relations prédatrices extra-groupales et transspécifiques (de chasse, guerrière, et cannibale), comme schème d'altérité relationnelle irréductible aux codages symboliques, sociologiques et psychologiques de la famille, et tout aussi irréductibles aux codages de la communauté (l'affin potentiel ne peut être collectivisé, et dans la scène prototypique du rituel anthropophage tupinamba, le meurtrier, s'identifiant intensivement à la victime, est retranché du *socius* : il ne participe pas au festin) et de la propriété (il n'y a pas d'échange de bien ou de signe *entre* des sujets habilités à se les approprier, mais échange de « points de

vue » les incluant l'un dans l'autre, incorporation de l'Autre en tant que point de vue sur soi inappropriable)<sup>21</sup>.

Mais la filiation morganienne importe autant que l'alliance post-structuraliste et « contre-nature » de l'héritage lévi-straussien et de la schizoanalyse guattaro-deleuzienne. Elle permet à tout le moins d'inscrire, en superposition du diagramme des tensions idéologico-politiques majeures de la « modernité » (communisme/nationalisme-socialisme/libéralisme), le triptique engelsien des formes politiques de la *propriété*, de la *famille* (ou des transformations des rapports entre institutions d'alliance et de filiation), et de l'*État* (ou de l'étatisation de la *communauté*). Le problème n'est pas simplement de coupler la question de la communauté et de la propriété à la polarité post-morganienne de l'anthropologie de la parenté : il s'agit plutôt d'accepter les glissements homonymiques que subissent les concepts anthropologiques de filiation et d'alliance du fait d'être toujours déjà rapportables à l'axe communauté-propriété, c'est-à-dire à l'axe anthropologico-politique de la citoyenneté « révolutionnaire » ou « bourgeoise ». Du côté de la communauté, le communisme est indissociable de la question des alliances de classe, et des classes comme effets de construction et de disruption d'alliances. On pourrait objecter que ce qu'un anthropologue appelle alliance, et ce qu'un communiste appelle du même mot, n'ont rien à voir. Pourtant on peut dire aussi qu'une condition historique *sine qua non* d'une idéologie communiste a été précisément de soustraire l'alliance au langage de la parenté, d'une généalogie partagée ou d'une descendance commune (cf. *Manifeste du parti communiste* : les prolétaires sont « sans famille » ; mais c'est surtout le freudo-marxisme qui a été sensible à ce point, en particulier Wilhelm Reich, précisément parce qu'il avait la plus vive conscience de l'usage que son adversaire, la « mystique nationaliste », faisait du langage de la filiation et de la famille<sup>22</sup>). Ils sont si peu dissociables qu'on pourrait même identifier la crise théorique du communisme avec celle de sa conception et de sa pratique des alliances (*hommage à Ernesto Laclau*). Tandis que le nationalisme est quant à lui inséparable de sa mobilisation du langage de la filiation ; et l'on ne trouvera guère d'exemple historique d'idéologie nationale qui, même lorsqu'elle pri-

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<sup>21</sup> Eduardo Viveiros de Castro et Carlos Fausto, « La puissance et l'acte. La parenté dans les basses terres d'Amérique du Sud », *L'Homme*, 1993, tome 33 n°126-128.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. G. Sibertin-Blanc, « Une *scientia sexualis* face à la mystique fasciste », *Actuel Marx*, n° 59 : *Psychanalyse, l'autre matérialisme*, 2016/1, p. 53 -67.



vilégie les symboles d'une culture, d'une langue ou d'une histoire commune, n'ait du se supplémenter par le recours à la symbolique de l'ancestralité et de la descendance commune, de la continuité généalogique et de la transmission de « l'appartenance nationale » comme « sur-famille » (qu'elle se formule dans le code socio-juridique de l'*héritage*, dans l'imaginaire bio-psycho-social de l'*hérédité*, ou les deux à la fois). (Avec toutes les « contaminations » entre ces deux pôles, par exemple l'effet en retour du nationalisme dans le communisme, dans l'idée d'« origine de classe », d'une appartenance de classe par la naissance).

3/ Tirons de notre diagramme une troisième observation : la communauté, la propriété, la parenté, y figurent les *formes extensives de la politique*, les formes qui développent en extension l'universalité intensive de sa déclaration (donc qui la « dés-intensifie », ou qui « dépotentialise » sa double identification intensive homme-citoyen/liberté-égalité). Mais de même que les valeurs de l'intensif et de l'extensif peuvent être répartis différemment sur l'axe de la filiation et de l'alliance, « l'extension » peut être conférée principalement à la communauté *ou* à la propriété : selon que l'on confère à la communauté elle-même la capacité collective de définir les relations extensives dans lesquelles individus et groupes s'individualisent et se socialisent, s'autonomisent et se solidarisent les uns des autres ; ou selon que l'on confère à la propriété la fonction d'« extensiviser » les relations communautaires, en faisant reposer les divisions et relations dans lesquelles se discernabilisent des individus et des groupes sur la forme générale de la propriété, sur les divisions de cette forme – à commencer par la division entre propriété de soi comme « personne » et propriété d'une chose, entre propriétés privées *ou* publiques, entre propriétés aliénables *ou* inaliénables etc. –, et sur les mouvements de son partage, de sa circulation, de sa répartition et de son attribution. Mais cela a pour conséquence que le concept de la politique comme *émancipation*, c'est-à-dire la subjectivation de la déclaration d'égaliberté pour elle-même, impliquera nécessairement la réintroduction d'un usage *intensif* des catégories de communauté et de propriété elles-mêmes.

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On peut le voir exemplairement dans les paradoxes logiques que Rancière a placé au cœur du langage de l'émancipation. Car ce qu'il appelle la logique de la « police » (l'autre de la politique émancipatrice), n'est rien d'autre que la communauté extensive, définissant cette extension par la continuité et la consistance imaginaire du jeu des identifications individuelles et collectives, conformément à la double médiation communauté/propriété. Dans les deux cas

cette logique repose sur la production d'un continuum – la continuité imaginaire d'un corps communautaire, et la continuité imaginaire des propriétés et des échanges entre propriétaires –, tel « un état de saturation de la communauté par le décompte intégral de ses parties et le rapport spéculaire où chaque partie est engagée avec le tout »<sup>23</sup>. De là l'idée que la subjectivation de l'universel égalitaire ne peut s'opérer ici qu'en interrompant la continuité imaginaire des identités communautaires et propriétaires, et des fonctions ou capacités que ces identités réfléchissent, au moyen d'un opérateur symbolique capable d'y réintroduire des figures de la division, de l'écart et de la différence à soi du propre et du commun. Ce que Rancière, détournant le « trait unaire » lacanien, appelle le « trait égalitaire », est précisément cet opérateur *supplémentaire* (un « un-en plus », mesure paradoxale d'un compte des incomptés) qui fait chuter, par son excès même, cette complétude imaginaire, la dé-sature en y introduisant la brèche d'un mécompte, qui rend litigieux le compte des parts appropriables et des parties de la communauté. Dès lors l'efficacité inconsistante de ce trait unaire doit s'inscrire aussi bien dans le langage de la propriété que dans celui de la communauté : la pratique de l'émancipation est d'abord celle qui rend homophonique les titres du propre ou du proprial, et les noms du commun. Ou plutôt, elle fait d'une propriété le « mot à sens opposés » (*Gegensinn*) potentialisant l'écart entre ce qui est reconnu à tous tout en étant dénié à certains, et qui fait d'un nom propre à quelques uns, précisément parce qu'ils sont inclusivement exclus comme incomptés, le nom commun de la communauté divisée, l'exposant de son inconsistance ou de sa différence à soi.

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Bien entendu, cette logique de la subjectivation politique ne dit rien – ne *doit* et ne *peut* rien dire – des conditions hétéronomes qui la rendent matériellement possible ou impossible. C'est-à-dire que ses propres limites ne peuvent être interrogées qu'à la condition d'être elles-mêmes déplacées dans l'écriture d'un autre concept de la politique (comme « transformation », ou bien comme « civilité »). Surtout, elle suppose aux sujets politiques une capacité de *désidentification* elle-même hyperbolique, ou de *suspension* radicale des différences anthropologiques dans lesquelles les individus sont toujours-déjà subjectivés.

4/ Ce problème prend tout son relief si l'on reparcourt notre diagramme par une quatrième série d'observations, de manière à réinscrire ici la contradiction an-

<sup>23</sup> J. Rancière, *La Méésentente*, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

thropologico-politique dont nous sommes partis. Car les différences anthropologiques, telles qu'elles sont radicalement resémantisées à l'intérieur du langage de la modernité politique, qui les fait entrer dans les dialectiques politiques d'inclusion et d'exclusion de l'universalité civique, ne peuvent le faire qu'en traduisant ces exclusions dans le langage de *l'inaptitude à la communauté*, et de *l'inaptitude à la propriété*, par défaut (par l'incapacité à être en possession de soi-même, c'est-à-dire à être une « personne ») ou par excès (par l'incapacité à renoncer à une propriété, c'est-à-dire à entrer dans l'échange). On pourrait montrer que cette double traduction « anthropologique » de l'exclusion du champ politique a trouvé son unité dans une matrice centrale de l'anthropologie européenne du XIXe siècle, à savoir le concept de narcissisme, permettant de loger dans un même continuum d'altérité et de minorité les enfants, les « sauvages », et les « fous », comme les variantes d'une seule et même déficience – déficit d'Autre ou excès d'« autoplastie » –, tant face à l'universel de la communauté et de sa loi, que face à l'universel de la propriété et de son échange.

Et cela implique corrélativement, en retour, que ce que les formations idéologiques majeures de la modernité ont projeté en position de principe – la communauté, la propriété – sera nécessairement marqué par les différences anthropologiques qu'il exploite autant qu'il les refoule. Pour le dire autrement, cela implique que la communauté, tout autant que la propriété, seront toujours-déjà *supplémentées* par certaines différences anthropologiques (de sexe, de génération, entre vie et mort, entre manuel et intellectuel, entre normal et pathologique...), permettant de renaturaliser, ou de ré-essentialiser leurs propres distinctions internes. La différence des sexes est évidemment ici exemplaire (mais la différence manuel/intellectuel ne le serait pas moins, la différence normal/pathologique non plus), dès lors que la communauté ne peut se poser comme la médiation extensive de l'universel qu'en se virilisant, et en refoulant le féminin soit dans la forme d'une sous-communauté subordonnée (privée, familiale, domestique), soit dans un lieu hors-communautaire (de nature, de corporéité pré- ou infra-sociale etc.). C'est tout autant le cas lorsque l'autre axe du diagramme est mobilisé pour distribuer, au sein même de la communauté, le pôle « d'alliance » communautaire (le langage, la culture, la réciprocité) du côté des hommes, et le pôle de la « filiation » communautaire du côté des femmes<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Le travail d'inspiration foucauldienne d'Elsa Dorlin, sur la transformation du statut du corps féminin dans le savoir médical de l'âge classique au XIXe siècle, serait de ce point de

Et il n'en va pas autrement encore, à l'autre extrémité du diagramme, dès lors que la propriété ne peut se poser comme matérialisation extensive de l'universel sans se sexualiser, ou sans exploiter la différence sexuelle pour anthropologiser ses propres contrastes catégoriels entre ce qui peut être propriété (chose) et propriétaire (personne). On pourrait montrer par exemple dans l'*Anthropologie* de Kant (1790), et plus significativement encore dans sa doctrine du droit conjugal et domestique (1796) que cette distinction ne va pas sans le supplément de la différence sexuelle, qui féminise la propriété et masculinise le propriétaire<sup>25</sup> (pour ne rien dire de la féminisation des marchandises dans le 1<sup>er</sup> chapitre du *Capital*, identifiant les propriétaires-échangistes à des proxénètes<sup>26</sup>).

Notons enfin que toutes ces différenciations combinant partages catégoriels et discriminations institutionnelles, pour conférer leurs formes extensives à la communauté et à la propriété, ne peuvent exploiter continument les différences anthropologiques qu'en renforçant leur usage lui-même extensif, c'est-à-dire en les traitant comme des disjonctions *exclusives*, dans lesquelles l'un des termes incarne l'universalité (les rapports communautaires, les relations d'échange, comme liaisons matérialisant la liberté, l'égalité, leur privation ou leur conquête, les conflits qu'elles suscitent etc.) à la condition de déléguer la valeur différentielle elle-même sur l'autre pôle tout en neutralisant sa capacité à « faire une différence » dans l'universel lui-même<sup>27</sup>. Or cela se répercute directement sur les limites du concept de la politique comme « transformation », bien que deux formulations antinomiques en soient possibles. Cela pose à ce concept le problème, non seulement d'une transformation des formes et normes

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vue éclairant (*La Matrice de la race. Généalogie sexuelle et coloniale de la nation française*, Paris, La Découverte).

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<sup>25</sup> La section de la *Doctrine du droit* sur le droit conjugal, matrimonial et domestique, constitue en effet un cas typique de mise en crise de ce jeu disjonctif-exclusif précisément au niveau de ce qui peut entrer dans la différentielle du proprialable (chose/personne), et corrélativement de mise en crise des formes de la communauté (conjugale, familiale, domestique), contaminée par un élément extime (en l'occurrence animal, suivant le brouillage d'une autre différence « quasi-anthropologique », entre le « sauvage » et le « domestiqué »), qui suture la métaphore féminine de la propriété domestique. Voir G. Sibertin-Blanc, « D'un aléa sexuel de la normativité juridique chez Kant : notes sur la perversion comme condition quasi-transcendantale du droit », *Filozofski vestnik*, Volume XXXVI, n° 2, Ljubljana, 2015, p. 153-177.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*, Paris, Minuit, 1977, chap. « Le marché des femmes ».

<sup>27</sup> Voir M. David-Ménard, *Les Constructions de l'universel*, PUF, Paris 2009.

des relations communautaires, et des formes et normes de l'appropriation, de l'expropriation et de l'échange des propriétés (l'espace idéologico-politique de la lutte des classes, en somme), mais d'une transformation des différences anthropologiques elles-mêmes qui y sont incluses. Suivant l'exemple précédent : comment non seulement transformer les rapports de communauté et de propriété, mais *dé-viriliser la communauté*, et *dé-féminiser la propriété*, sans que cela revienne pourtant à projeter l'abstraction vide d'une forme-communauté ou d'une forme-propriété purement et simplement *déssexualisées* ? Dans la mesure où ces différences dites « anthropologiques » – en fait toujours-déjà anthropologico-politiques – combinent toujours des aspects psychiques, voire biologiques, et des aspects sociaux historiques, dans la mesure où elles indiquent toujours « une double articulation de l'individualité au corps et au langage, un aspect réel et un aspect imaginaire » (« ce sont par excellence *des différences qui dénotent la réalité de l'imaginaire dans l'expérience humaine* »), elles adressent aussi bien au concept de la politique comme transformation, comme le souligne Balibar, le problème de ses limites internes, au niveau « d'une transformation de la politique [elle-même] qui engloberait non seulement l'homme-citoyen, mais *l'homme sujet de fantasmes ou de désir* »<sup>28</sup>. Une *transformation du concept de transformation*, donc, telle qu'on pourrait la voir à l'œuvre par exemple dans les travaux du philosophe et psychanalyste indien Ashis Nandy, et déjà dans les travaux de Franz Fanon sur une clinique de la subjectivité décoloniale aux prises avec l'incorporation, dans la structure narcissique même des colonisés, des imagos à la fois raciales et archi-sexualisées que leur impose le pouvoir colonial<sup>29</sup>. Mais rien n'empêche de porter le problème dans le concept de *différence* lui-même, et dans la façon dont on conçoit la polarité de l'intensif et de l'extensif dans le jeu de la différence ; et se serait alors le lieu d'annexer à cette réflexion sur les limites de l'universalité politique moderne, l'élaboration du concept de « disjonction inclusive » dont le fil court de la schizoanalyse de Deleuze et Guattari jusqu'à la contre-anthropologie anti-narcissique de Viveiros de Castro (ou que Monique David-Ménard a retravaillé ces dernières années au niveau d'une nouvelle conception analytique du transfert).

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<sup>28</sup> É. Balibar, *La Proposition d'égalité*, op. cit., p. 81 (j.s.).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. G. Sibertin-Blanc, « Décolonisation du sujet et résistance du symptôme : clinique et politique dans *Les Damnés de la terre* », *Cahiers philosophiques*, n° 138 : *Franz Fanon*, 3<sup>e</sup> semestre 2014, p. 45-67.

5/ Mais j'en viens plutôt à une cinquième et dernière série de remarques, qui concerne cette fois directement le concept de politique comme « civilité », et donc le problème que Balibar a cherché à poser dans une description topologique de l'extrême-violence : quand toutes possibilités émancipatrices sont détruites, mais aussi quand tout horizon d'une transformation quelconque est anéanti comme sous le roc d'une irrémédiable *anankè*, ou encore, là où ne s'impose plus que l'injonction implacable d'une identité « cryptique » soustraite à toute dialectique de la demande et du désir, et où les conditions matérielles d'existence deviennent aussi intangibles qu'une fatalité interminable, alors ne subsistent plus que la violence « ultra-objective » d'un Réel hors sens, et la violence « ultra-subjective » d'un Imaginaire intraitable. Et non seulement les facteurs de l'une et l'autre de ces deux voies d'ascension à l'extrême-violence sont multiples, mais toutes deux ne peuvent que se potentialiser l'une l'autre et à la limite (c'est le point où la notion d'*extrême* violence excède son appréhension phénoménologique) s'enchaînent l'une l'autre et ne cessent de passer l'une dans l'autre. Soit dans son illustration topologique : là où nulle agrafe supplétive n'intervient pour les relier, les deux boucles du Réel et de l'Imaginaire ne forment justement plus deux instances distinctes mais deux faces pleines glissant l'une dans l'autre, sans point d'altérité ou d'altération, dans un *continuum* moebiusien sans fin<sup>30</sup>.

Il est clair cependant que ces extrêmes sont toujours-déjà inclus virtuellement dans la contradiction anthropologico-politique de l'universel, avant que cette virtualité trouve les conditions contextuelles de s'actualiser dans des procédures de déshumanisation plus ou moins radicales. Mais une dernière fois ces tendances doivent être reportées dans le diagramme des formes politiques qui les médiatisent. Ainsi lorsque la « Chose » de la violence ultra-subjective devient la Communauté elle-même, érigée en un corps plein qui détruit d'autant plus les rapports d'échange, de réciprocité et de conflits, que ce sont les individus qui doivent être appropriés par le corps plein communautaire, et à la limite ne sont plus que les organes d'une communauté livrée à la pure jouissance d'elle-même. Ce qui ne peut avoir pour pendant que l'absolutisation impolitisable de l'autre imaginaire, l'altérité radicale du mauvais organe relégué comme déchet, moins objet qu'abject, un moins-que-rien qui est encore en trop, sur lequel l'idéalisation du corps communautaire se retourne en « idéalisation de la haine ».

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<sup>30</sup> É. Balibar, *Violence et civilité*, *op. cit.*, p. 112-117.

Mais les problèmes ne se posent pas moins dramatiquement du côté de l'autre médiation : non plus la communauté (et son auto-appropriation absolue), mais la propriété elle-même, comme forme politique donnant leur matérialité aux conflits pour sa reproduction et sa transformation, et leur extension aux luttes transformatrices des libertés et des égalités instituées. Et l'on pourrait suggérer ici que les seuils extrêmes se rapprochent lorsque la propriété cesse de fonctionner comme une forme politique pour des conflits d'appropriation et d'expropriation, mais n'est plus que le lieu évanouissant où fusionnent l'impératif tyrannique d'une appropriation absolu du propre, et l'incapacité à supporter la dépossession, c'est-à-dire une incapacité à nouer la capacité politique à un savoir de la perte. Nous le savons, le travail même de ce savoir impossible, lorsqu'il rencontre la question des différences anthropologiques, touche directement la question analytique du deuil, et singulièrement le problème de la différence existentielle, ou le travail interminable de re-différenciation de la vie et de la mort. Mais le problème de la « civilité » – ou d'une micropolitique de la subjectivité – se poserait ici justement lorsque ce travail de disjonction inclusive passe directement sous condition de la politique, et lorsque celle-ci, à la limite, détruit la possibilité même du travail du deuil, privant les vivants des moyens de se lier disjonctivement à leurs morts (mais quels sont les « leurs », justement ?), donc les coupant des moyens de s'identifier comme vivants, et partant de déterminer ce qui donne sens et valeur à leur vie, ce qui en fait ou en ferait, et à quelles conditions, une vie vivable, ou digne d'être vécue, ce qui veut dire aussi le cas échéant, une vie digne que l'on lutte pour en améliorer ou en transformer les conditions. Bref en détruisant le travail même de la disjonction inclusive, en traitant les vivants comme s'ils étaient déjà morts, ou en tout cas déjà plus tout à fait vivants, et en traitant les morts comme s'ils ne l'étaient pas complètement, ou pas encore suffisamment, appelant un surcroît de cruauté pour arracher ce qu'il reste de vie (de *sauf, for*, dirait Derrida) dans tout mort.

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Nous ne pouvons pas ne pas songer ici aux perspectives développées par Judith Butler, ces quinze dernières années<sup>31</sup>, à partir d'une réflexion psychanalyti-

<sup>31</sup> En particulier dans ses textes post-septembre 2001, ceux repris en premier lieu dans *Vie précaire : pouvoirs du deuil et de la violence depuis le 11 septembre 2001* (Paris, Amsterdam, 2004), et dans la série d'interventions rassemblées en 2008 dans *Ce qui fait une vie*. Je reprends ici une analyse développée avec Armelle Talbot, in G. Sibertin-Blanc et A. Talbot, « Scènes du deuil : le théâtre entre la vie et la mort », colloque international « Théâtre, performance, philosophie. Croisements et transferts dans la philosophie an-

co-anthropologique sur les dispositifs normatifs qui *instituent publiquement la perte*, donc qui sélectionnent et hiérarchisent les morts en les incluant inégalement dans un espace public de reconnaissance (quels morts sont « comptés » comme morts, c'est-à-dire comme des vies qui ont été détruites ?) et dans un champ d'expérience possible (quelles morts sont « vécues » comme des disparitions, c'est-à-dire comme des vies perdues qui nous endeuillent ?), et l'éclairage que cela projette sur les mécanismes de *déréalisation* qui potentialisent les virtualités exterministes de l'exclusion. Mais je soulignerai surtout, pour conclure, l'autre face de son interrogation (dont elle a pu rappeler elle-même il y a peu l'insistante actualité à l'occasion de la riposte de l'État français aux attentats du 13 novembre 2015), articulant les effets en retour de l'incapacité à supporter l'exposition à l'autre, la dépendance à l'autre, l'ambivalence de cette dépendance qui nous rend vulnérable aussi bien à sa violence potentielle qu'à sa disparition possible, avec une problématisation de l'*économie globale de la violence* circulant des échelles les plus locales aux plus internationales.

La réflexion entreprise dans *Precarious Life* porte précisément sur l'articulation de ces deux dimensions dans les ressorts de l'ascension à l'extrême violence dont les minorités sont les cibles électives. D'un côté, il s'agit d'analyser le lien de cet effet de déréalisation de certaines vies que produit récursivement le refus d'en reconnaître publiquement la perte, avec la violence tendanciellement « exterministe » qui s'exerce contre ces vies qui ne peuvent être pleurées, donc dont la perte n'en est pas une, ou dont la mort indiffère autant que la vie<sup>32</sup>. Mais d'un autre côté, il s'agit simultanément de penser le lien entre l'exploitation de cette violence contre ces vies qui n'en sont pas, et la dénégation par ceux qui exercent cette violence de leur propre vulnérabilité. Lorsque Butler souligne le « changement de l'horizon de l'expérience » qui s'est brutalement opéré pour les Nord-Américains avec les attentats de 2001, la question du deuil n'est plus seulement posée en rapport à un autre, humanisé ou déshumanisé. Elle se trouve surdéterminée par une autre perte portant directement sur l'imaginaire de l'identification politique et sur les mécanismes d'idéalisation qui soutiennent cet imaginaire : perte du sentiment de sécurité à l'intérieur des frontières du pays, perte de

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glo-américaine contemporaine », organisé par F. Garcin-Marrou, L. Kharoubi, A. Street et J. Alliot, Université Paris-Sorbonne, 26-28 juin 2014, consultable en ligne, URL : [https://www.academia.edu/12436893/Sc%C3%A8nes\\_de\\_deuil\\_le\\_th%C3%A9%C3%A2tre\\_entre\\_la\\_vie\\_et\\_la\\_mort](https://www.academia.edu/12436893/Sc%C3%A8nes_de_deuil_le_th%C3%A9%C3%A2tre_entre_la_vie_et_la_mort)

<sup>32</sup> J. Butler, *Vie précaire*, op. cit., p. 181.



cette singulière prérogative des États-Unis « d'être encore et toujours les seuls à violer les frontières souveraines des autres États, sans jamais se retrouver en position de subir eux-mêmes cette violation »<sup>33</sup>, perte enfin de la représentation de leur puissance et de l'identification collective à cette représentation. Le problème ainsi soulevé est de savoir comment leur propre vulnérabilité, au moment où elle leur était violemment rappelée, pouvait se voir aussitôt annulée dans un infernal *circuit mélancolico-paranoïaque*, retournant la violence subie en une violence vengeresse d'autant plus intraitable. Soit ce circuit d'un *double déni* analysé par Butler : *déni du deuil*, distribué inégalement par les normes incluant certaines vies de l'expérience de la perte, en refoulant d'autres, civils irakiens et afghans décimés par la guerre, mais aussi victimes des attentats du 11 septembre qui, parce que gays ou musulmans, parce que lesbiennes ou sans-abri, furent exclus des nécrologies publiques, « morts sans nom et sans visage qui tissent la toile de fond mélancolique de [notre] monde social »<sup>34</sup> ; mais de surcroît *déni de la mélancolie elle-même*, qui conjure la blessure narcissique causée par l'expérience de la perte au moyen de la projection d'un fantasme de maîtrise et de souveraineté absolues, fantasme d'un soi immunisé chargé de renverser « impossiblement » le sentiment d'impuissance en sentiment de toute-puissance. Si la mélancolie est l'issue sans issue d'un travail du deuil dénié, la paranoïa est l'issue sans issue d'une mélancolie déniée, comme celle que Butler illustre par l'injonction de G.W. Bush, dix jours à peine après les attentats, à remplacer le deuil par « l'action résolue »<sup>35</sup>, à mettre fin au temps du *pathos* pour entrer dans celui de représailles énergiques, comme si cette injonction ne pouvait faire autre chose que reconduire interminablement ce fantasme conjuratoire de toute-puissance missionnant les États-Unis à « réparer l'ordre du monde » – « avec ou contre » lui.

Aux marges de cette scène circulaire, Butler en esquisse une autre qui montre bien les implications directement politiques de sa pensée du deuil, mais dont il y a tout lieu de considérer qu'elle concerne tous les pays dits « développés ».

<sup>33</sup> J. Butler, *Vie précaire*, *op. cit.*, p. 66. Voir également p. 67-68 : « Pour cela, il faut accepter que le pays tout entier «perde» quelque chose : l'idée que les États-Unis ont sur le monde lui-même un droit souverain. Cette idée doit être abandonnée, oubliée ; nous devons en faire notre deuil comme on doit faire son deuil de tout fantasme narcissique de grandeur. Faire l'expérience de la perte et de la fragilité ouvre la possibilité de construire des liens d'une autre nature ».

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

Une scène où l'on aurait à « gagner » de la perte, de l'endurer, de supporter de demeurer dans son épreuve, en somme de parvenir à l'*agir* (au sens où le deuil fait l'objet d'un « travail ») : deuil de l'imaginaire des identifications géopolitiques, deuil du sentiment de sécurité que procuraient les inégalités du système-monde à ceux qui en bénéficiaient, deuil sans lequel on ne saurait envisager enfin, ni la possibilité de relations internationales moins asymétriques, ni une économie mondiale de la violence moins brutalement exacerbée par le trouble des frontières entre ceux qui croient avoir tout et refusent de ne rien perdre, et ceux qui n'auraient rien à perdre parce qu'ils n'auraient jamais rien eu, pas même une vie humaine. Ce que l'on pourrait appeler ici, en déformant une expression de Spivak, un tel *mélancolisme stratégique*, entendrait ainsi faire face, en même temps qu'à l'exigence de désidentification, à la question de ce que l'on est prêt à *perdre* dans cette désidentification : à commencer par ce que l'on est prêt à *perdre de soi-même*. Mais « soi-même », ici, ne se réduit pas à des idées que nous « avons », ou à des représentations dans lesquelles nous nous reconnaissons. Ce sont aussi des conditions matérielles d'existence, des manières de vivre, d'habiter, d'échanger, de produire et de consommer qui ne font qu'un avec le système des identités dans lesquelles on se reconnaissait jusqu'à présent. Non seulement les transformations de l'économie-monde et du « *nomos* de la terre » mettent à l'ordre du jour l'inscription pratique (institutionnelle autant que subjective, puisque le problème est nécessairement collectif, ou « transindividuel ») d'un tel travail du deuil en prise sur les mécanismes d'idéalisation inhérents à la constitution des identités historico-mondiales, pour certaines d'entre elles aussi longues que l'histoire coloniale elle-même ; mais l'horizon eschatologique que trace désormais pour l'ensemble de l'humanité la crise écologique suffit à donner à cette question toute son urgence, tout en exacerbant les contradictions dont elle est porteuse au « Nord » comme au « Sud », entre le « sous-développement » et des modèles de « développement » que l'on sait être, à moyen et même à court termes, délétères tant socialement qu'environnementalement (voire qui reproduisent ce que André Gunder Frank appelait naguère le « développement du sous-développement »<sup>36</sup>) ; ou entre les luttes contre la désindustrialisation et la délocalisation des appareils productifs qui précipitent des régions entières du « Nord » dans la pauvreté, et l'urgence d'inventer des paradigmes socio-économiques alternatifs à l'impératif productiviste et consumériste de la « croissance ».

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<sup>36</sup> A. Gunder Frank, *Le Développement du sous-développement : Amérique Latine*, Paris, Édition Maspero, 1970.

Rodrigo De La Fabián\*

## De l'impératif du bonheur dans le néolibéralisme contemporain. Une lecture psychanalytique du nouvel esprit du capitalisme

### 1. Introduction

Dans le livre *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*, Boltanski et Chiapello affirment ce qui suit :

Le capitalisme est, à bien des égards, un système absurde : les salariés y ont perdu la propriété du résultat de leur travail et la possibilité de mener une vie active hors de la subordination. Quant aux capitalistes, ils se trouvent enchaînés à un processus de production sans fin et insatiable, totalement abstrait et dissocié de la satisfaction de besoin de consommation... (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2011, p. 40)

En effet, selon ces auteurs, l'absurdité du modèle capitaliste est dans son cœur ; il ne serait qu'une « ...exigence d'accumulation illimitée du capital... » (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2011, p. 35). C'est-à-dire, son absurdité – ou irrationalité, selon Weber (2013, p. 45) – tient au fait que le seul sujet qui peut en jouir n'est ni le travailleur, ni le capitaliste, mais Le Capital.

Pourtant, malgré ce manque de sens, il est évident que le capitalisme est un système de production qui a besoin d'un fort engagement subjectif pour que ça marche. Dans ce sens, Boltanski et Chiapello font une distinction assez simple, mais absolument décisive : il faut distinguer entre l'exigence absurde d'accumulation illimitée – niveau où le capitalisme reste toujours le même –, et le niveau des discours de légitimation qui, d'une façon historiquement située, donnent du sens et sont responsables de l'engagement subjectif dont ce modèle a besoin.

Alors, en nous tournant vers la psychanalyse, en particulier vers la lecture lacanienne du capitalisme, nous pouvons y trouver des hypothèses très précises et très lucides qui permettent de bien comprendre le rapport entre le capitalisme et la jouissance absurde du Capital. En effet, à partir du séminaire XVI *D'un Autre à l'autre*, Lacan (2006) va rapprocher la notion marxiste de plus-value à la

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question du plus-de-jouir. Par contre, en ce qui concerne la question de l'esprit du capitalisme, c'est-à-dire de « ...l'idéologie qui justifie l'engagement dans le capitalisme... » (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2011, p. 41), nous n'y trouvons pas de réflexions équivalentes.

Dans ce contexte, cet article a pour but de faire une lecture psychanalytique de l'évolution de l'esprit du capitalisme. Pour y arriver, en lisant le Séminaire XVII *L'Envers de la Psychanalyse* (Lacan, 1991) nous allons montrer que nous pouvons déjà y trouver la distinction entre la question de la jouissance et la question du sens du capitalisme. En d'autres termes, nous allons montrer que Lacan distingue, d'une façon très nette, *jouissance de bonheur*. Par conséquent, faire l'histoire de l'esprit du capitalisme se traduit, dans ce texte, par montrer l'évolution du rapport entre capitalisme et bonheur.

Pour y arriver, le texte commence par reconstruire l'argument sur le capitalisme, développé par Lacan, en distinguant le niveau de la jouissance de celui du bonheur. Deuxièmement, l'article analyse la transformation que Foucault a considérée comme inaugurale de la subjectivité néolibérale, c'est-à-dire, l'invention de la notion de capital humain dans les années 60. En particulier, nous allons montrer comment, à travers de la notion d'*inversion*, la promesse du bonheur personnel, qui avait été interdite par le premier esprit du capitalisme, va être réintroduite. Finalement, le texte montre qu'à partir des années 2000, vont faire irruption en Occident, des nouveaux discours du bonheur, qui ont radicalisé certains aspects du néolibéralisme, plus particulièrement, nous allons montrer que l'impératif de la jouissance capitaliste, a été recouvert par l'impératif du bonheur.

## 2. Plus-de-jouir, plus-value et bonheur

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Dans son séminaire *D'un Autre à l'autre*, Lacan dit : « Le plus-de-jouir est fonction de la renonciation à la jouissance sous l'effet du discours. » (Lacan, 2006, p. 19). À quoi doit-on renoncer ? Comment arrive-t-on à ce renoncement ? Quel est le rapport entre le renoncement et le plus-de-jouir ?

Par rapport à la première question, Lacan nous dit que le plus-de-jouir est un renoncement à une forme de jouissance antérieure. Il la qualifie de « ...savoir ancestral... qui fait que la vie s'arrête à une certaine limite vers la jouissance... [vers] la mort... » (Lacan, 1991, p. 17). En effet, en suivant Freud, Lacan soutient

que, dès le début, il faut compter sur la tension entre le plaisir, en tant que principe qui est chargé de protéger la vie, et la pulsion de mort, qui dépasse la vie et va contre elle (Lacan, 1991, p. 51). Or, ce qu'il faut noter, c'est que Lacan n'oppose pas Thanatos à Éros, mais Thanatos au plaisir. Mais ceci ne veut pas dire que le *savoir ancestral* soit le synonyme du principe de plaisir. Si ce savoir est lié à la jouissance, c'est parce qu'à la différence du plaisir, qui est simplement une barrière vers la mort, il est à la fois un obstacle mais aussi un passage vers l'anéantissement<sup>1</sup>. C'est-à-dire, la première jouissance – le *savoir ancestral* – est issue de l'articulation entre Eros et Thanatos, en tant que détour vers la mort, laquelle s'oppose, aussi bien à l'inertie radicale de la pulsion de mort qu'au principe de plaisir. Tout d'abord, donc, le savoir et la jouissance s'embrassent dans un pêché de pensée, une *delectatio morosa*. Mais cette pensée, en tant que dérapage, dit Lacan, est un savoir inconscient : parfaitement articulé mais sans sujet, un savoir-non-su (Lacan, 1991, pp. 35, 88).

Donc, le plus-de-jouir serait la conséquence du renoncement à cette forme de jouissance première. Pour y arriver, une transformation doit avoir lieu au niveau du savoir acéphale. Lacan lie le savoir-non-su au savoir-faire de l'esclave : il sait faire beaucoup de choses mais il ne peut pas s'expliquer. La transformation dont on parle est décrite par Alenka Zupančič de la façon suivante : « ...un savoir qui ne se connaît pas lui-même et qui fonctionne, passe dans un savoir articulé qui peut être écrit et pensé indépendamment du travail auquel il est lié dès le départ. » (Zupančič, 2006, p. 150) Il s'agit donc de l'émergence d'un savoir qui croit pouvoir répondre de lui-même, du savoir épistémique (Lacan, 1991, p. 21). Pour ceci, il faut qu'un signifiant, en se différenciant des autres, prend la place du signifiant maître – ou simplement du S<sub>1</sub> – en initiant un travail de codification et de *lisibilité* (Lacan, 1991, p. 218) du savoir-non-su de l'esclave. Lacan assimile ce procès à l'histoire de la philosophie, laquelle ne serait que « ...le vol, le rapt, la soustraction à l'esclavage, de son savoir... » (Lacan, 1991, p. 21)

<sup>1</sup> Au début du séminaire [Séminaire 17] Lacan revisite l'idée de Freud du Jenseits. La vie est un détour auto-construit dans la voie vers la mort et, la plupart du temps, la vie ne se dépêche pas pour arriver à cette fin... Lacan connecte ce détour à l'instinct, en faisant une connexion entre la jouissance et une certaine forme de connaissance. L'instinct contient un savoir ancestral qui a pour conséquence que la vie traîne dans la voie vers la mort. Comme la mort c'est la forme finale de la jouissance, ce détour est en même temps la voie vers la jouissance. (*Verhaeghe*, pp. 19-21. La traduction est mienne.)

En troisième lieu, parce qu'il n'y pas de métalangage pour y inscrire le code, l'effort manqué de formalisation du savoir inconscient S2 par le S1, est à la base du renoncement à la jouissance première et, aussi, la cause de l'irruption de deux formes de négativités : le plus-de-jour ou objet *a*, et le sujet barré du discours.

### Discours du maître

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \underline{S_1} & \longrightarrow & \underline{S_2} \\ \mathcal{S} & & a \end{array}$$

D'un côté, le plus-de-jour est le déchet entropique qui actualise, de façon positive – en tant qu'objet –, l'impossibilité du savoir épistémique à formaliser le savoir ancestral<sup>2</sup>. De l'autre côté de la formule, comme la vérité du maître, se situe l'autre élément produit par l'inadéquation des signifiants avec eux-mêmes, le sujet barré. Si l'objet *a* est une magnitude positive, le sujet barré incarne l'impossibilité en acte du passage du S1 au S2<sup>3</sup>.

C'est-à-dire, lorsque le savoir-faire de l'esclave est de travailler par et pour le maître, il va se produire nécessairement un reste d'énergie excédentaire non utilisable, l'objet *a*. En même temps, la tombée de ce surplus signale l'impuissance du maître à se maîtriser lui-même, et par conséquent, de codifier de façon intégrale le savoir de l'esclave. Cette impossibilité est actualisée dans le discours du maître par le sujet barré ( $\mathcal{S}$ ) que le S1 ne cesse d'occulter sous la barre. C'est-à-dire, la vérité du maître, de celui qui porte et est porté par le S1, de celui qui s'autorise à partir du S1, est qu'il est châtré (Lacan, 1991, p. 101). En d'autres termes, personne n'aurait jamais le prestige phallique nécessaire pour s'identifier parfaitement avec le S1, au contraire, en tant que nom propre, le S1 laisse toujours un reste qui ne cesse pas de ne pas s'inscrire et qui, du côté du maître, est présentifié par le sujet barré qui habite en lui.

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<sup>2</sup> « Ce qui apparaît de ce formalisme...c'est.... qu'il y a perte de jouissance. Et c'est à la place de cette perte qu'introduit la répétition, que nous voyons surgir la fonction de l'objet perdu, de ce que j'appelle le *a*. » (Lacan, 1991, p. 54).

<sup>3</sup> « ...le sujet est la béance en tant que magnitude ou nombre négatif, dans le sens précis dans lequel la définition lacanienne du signifiant le situe... L'objet *a*, d'autre part, est un déchet positif qui est produit dans ce mouvement et que Lacan appelle le plus-de-jour... » (Zupančič, 2006, p. 148. La traduction est mienne.)

Or, pour Lacan, la fonction de l'Œdipe va justement être celle de transformer cette impossibilité structurale du S1 en une prohibition, en créant par-là un horizon phantasmatique de possibilité. C'est-à-dire, à la différence de Freud, l'Œdipe chez Lacan a pour principale mission, non pas d'interdire la jouissance phallique, mais de nier qu'elle est impossible en la transformant simplement en prohibition.

Une fois que l'impossibilité phallique est interdite, et par-là transformée en une possibilité, deux choses se produisent : en premier lieu, le phallus symbolique devient synonyme du bonheur :

...happiness, nous appelons ça en français bonheur ...le bonheur... personne ne sait ce que c'est. Si nous croyons Saint-Just qui l'a dit lui-même, le bonheur est devenu depuis cette époque, la sienne, un facteur politique. Essayons ici de donner corps à cette notion par un autre énoncé abrupt... il n'y a du bonheur que du phallus. (Lacan, 1991, p. 84)

Et, en deuxième lieu, le plus-de-jouir devient une forme de compensation pour le manque de *happiness*.

...en suppléance de l'interdit de la jouissance phallique, est apporté quelque chose dont nous avons défini l'origine d'une tout autre chose que de la jouissance phallique, celle qui est située, et, si l'on peut dire, quadrillée, de la fonction du plus-de-jouir. (Lacan, 1991, p. 85)

Ainsi, à partir du discours du maître, il nous faut distinguer, de façon très précise, le bonheur du plus-de-jouir. Le *happiness* est une promesse narcissique-phallique post-œdipienne liée à la question du 'pur prestige' du maître. Tandis que le plus-de-jouir est la miette dont le maître doit se contenter, en jouissant de l'impossibilité phallique. Le discours du maître est donc capturé par la répétition du plus-de-jouir *en tant qu'impossible*. Le maître peut se servir de l'élément excédentaire produit par le travail de l'esclave (Lacan, 1991, p. 91) comme un signe de prestige, il peut en jouir, le consommer même si ça ne sert à rien, en tant que pure valeur d'usage. Mais ces miettes produites par le travail excédentaire de l'esclave ne sont là que pour le souvenir de l'impuissance de son nom.

Or, le discours du capitalisme, selon Lacan, serait autre chose que le discours du maître. À ce sujet, il dit :

Quelque chose a changé dans le discours du maître à partir d'un certain moment de l'histoire. Nous n'allons pas nous casser les pieds à savoir si c'est à cause de Luther, ou de Calvin, ou je ne sais quel trafic de navires autour de Gênes, ou dans la mer Méditerranée, ou ailleurs, car le point important est qu'à partir d'un certain jour, le plus-de-jour se compte, se comptabilise, se totalise. Là, commence ce que l'on appelle accumulation du capital. (Lacan, 1991, p. 207)

En effet, la question de l'accumulation des capitaux suppose de résoudre la question suivante : quelles sont les conditions et à partir de quelle substance, arrive-t-on à produire, dans la circulation des marchandises, un élément excédentaire qui puisse s'ajouter à la somme totale du capital ? Nous connaissons la réponse de Marx à cette énigme : le capital s'accumule à partir de la plus-value qui résulte de la différence entre le coût de maintenir la force de travail vivante – c'est-à-dire le salaire – et la valeur à laquelle le capitaliste vend la marchandise.

Or, pour bien comprendre le point de contact entre Lacan et Marx et ses notions de plus-de-jour et de plus-value, il nous faut préciser ce qu'est la force de travail. À ce sujet, Lacan nous donne un petit exemple (Lacan, 1991, p. 54) :

Je vous défie de ne prouver d'aucune façon de descendre de 500 mètres un poids de 80 kilos sur votre dos et, une fois que vous l'avez descendu, le remonter de 500 mètres, c'est zéro, aucun travail. Faites l'essai, mettez-vous à l'ouvrage, vous verrez que vous aurez la preuve du contraire.

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En effet, celui qui remonte les 500 mètres va transpirer. Et justement cette sueur est l'objet *a* que le discours du maître produit mais ne comptabilise pas. Or ce que le capitalisme a découvert, c'est la façon de se servir de l'énergie excédentaire. Lorsque le plus-de-jour cesse d'être la limite de la machine signifiante – comme il l'était dans le discours du maître – et il est valorisé, compté et réintégré à la somme totale du capital, il devient alors, selon Lacan, la plus-value marxiste. À ce sujet, Lacan dit :

Ne sentez-vous pas, par rapport à ce que j'ai énoncé tout à l'heure de l'impuissance à faire le joint du plus-de-jour à la vérité du maître, qu'ici, le pas gagne ?...



l'impuissance de cette jonction est tout d'un coup vidée. La plus-value s'ad-joint au capital – pas de problème, c'est homogène, nous sommes dans les va-leurs. (Lacan, 1991, p. 207)

Donc, si dans le discours du maître, le premier étage était constitué par la paire S1 S2, dans le discours universitaire, que Lacan va considérer comme équivalent au capitalisme, il est substitué par S2 a. Ceci veut dire qu'au lieu du signifiant maître, l'agent du capitalisme est un savoir sans chef, acéphale. En effet, le li-béralisme économique, depuis Adam Smith jusqu'à Hayek, garde comme un de ses principes centraux l'importance de vider la place du Sujet Supposé Savoir. Soit sous la figure de la *main invisible*, chez Smith, ou *de l'ordre spontané*, chez Hayek (2001), pour cette rationalité, il est fondamental que le bien commun ne soit que le résultat des relations individuelles qui poursuivent le bénéfice per-sonnel. Au contraire, si cette place est prise par l'État ou par n'importe quel type d'intelligence qui croit pouvoir incarner le Sujet Supposé Savoir du marché, il est destiné à échouer. Donc l'agent du capitalisme est ce savoir sans sujet, orien-té vers le plus-de-jouir fétichisé en plus-value.

### Discours universitaire/capitaliste

S2 —→ a  
S1        ȡ

L'effet ou déchet de cette forme de production, est le sujet exploité, c'est-à-dire, il n'y a aucun sujet du plus-de-jouissance infinie, propre au capitalisme, parce que c'est Le Capital (S2), c'est Ça, qui jouit. Par rapport à l'éthique du capita-lisme, Weber affirme :

(...) Ici, le *summum bonum* peut s'exprimer ainsi : gagner de l'argent, toujours plus d'argent, tout en se gardant strictement des jouissances spontanées de la vie. L'argent est à ce point considéré comme une fin en soi qu'il apparaît entiè-rement transcendant et absolument irrationnel sous le rapport du bonheur de l'individu... (Weber, 2013, p. 29)

C'est-à-dire, rien de ce que le capitaliste gagne n'est pour lui, tout doit être ré-investi, parce que le sujet du capital est Le Capital et non pas le capitaliste. La

jouissance du capitaliste n'a rien à voir avec son bonheur<sup>4</sup>. Marx qualifie cette quête de richesse, en tant que fin en soi, comme une « chasse passionnée à la valeur d'échange » (Marx, 1985, p. 119). Le capitaliste est, donc, Le Capital personnifié (Marx, 1985, p. 119), « ...monstre animé qui se met à travailler comme s'il avait le diable au corps. » (Marx, 1985, p. 151)

En revanche, tant que l'esclave travaillait pour et à cause du maître, ce dernier avait la possibilité d'être heureux avec « ...cette petite dîme, d'un plus-de-jour... » (Lacan, 1991, p. 91). En d'autres termes, le plus-de-jour se lie au *happiness* du maître tant qu'il est produit par l'esclave comme un hommage à la puissance et au prestige de son nom. Le maître peut savourer le produit du travail de l'esclave, mais non pas créer un capital avec ceci. Par contre, tant que le capitaliste travaille pour un autre – Le Capital –, même plus, tant que cet Autre est acéphale – pure circulation du capital – alors il n'y a personne qui puisse, même partialement, capitaliser le plus-de-jour comme bonheur phallique. Lacan caractérise la jouissance capitaliste de la façon suivante :

Passé à l'étage au-dessus [*dans le discours universitaire*], le plus-de-jour n'est plus-de-jour, mais s'inscrit simplement comme valeur, à inscrire ou à déduire de la totalité de ce qui s'accumule d'une nature essentiellement transformée... Ce que Marx dénonce dans la plus-value, c'est le mémorial du plus-de-jour, son équivalent du plus-de-jour. La société des consommateurs prend son sens de ceci, qu'à ce qui en fait l'élément entre guillemets qu'on qualifie d'humain, est donné l'équivalent homogène de n'importe quel plus-de-jour qui est le produit de notre industrie, un plus-de-jour en toc pour tout dire. Aussi bien ça peut prendre. On peut faire semblant de plus-de-jour, ça retient encore beaucoup de monde. (Lacan, 1991, pp. 92-93).

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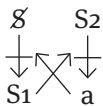
Pour Lacan, la jouissance liée à la plus-value dans le contexte d'une société de consommation est donc une pâle imitation du plus-de-jour. Selon Alenka Zupančič, Lacan serait en train de montrer un paradoxe fondamental de notre société contemporaine : étant donné que le surmoi est devenu l'impératif de la

<sup>4</sup> Selon Marx, le capitaliste doit renoncer à la valeur d'usage des marchandises, pour jouir simplement de la valeur d'échange, de la croissance du capital que la vente de la marchandise produit. Dans ce sens, Marx écrit : « La valeur d'usage ne doit donc jamais être considérée comme le but immédiat du capitaliste, pas plus que le gain isolé, mais bien le mouvement incessant du gain toujours renouvelé. » (Marx, 1985, p. 119).

jouissance, alors on a délié le plus-de-jouir de l'impossibilité qui était propre au discours du maître : « Le capitalisme, dans sa jonction avec le discours universitaire, est avant tout le discours du possible. Son slogan fondamental pourrait être exprimé en ces termes : Impossible n'est pas possible. » (Zupančič, 2006, p. 160)

En 1972, lors d'une conférence à Milan, Lacan (1972) va dire son dernier mot à propos du capitalisme. Plutôt que d'un cinquième discours, dans cette conférence, il va décrire le discours capitaliste non pas avec le discours universitaire, mais à partir d'une torsion particulière du discours du maître.

### Discours du Capitalisme



Dans cette modification du discours du maître, ce n'est plus le savoir –S2– qui est situé à la place du maître, mais le sujet barré. C'est-à-dire, le sujet est Le Capital qui a le pouvoir de s'auto-valoriser, en réintégrant le plus-de-jouir –a– que le maître ne pouvait pas capitaliser. Selon Samo Tomšič (2015, p. 220), il s'agit du rejet de la contradiction entre capital et force de travail, de la figure monstrueuse du capital qui se reproduit à soi-même sans aucune limite, sans aucune entrave.

Lacan arrive jusqu'à nommer cette jouissance insipide, vidée de toute impossibilité, comme une manque-à-jouir<sup>5</sup>. Par conséquent, dans la société capitaliste, la plus-value serait le plus-de-jouir mais vidée de son impossibilité. Ceci produirait une jouissance sans jouissance : du sucré sans sucre, des côtes de porc sans graisse, etc.

À cette lecture, disons plutôt *classique* de l'œuvre de Lacan, nous avons ajouté aussi la question du bonheur. Le maître, à la différence du capitaliste, peut consommer –mais non pas capitaliser– cette petite dîme d'impossibilité pro-

<sup>5</sup> « Car ... la plus-value, c'est la cause du désir dont une économie fait son principe : celui de la production extensive, donc insatiable, du manque-à-jouir. Il s'accumule d'une part pour accroître les moyens de cette production au titre du capital. Il étend la consommation d'autre part sans quoi cette production serait vaine, justement de son ineptie à procurer une jouissance dont elle puisse se ralentir. » (Lacan, 2001-1970, p. 435).

duite par l'esclave. Même plus, nous avons montré que cette jouissance opère comme une compensation phallique. Après tout, si petite que soit la dîme, le maître l'obtient grâce à son prestige.

Le malaise capitaliste, donc, ne se produit pas exclusivement au niveau du manque-à-jour, mais aussi comme un déficit de bonheur phallique. Telle que nous allons le voir, cette distinction est très importante, parce qu'elle va nous permettre de comprendre comment le capitalisme contemporain a subi une mutation, non pas au niveau de la jouissance, mais surtout au niveau du bonheur, c'est-à-dire, au niveau de son esprit.

## 2. La promesse de bonheur

En 1961, le prix Nobel d'économie et un des pères de la théorie du capital humain et du néolibéralisme contemporain, Theodore Schultz, écrit :

Pas moins que J.S. Mill à un moment donné a insisté sur le fait que le peuple d'un pays ne doit pas être considéré comme une richesse seulement parce que la richesse existe pour le bien du peuple. Mais Mill avait sûrement tort ; il n'y a rien dans le concept de la richesse humaine contrairement à son idée qu'il existe seulement pour l'avantage des personnes. En investissant en eux-mêmes, les gens peuvent élargir les possibilités de choix à leur disposition. Il est un moyen par lequel les hommes libres peuvent améliorer leur bien-être. (Schultz, 1961. La traduction est mienne)

Pour comprendre ce qui est en jeu dans cette citation, nous allons nous arrêter sur une conférence que Schultz (1962) a donnée au Chili un an plus tard. Il dit que la science économique classique considérait qu'il y avait trois sources de richesses : la terre, le travail et le capital. Étant donné que la quantité de terre est constante, le développement économique dépendait des deux autres. Mais le problème, continue-t-il, est que la force de travail ne pouvait augmenter qu'à condition d'agrandir la population. Alors, dit Schultz, pour l'économie classique, seul le troisième facteur, c'est-à-dire les biens tangibles de l'ordre de l'infrastructure, de l'équipement, etc., pouvait être modifié et pris en charge par cette discipline. Or, dit Schultz, la conception de la force de travail comme donnée, comme moyen naturel de production, est une erreur. Il démontre que le véritable capital des nations riches n'était ni la terre, ni les capitaux tangibles,

sinon la qualité – et non la quantité – de la force de travail. De façon à ce que le point de contact entre le travailleur et le capitaliste n'est plus la quantité de force de travail innée dont l'ouvrier dispose, mais le capital humain, c'est-à-dire une série de caractéristiques hétérogènes, améliorables par le propre travailleur, telles que l'éducation, les compétences de communication, la beauté, etc.

Dans ce sens, en critiquant Marx, Schultz écrit : « Les ouvriers sont devenus capitalistes non pas grâce à une diffusion de la propriété des actions des corporations, tel que le folklore [*marxiste*] l'aurait songé, mais à partir de l'acquisition de connaissances et de compétences qui ont une valeur économique. » (Schultz, 1961. La traduction est mienne.)

C'est-à-dire, en produisant une nouvelle subjectivité et sans altérer le rapport aux moyens de productions et la richesse, le néolibéralisme aurait fait disparaître la catégorie de *travailleur* (Read, 2009) en faveur de l'universalisation de la position du capitaliste.

En premier lieu, ce nouvel *homo œconomicus* néolibéral est stratégiquement lié à sa vie, en cherchant à se capitaliser lui-même en permanence. Faire du sport, rencontrer des gens à l'église, se marier, se blanchir les dents, etc., toutes sont des opportunités pour accroître le capital humain. En deuxième lieu, cette transformation majeure va changer le rapport subjectif au travail. À ce sujet, Foucault écrit : « Du point de vue du travailleur, le salaire, ce n'est pas le prix de vente de sa force de travail, c'est un revenu... Un revenu, c'est tout simplement le produit ou le rendement d'un capital. Et inversement, on appellera 'capital' tout ce qui peut être... source de revenus futurs. » (Foucault, 2004, p. 230) Par conséquent, si la surface de contact entre le travailleur et le capitaliste est l'ensemble des facteurs physiques et psychologiques qui ont un prix de marché, alors le revenu est produit par le propre travailleur et ses habilités pour capitaliser sa vie. Par conséquent, continue Foucault, l'*homo œconomicus*, « c'est un entrepreneur et un entrepreneur de lui-même... étant lui-même son propre capital, étant pour lui-même son propre producteur, étant pour lui-même la source de [ses] revenus. » (Foucault, 2004, p. 232) Ce n'est pas le patron de l'entreprise, mais l'entrepreneur de lui-même qui se paye, qui produit ses propres revenus.

Le nouvel *homo œconomicus* est donc à la fois le producteur et le consommateur de ce qu'il produit. Le concept-clé qui permet de surpasser le tabou du premier

capitalisme, l'interdiction de mélanger production et consommation, est la notion d'investissement (Lopez-Ruiz, 2007).

À ce sujet, Schultz écrit :

Bien qu'il soit évident que le gens acquièrent des compétences et des connaissances utiles, ce n'est pas évident que ces compétences et ces connaissances soient une forme de capital, que ce capital soit substantiellement un produit de l'investissement délibéré... les gens investissent en eux-mêmes et ces investissements sont très importants. (Schultz, 1961. La traduction est mienne.)

De façon à ce que le travailleur devienne capitaliste en divisant sa subjectivité. Quand le moi présent est en train de consommer, par exemple en payant une chirurgie esthétique, ou bien, selon l'exemple canonique du capital humain, en payant l'éducation, l'entrepreneur de lui-même est, en même temps, investisseur de son futur. C'est-à-dire, des actes que l'économie aurait considérés comme de pure consommation, deviennent des formes de consommation productive. À l'inverse, lorsque l'entrepreneur de lui-même est en train de produire, comme il sait que les fruits de son effort vont être consommés par son futur moi, le travail aussi change de valeur<sup>6</sup>. Par conséquent, ce qui fait la différence entre la nouvelle subjectivité néolibérale et l'*homo œconomicus* classique est que la consommation et la production sont devenues des investissements en lui-même.

Reprenons la première citation de Schultz que nous avons laissée en suspens. J.S. Mill pensait que le peuple ne pouvait pas être pris par une richesse, parce que la richesse devait être un bien du peuple. Sans doute Mill avait-il une conception du capitalisme plus classique, plus proche de celle de Marx, où le peuple ne travaillait pas pour lui-même, mais pour le capitaliste. C'est dans ce contexte que, même pour Mill, il était immoral de transformer, non pas le produit du travail, mais le travailleur lui-même, en une source de richesse des

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<sup>6</sup> En effet, l'entrepreneur de lui-même travaille dur, même plus que son antécédent. La raison de ceci nous la trouvons dans un autre prix Nobel et père de la théorie du capital humain, Gary Becker (1965) : ce qui auparavant était considéré temps de repos, de loisir, devient, pour le sujet néolibéral, la matière première pour augmenter son capital humain. Bref, la vie de l'*Homo Œconomicus* néolibéral n'est plus divisée selon la formule classique : 8 heures de travail ; 8 heures de loisir ; 8 heures de sommeil. Parce qu'il doit s'auto-exploiter 24heures/24 sur 7 jours par semaine pour se capitaliser.

capitalistes. Mais, dit Schultz, il avait tort. Parce que, dans la théorie du capital humain, le peuple devient une source de richesse pour lui-même. Souvenons-nous de la fin de la citation :

...il n'y a rien dans le concept de la richesse humaine contrairement à son idée qu'il existe seulement à l'avantage des personnes. En investissant en eux-mêmes, les gens peuvent élargir les possibilités de choix à leur disposition. Il est un moyen par lequel les hommes libres peuvent améliorer leur bien-être. (Schultz, 1961. La traduction est mienne.)

Voilà l'importance centrale que la notion d'investissement en soi-même a jouée dans la transformation du rapport subjectif au mode de production capitaliste. Cette conception a permis de modifier l'expérience de la lutte de classe, et de passer de l'hétéro exploitation à un modèle d'auto-exploitation. Comme disent Boltanski et Chiapello, tout devient un projet : la consommation présente est un projet de production future et la production présente est un projet de consommation future. Ceci aurait permis à l'entrepreneur de lui-même de devenir une *poche d'accumulation* (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2011, p. 170) différenciée du grand capital.

À différence de la lecture du capitalisme faite par Lacan, la nouvelle subjectivité néolibérale n'a plus l'expérience de produire pour Le Capital, mais pour son nom propre futur. Ce qui fait que le moment de la consommation, comme celui de la production, change de *savoir*, c'est justement que, dans le futur, c'est lui-même qui va les capitaliser. Par conséquent, l'entrepreneur de lui-même est en train de se construire un nom. Il n'est pas le maître, qui l'avait déjà, mais il n'est pas non plus le salarié d'un savoir acéphale. Il a en lui une source de plus-value qu'il doit auto-exploiter de façon à produire son nom propre. Bref, le passage du libéralisme vers le néolibéralisme implique de réintroduire la promesse de bonheur phallique qui avait été supprimée par une jouissance insipide et a-subjective. La formule *c'est pour moi que je travaille et je consomme* transforme le rapport subjectif à ses actes en y incorporant une promesse de jouissance narcissique qui leur donne un sens renouvelé.

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### 3. L'impératif du bonheur

Tel que le sociologue Sam Binkley (2011a, 2011b, 2014) l'a démontré, il y a un peu plus d'une décennie, la question du bonheur a cessé d'être un objet de spécula-

tion philosophique, un attribut insaisissable de l'expérience singulière des individus ou une conséquence collatérale de la modernisation et de l'amélioration des conditions matérielles d'existence des populations. En effet, à partir des années deux mille, le bonheur est devenu un nouvel axe de problématisation et d'intelligibilité du social et de l'individuel, c'est-à-dire une nouvelle rationalité qui oriente aussi bien les politiques publiques comme la psychologie clinique et la gestion des organisations.

Dans le domaine des politiques publiques, l'inquiétude contemporaine pour le bonheur est liée à un regard qui remet en question l'efficacité des indicateurs économiques traditionnels, tels que le PIB (Produit Intérieur Brut) ou le revenu par habitant, pour mesurer le bonheur subjectif des individus. L'antécédent plus ancien de ce virage date de 1972, lorsque le Royaume de Bhutan a décidé de commencer à mesurer et à orienter ses politiques publiques par le BIB (Bonheur Intérieur Brut). Dans le même sens, en 2008, Nicolas Sarkozy demande aux économistes Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen et Jean-Paul Fitoussi de faire un rapport sur la façon de mesurer le développement économique en France. Et une de principales conclusions de ce rapport est que « ...le moment est venu pour que notre système de mesure change l'accent de la mesure de la production économique à la mesure du bien-être des personnes. » (Stiglitz, Sen & Fitoussi, 2009, p. 13)

Le diagnostic qui explique ce virage dans les politiques publiques est le suivant : pourquoi veut-on avoir une bonne santé, une meilleure éducation, plus d'argent, etc. ? La réponse a toujours été la même : pour être plus heureux. C'est-à-dire, le bonheur est, pour le dire selon les termes de Marx, l'équivalent universel de tous les capitaux humains. Ou bien, pour l'exprimer selon la nomenclature de Lacan, le bonheur est un signifiant vide – sans signification propre – mais qui « ...est destiné à désigner dans leur ensemble les effets de signifié... » (Lacan, 1996-1958, p. 168), c'est-à-dire le signifiant phallique. Or traditionnellement, on avait cru qu'en mesurant des indices économiques objectifs – tel que le PIB, entre autres – on pouvait déduire les niveaux de bien-être d'une population. Mais ce que les nouveaux discours du bonheur découvrent est que cette prémisse était erronée et qu'en fait, il y aurait un écart entre les mesures objectives de prospérité et l'expérience subjective de bonheur. La conséquence de ceci a été une importante prolifération des *Happiness Index* partout dans le monde. Le *Better Life Index* publié par l'OECD (2015) et le *World Happiness Rapport* (Helliwell, Layard & Sachs, 2015) publié par les Nations Unies ne sont



que deux exemples parmi d'autres. Même au Royaume-Uni, la London School of Economics et Apple ont créé une Hédonimètre, c'est-à-dire une application pour téléphones portables qui permet de mesurer en direct les niveaux de bonheur de la population (Mappiness, 2016).

C'est dans ce contexte qu'au début des années 2000, une nouvelle sous discipline appelée *Psychologie Positive*, a été fondée par l'ex-président de l'American Psychological Association (APA) et professeur de l'Université de Pennsylvanie, Dr. Martin Seligman. Depuis sa création, cette nouvelle perspective a connu une croissance exponentielle. Par exemple, les universités de Harvard, Pennsylvanie et East London, entre autres, ont des programmes dans cette sous discipline. En 2009, des chercheurs dans ce domaine avaient reçu près de 226 millions dollars de l'Institut National de Santé Mentale des États-Unis (Ruark, 2009). Comme une sorte d'anecdote, mais qui montre bien l'expansion de la Psychologie Positive, la Banque de l'État du Chili n'a plus de Direction des Ressources Humaines, mais une Direction du Bonheur.

Historiquement parlant, la quête de bonheur n'a rien de nouveau. C'est dans l'*Illustration* que cette aspiration est devenue l'horizon normatif fondamental des revendications individuelles et collectives. Or quelle serait la nouveauté des discours contemporains du bonheur ?

Dans un bref texte appelé *Psychologie Positive et Bonheur*, insérée dans le Premier Baromètre du Bonheur de l'Institut Coca-Cola du Bonheur du Chili, le psychologue Claudio Ibáñez écrit :

Une des croyances la plus répandue est que le bonheur est un résultat, à savoir, un état émotionnel qui se produit lorsque nous atteignons quelque chose (comme un titre universitaire), nous avons un certain comportement (comme aller au cinéma) ou lorsqu'il nous arrive un événement positif (comme la naissance d'un enfant). Si ceci est vrai, ce qu'on ne connaissait pas, c'est qu'il existe une puissante relation inverse : que le bonheur conduit à de bons résultats. Une des grandes découvertes de la Psychologie Positive a été que les gens les plus heureux vivent plus longtemps, ont une meilleure santé, sont plus productifs, plus performants, ont de meilleures relations et sont plus généreux. Cette découverte... peut être exprimée comme suit : occupe-toi d'être heureux et tout le reste suivra. (Ibáñez, 2011. La traduction est mienne.)

Donc, il y a au moins deux bonnes raisons pour lesquelles nous devrions nous occuper d'être heureux. L'une d'elles a été largement connue, l'autre la Psychologie Positive nous l'aurait révélée. Certes, selon Ibáñez, il n'y a rien de nouveau à considérer le bonheur comme la conséquence naturelle d'une *bonne vie*. Or, selon Ibáñez, la nouveauté de la Psychologie Positive, est d'avoir montré qu'il existe aussi une *puissante relation inverse*. C'est-à-dire que le bonheur n'est pas seulement l'effet mais aussi la cause d'une *bonne vie*. Selon Binkley (2011b), le bonheur, pour la Psychologie Positive, n'est plus seulement une fin, mais aussi le moyen d'atteindre cette fin. En d'autres termes, le bonheur, pour la première fois dans l'histoire, est devenu non seulement la mesure universelle des capitaux humains, mais aussi un capital en soi-même. « L'émotion positive – écrit Seligman – fait beaucoup plus que simplement se sentir agréable ; elle est un panneau de néon qui montre que la croissance est en cours, que le capital psychologique est en train de s'accumuler. » (Seligman, 2013a, p. 66. La traduction est mienne.) Ou encore, dans un livre de coaching et Psychologie Positive, nous trouvons l'affirmation suivante :

C'est vrai ! Le bonheur est liquide, de la même manière que les instruments monétaires comme les actions. Les humains ont été construits avec un système émotionnel qui comprend le bonheur, et ce bonheur est supposé être dépensé. Il est un type de monnaie émotionnelle qui peut être dépensé, comme l'argent, dans les réussites de la vie que vous appréciez vraiment, tel que votre santé, vos relations et le succès au travail. (Biswas-Diener, 2010, p. 40. La traduction est mienne.)

La puissante relation inverse entre qualité de vie et bonheur implique donc que pour commencer à être plus heureux, on doit déjà l'être. En effet, pour augmenter un capital, il faut, tel que le démontre Marx, en avoir déjà un. Dans ce sens, Lyubomirsky (2008, p. 39. La traduction est mienne.) affirme : « Si vous n'êtes pas heureux aujourd'hui, alors vous ne serez pas heureux demain... ». De façon que dans l'impératif néolibéral du bonheur *Occupe-toi d'être heureux et tout le reste suivra*, il y a un premier moment implicite qui n'est pas de production, mais d'acceptation.

Seligman écrit : « Les pays riches du monde – l'Amérique du Nord, l'Union Européenne, le Japon et l'Australie – vivent dans un moment florentin : riche, en paix, assez de nourriture, bonne santé et harmonie. Comment allons-nous investir notre richesse ? Comment sera notre renaissance ? » (Seligman, 2013b, p.

237. La traduction est mienne.) La réponse qu'il nous donne est bien évidente : l'excédent de bonheur produit par les nations riches doit se réinvestir en augmentant encore plus le bonheur. C'est-à-dire une fois que nous acceptons, contre toute preuve de sens commun, que le capitalisme nous a déjà rendus heureux, alors on peut commencer à l'être plus encore.

En deuxième lieu, ce moment d'acceptation implique aussi une interprétation bien particulière de nos vies comme étant déjà heureuses. Seligman nous invite donc à nous libérer de la conception psychanalytique du passé, celle qui explique notre présent à partir des traumatismes infantiles. Contre cette conception, Seligman nous apprend une série d'exercices pratiques pour nous réconcilier avec notre passé. Parce qu'en fait, les expériences douloureuses que nous avons vécues, ne seront que des mauvaises interprétations des faits.

Tant la femme divorcée, dont la seule pensée de son ex-mari est focalisée dans la trahison et la tromperie, que le palestinien, dont sa réflexion sur son lieu de naissance est focalisée sur l'offense et la haine, sont des exemples d'amertume. Les pensées négatives fréquentes et intenses sur le passé sont la matière première qui bloque les émotions de bonheur et de satisfaction, et de telles pensées empêchent la sérénité et la paix. (Seligman, 2013a, p.75-76. La traduction est mienne.)

Alors, une fois que la femme divorcée et le palestinien ont accepté qu'ils soient déjà heureux, que l'amertume qui les envahit ne soit qu'une façon d'interpréter les faits, la Psychologie Positive nous indique que 50% (Lyubomirsky, 2008) du bonheur dépend de facteurs génétiques. Donc le sujet-heureux doit d'abord reconnaître qu'il a déjà un capital initial de bonheur, à partir duquel il va commencer à travailler pour le devenir encore plus. En deuxième lieu, le bonheur dépendrait de 10% de facteurs circonstanciels tels que l'argent, la santé, le système politique, etc. De façon que 40% du bonheur dépend exclusivement des actions volontaires que chacun peut réaliser. Dans un cours à distance, appelait *La décision d'être heureux*, publié dans un journal chilien, nous retrouvons l'affirmation suivante : « Que voulez-vous faire ? Être heureux ou continuer à attendre que quelqu'un ou une circonstance vous rende heureux ? Si vous attendez cela, la science vous assure que vous serez malheureux. Il est temps de changer et de prendre votre bonheur en main. » (Castro, 2013, 20 juillet. La traduction est mienne.)

Le signifiant phallique, perdu par le premier capitalisme en faveur de la passion d'échange, retrouvé dans la théorie du capital humain comme un horizon de possibilité, est devenu, dans les nouveaux discours du bonheur, le principal capital de l'entrepreneur de lui-même. Le bonheur, comme le nouvel S1, s'allie à une condition de ce signifiant méconnu par le maître de l'antiquité. Tant que le S1 n'a de signifié connaturel, alors il est destiné à manquer toujours les S2. Comme nous l'avons vu, cette condition était à la base de la production du plus-de-jour qui, pour le maître, opérait à la fois comme souvenir de sa castration phallique et comme petite dîme compensatoire. Or, lorsque le S1 n'est plus lié au nom propre du maître mais au bonheur, les choses changent radicalement. L'incapacité de spécifier son signifié, son haut degré d'indétermination, joue maintenant en sa faveur. En effet, le champ commun où, pour Seligman, la femme divorcée et le palestinien se retrouvent, a été démarqué par le phallus. Tant que les deux sont supposés avoir embrasé le signifiant phallique – c'est-à-dire d'aimer le capitalisme –, alors rien ne les empêche de considérer aussi bien la violence politique comme les tromperies de l'ex-mari comme des signifiés possibles de son bonheur. Telle qu'une bonne mère, le bonheur capitaliste ne rejette personne. Alors il n'y a plus besoin de nier l'impossibilité qui se loge dans le plus-de-jour, parce qu'il est re-capitalisé sous la forme de bonheur phallique.

Une fois vidé de tout signifié, la seule chose qui nous sépare du bonheur, c'est de vouloir l'attendre. Finalement, le bonheur n'est que la petite trace phallique, qu'on peut ajouter même aux pires des traumatismes. Dans ce sens, le concept de résilience, dans les nouveaux discours du bonheur, joue aussi un rôle important, en permettant de capitaliser la détresse.

Si dans son premier livre, dédié au sujet de la psychologie positive, Seligman (2013a) mettait l'accent sur le rapport entre bonheur et interprétation subjective de la vie, dans son deuxième livre, Seligman (2013b) essaye de sortir de cet idéalisme en y introduisant la notion de résilience.

La résilience est un concept qui a eu un fort élan après le 11 septembre américain (Neocleus, 2013 ; O'Malley, 2011). À la différence des autres stratégies de gestion du risque, la résilience assume que les catastrophes, telles que la guerre, les désastres économiques, les attentats terroristes, la perte d'un être cher, etc., ne sont pas évitables. Dans ce contexte, la résilience se situe dans un horizon post-apocalyptique et son objectif n'est plus de réduire la catastrophe à une

mauvaise interprétation des faits, mais de créer les conditions pour que les expériences traumatiques deviennent une opportunité pour augmenter le capital humain. *Vulnérables mais invincible* (Werner & Smith, 1982), voilà le titre d'un livre très importante sur la résilience qui synthétise bien son propos.

En justifiant la possibilité de transformer les traumas en opportunités de capitalisation individuelle, Seligman nous indique qu'une étude réalisée sur 1700 personnes a montré que « ...les individus qui ont eu trois [expériences limites] – violation, torture, et emprisonnement par exemple – étaient plus forts que ceux qui en avaient eu deux. » (Seligman, 2013b, p. 160. La traduction est mienne.) Par conséquent, Seligman a mis en place un programme, au sein de l'armée américaine, qui s'appelle *Comprehensive, Soldier and Family Fitness* (US Army, 2014a), qui cherche à développer la résilience des soldats.



Dans la page web de l'armée des Etats-Unis, la résilience est définie de la façon suivante : C'est, « L'habilité mentale, physique, émotionnelle et comportementale pour faire face et surmonter l'adversité, s'adapter au changement, et apprendre à grandir [growth] avec les expériences négatives... (US Army, 2014b) Selon Seligman ce programme ...augmentera le nombre de soldats qui grandiront [growth] psychologiquement dans le combat... » (Seligman, 2013b, p. 128. La traduction est mienne.)

Le seul fait d'avoir survécu à la catastrophe, d'être encore là, est suffisant pour continuer à être heureux. Si les facteurs circonstanciels, tels que la mort ou la souffrance des autres pendant une catastrophe, ne représentent plus que 10 %

d'incidence sur mon bonheur, le zombi post-apocalyptique néolibéral doit continuer son travail pour devenir encore plus heureux, en re-codifiant la catastrophe en termes de bonheur, en capitalisant la totalité de sa vie. Alors, il n'y pas d'excuse. Devenir encore plus heureux relève de ta responsabilité !

#### 4. Conclusion

Nous avons montré que déjà chez Lacan, il est possible de distinguer entre la jouissance absurde du capitalisme et le bonheur phallique, en tant que source de sens et de légitimation de ce mode de production. Conséquemment, l'article a distingué trois moments différents de l'esprit du capitalisme : en premier lieu, le moment weberien, où le bonheur du capitaliste était interdit ; en deuxième lieu, avec l'émergence de la théorie du capital humaine, nous avons montré comment le bonheur phallique est devenu une promesse pour l'entrepreneur de lui-même ; et, finalement, à partir des années deux mille, l'article met en évidence que le bonheur phallique n'est plus une promesse, mais un capital qui permet de capitaliser narcissiquement même les pires de traumas. Nous pouvons, donc, conclure que dans le capitalisme actuel, l'impératif absurde de jouir sans limite, a pris du sens, en se révélant aux individus comme l'impératif du bonheur. Si chez le premier capitalisme, le capitaliste calviniste devait supporter l'irrationalité – dans le sens weberien de l'expression – de produire pour un Autre – Le Capital –, le capitaliste contemporaine ne produit que pour lui-même. Autrement dit, alors que tout a du sens, l'hétéro-exploitation est devenue une figure beaucoup plus prenante, celle de l'auto-exploitation.

Or, ceci ne veut pas dire que le sens du nouvel esprit du capitalisme peut nous faire oublier la jouissance du Capital. Les traits de cette jouissance gâtent encore au centre de la nouvelle rationalité. En effet, qui ne veut pas être heureux ? C'est-à-dire, qui aurait pu songer à un argument plus puissant, pour légitimer les pires des exploitations, que la promesse de bonheur ? Mais de l'autre côté, peut-on concevoir une affirmation plus gratuite, plus absurde, que la prémisse qu'on est déjà heureux, que nous disposons déjà de ce capital à faire accroître ? Nous pouvons, donc, y constater la transformation de la promesse en impératif de bonheur : quand le bonheur devient un capital, la jouissance absurde du Capital s'y accroche. Par conséquent, le bonheur est à la fois l'écran imaginaire, qui crée de l'adhésion moïque à l'impératif surmoïque d'accumulation et, à la fois, est un objet privilégié de jouissance pour Le Capital. Quand le bonheur a

été vidé de tout signifié, Le Capital trouve, en face de lui, un objet différentié, mais de sa propre taille, pour jouir de soi-même, à travers nous.

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Vladimir Safatle\*

## Une certaine latitude : Normativité et contingence dans la biopolitique de Georges Canguilhem

*La santé est dans l'homme  
une certaine latitude...*  
Georges Canguilhem

*Nous vivons dans l'oubli  
de nos métamorphoses*  
Paul Eluard

« C'est la vie beaucoup plus que le droit qui est devenue alors l'enjeu des luttes politiques, même si celles-ci se formulent à travers des affirmations de droit » (Foucault, 1977, p. 191). La phrase de Michel Foucault exprime une mutation importante dans la compréhension des structures du pouvoir au cours des dernières décennies. Telle mutation est liée à la conscience de la façon dont les discussions à propos des mécanismes d'« administration des corps et de gestion calculatrice de la vie » ont occupé le centre des problèmes concernant les effets de la sujétion sociale. Des mécanismes qui montrent comment le fondement de la dimension coercitive du pouvoir se trouve dans la production des horizons disciplinaires de formes de vie. Ainsi, depuis que Foucault a commencé à utiliser systématiquement des termes comme « biopouvoir » et « biopolitique »,<sup>1</sup> nous sommes devenues plus sensibles à la façon dont les discours disciplinaires sur la sexualité, les dispositions corporelles, la santé, la maladie, l'expérience du vieillissement et de l'autocontrôle établissent les normativités responsables de l'idée sociale d'une vie pouvant être vécue. D'où une affirmation majeure comme : « l'homme, pendant des millénaires, est resté ce qu'il était pour Aristote : un animal vivant et de plus capable d'une existence politique ;

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<sup>1</sup> La « Biopolitique » est une notion créée probablement par Rudolph Kjellén, en 1920, pour décrire sa conception de l'État comme une « forme vivante » (*Lebenform*) pourvue de l'organicité propre à une forme biologique (cf. Kjellén, 1920, pp. 3-4). Pour une généalogie du concept de biopolitique, voir Esposito, 2008.

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l'homme moderne est un animal dans la politique duquel sa vie d'être vivant est en question » (Idem, p. 188).

Néanmoins, dire que la vie est devenue l'objet de dispute des luttes politiques signifie, au moins pour Foucault, dire aussi autre chose. Car il s'agit d'affirmer que le biologique ne peut pas être compris comme un champ autonome de production des normativités capables d'influencer la détermination de nos possibilités sociales. Il ne pourrait même pas être compris comme un point d'imbrication entre vie et histoire, car celui qui parle d'« imbrication » présuppose deux pôles ontologiquement distingués. Mais souvenons-nous, par exemple, du sens d'une affirmation de Foucault à propos de la notion de biopouvoir :

Ensemble des mécanismes par lesquels ce qui, dans l'espèce humaine, constitue ses traits biologiques fondamentaux va pouvoir entrer à l'intérieur d'une politique, d'une stratégie politique, d'une stratégie générale de pouvoir, autrement dit comment la société, les sociétés occidentales modernes, à partir du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, ont repris en compte le fait biologique fondamental que l'être humain constitue une espèce humaine (Foucault, 2004, p. 3).

Lorsqu'il fait cette affirmation, Foucault n'est pas en train de dire que les traits biologiques majeurs de l'expérience humaine peuvent rentrer dans une stratégie politique parce que la politique serait déterminée, serait limitée par ces fondements biologiques. Il dit que le biologique, au moins à l'intérieur d'une problématique politique doit apparaître comme ce qui n'a pas de fondement propre<sup>2</sup>. Il y aurait une plasticité qui serait constitutive du biologique, qui permettrait au biologique d'être un genre d'histoire qui s'oublie de sa propre nature. Déjà dans *Les mots et les choses* les réflexions sur le biologique sont présentés

<sup>2</sup> Cela nous explique peut-être pourquoi le concept de vie chez Foucault n'est jamais déterminé de façon explicite « en restant essentiellement implicite » (Muhle, 2008, p. 10). Il doit rester implicite parce qu'il est, au moins pour Foucault, un concept sans autonomie ontologique. Muhle soutient une autre hypothèse, à savoir, qu'il y a un « double rôle de la vie » chez Foucault : comme objet d'une biopolitique et comme modèle fonctionnel à être imité par la biopolitique. Néanmoins, il faut souligner que la vie n'est jamais pensée par Foucault à partir d'une organisation conceptuelle immanente, comme nous l'observons chez Canguilhem (avec les concepts d'errance, de normativité vitale, d'organisme, de rapport au milieu etc.). Il est possible de dire qu'il y a une latence dans la pensée de Foucault qui, dans certaines situations, permet à la vie d'apparaître comme modèle fonctionnel à être imité. Mais une latence est très différente d'une tâche philosophique assumée.

comme l'exposition de la vie réduite à la condition de concept d'une épistème historiquement déterminée. Cela amène Foucault à dire que, si la biologie était méconnue au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle : « il y avait à cela une raison bien simple : c'est que la vie elle-même n'existait pas. Il existait seulement des être vivants » (Foucault, 1966, p. 13). Ainsi, la vie n'apparaîtra jamais à Foucault comme ce qui produit un forçage des discours vers des transformations structurelles. La conséquence de cette perspective est bien décrite par Giorgio Agamben :

Comme si, à partir d'un certain moment, tout événement politique décisif était toujours à double face : en gagnant des espaces, des libertés et des droits dans leurs conflits avec les pouvoirs centraux, les individus préparaient à chaque fois simultanément une inscription tacite mais toujours plus profonde de leur vie dans l'ordre étatique, offrant ainsi une asise nouvelle et plus terrible au pouvoir souverain, dont ils voudraient s'affranchir. (Agamben, 1997, p. 131)

Ce dégonflage ontologique de la vie à l'intérieur des réflexions sur les stratégies politiques fait de toute reconnaissance d'une dimension vitale à l'intérieur du corps politique l'expression d'une codification de la vie par l'ordre sociale, d'un modelage de la vie par le pouvoir. Cela ouvre les portes, au moins dans la lecture proposée par Agamben, à une certaine indiscernabilité entre toute biopolitique possible et les formes de gestion propres à un pouvoir souverain qui opère à travers la dépossession des sujets. Un pouvoir capable de transformer des espaces sociaux dans des zones de gestion de l'anomie. Dans cette lecture, la biopolitique ne peut être autre chose qu'une technique du pouvoir souverain, car elle décrit l'influence du pouvoir souverain dans la constitution d'une vie sans prédicat, d'une vie nue, dénudée de sa normativité immanente.

Le pari pour ce dégonflage ontologique de la vie semble se justifier lorsque nous nous rappelons de certains traits concernant les usages politiques de la biologie. Il n'est pas question de simplement se rappeler des usages de la biologie en tant qu'horizon de justification des pratiques eugénistes et racistes (Rudolph Hess a dit, par exemple : « le national-socialisme n'est rien d'autre que de la biologie appliquée ») ou de justification de la brutalité de la spoliation économique par le darwinisme social. Rappelons-nous que l'articulation entre la biologie et la politique s'est toujours appuyée sur le soutien de la « corporéité du social », sur le soutien de l'organisation « naturelle » du social comme un corps unitaire capable d'exprimer la prétendue simplicité fonctionnelle des organisations vi-

tales. Cela fournirait le fondement d'une vision fonctionnaliste et hiérarchisée de la structure sociale qui comprend des conflits sociaux comme expressions de pathologies destinées à être extirpées, comme si l'on enlevait un tissu nécrosé. Déjà chez Hobbes, les antagonismes et les conflits sociaux étaient décrits comme des pathologies dont la grammaire serait dérivée de la nosographie des maladies d'un organisme biologique<sup>3</sup>. La politique ne peut apparaître ici que comme une immunisation contre les maladies du corps social.

Lorsque, des siècles plus tard, la sociologie d'Emile Durkheim décrit les dérégulations de la normativité comme des situations de « pathologies sociales », nous trouverons ici la continuité d'une perspective qui se sert du biologique pour légitimer l'idée selon laquelle la vie sociale obéit à des dynamiques préalablement établies. Car le parallélisme assumé entre individu et société à travers l'usage sociologique d'un vocabulaire médical permet à Durkheim de parler de la société comme d'un « organisme » ou d'un « corps » qui a besoin d'interventions afin de se débarrasser des événements qui l'affaiblissent. Ces analogies seront très importantes pour les premières discussions sur la biopolitique avant la Seconde Guerre mondiale (Cf. Roberts, 1938 e Uexküll, 1920). Ce terme a été créé pour renforcer l'analogie entre le biologique et le social, entre la normativité vitale et la normativité sociale. Cette analogie partait d'une vision idéale de la totalité sociale pour projeter cette vision à l'intérieur de la nature, qui commence à fonctionner comme l'image de ce que les secteurs hégémoniques de la vie sociale essaient d'établir comme normalité. Ainsi, la biologisation de la politique sera le mouvement complémentaire d'une vraie judiciarisation de la vie, car la vie se laissera penser sous la forme des normes juridiques et de nos modèles de pouvoir et de légitimité. La vie sera le fondement de la loi parce que la loi trouvera dans la vie sa propre image inversée. Ainsi, il est possible de comprendre pourquoi une partie majeure de la reconstruction de la pensée critique dans les dernières décennies est passée par le dégonflement ontologique de la vie. Un dégonflement produit par les déploiements du concept foucauldien de biopolitique.

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Néanmoins, nous pouvons actuellement mettre en question le besoin de cette stratégie. Au lieu de procéder au dégonflement ontologique de la vie, nous pou-

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<sup>3</sup> Il suffit de se rappeler ici des parallèles présents dans le chapitre XXIX du *Léviathan* où Hobbes parle des « diseases of a commonwealth » afin de mettre en garde contre : « ces choses qui affaiblissent ou tendent à la dissolution de la république » (Hobbes, 2000)

vons nous demander si les figures totalitaires produites par le rapprochement entre les discours de la politique et de la biologie, avec ses métaphores de la société comme organisme ou avec le darwinisme social ne seraient le résultat d'une mécompréhension de ce qui est une normativité vitale. Ainsi, au lieu de couper simplement toute possibilité d'articulation entre les deux champs, il y a une opération plus rusée qui consiste à donner au concept de vie un voltage spéculatif renouvelé.

Cette opération est clairement présente chez le professeur de Foucault, à savoir, Georges Canguilhem. Rappelons-nous, par exemple, du sens d'une affirmation comme : « Ce n'est pas parce que je suis pensant, ce n'est pas parce que je suis sujet, au sens transcendantal du terme, c'est parce que je suis vivant que je dois chercher dans la vie la référence de la vie »<sup>4</sup>. Je peux penser la vie parce que la pensée n'est pas fondée sur l'abstraction d'un sujet transcendantal qui apparaît comme condition préalable à la catégorisation de l'existant, ni comme substance pensante. Je peux penser la vie parce que elle s'exprime dans ma condition d'existant, parce qu'elle fait de mon existence une expression de soi même. Ma pensée ne peut pas se distancier complètement de la reproduction du mouvement de la vie. Ce qui nous explique pourquoi : « nous ne voyons pas comment la normativité essentielle à la conscience humaine s'expliquerait si elle n'était pas en germe dans la vie » (Canguilhem, 2002, p. 77). Néanmoins, si la normativité essentielle à la conscience est « en germe dans la vie », alors rien n'empêcherait Canguilhem de donner un pas politiquement décisif en disant : « les phénomènes d'organisation sociale sont comme une imitation de l'organisation vitale, dans le sens qu'Aristote disait que l'art imite la nature. Imiter n'est pas copier, mais essayer de retrouver le sens d'une production » (p. 226)<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Cette proposition suit de près une idée nietzschéenne selon laquelle : « Lorsque nous parlons de valeurs, nous parlons sous l'inspiration, sous l'optique de la vie : la vie elle-même nous force à établir des valeurs, elle même évaluée à travers nous, lorsque nous établissons des valeurs » (Nietzsche, 2002, p. 36). C'est une proposition éloignée d'une perspective biopolitique foucauldienne pour autant qu'elle comprenne le concept de vie comme étant doué de puissance productive autonome du point de vue ontologique. Concernant l'influence de Nietzsche sur Canguilhem, voir : Canguilhem, 1990, pp. 16-17. Voir également Daled, 2008, pp. 115-140 et Fichant, 1993, p. 48

<sup>5</sup> En ayant en vue des affirmations de cette nature, Pierre Macherey dira : « Ainsi, la perspective traditionnelle relative à la relation entre vie et normes se trouve inversée. Ce n'est pas la vie qui est soumise à des normes, celles-ci agissant sur elle de l'extérieur, mais ce

Lorsqu'il affirme que les phénomènes d'organisation sociale sont comme une imitation de l'organisation vitale, Canguilhem montre comment son concept de vie n'opère pas qu'à l'intérieur des discussions sur la clinique et les sciences médicales. En fait, il a des résonances importantes pour la critique sociale, pour autant qu'il fournisse un genre d'horizon biopolitique qui ne se limite à la critique foucauldienne et à sa manière d'exposer comment l'activité vitale est construite comme catégorie de normalisation et de légitimation des procédures disciplinaires. Le concept de Canguilhem produit les fondements d'une biopolitique vitaliste transformatrice<sup>6</sup>. Comme ici la vie n'apparaît pas seulement en tant qu'objet réifié des pratiques discursives, mais comme puissance qui produit des concepts, Canguilhem peut donner un genre de fondement biologique à l'horizon de la pensée critique. Le biologique, c'est-à-dire, la dimension de la vie qui provoque en nous l'étonnement capable de produire des concepts, n'apparaît pas simplement comme le produit d'un discours. Il apparaît comme l'expérience qui produit des discours, principalement des discours qui nous permettent de nous tourner contre d'autres discours responsables pour produire en nous un sentiment fort de limitation.

D'autre part, faire appel à la vie en tant que fondement de la critique sociale aurait l'avantage de limiter la dépendance de la pensée critique envers les philosophies de l'histoire qui essayent de justifier aussi bien des perspectives téléologiques qu'une confiance finaliste envers le concept de progrès. Cet appel à la vie a été une stratégie majeure à l'intérieur de la philosophie française contemporaine et peut être retrouvé dans les expériences intellectuelles assez indépendantes l'une par rapport à l'autre, comme celles de : Henri Bergson, Georges Bataille, Gilbert Simondon et Gilles Deleuze.

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Néanmoins, cette stratégie pourrait aussi être critiquée dans la mesure où elle ouvrirait la porte à la fascination idéologique vis-à-vis de l'origine, une origine maintenant naturalisée. À moins que le concept de vie ait été déterminé de telle

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sont les normes qui, de façon complètement immanente, sont produites par le mouvement même de la vie » (Macherey, 2010, p. 102)

<sup>6</sup> Cela peut être expliqué par le fait que les concepts sur la vie ne sont pas, chez Canguilhem, que des objets d'une épistémologie généalogique, mais aussi d'une vraie ontologie. Ce que François Dagonet a bien compris en affirmant: « tant que Michel Foucault s'engage dans une étude généalogique, Georges Canguilhem exploite moins le champ de l'histoire et se livre à un examen ontologique (en quoi consiste la santé ?) » (Dagonet, 1997, p. 15)

façon qu'il ne soit plus capable de fournir des normes positives de régulation du comportement, mais qu'il ne fournisse que la description d'un mouvement processuel immanent, c'est-à-dire, une processualité dont la téléologie se retrouve, de façon immanente, dans le processus même. Une processualité que Canguilhem décrit lorsqu'il parle de la vie comme activité caractérisée par l'errance. Dans ce cas, la vie ne fournit pas des déterminations ontologiques de forte teneur prescriptive. Elle fournit la possibilité toujours ouverte d'une « mobilité normative » de l'existant. Une mobilité qui exprime un modèle paradoxal d'auto-organisation. Il s'agit donc d'examiner comment une normativité vitale pensée à partir de la notion d'errance peut fournir une nouvelle compréhension des potentialités propres aux articulations entre le politique et le biologique. Il s'agit aussi de comprendre le modèle de processualité présupposé par une telle normativité vitale. En ce sens, nous devons commencer par essayer de comprendre le sens de la notion de « norme » chez Canguilhem.

### **Normativité vitale et errance**

La singularité de la position de Canguilhem est le résultat de l'articulation de deux idées apparemment contradictoires, à savoir, normativité et errance. Notre concept naturel de normativité semble éloigné de quelque chose que nous pourrions nommer « errance ». Ainsi, l'affirmation selon laquelle la relation entre vie et normes est complètement immanent, comme semble l'avancer Canguilhem, ne pourrait pas être soutenue. Car nous aurions des difficultés à expliquer pourquoi il y a des normes qui se posent contre l'activité vitale, des normes qui produisent un comportement catastrophique que Canguilhem qualifie, dans un ton bergsonien, de « mécanisation de la vie ». En fait, cette mécanisation semble indissociable de l'application même du concept de norme.

Normalement, nous comprenons par « norme » une règle fondée sur la régularité et la standardisation des attentes de comportement. Ce qui explique pourquoi il est difficile pour nous de dissocier la norme d'une certaine force coercitive. En tant que force capable d'organiser notre perception à partir de l'identification du caractère nécessaire des régularités, la norme s'imposerait comme une forme d'expérience du temps caractérisée par la reproduction compulsive du continuum. Vivre sous l'empire des normes serait, nécessairement, vivre à l'intérieur d'un temps régulier dépourvu d'événements, un temps de redondance.

Souvenons-nous encore comment nous relient la « norme » à la capacité de produire des jugements. Les jugements seraient des propositions qui nous compromettraient avec un type déterminé d'action, pour autant que : « représenter quelque chose, parler sur quelque chose ou penser à quelque chose c'est reconnaître son autorité sémantique sur l'endossement que quelqu'un assume lorsqu'il juge » (Brandom, 2009, p. 35). En ce sens, prononcer des jugements serait indissociable de l'acte d'assumer la responsabilité d'agir sous une forme déterminée. Cette responsabilisation serait le fondement d'une identité composée par l'intégration des jugements cohérents entre soi et prononcés à plusieurs moments du temps. Ainsi : « il faut intégrer des nouveaux endossements dans le tout composé par nos endossement préalable » (p. 36).

Il n'est pas difficile de percevoir comment la notion de « norme » dérive ici de l'expérience de l'ordre juridique. D'abord, cette expérience sert de fondement à une notion de responsabilisation fondée sur la clarté sémantique des propos, une clarté qui demande l'absence de polyvalence et de surdétermination dans le rapport entre jugement et action. Tout se passe ainsi comme si l'on ne pouvait pas faire dériver, sans perdre la consistance, une multiplicité possible d'actions d'un même jugement. D'autre part, cette expérience suppose une idée de stabilité de la situation. Je dois intégrer de nouveaux endossements dans le tout composé par les endossements préalable parce que la situation où je m'insère serait une totalité stable et régulière. En fait, la façon dont Canguilhem comprend la dynamique vitale des normes ne passe pas par là.

Il est vrai que Canguilhem dira « la vie est une activité normative ». Elle est activité normative parce que tous les organismes biologiques agissent en faisant des sélections à partir des valeurs. Il est important de souligner cet aspect pour autant que la normativité vitale ne soit pas un genre de conditionnement, d'action reflexe complètement déterminée par le milieu. Elle est activité évaluative, un type de jugement qui peut faire appel aux affects, aux sensations et aux modes d'affections. Les affections portent des jugements, pour autant que : « vivre est, même pour une amibe, préférer et exclure » (Canguilhem, 2002, p. 105). Cette activité évaluative présuppose la capacité d'établir des rapports, de faire des comparaisons entre des contextes ayant en vue le renforcement de la vie. Canguilhem conserve le terme « norme » pour pouvoir penser l'expérience comme un processus relationnel fondé sur des valeurs. Mais, dans ce contexte, l'activité normative n'implique pas la régulation du comportement à partir de



quelque chose comme une consigne fixe. Elle indique une « capacité transitive »<sup>7</sup>, c'est-à-dire, une capacité d'entrer en mouvement, en passant d'une situation à l'autre, en refusant des limitations. Les normes vitales ne connaissent pas des déterminations sémantiques stables. Elles ne sont que l'expression de la capacité de l'organisme à rentrer en mouvement. Ce qui explique pourquoi Canguilhem dira que la norme de la vie est exactement sa capacité à changer continuellement de norme<sup>8</sup>.

Nous pourrions nous demander pourquoi il y a de la « normativité » dans cette capacité d'entrer en mouvement. Peut-être parce que, pour l'organisme, rentrer en mouvement exige aussi bien la perception de changer de lieu que la décision à propos de l'acte de se laisser ou de ne pas se laisser rentrer en mouvement. Cela veut dire, évaluer le mouvement, vouloir rentrer en mouvement. S'il n'y avait pas d'évaluation venue de l'organisme, s'il n'y avait pas une implication intentionnelle produite par le jugement, on aurait un mouvement complètement déterminé par l'extérieur, les organismes ne seraient que des structures conditionnées. Néanmoins, Canguilhem sait que l'acte de juger n'est pas « une opération logique de reconnaissance de la réalité », mais une capacité d'évaluation concernant tout vivant (cf. Franco, 2011, p. 77). Ainsi, si Canguilhem parle des normes, c'est pour définir l'organisme comme une puissance normative, en renversant la direction normalement présupposée de l'activité normative, direction normalement comprise comme un processus qui va du milieu à l'organisme. Comme nous le rappelle bien Badiou (2012, p. 76), cette stratégie de renversement de la direction de la normativité produit un espace de multiples centres où le milieu n'est plus uniforme. Car parler d'individualité biologique en tant que puissance normative, c'est une façon de transformer la norme dans une procédure d'individuation contraire à l'idée de normativité du milieu. Il y a une puissance normative de l'individualité biologique qui produit des formes singulières de rapport au milieu. Cette puissance normative fournit à l'organisme la confiance de se mouvoir d'un milieu à l'autre, en transformant sa réponse à l'imprévisibilité du milieu en une occasion de créer des formes nouvelles. Ce qui

<sup>7</sup> Canguilhem, 2009, p. 132

<sup>8</sup> Ainsi: « les normes ne sont plus ce qui déterminent des droits et des obligations en s'imposant aux sujets du dehors comme dans le transcendantalisme moderne – en nous permettant de faire ce qui est permis et en nous interdisant de faire ce qui n'est pas permis – mais elles sont la modalité intrinsèque assumée par la vie dans son pouvoir illimité d'exister » (Esposito, 2008, p. 186)

nous explique pourquoi : « la normalité des vivants, c'est la qualité du rapport au milieu qui permet à ces vivants, à travers des variations individuelles de ses descendants, de créer des nouvelles formes de relation à un milieu nouveau » (Canguilhem ; 2002, p. 132). Mais essayons de mieux comprendre ce point.

### Ce que peut signifier « dominer »

Partons de l'importance donnée par Canguilhem à la dissociation entre santé et adaptation au milieu. Une importance résumée dans des affirmations comme : « normal est vivre dans un milieu où des fluctuations et des événements nouveaux sont possibles » (Canguilhem, 2002, p. 146) ou encore : « L'homme ne se sent en bonne santé que lorsqu'il se sent plus que normal, c'est-à-dire, non pas simplement adapté au milieu et à ses exigences, mais aussi normatif, capable de suivre de nouvelles formes de vie » (p. 161). Ces affirmations sont des manières de dire que la santé dissocie « normalité » et « normativité », en permettant ainsi aux organismes de vivre dans un monde d'accidents possibles<sup>9</sup>. Cela exige une notion de rapport entre organisme et milieu qui ne peut pas être comprise comme une adaptation simple, comme une conformation à un système métastable. Un organisme complètement adapté est malade pour autant qu'il n'aura aucune marge qui lui permette de supporter aussi bien les modifications que l'infidélité du milieu. Nous ne sommes pas capables de bien comprendre un organisme biologique lorsque nous ne voyons en lui qu'un ensemble de fonctions qui répond à des exigences d'adaptation à un milieu fermé. Cette vie serait l'exemple d'une raison qui s'est limitée au principe d'autoconservation. Une vie mutilée car incapable de reconnaître sa puissance de production des valeurs. D'où l'idée que *la maladie apparaît comme fidélité à une norme unique*. Elle est le nom que nous donnons à une norme de vie qui n'accepte aucune déviance par rapport aux conditions de sa validité. D'où la définition : « une vie saine, une vie confiante dans son existence, dans ses valeurs, c'est une vie en flexion, une vie en souplesse, presque en douceur (...). Vivre c'est rayonner, c'est organiser le milieu à partir d'un centre de référence qui ne peut lui-même être référé sans perdre sa signification originale » (Canguilhem, 2003, p. 188).

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<sup>9</sup> « La santé comme expression du corps *produit* est une sécurité vécue dans un sens double : sécurité contre le risque et audace devant lui. C'est le sentiment d'une capacité de surmonter les capacités initiales, capacité d'amener le corps à faire ce qu'il semblait initialement incapable de promettre » (Canguilhem, 1990, p. 26)

Essayons de mieux comprendre cette flexibilité propre à la vie. Être flexible, c'est, principalement, être capable de rentrer en mouvement. Si nous acceptons la théorie de la dégénérescence, nous serons obligés d'admettre que la guérison de la maladie serait liée à une forme quelconque de retour à des états antérieurs, à des états où les fonctions vitales liées à la préservation et à génération pourraient être rétablies. Néanmoins, « maladie » est le nom correct de ce genre de fixation à un état antérieur de santé. Car la vie ne connaît pas la réversibilité, même si elle connaît des réparations qui sont des innovations physiologiques. Goldstein disait que : « l'on ne peut jamais retrouver l'ancienne manière d'agir et l'ancienne adaptation à l'ancien milieu qui correspondait à l'essence de l'organisme sain » (Goldstein, 1983, p. 348). La santé nouvelle n'est pas la santé d'au-paravant. Elle n'est pas non plus la récupération de déterminations normatives antérieures. En fait, la santé est indissociable d'une compréhension nouvelle du sens de « suivre une norme ». Rappelons-nous de l'affirmation de Canguilhem :

Comme la santé n'est pas une constante de satisfaction, mais l'a priori du pouvoir de dominer des situations dangereuses, ce pouvoir est utilisé pour dominer des dangers successifs. La santé après la guérison n'est pas la santé antérieure. La conscience que guérir n'est pas revenir aide le malade dans la quête d'un état de moindre renonciation possible, en le libérant de la fixation à l'état antérieur (Canguilhem, 2000, p. 70).

Qu'est-ce que peut être, dans ce contexte, « l'a priori du pouvoir de dominer des situations dangereuses ? ». Si nous définissons « dominer » comme l'acte de soumettre le fonctionnement d'une situation à l'image d'un ordre établi a priori ou préalablement, nous n'aurons aucune idée de ce que Canguilhem a en vue. Il serait impossible de comprendre, par exemple, pourquoi guérir ne peut pas être rétablir. Dans ce cas, retourner aux images d'ordre préalablement établies.

Theodor Adorno avait l'habitude de dire qu'il n'est possible de dominer une langue que lorsque nous nous laissons dominer par elle, c'est-à-dire, lorsque notre raisonnement se laisse aller à travers la structure interne de la langue. Peut-être cela vaut-il aussi pour le phénomène que Canguilhem a en vue. Le pouvoir de dominer des situations de danger est indissociable de la capacité de se laisser dominer par des dangers successifs. Si nous acceptons que ces « dangers » représentent des situations qui peuvent produire la désorganisation et le désordre de l'organisme jusqu'à la mort, alors nous dirons que dominer ces si-

tuation est indissociable de la capacité d'être : « un système en déséquilibre incessant compensé par des emprunts à l'extérieur » (Canguilhem, 1990). Voilà un concept apparemment paradoxal, pour autant qu'un système en déséquilibre incessant soit un système qui serait capable de faire du risque perpétuel de sa dissolution l'opérateur même de son développement, qui serait capable de créer des habilités à partir de ce qui semblait réfractaire à toute création technique. Ce déséquilibre nous pose devant l'un des concepts majeurs de Canguilhem, à savoir la notion d'errance.

### **Qu'est-ce qui se passe lorsque nous rentrons par une mauvaise porte ?**

Canguilhem avait l'habitude de dire que la maladie pouvait être comprise comme une erreur, mais pas au sens d'un calcul erroné. Si la maladie est comme un erreur cela doit être compris au sens de « rentrer par une mauvaise porte ». Si nous revenons à notre première définition de la maladie comme une restriction de la capacité d'action à travers la fixation dans une norme unique, alors il est possible de compléter cette définition en exploitant un mouvement double. La maladie apparaît comme une réaction catastrophique à la perception de l'instabilité du milieu. Ainsi, l'organisme erre parce qu'il agit comme si le milieu était stable. Il continue à réagir de façon mécanique, comme si le milieu n'avait pas passé par des modifications. Ce qui amène l'organisme à survivre à travers la restriction radicale de son milieu.

Mais qu'est-ce que signifie ici « rentrer par la mauvaise porte ? ». Qui rentre par la mauvaise porte se perd, mais aussi rencontre l'imprévisible, l'imperçu qui ne vient à l'existence que lorsque nous changeons la structure de notre perception. Rentrer par la mauvaise porte, c'est la condition pour produire des changements structurels dans l'organisme. Néanmoins, dans une affirmation importante concernant son concept d'errance, Canguilhem dit : « Rien n'arrive par hasard, mais tout arrive sous la forme des événements. C'est pour cela que le milieu est infidèle. Son infidélité est exactement son devenir, son histoire » (Canguilhem, 2002, p. 159). Qu'est-ce que peut signifier cette négation du hasard, ainsi que cette contraposition entre hasard et événement ? Nous pouvons essayer de contextualiser en disant que ce régime de négation du hasard doit être mieux expliqué, car il n'est peut-être que le refus d'admettre des événements dépourvus de rapport. Il n'est pas opportun de dire que Canguilhem cherche à soutenir la soumission de tout événement possible à des relations de causalité détermi-

née. Cela signifierait l'élimination absolue de la contingence dans le processus de développement des formes vitales.

Dans ce contexte, « rien n'arrive par hasard » signifie simplement que rien n'arrive sans imposer un devenir capable de reconfigurer les possibilités de l'organisme, en définissant de façon rétroactive une histoire. La nécessité n'est pas une détermination ontologique inscrite de façon préalable à l'intérieur des formes vitales. Les formes vitales ne sont pas le résultat d'un projet qui se déploierait dans le temps. La nécessité est une détermination processuelle qui fournit à l'historicité la fonction de construire des rapports entre des contingences. Car l'errance n'est pas une succession de contingences qui n'ont pas de rapport entre elles. Cela nous amènerait à l'idée d'un système emprisonné dans un temps discontinu, un tempo pointilliste et instantanéiste à l'intérieur duquel les organismes seraient des *tabula rasa*. Même au niveau des structures cellulaires, cette idée du temps de la vie comme un temps discontinu n'est pas soutenable :

La réponse d'une cellule aux modifications de son environnement n'est pas univoque. Sa réponse dépend à la fois de la nature des signaux, du moment où elle les perçoit et de l'état dans lequel elle se trouve. Sa réponse dépend à la fois de son présent et de son histoire, des signaux qu'elle a reçus dans le passé et de la manière dont elle les a interprétés. (Ameisen, 2003, p. 51)

La vie a de la mémoire, de l'habitude, de la répétition, un peu comme un pianiste dont les doigts se rappellent d'une pièce que la conscience est incapable de recomposer. Les activités antérieures restent enregistrées comme des points dans un processus continu de recomposition dynamique à partir des pressions du présent.

Néanmoins, l'errance n'est pas un mouvement soumis à une finalité téléologique transcendante. Pour mieux comprendre ce point il faut insister sur l'existence de la contingence. Dans ce sens, rappelons-nous de la singularité de la processualité propre à la vie<sup>10</sup>. Si nous assumons que l'organisme peut avoir une

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<sup>10</sup> En ayant en vue la nature des erreurs qui modifient l'instruction génétique en produisant des mutations qui peuvent avoir des conséquences importantes pour l'espèce, François Jacob dit que tout le système est agencé pour produire des erreurs à l'aveugle. Il n'y a pas dans la cellule une composante pour interpréter le programme dans son ensemble, pour « comprendre » une séquence afin de la modifier. Les éléments qui traduisent le texte génétique

expérience de la contingence, il faut accepter qu'un organisme biologique est une organisation dynamique capable d'être un processus de :

Désorganisation permanente suivie de réorganisation, avec apparitions des propriétés nouvelles si la désorganisation a pu être supportée et n'a pas tué le système. Autrement dit, la mort du système fait partie de la vie, non seulement sous la forme d'une potentialité dialectique, mais comme une partie intrinsèque de son fonctionnement et de son évolution : sans perturbations au hasard, sans désorganisation, pas de réorganisation adaptatrice au nouveau ; sans processus de mort contrôlée, pas de processus de vie (Atlan, 1979, p. 280).

Ici, nous trouvons la différence ontologique majeure entre un organisme et une machine artificielle. Au moins selon Canguilhem : « dans la machine, il y a une vérification stricte des règles d'une comptabilité rationnelle. Le tout est rigoureusement la somme des parties. L'effet est dépendant de l'ordre des causes » (Canguilhem, 2003, p. 149). Mais l'organisme ne connaît pas la même comptabilité : « une fiabilité comme celle du cerveau, capable de fonctionner avec continuité alors que des cellules meurent tous les jours sans être remplacées, avec des changements inopinés de débit d'irrigation sanguine, des fluctuations de volume et de pression, sans parler d'amputations de parties importantes qui ne perturbent que de façon très limitée les performances de l'ensemble, n'a évidemment pas d'égal dans quelque automate artificiel que ce soit » (Atlan, 1979, p. 41). Il y a un principe d'auto-organisation de l'organisme qui lui permet de faire face à des déstructurations et à des désordres profonds. Cela est possible parce qu'un système réduit à une seule voie de contact (entre A et B, par exemple) serait complètement désintégré si une telle voie se désordonnait. Mais les organismes ne sont pas des systèmes d'une telle nature. Au contraire, ils sont composés par plusieurs sous-systèmes qui rendent possible que la complète indépendance entre A et B ne soit pas la dissolution complète de l'organisme.

Néanmoins, la possibilité de la destruction de l'organisme comme système est un donné réel et il faut qu'il soit un donné réel pour que l'idée d'errance puisse montrer sa nécessité. L'errance implique de pouvoir se perdre, de dépenser tout le processus accumulé dans une irrationalité économique profonde, ce qui ex-

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ne comprennent que la signification des triades prises de façon séparée. S'il existait une volonté pour modifier le texte, elle n'aurait pas d'action directe (cf. Jacob, 1970, p. 310)

plique pourquoi la destruction du système est une partie intrinsèque de son fonctionnement. C'est parce qu'il peut se perdre complètement, qu'il peut faire face à la puissance de l'anormativité, que des organismes sont capables de produire des formes nouvelles, de vivre dans des milieux où des événements sont possibles. Cette figure de l'événement démontre comment les expériences de l'aléatoire, du hasard et de la contingence produisent une tension dans l'organisme à cause du risque de sa décomposition. Ces expériences liées à l'errance fournissent à la vie sa « normativité immanente » (Muhle, 2008, p. 106).

La nature paradoxale d'un système qui fonctionne à travers l'errance vient de son absence de tendance à « persévérer dans son propre être ». Pour avoir une errance qui ne soit simplement un mouvement d'expression du développement biologique vers un progrès continu, nous devons accepter l'existence d'une tendance à la « dilapidation de soi » propre aux organismes. Ce qui explique pourquoi Canguilhem n'a jamais eu de difficulté à admettre, par exemple, le fondement biologique d'un concept comme celui de pulsion de mort chez Freud<sup>11</sup>. Cette tendance à la dilapidation de soi a été décrite à travers des phénomènes comme l'apoptose, c'est-à-dire, la mort cellulaire produite par un principe interne :

On a longtemps pensé que la disparition de nos cellules – comme notre propre disparition en tant qu'individu – ne pouvait résulter que d'accidents et de destructions, d'une incapacité fondamentale à résister à l'usure, au passage du temps et aux agressions permanentes de l'environnement (...). Aujourd'hui nous savons que toutes nos cellules possèdent le pouvoir, à tout moment, de s'autodétruire en quelques heures (...). Et la survie de chacune de nos cellules dépend, jour après jour, de sa capacité à percevoir dans l'environnement de notre corps les signaux émis par d'autres cellules, qui, seuls, lui permettent de réprimer le déclenchement de son autodestruction (...) un événement perçu jusqu'ici comme

<sup>11</sup> Canguilhem dira que si le vivant est un système en déséquilibre compensé par des emprunts à l'extérieur, s'il est vrai que la vie est en tension avec le milieu inerte, il n'aurait rien d'étrange dans l'hypothèse d'un instinct de réduction des tensions à zéro, d'une tendance vers la mort (Canguilhem, 1990). Canguilhem pense surtout à des affirmations d'Henri Atlan pour qui le seul projet des organismes c'est de mourir, c'est-à-dire, comme dans tout système physique, de trouver un équilibre. Car, comme nous montre W.R. Ashby, le retour à l'équilibre n'est banal que pour des algorithmes d'organisation de systèmes simples. Dans des systèmes complexes, avec un grand nombre de paramètres qui peuvent varier en même temps, les chemins utilisés pour revenir à l'équilibre offrent des possibilités d'organisation extrêmement nombreuses (cf. Atlan, 1992, p. 224).

positif – la vie – semble résulter de la négation d'un événement négatif – l'auto-destruction (Ameisen, p. 15).

Pour chaque cellule, vivre c'est réussir à réprimer son propre suicide, c'est nier une négation. Cette idée produit des conséquences importantes pour le concept d'auto-organisation. Car des systèmes organiques, grâce à la constance des erreurs de lecture, auraient une tendance interne à la décomposition et au désordre. Cette tendance peut les amener à l'auto-destruction ou à l'errance, avec ses risques et sa réorganisation provisoire. D'où l'idée que : « vivre, se construire en permanence, c'est utiliser des outils qui risquent de provoquer l'autodestruction, et être, en même temps, capable de réprimer cette autodestruction » (Ameisen, p. 316). La mécanisation de la vie décrite à travers les phénomènes de la maladie n'est pas simplement une réaction catastrophique contre un milieu en mutation. Elle est aussi incapacité à agencer des tendances internes à l'organisme.

Dans ce sens, nous pourrions mesurer la singularité du vitalisme de Canguilhem. Au lieu d'être simplement l'ensemble des fonctions qui résistent à la mort, la vie chez Canguilhem est le processus qui se sert des dynamiques de polarité interne avec la mort et la maladie pour produire des systèmes en dialectique perpétuelle d'équilibre et de déséquilibre. Si le « vrai projet biologique » ne peut être que le retour à l'équilibre, alors la biopolitique que nous pouvons extraire de Canguilhem sera nécessairement une politique qui vise garantir les conditions pour l'expérience de cette processualité paradoxale du vivant. *Une biopolitique de la mobilité normative.*

### **La vie a sa façon de résoudre des problèmes ontologiques**

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Mais si nous voulons comprendre cette biopolitique comme une mobilité normative fondée sur la processualité de l'activité vitale, nous devons nous pencher sur la façon dont elle reconfigure l'expérience de la contingence. Cette expérience peut nous fournir une voie importante en vue d'une redéfinition de la force critique de la biopolitique.

Si nous nous tournons vers Aristote, il sera possible de voir comment la contingence (το ενδεχομενον) nomme aussi bien ce qui pourrait ne pas être que ce qui pourrait être d'une autre façon, c'est-à-dire aussi bien les choses qui peuvent ne



pas être que des attributs qui peuvent ou ne peuvent pas appartenir à la chose<sup>12</sup>. Nous avons ici deux figures complémentaires de la possibilité d'existence de ce qui n'est pas nécessaire, selon la définition du nécessaire comme : « ce en raison de quoi il est impossible à une chose d'être autrement » (Aristoteles, 1966a, 1015b). Ainsi, il est contingent que je sorte aujourd'hui pour aller au marché et que je rencontre, par hasard, mon débiteur. Il est contingent que Socrate ait des prédications accidentelles (συμβεβηκος), comme d'être blanc ou noir. Car si Socrate est blanc ou noir, s'il est assis ou debout, rien ne changera dans son essence, même si ces attributs ne sont pas à la même distance que les déterminations essentielles. Il n'y a pas, pour Aristote, d'ontologie de l'accident. Surtout, parce qu'elles ne se confondent pas avec l'essence de Socrate, ces déterminations accidentelles sont interchangeable. Du point de vue ontologique, ces opposés sont équivalents. Ainsi, l'existence de ce qui a le statut de contingent est, du point de vue ontologique, indifférent et interchangeable. Il n'y a pas d'ontologie du contingent.

Cette libéralité aristotélique par rapport à l'existence de ce qui n'est pas produit par une cause déterminée renvoie à une compréhension de la contingence bien définie par Hegel : « cette unité de la possibilité et de l'effectivité (*Wirklichkeit*) c'est la contingence (*Zufälligkeit*). Le contingent c'est un effectif qui, en même temps, n'est déterminé que comme possibilité, dont l'autre est aussi » (Hegel, 1986, p. 230). La contingence est l'unité de la possibilité et de l'effectivité parce que, même en existant, elle conserve la marque de ce qui pouvait ne pas être, de ce qui est une simple possibilité. Ce qui permet à Hegel de dire que la contingence est l'espace d'une contradiction majeure : « le contingent n'a pas de fondement parce qu'il est contingent, et il a bien un fondement parce que, en tant que contingent, il est ». Son existence n'a pas de fondement parce qu'elle est érodée par la situation de simple possible, elle est voisine du non-être, comme disait Aristote. Mais en même temps, elle a une forme de fondement parce qu'elle participe à l'effectivité. Assumer l'existence effective de la contingence est, pour Hegel, se confronter à un « renversement immédiatement posé » (*gesetzte unvermittelte Umschlagen*), c'est-à-dire un passage continu dans les opposés qui ne

<sup>12</sup> Aubenque, en rappelant qu'Aristote désigne le contingent aussi bien comme ce qui peut être d'autre forme que comme ce qui peut ne pas être, dira que tous les pouvoir-être-d'autre-façon supposent le pouvoir-ne-pas-être (Aubenque, 2013, p. 326)

se stabilisent jamais et qui, à cause de cela, nous renvoie vers l'expérience d'une « inquiétude absolue du devenir » (*absolute Unruhe des Werdens*).

Mais penchons-nous sur un point. Cette inquiétude n'est absolue que pour une philosophie, comme la philosophie hégélienne, qui refuse des distinctions ontologiques strictes entre contingence et nécessité, pour autant qu'elle essaie de comprendre comment le nécessaire s'engendre à partir de l'effectivité, comment l'effectivité produit la nécessité, produit un « ne pas pouvoir être d'autre forme ». Ce qui ne signifie pas que la réalité actuelle doit être philosophiquement justifiée, comme on l'a déjà dit sur Hegel plusieurs fois. En fait, cela nous oblige à comprendre comment des phénomènes contingents se transfigurent en nécessité en inaugurant des processualités singulières. La critique de la nécessité ontologiquement rassurée par des relations de causalité déterminée n'amène pas Hegel à réduire toute existence à la condition d'existence discontinuée<sup>13</sup>.

La réflexion sur la vie chez Canguilhem nous montre quelque chose de cet ordre. D'abord, elle montre comment le contingent apparaît comme l'imprédictible comme le cas au delà de la norme. Ainsi, le contingent sera ce qui porte une expérience d'anormativité qui peut produire une désorganisation effective. Une possibilité qui n'est pas un risque calculé, mais qui peut effectivement se réaliser. La vie joue avec sa fin pour la retarder au maximum.

D'autre part, la contingence est exactement ce qui ne pouvait pas être autre, car elle est ce qui ne pouvait pas être interchangeable. A partir du moment où la contingence arrive, l'organisme transforme cet événement en un moteur pour la modification de son système de régulation, il abandonne des normes, la vie rentre dans un débordement par rapport aux normes antérieures en réorientant

<sup>13</sup> Ce qui est le résultat nécessaire d'un projet comme celui présenté dans Meillassoux, 2006. Dans son cas, la suppression de la garantie ontologique du principe de raison nous amène vers la contemplation de la contingence déconnectée et vers la croyance erronée en ce que tout pourrait être autre ou ne pas être. Car Meillassoux semble emprisonné dans une sorte de renversement de la nostalgie de l'analyticité du fondement. Tout se passe comme s'il affirmait : « S'il y avait fondement, il marquerait la réalité du sceau de la nécessité analytiquement rassurée. Mais, comme il n'existe pas, comme l'illusion de sa présence s'est évanouie, comme nous sommes seuls au monde, tout est maintenant déconnecté ». Ainsi, nous disons seulement de la contingence qu'elle est radicalement dépourvue de sens et d'expression d'un temps instantanéiste, comme si Malebranche gardait sa notion de temps, mais maintenant sans Dieu pour rassurer sur la création continue de choses stables.

son histoire. Rappelons-nous, par exemple, comment l'un des processus biologiques majeurs pour la création des formes nouvelles est la symbiose<sup>14</sup>. Un processus qui, dans plusieurs cas, doit être compris comme un rapport contingent de combinaison entre des unités biologiques qui ne respectent pas les classifications antérieures des vints, qui produisent des formes qui ne sont pas complètement compréhensibles à partir du simple calcul des fonctions d'adaptation. À travers la symbiose, une rencontre contingente devient le moteur d'un processus de transformation.

Nous pouvons alors dire que la contingence nous amène vers une compréhension plus claire de ce que nous pouvons appeler la « processualité ». Comme elle a des propriétés processuelles, la contingence peut être le fondement de transformations de l'organisme, elle apparaît comme le fondement d'un organisme dont l'identité est définie par sa capacité à rentrer en errance, par sa « capacité transitive ». Dans ce contexte, il n'y a pas de sens à parler de la contingence comme ce qui peut être autre. En fait, s'il y a quelque chose qui pourrait être autre c'est la structure normative du milieu où l'organisme se trouve, car ce milieu est en transitivité continue.

Nous pourrions déplier ce problème en insistant sur la notion d'erreur comme une erreur dans la décodification des messages émis entre les gènes. Soulignons ce passage de Canguilhem :

Comme les enzymes sont les médiateurs à travers lesquels les gènes dirigent les synthèses intracellulaires de protéine, pour autant que l'information nécessaire pour cette fonction de direction et de vigilance soit inscrite dans les molécules d'acide désoxyribonucléique au niveau du chromosome, cette information doit être transmise comme un message du noyau au cytoplasme, où elle doit être interprétée afin de permettre la reproduction, la copie de la séquence d'acides aminés constitutive de la protéine à synthétiser. Mais quel que soit le mode, il n'existe d'interprétation qui n'implique d'erreur possible. La substitution d'un acide aminé par un autre crée du désordre par intelligence du commandement. (Canguilhem, 2010, p. 208)

<sup>14</sup> Sur ce point, voir surtout David-Ménard, 2011, p. 292

Il y aurait une contingence irréductible venue des erreurs possibles dans le processus de transmission d'information et de réplication des messages génétiques dans le niveau cellulaire. Des erreurs qui exposeraient la fragilité de l'organisme à persévérer dans son être. Ainsi, des organismes seraient devant deux formes de contingence : d'une part, les aléatorités (*aléas*) de l'ambiant perturbant le monde de la vie et, d'autre part, un hasard intrinsèque engendré par les mécanismes biologiques et écologiques pendant l'évolution (cf. PAVÉ, 2007, p. 8). Une contingence liée au rapport entre organisme et milieu, une autre liée à la transmission de l'information génétique interne à l'organisme.

Néanmoins, l'exemple de Canguilhem à propos d'un hasard intrinsèque aux mécanismes de l'organisme nous montre encore autre chose. En fait, la possibilité d'erreurs au niveau cellulaire est l'une des formes les plus claires d'expression de la fonction du hasard en biologie. Cette erreur n'a pas de valeur en soi, de valeur positive ou négative. Elle pourra acquérir une valeur. Si sa valeur n'est pas éminemment négative, si l'organisme est capable de réactivité en se servant de sa capacité d'autodestruction désorganisatrice pour l'inhiber latéralement, l'erreur pourra avoir la fonction de cette ruse hégélienne qui fait du chemin de l'erreur le chemin de la vérité. Un chemin qui montrera comment : « la production des erreurs est nécessaire pour la réduction du niveau de redondance dans les organisations biologiques, en ouvrant l'espace pour la configuration de nouvelles organisations » (Franco, 2011, p. 96). À travers l'erreur, des anomalies se produiront, nous amenant vers de nouvelles formes de vie<sup>15</sup>. Ainsi, la contingence peut produire de façon rétroactive la nécessité.

## **Le capitalisme méconnaît des contingences**

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Nous pourrions nous demander si cette idée de désorganisation permanente suivie de réorganisation ne serait qu'un concept faible de hasard et de contingence, une sorte de « contingence contrôlée » par des structures de relations. Nous pourrions même nous demander si cette idée ne serait qu'un simili de la réalité sociale du capitalisme tardif avec sa flexibilisation constante et sa désorganisation contrôlée par la processualité dynamique du Capital. Ainsi, en quoi une biopo-

<sup>15</sup> Dans ce sens, Jacques Monod nous rappelle que les altérations accidentelles sont la seule source possible de modifications du texte génétique, donc que le hasard seul est à la source de toute nouveauté, de toute création dans la biosphère (Monod, 1972, p. 148).

litique de la mobilité normative pourrait servir de fondement à une critique du capitalisme dans sa phase de flexibilisation générale des identités ?

Afin de répondre à cette question, il est important de se rappeler que la désorganisation produite par le Capital est la condition pour qu'un principe général d'équivalence, la forme-marchandise, soit un genre d'axiome non questionnable. Les caractéristiques majeures du monde flexible du Capital sont l'interchangeabilité et la réversibilité. Cette circulation d'échange et de réversibilité ne peut se produire que grâce à l'univocité du Capital. Cette univocité peut se réaliser parce qu'elle impose une façon singulière de vider le temps. Car le temps du Capital est l'éternité du toujours réversible, le temps des opérations toujours faites avec des termes échangeables et commensurables. La différence entre la flexibilisation du Capital et l'activité vitale n'est pas une différence de degré. Nous n'arriverons pas à l'activité vitale en intensifiant les processus internes au capitalisme, même si le capitalisme essaye de mimer la vie.

En fait, Marx disait, dans le livre III du *Capital*, que la capacité d'auto-valorisation du Capital donnait l'impression d'un organisme vivant. En tant que capital producteur d'intérêt nous avons la forme D-D' où la valeur se valorise elle-même à travers des activités financières sans passer directement par l'incarnation de l'argent en marchandises. Dans ce contexte d'auto-valorisation « spontanée », Marx dira que l'argent est maintenant un corps vivant qui veut se multiplier. Mais cette caractéristique de « génération spontanée » de la plus-value ne pouvait pas être comprise comme simili de l'activité vitale.

En fait, la différence entre la dynamique du Capital et l'activité vitale est qualitative. L'activité vitale ne connaît pas d'interchangeabilité ni de réversibilité. Comme nous avons dit, un événement contingent n'est pas ce qui pourrait exister autrement ou qui pourrait ne pas être, comme si le contingent était échangeable avec ses opposés. Je ne peux dire que quelque chose aurait pu être autre qu'à partir de la perspective d'une relation de causalité qui m'apparaît comme nécessaire. Mais devrions-nous continuer à conjuguer causalité déterminée et nécessité ?

En ce sens, il est possible de dire qu'un événement contingent est celui qui présente l'imperçu et l'incommensurable. Un incommensurable qui n'indique pas l'infiniment grand ou l'infiniment petit, mais l'infiniment autre. Ainsi, il casse la redondance d'un système d'information qui doit trouver toujours un dénomina-

teur commun de comptabilité. Cette autre scène produite par la reconnaissance de la contingence nous amène vers cette auto-organisation paradoxale où les systèmes vitaux sont en réordination continue, produisant de nouvelles normativités. Cette autre scène insiste toujours en dehors du temps du Capital. Car c'est la vie dans sa souveraineté insoumise qui nous amène en dehors de ce temps.

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Cindy Zeiher\*

## The Subject and the Act: A Necessary *Folie à Deux* to Think Politics

Politics is politics, but love always remains love.  
– Lacan, Sem VII p. 324.

This paper grapples with a single question: what precisely makes a subject think politics?<sup>1</sup> Although Lacan portrays the repetition of revolutionary politics as an *impasse*, Lacanian theory has since been harnessed in a confrontation with politics. On the face of it a convergence between politics and Lacanian psychoanalysis appears unlikely; invoking unconscious forces in the political realm would seem to be an impossible task. This is because whereas psychoanalysis is concerned with subjective suffering, politics has to do with action and with rational thought. Yet both psychoanalysis and politics deal with the same things, the subject, the social bond, anxiety and with the formation and presence of desire and lack.

It is important to start with an understanding of the subject. Pluth suggests the subject is to be understood as “represented in and for the Other” (2009, p. 78). For Lacan the subject emanates from unconscious forces, is one which does not fully recognise itself and which is therefore divided, castrated and oriented towards lack rather than to the determination of consciousness. In *Écrits*, Lacan is being precise when he states that the subject is a signifier represented by another signifier, meaning that the subject must be a subject of language (2004, p. 835). Lacan’s constitution of the subject also emphasises the implication of Descartes’s *cogito* (Seminar XI, p. 126):

I am not designating the living substratum needed by this phenomenon of the subject, nor any sort of substance, nor any being possessing knowledge in his

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Ed Pluth and Agon Hamza for their insightful and constructive critique of an earlier version of this paper, as well as Frank Ruda for his many helpful points on the final version.

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pathos... nor even some incarnated logos, but the Cartesian subject, who appears at the moment when doubt is recognised as certainty.

The subject of politics operates within the particular logic of the symptom. The function of the symptom is to both maintain the structure of the Law and allow the subject to traverse it. For the political subject the symptom is obscure and figurative, manifesting as anxiety. Here the symptom is located at the interface of desire with drive, or as Lacan states in Seminar XIV: *La logique du fantasme* (1966-1967), “the right and the wrong sides” where desire and reality are visible on a horizon which can be only partially recognised. It is only partially recognised because full recognition would render complete freedom from the symptom impossible. The political subject needs the structure of fantasy in order firstly to recognise itself as a political subject and secondly to enable it to harness potential emancipatory power. The functioning of fantasy is crucial because the subject is thereby able to present itself as divided, a position barred by the signifier (the realm of politics) which initially constituted the subject within the social bond. Here, the act has the function of staging a confrontation between the subject and politics. The act frames the political subject as a subject which repeats itself but with the desire for absolute difference (*L'identification*). Lacan states in Seminar XIV that (1966-1967, p. 50)

[i]f [*objet*] *a* is the frame of the subject, this frame falls at the level of the most fundamental act of life, the act in which the subject as such is engendered, that is, the repetition of the signifier.

Before we commence deliberations on what constitutes a political act, we must consider the body as a signifier mediating difference. The body, Pluth states, is not, “a treasure trove of signifiers... it suffers from signifiers and in doing so this body seems to belong, in part, to the Other” (2007, p. 60). Here Pluth is suggesting that the body’s suffering produces a subject-effect, essential for the subject’s continuation as a subject, which in turn provides a context and motivation for identification and recognition. Pluth then suggests that, “... recognition is sought after as a kind of legitimation of my entry into the Other as a speaking being” (p. 61). Here he provides a launching pad from which to consider the political subject as simultaneously an anxious one. The subject-effect manifests as a tension between anxiety and the demand for this anxiety to be harnessed into an act. However, this is not just any act, and the political subject well knows this.

The function of the act is to render affect, in particular that of anxiety. Regarding the function of anxiety, Lacan in *Sem X: Anxiety* (1962-1963, p. 4-6) states that

[a]nxiety then is the signal of the real and of an irreducible mode under which this real presents itself in experience... What is the moment of anxiety? Is it what makes possible this gesture through which Oedipus can tear out his eyes, make this sacrifice of them, this offering, this ransom of blindness in which his destiny is accomplished? Is that what anxiety is, the possibility, let us say, that man has of mutilating himself? No. It is properly that which through this image, I am striving to designate for you: it is that an impossible sight threatens you of your own eyes on the ground.

The political subject must rely on anxiety because it provides a passage to the Real and specifically to the Lacanian conceptualisation of an encounter with the Real as negative enjoyment. For Lacan, anxiety is the only true affect. Given these Lacanian reference points, we can now consider the political act as located within two affective dimensions, the first being that of the speech-act. Here one turns to Lacan's notorious dystopian rebuke to protesting Parisian students in 1968 (1990, p. 126):

[T]he aspiration to revolution has but one conceivable issue, always, the discourse of the master. That is what experience has proved. What you, as revolutionaries, aspire to is a Master. You will have one... for you fulfil the role of helots of this regime. You don't know what that means either? This regime puts you on display; it says: 'Watch them fuck...'

Here, Lacan posits not only a theoretico-political horizon, but also a stern caution to passionate reactionary politics demanding recognition, a caution which now also serves as a timely critique of contemporary hegemonic orders – don't be so quick to boast your victories and fall in love with yourself. Lacan actively resists absolutism in political praxis, but what he offers is a consistent theory of surplus-*jouissance* (the subject's true intention) from which to pivot a praxis of politics wherein the subject is politically interpellated. For Lacan it is imperative to resist the position of *sujet supposé savoir*, the subject-supposed-to-know, because there is no necessary unique relationship between the subject and knowledge. Rather, such knowledge as the subject already possesses will emerge. When it does, it will not necessarily reveal anything new to the sub-

ject but rather affirm what the subject already knows. So, what makes an act specifically political? Lacan maintains that this is not an act that consists of recouping power within the socio-symbolic, that being a rejection of speech in the guise of performative action. Rather, the political act is different from any other act because to whom or to what the act is addressed, whether to another subject, collective or object, is a retroactive condition of the possibility of an act and its first logical appearance, or as Badiou puts it “that [which] brings to light a possibility that was invisible or even unthinkable (2013, p. 9). It is pertinent to here consider Badiou’s claim that politics is one of philosophy’s conditions because it brings about that which was previously ignored (2013). Unlike the classical positions of Laclau, Critchley and Kouvelakis, Badiou rejects the category of ‘the political’ as a philosophical misnomer. Implied here is firstly the importance of how politics is situated as fluid and atemporal, both ‘here and now’ and within the ‘past and the future’, and secondly that the subject cannot be reduced to political singularities. To ‘ignore’ is a precise act which does not demand that the subject attempt to articulate the impossibility of what constitutes the political realm. More so, to ‘ignore’ situates politics as *un-evental* and as unable to produce anxiety *vis-à-vis* the potential for revolutionary questions. Badiou’s insistence that we expose ourselves to the multiplicity of events of politics directly suggests that we, as singular subjects, are called to name the universal of politics in all of its multiplicities. He provides a way to think politics not only as the management of the political economy but also as a possible future politics, *la politique* to come.

The second affective dimension of the act of politics, which I argue is also a dimension of the affect of anxiety, is bodily and located beyond subjectivisation. Here the act can be considered as pure encounter and is retroactively interpellated within the subject. This implies that the act must initially have had no meaning for the subject, that there was no clear agent and that it was the act which produced the subject. Subjectivisation of the act after it has taken place entails that the act and the subject have become inextricably enmeshed and in order for the subject to harness a subjectivisation within politics, the act must mean something, more so it must leave a spectral trace of what took place, a proposition to us of a possibility. Thus meaning is revealed not only *by* the sub-

ject and *through* the act, but also by the subject demanding that others witness and recognise such an enmeshment of act with subject.<sup>2</sup>

Here, the strategy of situating the *event* via the *act* enables an identification of the subject as politics *par excellence*. Žižek (2005, unpaginated) describes the process of how the coordinates of desire, anxiety and fantasy, are for the subject beyond the demand of the Other:

There is no freedom outside the traumatic encounter with the opacity of the Other's desire: freedom does not mean that I simply get rid of the Other's desire—I am as it were thrown into my freedom when I confront this opacity as such, deprived of the fantasmatic cover which tells me what the Other wants from me. In this difficult predicament, full of anxiety, when I know *that* the Other wants something from me, without knowing *what* this desire is, I am thrown back into myself, compelled to assume the risk of freely determining the coordinates of my desire [emphasis original].

To articulate a demand is to fully enter the coordinates of the Other. But it does more than this as Lacan (Sem VI, 1958-1959, p. 27) states: “[demand] institutes the other to whom it is addressed as the one who may be present or absent”. The demand of the Other to act is made not only as a response to the subject's desire, but also in recognition of it. Yet given that suspension of the Other is impossible, its status in politics manifests paradoxically as a mutual splitting between it and the subject in that the subject supposes the Other to be making a demand (for an act) which at the same time the subject does not want to be satisfied.

The problem facing today's subject of politics evidenced, for example, in the failure of the current Left is that the Other is positioned as uncertain and precarious so that any attempt to prescribed political outcomes results in disappointment because nothing is being proposed, no act, and therefore no imaginable event. Thus the Left is stranded with assemblages, representations and identifications, which with great gusto it harnesses in the form of identity politics.

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<sup>2</sup> Although it is with some tentativeness, I state that such a witnessing invokes Honneth's (1992) deliberation on Hegel's treatment of the subject as in part a struggle for recognition constitutive of reifying social practices (2005). This struggle, Honneth maintains, should be central to the political vocabulary of social conflict.

This monopoly (of possibilities) merely articulates what is or is not possible, for example, the rise of an ineffective postmodern-liberal Left which no longer requires action in order to appear political. By contrast Badiou claims, “[w]ith a political event, a possibility emerges that escapes the prevailing power’s control over possibles” (2013, p. 11). Thus in spite of its posturing and acting out, today’s Left lacks the presence of a motivation which centres on the act as the primary location for entry into the Other. Pluth (2007, p. 140) articulates this when he says that

[i]dentity has become an important term in contemporary political discussions ... An identity politics usually makes a demand for recognition by appealing to notions of justice and equality, but there is often something more in its demands. For this reason, the recognition and victories obtained may be unsatisfying, because for many in the movement the movement was not just about recognition of specific demands.

Identification seizes the subject through the conduits of specific principles, which in turn propagate and reinforce specific acts. This positing of identity politics above the act, rather than reinforcing the struggle merely frames the act within an attempt at consensus. For an act to be political it has to occupy the place of the Other because this is precisely the place where the intersection between demand and desire can be articulated. The act is both a demand and a response to demand, rather than to any specific demand. The act also provides a rupture to this dialectic by opening up desire for a different demand to be articulated. Here demand and desire are not altogether separate but contingent on the Other for signification of the subject as being one of desire. Lacan (Sem IX, 1961-1962) indicates that desire and demand are always connected when he states “[i]t is not that demand separates us from desire [...] its signifying articulation, determines me, conditions me as desire”. Thus the act gives coordination to and recognition of desire, but as Pluth (2007, p. 63) states, the ambiguity of desire is always present: “it always remains in part a desire to be recognised by the Other after an encounter with the Other’s desire, but at the same time it is interested in cancelling out any placing and recognition in the Other”. The function of fantasy is crucial here because through desire it provides a formal passage to the act via the logic of the constitution of the subject. The passage of the act is ambiguous, atemporal and indeterminate. It is important to note that there is *no* one supreme ethical act to which the subject of politics can attribute transformational potential, neither

can it fully exclude itself from the politico-symbolic spaces of power and authority. This implies that there must be that there must be some minimal difference (an irreducible gap) between the subject and the social which supports the act. What I am also claiming is that here there is no suspension of the big Other, there are only acts which either hit the target or do not. Revolution is here understood as surpassing any transitional order and attaining ontological consistency which inscribes the relation between act and event into the order of the Other. Šumič-Riha (2009, p. 249) addresses the problem of ontological consistency facing the subject of emancipatory politics when she states:

The starting point of emancipatory politics is nothing but the irreducible gap between the subject's being and his/her symbolic existence or, more precisely, its departure point is not the alienated subject of the master's discourse, the subject taken up by the master's order, but rather the subject as the failure of the master's discourse to completely absorb or take up his/her being in the imposed system of places and functions.

In this way the act and the subject are constituted as one of mutual interdependency (and of inevitable failure) interpellated within the discourse of the Master. However, the necessary insertion of fantasy through which the act can be deliberately recognised and demanded reconfigures this relation. The act-as-pure (without subjectivisation) designates the subject as possible 'un-being', *désêtre*, a condition to which the subject strives. This *impasse* stages political motivation, impossible desire and confrontation both with the inevitability of alienation and with the desire to supersede it. It is useful to here note Lacan's adoption of Marx in *Seminar XIV: La logique du Fantasme*, when he claims that what becomes enjoyed (*ce dont on jouit*) circulates as an object of *jouissance* and thus becomes a locus of transference of this *jouissance*-value.

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At this point we can return to the problem of desire as also a problem for politics. Pluth (2009, p. 63) conceptualises this well when stating "desire is understood to be something which can free one from determination by and subjection to the Other. Desire, then, would be another word for freedom". Nevertheless an ambiguity manifests, as Pluth points out, since in this quest for freedom another kind of subjection to the Other occurs when desire emerges also as demand. It is here that one can make a distinction between fantasy and the act. Pluth (p. 64) maintains that "[a]n act, unlike the fantasy, does not make a demand

on the Other and is not aimed at acquiring recognition by the Other". For the political subject, this is an unconscious distinction which manifests as demand for response in the form of an act. The desire for an act is insufficient in itself and thus the political subject *must* act both as a recognition of and a response to demand. Šumič-Riha (2009, p. 247) contends that this could be a desire *to be counted* when she says, "[h]ence, if politics itself is viewed as a disruptive excess of equality over to the distributive logic of the State, this signals that a new perspective is opened for the theorization of politics: one that locates the proper place for emancipatory politics, that is, for 'political subjects who are not social groups but rather forms of inscriptions of the count of the uncounted,' within the very terrain in which the statist counting operates."

This leaves the political subject with the counter-problem of refusal (or resisting the Other's demand). What if one refuses to act, instead remaining silent in the face of demand? Here the function of the Other determines that the political subject recognises the Other as constituted in the demand to respond. The political subject positions itself in relation to the demand of the Other and is thus an object of both the Other and of the need to act. For the political subject the Other is the political act regardless of the subject's willingness or refusal; the political subject is political only in relation to the political act. The problem of *what kind of act* is a question directed to the Other: *Che vuoi?* This is unanswerable because the question, anxiously posed to the Other, represents the subject's attempt through the signifying chain to reliably and unquestioningly constitute itself as a meaningful subject. This is problematic for the political subject who relies on the political act to motivate and satisfy both demand and desire. Here we must turn our attention to transference and Lacan's (Sem VIII, 1960-1961, p. 4) notion of 'subjective *disparity*', a necessary distance where "the goal is to relate the notion [the technique of transference] to an experience". What does this mean and how does it apply to the relation between the subject and the act of politics? Here Lacan is not only giving primacy to the signification of the act, but also preserving the relation between desire and action as an ethical mediation. When reflecting on the 'madness' of Socrates, Lacan (Sem VIII, 1960-1961, p. 9-10) stresses "the seething ground of the social infection" as being one's guide within inter-subjectivisation and as a way towards understanding resistance to the social bond (p. 11):



In any case it would be a bad appreciation of things not to recognise at the beginning that psychoanalysis demands from the first, a high degree of libidinal sublimation of the level of collective relationships.

For transference to be apparent requires insertion of the order of the Imaginary together with avoidance of inter-subjectivity. Both the condition and the contingency of politics are here crucially relevant for the political subject which must, like politics, itself exercise indeterminacy and consciously break from political identity politics. Politics being inherently unstable, the political subject needs to wrestle with ideological discourses which may obfuscate the true intentions of political acts. Here, Žižek (1999, p. 211) offers that “today, more than ever, one has to insist that the only way to open the emergence of an Event is that of breaking the vicious cycle of globalization-with-particularization by (re)asserting the dimension of Universality against capitalist globalization.” For Badiou politics provides a possible event to become a political subject through initiating precise and deliberate political actions.

Nevertheless, it is precisely through the act that a political subject is bound to the Other. Zupančič states (2000, p. 255) that “in an act, there is no divided subject ... The subject of an act is not a divided subject – this is another way of saying that there is no subject or hero of an act.” The subject and the political act are entwined and there can be no separation between these dimensions, they are in a necessary *folie à deux*, or ‘madness made of two’. What does this mean precisely? *Folie à deux* is best understood as a shared interior fantasy of excess and lack. Psychoanalytic studies of psychosis suggest that this occurs when the signifier is most powerful and the subject is captured by it to produce a totality which attempts to dispense with the social bond. This provides the foundation for understanding Lacan’s *act* as being differentiated from acting out or not acting. That one pathologically over-identifies with the power both of the Other and of one’s desire, structures not only desire but also demand. The implication of this over-identification is that the act is deemed as that which will finally enable the subject to become who it might be. This political position is one in which the precariousness of the signifier can be understood as nevertheless structuring legitimacy as a form of signification. The intricate relationship between the signifier and the subject inevitably fails and the subject then anxiously, albeit momentarily questions the tenacity of the signifier. Apollon (1996, p. 43) considers the limit of the signifier in the realm of the political when he says that

[t]he psychotic position with regard to the politics of the signifier suggests the function of belief where the key signifier is missing to endow the delusional reconstruction of its legitimacy. It hints at the formation of the relationship of legitimacy and the belief in a political enterprise of reformation for societies based on a common goal. The analyst cannot help taking into account the structural proximity between the delusional reconstruction of the symbolic world on the ground of psychotic belief and the ideological and political enterprise of unifying those differences that split the patchwork of civil society on the ground of a dreamlike common good.

The *contagious* transmission structuring *folie à deux* allows concealment of its pathology and thereby maintains a synchronised, repetitive constellation of demand and desire. The pathos of *folie à deux* is symmetrical in that the subject does not disavow the act. The difference between subject and act is peculiar in that by disregarding the imbalance between the act and the subject (notwithstanding that they are a unity), fantasy is projected as the act itself. For example, the phrase, 'the common good' conjures up a belief, a dream-like signification, in which the subject feels compelled to act in specific ways and to employ specific strategies and iterations which propagate this stance. The subject implicates the Other as operating with such beliefs and defining the limits imposed by the Law regarding affronts to this stance. However, any obstacle to such a stance is not necessarily a manoeuvre against its ideology, rather a case of *jouissance* reckoning against authority. The act which both propagates and resists ideological form and content provides the frame for and operates as the inseparable Other for the political subject; the subject and the act must be fused and the identification of this fusion must be apparent. Furthermore, *folie à deux* between the act and the subject provides an ethical stance for the subject of politics because it fully harnesses the divided subject as one seeking both pleasure and moral obligation within the political realm. Zupančič (2000, p. 21) identifies this division as both Kantian and Lacanian when she states that

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[t]he relationship between happiness and duty is thus not that of a negation but, rather, that of indifference. However, the most important point concerning the divided 'practical' subject is the following one, which can also serve as our point of departure: 'The subject is divided by the fact that he has to choose between pathos and division'. That is to say: the subject is not divided between the patho-

logical and the pure. The alternative to pathological subjectivity is not pure or immaculate ethical subjectivity, but freedom or autonomy.

It can be argued that the contemporary subject by-passes this conundrum (to think politics) to some extent because freedom, being framed as impracticable and unattainable is thrown into crisis and thus avoided. However, what is to be fought for is uncertainty as an ethical and even a rational stance. And yet, like demand, whether if we refuse freedom or appropriate it, we are inevitably interpellated within it because of a compulsion to deliberate it. The Lacanian political subject enunciates this as a freedom within the Real, a freedom which is beyond articulation, unable to be fully disclosed but only enacted. For the political subject the demand of the act lies within the realm of the Other, despite the unclear orientation of such a demand. The 'political' act remains faithful both to an ethic of desire and to the division of the subject as one that demands. Zupančič (2000, p. 144) describes this when she states that

[t]he feeling of respect seizes us when the law becomes visible in an exemplary case of ethical action. What becomes visible in this way is precisely the absence of a cause for such an action.

Subjects of politics are trapped within irresistible Imaginary substitutions which strive to underpin the logic of the *objet a*. As Zupančič suggests, an object which signifies an ethical act must also supplement it. The problem of the logic of *objet a* for the subject is locating this signifying object within the subject's formulation of demand and desire. The signifier has the power to either fully harness or diffuse identification and thus, recognition of the object. The investment of the symptom in being universal enabling us to speak both of it and possible alternatives to it, opens up the conditions of desire and demand. The symptom being the most noticeable is therefore the most able to be managed by the political subject. This posits the subject of politics as a subject *par excellence*, one who is always in sympathy with an act which illuminates an ethical fantasy involving commitment to a intervention as a condition of politics.

The subject and the 'political act' (which must also be read as the Other) are in an inextricable *folie à deux*, a precise political status that could with advantage be taken up by the Lacanian Left because in speaking to the act as being *something more* than recognition the problematic lure of identity politics is confront-

ed. To succumb to the fantasy of the Other is to both surrender to and transgress the law in an essential yet elusive encounter. The power of authority, of the law, establishes a legitimacy which can be resisted and challenged, yet even this ultimate hysterical contestation indirectly appropriates the authority of political power. Authority is the signifier which both legitimises and represses the political subject. As Santner (2013) suggests, it is via the interpellation of authority that a different relation can be possible, and that it is this relation which invites fidelity to interruption of authority.<sup>3</sup> For a subject to *be* political, we must turn to Lacan and it appears that some political commentators and activists are already undertaking this critical psychoanalytic turn. Lacanian psychoanalysis speaks directly to lack in politics, insofar as both subjects and the social conditions in which they reside interact through repetition, lack and loss. The realm of the political operates both as a source of and a barrier to enjoyment as Todd McGowan (2013) suggests. McGowan makes a plea for enjoyment as being the preferable political form central to the act, which is always in anticipation. This resonates strongly with Lacan's memorable declaration to the protesting students of May 1968. Although Lacan sympathised with radical politics, like Marx he was also deeply suspicious of its potential to reaffirm dominant structures through interpellation by power and authority. A contemporary example is the espousal of environmental issues by today's Left which merely reaffirm dominant ideological structures wherein no real sacrifice is being made. (Perhaps instead the Left could harness courageous conviction by directing the act towards a counterhegemonic movement). The poignant passage concluding Lacan's *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* examines the complexity of sacrifice which, when framed as a political dimension remains unacknowledged and thus unformed (1977, p. 274-275):

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There is something profoundly masked in the critique of the history that we have experienced... Experience shows us that Kant is more true, and I have proved that his theory of consciousness, when he writes of practical reason, is sustained only by giving a specification of the moral law which, looked at more closely, is simply desire in its pure state, that very desire that culminates in the sacrifice, strictly speaking, of everything that is the object of love in one's human tenderness –

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<sup>3</sup> Santner deliberates the figure of the 'neighbour' as being eventual and "breaking with the order of the everyday" (2013, p. 106).

I would say, not only in the rejection of the pathological object, but also in its sacrifice and murder.

At this point we can return to my original question: what precisely makes a subject think politics? If we consider seriously Lacan's above passage we can conclude that the subject holds at its kernel an intersection of conflict between desire, demand and sacrifice, which is however beyond precise identification. Because sacrifice is not an endorsement which appeals to the postmodern-neoliberal alliance, what tends to happen instead is avoidance of politics, its possible acts and interventions. Although the libidinal economy of sacrifice has a precise political function, as Žižek (2004, p. 166; with Gunjević, 2012) notes in response to the second mode of Jean-Luc Marion's structure of sacrifice as a conditional gift, sacrifice is far more complex, indeed "one sacrifices oneself (one's honour and future in respectful society) to maintain the appearance of the Other's honour, to save the beloved Other from shame". Here the logic of sacrifice determines that the sacrificial act is problematic and cannot be undertaken simply as a gift because sacrifice is an ideological practice which is not necessarily an offer of devotion.<sup>4 5</sup>

Demand such as that for social equality circumnavigates the inadequacy of ideological practice where it is obfuscated by sacrifice. Early on in *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, Lacan makes a cogent point which resists the aim of history: it is fully impossible to understand sacrifice because it exceeds the logic of identification: "... there are certainly a few who do not succumb to the fascination of the sacrifice in itself – the sacrifice that, in the object of our desires, we try to find evidence for the presence of the desire of this Other..." (1977, p. 275-276). In light of this, Badiou's claim that one needs to be faithful to a past event (2013, p. 13) in order to prepare for a potential new one appears a somewhat precarious and, at the same time, an urgent plea. Sustaining fidelity to past events is a political conduit, one of whose legacies is the propagation of

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<sup>4</sup> Žižek refers to atheism when he says that the truth it espouses must be sacrificed for the larger revolutionary project (2003). Žižek also discusses sacrifice in his earlier *Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989, p. 116) where he considers the conflation of love, devotion and sacrifice as a "gentrification" function of the unanswerable, *Che vuoi?*

<sup>5</sup> Ruda (2014, p. 121) considers Marion's second modality of sacrifice as operating within the political economy "because one expects to be reim-bursed [for one's sacrifice] and thus one can count on the logic of exchange".

identity-politics. Although as Badiou states “political subjects are always between two events” (2013, p. 13), I suggest further that they retain fidelity to what happens in this gap, in particular to how thinking and criticality are organised. Lacan refers to the need for criticality in Sem VIII (1960-1961, p. 13) when making a claim for “impassioned questioning [which] characterises the beginning of the dialectical process”. Here sacrifice is opaque within the desire/demand dialectic and this is precisely where anxiety lies for the subject. At this point, for subjects to think politics they must commit firstly to an invocation of the dialectic of desire via the passage of the act, and secondly to an avowal of the indeterminacy of politics as protection against a new Master being (un)wittingly invoked, for example that of the fall back position of identity-politics. The sacrifice lies in resisting desire for a new Master and remaining in a state of uncertainty. For this to take place, the subject must ironically surrender to the pathos of politics as a truth procedure. Here sacrifice takes on a more subtle hue: what is really at stake is finding the presence of desire of the Other. In this way, sacrifice provides a “way to proceed to the limit of *jouissance*” (Baas, 2014, p. 257). For Žižek (2003) the particularity of this sacrificial will to *jouissance* is obscene. Both impossibility and unavoidable repetitive excess of attachment haunt every act and/or intervention of politics. Lacan states that “[t]he key to this insistence in repetition is that in its essence repetition as repetition of the symbolical sameness is impossible” (1970, in Macksey et al.). Baas (p. 257) distinguishes the act from fantasy when asserting:

[i]t is within this dimension of sacrifice that it could be understood in terms of a logic of the sublime; the sublime approaches *jouissance as much as it possibly can* – it touches on the limit of impossible enjoyment [...] it is the moment of that ‘anguished joy’ which, however, *is only a moment*, a limited point [emphasis original].

Thus Lacanian psychoanalysis provides a motivation both for the moment preceding the act as well as for the act itself, a sacrificial act which approaches and determines the limits of the Law. It is the experience of sacrifice which renders it as excess and which continually reorients us towards the act. One sacrifices in order to fill a gap in the Symbolic and it is here that the act as sacrificial can be considered an indeterminable political *thing* beyond identification and usually recognition. Wells (2014, p. 3) states that

Lacanian theory is privileged in its focus on this moment of encounter, [with lack and excess] which Lacan argues is a singular motive force in human experience. It is precisely our striving to retrieve our lost objects, to be rid of our excessive attachments or at least come to grips with these impossibilities that moves us.

Let us not underestimate the anxiety-producing effects of both the act and of sacrifice in politics. Hamza and Tupinambá refer directly to the trauma of historicisation and the (im)possibility of the act, or more precisely what they term “the movement for power” (2016, p. 440):

[W]e must be able to face estrangement precisely so that, looking it in the face, and tarrying with it, we might avoid the worst, which is to assign to the possibility of social catastrophe the properties of a natural one: unavoidable, merciless and impossible to change.

Hamza and Tupinambá probe the problem of historicisation of the political event as a symptom which paralyses the subject who is unable to articulate a new political signifier notwithstanding that an enabling structure is already in place to do so. Such historicisation manifests as suffocating, conservative nostalgia. I suggest that another modality could be established via the act, one which presupposes the act to be a necessary pathos of politics, thus requiring specific handling of sacrifice. To remain anxious in the face of politics is an ethical stance because one is always faced with the appearance of lack in spite of the total and overwhelming presence of authority. Sacrifice can be a point for deliberating the political project as one that has the potential to break from ideology and give specificity to the minimal distance required for the subject to *think* politics. Here the act and the subject combine as a source of exchange with which to approach the impossible *thing*, the limit of human experience, without always relying on ideological fantasy. Rather, the subject needs to be anxiously struggling with a fidelity to the past, rather than honouring it. The *thing* – that which propels anxiety – mediates proximity to the Real and allows for *jouissance* to be reinstated through the process of sublimation. As the subject already knows, the act in its repetition will not always be transgressive or result in an event. Badiou offers that “the political is philosophically designated as the concept of the communitarian link, and of its representation in an authority (1985, p. 15). He elaborates, “In order to portray the political as a fiction and orient oneself towards politics, the first task is to disengage the latter from the prescription

of connection” (p. 18). It is the failure and incompleteness of the act as a social connection to think politics which renders it genuinely ‘political’ and in this way is arguably uniquely Lacanian in orientation. As Wells (2014, p. 5) states:

The Lacanian Real is precisely that Thing whose essence is that it simultaneously has no unity, no consistent positive existence and is somehow *there, in the Real*, persisting and antagonising us against all odds [emphasis original].

The act is the *thing* of the political because only through the act can the subject search for knowledge, notwithstanding that knowledge of the *thing* itself is unattainable. Subjects must not be absent from current politics, because to do so is to be caught within the impasse of fidelity to *only* the past. Rather they should maintain connection to the *thing* as a necessary illusion with which they are bound, always presupposing both that there is a demand and that this demand takes the form of loyalty to the integrity of praxis. The *thing* and the subject provide a logic of *the double, a two-some, à deux*, in which an ontological truth of how the subject should think politics requires a devotion to the *thing* without knowing precisely what it is. The act, the *thing* manifesting from an interpellation between fidelity to the past and anxiety about the future, circulates around lack and must be repeated. Such repetition provides the core proposition that knowledge of the Other is impossible with regard to which actions are viable. The act may not result in an event of transgression or emancipation, yet this act is of significance because even in failure it presents as a moment, albeit one of *non-sense*. Here, the subject specifically resists the political as a meta-language through its reworking the structures of demand and of the act. Instead, resultant from this there is the invitation to think politics. Thus, *folie à deux*, the illusion of completeness between the act and the subject remains intact as an ethical stance in its potential to uncover unconscious desires via the act. More than this, *folie à deux* is a symptom of the Other when considered as a pathos of politics because it can allow the act to materialise as a specific and necessary point of deliberation. The subject must grapple with this symptomatic conception of the act, which is one of both politics itself and of being political via the act. Importantly, the act must remain imprecise, indeterminate, atemporal yet context bound because it is the act which orders both approach and substance via signification.

I claim that it is possible to talk about the politics of psychoanalysis as a *thing* of the act, although in psychoanalytic discourse this is usually understood as



a form of sublimation. I also maintain the inverse, that the act enunciates the subject and provides legitimacy through transmission, or as Brennan (2004) puts it, the contagious energy which accompany judgements. Psychoanalysis provides a way to think politics because it critically questions traditions and processes of historicisation through conduits of *jouissance*, demand and desire. Simply put, psychoanalysis allows politics to map lack and demand and thereby break from recurrent, sometimes regressive historical teleology. In this undoing of socially sanctioned, neurotic idealisations, our fetishes and fascinations are thrown into crisis, and more so, those who propagate such sublimations are rendered answerable through the subject repeatedly making revolutionary, even impossible, demands. This kind of transmission, what Lacan calls ‘the field of experience’, puts the symptom to work and from this the act manifests and attempts to undermine the signalling of meaning. Here the subject oscillates between necessary coexisting forces of *love* and *hate* and is usually situated somewhere in between and within cognition beyond love and hate in so far as their unpredictability could provoke either disjuncture or possibly, truth. Love and hate could be seen as standing in for Badiou’s *scene-of-the-two* (derived from the Maoist dictum that *one divides into two*), where although apparently indistinguishable they are nevertheless sufficiently distinct for there to be a third position. This “same difference” (Dolar, 2012, unpaginated), together with the possibility of transmission, must be engulfing and unapologetic, the only interruption being that of the act insofar as the act alone can speak to difference. The act is both concrete and metonymic because the parameters of love and hate are here combined in a single category of demand for an act. Love and hate are not simple affects but complex mechanisms underpinning the desire for and contagious transmission of the condition to think politics. In addition they focus attention on *jouissance* as an affective political agent of transmission. For the subject there can be no *one* universal political act because all political acts are failures of political desire within the structural limits imposed by capitalism, which splits the unitary structure of the subject and the act. In this way Lacanian psychoanalysis has the potential to invigorate Marxism, which confronts antagonistic structures of capitalism as inevitable failures. The failure of an act signifies affective and visceral recognition of and devotion to it. The subject is here compelled to act both by way of a transmission of body (speech) and affect (love, hate and anxiety) and as a projective identification with politics.

The act is thus a contagion which is a point of departure for the subject in that the act combines desire, demand and sacrifice in an explication of political subjectivity. *Folie à deux*, the *scene-of-the-two*, provides a singularity between the act and the subject as a materialist form from which contagious transmission emanates. This kind of affective bodily coercion of the subject *enacting* politically is strangely mad, even erotic, because like psychoanalysis, the realm of the political operates along the same lines as the “analytical cell... [which is] nothing but a bed for lovemaking” (Lacan, Sem VII, 1960-1961, p. 15). For the political subject this is precisely where transmission resultant from the act is located, a contagion which in Lacanian terms involves “the giving of something to another who does not want it”. As Lacan implies, politics is never simply political and love is never just love because both are modalities wherein struggle can be truly thought.

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Rok Benčin\*

## Melancholy, or the Metaphysics of Fictional Sadness

Following Alain Badiou's recent proposal for a metaphysics of happiness, in which "real happiness" gains a metaphysical dimension by being conceptualised as an affect related to infinity, subjectivity, and truth procedures, this essay raises the question of whether there could also be a "real" sadness that would merit its own metaphysical treatise. If there is a kind of sadness that is not merely confined to the despair of a finite individual, but has been related in the course of the history of western thought to metaphysical aspirations, it goes by the name of melancholy. In order to show that a metaphysics of melancholy is indeed possible and that it could even be considered as complementary to the mentioned metaphysics of happiness, two major characteristics of the melancholic condition need to be thoroughly re-examined, namely alienation from the world and the loss of the object.

### Towards the metaphysics of affect

To suggest an introductory indication of what connects metaphysics and melancholy, we can consider the classical work on melancholy by Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, at the centre of which is an interpretation of Albrecht Dürer's famous engraving *Melencholia I* (1514). According to these authors, Dürer achieves "the merging of two different worlds of thought and feeling" by combining two historical types of figures, namely the allegory of geometry as an exemplary science of this era and a portrait of melancholy as a wretched state of mind of the slothful. By combining the two figures, Dürer transforms the meaning of both: "He was bold enough to bring down the timeless knowledge and method of a liberal art into the sphere of human striving and failure, bold enough, too, to raise the animal heaviness of a 'sad, earthy' temperament to the height of a struggle with intellectual problems."<sup>1</sup> While ge-

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*, Kraus-Thomson, Nendeln 1979, p. 317.

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ometry's tools for mapping the order of the cosmos now slip into "a chaos of unused things," melancholy intellectually struggles with "not being able either to grasp or to release an imaginary something."<sup>2</sup>

This merging of thought and feeling provides us with a set of problems common to both metaphysics and melancholy. If both have always been alienated from reality, although for different reasons, the former due to its search of the transcendent order of the cosmos and the latter due to the predisposition to sadness and idleness, their alienation now coincides. There is a glitch in the order of the cosmos, which makes the metaphysical effort harder but also more necessary than ever. According to Theodor W. Adorno, the "absurdly rational" metaphysical systems of the 17<sup>th</sup> century "served a compensatory purpose. The *ratio* which in accordance with bourgeois class interests had smashed the feudal order and scholastic ontology, the form of the intellectual reflection of that order – this same *ratio* no sooner faced the ruins, its own handiwork, than it would be struck by fear of chaos."<sup>3</sup> Under the threat of disintegration into chaos, the world is no longer the evident totality, but a problem to be resolved with an ingenious philosophical apparatus. The same problem inspires the nascent feeling of baroque *vanitas*, which implies a new kind of object, the ungraspable "imaginary something" that affects the melancholic with a sadness without a cause.

The essay will thus explore the world "out of joint" and the undetermined object within the void of the absent cause of sadness as the two problems of a supposed metaphysics of melancholy. The latter is only possible, however, under the condition that the melancholic object not only testifies to a loss of the world, but also supports a specific kind of subjective relation to the world. What must be found among the ruins of the well-ordered world, is, to use Adorno's phrase, the possibility of a metaphysical experience.

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An indication that such an endeavour makes sense today, after a century or more of the abandonment of metaphysics from all sides of the philosophical spectrum, can be found in the actual attempts at developing a metaphysics of affects. For an exemplary metaphysics of affect in these post-metaphysical times,

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 317, 319.

<sup>3</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. by E. B. Ashton, Routledge, London and New York 1990, p. 21.

we will turn to Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*. Among the most recent examples, we will discuss Badiou's *Métaphysique du bonheur réel*, from which the title of this essay is derived by means of paraphrase. For reasons that will soon become clear, I will pose the question of whether the metaphysics of real happiness can be opposed or supplemented by a metaphysics of melancholy as fictional sadness. Additionally, a metaphysics of melancholy was recently proposed by Ilit Ferber in *Philosophy and Melancholy*, her reading of Walter Benjamin's early writings on the baroque *Trauerspiel* via Martin Heidegger's notion of *stimmung* and the Leibnizian concept of the monad.

In order to start exploring the metaphysics of melancholy, however, we must first turn to the two main references for thinking melancholy within contemporary philosophy, namely Sigmund Freud and Walter Benjamin. The loss of reality or the lack of libidinal investment in the outside world is a key symptomatological starting-point for psychoanalysis, while the melancholic specifically struggles with an indeterminate lost object. Around the same time, Benjamin developed his own thoughts on baroque melancholy as contemplation of the fragmented ruins of a world that has lost its meaning. Both authors thus seem to confirm our hypothesis on the dual problem of world and object as the crux of the metaphysics of melancholy.

### Objects without a world

From his early metapsychological writings onwards, Freud recognised alienation from reality as the fundamental fact of both neurosis and psychosis.<sup>4</sup> The distinction between the two is further elaborated in "The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis", where Freud brings into consideration "the question not only of a *loss of reality* but also of a *substitute for reality*."<sup>5</sup> While the neurotic constructs "a *world of phantasy*," parallel to reality, the psychotic goes a step

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<sup>4</sup> "We have long observed that every neurosis has as its result, and probably therefore as its purpose, a forcing of the patient out of real life, an alienating of him from reality." Sigmund Freud, "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning", in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XII*, trans. by James Strachey, The Hogarth Press 1958, p. 218.

<sup>5</sup> Freud, "The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis", in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIX*, trans. by James Strachey, The Hogarth Press, London 1961, p. 187.

further with “the creation of a new reality,” which acts as a surrogate world that completely replaces the real one.<sup>6</sup> While the neurotic can be considered as a proto-artist – an artist able to “mould his phantasies into truths of a new kind,”<sup>7</sup> the psychotic is a proto-metaphysic, as exemplified by “the characteristic tendency of paranoics to construct speculative systems.”<sup>8</sup>

For reasons beyond the scope of this paper, however, the pair of the neurotic and the psychotic becomes insufficient for Freud at a certain point. He thus introduces a new pair, namely the melancholic and the fetishist. From our current point of view, the difference between the two pairs primarily concerns the shift of focus from the world to the object. While the psychotic requires a completely new reality, the fetishist, for example, is driven by a substitute object (a fetish in place of the mother’s absent phallus). The fetishist can remain indifferent to the real world, as long as his or her subjective structure is supported by the exceptional object.

In the case of the melancholic, the ontological status of the surrogate object is more peculiar. As is well known, Freud introduced melancholy as a pathological double of the normal process of mourning. The features of both states, such as the inhibition of activity and the loss of interest in the outside world, as well as the ability to love, are very similar. While both are reactions to a lost object, the difference is primarily in the nature of loss itself. While mourning is fully conscious and attached to a definable lost object (even if this object is an abstraction or an ideal), melancholy is “related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness.” Nevertheless, “even if the patient is aware of the loss which has given rise to his melancholia,” meaning that the mental state is linked to the same starting point as in mourning, i.e. the conscious loss of an identifiable object, there remains a surplus of loss that is not reducible to the mourning for a lost object. Even if the patient “knows *whom* he has lost,” he does not know “*what* he has lost in him.”<sup>9</sup> The crucial difference between

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 187, 185.

<sup>7</sup> Freud, “Formulations on the Two principles of Mental Functioning”, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

<sup>8</sup> Freud, “On Narcissism: An Introduction”, in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV*, trans. by James Strachey, The Hogarth Press, London 1957, p. 96.

<sup>9</sup> Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia”, in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV, op. cit.*, p. 245.



mourning and melancholy, revealed at the point of their greatest proximity, is a redoubling of the lost object that takes place in the latter. The actual lost object is not what the melancholic truly loses.

It seems that the melancholic too, like the fetishist, generates a substitute object to make up for the loss. However, while the function of the fetish is to merge with the loss to the point of its disavowal, the melancholic object emerges as distinct from any defined and identifiable object that might have been lost in order for the melancholic to be able to cling to the loss itself. In distinction from the lost object, the loss itself functions as an object, the object of loss. This is the object the melancholic identifies with, causing the specific mental features of melancholy that Freud goes on to discuss in detail. While the first pair, the neurotic and the psychotic, produce substitute worlds without grounding in objectivity (worlds without objects), the second pair, the fetishist and the melancholic, generate surrogate objects separated from the meaningful whole (objects without a world).

The other major source of the philosophical comprehension of melancholy (several aspects of which were a crucial influence on Adorno, for example) is Benjamin's book on the German baroque drama, the *Trauerspiel*. As Adorno after him, Benjamin turned to Leibniz to present his view on the philosophical method. A study on a largely forgotten literary phenomenon can be philosophical, because every idea (the idea derived from the *Trauerspiel* included) is a monad, containing all other monads and therefore an image of the world.<sup>10</sup>

In Benjamin too, we can find a problematised idea of the world together with the notion of a fragmentary object. Crucial for the former is the idea of natural history. The world of the baroque era is a world dominated by religion but deprived of eschatology. The historical succession therefore freezes "into a figurative spatial simultaneity."<sup>11</sup> History is absorbed back into nature and becomes a part of the landscape, a setting, which, in its passivity, intrudes into dramatic action.<sup>12</sup> Lutheranism breaks the link between good deeds and redemption, thereby di-

<sup>10</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. by John Osborne, Verso, London, New York 1998, pp. 47–48.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 91–93.

vesting human activity of its eschatological meaning. Benjamin saw Dürer's engraving as a document of the resulting aversion to practical activity. All this results in an empty, alienated world in which a ruin becomes the paradigm of objectivity. Once the objects are no longer a part of the meaningful whole of the world, "the most simple object appears to be a symbol of some enigmatic wisdom because it lacks any natural, creative relationship to us."<sup>13</sup>

Deprived of the world, objects appear as dead objects subjectable to contemplation that invests them with new, arbitrary meanings. Ruins thus become a source of invention: "That which lies here in ruins, the highly significant fragment, the remnant, is, in fact, the finest material in baroque creation."<sup>14</sup> The fragmentary object without a world appears as such to the melancholic, who expresses its new meanings in the language of allegory:

If the object becomes allegorical under the gaze of melancholy, if melancholy causes life to flow out of it and it remains behind dead, but eternally secure, then it is exposed to the allegorist, it is unconditionally in his power. That is to say, it is now quite incapable of emanating any meaning or significance of its own; such significance as it has, it acquires from the allegorist. He places it within it, and stands behind it; not in a psychological but in an ontological sense.<sup>15</sup>

Benjamin's ruins are therefore melancholic objects without a world. Eric L. Santner claims that Benjamin's melancholy provides a glimpse into the realm of "creaturely life" beyond the matrix of representations that constitutes the world. The melancholic objects testify that "life can persist beyond the death of the symbolic forms that gave it meaning and that symbolic forms can persist beyond the death of the form of life that gave them human vitality."<sup>16</sup> Melancholy is therefore a "condition of radical designification."<sup>17</sup> Ferber argues that these "objects become eternal reminders of the emptiness remaining after all meaning and hope for salvation have disappeared," although they also demonstrate a

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 138–140.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 183–184.

<sup>16</sup> Eric L. Santner, *On Creaturely Life*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, London 2006, p. 17.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

“capacity to be recharged, to acquire new signification.”<sup>18</sup> The objects without a world nevertheless find their expression in allegories that ascribe to them a different kind of meaning.

The crucial question that will define the possibility of the metaphysics of melancholy lies here: are we only dealing with the loss of the world and with fragmentary objects that testify to this loss, or do the indeterminacy of the melancholic object (Freud) and its potential for another kind of signification (Benjamin) enable a different kind of subjective relation to the world?

### The object as monad

The problematised notion of world and the undetermined object that at the same time is and is not a part of this world are also at the core of Adorno’s affective (post-)metaphysics. *Negative Dialectics* opens with a famous claim that philosophy is still possible because it has failed to find its proper end. Philosophy’s hopes were embedded in the prospect of the revolutionary transformation of the world (instead of its mere theoretical interpretation), which would realise philosophy by ending it. However, as the post-war society testifies, according to Adorno, the moment of praxis was missed.<sup>19</sup> One could say that philosophy thus resembles Juliet accepting her own (temporary) death in expectancy to be reawakened into a love fulfilled, only to find Romeo well and truly dead beside her. After the non-event of the transformation of the world, philosophy reluctantly resumes its task of interpretation, which it can only fulfil by means of the ruthless dagger of self-critique.

Philosophy thus continues as a fidelity to the lost object of its own end, thereby displaying a properly melancholic structure. There are several consequences of this melancholic reawakening of philosophy, most notably that the notion of truth is now tied to an affect: “The need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth.”<sup>20</sup> To remain true to this affected notion of truth, philosophy must renounce its pretended systematic grasp of the whole. The lost object of its end

<sup>18</sup> Ilit Ferber, *Philosophy and Melancholy: Benjamin’s Early Reflections on Theater and Language*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2013, Kindle edition, pp. 38–39.

<sup>19</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18.

entails the loss of the whole – the very subject matter of philosophical thought. This does not mean, however, that the whole does not exist. Philosophy must identify it as the system external to it, namely the repressive system of society. The systematic domination that causes suffering in the world is reproduced within philosophy by the principle of identity: “The principle of domination, which antagonistically rends human society, is the same principle which, spiritualized, causes the difference between the concept and its subject matter.”<sup>21</sup> Negative dialectics must therefore conceptually think what eludes the identity of the concept – the non-identical. The non-identical supports the resistance of thought to the world as it is and therefore maintains a critical perspective on the unchanged world from the point of view of utopian change.<sup>22</sup>

Having renounced its grasp of the whole, philosophy can only think in fragments. However, such fragmentary thinking is not a sign of the limitation and finitude of philosophical thought, but rather presents its infinitisation. The closed system is now shattered and expanded into an infinite fragmentary philosophy, although each fragment is a means of accessing the lost whole: “What makes philosophy risk the strain of its own infinity is the unwarranted expectation that each individual and particular puzzle it solves will be like Leibniz’s monad, the ever-elusive entirety in itself – although, of course, in line with a pre-established disharmony rather than a pre-established harmony.”<sup>23</sup> Faced with the lost object of its own end, which also entails a renouncement of its subject matter, the whole, philosophy gains a new object, the non-identical, and a new subject matter, an infinity of monadic fragments in which to read the disharmony of the world.

Following Adorno, the possibility of merging the different characteristics of Freud’s and Benjamin’s descriptions of the melancholic object is implied. The object of loss, i.e. the undetermined object that emerges in surplus to the actual lost object, functions as a monadic residue, with windows closed from the world, in which the truth of the world, its very disharmony, can nevertheless be

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>22</sup> “Accompanying irreconcilable thoughts is the hope for reconciliation, because the resistance of thought to mere things in being, the commanding freedom of the subject, intends in the object even that of which the object was deprived by objectification.” *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14.

read. The significance of the melancholic monad thus provokes a change in the subjective relation to the world.

### Real affects and fictional objects

There is an Adornian trait in Badiou's own metaphysics of affect, even though the general frame is obviously very different, since the affect, related to truth, is not suffering but rather happiness. For Badiou, any philosophy worthy of its name is a metaphysics of happiness.<sup>24</sup> Real happiness, however, does not originate in the satisfaction of needs, it is an affect of scientific, political, artistic, and amorous subjects of truth. It can be observed that affect is not, as in Adorno, the condition of truth, but rather its effect. Nevertheless, for Badiou as well as for Adorno, the desire of philosophy stems from a reaction to "the miserable state of the world."<sup>25</sup> Happiness is as rare as the events that give rise to the subjects of truth procedures. Subjects form as a response to the contingent encounter with an appearance of something that is a part of the world, but is at the same time excluded from it, like the Adornian non-identical: "Happiness is the affect of the Subject as an immanent exception."<sup>26</sup>

For Adorno, real happiness is only possible as a Stendhalian *promesse*, which can still be kept by philosophy or art only as a strict demonstration of its unrealisability. Badiou, on the other hand, calls precisely for *finir avec la fin*, for the end to come to an end. Philosophy has spent the last century declaring the end of the metaphysics of truth, but now it is time to re-establish philosophy under the condition of subjective procedures of universal truths, which are only measured by their realised consequences, not their promises.

Badiou admits, however, that "a certain measure of despair is the condition of real happiness."<sup>27</sup> As testified by Kierkegaard's "anti-philosophy", this despair comes from an individual's encounter with the impossible appearance that imposes a decision upon him or her, a decision to either accept the event and become a subject or to remain enclosed within the imaginary individual identity.

<sup>24</sup> Alain Badiou, *Métaphysique du bonheur réel*, PUF, Paris 2015, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 88.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 39, 88.

Nevertheless, his or her despair is transitory, while the true affect of the subject remains happiness. For Badiou, there is no affectual *stimmung* of being-in-the-world, a *stimmung*, such as the Heideggerian anxiety that delivers the *Dasein* to its finitude. Real happiness comes from a rupture in the world and the necessary despair is only the affect of the uprooting of the individual from its disoriented existence in the world as it is. Badiou rejects the possibility that a revelation of Being or a return of the Gods could lead to real happiness. According to him, the Heideggerian “Return” is a hopeless nostalgia, an always already defeated cause. Despair or defeat can give rise to poetry or an anti-philosophy in the style of Kierkegaard, but there cannot be a philosophy of despair: “though there exists a poetics of the defeat, there is no philosophy of defeat. Philosophy, in its very essence, elaborates the means of saying ‘Yes!’ to the previously unknown thoughts that hesitate to become the truths that they are.”<sup>28</sup>

Following Badiou, therefore, there can be no metaphysics of melancholy, since despair is the affect of individuals confined to their finitude and not a real subjective affect of an infinite truth. The aim of this essay is not to reverse Badiou’s re-appraisal of infinity and truth, but to show how a metaphysics of melancholy is nevertheless possible. In order to do that, it has to be shown how there is something real about its fictitious nature and how it can be thought of beyond the limitations of individual finitude. If it can be shown that melancholy is, in a certain sense, a subjective affect of infinity, then the metaphysics of melancholy can supplement the metaphysics of happiness.

The first question, then, would be if melancholy, the sadness without a cause, can in any way be considered as real. Giorgio Agamben has emphasised the close relation to phantasm in the historical development of thinking melancholy. According to Agamben the melancholic loss of reality is a part of the strategy aimed at transferring the reality principle from the world to the phantasm. Reality is lost in order for the phantasm to become real: “The lost object is but the appearance that desire creates for its own courting of the phantasm, and the introjection of the libido is only one of the facets of a process in which what is

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<sup>28</sup> Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event*, 2, trans. by Alberto Toscano, Continuum, London, New York 2009, p. 3.

real loses its reality so that what is unreal may become real.”<sup>29</sup> The achievement of the melancholic is of the same kind as the achievement of the artist compared to a regular neurotic according to Freud: the ability to mould phantasies into truths. The appearance that the melancholic creates is not merely imaginary; it is rather a properly subjective fiction.

In contrast to the standard interpretation which understands the loss of the ability to desire as a fundamental characteristic of the melancholic condition, Agamben claims that the lost object is an imaginary invention of desire by way of which the melancholic establishes a paradoxical relation to the unobtainable object of desire: “From this point of view, melancholy would be not so much the regressive reaction to the loss of the love object as the imaginative capacity to make an unobtainable object appear as if lost.”<sup>30</sup> The melancholic does not actually lose anything, he or she invents a loss which allows him or her to establish a form of existence of what can never be possessed. What is created by the fiction of a loss is loss as an object, the object of loss, which makes the desire “capable of reversing privation as possession.”<sup>31</sup> The melancholic thus carries out a Pauline turn: what was real becomes unreal, what was unreal becomes real. Melancholy is thereby real by being fictional.

### The monadic object and possible worlds

From the outset, we have been investigating the dual problem of object and world as a hypothetical primary concern of the metaphysics of melancholy. Following the presented readings of Freud, Benjamin, Adorno, and Agamben regarding insights pertinent to the metaphysics of the (melancholic) affect, some conclusions on the character of the melancholic object can first be derived; conclusions that cannot, however, be fully ascribed to any of the mentioned authors.

First, the emphasis shifts from a factual lost object to an indeterminate object produced in the process of loss. The melancholic affect is not related to the loss

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<sup>29</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans. by Ronald L. Martinez, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London 1993, p. 25.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

of an object, but rather to the production of a surplus, indeterminate, and fragmentary object that seems alien to the world.

Second, subverting the false dilemma of its belonging either to the realm of reality or the realm of illusion, the melancholic object can be described as fictitious: it has the artistic character of converting imagination to new realities.

Third, the melancholic object has a monadic structure. Not only is it a fictional reality, it also touches on something real. Its windows being closed to the world, there is a truth about the world that is nevertheless inscribed in its interiority, as if a Leibnizian monad would roll out of the broken clockwork mechanism of the world.

Finally, the monadic object can be invested with meaning. In other words, the inscriptions of the world within the monad can be read. Melancholy is therefore not an epitome of numb passivity; there is a specific melancholic desire or activity, related to developing the potential fictions inscribed within its monadic structure.

The question remains, however: What are the consequences of this fictional object for the world? Is the world irreversibly lost or even simply irrelevant to the melancholic, obsessed with the worldless object? The melancholic inclination towards the phantasmatic, emphasised by Agamben (not without reference to Benjamin, as well as Freud), implies that the affect may not only concern the objects without a world but also “worlds without objects”, i.e. unrealised, imaginary worlds. The melancholic’s perceived passivity is a consequence of the desire for something unobtainable in this world. However, melancholy is also a strategy for inverting the reality principle and presenting the unreal as real.

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At this point we can once again return to Leibniz. His philosophical system is an excellent example of what Adorno described as the “absurdly rational” attempts of 17<sup>th</sup> century philosophy to compensate for the loss of the orderly world and to keep the threatening chaos at bay. In contemporary philosophy, the glitch in the order of the cosmos becomes manifest and is often explained precisely through a return to Leibniz. Adorno, for example, used his concept of monad as a model for the modern artwork (and I have used it here as a model of the melancholic object in a similar manner): closed from the world (artwork no longer simply



represents the world), it presents its essential disharmony. The disharmony of the world entails that not only is it no longer possible to show how, like it still was for Leibniz, if rationalist criteria are applied, we have to admit that despite empirical evidence to the contrary, we live in the best of possible worlds, but that we can no longer say that we live in a world at all – at least not as in a unified, orderly whole.

There are, however, two slightly distinct versions of articulating this problem. On the one hand, we could say that the world is lost, while on the other we could claim that the world has become fragmented or multiplied. These two options seem to co-exist in the writings of a host of contemporary philosophers. Badiou claims that today we no longer live in a world, not exactly because there is no unifying principle, but rather because the world lacks recognisable political struggles that would allow for subjective orientation.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, Badiou has developed a new, objective phenomenology of worlds, which claims that a human being can simultaneously exist in a “virtually unlimited number of worlds.”<sup>33</sup> The impossibility of orientation is also diagnosed by Jean-Luc Nancy, who has claimed that we are witnessing the end of the unifying world of sense, which nevertheless opens up “*the praxis of the sense of the world*” in its plurality.<sup>34</sup>

The same duality can be found in Gilles Deleuze, who famously argued that the belief in our world is lost and the “link between man and the world is broken.”<sup>35</sup> However, Deleuze also turned to the Leibnizian idea of a multitude of possible worlds. Similarly as Adorno, he claimed that baroque philosophy was a desperate attempt to hold the chaotic divergences at bay. Leibniz thus divided “impossible” divergences between different possible worlds, only one of which was chosen for actual creation.<sup>36</sup> Today, on the contrary, we live in an

<sup>32</sup> Badiou, “The Caesura of Nihilism”, *The Adventure of French Philosophy*, trans. by Bruno Bosteels, Verso, London, New York 2012, pp. 53–66.

<sup>33</sup> Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>34</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. by Jeffrey S. Librett, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London 1997, pp. 4, 9.

<sup>35</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1989, pp. 171–172.

<sup>36</sup> Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. by Tom Conley, The Athlone Press, London 1993, pp. 81–82.

age of the “neo-baroque”, in which the multitude of worlds is no longer merely possible, but actually exists: “nothing prevents us from affirming that impossibles belong to the same world, that impossible worlds belong to the same universe.”<sup>37</sup> Like the other two philosophers mentioned, Deleuze seemed to hesitate between the “melancholic” image of loss and a “schizophrenic” image of a multiplication of worlds.

Last but not least, we turn to Agamben, where a certain notion of loss of the world can also be found, for example in his thesis on the destruction of experience.<sup>38</sup> What is more interesting in this context, though, is his own reaffirmation of the Leibnizian multiplicity of worlds. In contrast to Deleuze, he preserves the potentiality of worlds. We must listen to “the lamentation that [...] arises from everything that could have been but was not, from everything that could have been otherwise but had to be sacrificed for the present world to be as it is.”<sup>39</sup> The existing world was created at the expense of all the other possible ones. The task of the new Messiah is not to redeem our world, but to save all the inexistent ones.

How can we intervene in these discussions on the notion of world in contemporary philosophy from the perspective of the metaphysics of melancholy we have been developing? I would like to argue that the notion of the melancholic object developed above implies a shift of emphasis from the loss of the world to its multiplication and potentialisation. It seems that the properly melancholic loss of the world entails a desire for other worlds, which, however, remain unrealised. The fictional object, generated in the loss, is the object of this melancholic desire. Due to its indeterminate and readable monadic character, the object evokes a multiplicity of worlds in their potentiality.

### **Between real happiness and fictional sadness**

The crucial question that still needs to be answered at this point is what kind of potentiality is at stake here? The Agambenian answer would see the monadic object as the monument and guardian of all the uncreated worlds in their

<sup>37</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

<sup>38</sup> Agamben, *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*, trans. by Liz Heron, Verso, London, New York 1993.

<sup>39</sup> Agamben, “Bartleby, or On Contingency”, in: *Potentialities*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1990, p. 266.

very potentiality. Another solution is offered by Ferber in her metaphysics of melancholy. She understands melancholy in the Heideggerian manner as a mood, which is not a particular way of seeing the world but a manner in which the world discloses and reveals itself to us.<sup>40</sup> She suggests, however, that the principle mood of philosophy is melancholy, rather than anxiety.<sup>41</sup> Following Benjamin, she claims that melancholy, as such a mood, combines extreme closure from the world with a radical expression of the world.<sup>42</sup> It is precisely the Leibnizian monad that provides Benjamin with the means to conceptualise this duality. While the monad is in no relation to the rest of the world, it nevertheless contains all other monads within itself and thereby to a certain extent expresses the world as a whole: “the world is not an object for the monad but is part of it. [...] Secured in its utter closure, the monad not only expresses the world: it includes it by means of expression.”<sup>43</sup> The harmonious monadic expression thus achieved relies on the “pure language” of “mere potentiality,” the mute language of nature beyond communication and referentiality, which Benjamin describes in his early writings.<sup>44</sup>

I would like to propose a third answer that would provide the missing link between melancholy and the idea of a metaphysics of affect proposed by Badiou in relation to happiness. If there is indeed to be a metaphysics of melancholy in this sense, the potentiality evoked by the affect must transcend individual finitude and form a certain subjective infinity. In order to find this missing link, I will once again turn to Benjamin and Adorno, specifically to their readings of Marcel Proust. It seems that Proust himself associated melancholy with potentiality. Brassai comments on Proust’s frequent paraphrases of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s famous verses “*Look in my face; my name is Might-have-been; / I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell,*” which were written as a dedication on a photograph given to him by his friend Edgard Aubert.<sup>45</sup> In one of the texts col-

<sup>40</sup> “In that sense, mood is necessary for the disclosure and appearance of the world in its entirety as hopeful, boring or anxious. The world, in other words, is not ‘colored’ or veiled by a certain mood; on the contrary, the world is constituted of, and made intelligible by, mood.” Ferber, *Philosophy and Melancholy*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 83, 170.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>45</sup> Brassai, *Marcel Proust sous l'emprise de la photographie*, Gallimard, Paris 1997, pp. 38–41.

lected in *Essais et articles*, for example, Proust wrote about memories filling him with melancholy due to all the unrealised possibilities, everything that might have happened but was never to be.<sup>46</sup>

In this vein, Benjamin explained Proust's *memoire involontaire* through a twist in which we can recognise the melancholic invention of a surrogate that takes the place of the lost object. Similarly to how Agamben will describe melancholy, Benjamin described Proust's strategy as a will to forget the real events in order to relive and rewrite them through memory: "For an experienced event is finite – at any rate, confined to one sphere of experience; a remembered event is infinite, because it is merely a key to everything that happened before it and after it."<sup>47</sup> Time is not simply (a) lost (object), there is an intention to forget in order to produce a surrogate memory, a substitute object of loss that could be expanded to a work of art. Benjamin emphasises the infinity of the remembered event by recalling that Proust never stopped adding new paragraphs to his manuscripts.

When discussing the further possibility of a metaphysical experience in the conclusion of *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno referred to the promise of happiness that is found by the Proustian narrator as a child in the names of distant villages to which he would one day like to travel. Actually traveling there later, the narrator finds these places to be nothing like he imagined: "One thinks that going there would bring fulfilment, as if there were such a thing. Being really there makes the promise recede like a rainbow. And yet, one is not disappointed; the feeling now is one of being too close, rather, and not seeing it for that reason."<sup>48</sup> It can be observed that in such a metaphysical experience, happiness and melancholy coincide beyond the opposition between fulfilment and disappointment. Such experience aims at what in objects is not identical to them: "Happiness, the only part of metaphysical experience that is more than impotent longing, gives us

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<sup>46</sup> "Chaque fois que, afin de l'évoquer, je regarde au fond tremblant et terni de ma mémoire un de ces fêtes, aujourd'hui mélancolique d'avoir été délicieuse de possibilités depuis irréalisées, il me semble d'entendre qui me dit avec le poète : 'Prends mon visage, essaie si tu le peux de le regarder en face ; je m'appelle ... ce qui aurait pu être et qui n'a pas été.'" Marcel Proust, *Essais et articles*, Gallimard, Paris 1994, p. 158.

<sup>47</sup> Benjamin, "On the Image of Proust", in: *Selected Writings, Volume 2: Part 1 (1927-1930)*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone et al., The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge and London 2005, p. 238.

<sup>48</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics, op. cit.*, p. 373.

the inside of objects as something removed from the objects.”<sup>49</sup> Happiness as a metaphysical affect may exist as an unfulfillable promise, and yet this negativity has another side, a certain “positive” negativity: it offers an experience of the non-identical. Proust’s “reconstruction of experience,” Adorno concludes, resists the world that makes the promise of happiness unfulfillable.<sup>50</sup>

These remarks on Proust can give us some final clues to what kind of potentiality is at play in melancholy. Melancholy only evokes the multiplicity of worlds in their potentiality by way of this multiplicity being inscribed in the worldless indeterminate object. And yet, the monadic character of this object invites a reading, the development of a fictional world from the potentiality opened up by the invented surrogate object. From this perspective, potentiality is simply a retroactive assumption of the work of fiction. By taking Benjamin’s remembered event as a model, we can see how the monadic object is infinite by being “merely a key”, a break that triggers narrative development. Melancholy is “artistic” in the Freudian sense: it transcribes phantasy into something real – a fiction.

Inducing neither passivity nor activity, melancholy marks the point where the loss of reality is staged as a refusal, clearing the way for the worldless object as an immanent exception, a rupture that opens the possibility of other worlds by triggering the work of fiction. This is the point where melancholy is, in Adorno’s words, “more than impotent longing.” Coinciding with the promise of happiness, melancholy acquires a metaphysical dimension. From the Badiouian perspective, it thus transcends the despair of an individual, confined to his or her finitude. Melancholy implies a subjective stance of refusal of reality, producing a passage of infinity within its monadic object, ready to be developed in a different world. Melancholy can thus be seen as the “necessary measure of despair” that paves the way to “real happiness”.

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 374.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*



Marcus Coelen\*

## Prolegomena to the Writing of Affect

A peculiar, both unobtrusive and disturbing heritage or rather *resource* or even better *archive*—with all the “*mal*” that would have befallen it already before the time of its conception—is given to thought by the fact that the first systematic exposition of *affects* is to be found not in a forerunner of so called “psychology,” but in what is first of all a treatise on the order of speech, public oration, and efficiency in political altercation, i.e. Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*.<sup>1</sup>

Ever since this philosophical *envoi*, it is as if the thinking of affect had imprinted into itself a historical scheme in which it appears to be bound to swing back and forth like a pendulum between two poles; one might even say that this thinking has auto-affected itself by its own historicity in the form of an irreducible oscillation between two extremes. One thus finds, on the one hand, affect being thought as an independent, autonomous, and privileged entity, to be seen as something more original, more authentic, or essentially unaltered by language as opposed to, on the other hand, a conception where affects are nothing but effects, derivative and subordinate to language or to a *logos* that can entirely calculate them, accounting for their secondariness and subordinacy. Whereas the latter might be epitomized in one of the most illustrious lines in Spinoza’s *Ethics*, the former is certainly a pervading assumption of common sense. For what could be further removed from the way affects impose themselves on us, with their physiological persuasiveness and immediate claim to amorphous veracity than to contend, as the *Ethics* at the beginning of its third part famously does, that it is possible and even necessary to treat them as if they were “lines, planes, or bodies,” i.e. in the rigorous language of geometry? The logic of this distinction in the (thinking of) affect is certainly not reducible to a naïve belief in immediate experience with a *doxa* attached, as opposed to the rigor and profundity of

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<sup>1</sup> See, for a thorough treatment of this archive and a critique of modern simplified theories of affect based thereon, Daniel Gross, *The Secret History of Emotion: From Aristotle’s “Rhetoric” to Modern Brain Science*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2006.

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a philosophical investigation cold-heartedly debunking the former. Things are more complex, as it is shown by the history and institution of psychoanalysis in which the status of the affects—causes or effects, primary or secondary, clinically indicative or misleading—is often seen as a dividing line, without it being possible to call the one side entirely naïve and the other totally blinded by philosophical zeal (although either phenomena are known to occur).<sup>2</sup> However, some naivety—or bad faith—may be discerned in the thriving field of *Affect Theory* when, feeding on the historical schematism just mentioned, prominent authors<sup>3</sup> in it claim to liberate affects from the subjugation of what they frame as a structuralist or post-structuralist logo-centrism, represented to them not exclusively but especially by a Lacanian psychoanalysis that in some cases is rather sloppily construed.<sup>4</sup> In any case, it is the complexity of affect “itself” that seems to keep triggering a perennial *polemos* in which, strangely enough, the excitement over a fresh clash meets a repetition happily oblivious to the tedium it might present otherwise—and you do not have to be a psychoanalyst to suspect in this trait a vicissitude of the sexual drive. Neutralizing this scheme might allow for a reflection on what exactly it is driven by and how.

It is no coincidence that a historical schematics similar to that of affect theory can be seen in literary criticism to the extent that it recurrently refers back to Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, albeit mostly alongside his *Poetics*. Across disciplines and

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<sup>2</sup> Literature on this is extensive; see, for a recent contribution from a Lacanian perspective, Colette Soler, *Les affects lacaniens*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2011. The book comprehends a short and necessarily biased presentation of some of the polemics surrounding Lacan’s use of the terms and concepts of affect (see pp. VI – X, “Le procès”). A systematic study with aspirations to be a standard reference is certainly André Green, *Le discours vivant. La conception psychanalytique de l’affect*, Paris, PUF, 1973; re-edition 2003, in the collection “*Quadrige*”.

<sup>3</sup> See, to index the most important ones, Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 2002; William E. Connolly, *Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed*, Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 2002; Daniel Lord Smail, *On Deep History and the Brain*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2008; Eve Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 2003. For a more didactic presentation, see Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (eds.), *The Affect Theory Reader*, Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 2010; the editors’s introduction to this volume is rich and provides a detailed bibliography and extensive presentation of the material (pp. 1-27).

<sup>4</sup> For a brilliant interrogation of the affect theory’s reference to scientific material, see Ruth Leys, “The Turn to Affect: A Critique,” *Critical Inquiry* 37 (Spring 2011), pp. 434-472.



throughout the course of history, the pendulum continues to swing between formalist, immanent methods and their theoretical defence, and ideological appeals for the acceptance of neutralized narratives of context, history, and politics calling on literary texts to wittingly or perversely illustrate them. The interest in invoking this goes beyond providing a reference to analogous lives in the history of thought. The two parabolas—the one written by “affect” and the other drawn by “literature” into the skies onto which we project that very history—frequently intersect, but when they do most of the minimalist elegance their shape holds as a promise is gone—even if it is only to produce more complex, dysmorphic, and volatile figures, figures somehow reminiscent of life in its unabated strangeness. Marcel Proust’s *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, for instance, which was written most of all *contre* a type of literary appreciation that goes by means of the study and description of the life and history—the “context”—of their authors while disregarding poetic form to a large extent, veered off into a monstrous fictional being that keeps living and dying by transforming jealousy and love into syntax, the intermittences of the heart into punctuation, and affect back into the rhetoric of a somewhat foreign language—the claim for which is not unrelated to Proust’s stance and reflections in relation to the politics of his time, especially the Dreyfus affair.

Eve Sedgwick, both a brilliant literary critic and a queer activist, had become at the moment of her untimely death in 2009 a predominant voice in *Affect Theory*, turning to scientific models and yet still maintaining an almost desperate affection for the textual.<sup>5</sup> One of the most powerful contributors to literary studies in the last century, Paul de Man, if not starting from immanent criticism then certainly in critical proximity to it, proceeded in his last writings to a fervent interrogation of all “aesthetic” categories, including sense and pathos, exposing them as “ideological” in the most problematic sense. De Man can be read surreptitiously as the author of a sustained reflection on linguistic affect and its “materialistic” politics.<sup>6</sup> This widening and diversification of *discourse* allowed Michel Foucault to move into a critical and inventive philosophy of the politics of pleasure—a rhetorical category if there ever has been one—in combination with the analysis of its minute mechanisms as explicitly set forth in *L'ordre du dis-*

<sup>5</sup> See Sedgwick, *Touching feeling*, passim.

<sup>6</sup> See Paul de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, edited with an introduction by Andrzej Warminski, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

*cours*, preceded by the “énoncé” in *L'archéologie du savoir*, and extending a long infatuation with a type of literature highly concerned with its linguistic form.

These examples, and there would be many others, invite us to abandon the historical and conceptual schemes that seduce us into believing that affect or the study of language “affected” by itself as other, i.e. literature or discourse, could be situated by them. They combine the most detailed analyses with a certain speculative spin, displacing both “affect” and “language”, as well as “(literary) language” and “context”. They cast them first of all onto a certain *scene*, writing them into a *script*, playing and producing the herewith altered senses. Some of this can already be found in Aristotle’s definition of *anger*: “a desire, accompanied by ... distress, for conspicuous retaliation because of a conspicuous slight that was directed, without justification, against oneself or those near to one.” (*Rhetoric*, 1378a31–33) This description tells us little about affect “itself” and equally little about rhetoric as “language” as we believe we know them. It speaks more of desire and its disposition as well as the scene of its mechanism. This is a stage where no one and no affect would ever be alone: a micro-sketch of politics. Affect, as presented in the form of anger in this definition, is speculative in both senses of the word: projected into the visual through a logic of relation or exchange and determined by the attempt to control its own excessive momentum by inscribing it into the field of the other.

Freud epitomized this combination of attention to intricate details with an honest attitude towards speculation in his sprawling theorization of affect. The complex of affect stretches out over all of his writings, and most importantly, draws a figure whose lines would necessarily have to touch both the minute forms of the *Witz*—the “most social product of the unconscious”—and the grand historical projections of the primal horde and the man Moses. The lines of this figure, contorted and multiply knotted into the whole texture of the drives and the unconscious, coil up into a singular and enigmatic term that is itself essentially splintered as it marks its very singularity, reduction, and minimalism as much as it demarcates the boundaries of its realm as virtually infinite. The term is *identification* and it can itself be identified only in a multiplicity of figures ranging from Freud’s early apodictic claims to his later gnomic statements.

In 1938, the year before his death, Freud returned to some of his lifelong preoccupations, inscribing them as aphorisms which have survived as posthumous

fragments. Among them, we find this frequently quoted gnomic statement on identification, where the breast forms the basis for an ontology of the child: “‘Having’ and ‘being’ in children. Children like expressing an object-relation by an identification: ‘I am the object.’ ‘Having’ is the later of the two; after loss of the object it relapses into ‘being’. Example: the breast. ‘The breast is part of me, I am the breast.’ Only later: ‘I have it’—that is, ‘I am not it’...”<sup>7</sup> Through this riddle of the being and having of the child, Freud seals a notion of primordial Being as being what one is not, without having it. However the scope of this formula of identification is not limited to the child. And how could it be, when “child” means the unconscious knowing of no end? The ontological predicament of the child betrays the mechanism of affect tout court. The traces of Freud’s aphoristic pronouncements can be found almost two decades earlier in his reflections on the role of affect in the social in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, where affect is presented in its empirical simplicity as one of those mechanisms psychoanalysis just knows about.

The trajectory of Freud’s *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (*Massenpsychologie und Ichanalyse*) begins with a hypothesis on the libido: “We will try our fortune, then, with the supposition that love relationships (or to us a more neutral expressions, emotional ties) also constitute the essence of the group mind.” (S.E. XVIII, 91)<sup>8</sup> And libido—“an expression taken from the theory of emotions” (S.E. XVIII, 90; GW XIII, 98)—is here joined to that mechanism, or has itself become the mechanism, which has to be called fundamental and seen as the first, maybe the only step beyond narcissism: “Identification is known to psycho-analysis as the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person.”<sup>9</sup> (S.E. XVIII, p. 105) What Freud will repeat in his later works is here being introduced as an empirical psychoanalytic self-evidence: “As a matter of fact, we learn from psycho-analysis that there do exist other mechanisms for

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<sup>7</sup> “Findings, Ideas, Problems”, in S.E. XXIII, p. 299; “Haben und Sein beim Kind. Das Kind drückt die Objektbeziehung gern durch Identifizierung aus: ich bin das Objekt. Das Haben ist das Spätere, fällt nach Objektverlust ins Sein zurück. Muster: Brust. Die Brust ist ein Stück von mir, ich bin die Brust. Später nur: ich habe sie, d.h. ich bin sie nicht.” (*Ergebnisse, Ideen, Probleme*, in GW XVII, 149-152.)

<sup>8</sup> “Wir werden es also mit der Voraussetzung versuchen, dass Liebesbeziehungen (indifferent ausgedrückt: Gefühlsbindungen) auch das Wesen der Massenseele ausmachen.” (GW XIII, 100)

<sup>9</sup> “... die Identifizierung (ist) die ursprünglichste Form der Gefühlsbindung an ein Objekt.” (GW XIII, 118)

emotional ties, the so-called *identifications*, insufficiently-known processes and hard to describe ...”<sup>10</sup> (S.E. XVIII, 104) The difficulties of representing, describing and thinking these processes will give rise, in the *New Series of Introductory Lectures*, to a double definition of identification as imitation and incorporation. But these explanations will equally testify to what seems for Freud the most important thing about identification and what the late aphorisms lays bare in all their lucid obscurity: affect as mechanism of a subject that is not there to carry it, to be its substance, or hold its underlying disposition. Identification identifies and affects the subject as other than subject.

Throughout *Massenpsychologie*, which nevertheless is devoted to representing what is difficult to represent, identification will remain an enigma—a *Rätsel*. Freud repeatedly insists on the mechanical-grammatical deployment of affect—“*Umwendung*”—as an operation of the social, thereby formulating the affective sharing of the masses as the basis for identification. Freud writes: “We already begin to divine that the mutual tie between members of a group is in the nature of an identification of this kind, based upon an important emotional common quality; and we may suspect that this common quality lies in the nature of the tie with the leader. Another suspicion may tell us that we are far from having exhausted the problem of identification, and that we are faced by the process which psychology calls ‘empathy [*Einfühlung*]’ and which plays the largest part in our understanding of what is inherently foreign to our ego in other people.” (S.E. XVIII, 107) And yet this empathic foundation is a “social feeling” based on “the reversal of what was first a hostile feeling into positively-toned tie in the nature of identification.”<sup>11</sup> (S.E. XVIII, 120) The forging of a common ground (*Gemeinsamkeit*) from a hostility toward the other (*Ichfremde*) is what makes the masses. It isn’t until 1938 that Freud will formulate the aphorism that exteriorizes the enigmatic character of identification as the writing of the paradigmatic matrix of being and having the breast.

However it is not, for the masses, the mother or the breast that holds the conceptually insistent yet fragile identification, and thus the fundamental binding of af-

<sup>10</sup> “Wir erfahren tatsächlich aus der Psychoanalyse, dass es ... Mechanismen der Gefühlsbindung gibt, die sogenannten *Identifizierungen*, ungenügend bekannte, schwer darzustellende Vorgänge ... “ (GW XIII, 113f.)

<sup>11</sup> “Das soziale Gefühl ruht also auf der Umwendung eines erst feindseligen Gefühls in eine positive betonte Bindung von der Natur einer Identifizierung.” (GW XIII, 134)

fect, in its place: here, it is the father and the speculation that reaches out to him. Freud, in one of those turns in his writing where, almost imperceptibly, what seemed to have been the object becomes the subject of the exposition, reverses the scientific endeavour attributing to the masses the status of an “object” and attributing to itself the status of the “subject” presenting and analysing it, thereby exposing this psychology of the masses to a phylogenetic heritage, a heritage produced as a side effect only at the point when the primal father all but forces the horde of brothers to create themselves through the act of murder: “He [i.e. the father] forced them, so to speak, into group psychology. His sexual jealousy and intolerance became in the last resort the causes of group psychology.”<sup>12</sup> (S.E. XVI-II, 124) By the same token, psychoanalysis is transformed into the writing limit, the bloc-and-pen border, at which and by which there is a notetaking of the sheer affect and constitutive identification of the brothers *about to become* subjects (of “individual” psychoanalysis) by murdering the one called “father,” however speculatively, to constitute him as a one to identify *with*, incorporate, be affected *by*, imitate, speak and write *about*. In *this* psychology of the masses *and* psychoanalysis, the latter is itself affected by and identified with, is incorporating into itself, the scene of the mythic father before and after his being slaughtered.

Psychoanalysis is like a child “being” the breast that it “does not have” while not being there, or only in paradigm. But also, to invoke another of psychoanalysis’ historical and speculative *sisters-figures*, psychoanalysis is the paradox of thinking *Life*, as it is in Canguilhem not so much the object of science as that which produces science as one of its norms to obey to or to stray from. Here the affect at stake is audacity, the courage to let not knowing insist in a form. For we cannot know what affect is. Yet, that is no reason for not giving it names and constructing it into syntax, articulating its plasticity of rigour, as “identification” does. We do not know what the unconscious is either, which does not prevent psychoanalysis from existing albeit in a fragile fashion. Neither do we know what Nature is, yet natural science does not really suffer from fragility so much as hegemonic existence. Only to thinking we say that we neither know what it is nor whether it exists. Thinking is, perhaps, this uncertainty. What counts, in any case, is the specific way in which these discourses, institutions or

<sup>12</sup> “Er [i.e. the father] zwang sie sozusagen in die Massenpsychologie. Seine sexuelle Eifersucht und Intoleranz sind in letzter Linie die Ursache der Massenpsychologie geworden.” (GW II, 138f.)

writings relate to the *non-savoir* that certainly does not only befall them accidentally. Whether in formalistic, algebraic, and statistical production of the object clothed in empirical observation; in unlimited yet always specific transfer; or in becoming textual historicity—the unknown or rather the specific unknowing is writing its names and sentences into a world. According to Freud’s matrix of the political, affect is identified as a result of the speculative murder of the other at a time both before and beyond the impossible time of a subject that is neither killed nor killing. Identification “itself” is affected by its groundlessness.<sup>13</sup> This is a murder that never stops not happening. The *political* is a name for thinking exposed to the uncertainty of its existence. Through identification psychoanalysis is affected by its other, thinking, introjecting it into itself precisely as affect while projecting an outside called the political. This writing of the name of the political is a syntax that rearticulates *non-savoir*.

The Freudian encounter with the political is based on the aporia of *identification*, on the enigma it produces in and through itself, and on the fable of the slain father as a speculative supplement. All of these affective phenomena—aporia, enigma, and fable—are offspring of the insoluble problem of narcissism, a radical solipsism and ipseism, an infinitely expanded enclosure, from which no passage is possible to the other. There is *no relation* and therefore the only possible formulas for a psychoanalytic writing on the political would be “no relation to relation” or “relation without relation.” To psychoanalysis, thus, the political must appear as that to which it cannot relate. Given this meta-psychological—clinical and theoretical—necessity, not many options remain for psychoanalysis facing the political: without being exhaustive, one can name the following: 1) the empiricist, 2) the theoretically weak, 3) the theoretically strong option.

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The first consists in empirically accepting the existence of the social and the political, and admitting that, from a psychoanalytical point of view, one cannot contribute anything to elucidate or analyse it. This option is fatalistic, at least *in theory*, yet it does not prevent anyone from being a clinician receiving homosexual subjects in the morning and a reactionary writing diatribes against

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13 This has brilliantly been shown by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy in their *La panique politique*, Paris, Christian Bourgois, 2012. The reflections sketched out here are heavily indebted to their analysis which was already presented in the late 1970s but waits to be taken into consideration to the fullest extent by current psychoanalytic thinking.

gay marriage for a local newspaper in the evening. This option is thus not only theoretically fatalistic, but also ethically cynical, whatever its “political” colouring might be. It only cowardly acknowledges the *Ichspaltung im Abwehrvorgang* (Ego-Splitting in the Defensive Process) on the surface by illustrating it by means of conduct: a repression by conscious existence of sorts. By warding off the forces of otherness that threaten the integrity of the ego—the ego here being both the one of the analyst and the one of psychoanalysis as an entity—this ego opts for splitting itself in isolation. Psychoanalysis, acting as an ego treating itself as analyst, tries to save itself by reducing itself to what it is not, i.e. an entity *not* being constituted by what it is not and by what it cannot relate to.

The second option, theoretically weak, recklessly abandons the violent thrust of narcissism while emphasizing the inherently “social” nature of the psyche in its stead. Freud takes this path in *Massenpsychologie und Ichanalyse* when he contends that ego psychology is social psychology, or when he defines the superego as the ego’s social instance, or when he pronounces in *Moses and Monotheism*: “The contents of the unconscious is collective through and through” (GW 241). A lot of lacanian theory is precisely a theory of the Other based on the aphorism that desire is the desire of the other. Lacan’s formula—the signifier represents the subject for another signifier—is as proto-social as it is non-representational insofar it defines the subject as the effects of an alienating texture-towards-the-other. In the extreme case of psychosis the name-of-the-father is foreclosed resulting in the tragic failure of the subject to enter the symbolic order. Lacan’s four discourses diagram the social bond by showing the various possible permutations of agent, other, truth, and product. This option is “theoretically weak” for lack of acknowledging the “weakness” it is grounded in, the *Hilflosigkeit* that is not as much its object as it is that against which it erects itself. “Strong” is the option that is practically affected by *helplessness* in theory.

The thinking of affects and passions in the western philosophical tradition often relies on a schematics that combines a set of multiple passions organized in opposing couples (joy/sadness, pleasure/pain etc.) with a singular fundamental passion devoid of opposition. In Descartes, where this scheme appears, not surprisingly, in its “clear and distinct” manner, it is *astonishment* or even *admiration* that forms “the first of all the passions. And it doesn’t have an opposite ...” In the lineage starting with Kierkegaard and continuing via Heidegger to Lacan,

*anxiety* is the fundamental affect, the affect of affectedness itself. In the thought of the senses and sensuality, a thought adjacent to the one on passions, it is often *touch* that figures as the sense of senses, a position shared by Condillac and Nancy, and shown by Derrida in *Le toucher*. One may pay homage to this philosophical tradition of passion and affect in radicalizing it by not only doing away with any organized set of passions that would inevitably moralize and normalize them, but also by presenting helplessness as fundamental affectedness. This move lies in decision to juxtapose *errancy*, *contingency*, and *indeterminacy* with the fundamental affectedness of *Hilflosigkeit*, thereby disconnecting the “value” of the philosophical disposition of affect from itself. Not reversing this value but *abandoning* it by making “weak” categorical modalities into names of affect, inventing syntax for thought, and creating *Hilflosigkeit* as an adventure of thinking. The *orders* of affect are disrupted and abandoned to the chances of discourse. To speak of *radicalization* here, to evoke the notion of a *fundamental* affectedness and to praise the *grounding* in the philosophical tradition of the thought that develops this notion, would be to deploy an antithetical rhetoric and more importantly—the importance of rhetoric in any theory of affect notwithstanding—to mark the trait of an antinomy that traverses the thought-of-affect. Nothing is grounded, nothing is resting on a foundation, and no root is to be extracted from *Hilflosigkeit*. The question that arises from this solitude has its stakes in the Earth—ground, resource, home, all put into question under this name—and leads to a philosophy of *Nature* as that which affects us in only in detachment and withdrawal. In the poetic-speculative discourse of a writer like Georges Bataille, the awakening to such a question of the Earth as withdrawal might reach out to the most traditional terms of death and nothingness. Bataille writes, “La question qu’est la terre, qu’est la mort, la mort qui est peut-être l’aube – enfin de rien. (The question is what is the earth, what is death, the death who is perhaps the dawn - finally nothing.)” Abandoned to abandonment such stable terms will still have to be read.

From such a reading, *The Disorder of Affect* would have to be written, as the phrase that it names indicates, as an alteration, a partial substitution, a frivolous and serious displacement, a certain reversal and diffraction of *The Order of Discourse*. It would never satisfy itself to have reached the classicist, admirably contained and elegant form of Foucault’s inaugural lecture at the *Collège de France*, which despite the liberties it took, remained bound to what it was enunciating, i.e. discourse. And it didn’t *want* to be otherwise. *Mise en abyme, pars*



*pro toto*, metonymy, allegory, a part split-off, a contingent spark of language, a spasm of discourse itself—whatever rhetorical or literary order one might apply to Foucault’s words—they remain affected by what they distance themselves from, through an undecidable chasm of discourse and order, through language and murmur. *The Disorder of Affect*—which is also its *dis*-course—is not in the same way affected by itself, not even remotely. It *disrupts* auto-affectation and the transcendental synthesis of time. This is its chance and its danger: It might reinforce tradition by repeating philosophy’s perennial gesture, or veer into the naive forms of immanentism and scientism many proponents of *Affect Theory* betray, or spark a new unheard of way of thinking.

In taking this risk, *The Disorder of Affect* produces neither affect nor effect nor cause, leaving these categories not behind but in place, unaffected, in in-determination, erring in their very stability. What will err between, around, through them is something else: not to be determined, yet to be written. To say that *The Disorder of Affect* is something yet to be written is incorrect, or too correct, for the not yet of this dis-order is itself what is constantly already being written, said, murmured and screamed, by everyone, recognized as such or unrecognized. Identification with an ideal of a writing yet to come. One may allude here, to the lurid, pathos-ridden figures in the writings of Bataille with his erotological project to affirm a specific affect “beyond” helplessness, i.e. anxiety. The speculative trajectory of Bataille’s poetics draws its syntax from the projection out of the night of *Hilflosigkeit* by encircling the figure of death. For Bataille, the sovereignty of death is as empty as it is absolute. “In the night emptier than the night is the night that opens death. (*Dans la nuit plus vide que la nuit qu’est la nuit qui ouvre la mort.*)” As Bataille writes in *Madame Edwarda*, “My anxiety is finally the sovereign absolute. (*Mon angoisse est enfin l’absolue souveraine.*)”

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However, erotology with its heart of anxiety and horror speculatively reaching out to poetic non-existence on the one hand, and politico-psychoanalytic affect philosophy preoccupied by *Hilflosigkeit* and its political incarnation on the other hand, might be distinct from each other in style rather than in essence. Or, to put it in more adequate terms paying Aristotle his due, they *speak* differently to render differently the “conspicuousness” of their “anger”, accompanying it with different tones of “distress” as they address the “conspicuousness” of injustice given within the political.



# **The Aesthetics of Everyday Life**

Edited by Aleš Erjavec



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## The Politics of Aesthetics of Contemporary Art in Slovenia and its Avant-Garde Sources

### 1. The Theoretical and Contextual Frame

#### 1.1 *An Introduction to the Politics of Aesthetics in Contemporary Art*

Our study of the meaning of the connections between avant-garde art and politics for contemporary artistic practices presumes the synthesis of theoretical discoveries regarding the avant-garde deconstruction of the modernist work of art and the institution of art (Peter Bürger's theory of the avant-garde<sup>1</sup>) with contemporary findings in studies of the avant-garde.<sup>2</sup> These discoveries are then linked to the key international avant-garde movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including Slovenian art, and to the further reconciliation of art and the social sphere in contemporary participatory practices.

We shed additional light on the avant-garde impulses for the reciprocal articulation of aesthetics and politics by linking them with the Jacques Rancière philosophy when we delve into the key undertaking of contemporary aesthetics, which is for us to theoretically explain contemporary sentience. Above all, we are interested in the social destiny of the sensuous as shown in the contemporary critical and socially engaged art context, which can be perceived as a specific politics of aesthetics. According to Rancière, aesthetics is linked to a special mode of experience of or thinking about art that he calls an aesthetic regime. The aesthetic regime is characterized by an internal relation between aesthetics and politics that unveils to us—as does politics—“what is common to

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> In this context, we are interested in those new approaches that are at the same time in dialogue with the philosophy of Jacques Rancière. Cf. Aleš Erjavec (ed.), *Aesthetic Revolutions and the Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde Movements* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

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the community” within the (given/new) “distribution of the sensible”.<sup>3</sup> Such a (re)distribution is possible only by an inherent and direct connection between aesthetics and politics, and it “extends aesthetics beyond the strict realm of art” into social or political domains.<sup>4</sup> Rancière thus connects the theories of politics and aesthetics respectively in the “redistribution of the sensible”, which enables for us “a consideration of the aesthetic in politics, as well as of the political in aesthetics”.<sup>5</sup> Typical traits of the aesthetic regime are permanent rivalry between art and non-art, interventions in the established distribution of the sensible, the equality of represented subjects and styles, and “the absolute singularity” of defining a meaning.<sup>6</sup> The aesthetic regime of art appeared together with “aesthetic revolution”<sup>7</sup> at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and was also the main characteristic of the historical avant-gardes. The idea of aesthetical revolution is one of those concepts which seems to be especially appropriate for exploring avant-gardes, as it discusses the effect of aesthetic avant-garde movements that differ from merely artistic avant-gardes of the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in that they link their art projects to the political avant-garde. Their intent is not only an introduction of new styles or techniques (artistic avant-garde, the autonomy of art), but also a transformation of life and the world (aesthetic avant-garde, heteronomy of the world of art and non-artistic spheres).<sup>8</sup> In order to achieve this, an aesthetic revolution is needed as an event, which according to Rancière brings a watershed “redistribution of the sensible” and the start of the “aesthetic regime of art” that remains with us down to this day.<sup>9</sup> Besides transcending artistic classifications and hierarchies, Rancière insists

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 12–13.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>5</sup> Léa Gauthier and Jean-Marc Adolphe, “Democracy as a Scandal Bound to Happen”, *Maska* 19, 86–87 (2004), p. 50.

<sup>6</sup> Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p. 23.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27. Rancière actualizes the idea of aesthetic revolution that comes from German Romanticism: the avant-garde efforts to transform life itself and the world echo Schiller’s utopian idea of the aesthetic state as the joining of the artistic and political.

<sup>8</sup> This is also a central thesis pursued by Aleš Erjavec with the coauthors in *Aesthetic Revolutions and the Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde Movements* (cf. *op. cit.*).

<sup>9</sup> Aesthetic revolution can be understood according to Erjavec as a series of events caused by the aesthetic avant-garde movements of the 20th century—also outside Europe and the United States (Mexico, Nicaragua, Brazil, etc.). Cf. Erjavec, “Introduction”, in *op. cit.*, p. 5.

on the preservation of tensions or on a basic paradox<sup>10</sup> between the autonomy and heteronomy of art, and he tries to include the artistic, social and political dimensions of both avant-garde and contemporary (participatory) artistic practices, which all belong to the same aesthetic regime in his thought.

The actualization of art as a politicized aesthetic practice today concerns its connection with a community and democratic emancipatory politics that allows a *dissensus*<sup>11</sup> in the name of equality. Rancière understands avant-garde art as a driving force behind political subjectivization or as an aesthetic anticipation of a future community.<sup>12</sup> He explains aesthetic practice by means of forms of visibility shown through art on the basis of a primary aesthetics that defines the space of an individual community. The key element here is emancipation stemming from the principle of the equality of intelligence and starting with an understanding that the distribution of the visible is a part of the configuration of dominance and submission. Emancipation begins “when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or transforms this distribution of positions”.<sup>13</sup> The key supposition here is that of an (in)equality or contact between two modes of the distribution of the sensible (police and politics). This is a regime which defines who is (in)visible in the public space of a community. On this premise, Rancière forms a view of the equality of intelligence as an emancipatory politics and fundamental principle of aesthetics—also in the context of art:

This shared power of the equality of intelligence links individuals, makes them exchange their intellectual adventures, in so far as it keeps them separate from one another, equally capable of using the power everyone has to plot her own path. [...]. It is in this power of associating and dissociating that the emancipation of the spectator consists—that is to say, the emancipation of each of us as spec-

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), p. 36: “The politics of art in the aesthetic regime of art, or rather its metapolitics, is determined by this founding paradox: in this regime, art is art insofar as it is also non-art, or is something other than art.”

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 148: “Art and politics each define a form of dissensus, a dissensual re-configuration of the common experience of the sensible.”

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, pp. 29–30.

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 13.

tator. Being a spectator is not some passive condition that we should transform into activity. It is our normal situation.<sup>14</sup>

The idea of the emancipated and active spectator thus derives from the idea of intellectual emancipation,<sup>15</sup> and in the context of aesthetic regime it regards art as a form of emancipation.

Rancière's actualization of the relations between artistic and political avant-gardes and their placement within the aesthetic regime of art prompts us to question ourselves about the avant-garde legacy, its influence on the contemporary art of participation and modes of subjectivization in the light of its integration within a collective or community. Alongside utopia and revolution, participation is the main idea of progressive art that strives for positive social change. Regarding the expansion of participatory principle, Rancière establishes how contemporary politics and art experienced the so-called "ethical turn"<sup>16</sup>, which along with the efforts to re-establish social bonds contributes to the creation of an image of an imaginary, non-problematic, unified and conflict-free community. The effectiveness of politics as conflict recognized in avant-garde art disappears in the neutral and consensual form of relation in contemporary art. Rancière therefore advocates art and politics that are aware of the necessity of acknowledging a dissensus in a community.

The politics of aesthetics is always a meta-politics denoted by the fundamental paradox of art that is simultaneously non-art; the suppression of art as a separate reality and the concealment of its autonomy give birth to a promise of emancipation by transforming art into a form of life. Here we are trying to think such a politics of aesthetics while discussing the examples of participatory practices in Slovenia in the light of the avant-garde artistic tradition.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> Intellectual emancipation is a result of Rancière's study of archival sources on workers' emancipation, which through the example of the French professor Joseph Jacotot from the 19th century is recorded in the book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1987). This work was the basis for the subsequent redefinition of politics in the context of a so-called (re-)distribution of the sensible. Cf. Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 35: "Social emancipation was simultaneously an aesthetic emancipation, a break with the ways of feeling, seeing and saying that characterized working-class identity in the old hierarchical order."

<sup>16</sup> Rancière mainly detects the ethical turn in two forms: "sublime art" and "relational art". Cf. Rancière *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, pp. 109–132.



### 1.2 Participatory Artistic Practice and Its Avant-Garde Sources

We will start by presenting key theoretical concepts and contexts that serve as a basis for current aesthetic thought in order to reflect on the relation between avant-garde artistic tradition and politics. This relation originally presented itself as a symptom of the institutional crisis in art and as a sign of transitions and splits between the modern autonomy of the institution of art and the aspirations of the avant-garde to transcend art and move towards life (aesthetic heteronomy). As a rule, attempts at avant-garde theorization must first confront Peter Bürger's influential *Theory of the Avant-garde* (1974).<sup>17</sup> Bürger understands the paradoxical situation of the division of art between autonomy and pragmatic aims through the inability of the avant-garde to abolish art in or through new life practices, and he defines its aspiration as historical. As a consequence, the neo-avant-garde of the 1960 could not re-establish the sociopolitical protest of the historical avant-garde but could only institutionalize it, as its art pieces entered modern art museums instead of life. According to Bürger, art can only enter into the so-called "post avant-gardiste phase", that is into a period of the "post-modern avant-garde" or "post-avant-garde".<sup>18</sup> What is very interesting for us here are the events in Slovenia that led from the historical avant-garde via the neo-avant-garde to the retro-avant-garde movement of Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) and thus contributed to the third-generation avant-gardes or a specific postsocialist avant-garde, which can be understood as a product of Eastern or postsocialist postmodernism in the territories of former (and in some cases current) socialist countries (Cuba, China).<sup>19</sup> Bürger concludes that the avant-garde self-critique of the system of art, which in its most radical form

<sup>17</sup> Bürger in his *Theory of the Avant-garde* developed the so-called critical institutional theory of art from a Hegelian perspective and with the conceptual apparatus of the critical theory of society as its background. When the avant-garde rejects bourgeois aestheticism for isolating art (and thereby the institution of art) from life, it simultaneously advocates the (total, modernist, utopian) project of transforming the practice of living itself. However, a precondition for the emergence of avant-garde art as a self-criticism of the institution of art is precisely its autonomy.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Charles Jencks, "The Post-Avant-Garde", in *Art and Design* 3, 7–8 (1987), p. 20. Such a classification of historical avant-garde movements into three periods in the area of the former Yugoslavia, in which such movements are in many ways parallel to those of Central Europe, can be found in the anthology by Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković (eds.), *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-Gardes, Neo-Avant-Gardes and Post-Avant-Aardes in Yugoslavia 1918–1991*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> In his classification of avant-garde instead of post-avant-garde, Aleš Erjavec introduces the concept of postsocialist avant-garde. Cf. Erjavec, *op. cit.*, pp. 7–9.

means destroying the institution of art itself, enables a fundamental theoretical insight into the socio-historical determinism and partiality of art in general.

A large part of both the historical avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde refuted the principle of the work of art—an object, a product—as did not pass unnoticed among theorists of the avant-garde. Hence we can follow the flow of the transformation of an art piece as an artefact into a post-aesthetical work of art (i.e. art that is not substantiated by the category of beauty, etc.), a work of art as a fragment and avant-garde tendencies for artistic events and situations outside artistic environments. In stressing the outside nature of the avant-garde with respect to art, we have in mind its main intention of transcending the boundaries (norms, standards, canons, institutions, forms, techniques, etc.) of art itself. One of the consequences of this is the closeness of the artistic avant-garde with often controversial and paradoxical processes variously termed as the politicization, educationalization, ecologization, technification and scientification of art. Especially important but controversial is the process of art's politicization, which has already received numerous critiques (Benjamin) and approvals (Rancière) in turn. This historical avant-garde line announces “a social turn”<sup>20</sup> of art and the simultaneous occurrence of participatory art, which is on the rise since the 1990s.<sup>21</sup> While the participation of historical avant-garde generally dealt with the revolutionary mobilization of masses for total and utopian political goals (the dissolution of art in life in close correlation with party politics), it transforms into a more reformative participation of people (democratization of art in connection with anarchistic activism and emancipatory movements) with the neo-avant-garde, and it leads to a less political and more playful or didactic participation in the sense of changing consciousness and perception.<sup>22</sup> Now the centres of participatory practices are those communities which are not

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Claire Bishop, “The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents”, in *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), pp. 11–40.

<sup>21</sup> We are dealing here with so-called post-studio practices, in which the key media are people and for which the key concepts in use since 1990s are “socially engaged art”, “community art”, “relational art”, “participatory art”, “collaborative art”, “dialogic art”, “new public art”, and “social practice”.

<sup>22</sup> For a historical perspective of “participation as a programme” in avant-garde art (revolutionary/reformative or more playful and/or didactic), cf. Christian Kravagna, “Working on the Community: Models of Participatory Practice”, in Anna Dezeuze (ed.), *The “Do-it-Yourself” Artwork: Participation from Fluxus to New Media* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp. 241–243.

connected to any concrete political project, but only with a loose and principled rebellion against the global logic of neoliberal capitalism.

Theoretic confrontations with socially engaged and community-oriented or participatory art are strewn with numerous traps. Contributing to this are the procedures and approaches that turn out to be of great importance in contemporary art, i.e. the critical dimension, documentary or reality references, processuality, exploration, transdisciplinarity, performativity, participation and artistic aspirations towards community. Beside contemporary art's temporariness and transience, skepticism is evoked particularly by the political claims that were supposed to be inherent to those principles and by their exclusion from economic and political instrumentalization. Scruples about politics often being a "blind spot" of contemporary art are quite common and often not unfounded, since contemporary art tends to sidetrack a precise analysis and critique of its own production conditions together with the actual possibilities to resist the existing situation in the art sphere itself and in a broader context.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, this does not mean that all contemporary art is only fashionably fitted out with the attributes of "the political" without any subversive potential or that it is completely trapped in the machinery of hyper-production and -consumption. One of the promising starting points of Rancière's discussion of "the paradoxes of political art" is our understanding the possibility of political art to establish (aesthetical) distance towards social events.<sup>24</sup> Discussion about this distance is crucial for the reflection on contemporary art practices and the politics of representation. Contemporary art is often tightly woven into the social fabric and is thus always in a specific paradoxical intertwining of distance and closeness to differing ideologies and public politics. In this respect we can agree with Rancière that there is no prior criterion for establishing a relation between aesthetics and politics or between politics and art, and that progressive art always includes egalitarian political ideals.

Within the context of key international waves of the historical avant-gardes, neo-avant-gardes and specific postsocialist retro-avant-gardes, the impulse

<sup>23</sup> Hito Steyerl, "Politics of Art: Contemporary Art and the Transition to Post-Democracy", in Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle (eds.), *Are You Working Too Much? Post-Fordism, Precarity, and the Labor of Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011), p. 35.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Jacques Rancière, "The Paradoxes of Political Art", in *Dissensus*, pp. 142–159; "Politics of Aesthetics", *Maska* 19, 88–89 (2004), p. 10.

of reconciling art and politics has played an important role in contemporary Slovenian art as well. The emergence of contemporary art in Slovenia is in general linked to this avant-garde tradition,<sup>25</sup> albeit it shows its key attributes through differentiation between the contexts of modernism and contemporary social reality. By using the idea of Rancière's aesthetical regime, we can see that contemporary art in Slovenia has a certain continuity with the participatory impulses of international avant-garde movements and their heteronomous nature, but nevertheless certain deviations and differentiations exist as well. Later, we are going to focus mainly on the effects of contemporary art dealings with the social sphere, where interventions into public and social space on the principle of participation are of key importance.

### 1.3 *The Case of Slovenia*

The historical avant-garde movement in Slovenia had its more prominent expression only in the form of Constructivism, which broke with the official art and national Slovenian culture within the former Yugoslavia.<sup>26</sup> In doing this, it put itself on the map of the international European avant-garde, with ideas crucially linked to the great utopian ideologies from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Constructivism later established a certain continuity with the post-war avant-garde emerging in Socialist Yugoslavia, with the neo-avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s (represented in Slovenia especially by neo-Constructivist experiments in sculpting, by the OHO group Conceptualism and by the so-called "Celje Alternative of the 1970s").

The question of economic and socio-political determination and the subsequent institutional (non)consideration of conceptual art in the context of socialism could be linked to the discussion about the political aspect of conceptual art in the territory of Eastern Europe: it can also be regarded as a form of institutional critique directed against the deficiency of art institutions.<sup>27</sup> The oppositional at-

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Zdenka Badovinac, "Introduction", in Igor Španjol (ed.), *OHO: A Retrospective* (Ljubljana: Moderna galerija; Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2007), p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy within the state named the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, there followed in 1929 the Kingdom of Yugoslavia; the country was renamed the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia in 1946 and then again in 1963, when it was named the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Nataša Petrešin, "Self-historicisation and Self-institutionalisation as Strategies of the Institutional Critique in Eastern Europe", in Marina Gržinić and Alenka Domjan (eds.),

titude of Eastern European conceptualism towards state institutions is a consequence of a much greater social control over the field of art there as compared to the West. The main difference between the two art systems therefore concerns the different function of conceptual art in the developed Western art system, where conceptual artists strived in particular to do away with the commodity status of art objects (a consequence of this is a tendency towards dematerialisation).<sup>28</sup> There conceptual art was thus seen as an alternative to the rules of institutional and market law. The process of institutionalization of conceptual art in Slovenia differs from that of the West and cannot be separated from the then-common Yugoslav space. However, Eastern European art, which at first acted as a critique of institutions, was, in the end, at least partly integrated into them.

The postmodern retro-avant-garde movement NSK (formed in 1984) fits the era of “postmodern avant-garde” or “post-avant-garde” in Slovenia (back then within the SFR Yugoslavia). The development of postmodernism in the first half of the 1980s was focused on the past and actualized the questions of the classic avant-garde, which encouraged appropriate theoretical research, documentation and evaluation according to their place within the European and broader cultural history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The demise of socialism coincided with the emergence of Western postmodernism, which supports Erjavec’s thesis about the emergence of a specific form of postmodernism within the transition period of the so-called “postsocialism” of former Eastern Europe, which saw the rise of interest by the Western art system only in the 1990s.<sup>29</sup>

With independence in 1991, Slovenia entered the transition period that led to neoliberal capitalism, crucial for forming new production conditions in art. As a consequence, this changed artists’ modes of work, their relations to audiences and an experience of art that has found itself being pushed more and more to the fringe of social events. This is one of the reasons for critical performative,

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*Conceptual Artists and the Power of Their Art Works for the Present* (Celje: Zavod Celeia, 2007), pp. 23–28.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, “The Dematerialization of Art” (1968), in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (eds.), *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 46–50.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Aleš Erjavec (ed.), *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art under Late Socialism* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Aleš Erjavec, *Postmodernism, Postsocialism and Beyond* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008).

participatory and research practices traversing traditional institutional venues, alternative places and broader social spaces.

The influence of the avant-garde legacy of reconciling art and politics through international impulses is reflected in neo-avant-garde phenomena in Slovenia as well. It is worth mentioning that neo-avant-garde developments in Slovenia were parallel to the reconstruction of the historical avant-garde, hence members of the neo-avant-garde could not find many inspirations in the historical avant-garde. Due to the looser ideological state control, there was greater permeability of Western cultural influences, including pragmatic realizations of “concrete utopias” or “micro-utopias”, efforts for the revolutionization of daily routines (in the spirit of Situationism, for example), individual rebellion by young people (hippyism, anti-war movement, rock culture), and actionism by German artist Joseph Beuys. The origin of participatory art practices was introduced to Slovenia by the neo-avant-garde group OHO in particular. The neo-avant-garde legacy still resonates in the contemporary participatory art and its articulations of public and social space. From the 1990s onward, the focus of interest by individual artists and art collectives is often directed towards the community. Among those who actively direct their artistic creation to this field in Slovenia and abroad are Marjetica Potrč, Apolonija Šušteršič, Obrat association and the Association of Fine Artists of Celje (Društvo likovnih umetnikov Celje–DLUC). The legacy of the political implications of the historical avant-gardes (Suprematism, Constructivism, etc.) has had an important influence on the internationally most recognized third generation of the avant-garde in Slovenia, the postsocialist avant-garde or the so-called retro-avant-garde, understood as a politicized artistic practice after the fall of socialism (NSK) that has led to contemporary projects interlacing art and science, and to redefining relations with politics under new conditions of global neoliberal capitalism. Due to the scope and specifics of its conceptual problems, the transdisciplinary practice of post-gravity art—which is based on media archeological and technoscientific research and which itself explicitly refers to Suprematism and Constructivism (Dragan Živadinov and his collaborators) but is not participatory in its essence—is only mentioned in passing in this paper and is the object of an independent discussion elsewhere.

## 2. Re-Education of Perception: Art in Social Space

Neo-avant-garde artistic manifestations play an important role in creating a new social sensibility through the individual's sensory apparatus, critical view on political norms, eco-awareness, etc. One very telling example is Beuys' work on so-called "social sculpture", which does not have only artistic but also distinctly non-artistic functions, namely scientific, educational and above all political.<sup>30</sup> Beuys' goal was the transformation of social life, the integration of new art forms with forms of a non-exploited nature, the creation of alternative life-forms as social sculptures, of society as a work of art. The neo-avant-garde of the 1960s (USA, Europe) in general contributes a unique aesthetic revolution with their conceptual turnaround and with the inclusion of daily routines and coincidences in art. This aesthetic revolution can be discussed together with the occurrence of the so-called "cultural revolution of the 1960s" and a new sensibility or a new distribution of the sensible as a way of fighting against individualistic capitalism.<sup>31</sup> Avant-garde efforts to transform life and world through art resound with Schiller idea on aesthetical education,<sup>32</sup> which sees the aesthetic as a union of the artistic and political in a future community.<sup>33</sup> Opposite to this universal utopian tendency of the majority of other avant-gardes is the OHO<sup>34</sup> group avant-garde impulse that was expressed in aesthetic and social provocation, and achieved special meaning in the so-called "reistic phase"<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Claire Bishop, "Social Sculpture", in *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), pp. 102–106.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Tyrus Miller, "All along the Watchtower: Aesthetic Revolution in the United States during the 1960s", in Erjavec (ed.), *Aesthetic Revolutions*, pp. 145–177.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p. 27.

<sup>34</sup> The OHO group is one of the most significant representatives of neo-avant-garde in the 1960s and 1970s in Slovenia, which played a pioneering role in the historical context of the neo-avant-gardes in the broader Yugoslav space; OHO entered the history of the neo-avant-garde movements also at an international scale. Cf. Tomaž Brejc, *OHO 1966–1971* (Ljubljana: ŠKUC, 1978); Španjol (ed.), *op. cit.*; Laura J. Hoptman and Tomaš Pospiszyl (eds.), *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2002), pp. 92–95.

<sup>35</sup> The concept of *Reism* indicates an attempt to reach a non-anthropocentric world of "things" (lat. *res*: thing). In the first *reistic* period (1966–68), OHO functioned as a multi- and inter-media movement with a broad range of members and collaborators. In the second period (1969–70), OHO was organized as an art group of four members whose activi-

when the members of the group strove not to change the world but only “to change consciousness and transform it into the permanently open and attentive reistic vision”<sup>36</sup>:

Reism sought to establish an identity between art and life, but not through the realization of an utopian project represented by art. Rather, we could say they understood the field of art as an area where particular attention and a reflective attitude were still possible and sought to extend this attitude beyond the isolated field of art to life as a whole.<sup>37</sup>

The members of the group nevertheless tried to eliminate art as a special social sphere. The founding member of the OHO group, Marko Pogačnik, and his friends thus established a commune (the Šempas Family, 1971–78) where they tried to actualize an alternative form of life that, besides artistic endeavours, included eco-farming and coexistence with nature (in which we can recognize the



**Fig. 1:** The Šempas Family, *Nature—Art*, 1978. Courtesy of Moderna galerija/Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana.

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ties included process-oriented avant-garde art. In its third and final period (1970–71), OHO was transformed into a community and ended up with “transcendental conceptualism” (cf. Brejc, *op. cit.*, pp. 29–33) as a radicalisation of the dematerialisation of the art object or the upgrading of the rational concept with a spiritual, mystical dimension. In 1971 OHO decided to abandon art as a separate field and tried to find a synthesis of art and life by founding a commune in the village of Šempas.

<sup>36</sup> Igor Zabel, “A Short History of OHO”, in Španjol (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*



continuity between the Šempas Family practices and OHO's land art projects). (Fig.1) With this gesture, they significantly contributed to the development of contemporary and community-oriented artistic practice in Slovenia, which has been emergent particularly from the 1990s onward.

The OHO group introduced forms of conceptual art, land art, body art, *arte povera* and process art in Slovenia – all of which have radically intervened into the traditional perception of a work of art. In a formal sense, this means a de-construction of an autonomous and completed art object and its expansion into a process, action, situation, event, a site-specific work, art installation outside traditional exhibition spaces, an intervention into social space. This tendency was, after OHO's programming conceptual projects from the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, continued by the alternative scene of the 1980s. In the 1990s, the visual art in Slovenia started to problematize conventional art norms in a multidimensional manner, including in relation to social spaces and their mechanisms: new strategies of entering into urban public and social spaces appeared.

“Art in social space”<sup>38</sup>, with its processual, research, relational and participatory artistic procedures, is thus linked in an artistic and historical sense partly to the specific tradition of the historical avant-garde, but mainly to the neo-avant-garde movements. The wave of community-based public art projects, which in the international context expanded under the label *new genre public art* (the term was introduced by Suzanne Lacy),<sup>39</sup> had bypassed Slovenia in its rise. With some delay, the tendencies for art in public urban space in Slovenia were encouraged from abroad (through the Soros Centre for Contemporary Art, SCCA–Ljubljana)<sup>40</sup> and represented the first wave of this form of art in Slovenia, while the second wave has been presented by engaged artists who have created their

<sup>38</sup> For the influential thinker of space Henri Lefebvre, “social space” is a place of social practice under the certain influence of capital and capitalism (cf. H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Blackwell, Oxford 1997, pp. 9, 26). Furthermore, according to the cultural sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, “social space” includes various types of capital: economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital; embedment in the social space also affects our movement and relationship to other social positions, etc. (cf. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Routledge, London, 1984, pp. 114, 291).

<sup>39</sup> Suzanne Lacy (ed.), *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995).

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Lilijana Stepančič (ed.), *Urbanaria* (Ljubljana: Soros Center for Contemporary Arts, 1994–1997).

art since the start of the new millennium (the majority of these artists have been from the narrower sphere of fine arts and architecture). Among the examples which importantly contribute to questioning production and other interpersonal relations both in the spheres of art and culture respectively, as well as in broader social reality, is the establishment of someone's own (fictitious or phantom) institutions, research platforms, etc. The common attributes of such projects are a certain affinity towards conceptual art, expansion from "just art" to social space, urban contexts, forms to which we can attribute a relational form, participation and striving towards community despite the heterogeneity of their formal approaches and content accents.<sup>41</sup>

### 3. Urban Anthropology, Participation, Striving towards Community

In continuing this paper we shall focus particularly on those contemporary artistic articulations by Slovenian artists that are actualized in different hybrid forms of experimental spatial, aesthetic and habitation practices playing a connective role in a community. Central to those projects concerned with the production of spaces is the question of the role of the public in their involvement in decision-making processes regarding spatial practices, since these projects are connected to the local community's ways of habitation. One of the vital characteristics of community-oriented artistic practices is that they stem directly from a social space, transcend the borders between art and everyday life, and strive to activate and transform a community in the sense of *public* and *common/community* spaces. In the course of this process a classical viewer is transformed into an active co-designer of an artistic act, which is at the same time an intervention into a social space. The key element for the articulation of a collective or community is the idea of actualising participation as the process which treats the participants as the "material" or "medium" of the project, where the "residue" of the process is inseparable from the "performer". The artists devise their own actions through research (with a series of workshops, participatory artistic actions, informal meetings with the local community, etc.) that assumes their own involvement in the everyday life of the urban centre, whereby the community is firstly understood in terms of everyday coexistence and cooperation. The

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<sup>41</sup> Mojca Puncer, "Art in the Social Space: Parallel Strategies, Participatory Practices, Aiming towards Community", in Barbara Orel, Maja Šorli and Gašper Troha (eds.), *Hibridni prostori umetnosti (Hybrid Spaces of Art)*, (Ljubljana: Maska, 2012), p. 235.

**Fig. 2:** Marjetica Potrč, *Next Stop, Kiosk*, 2003, mixed media: a house-jack, a group of urban kiosks (the System K-67 kiosks were originally designed by the Ljubljana-based architect Saša J. Mächtig in the late 1960s; they could serve as a basis for a mobile dwelling unit), with reference to a South American *palafita*—a house on stilts—and the illegal rooftop houses of Belgrade; installation view at the Moderna galerija, Ljubljana. Photo: Dejan Habicht, Matija Pavlovec. Courtesy of Moderna galerija, Ljubljana.



main difference lies in the fact that their post-minimalist predecessors can be addressed in a broader sculptural context,<sup>42</sup> whereas contemporary artists work in “an expanded, cross-disciplinary field”, which can also include research, similar to the work of a geographer, social worker, anthropologist, activist or experimental architect, etc.<sup>43</sup>

Among those contemporary Slovenian artists tackling concrete social issues, it is worth to focus on the internationally renowned architect, sculptress and urban anthropologist Marjetica Potrč, who artistically explores often overlooked and conflictual aspects of contemporary cities, possibilities of self-supply and habitation alternatives. (Fig. 2) In her art, Potrč actualizes the idea that art can change the world or encourages deliberation. Her typical artwork is based on a structure or situation that she finds in a remote location—in Venezuela, for example—where she tries to contribute to its revitalization. Among other things,

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Brian Wallis, “Survey”, in Jeffrey Kastner (ed.), *Land and Environmental Art* (London: Phaidon, 1998), p. 37.

<sup>43</sup> Claire Bishop in Jeffrey Kastner (eds.), *Nature* (London: Whitechapel; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), p. 107 (Tim Griffin (chair), *et. al.*, extracts from “Remote Possibilities: A Roundtable Discussion on Land Art’s Changing Terrain”, 2005).

Potrč collaborated in designing dry bathroom facilities for a favela in Caracas (*Dry Toilet*, 2003), a system for rainwater collection and other sustainably oriented practical and artistic solutions. When asked about socio-critical dimensions of her art, Potrč replies, “My work is not about social criticism or institutional critique; rather I’m trying to show what I see today in cities—for instance, low and high cultures having similar goals.”<sup>44</sup> Artistic actualizations of the ideas about self-sufficiency, self-organization and alternative sources of energy in Potrč’s art are based on high social and environmental awareness and are very engaged since they originate in the habitation needs of individuals, disadvantaged groups and local communities. Potrč belongs to the increasingly larger group of artists who reject the creation of stable and self-sufficient structures or events strictly defined in time and space, but instead suggest open and ongoing projects where more or less temporary “experimental communities”—embracing artists, non-artists, social relations and exchanges between them, and focusing on the search for inventive solutions for specific issues—are formed.<sup>45</sup>

In her public art projects, Apolonija Šušteršič explores spatial participation practices where the local community’s collaboration plays a crucial part. Together with Meike Schalk, Šušteršič created *Garden Service* (2007), a temporary garden in a public yard for the Edinburgh International Festival. (Fig. 3) The phenomena she is particularly interested in are “participation, agonistic plurality, the appropriation of space, and performance and performativity”.<sup>46</sup> Šušteršič is also a member of the Ljubljana-based Obrat association. Obrat members strive for an interdisciplinary integration of art, architecture and urban planning in the so-called “critical spatial practices”.<sup>47</sup> In their project *Beyond the Construction Site* (August 2010–ongoing), which is situated in the long-closed building site on Resljeva Street in Ljubljana, they explore the potentials of degraded municipal areas and their revaluation with temporary community interventions:

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<sup>44</sup> Hans Ulrich Obrist, “A Conversation with Marjetica Potrč”, in Livia Páldi (ed.), *Marjetica Potrč: Next Stop, Kiosk* (Ljubljana: Moderna galerija; Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2003), p. 42.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Carlos Basualdo and Reinaldo Laddaga, “Experimental Communities”, in Beth Hinderliter, et al. (eds.), *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 197–214.

<sup>46</sup> Meike Schalk and Apolonija Šušteršič, “Taking Care of the Public Space”, *AB—Architect’s Bulletin (Participation)* 41, 188–189 (2011), p. 43.

<sup>47</sup> Urška Jurman and Apolonija Šušteršič, “Introduction”, *AB*, 188–189, p. 10.

**Fig. 3:** Apolonija Šušteršič and Meike Shalk, *Garden Service*, 2007, participatory public art project, meeting place in the temporary garden, Chessels Court, Edinburgh. Photo: Kees van Zelst, Daniel Killian. Courtesy of the artists.



**Fig. 4:** Obrat, *Beyond the Construction Site*, March 2011, community-based project of urban gardening, view on the gardens from the Resljeva Street 32, Ljubljana. Photo: Suzana Kajba. Courtesy of Obrat association.



“[T]he site is being transformed into a hybrid community space, dedicated to urban gardens, socializing, ecology, culture, play and education”.<sup>48</sup> (Fig. 4)

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The practices of individual artists from the Association of Fine Artists of Celje (DLUC) are also distinguished by their social engagement and environmental awareness.<sup>49</sup> Art enters the public space, where it addresses the residents of the

<sup>48</sup> Obrat, *AB*, 188–189, p. 105.

<sup>49</sup> These are especially the works of artists Andreja Džakušič, Simon Macuh and the tandem Estela Žutić and Gilles Duvivier. Cf. Mojca Puncer, “Community Based (Artistic) Practices as a New Spatial Ecology in Celje”, in Irena Čerčnik (ed.), *WE MET AT SIX: Proposals for*

city of Celje. In this, the Celje art scene has important references in the so-called Celje alternative of the 1970s, which brought conceptualization and performativity to the local art practice that extended beyond the gallery walls.<sup>50</sup> At the end of the 1990s, artists took art onto the streets of Celje (the Admission Free festival has been run under the auspices of DLUC since 1999), sparking off a renewed interest in social issues and art activism. In Celje, a complex network of local artists has been forged in collaboration with the art institution, whose aspiration always strove towards change in the local environment. In the new social conditions, individual DLUC members practice community art as a part of an informal urbanism, actively involving themselves in initiatives for the revitalization of the city centre. In pursuing real, sustainable impact within the local community, these artists are acting following the principles of urban regeneration, social integration and participatory urbanism.

Such socially aware and at the same time poetic works also have a pedagogical function since they propose practical solutions (e.g. regarding the self-supply of food) while contributing to the development and dissemination of ecological discourse. Otherwise, it is not only speech that can be recognized today as an artistic medium, but also teaching, which artists usually link with experimentation and play.<sup>51</sup> The latter can be recognized as an important activity that is not alienating (as opposed to the functionalism and rationalism of urbanism) and is accessible to all, which is why it is imperative to find spaces for play in urban areas. An echo of Situationist urbanism<sup>52</sup> can also be recognized here, which likewise resonates in the proposals for contemporary informal participatory urbanism. The latter emphasizes user-friendly and adapted spatial planning.<sup>53</sup>

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*Communal Practices and Green Areas in Celje* (Celje: Zavod Celeia; Ljubljana: KUD Mreža/Galerija Alkatraz, 2015), pp. 4–10.

<sup>50</sup> On Celje alternative see Mojca Puncer, “Conceptual Art in Slovenia: An Example of the Celje Alternative in the Seventies”, *Maska* 24, 123–124 (2009), pp. 104–123.

<sup>51</sup> Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 245.

<sup>52</sup> The avant-garde movement of the Situationist International (SI) (1957–1972) is characterized by doubt in art, so its vision of the aesthetic revolution favours direct collective action in an everyday urban environment (implementation of so-called “unitary urbanism”) prior to the production of works of art for the art world. Cf. Raymond Spiteri, “From Unitary Urbanism to the Society of the Spectacle”, in Erjavec (ed.), *Aesthetic Revolutions*, pp. 178–214.

<sup>53</sup> For example, this trend is today reflected in the form of the global campaign of urban walks known as Jane’s Walk (so called after the American-Canadian urban planner and activist, Jane Jacobs) as a catalyst for people’s needs and desires.



**Fig. 5:** Andreja Džakušič, *Hanging Gardens*, 2015, installation view at the Gallery of Contemporary Art Celje (as part of the exhibition *We Meet at Six: Proposals for Communal Practices and Green Areas in Celje*). Photo: Tomaž Černež. Courtesy of the Center for Contemporary Arts, Celje.

These artists are interested not merely in the overlooked aspects of the local urban space in their research, but also in the relationships with the local residents of the space of exploration itself, as well as in the aesthetic and conceptual relationships with the gallery audience and the general public. The participatory process at a specific location itself does not actually have a secondary audience, which makes the public critical discourse in the form of an exhibition all the more important. (Fig. 5) Creating works/projects following the principles of participation is necessarily integrated into a network of connections with specific historical and socio-political contexts as well as everyday life situations.

#### **4. Paradoxes of the Politics of Aesthetics: Community-Oriented Art Practices**

The current global state of crisis has its causes in radical changes from the last two centuries—from industrial modernity to the post-industrial and information society—and expresses itself through the consequences of war cataclysm, genocides, natural disasters, mass migrations, etc. Many contemporary art expressions do not agree with visions of destruction and are not driven by any utopian

vision of the future. Instead, when inevitably confronted with the instrumentalization of their aesthetical dimension, they are driven by the awareness of their own limited power.

Community-oriented art takes over the concern for the common good while looking for new productive and ethical principles of working together in the community and encouraging efforts for lasting and sustainable changes. In a society where alternatives are lacking at the systemic level, a certain alternative is offered by art. Rancière recognizes in this the danger of the instrumentalization of art and politics in the name of an ethical neutralization of disagreements and achievement of consensus in society. Through its close relation to politics, Rancière's ideas of aesthetics can significantly improve our understanding of the effects of contemporary art's involvement with the social sphere and community-oriented art. Rancière rehabilitates the aesthetic in the sense of *aesthesis* as "an autonomous regime of experience that is not reducible to logic, reason or morality".<sup>54</sup> It is a form of the sensual perception of art, which moves aesthetics closer to politics through the potentiality of the new "distribution of the sensible" (distribution and exchange of experiences, skills, ideas and knowledge among subjects). What is significant here is that, due to the artistic attempts to strengthen social bonds and a sense of community, politics and aesthetics, according to Rancière, disappear in ethics or the instrumentalization of ethics in the name of reaching a consensus and denying antagonisms in a community:

For instance, by replacing matters of class conflict with matters of inclusion and exclusion, it [contemporary art] puts worries about the "loss of the social bond", concerns with "bare humanity", or tasks of empowering threatened identities in the place of political concerns. Art is summoned thus to put its political potential to work in reframing a sense of community, mending the social bond, etc. Once more politics and aesthetics vanish together into ethics.<sup>55</sup>

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Rancière in his critique of recent ethical turnarounds does not oppose ethics, only its instrumentalization. Rancière recognises one of the key paradoxes of the politics of aesthetics in this weakening or even depleting of political disagreement and social antagonisms on account of artistic dealings with "social

<sup>54</sup> Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 18.

<sup>55</sup> Rancière, "Politics of Aesthetics", p. 16.



bond loss” and their agreeing to new forms of consensus. The politics of aesthetics is supposed to reflect on the contradiction between the autonomy and heteronomy of art.

The articulation of community with the intervention of art in post-utopian times concerns society as a whole and regards the very survival of human beings. In order to analyse artistic ambitions in a community, it is sensible to consider discoveries within the Italian *post-operaist* theory of contemporary work or labour<sup>56</sup>, which together with the activation of flexibility and similar concepts (viability, precarity, etc.) in the world of art significantly contribute to the understanding of contemporary production of flexible subjectivities. The concept of resilience as an upgrade of global orientation towards the sustainable development of developed Western society (or globally the North exploiting the poor South) is also closely connected with the aspirations of contemporary (participatory) art.<sup>57</sup> The concept of a flexible creative subject, which effectively intertwines with the neo-liberal production scheme, is in harmony with these aspirations. A transition to post-Fordist capitalism is enabled by the occurrence of an “immaterial labour” as a new production paradigm, where the key tools of the production process are communication, affectivity, and the making of inter-subjective relations.<sup>58</sup> The neo-liberal concept of community has a destructive effect on social ties, as it exploits them for its own driving force, while it abolishes public welfare and social security with its implementation of new economic models. Community-oriented art takes on the role of a caretaker for the common good through new forms of cooperation. In a society lacking alternatives on a systemic, national level, a certain alternative comprised of non-conformity, informality, performativity, friendship, empathy and sensibility is offered by art to fellow people, a living environment and nature. With such approaches, artists

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (eds.), *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez (ed.), *Resilience / The 7th Triennial of Contemporary Art in Slovenia* (Ljubljana: Moderna galerija, 2013), p. 5.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor”, in Virno and Hardt (eds.), *Radical Thought in Italy*, pp. 133–147. According to Lazzarato “immaterial labour” produces mostly “social relations”, and only if it is successful in this production is it of economic value. In this regard, so-called “affective labour”, which, due to its vague nature, is very difficult to measure, is of key importance.

want to activate a *provolutive*<sup>59</sup>, self-organising process in the fabric of social relations, which are crisis situations of neoliberalism, capitalistic hyper-production and -consumption often rendered stunted or non-operable. Art theorists thus rightly warn about the danger of the instrumentalization of participatory art in its aspiration to restore and strengthen social ties in Europe during crisis.<sup>60</sup>

The production of subjectivity in capitalism and the creation of community ties through art intervention can nevertheless be seen in a more optimistic light. What we need to redefine are the processes of subjectivity production in the light of their integration into a community. We can use the reflections by Félix Guattari, who places the production of a fluid, flexible subjectivity and its placement within the framework of the general economy of exchange at the centre of his thought.<sup>61</sup> He emphasises our ability to create new modes of thinking and operating that represent numerous similarities with artistic activities. Guattari discovers a privileged territory of subjectivization in art, which then offers a possibility of new living forms and possible models for human existence in general. Subjectivity exists only through the modes of connections with other people, social groups or information machines. A similar view on subjectivity can be found by Rancière in his otherwise vague conceptualization of some kind of fluid, “unpredictable”, “fleeting” subject, which can also be seen as rebellious, dissident, etc.<sup>62</sup> In the name of resistance to the uniformity of thinking and operating, modes of social production need to go through the screen of “mental ecosophy”. Individual subjectivity is thus the result of *dissensus* and at the same time inseparable from the entirety of social relations.<sup>63</sup> Guattari in his defence of the “three ecologies” (environmental, social and mental) pays particular attention to aesthetics as a basis that allows flexible modes of operation on various levels, and by this articulation of “ecosophy” he offers an alternative model of subjectivity production. Art has a function of reconstructing subjectivity, which

<sup>59</sup> Provolutive strategy as a work method means, above all, constructing and connecting (as opposed to revolution strategy, where demolishing old structures precedes the building of new). Cf. Marjan Krošl, “A Theory of Provolution in Contemporary Art”, in Alenka Domjan (ed.), *Concept Phoenix* (Celje: Zavod Celeia, 2009), pp. 4–28.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 5.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 1–32. Guattari’s work is an important reference for Nicholas Bourriaud’s idea of relational aesthetics.

<sup>62</sup> Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 61.

<sup>63</sup> Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies* (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 33.

then brings it closer to a psychoanalytical (therapeutic) perspective. But above all, art helps “to ward off the ordeals of barbarism, the mental implosion and chaotic spasm looming on the horizon, and transform them into riches and unforeseen pleasures”.<sup>64</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

This paper on contemporary art in Slovenia is based on art practices that transcend the dichotomy between art and social context as two completely separate spheres. The boundaries between art forms themselves, between the sphere of art and other disciplines, as well as between art, everyday life and broader social reality are clearly shifted or permeable. The start of all these processes is in the 1960s in the conceptual turning point, with individual impulses in historical avant-garde. The reflection of participatory artistic procedures reveals how contemporary art practices have moved away from historical avant-garde explorations in the connections between art, aesthetic and politics. On the one hand, we have been witness to different relations between aesthetic and political that call for ethical questioning anew, while on the other, we have seen a further loosening of the autonomy of the art sphere with the aim to constantly search for new artistic strategies of integration in a complex economic logic of globalization.

The practices discussed here are permeated with life-forms of a specific cultural environment, and these are the hubs where we need to look for new strategies of phenomena like participatory, community-oriented art—not in the sense of searching for an ideal model, but rather in the sense of experimenting with open concepts that question anew dominant relations and ideologies, and open horizons for new intellectual articulations and incentives to act. Contemporary participatory art in Slovenia wishes to imprint itself into a broader cultural perception as a call for intensifying the contribution of art to the reorganization of globalized social reality, and these efforts can be linked to avant-garde calls for positive social changes. One of the interpretative keys is the consideration of aesthetic and sociopolitical aspects in art theory and philosophy of art. With the analysis of the community-oriented art, this discussion has aspired to open aesthetic and political perspectives that are inspired by Rancière’s aesthetics, which among other things reminds us of the so-called “ethical turn” of con-

<sup>64</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, p. 135.

temporary art in its attempts to patch up social connections. Guattari offers a promising concept of “an ethico-aesthetic paradigm” that not only provides the ability to open up social interspaces in the Situationist sense, but also serves as a basis for the transversality of art as a global and subversive social power against capitalism, which with its demand for a complete social revolution continues the line of avant-garde artistic utopias. Numerous phenomena in contemporary participatory art, including projects based on research and exploration of phenomena in urban space, are influenced by the ideas of the Situationist avant-garde movement. The Situationist International can be placed in the broader trajectory of emancipatory fights and protests firmly rooted in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but in this time of crisis and recent anti-globalist and anti-austerity protests their ideas are nevertheless still topical, as they are an expression of not agreeing with the political *status quo*, and are part of the same desire to search for new meanings and to envisage a different world. Artists are often among the first to grab for this latent potential.

According to Guattari, art has to—as in Rancière’s aesthetical regime—reach for the social (sensorial community experience), but at the same time it must stay in the domain of art and be successful in both fields, which means that it perseveres in a constant tension, even as paradox. Such tension gives birth to a transformative aesthetical experience and emancipatory political potential, which exist at the integration points of resistance and dematerialized artistic strategies freed of utilitarianism, brought on by contemporary social movements directed against consensus and exclusion while producing and distributing a common sensory experience, cognizance and knowledge.

WANG Jianjiang\*

## The Bustle and the Absence of *Zhuyi*.<sup>1</sup> The Example of Chinese Aesthetics\*\*

Compared with the rapid development of Chinese economy, which is the leading one in the world, modern philosophy and aesthetics in China are in a position that is subordinate to the West. In contemporary Chinese aesthetics, for instance, there have occurred heated discussions of and a craze for aesthetics as well as various rampant *Zhuyi* in the 1950s and 1980s. However, the debate of *Zhuyi* in the 1950s was described as politicized and of a low level. The hustle of *Zhuyi* in the 1980s bore witness to all kinds of doctrines and “-isms” in Western philosophy and aesthetics that also found their way into China, though Chinese philosophers and aestheticians remained merely spectators to these processes. A closer look can disclose the reasons behind the absence of *Zhuyi* in Chinese philosophy and reveal the roles played by aesthetics and the humanities as a whole in the earlier hustle of *Zhuyi*. There are subjective and objective reasons for the weakness of Chinese academic power. There exists a severe imbalance between underdeveloped Chinese philosophy and aesthetics and the developed economy. Eliminating the imbalance is essential for China to pursue develop-

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\*\* This study was supported by the National Social Sciences Program (15BZW025) and by the Shanghai Governmental Academic Peak for Universities in Shanghai.

<sup>1</sup> *Zhuyi* in modern Chinese is similar to “-ism” in English. *Zhuyi* designates a systematized, theorized and influential thought or proposition of a specific idea, aim and doctrine related to the objective world, social life and academic issues, while “-ism” refers to any distinctive doctrine or practice, system or movement. When it comes to morphology, “-ism” usually serves as an ending or suffix when forming a noun. Although there were Confucianism, Taoism in ancient China and the Three Principles of the People (*Sanmin Zhuyi*) by SUN Yatsen in modern times, we do not have *Zhuyi* at present except Marxism from the West. MAO Zedong’s thought and DENG Xiaoping’s theory cannot even be called *Zhuyi*. Thus, the usage of *Zhuyi* in modern Chinese is, in a narrow sense, different from the broader use of Western “-ism.” *Zhuyi* in this essay is equivalent to the great “-isms” that have exerted a great impact on humans such as Marxism, existentialism, naturalism, etc.; it also includes those “-isms” that have strongly influenced Chinese aesthetics, such as modernism, post-modernism, structuralism, deconstruction, etc. However, the general ideas and thought as well as the artistic methods and schools are not in the range of *Zhuyi*.

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ment further, but the emergence of a new balance is not possible without the establishment of *Zhuyi* and schools.

With its sustained rapid development over the last forty years, the Chinese economy has become the locomotive of world economy. With the launching of the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative<sup>2</sup> and the founding of the Asian Investment Bank, China is playing an increasingly important role as an international economic power. It has been making remarkable progress in many fields and is unfolding a magnificent picture of the “China dream.” Some clues as to what such development means can be discerned in the popular documentaries. However, compared with its rapid economic growth, China has not achieved comparable positions in philosophy, the humanities or the social sciences. Moreover, it is inferior when compared to international academia, as it blindly adores, follows, imitates, and interprets the West. The reason for the severe imbalance between Chinese culture and the Chinese economy<sup>3</sup> can be found in China’s absence of *Zhuyi*. This situation is most visible in the research of aesthetics.

Compared with the West, aesthetics occupies a different place in China. Early in 1906, WANG Guowei claimed in his “Comment on the Delivered Charter of the Juxtaposition of Confucian Classics and Humanities in Universities” to establish the course of Aesthetics.<sup>4</sup> Aesthetics in contemporary China is endowed with special ideological form. National ideological orthodoxy was first founded in the great discussion in 1950s about aesthetics, which today functions as a

<sup>2</sup> The Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road—also known as The Belt and Road (abbreviated B&R), One Belt, One Road (abbreviated OBOR) or the Belt and Road Initiative—is a development strategy and framework, proposed by the People’s Republic of China that focuses on connectivity and cooperation among countries primarily in Eurasia. It consists of two main components: the land-based “Silk Road Economic Belt” (SREB) and the oceangoing “Maritime Silk Road” (MSR).

<sup>3</sup> Karl Marx in the *Introduction to the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* proposed the important thesis of “the unequal development of material production and of art,” while Engels discussed this thesis often in some of his letters, both forming Marxist theory of unequal development of art and material production.

<sup>4</sup> See WANG Guowei, “Comment on the Delivered Charter of the Juxtaposition of Confucian Classics and Humanities in Universities,” in NIE Zhenbin (ed.), *Selected Writings of Famous Literary Figures in Modern Chinese Aesthetics* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang University Press, 2009), p. 91. WANG Guowei criticized ZHANG Zhidong, the minister of Education, for juxtaposing Confucian classics and the humanities in universities instead of setting up philosophy and aesthetics within the humanities and merging Confucian classics into humanities.

platform for expressing philosophical ideas, with some important philosophical and artistic issues in fact being resolved within aesthetics. For instance, official aesthetics was targeted during the performances of the 2016 Chinese Spring Festival Gala<sup>5</sup> and became an object of criticism. Aesthetics is also the discipline in Chinese humanities that takes the lead in connecting with the West and the world at large. At the Beijing 18th International Congress of Aesthetics on August 2010, Chinese representatives accounted for 60% of over 1,000 participants,<sup>6</sup> which surpassed those of other disciplines. In China, aesthetics is an important secondary discipline, and most universities award units of doctoral and master degrees on aesthetics while most American universities do not. Aesthetics in China is also expected to exert a huge impact on the society, such as helping to build a harmonious society, to create a second nature and to guide literature and art. Educating the public through aesthetics is considered to strengthen the soft power of the country by beautifying objects, deepening the scientific studies and improving people's living standards.<sup>7</sup> From the 1940s to the 1980s, aesthetic issues were primarily interpreted as the battle between materialism and idealism. In China today, however, the founding of *Zhuyi* besides Marxism and socialism is still a sensitive and unorthodox political issue. Thus, this article probes into the problem of Chinese *Zhuyi* from the example of aesthetics.

### The Bustle of *Zhuyi*

After modern Chinese aesthetics came into being in the early 20th century, its founders, WANG Guowei<sup>8</sup> and CAI Yuanpei<sup>9</sup> adhered to the principle of “the in-

<sup>5</sup> LI Youguang, “What Praise-singing Party Will Power Aesthetics Want to Be?” *Exploration and Free Views*, We Chat web, February 7, 2016. “Praise-singing party” here refers to the people who sing high praise for the government and its initiatives. PAN Zhichang, “The Last Supper: Spring Festival Gala and National Imagination,” <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/79860.html>, February 7, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> AN Jing, “The 18th International Congress of Aesthetics Held in the Peking University,” *Philosophical Trends*, no. 12, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> See ZHANG Pingzhi, *What Is Aesthetics for?* (Zhengzhou: Elephant Press, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> WANG Guowei said, “the most divine and noble but disinterested for the current times are philosophy and fine arts. Though the public clamor them as disinterested, it is not detrimental to the value of the disciplines.” See WANG Guowei, “Discussion on the Bounden Duties of Philosophers and Artists,” in YAO Jinming and WANG Yan (eds.), *Collected Works of Wang Guowei*, vol. 2 (Beijing: China Culture and History Press, 2007), p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> CAI Yuanpei thought of aesthetics and aesthetic education as surpassing politics for their feature of being disinterested. See CAI Yuanpei, “The Opinions on New Education,” in

terest in disinterestedness” as found in Kant’s aesthetics. Thus until the 1930s, ideological struggle had never been launched in aesthetics. After that, however, there were some disputes on whether literature and art reveal class division or exhibit supra-politics. The publication of *New Aesthetics* by CAI Yi in the 1940s<sup>10</sup> is considered to be the formal staging of *Zhuyi*’s aesthetics in China. The discussion as to whether literature and art show class division and whether aesthetics is interested or disinterested continued into the 1950s.

The great debate about aesthetics in China in the 1950s seemed to involve “the contention of a hundred schools of thought” where on the surface teachers and students, scholars and workers, peasants and soldiers could criticize each other. But from the outset this kind of criticism had the characteristics of national ideological controversy and class struggle.<sup>11</sup> To begin with, all aesthetic issues were labeled with the attributes of the proletarians or landlords and the bourgeoisie so that aesthetics possessed an obvious class nature and revealed class division. Second, all discussions about the essence of beauty were described as the philosophical dilemma between “idealism” and “materialism,” causing Chinese aesthetics to exhibit a clear ideological divide. Third, this kind of aesthetic ideology was closely connected with class division in aesthetics—idealist aesthetics was regarded as the thought of landlords and bourgeoisie, while materialist aesthetics was considered to be the thought of the proletariat. Fourth, because of this class division and ideological confrontation, many representative figures classified as idealist aestheticians were entangled in politics and even suffered from persecution. The vigorous debate on aesthetics, which produced several aestheticians and several schools of aesthetics, finally ended with political and ideological struggle turning into the Anti-Rightist Movement and the Cultural Revolution as a new stage of development.

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GAO Pingshu (ed.), *The Complete Works of Cai Yuanpei*, vol. 2, GAO Pingshu (ed.), (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1985), p. 137.

<sup>10</sup> CAI Yi, *New Aesthetics* (Chongqing: Qunyi Press, 1948).

<sup>11</sup> *Collection of Essays on Aesthetic Issues*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Writers Publishing House, May, 1957). See ZHU Guangqian, “The Reactionary of My Literary and Artistic Thoughts,” pp. 1–35; HUANG Yaomian, “On the Aesthetics of Rentiers,” pp. 69–135; MIN Ze, “The Source and Flow of Zhu Guangqian’s Reactionary Aesthetic Thought,” pp. 165–217; WANG Ziye, “The Art of Fighting,” pp. 218–238.



The great debate on aesthetics in the 1950s resulted in four aesthetic schools: subjectivist idealist aesthetics represented by LV Ying<sup>12</sup> and GAO Ertai,<sup>13</sup> objectivist materialist aesthetics advocated by CAI Yi,<sup>14</sup> dualist aesthetics proposed by ZHU Guangqian,<sup>15</sup> and a practical aesthetics of Marxism represented by LI Zehou.<sup>16</sup> The contention between these schools of thought led to an upsurge in aesthetics. Despite its distinct color of class struggle and political ideological struggle, the debate about aesthetics was unprecedented in China, which is why the academic circles still call it “the 1950’s Great Debate on Aesthetics” or “four schools of Chinese aesthetics” and give it other academic honorary titles, which almost hide the political and ideological struggle dominated by the leftist thought. Reflecting on the great debate about aesthetics in the 1950s, we can see that leftist thought and logic are unusually visible. In the 1950s great debate on aesthetics, the notion of *Zhuyi* was employed to divide people, factions, and thought, and to help establish the criteria for aesthetics—whether it be progressive or backward, revolutionary or reactionary.

*Zhuyi* in modern Chinese means the expression of theory, the cohesion of thought, a sign of value and the guiding principle and slogan of action. But there are different levels in *Zhuyi*, which can be spontaneous or original. For instance, materialism and idealism were developed spontaneously since humans had a world view, which therefore can be regarded as the most primitive and the most common type of *Zhuyi* devoid of originality. Nevertheless, *Zhuyi* created by humans in modern times are basically all conscious, targeted and thus original and of a high level.

<sup>12</sup> LV Ying wrote in his *What Is Beauty*, “I still believe that beauty is the social consciousness of human beings.” *Collection of Essays on Aesthetic Issues*, vol. 4 (Beijing: Writers Publishing House, 1959), p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> GAO Ertai claimed in his *On Beauty*, “Is there objective beauty? My answer is no, and objective beauty does not exist.” *Collection of Essays on Aesthetic Issues*, vol. 2, ed. by the editorial office of *The Literary Gazette* (Beijing: Writers Publishing House, August 1957).

<sup>14</sup> CAI Yi, “On the Fundamental Differences of Materialism and Idealism,” *Collection of Essays on Aesthetic Issues*, vol. 2, ed. by the editorial office of *The Literary Gazette* (Beijing: Writers Publishing House, August 1957), pp. 170–200.

<sup>15</sup> ZHU Guangqian, “On Beauty: The Unity of the Subjective and Objective,” *Collection of Essays on Aesthetic Issues*, vol. 3, ed. by the editorial office of *The Literary Gazette* (Beijing: Writers Publishing House, 1959), pp. 1–56.

<sup>16</sup> LI Zehou, “The Objectivity and Sociality of Beauty,” *Collection of Essays on Aesthetic Issues*, vol. 2, ed. by the editorial office of *The Literary Gazette* (Beijing: Writers Publishing House, August 1957), pp. 31–45.

The bustle of *Zhuyi* in the great debate about aesthetics in China in the 1950s was based on the antagonism of materialism and idealism. This antagonism was primitive, low-leveled, lacking in originality, and possessing limited academic value. According to Engels, the problems about idealism and materialism are only meaningful when they relate to the basic philosophical problem, that is, the problem of the relation between thinking and existence; otherwise they possess no meaning.<sup>17</sup> It remains a question whether this kind of debate about materialism vs. idealism works when applied to aesthetics. Compared to modern Western theories such as Marxism, existentialism, pragmatism, structuralism, deconstruction, etc., the great debate in aesthetics of the 1950s is nothing but a primitive and low-level of *Zhuyi*, devoid of originality. In a sense, it can only be called the bustle of *Zhuyi*, rather than the creation and construction of *Zhuyi*. It is the primitive nature and low-level *Zhuyi* that leads to the following characteristics of the great debate on Chinese aesthetics in the 1950s.

First, this debate was primitive. On the one hand, since the twentieth century, Western aesthetics has undergone a major historical transformation through its upgrading and updating. In his *A Critical History of Modern Aesthetics*, William Francis Hare, Earl of Listowel<sup>18</sup> has noted how Western aesthetics has shifted from top-down metaphysical aesthetics to bottom-up physical aesthetics, namely, from speculative aesthetics to experimental, psychological, scientific, and linguistic aesthetics. Accordingly, many new ideas, methods and orientations have sprung up. Chinese aesthetics of the 1950s, however, was still submerged in the problem of the subjective or objective nature of beauty and regarded it as the standard with which to differentiate idealist aesthetics from materialist aesthetics. Its academic backwardness is self-evident. The level of aesthetic debate remained low, which was especially true of philosophical debate, causing a gap of half a century when compared to contemporary Western aesthetics. On the other hand, the philosophical problems discussed embody the preliminary character of research contents. For instance, the old problems such as “is aesthetics interested or disinterested” could not be solved. People only regarded interested pleasure or the interests of revolution as the essence of beauty and

<sup>17</sup> See *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, trans. by Central Compilation & Translation Bureau (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1995).

<sup>18</sup> William Francis Hare, 5th Earl of Listowel (1906–1997), styled Viscount Ennismore between 1924 and 1931, was an Anglo-Irish peer and Labor politician. He was the last Secretary of State for India as well as the last Governor-General of Ghana.

completely ignored the disinterested side of aesthetics, which can lead to the prevailing of such misunderstandings in aesthetics as “the good, the useful, the proletarian or the materialist is beautiful,” while “the landlords, the bourgeoisie, or the idealist is ugly.”<sup>19</sup>

The next issue is closure. In the post-World War II decades in the West, various ideas prospered, and all kinds of aesthetic schools were competing, with this trend being characteristic also of Western modernist aesthetics and Western Marxist aesthetics. However, at that time, China was isolated from Europe and America due to its extreme political closure that put it at a great distance from mainstream Western thought and culture. At that time books of Western philosophy and aesthetics were seldom published or translated in the Chinese mainland. Accordingly, for Chinese scholars it was difficult to read the works of aesthetics from the West. In the mid-1960s, *Selection of Bourgeois Philosophy Data*, edited by the *Philosophical Study* editorial office and published by the Shanghai People’s Publishing House, was confidentially communicated in the form of “internal reading.” This reality was also reflected in the research of aesthetics, which implied that China’s closure had resulted in little knowledge, plain language, layman terminology, and obsolete terms already enunciated by others. It is not an overstatement to say that “louts” were studying aesthetics. The most obvious characteristic that the closure showed was that those who took part in the discussion were restricted by barriers of materialism that they did not dare to cross. Proud of materialist aesthetics and ashamed of idealist aesthetics, they attacked each other, but all they did was to maintain or further develop their identities as materialists. The debate on aesthetics was enclosed in the most primitive and most elementary discussions about *Zhuyi*.

Next comes the politicization of *Zhuyi*. Among the principles of aesthetics there exists the paradox of disinterested form and interested aesthetic function. Kant was the first to put forward the thesis that beauty is the interest in disinterestedness. This thesis looks simple but has actually become a dividing line between aesthetic professionals and outsiders. Since the 1930s, there had been heated discussions about the class character of literature and art, and the relationship

<sup>19</sup> The academic papers of this period’s great debate on aesthetics are compiled in *Collection of Essays on Aesthetic Issues*, vols. 1–6, ed. by the editorial office of *The Literary Gazette* (Beijing: Writers’ Publishing House, 1957–1964).

between literature, art and politics. In the 1950s, views that emphasized the interestedness of aesthetics were further intensified; by applying class attributes for the delimitation of taste and the identity of aesthetics, they manifested a strong ideological character and consciousness of class struggle, thus pushing aesthetics onto the track of political struggle. Some scholars in the great debate on aesthetics such as GAO Ertai were accused of researching idealist aesthetics, labeled as rightists, and suffered brutal persecution at the hands of the anti-rightist movement. Political interference in academic work constituted a characteristic of aesthetics in the 1950s.

The next issue is the transience of themes. The issues discussed in the great debate on aesthetics in the 1950s failed to remain major topics of aesthetic revival in the 1980s. Questions such as “Is beauty subjective or objective?”, “What is subjective idealist aesthetics?” “What is objective materialist aesthetics?”, etc.—all of which were debated furiously in the past—were ignored and soon even completely forgotten. Academic history has made these issues transient and temporary. It can also be said that circumstances changed with the passage of time, making such issues invalid and revealing them to be without the gene for sustainable growth.

The reasons that constitute the features of Chinese aesthetics in the 1950s are as the follows:

First, modern Chinese aesthetics that was transplanted from the West has been involved in continuous revolutionary movements since the Revolution of 1911. Its research and theoretical construction were intermittent, causing its poor development. Chinese aesthetics in the 1930s and 1940s did not gain as much attention from society as modern literature, and aesthetic knowledge was far from being universalized. Young students with narrow academic viewpoints and poor ideological preparation proved to be insufficient in their drive for aesthetic knowledge and were guided mistakenly by the simple struggle of ideology and debate about *Zhuyi*. At that point their aesthetic research served merely the simple debate about materialism vs. idealism.

Second, at that time Chinese aesthetics was separated from the West and held a narrow view. Arrogant, it knew nothing of the broadness of aesthetics, especially the achievements of Western Marxist aesthetics and of basic modern Western

aesthetics. Therefore, many young people worked individually without being very much concerned with the outside world. As LI Zehou wrote in the preface to *A Collection of Translated Essays in Aesthetics*,<sup>20</sup> “Many young people who have a craze for aesthetics spend a lot of energy and time to contemplate, creating huge systems, but they do not even have common sense knowledge about aesthetics. Their articles or systems are like castles in the air, and lack academic value. They should not be blamed, because they have no idea about the results and level of foreign research.”<sup>21</sup> LI Zehou gave these remarks in the early 1980s after China launched its reform and its opening-up policy.

Third, politics dominated academia and academics, and the latter were forced to be interested. Behind the disinterestedness of aesthetics was a systematic interestedness, which caused aesthetics to become a political tool for interested people. The debate on the class nature of literature and art started in 1930s, and by 1942 when MAO Zedong published his *Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art*,<sup>22</sup> the functions of literature, art and the “interested” value of aesthetics were increasingly brought to the attention of the party. However, people who did not understand aesthetics were more likely to turn the potentially systematic interest or the interest in disinterestedness into narrow pragmatic interest, which led to the politicization of the debate on aesthetics.

Fourth, the great debate of the 1950s on aesthetics neither linked such aesthetics to traditional Chinese aesthetic thought nor connected it with the reality or the public, but left it isolated as a “castle in the air.” So to speak, it was not Chinese, and it possessed only a limited role in China proper. Therefore issues discussed in the 1950s were no longer considered relevant later on and were thus laid aside, forgotten or avoided by people involved in the 1980s in the revival of aesthetics.

<sup>20</sup> A book series of translated essays in aesthetics covering about 50 influential works of aesthetics includes *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795) by Friedrich Schiller, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911) by Wassily Kandinsky, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art* (1953) by Susanne Langer, etc. LI Zehou as the editor-in-chief wrote a preface to the series.

<sup>21</sup> LI Zehou, The preface to *A Collection of Translated Essays in Aesthetics* (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1984), p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> MAO Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, in one volume (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1964), pp. 804–835.

In a word, Chinese aesthetics in the 1950s was developed in the primitive and lower-leveled debate of *Zhuyi* and thus remained poor in its meaning and function, which likewise arose from the poverty of knowledge, thought, academics, and disciplines.

### The Rampancy of *Zhuyi*

The reform and the opening up of China in the 1980s ushered in the second boom of Chinese aesthetics. This boom was very different from the great debate on aesthetics from the 1950s. First, it had a different historical background. With the door wide open in the 1980s, thoughts were liberated, and methods freed while Western disciplines flooded China. Chinese aesthetics was overwhelmed by the treasure house of Western aesthetics and could only obey and follow the West, lest it fall behind. Secondly, with issues being so dispersed, there was no great aesthetic debate such as that of the 1950s. Chinese aesthetics in the 1980s did not renew the issues of the 1950s but offered brand-new visions and Western aesthetic issues instead. The issues concerned had a wide coverage, involving methodology, new ideas and technical application, as well as the essence of beauty. Thirdly, Western aesthetic discourse became the discourse of Chinese aesthetic researchers, with the Chinese aestheticians suffering from “aphasia.”<sup>23</sup> The results of the reform and of the opening up were the massive inroads into China made by Western science and technology, culture and thought in general. Chinese aesthetics thus provided a breeding ground for various Western “-isms.” Some political movements seeking to strengthen the construction of socialist spiritual civilization in order to “combat against spiritual pollution” did inhibit the radical orientation of anti-socialist mainstream values.<sup>24</sup> The influx of Western “-isms” (*Zhuyi*) was not suppressed but strengthened, however, because of recognition from folk ideological circles and academia in China. Various introductions of Western aesthetic works involving “-isms” (*Zhuyi*) and different interpretations of “-isms” (*Zhuyi*) proved to be an irresistible trend. As a result, characteristics of Chinese aesthetics were neglected,<sup>25</sup> its diversity was

<sup>23</sup> CAO Shunqing, “Aphasia of Literary Theory and Cultural Symptoms,” *Literary Schools of Thought Content*, no. 2, 1996, pp. 50–58.

<sup>24</sup> LI Qiang, “Deng Xiaoping and the Combat against Bourgeois Liberalization,” *Studies on Marxism*, no. 3, 2009, pp. 130–136.

<sup>25</sup> As some Chinese scholars said, the construction of Chinese *Zhuyi* could only absorb resources of thought from the West instead of China. WANG Hongyue, “The Loss and Way-

hidden, even its existence was made suspect.<sup>26</sup> The premise of a dialogue between Chinese and Western aesthetics was disappearing.

In the 1980s, the most striking feature of Western aesthetics swarming into China was the intensive bombardment of “-isms” (*Zhuyi*). The names of influential Western aesthetic thoughts often end with “-isms.” “-Isms” are many kinds and of different types. Although Chinese aesthetics has a long history with rich content, it has almost never been called *Zhuyi*. Therefore, there are not as many *Zhuyi* in Chinese aesthetic thought as there are “-isms” in Western aesthetics. The only few *Zhuyi* we have in modern and contemporary times all still come from Western Marxist, primitive materialist, and idealist aesthetics. Chinese aesthetics thus consists of various *Zhuyi* from the West. The so-called aesthetic diversity also seems to be merely the patent of numerous “-isms” (*Zhuyi*) in Western aesthetics. “-Isms” (*Zhuyi*) from the West flood into China, thereby inevitably exerting an impact on Chinese traditional aesthetic thought and orthodox ideology. In particular, Western modernist and post-modernist aesthetics are transforming and shaping Chinese aesthetic concepts and ideals as well as artistic thinking.

With respect to discussions of several preliminary *Zhuyi* in the great debate on aesthetics in the 1950s, *Zhuyi* has been rampant in Chinese aesthetic research since the 1980s. Western philosophy and aesthetics with the flag of “-isms” (*Zhuyi*) are unimpeded in China, as though they were confirming that globalization is of an American and Western designation. The grandiloquence of Chinese scholars who proclaimed to “assimilate the world” in the context of globalization<sup>27</sup> appears to be thoroughly spurious. Nevertheless, we hear more about the “aphasia” that Chinese aesthetics has suffered and the plaintive wail of having

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out of Spiritual Construction: A Discussion with Mr. Wang Jianjiang,” *Exploration and Free Views*, no. 4, 2012, pp. 36–39.

<sup>26</sup> Is Chinese aesthetics, the aesthetics of China or aesthetics in China? This question originated from that of the famous philosopher JIN Yuelin, who asked in the first volume of the Review Report of *Chinese Philosophy* by FENG You-lan in 1930: “Is the so-called Chinese philosophy the history of Chinese philosophy or the history of philosophy in China?” See CHEN Weiping, “The Issue of Jin Yuelin and the Discussion of Subject Independence of History of Chinese Philosophy,” Shanghai: *Academic Monthly*, no. 11, 2005, pp. 12–20.

<sup>27</sup> “Assimilating the world,” a phrase from “‘Globalization’ and ‘Assimilating the World’” by YANG Shousen. This paper was included in the *Context of Globalization and National Culture and Literature*, TONG Qing-bing, CHANG Guangyuan, and LIANG Daoli (eds.), (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2002), pp. 54–67.

“aesthetics in China” instead of Chinese aesthetics. The main reasons why philosophy and aesthetics of Western “-isms” (*Zhuyi*) started to become rampant in China in the 1980s are as follows:

First is the impact of globalization. Globalization was once considered to be Americanized, while in fact globalization is not Americanized but designates instead the current situation according to which European and American cultures lead and dominate the development of world culture and economy. This implies that the logic of capital has started to rule the world. Chinese aesthetic circles find the ferocity of globalization unexpected. It is thus a convenient choice for Chinese aesthetics, which has not implemented its modernization, to follow Western aesthetics in the context of globalization.

Second, the strong political nature of the issues of the great debate on aesthetics in the 1950s could not be retained in 1980s. Even more, it causes people to become adverse to philosophy and metaphysics. At the beginning of the 1980s, people regarded Western aesthetics and natural sciences with expectation and curiosity. Consequently in the 1980s there emerged a methodological craze for aesthetics and the theory of literature and art,<sup>28</sup> composing a significant part of the second upsurge in Chinese aesthetics. However, with the updating of ideas following this methodological craze, the debate about idealist aesthetics vs. materialist aesthetics was regarded as politicized and abandoned by researchers. There was then a rejection of traditional philosophy such as materialism, thus leaving an opportunity for the massive inroads of the “-isms” (*Zhuyi*) of Western philosophy and aesthetics.

Third, the aesthetic debate in 1980s was separated from traditional Chinese culture. What should be able to resist the infiltration of foreign cultures in China should be its own native culture. But in terms of aesthetics, the great debate on Chinese aesthetics in the 1950s neither reactivated traditional Chinese culture

<sup>28</sup> The main characteristic is to use the method of natural science to study aesthetics and literary theory. In addition to some aesthetics researchers and literary theory researchers, some scientists also participated in the research of literature and aesthetics with the methodology of natural sciences, such as the famous scientist QIAN Xuesen. The representative results include *Literary Theory, Aesthetics and Modern Science* by QIAN Xuesen and LIU Zaifu (China Social Sciences Press in 1986) and *Foundation of Literary Criticism Methodology*, compiled by FU Xiuyan and XIA Hanning, Jiangxi People's Publishing House in 1986.



that has been gradually forgotten since the “May 4th” movement nor inherited and carried forward traditional Chinese aesthetic culture. On the contrary, in the politicized struggle over *Zhuyi*, it completely cut off its relation with traditional Chinese aesthetic culture and aesthetic thought. When facing the influx of Western “-isms” (*Zhuyi*), it had no choice but to follow its trends.

Fourth, the national ideological orthodoxy is loosened, leading to a shift in discursive power. After deserting the ideological orthodoxy influenced by the former Soviet Union, it had nothing to rely on. Accordingly, it catered to and followed the influx of various “-isms” (*Zhuyi*) from the West, causing Western liberal thought to spread and gain discursive power while the orthodox thought of the ruling party lost its effect. This was manifested in aesthetics as the marginalization of Marxist aesthetic research. Marxist aesthetic texts, which China pushed forward with great force, are neglected; freedom of thought is hard to be controlled in colleges and universities, which provide soil for the landing and spreading of numerous Western “-isms” (*Zhuyi*) in China.

Fifth is the lack of autonomous and self-guided *Zhuyi*. Aesthetic theories and thought in 1950s have their evident limitations, which are far behind those of the West both in method, ideas, scope and system. In terms of *Zhuyi*, it cannot be said that materialism and idealism are the *Zhuyi* of China. As a result, how can China, with the absence of *Zhuyi*, have an equal dialogue with the West, full of various “-isms,” and then find its place in international academia? Compared with the 1950s, the bustle of *Zhuyi* in the 1980s ran rampant and achieved its extreme form. Almost all essays about Chinese philosophy and aesthetics were shrouded in the halos of various Western “-isms” (*Zhuyi*). Through careful analysis, it can be shown that these are two completely different bustles of *Zhuyi*. In the 1950s a farce of *Zhuyi* was performed on a closed stage of aesthetics in China, while in the 1980s Westerners sang solo on an open stage of aesthetics in China, with the Chinese being only spectators. If the Chinese aesthetics was presented as a farce of *Zhuyi* in the 1950s, it turned out to be a tragedy of *Zhuyi* in the 1980s and beyond: Chinese aesthetics was reduced to dire poverty.

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### **The Absence and the Reconstruction of *Zhuyi***

Compared to the bustle and rampancy of *Zhuyi* in Chinese aesthetics, original *Zhuyi* are absent therein. There are no original *Zhuyi* renowned in the interna-

tional forums that would belong to the Chinese, and it is not feasible for us to declare in the international aesthetic forums that materialist philosophy and aesthetics or Marxist philosophy and aesthetics are the original *Zhuyi* of China. There are two reasons for this situation.

On the one hand, there exists a lack of consciousness of *Zhuyi*. It is not recognized that the highest forms of development of any theory, including the aesthetic one, are *Zhuyi* and schools established on the basis of *Zhuyi*. *Zhuyi* and schools are the highest level of the development of human thought. Some *Zhuyi* and schools are produced in our present time. These schools are founded under the influence of *Zhuyi* with the endeavor of several generations. Nevertheless, *Zhuyi* and schools are milestones of thought and symbols of a doctrine, a theory or an idea that is able to stand firmly in the academic community. The lack of this symbol means a lack of necessary recognition and existence. China in the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods experienced the contention of a hundred schools of thought that relied on the staging and competition of all kinds of *Zhuyi*, thus forming ideological prosperity and development, and reaching a peak difficult to achieve by later generations. But scholars in contemporary China are not conscious of creating *Zhuyi* and lack the ambition of establishing their own school of thought. They can only think small scale and feel satisfied with the state of Guanzhui<sup>29</sup> that they have constructed, while the establishment of *Zhuyi* has never entered their mind.

On the other hand, there is a lack of independent thinking. Blindly subservient to ready-made ideas and ossified disciplinary paradigms, or to turning academics into an appendage and tool of political ideas, Chinese scholars dare not think for themselves, let alone be inventive and creative. They think that disagreeing with some ideas means to stay away from them or resist them, rather than to learn from them. And for the idea they favor, they will worship and follow it without any analysis or criticism; instead of critically inheriting the idea, they accept it entirely and thus lose the ability of independent thinking. Nevertheless, one thing is consistent: if they learn from the West, the scholars

<sup>29</sup> Chinese scholars have a tradition of being modest and call their own opinions “views from tube and cone,” which is a modest designation. The most famous academic work of the most renowned contemporary scholar, QIAN Zhongshu, is named *Guan Zhui Bian*, that is, the views from tube and cone, which means “Limited Views” of Ideas and Letters.

follow only the lead of the West. As a result, Chinese aesthetics is reciting books for Westerners. For others, the ancients whom they learn from are respected as a perfect model, or an ideal idol, rather than treated as objects of criticism. If scholars are said to adhere to Marxism, this means that they regard it as a rigid doctrine, without knowing that the living soul of Marxism is criticism and innovation. Marxism was founded by critically inheriting the most advanced thought of mankind and through revolutionary transformation. However, those Chinese people who are engaged in philosophical and aesthetic research today think of Marxism as divine law which can only be indiscriminately cited, without allowing people's thinking and reflection, or the establishment of *Zhuyi*. This approach is completely against the critical spirit of Marxism,<sup>30</sup> and does not help in the construction and development of thought.

The subjective reasons described above have led to individual apathy as to the creation of *Zhuyi*.

And there are three objective reasons:

First is the influence of leftist extremist thought, which has imprisoned people's minds. In particular, the psychological deterrent and damage that academic politicization and the enlargement of class struggle have on intellectuals cannot be eliminated in a day.

Second is the alienation from Chinese cultural tradition caused by China's violent modern revolution overthrowing the feudal system and the ideological movement against the feudal culture. The essence of thought cannot be absorbed from the excellent tradition of Chinese culture, which has been regarded as the spiritual element of contemporary aesthetic and ideological construction. Therefore, in the influx of Western "-isms" (*Zhuyi*), Chinese cultural tradition cannot find its foothold and starting point or an opportunity for a dialogue with Western scholars, becoming duckweeds without roots, thus rendered incapable of establishing *Zhuyi* in aesthetics.

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<sup>30</sup> Marxism begins from dissecting goods and criticizing capitalism, and it does not rule out or suppress criticism. On the contrary, it regards criticism as a motivational force of spiritual construction.

Third is the replacement of the ideological edifice with the aid of discipline. Aesthetics belongs to the humanities. The humanities differ from the natural sciences in their ideological content and value orientation. Between the 1950s and 1980s, there appeared two waves of bustle of *Zhuyi* in Chinese aesthetics. However, since the 1990s, the stage of Chinese aesthetics is full of the performance of *Zhuyi*, all of which originated in Western aesthetics. In Chinese aesthetics, the debate about *Zhuyi* is absent and almost forgotten. Meanwhile, the prosperity of Chinese aesthetics is manifested as the prosperity of discipline construction, such as the springing up of doctoral degree of aesthetics and literary aesthetics, doctoral students of aesthetics graduating one batch after another, aesthetic meetings held one after another, papers of aesthetics published by the thousands, dozens of aesthetic monographs coming out each year, as well as the crisscross of aesthetic projects, which indicate that people with some ability to carry out aesthetic research have all participated. The Chinese aesthetic community is also becoming more numerous. In 2010, the 18th International Congress of Aesthetics was held in the Peking University. Ordinary members of the International Association for Aesthetics numbered over 600, while the number of all participants increased to more than 1,200 due to the participation of new members from China. Inconsistent with the vast legion of Chinese, only a few people joined the group of foreign languages, while a great majority of the Chinese aesthetic researchers talked about Chinese aesthetics in the Chinese language with their discourse therefore being hard to be understood by foreign scholars. Much worse, Chinese aestheticians did not propose any influential ideas or thoughts that could merit the attention of international aesthetic circles, and its large-scale but small contribution was completely unexpected.

Although Chinese aesthetics seems to be prosperous now, behind this apparent prosperity is a poverty of thought, as well as an absence of *Zhuyi* and a flood of academic bubble. Study is replaced by projects, and thought by discipline. The reason is that projects and discipline are driven by financial and pragmatic interests and evaluated by quantity, which has set up a convenient route for people engaged in the study of aesthetics. They need not go through deep and painful thinking, but can achieve honors and fulfill their interests from projects as well as from the support of sheer numbers. Thus the value of aesthetics has shrunk, the critical ability of aesthetics has dissolved, and the construction of *Zhuyi* in aesthetics has been lost on the way. Currently, the “false” prosperity of Chinese aesthetics comes from the deviation between discipline and thought.

The retreating of thought and the foregrounding of discipline will undoubtedly cause an “obesity syndrome” in the disciplinary development of Chinese philosophy and humanities.

The objective reasons above have led to the collective amnesia of Chinese aesthetics on *Zhuyi*. A combination of subjective and objective reasons contributes to the current situation in which nobody wants (nor could anyone even construct) *Zhuyi*, which makes the ideological content and originality of Chinese aesthetics idle talk.

However, behind the subjective and objective reasons there also exists the weakness of Chinese academic power. That is, academia cannot be fully an independent force unrestricted by the regime, nor can it become a completely free subject whose academic ideas opposing the ruling ideas of the regime are allowed to disseminate far and wide. Therefore, in this case, the establishment of *Zhuyi* is a highly dangerous thing that has become the direct cause of China’s lack of *Zhuyi* established on the basis of local culture.

Despite China’s tolerance and acceptance of modern art, Chinese ideological circles have limited freedom, which has largely hampered the emergence of *Zhuyi* from folk thought. After a big discussion at the end of the 1970s, disco, jazz, modern sculpture, and modernist paintings from the West were not only accepted by Chinese intellectuals but also became popular among ordinary people. We can see this just by looking at the frenzy of square dancing<sup>31</sup> and the scattering of modernist sculpture and paintings in the streets. Chinese modernist and post-modernist art sometimes would even erupt in Beijing and Shanghai and lead the world trend. However, in the field of ideology, the official actions advocating the theme of this era while fighting against spiritual pollution, liberalization, the Western parliamentary system and Western ideological penetration have never ceased. In this case, new and independent thought will be rather unlikely to occur.

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<sup>31</sup> In China, square dancing or plaza dancing is an exercise routine performed to music in squares, plazas or parks of the nation’s cities. It is popular with middle-aged and retired women.

While post-modernism is taken seriously in the former Soviet Union and other countries, Chinese authorities remain alert to the atmosphere of modernism and post-modernism. The post-modern crossover aesthetics of Wolfgang Iser advocated by GAO Jianping,<sup>32</sup> the current President of the International Association for Aesthetics, and a lengthy discussion of the “aestheticization of everyday life”<sup>33</sup> in Chinese academic circles are both good examples supporting my argument. However, under the influence of post-modern deconstruction, anti-essentialism, the return to society and the trend of the aestheticization of everyday life, China’s attempt to construct *Zhuyi* has soon become diluted by pragmatism in daily life and therefore become more difficult.

After 1989, Chinese authorities attached great importance again to the ideological realm by trying to apply nationalism against Western modernism and post-modernism and to contribute to the revival of Chinese culture with the so-called national studies. But this cultural construction based on nationalism and national culture studies was just a response to the fact that China has lacked *Zhuyi* since the contention of a hundred schools of thought from the Warring States Period,<sup>34</sup> and the result of this has naturally guided academics to the old ways of textual research and interpretation. The majority of humanities projects supported by the Chinese National Social Science Fund are allocated to those topics that are somewhat relevant to national studies and focus on textual research. Since then, while acquiring a huge fund, the establishment of *Zhuyi* has been completely discarded by scholars.

On the background of globalization, Chinese aesthetics has to confront the following question when compared to Western aesthetics: “what is Chinese aesthetics”? Is it technological, disciplinary, morphological aesthetics or aesthetics of thought or *Zhuyi*, or aesthetics as described above? The answer should

<sup>32</sup> GAO Jian-ping, “The Transcendence and Return of Aesthetics,” *Journal of Shanghai University*, no. 1, 2014, pp. 21–29.

<sup>33</sup> The view of the “aestheticization of everyday life” comes from the British scholar Mike Featherstone, who published *The Aestheticization of Everyday Life* in 1988, while Wolfgang Iser examined global aestheticization phenomena from a philosophical perspective in *Undoing Aesthetics*, published in 1997 and translated into Chinese in 2002. In China the discussion of the aestheticization of everyday life lasted for nearly ten years.

<sup>34</sup> The *Zhuyi* that was clearly put forward in modern Chinese history includes only SUN Yatsen’s “Three Principles of the People” (Nationalism, Democracy, the People’s Livelihood).

be self-evident. For Chinese aesthetics, its disciplinarity is the basis that has guaranteed it has become the object of research and construction as a discipline. And its morphological character is important in distinguishing itself from the aesthetics of other nations. Its technicality also facilitates the improvement of social reality. Moreover, its ideological content or thought is the soul of this discipline, essential for the elevation of spiritual state. And *Zhuyi*, developed from the foundation of thought, is a sign of the discipline's standing firmly in the world academic community. German aesthetics attained the commanding heights of world aesthetics with the emergence of old and new Kantianism, Hegelianism and Marxism, as well as Nietzscheism, existentialism, and skepticism, etc.

With respect to the developed economy, how are the less developed Chinese contemporary philosophy and humanities (including aesthetics) trying to survive and thrive in the process of realizing the "China Dream?"

First of all, the construction of philosophical and aesthetic thought from independent academic groups outside the government management system alongside official authorities should be highlighted, and the construction of thought needs to start with the establishment of *Zhuyi*. Folk academia should remain in necessary tension with official academia and put forward *Zhuyi* beyond Marxism, construct and promote *Zhuyi* according to the policy of "a hundred flowers bloom" and "a hundred schools of thought contend,"<sup>35</sup> as advocated by China's ruling party. They should also build *Zhuyi* into the debate on the basis of which schools are established and developed, rather than hesitating, feeling scared, saying one thing but doing completely the opposite, or obeying the unspoken rules.

Secondly, Chinese aesthetics should start from the filtration, extraction, processing and transformation of traditional Chinese culture by focusing on the integration and innovation of Western and Chinese knowledge. Chinese aesthet-

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<sup>35</sup> They are also called DOUBLE HUNDREDS POLICY, referring to a period in 1956 in the People's Republic of China during which the Communist Party of China (CPC) encouraged its citizens to openly express their views and offer solutions to national policy based on the famous expression by former Communist Party Chairman MAO Zedong: "The policy of letting a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend is designed to promote the flourishing of the arts and the progress of science."

ic culture has a long history and rich resources while taking various aesthetic forms; in the meantime its conservative and moderate inertia also contributes to the restraint of scholars' original thoughts and impulses. A successful experience tells us that Western academic thought, including Marxism, is accomplished in the process of inheritance, development, opening and criticism. Accordingly, the idea of establishing *Zhuyi* and schools in Chinese philosophy and aesthetics through outright opposition to Western culture, instead of absorbing its reasonable elements and successful experience, is not a wise choice. On the contrary, based on the history and current situation of Chinese aesthetics, scholars should excavate and systemize the resources of Chinese philosophical ideas while at the same time looking around the world, drawing conclusions on the basis of advanced experiences from the West and focusing on meritocratic selection and creative combination in the convergence of Chinese and Western cultures today.

Finally, Chinese aesthetics should be alert to the trend of "narrow" nationalism in the construction of *Zhuyi*. In the face of rising China, various tones from the West show up together.<sup>36</sup> Some of them believe that China can only be an economic superpower but will never become a great power in culture because China can only provide goods to the world instead of ideas. When confronting such a weakness, many Chinese scholars do not find differences or look for reasons through the contrast with the West. On the contrary, believing that China is a big country with a long history and splendid culture, they always think about walking "towards the world" and assimilating the world. In their understanding, the construction of a humanistic spirit is like a battle against the West.

Therefore, to establish *Zhuyi* with important academic meaning, first of all dialogue and understanding should be enhanced between China and the West, and the practice of highlighting national spirit or local characteristics should be discarded when confronting the West. In 2009 when the international conference

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<sup>36</sup> This is a hot topic about China often found in the Western media in recent years. It contains roughly four different views. The first posits that China is on the rise. The second describes the China threat, which holds that China will expand after its rise and pose a hazard to world peace. The third projects a China without power in the belief that China can be a big country but not a powerful country because it doesn't have strong cultural (soft) power. And the fourth foretells a collapse of China, according to which China will eventually crumble because of defects within its system and the size of its population.



on aesthetics titled “Global Aesthetic Dialogue” was held in Amsterdam, I was warmly received by Professor Dennis of the Goethe Institute in Frankfurt. When I asked him what are the specialties of Frankfurt, he said, there are two things: one is the Euro, and the other is the Frankfurt School. The European Central Bank is in Frankfurt, and the Euro comes from the central bank. The Frankfurt School (also known as the school of Western Marxism or of Critical Theory) produced many academic masters, the impact of whom is beyond compare. China has always advocated its Chinese characteristics, but in addition to the independence of the political system and ideology, should these so-called characteristics only retain their national and local qualities? Could there be a “universal standard,” a value able to be recognized universally besides these national and local characteristics? Should there also be a high level of thought and theories?

Furthermore, if the present cultural situation in China is taken into account, it will turn out not only that Chinese aesthetics lacks *Zhuyi*, but also that Chinese philosophy and ethics (and even all of the Chinese humanities and social science circles) lack *Zhuyi*. China believes in Marxism only, while Mao Zedong’s thought and DENG Xiaoping’s theory cannot be called *Zhuyi*. Admittedly, as a person born in Trier in Germany, Marx is not surnamed Ma<sup>37</sup>; Marxism is from the West. This is no doubt a problem for China, which sticks to its national pride. In recent years, China’s official theoretic circles have put forward the proposition of the “Sinification of Marxism,” designed to tone down this problem. However, despite its expectations for China to become a great cultural power comparable to its economic status, it has not generated its own *Zhuyi* and schools, so how could it then take part in a dialogue with Western theories and thought? How could it defend the “cultural security” that China cares about? How can it guarantee the independence and prominence of Chinese culture among all kinds of thought and culture throughout the world?

Given the critical importance of *Zhuyi* in theory and its absence in Chinese philosophy and aesthetics, I appealed for strong consciousness of *Zhuyi* in the “Haikou Chinese Philosophy Forum” in December 2011 and wrote to construct *Zhuyi*.<sup>38</sup> In fact, I have already proposed “Bie-Postmodernism” (Bie-Xiandai

<sup>37</sup> Ma is a Chinese surname.

<sup>38</sup> WANG Jianjiang, “Chinese Aesthetics: The Absence and Reconstruction of *Zhuyi*,” *Exploration and Free Views*, no. 7, 2012, pp. 25–30.

*Zhuyi*),<sup>39</sup> a theory of the new times and the new historical development stage in which this *Zhuyi* is no longer the original form of materialism or idealism, nor a social form of socialism or capitalism. Materialism and idealism, as Engels said, are basic philosophical problems that are irrelevant to aesthetics. Even if the labels of socialism and capitalism are used, they are irrelevant to aesthetics. What is questioned is not Western modernism or postmodernism but rather a new Chinese-style modernism with practical connotations. In my opinion, any kind of *Zhuyi* should be a unique ideological system under the background of a specific culture.

In short, academic influence is significant for the strength of a country. Pursuing cultural revival is particularly important for China. But academic influence comes from academic quality instead of quantity. In the assessment of academic quality, *Zhuyi* is the hard currency for academics. Academics without *Zhuyi* have difficulty to stand on their own, while those governed by original *Zhuyi* can truly be independent in the academic world. As the saying goes, a great era calls for great thinkers and academic masters. However, great thinkers and academic masters do not only emphasize the innovation of opinions and disciplinary systems. Innovation on these two aspects is far from enough because they have not reached the height of *Zhuyi*. Therefore, if China wants to change the present situation of possessing a developed economy but less developed thought in order to promote its academia, to enhance its soft power and to realize the “China Dream,” it should advance in a pioneering spirit by starting to advocate and construct *Zhuyi*.

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<sup>39</sup> WANG Jianjiang, (1) “Bie-Postmodernism: the Appeal and the Construction of *Zhuyi*,” *Exploration and Free Views*, no. 12, 2014, pp. 72–77. (2) “Bie-Postmodernism: Beyond Aesthetics and after Postmodernism: On Reaction to an International Aesthetics Trend Led by Wolfgang Iser,” *Journal of Shanghai Normal University*, no. 1, 2015, pp. 5–14.

Aleš Erjavec\*

## Revolutions and the Avant-Gardes

### 1. Introduction

Most of us will agree that today revolutions are hard to find. A decade ago issues of communism, revolution and class antagonism attracted some attention but only until the economic crisis stunningly revealed the absence of viable theories relating to issues such as social justice, revolution, social antagonism, etc. Soon it became generally accepted that new times required new theories, but since revolution was no longer happening the term soon lost much of its subversive meaning. As a consequence of such situation the term has been transformed into a quotidian word used in everyday speech to enhance the meaning of extreme change or achievement. We thus hear speak of the revolutionary anti-ageing formula that reduces wrinkles by 64%, about a revolutionary financial invention that allows one to spend more than he or she earns, or of a gastronomic revolution brought about by fusion cooking. What about “aesthetic revolution?” Perhaps not surprisingly, in Wikipedia the term refers foremost to “Lifestyle fitness clothing.”

The mentioned examples show that, especially in the last decades, revolution has lost much of its previous significance. In the past it affected innumerable human lives and determined the course of communities of sense in ways that very much diverged from those of our contemporaneity. Today revolution has lost its historical and political significance, and this change has opened the door to inflationary use of the term.

In Western history the paradigmatic socio-political revolution is the “French Revolution” (1789–1799)—an event of such historic proportions that it produced a specific signification not only in relation to other similar events that followed it but also when transposed into other realms of society. Compared to the French Revolution, all previous revolutions appear insignificant. This holds true both of the English Revolution of 1642 and the “American Revolutionary War,” i.e.,

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“American War of Independence” (1775–1783), as well as for later cases such as the European revolutions of the nineteenth century (of 1830, 1848 and 1871). Kant referred to the invention of his transcendental philosophy as a “Copernican revolution,” while Romanticist philosophers such as Friedrich von Schlegel spoke of “aesthetic revolution.” After 1789 “revolution” soon became a household word.

The other historic socio-political revolution in the last two centuries was the “October Revolution” (1917), which, like the French Revolution, sent ripples of fear, hope and anxiety across Europe. “Revolution” also entered the vocabulary of avant-garde artists and helped engender the idea of an “alliance of political and artistic radicalism, this parallel of the two avant-gardes.”<sup>1</sup> In 1917 the Dadaist artist Hugo Ball referred to “the Dada revolution,” the leader of the surrealist movement André Breton often referred to the surrealist revolution, and the leader of Italian futurism, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, elaborated on the futurist revolution and the “Italian revolution.” In these last cases it is reasonable to infer that such an omnipresence of the term was linked to the October Revolution. In the Italian case, early on the term signifying the “aesthetic act of gigantic significance” was “war,” which was only later fully replaced by “revolution.”

“Scientific revolution” is another concept related to the already mentioned meanings of “revolution.” It was developed in the thirties of the previous century by French philosopher of science Alexandre Koyré. Koyré distinguished several revolutions in modern physical science that were all characterized by discontinuities: the Greek development of the idea of Cosmos, the revolution of Galileo and Descartes, an unspecified revolution in the nineteenth century, and finally the more recent revolution of Albert Einstein and Niels Bohr. In his view the scientific discoveries in Europe a few decades before and after 1600 constituted the paradigmatic revolution: “Earlier concepts and theories lost their meaning because they no longer made sense in the context of the new world-view; the new concepts and theories at once began to look seductively self-evident for the same reason.”<sup>2</sup> The “intellectual mutation,” as Koyré called it—borrowing the term from the French philosopher and historian of science

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<sup>1</sup> Renato Poggioli, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, translated by Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Floris H. Cohen, *The Scientific Revolution: A Historiographical Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 75.

Gaston Bachelard—consisted of “the replacement, by Galileo and Descartes, of the closed, purposive, qualitative Cosmos of the Greeks and of medieval Europe with the conception of the infinite space of Euclidean geometry. [...] The concept of the ‘Scientific Revolution’ denoted, in its original guise, not a historical period so much as an event, or rather a highly interconnected range of events.”<sup>3</sup>

More recently the concept of the scientific revolution became associated with Thomas Kuhn’s famous work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). Kuhn too, saw the main precondition of a revolution in the capacity of natural sciences to create a radically new viewpoint and a novel way of looking at, and explaining, natural phenomena—in other words, to create an intellectual mutation.

An issue related first to scientific revolution was the question of whether a revolution is a single and unique (specific) historical event or rather a part of a recurring (or potentially recurring) pattern. The prevalent view is that such scientific revolutions were more than one, but the revolution around 1600 represents *the* scientific revolution.

Another revolution was the philosophical one, made by Immanuel Kant. Kant, who saw his own philosophical endeavor as “scientific,” regarded his transcendental philosophical project as an essential turning point in modern philosophy and thus a veritable scientific revolution. In the preface to the second edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787), Kant twice likens his own philosophical “revolution” to that of Copernicus: the latter dared, “in a manner contradictory of the senses, but yet true, to seek the observed movements, not in the heavenly bodies, but in the spectator.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, claims Kant, “Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects.”<sup>5</sup> Contrary to this common sense approach, we must, argues Kant, “suppose that objects conform to our knowledge. This would agree better with what is desired, namely, that it should be possible to have knowledge of objects *a priori*, determining something in regard to them prior to their being given. We should then be proceeding precisely on the lines of Copernicus’ primary hypothesis.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 495.

<sup>4</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1965), p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

In relation to revolutions in science as well as in society, the ambiguity of the term “revolution” was often played upon, for it could denote both a mechanical circular motion, and thus a recurrence of the same, and an instance of radical historical change intrinsic to human knowledge or historical progress, based on the negation of the past and a vision of a future.

*The* revolution in the twentieth century was the October Revolution, with yet another historic revolution on grand scale being the “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution” (1966–1976) in China. Of course social and political revolutions also existed elsewhere: in Latin America, for example, where the major ones were those in Mexico, Cuba, and Nicaragua. In the Cuban case the idea of a social and political revolution was linked to a characteristic component of cultural revolution, namely that of a “New Person” (an idea initially conceived by Leon Trotsky) who resembled a kind of a communist superman.

Since the nineteenth century and especially in the first half of the twentieth, the social agent of socio-political revolutions was considered to be, according to Marxism, the proletariat (or the working masses), with class struggle serving, in the words of Louis Althusser, as the “engine of history.” Such revolution, led by the communist party as the vanguard of the proletariat, was often designated as a “proletarian revolution.” An alternative agent of such revolutions was the nation. Marinetti thus claimed in 1921 that “The Nation is nothing other than a vast political party,”<sup>7</sup> while in 1920 Chen Duxiu (1880–1942), one of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party, argued: “I recognize the existence of only two nations: that of the capitalists and that of the workers. [...] At present, the ‘nation’ of the workers exists only in the Soviet Union; everywhere else we have the ‘nation’ of the capitalists.”<sup>8</sup>

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“Political revolution” is related to social revolution, which is—especially according to Marxism—the pivotal form of revolution, around which cluster other revolutions: the political, the economic, and the cultural. Together with the political, social revolution designates a radical (and often violent) transformation

<sup>7</sup> F. T. Marinetti, “Beyond Communism,” in Günter Berghaus (ed.), translated by Doug Thompson, *F.T. Marinetti, Critical Writings* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), p. 341.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Benjamin I. Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 28.

of the political and social system of a society as a whole. Such an interpretation was not limited to Marxists: Mussolini claimed, “For a revolution to be great [...] it must be a social revolution.”<sup>9</sup> Since the French Revolution, modern revolution has been based on the idea of social justice—that a radical change is “just” even if it is against extant laws. In the nineteenth century it became related to the communist political agenda and its belief in an ontological antagonism that exists as a clear polar division of society and is materialized also in state institutions and their repressive or ideological mechanisms—in what Louis Althusser has called “ideological state apparatuses” and Jacques Rancière the “police.” Another possible cause for social upheaval—more common under populist regimes—is the creation of an enemy on ethnic or racial grounds.

Let me now for a moment stop at “cultural revolution.” It concerns two possible interpretations of culture within a society that is undergoing a social and a political revolution. In its conventional sense it concerns both, although it is usually carried out within the framework of the latter—but with the intention of achieving results also within the former, for it aims at remolding a society from the economic base to its superstructure. While social revolution aims primarily at transforming the economic base of a society and thereby effect a transformation in the means of production, cultural revolution aims either to transform segments of the already extant culture (by pursuing a certain cultural policy) or—and in such instance we speak of cultural revolution proper—to transform the very mentality and mindset of a people: “all systemic revolutions have had to confront this problem: [...] the production of a new culture in the narrow and specialized sense of literature, film, and the like; and the remolding of the culture of everyday life in the more general sense.”<sup>10</sup>

Lenin employed the notion “cultural revolution” in 1917 and the term in 1923 when he argued that “in our country the political and social revolution preceded the cultural revolution, the cultural revolution that now confronts us. This

<sup>9</sup> Benito Mussolini, “Address to the National Corporative Council,” in *A Primer of Italian Fascism*, edited and with an introduction by Jeffrey Schnapp; translated by Jeffrey Schnapp, Olivia E. Sears, and Maria A. Stampino (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), pp. 163–164.

<sup>10</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2010), p. 267.

cultural revolution would now be sufficient to transform our country into a completely socialist state.”<sup>11</sup>

The need for rapid cultural transformation of society was especially urgent in underdeveloped countries such as the Soviet Union or China, prompting the respective communist parties to accentuate the need for a cultural revolution so as to accelerate the pace of economic transformation. It was within such a context that Joseph Stalin referred to writers and cultural workers as the “engineers of the human soul.”

The Cultural Revolution in China attempted to change not only the property of the means of production and thereby the class composition of Chinese society, but also the essential subjective and existential conditions of the lives of the Chinese people: Mao Zedong sought to transform norms, values, and culture as such, subsuming all forms of social and private lives to the aims of the Revolution. It offered the point of departure for the New Wave movement of the 1980s that attempted “to effect an aesthetic and ethical transformation of Chinese society and to redefine the Chinese identity.”<sup>12</sup>

Yet another revolution is “artistic revolution,” which designates an emergence of a new style and a new technique in art, a new mode of expression or language of art that can be relatively independent of simultaneous historic political or social transformations. Cases abound: impressionism (1870s and 1880s), expressionism (1905), cubism (1907), or abstract expressionism (1950s) were all instances of unprecedented artistic inventions.

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Artists were well aware of the capacity of art to transform our perception of the world and perhaps even to contribute, in its own way, to the transformation of the world itself. Thus the Mexican muralist painter Diego Rivera proclaimed cubism to be “a revolutionary movement, questioning everything that has previously been said and done in art. It held nothing sacred. As the new world would soon blow itself apart, never to be the same again, so Cubism broke down forms as they had been seen for centuries, and was creating out of the frag-

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, p. 270.

<sup>12</sup> Martina Köppel-Yang, *Semiotic Warfare: The Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979–1989, A Semiotic Analysis* (Hong Kong: Timezone, 2003), p. 182.



ments new forms, new objects, new patterns, and—ultimately—new worlds.”<sup>13</sup> A related point was made by Herbert Marcuse in his book *Aesthetic Dimension* (1977): “Art can be called revolutionary in several senses. In a narrow sense, art may be revolutionary if it represents a radical change in style and technique. Such change may be the achievement of a genuine avant-garde, anticipating or reflecting substantial changes in the society at large.”<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, both statements also imply that the “revolutionary” gesture is essentially that of a novel form of *representation* as opposed to the *transformation* effected by a movement such as Italian futurism, which as early as its initial 1909 “Futurist manifesto” announced its intent not only to change the established representations of the world, but also to transform the world itself.

## 2. The Avant-Gardes and Revolutions

The link between political and artistic revolution and between the artistic and the political avant-garde was highlighted by the Hungarian researcher of avant-gardes, Miklós Szabolcsi, who observed that “a [political and social] revolution without an avant-garde [in art] is really a pseudo-revolution.” He furthermore argued that “we can speak of a true avant-garde only if it overlaps with a political revolution, realizes it or prepares it.”<sup>15</sup> What Szabolcsi was claiming was that without a connection to some kind of political avant-garde project, a true artistic avant-garde just doesn’t exist. In Szabolcsi’s view this is valid also the other way around: without the identification of avant-garde artists with the political revolution (and their ensuing support), such a revolution doesn’t stand a chance—not because artists would be such great soldiers, but because practically every authentic revolution contains an essential emancipatory kernel that is to be found in art. Such art is often (although not necessarily) also avant-garde: if a political and social revolution is avant-garde too, then these broader circumstances find an affinity with similarly revolutionary (avant-garde) art: “The avant-garde movements saw the artistic and the social revolution as an interdependent process, as a single continuum. That is why artists and critics often

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in David Craven, *Art and Revolution in Latin America, 1910–1990* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Boston: Beacon, 1978), p. xxi.

<sup>15</sup> Miklós Szabolcsi, “Ka nekim pitanjima revolucionarne avangarde,” *Književna reč* 3, no. 101 (1978), p. 14.

described the October Revolution as a continuation of the revolutionary process started in Cubism and Futurism in the early 1910s. They believed that artistic and the social revolutions complement and reinforce each other.”<sup>16</sup>

The affinity between the political and the artistic avant-gardes is manifold: they often share a certain *Weltanschauung*, they both find themselves in a marginal and subordinate position and thus in similar circumstances, and both are forms of emancipation—just like the broader social revolution. Such affinity most frequently doesn’t last long: soon the anarchic spirit of the avant-gardes in art comes into conflict with the emergent institution-building spirit of the political avant-gardes.

What is avant-garde art? “Avant-garde” is a military term that was in use long before the French Revolution. It designated the advance guard—a small unit of soldiers who moved ahead of the main military force to explore the path on which the main unit will proceed. In the nineteenth century it started to be used also in politics and in art. What avant-garde means in politics is fairly well-known: it usually applies to the communist party. Why? Because according to Marxism (Leninism), the transitional period of socialism is to lead to a classless society, but to get there the proletariat—and society as a whole—needs someone to guide and lead it—and this is the communist party for it purportedly represents the advance guard or unit of the working class as a whole. The communist party is a collective revolutionary subject. This is why it is anonymous and why its members are replaceable: they are but cog wheels in the machine that is taking them—alas, with much effort and friction—to a classless society. In the Soviet case the party claims to possess the objective truth of history, this being possible only if it considers itself to be simultaneously exterior and interior to history. It is here that the difference between avant-garde art that involves changes in style and technique and that which involves the “descent into the street” occurs.

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The early meaning of the avant-garde is perhaps best explained by Gabriel-Désiré Laverdant in 1845: to know “whether the artist is truly of the avant-garde, one must know where Humanity is going, know what the destiny of the human

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<sup>16</sup> Jaroslav Andel, “The Constructivist Entanglement: Art into Politics, Politics into Art,” in *Russian Constructivism 1914–1932: Art into Life* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), p. 225.

race is.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, as in politics, we can speak of an avant-garde in art only if the avant-garde artist knows where society is heading, what its historical purpose is—something that is possible if the artist ascribes to certain political ideas and visions of the future. Of course, in art these visions of the future are not as obvious as in politics; in art this future can also be present as an opposition to the past, as its transgression by new styles and expressive inventions—something that is typical of avant-garde art as well as of modernism as a whole. Nonetheless, Laverdant’s description of avant-garde art differs from its contemporary meaning, one that has been formed on the basis of twentieth-century experiences both with *Realsozialismus* (where it was the “real” that aborted the spirit of the revolution) and with its socialist aesthetics and cultural policies.

If in the nineteenth century we speak of avant-garde artists (forming what Stefan Morawski named “proto-avant-gardes”<sup>18</sup>), then in the twentieth century we refer to avant-garde movements—loose groups of artists who often disclaim such designation and proclaim their aim to transcend art in the classical sense. These movements share some common features: working as groups; publishing manifestoes; scandalizing society by provocative statements, behavior and actions; being active in different artistic genres or ignoring borders among them altogether; and, often, being also politically provocative and revolutionary. But there is also an important difference within the avant-gardes: there are those who limit their revolutionary actions to the realm of art—Cubism for example—and there are others who demand “that art move from representing to transforming the world,”<sup>19</sup> that it step out of museums, galleries and so on into “life”—be it as political propaganda or as the transformation of society and the individual in other ways. What this means can be described by an unlikely author, namely Karl Marx from the eleventh of his “Theses on Feuerbach” (1845): “Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.” All we have to do is replace “philosophers” with “avant-garde artists” in order to discern where avant-garde artists were heading—to the demand “that art move from representing to transforming the world.” We see that there is thus a deeper unity or resemblance between the political and artistic avant-gardes—a feature

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Poggioli, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> Stefan Morawski, “On the Avant-garde, Neo-avant-garde and the Case of Postmodernism,” *Literary Studies in Poland* 21 (1989), p. 83.

<sup>19</sup> Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship and Beyond*, translated by Charles Rougle (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 14.

that, to a different extent, can be found throughout the previous century when appearances of avant-garde art coincided with political revolutionary events.

As has been claimed in more detail elsewhere,<sup>20</sup> in the twentieth century there existed three waves or generations of avant-garde art: the early (between 1905 and 1930), the neo-avant-garde (after World War II) and the post avant-garde (in the eighties in former or present socialist countries). The politicized avant-gardes sometimes found a political avant-garde with which to share their ideas and visions and sometimes they did not, in which case they played both roles—that of the political agent and the artistic creator. The early avant-gardes represent the paradigmatic instance of avant-garde movements in the twentieth century.

The early avant-gardes—futurism, cubism, expressionism, surrealism, constructivism and so on—wanted to change the world, society and art and didn't care much about money, profit or success. They were like political revolutionaries, completely devoted to their cause. The revolutions they created were both artistic and political, which is why I call them “aesthetic revolutions.” They conflated artistic and political aims, pursuing these in the artistic, political and social spheres of society. Other instances of aesthetic avant-gardes will be discussed in the closing part of this essay.

### 3. Revolutions through Art

We may agree that the purpose of the political avant-garde is to carry out a socio-political revolution, while the purpose of the politicized artistic avant-gardes is to carry out an aesthetic revolution that changes not only artistic styles but also the ways in which we perceive the world and life in general.

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At first glance all revolutions seem to fail—not only as attempts to “move from representing to transforming the world,” but also in their efforts to revolutionize life and society: in the 1920s Marinetti and the Italian futurists abandoned their ambitions to lead an independent and progressive politics and started to support or coexist with fascism, sharing the latter's nationalist affinities; Russian futurists—soon to be identified with the radical journal *Lef*—became increasing-

<sup>20</sup> See Aleš Erjavec (ed.), *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art under Late Socialism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

ly exclusivist and in 1925 lost the support of Lunacharski, who proclaimed the Lef group “to be an almost obsolete thing;”<sup>21</sup> Constructivist artists Rodchenko and Lissitzky turned to publication design, making the propaganda magazine *USSR in Construction* (1930–1941) the means of their increasingly solitary constructivist research; surrealists in the thirties underwent transformation from a movement into a school, slowly losing or abandoning their special role as “adoptive children of the revolution,”<sup>22</sup> no longer supporting Stalin but Trotsky and the Fourth International.

Yet in the decades following World War II, the early avant-gardes have undergone an unexpected change: “the failure of the avant-garde utopia of the unification of art and life coincides with the avant-garde’s overwhelming success within the art institution.”<sup>23</sup> Since “life” is not a definable category, “the avant-garde project is predisposed to failure, with the sole exception of movements set in the midst of revolutions,”<sup>24</sup> such as Russian constructivism. Bürger was the first to make such a claim, for he “viewed the situation from the perspective of the avant-garde rather than the traditional arts, and he therefore judged success not according to lasting aesthetic potential but according to radical political effect. [...] [A]s he argued, the avant-garde’s failure lay precisely in its being accepted as nothing more than the producer of legitimate works of art.”<sup>25</sup>

The dilemmas then are these: should the fact that the radical early avant-gardes ended up progressively influencing other art the same way as the non-radical ones did be considered failure or success? Moreover, should the fact that they did not transform the world by fusing art and “life” be regarded as a sign of their

<sup>21</sup> Leon Trotsky, quoted in Halina Stephan, *“Lef” and the Left Front of the Arts* (Munich: Verlag Otto Sagner, 1981), p. 53.

<sup>22</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,” in *Selected Writings 1927–1934*, vol. 2, edited by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith; translated by Rodney Livingston and others (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 209.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Bürger, “Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde: An Attempt to Answer Certain Critics of *Theory of the Avant-Garde*,” *New Literary History* 41, no. 4 (Autumn 2010), p. 705.

<sup>24</sup> Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the Turn of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), p. 15.

<sup>25</sup> Brandon W. Joseph, W. *Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), p. 12.

ultimate failure or not? In this respect their success equaled that of the “purely” artistic avant-gardes such as cubism.

The answers to these questions are important in relation to the assessment of the nature of an aesthetic revolution: “an aesthetic revolution could only be realized in conjunction with a total overhaul of society,”<sup>26</sup> the latter being contrasted with the “partial, the *merely* political revolution, which leaves the pillars of the house standing.”<sup>27</sup>

The “bare” definition of a revolution runs as follows: “Revolution is a term with a precise meaning; the political overthrow from below of one state order, and its replacement with another. [...] [R]evolution is a punctual and not a permanent process. That is: a revolution is an episode of convulsive political transformation, compressed in time and concentrated in target, that has a determinate beginning [...] and a finite end.”<sup>28</sup>

The opposite opinion is that of revolution as a continuous process and as a permanent revolution. Such revolution is a “*déroutement*”—an unfolding that transgresses the “end as a necessary failure” paradigm.

Revolution is here described either as an event or a process, or as a tension between the two. In this last case we regard it as both at once. In such a case, “revolution must be conceived [...] as an irreducible duality oscillating between process and event.”<sup>29</sup> Its nature as a temporal process causes it to remain unfinished and therefore a failure and a defeat: “self-criticism of the revolution [...] is the very condition for its reactivation, the condition for the ‘inversion’ of the void into a new opening on to the event.”<sup>30</sup> A revolution is thus a combination of a process and an event. This is true of a social and political revolution, but is it

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<sup>26</sup> Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction, 1909–1944* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1996), p. 47.

<sup>27</sup> Karl Marx, “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law,” quoted in Stathis Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution: From Kant to Marx* (London: Verso, 2003), p. 326.

<sup>28</sup> Perry Anderson, “Modernity and Revolution,” *New Left Review* 144 (March–April 1984), p. 112.

<sup>29</sup> Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*, p. 27.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 341.

true also of aesthetic revolution? It seems that it is but to a lesser extent, for the sensible and sense-perception are not easily defined and articulated.

We will recall Laverdant's description from 1845 of an avant-garde and his demand that to know "whether the artist is truly of the avant-garde, one must know where Humanity is going, know what the destiny of the human race is."<sup>31</sup>

It was the Croatian literary theorist Aleksandar Flaker who attempted to resolve this issue, a part of which concerned also the almost standard question of political and aesthetic utopia. Flaker introduced the notion of "optimal projection" in the etymological sense of *pro-jectio*, namely a shot forward, into the distance. He argued that the self-designation of individual avant-garde movements, such as futurism, constructivism, Zenitism and Ultraism, contained a projection toward the future. In such an instance at stake was not a "utopia," warned Flaker, but movement: "The notion of the 'optimal projection' does not signify for us the same as the notion of 'utopia.' 'Utopia' already with its original semantics designates a nonexistent 'place' or 'land,' while the texts that formed utopia regularly designate it as a closed, delimited space with an ideal social structure."<sup>32</sup> In its representative discourse the avant-garde is the *opposite* of utopia and opposes "reification of the ideal, incessantly realizing its proper, individual, and poetic selection."<sup>33</sup> Utopia is a *static* entity and therefore the opposite of a movement: "The utopian project is a structure projected into the future, while optimal projection is only the direction of the movement. When we say: utopian project we by that very designation disqualify it as unrealizable while when speaking of optimal projection, we speak of a movement, which is realizable."<sup>34</sup>

In this way a series of avant-garde activities acquires sense: manifestoes, public statements, political agendas, imaginary representations of the future to come that are immediately denigrated and overturned, leading Marx to abstain from depicting the classless society. Some of the same activities appear on the side of the political avant-gardes, especially once they gain power: the infinite planning in the former socialist countries, the detailed projections of the future and

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Poggioli, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*, p. 68.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 336.

reports both equally fictitious, constitutes an imaginary movement into a socialist future that exists in documents and political speeches but not in historical reality—nor is it ever to appear therein. It is perhaps for this same reason that avant-gardes “theorize endlessly.”<sup>35</sup>

Upon closer scrutiny the idea about the failure of the aesthetic avant-gardes seems premature, for an important segment of the “transformation of the world” includes not only punctual events within a revolution, but also profoundly changed sense perception and a redistribution of the sensible engendering new visions of world and of life, leading not only to a transformation of the expressive means of future art, but also to already lived as well as imagined or projected life all at once. Here is how these visions and experiences are expressed by the futurist Giovanni Papini in an article in the journal *Lacerba* on December 1, 1913:

I am a futurist because futurism signifies a total appropriation of the modern civilization with all its enormous wonders, its fantastic possibilities and its horrible beauties. [...] I am a futurist because I am tired of Byzantine tapestries, false intellectual profundity[,] [...] of harmonious rhymes, pleasant music, pretty canvases, photographic painting, decorative, classical, antique and ambiguous painting. [...] I am a futurist because futurism signifies love for risk-taking, for danger, for what didn't attract us, for what we have not tried, for the summit that we didn't expect and for the abyss that we have not measured. [...] I am a futurist because futurism signifies a desire for a greater civilization, for a more personal art, for a richer sensibility and for a more heroic thinking. I am a futurist for futurism signifies Italy as it was in the past, more worthy of its future and its future place in the world, more modern, more developed, more avant-garde than other nations. The liveliest fire burns today among the futurists and I like and I am boasting that I am and remain among them.<sup>36</sup>

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Statements such as these show that a transformation of the world doesn't have to be deferred to an imaginary or distant future, but is already here. Within such framework “life” ceases to be an empty concept but becomes instead “a

<sup>35</sup> Stefan Morawski, “The Artistic Avant-Garde: On the 20th Century Formations,” *Polish Art Studies* 10 (1989), p. 88.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Giovanni Lista, *Le futurisme* (Paris: Hazan, 1985), pp. 91–92.



concept designating all material being and all that is immediately present to the senses.”<sup>37</sup> Life can also designate the shared life of individuals, of a social class or of a community. It is what they all have “in common,” with art being at the same time their expressive means and an experiential object of their perception.

Although an aesthetic revolution may be announced by an event—the founding manifestoes of various movements would count as such events— it necessarily involves a process whereby the extant, assimilated (and therefore often unnoticed) kinds of sensibility are replaced by some other kinds, with this change being constituted by and affecting different spheres of life. An aesthetic “revolution” thus always involves a profound change or transformation of perspective that necessarily exceeds the limits of art as “pure” art—especially that whose ambition is to research its proper expressive means (or “language”) or one that possesses no function except to be without one. If one compares the provocative and disorderly *serate* of the early Italian futurists or Giacomo Balla’s 1914 *Il vestito antineutrale*, with “shoes ready to deliver merry kicks to all neutralists,”<sup>38</sup> on the one hand and the pastoral artifacts of developed cubism from across the globe on the other, then one senses the difference between the radical and the artistic avant-gardes and therefore between different facets of art. It is now possible to answer the question about the “failure” of the avant-gardes: for the most part they failed neither in transforming life—instead they merged with it— nor by becoming successful—in this they simply joined their more pronouncedly artistic counterparts.

As already mentioned, there is a link between aesthetic, artistic and political revolution: “The coming Revolution will be at once the consummation of and abolition of philosophy; no longer merely ‘formal’ and ‘political,’ it will be a ‘human’ revolution. The human revolution is an offspring of the aesthetic paradigm.”<sup>39</sup> In this way the politicized avant-gardes represent in art a particular parallel and complement to the revolutionary political avant-gardes: they both strive to trans-

<sup>37</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters*, edited and translated by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), p. 101.

<sup>38</sup> Catherine Tisdall and Angelo Bozzolla, *Futurism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 194.

<sup>39</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, translated by Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 120.

gress the borders between the relatively autonomous spheres of life that were erected in modernity and that art, by its very nature, transgresses incessantly.

The avant-garde movements of the previous century—be they the “early” (the “classical,” the “historical”) avant-gardes, the neo-avant-gardes or the post-avant-gardes—have been characterized by revolt, be it against art, tradition, the bourgeoisie, society or all of these; but not all of them have bound revolt to revolution—not all of them have bound the often individual and always counter-reactive action and discourse of revolt to the often programmatic and always collective and future-oriented project of a revolution. Those that did experience the conflicts inherent to political struggles, which, as a rule, avant-garde artists appear to have lost: they seem not to have been successful in welding the individual experience of freedom to the other, collective revolutionary experience. Since our view is usually that of autonomous art, its political aspirations and involvements arising from this striving for the “marriage of artistic and social revolution” fall victim either to the charge of cooption of art by politics or of the willful desire to turn its revolt into revolutionary action.

#### 4. Aesthetic Revolutions<sup>40</sup>

There is a Romantic author, often described as a major aesthete in the Romantic movement in Germany, who profusely employed the notion of “aesthetic revolution,” namely Friedrich von Schlegel (1773–1829).

In Schlegel the “aesthetic revolution” relates to two theses: that art of his contemporaneity (as well as any art of the present or the future) is not restricted by the seemingly unattainable ideals of Greek antiquity but is “futuristic, or to use Walter Benjamin’s terminology, a messianic one, considering art within a process toward ever higher achievements.”<sup>41</sup> In Schlegel there thus exists no historic closure of art as in Hegel. Instead, art continues on its path, which is determined by philosophy: art of different epochs, whether of modernity or futurity, meets on the same comparative theoretical ground and in every epoch, be it present or future, continues on its path. Last but not least, Schlegel claims

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<sup>40</sup> See also Aleš Erjavec, “Estetska revolucija: Schlegel, Malraux in Rancière s Schillerjem,” *Filozofski vestnik* 33, No. 1 (2012), pp. 77–90.

<sup>41</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 60.

that in modern art—or with the demise of the ancient world—boundaries among genres have collapsed, thereby setting the stage for the general notion of art as such, which has become the dominant artistic designation for the next two centuries and beyond. Such a claim is echoed in Jacques Rancière and in his view that in the so-called “aesthetic regime of art” different genres and works coexist within an undifferentiated realm of art.

Another author employing the notion of the aesthetic revolution was André Malraux (1901–1976). Especially in his *La Métamorphose des dieux* (1957), Malraux outlined his own theory of “aesthetic revolution.” Again resemblance both with Schlegel and Rancière can be discerned, the reason for this uncanny similarity probably lying in their common reference to Kant and his Copernican revolution, which resulted not only in the transcendental position as regards our interpretation of the sensible world but was also related to the “‘way’ of seeing” in the aesthetic sense.

In Malraux “aesthetic revolution” refers to the enormous expansion of the realm of art occurring since 1900: “The metamorphosis of the past was first a metamorphosis of seeing. Without an aesthetic revolution, the sculpture of ancient epochs, mosaics, and stained glass windows would never have joined the painting of the Renaissance and the great monarchies; no matter how vast they might have become, ethnographic collections would never have surmounted the barrier that separated them from art museums.”<sup>42</sup>

What caught Malraux’s attention and the reason why he designated it an “aesthetic revolution” was the phenomenon that occurred toward the end of the nineteenth century as Europeans for the first time started to regard—and thus to see and interpret—artifacts from historically and geographically distant cultures as subsumable under the general category “art”—even in instances in which such artifacts were created in settings that were unfamiliar with the notion of art altogether: “There seems in short to have been a puzzling transformation. An object that was (for example) once created to be a god, in a culture that had no

<sup>42</sup> André Malraux, *La Métamorphose des dieux* (Paris: NRF, La Galerie de la Pléiade, 1957), p. 21.

word for art, has become a ‘work of art’ in a Western culture that, often enough, is unsure even of the name of the god that the object once embodied.”<sup>43</sup>

What happened toward the close of the nineteenth century was that objects that were previously valued by Europeans for their material value only were then transformed in the eyes of their beholders: coins or statues comprised of precious metals, for example, that were previously simply melted down started now to be regarded as precious objects, their value to a large part unrelated to the material from which they were made. It was this essential transformation of the interested look into a disinterested aesthetic “gaze” that was of concern to Malraux: “The Egyptian statue that we now admire as ‘art,’ he suggests, is not ‘timelessly or essentially art any more than it was timelessly or essentially the Pharaoh’s double.’ It is both—and neither: ‘both’ in the sense that it *has been* a ‘double’ and is *now* a work of art; ‘neither’ in the sense that it is not *essentially* either.”<sup>44</sup>

Malraux touched upon the issue of artifacts that have become art due to their being exhibited in museums, thereby joining Renaissance and modern western works in the “imaginary museum” of “art.” In other words, by detecting the changed stance of the European public and art establishment toward a whole body of artifacts that until then were not considered art but rather ethnographic objects or even precious metals only (what he called “a metamorphosis of our way of seeing”), Malraux diagnosed a hitherto unnoticed “aesthetic revolution” whereby the realm of art (and of the beautiful) was substantially broadened, setting the stage for its further expansion in the remainder of the twentieth century.

Schlegel and Malraux employed the notion of aesthetic revolution in related as well as in dissimilar ways. In Schlegel it applied both to the theory and to the object of its inquiry. In Malraux it applied to reality only, namely to the hitherto disregarded transformation of the way of seeing art objects and thereby to a profound reconfiguration of the realm of art. In this respect the aesthetics of Jacques Rancière resembles the logic of Malraux’s, for they both allow us to see the essential transformation as concerns “art” in the manner in which certain objects have begun to be regarded. Rancière distinguishes three regimes: the ethical regime

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<sup>43</sup> Derek Allan, “André Malraux and the Challenge to Aesthetics,” *Journal of European Studies* 33, no. 1 (2003), p. 28.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

of images, the representational regime of art and the aesthetic regime of art. The first is based on ethics and the second on the veracity of the representation: by comparing the representation and the represented referent we can determine the “quality” of an image. Contrary to these two regimes the “aesthetic regime of art” abolishes the system of genres and creates “art” in the singular. The prerequisite for the creation of the aesthetic regime is a so-called “aesthetic revolution.”

In Rancière the “aesthetic revolution” concerns a hitherto unrecognized (or incorrectly designated) move from the representative regime of art (which is normatively based on representational criteria of veracity to the depicted referent) to the aesthetic regime of art (this one being much more democratic and transformative of the extant relations between the visible and the invisible): “In this regime, the statue of Juno [Ludovisi] does not draw its property of being an artwork from the conformity of the sculptor’s work to an adequate idea or to the canons of representation. It draws it from its belonging to a specific sensorium.”<sup>45</sup> This new sensorium is based on “aesthetic free play”—a feature in Rancière’s eyes essentially characteristic of the novel regime of art that emerged two centuries ago. The new regime introduced by Rancière covers all the art of more than two centuries.

According to Rancière, then, the “Kantian revolution” engenders an aesthetic “silent revolution” that creates the conditions of possibility for perceiving modern artifacts as art (very much along the lines noted by Malraux). Aesthetic free play thus “ceases to be a mere intermediary between high culture and simple nature, or a stage of the moral’s subject self-discovery. Instead, it becomes the principle of a new freedom, capable of surpassing the antinomies of political liberty.”<sup>46</sup>

An “aesthetic revolution” is realized by spontaneous collective action—contrary to a political revolution, which is most often realized by a directed political action. The former involves not individuals but movements: cases where the discursive, practical and material activity and creativity of a group (or sporadic singular instances thereof) eventually generated an “enthusiasm” that transformed solitary cases into historically recognizable and mutually related events

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<sup>45</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, translated by Steven Concoran (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), p. 29.

<sup>46</sup> Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, p. 99.

realized by groups or movements that are today displayed in material and discursive repositories of culture and art history or have been retained as material cultural artifacts. Italian futurism, surrealism, and other aesthetic avant-garde movements are not “just” a series of artistic phenomena that have been political and politicized simply by coincidence. They have become such things intentionally and have accordingly effected historical innovations and consequences. As instances of the “aesthetic,” they have intentionally attempted to unify the artistic and political components of human and social existence in a “futurist moment” or an “optimal projection.”

In Schlegel, Malraux and Rancière we encounter different albeit related usages of “aesthetic revolution.” In Schlegel the “aesthetic revolution” is not really a concept but a descriptive term referring to aesthetics and to its *object*, i.e. the beautiful in art. At the same time it is involved in Schlegel’s development of a different historical interpretation of art. Malraux’s use of the term is in some respects uncannily close to that of Rancière for it also involves a “way of seeing,” thereby pointing to the transmogrification of anthropological artifacts into works of art before the eyes of the public in an “imaginary museum.” At the same time, however, “aesthetic revolution” does not carry considerable conceptual import in Malraux either.

A different case is that of Rancière, who imputes to Schiller’s commentary on the Juno Ludovisi not only “aesthetic revolution,” which purportedly represents a “silent revolution,” with both revolutions naming the emergence of the “aesthetic regime of art.” He also, moreover, connects such a revolution to the Kantian “Copernican revolution” and to aesthetic experience, judgment of taste and the sensible. What Rancière is thus doing is transposing Kant’s “revolution” into the realm of the sensible, proclaiming aesthetics to be the transcendental precondition for contemporary notion of art. While Rancière shows much sympathy for aesthetic avant-gardes, he nonetheless regards them within the frame of his aesthetic regime of art.

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What is characteristic of an aesthetic revolution is that it is carried out by aesthetic avant-garde movements and that it accomplishes a pivotal modification in what Rancière designates as the “distribution of the sensible” (or, rather, its “redistribution”) in the sense that it represents a unity of art and politics, which are “consubstantial insofar as they both organize a common world of self-evident

facts of sensory perception.”<sup>47</sup> An aesthetic revolution resembles other kinds of revolutions except that it is realized by aesthetic avant-gardes that strive for a unity of art and “life.” It also produces a new sensibility and engenders a “new way of seeing.”

At the beginning of this essay I pointed out the obvious: recently the notion of the revolution has lost much of its former subversive potential. This doesn’t signify that this cannot change in the future and that revolution will never again acquire “revolutionary” significance. If it does, such an emergence will signify that certain conditions for the resurrection of revolution have been met and that these are now once more mirrored in contemporary social and political circumstances. The next time around such circumstances and context may transgress the dominant western paradigm of this notion as it has existed since the French Revolution and through the October and Chinese Cultural Revolutions, even though such interconnectedness is weaker than expected. It is equally possible that if a new revolution were to arise, it may reflect the fact that today society is organized differently than in the previous two centuries. Thus, today the world is one, but its singularity is less uniform than it was no more than a few decades ago. Revolutions are furthermore internally divided. It has thus been pointed out that “The French Revolution [...] was really three revolutions—a democratic republican revolution, a moderate Enlightenment constitutional monarchism invoking Montesquieu and the British model as its criteria of legitimacy, and an authoritarian populism prefiguring modern fascism.”<sup>48</sup> Every revolution can be divided in similar ways. In this essay it was my intent to explain the relation between revolution and avant-garde art and movements, a tandem that has very often existed together and that reached its apogee in the very beginning of the twentieth century. At that time and somewhat later, the forceful emergence and existence of aesthetic avant-garde movements such as Italian futurism and Russian constructivism shared a strong state, persuasive political ideology and often clear identification of the enemy. Today this situation is a thing of the past. Only the resurrection of these and related characteristics will allow for the avant-gardes to be born again. Revolution may follow a similar path.

<sup>47</sup> Gabriel Rockhill, “The Politics of Aesthetics,” in Gabriel Rockhill and Philip Watts (eds.) *Jacques Rancière. History, Politics, Aesthetics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 196.

<sup>48</sup> Jonathan Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas: An Intellectual History of the French Revolution from the Rights of Man to Robespierre* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 695.





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## Avant-Gardes in Yugoslavia

In this study, I will approach the avant-gardes as interdisciplinary, internationally oriented artistic and cultural practices.<sup>1</sup> I will present and advocate the thesis that the Yugoslav avant-gardes were a special geopolitical and geo-aesthetic set of artistic and cultural phenomena defined by the internal dynamics and interrelations of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and by the external dynamics, cosmopolitan relations, and internationalisations of local artistic excess and experimentation with international avant-garde practices. I will devote special attention to the local and international networking of cities as the political and cultural environments where the avant-gardes took place. Above all, the avant-gardes thereby acquired the character of extremely urban artistic and cultural phenomena.

### Introductory Interpretation of the Concept of the Avant-garde

Discussing the status, functions, and effects of any *avant-garde* does not boil down to asking what phenomenal or conceptual, i.e. formalist, qualities are characteristic of an avant-garde work of art, the behaviour of an avant-garde artist, or her private or public life. On the contrary, equally important are directional questions regarding the instrumental potentialities or realisations of the avant-garde as an interventional material artistic practice in between or against dominant and marginal domains, practices, or paradigms within historical or present cultures. Avant-garde artistic practices are historically viewed as transformations of artistic, cultural, and social resistances, limitations, and ruptures within dominant, homogeneous or hegemonic artistic, cultural, and social environments. The avant-garde emerged at that historical juncture when the vertical class bourgeois society of the 19<sup>th</sup> century transformed into a horizontal,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Miško Šuvaković and Dubravka Đurić (eds.), *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-Avant-Gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918–1991* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2006), pp. 12–13. Miško Šuvaković (ed.), *Radikalne umetničke prakse: istorija umetnosti XX veka u Srbiji. Tom 1* (Belgrade: Orion Art, 2010), p. 59.

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consumer, and increasingly media society—the society in the age of mass “mechanic-electric” reproduction and communication on the eve and in the wake of World War I.

The avant-garde emerged by transcending the hierarchical lines of the class society of advanced modernism. That is why many have written about the mutual proximity, if not overlapping, of artistic, cultural, and political avant-gardes. For instance, Aleš Erjavec explicitly stresses the link between political and artistic avant-gardism:

The avant-garde (i.e. the revolutionary and the radical) agendas of artists sometimes not only met but also collided with similar agendas of the political avant-garde. The most vivid case of a conflict is the one that emerged in the Soviet Union in the decade after the October revolution, while the Italian futurism vis-à-vis the nascent and at that time still revolutionary fascism could offer an example of political cooperation.<sup>2</sup>

In paradigmatic terms, one could say that the avant-gardes typically emerged in one of the following three ways:

1. Due to the crisis of high modernism, stable and traditionally elaborate. There is an obvious analogy with the *workings* of capitalism,<sup>3</sup> which produces its own crises by itself or, by means of its radical and often uncontrollable forms of production, exchange, and consumption, provokes social crises only to emerge from them strengthened with new means of producing, exchanging, and consuming the regulated and deregulated everyday, which also means with new conditions for creating and receiving art.
2. By way of the experimental development of modernism, which includes an obvious paradox: modernism has always been posited by canonising high aesthetic values that thwarted or only suspended progress, whereas the avant-gardes, in relation to the dominant modernist climate of canonical (timeless, universal, i.e. trans-historical, trans-subjective, and trans-geographical) determinations, assumed the role of an experimental or innovative

<sup>2</sup> Aleš Erjavec, “The Avant-Gardes: From Modernism to Postmodernism”, in *Postmodernism, Postsocialism and Beyond* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), p. 3.

space on behalf of and in favour of modernism, i.e. modernism engendered in its productive *body* a space of otherness that enabled its simultaneous development and canonisation.

3. By critiquing, provoking, subverting, or destroying modernist canons, i.e. as a reaction to the totalising and canonical vision/version of modernism as a dominant and hegemonic rational and instrumental culture, which points to the key problem of the similarities, competitiveness, and differences between the avant-garde *qua* anti-mimetism and critical realism (i.e. mimetism) *qua* political subversion of the modernist non-functionality of art.

Modernisms and material practices within 20<sup>th</sup>-century modernisms may be presented and interpreted using different interpretative models of historicisation.<sup>4</sup> Those models range from indexing historicist and essentialist modernism, via the catastrophic and revolutionary model of paradigm shifts in art, to rather dispersive and anarchic postmodernist conceptions of the domination of the synchronic over the diachronic, of post-history and a metastasising eclecticism, etc. On the other hand, one might also construct interpretative models/maps of indexed confrontations within the large and diverse mega-modernist paradigm from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century on. For example, one could speak of the role of bohemia and the avant-garde as an autonomous territory of non-functional work,<sup>5</sup> therefore also life, in the instrumental and productive bourgeois society of European cultures before World War I. The historical avant-gardes<sup>6</sup> may be interpreted as the vanguard of new stages in the development of bourgeois modernist society around 1900. But the historical avant-gardes also constituted a provocation as well as resistance to the dominant ruling bourgeois society and its hegemonic universalism in the opening decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The historical avant-gardes were realised both as a project and optimal projection<sup>7</sup> of an apocalyptic, ideal, or new art, culture, or society. Also, the historical

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity: An Incomplete Project", in Hal Foster (ed.), *Postmodern Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 1985), pp. 3–4.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Nigel Blake and Francis Frascina, "Bohemia and the avant-garde", in "Modern Practices of Art and Modernity", in Francis Frascina, Nigel Blake, Briony Fer, Tamar Garb and Charles Harrison, *Modernity and Modernism / French Painting in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 50–53.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Aleksandar Flaker, "Optimalna projekcija", in *Poetika osporavanja. Avangarda i književna ljevica* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1984), pp. 66 and 68.

avant-gardes have been viewed as an extremely productive way of transforming high bourgeois modernism into the emerging mass-media and consumer culture of the 1920s. Paradoxically, as an idealist project of modern liberal bourgeois society, the historical avant-gardes were sometimes also socially realised in totalitarian regimes of the 1920s and '30s.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, as an excess project within the crisis-ridden modern bourgeois society, the avant-gardes became victims of totalitarian regimes and their hyper-modernist reductions of the idea of modernity itself.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, my starting definition of the avant-gardes is the following: in the broadest sense, the avant-garde denotes supra-stylistic or extra-stylistic radical, excessive, transgressive, critical, experimental, projective, programmatic, and interdisciplinary practices in art and culture. Avant-garde artistic and cultural practices emerged around 1900.

The radicalism of an avant-garde artist, group, or movement was reflected in their rejection or subversion of traditional or academic modern art, bourgeois culture and society within various paradigms of modernity and modernisms. Excessive, subversive, and transgressive<sup>10</sup> are those works in art, forms of public and private behaviour and activity whose phenomenality, appearance, import, and meanings are provocative and shocking to the values of bourgeois modern society. Excesses and transgressions may be aesthetic, cultural, moral, or political. An excess has become the avant-gardist act of provoking and destroying the autonomy of modernist art and bourgeois culture and society by means of a critical, projective, and manifestly political conceptualisation of artistic activity. That is why the avant-garde emerges as the vanguard or guide that transgresses the limits of established postmodernity, while decadence occurs as *neurotic resistance* that obsessively affirms the borders between the normal and the exotic,

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Boris Grojs [Groys, Boris], "Ruska avangarda: skok preko progresu", in *Stil Staljin* (Beograd: Službeni Glasnik, 2009), pp. 23–49.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Stephanie Barron, (ed.), *Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-garde in Nazi Germany (Entartete Kunst. Das Schicksal Der Avantgarde im Nazi Deutschland)*, (Los Angeles: LACMA, Munich: Deutsch Historisches Museum, Hirmer Verlag, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Denis Hollier, *Against: The Writings of Georges Bataille* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), pp. 134–138. Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 72–87.

or obsessively leads towards an utterly individual enjoyment and/or depression that uncovers the dark side of every modernity.<sup>11</sup>

An experimental status of art suggests that the aim of action in art is not the inspired creativity of a craftsman production of a work of art, but rather a desire to examine and change the ontologically assumed and socially recognised character of art. Experimentation is pursued by means of exploring the media, materials, methods, and ideologies of acting in art. For example, radical experimentation turned the artists of constructivism into technicians and researchers. In avant-garde art, the work as a made object becomes less important, while experimentation and research<sup>12</sup> attain central importance. Avant-garde art stands for a total transformation of art, culture, and society, which is why it has a projective character. The notion of project defines the meaning of avant-garde acting in terms of ideology, values, and significance.

The avant-garde is interdisciplinary because avant-garde *artistic works* are not made within the defined and autonomous artistic professions, disciplines, and their media. Avant-garde products emerge by overstepping, critiquing, and destroying the limits of the usage and conceptual or sensuous phenomenality of media, disciplines, and genres of art. An avant-garde *artistic work* either points to the limits of a medium—the limits of mimetic painting were developed and problematized from impressionism to abstract art—or oversteps them, producing citational, collage, assemblage, and readymade objects, situations, events, and textual structures (Dada, constructivism, surrealism). The notion of an avant-garde *work of art* expands to cover hybrid artistic methods, materials, modes of behaviour, inter-generic determinations, and relations between different disciplines of art. Classification terms such as “literary avant-garde”, “avant-garde painting”, “avant-garde sculpture”, “musical avant-garde”, or “film avant-garde” are only approximate labels, not accurate identifications, because avant-garde art is an inter-media, inter-generic, and interdisciplinary formation that connects and erases the borders of artistic disciplines and, indeed, professions.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Milorad Belančić, “Poreklo dekadencije”, in Dražen Katunarić (ed.), “Dekadencija” (special issue), *Delo*, nos. 3–4, Belgrade, 1988, p. 109.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Đulio Karlo Argan [Argan, Giulio Carlo], “Umetnost kao istraživanje”, in *Studije o modernoj umetnosti* (Belgrade: Nolit, 1982), pp. 154–155.

“The historical avant-gardes” is a trans-stylistic term that denotes radical, excessive, transgressive, critical, experimental, projective, and inter-media movements from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-1930s. “The avant-garde” is a trans-stylistic term because it is not defined as an epochal hegemonic model of shaping art, a specific singular instance of artistic expression, a coherent movement, defined school, or “great vogue”, but rather as a set of heterogeneous and hybrid singular cases, movements, schools, or vogues with their own radical, critical, experimental, projective, and inter-media features. As a collective term, “the avant-garde” is historically determined, because it pertains to the inconsistency and contradictions of industrial bourgeois society and its modernist culture, turning into the mass consumer and media society. The emergence of the avant-gardes began in mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century French culture, when the modernist ideals of the autonomy of art turned out to be a hindrance to an unbroken radical development and transformation of art and culture in a society based on the market and production. Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and in the opening decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, avant-garde art emerged in various national cultures: France (symbolism, post- and neo-impressionism, fauvism, cubism, Dada, surrealism), Italy (futurism), Germany (expressionism, Dada, constructivism, New Objectivity), Russia (symbolism, neo-primitivism, cubo-futurism, constructivism, suprematism), Switzerland (Dada), the Netherlands (the neo-plasticism of *De Stijl*, constructivism, Dada), England (vorticism, surrealism), the United States (expressionism, cubism, Dada, surrealism), Japan (Dada), Poland (expressionism, constructivism, unism), Czechoslovakia (symbolism, cubism, Dada, constructivism, surrealism), Serbia (expressionism, cubism, Zenitism, Dada, actionism, surrealism), Croatia (expressionism, cubism, Zenitism, Dada, surrealism), Slovenia (expressionism, Dada, constructivism), etc. Among those, the French, Italian, German, and Russian avant-gardes of the opening decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are regarded as paradigmatic. The term “paradigmatic avant-gardes” denotes the typical, great, or hegemonic avant-gardes that define a certain horizon of the historicisation of the international concept of the avant-garde. In histories of art, the following terms are also used in relation to the historical avant-gardes: “Eastern European”, “Middle European”, and “Central European avant-gardes”. “Middle European avant-gardes” denotes avant-garde practices in cultures that were under the influence of Austria-Hungary, typically the Austrian, Czech, Slovakian, Hungarian, Croatian, Slovenian, and Vojvodina

avant-gardes. “Central European avant-gardes”<sup>13</sup> denotes avant-garde practices that emerged in between the spheres of influence of Moscow and Paris, including the Polish (Poznań, Warsaw, Łódź, Cracow), German (Berlin, Dessau, Weimar), Czech (Prague), Austrian (Vienna), Hungarian (Budapest), Romanian (Bucharest), Slovenian (Ljubljana), Croatian (Zagreb), and Serbian (Belgrade) avant-gardes. The Middle and Central European avant-gardes are so-called minor or “non-paradigmatic” avant-gardes, which means that they are characterised by left- or right-leaning intellectual artistic practices typically linked with either private actions or the publication of small-circulation avant-garde magazines. According to Lev Kreft,

Speaking of the regional and cosmopolitan, as well as the relationship between (avant-garde) art and society in the context of Central European avant-gardes, we must begin by asserting that the avant-gardes were certainly not mainstream. They could be cosmopolitan, sometimes with a radical component of proletarian internationalism, and they could be nationalist, sometimes involving militant primitivism, but they were not central. Especially not in Central Europe: there, they were marginal and eccentric movements removed from mainstream ideologies of national arts and cultures, which were themselves typical of this region of belated modernisation. To call this part of Europe “Central” sounds ironic and the avant-gardes expressed that irony by attacking nation-building cultural ideologies inherited from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as by examining the central positioning of Western culture from the perspective of its decadence, especially following World War I. They were marginal both on account of being avant-gardes and Central European.<sup>14</sup>

Immediately following World War I and during the 1920s, the national avant-gardes confronted or linked with one another, giving rise to the notion of international art. The avant-garde was then redefined as the complex relationship between international artistic practices, while national avant-gardes were viewed in relation to international tendencies. The demise of the historical avant-gardes

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Timothy O. Benson, “Central European Avant-Gardes”, in *Central European Avant-Gardes: Exchange and Transformation, 1910–1930* (Los Angeles: LACMA, 2002), p. 15. Cf. Krisztina Passuth, *Treffpunkte der Avantgarden Ostmitteleuropa* (Budapest: Balassi, Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 2003), p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Lev Kreft, “Politike avangardi u Centralnoj Evropi”, *TkH*, no. 8, Belgrade, 2004, p. 9.

is dated to the early 1930s, when the Soviet Union, Germany, and Italy saw the solidification of totalitarian bolshevist, national-socialist, and fascist regimes.

### **A Case Study: The Avant-garde in Yugoslavia**

The “Yugoslav avant-gardes” denotes a multitude of transgressive, experimental, inter-media, and interdisciplinary phenomena in the interstices between literature and the fine arts in the Slavic south (Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina) between 1918 and 1935. During the 1910s, '20s, and early 1930s, the South Slavic cultural space saw the formation of specific avant-garde cultures such as the Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian avant-gardes. These avant-gardes were not mutually isolated, but defined by their inter-textual and inter-subjective exchanges and influences. Authors and artists such as Miroslav Krleža, Dimitrije Mitrović, Antun Gustav Matoš, Stanislav Vinaver, Tin Ujević, Mihailo Petrov, Branko Ve Poljanski, Ljubomir Micić, Jo Klek (Josip Seissel), Marijan Mikac, Dragan Aleksić, Marko Ristić, Avgust Černigoj, Edvard Stepančič, Josip Slavenski, Miloje Milojević, Vlado Habunek, Josip Kulundžić and others acted within the domains of Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, and Slovenian culture by generating a flow of ideas, polemical situations, and actions that produced an open, unstable, and inconsistent *avant-garde world* in Yugoslavia, i.e. the Balkans, Middle and Central Europe.

The condition of culture and the arts in the Slavic South before World War I was complex: the Kingdom of Serbia was a state where the national moderate-modernist cultures and initial values of bourgeois society were only just being established. There were significant influences from French culture. Slovenia, Croatia, Vojvodina, and Bosnia and Herzegovina were under Austro-Hungarian rule—their cultural milieu was determined, on the one hand, by the awakening of their national cultures and quest for their national identities and, on the other hand, by the mega-cultural framework of Central European modernity (cosmopolitanism and eclecticism, which emerged under the influence of cities such as Vienna, Budapest, Munich, Berlin, and Prague). It was a period when the political and cultural idea of Yugoslavdom was formed and realised as the project for a future communion of the South Slavic nations. The phenomena that anticipated the modernist and avant-garde positions that were current at the time were post-impressionism, symbolism, Secession, futurism, and expressionism.



For the most part, avant-garde tendencies may be observed in South Slavic lands that were under Austro-Hungarian rule between 1910 and 1917. In the journal *Ljubljanski zvon* (1909), Friderik Juvančič published informative pieces on futurist manifestoes and Marinetti's school. Parts of Marinetti's *Manifesto of Futurism* were also published in No. 3 of the Zagreb-based periodical *Savremenik*.

In *Bosanska vila* (Sarajevo, 1913), the poet, anarchist, and member of *Mlada Bosna* Dimitrije Mitrinović published his "Estetičke kontemplacije" (Aesthetic Contemplations), where he expounded ideas close to German expressionism and Italian futurism, constructing his own aesthetic-ethical vision of a new art and culture.<sup>15</sup>

In 1914, Joe (Joso) Matošić prepared the publication of a futurist magazine, *Zvrk*, in Zadar.<sup>16</sup> The magazine did not come out, and only sketches remain. Anton Aralica, Ulderiko Donadini, and, for sure, Anton Gustav Matoš are also mentioned as members of this futurist group of artists. Expressionist and futurist modes of expression are revealed in the poetry of Janko Polić Kamov and the poetry and dramatic writings of A. G. Matoš. Antun Branko Šimić was one of the leading activists of new art in Croatia, as well as a critic who wrote about Dadaism, expressionism, and neoclassical, i.e. constructive and geometric, painting.<sup>17</sup> In 1917, Miroslav Krleža published his "Croatian Rhapsody" ("Hrvatska rapsodija"), where he challenged the national mythology and poetics of Croatian Secession, and constructed an optimal projection of *cosmopolitanism*, hinting at avant-garde strivings towards the totality of the artistic. The magazines *Vijavica* (1917–1918) and *Juriš* (1919), published by Antun B. Šimić, were close to the expressionist tendencies and activities of the German journal *Der Sturm*. Krleža and Cesarec edited the expressionist journal *Plamen* (1919). In the Kingdom of Serbia, anticipations of expressionism, futurism, and cubism may be found in the poetry of Stanislav Vinaver (*Telegrafski soneti* [Telegraphic Sonnets], 1911; and "Manifest

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Dimitrije Mitrinović, "Estetičke kontemplacije", *Bosanska vila* XXVIII nos. 4, 5, 6, 10, 11–12, 13–14, 15–16, 17–18, 19, and 20, Mostar, 1913, pp. 49–52, 65–67, 91–92, 154–156, 173–174, 200–202, 223–225, 247–248, 268–269, 285.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Boro Pavlović, "Futurizam Zvrk", in *Ugodna pripovjest – Neobuhvatljivi eseji* (Zagreb: Disput, 2003), pp. 123–183.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Antun Branko Šimić, "Dada", "Ekspresionizam i svečovječanstvo", "Konstruktivno slikarstvo", "Slikarstvo i geometrija", in *Djela II* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost and Zagreb: August Cesarec, 1988).

ekspresionističke škole” [Manifesto of the Expressionist School], 1920), and the notion of bohemia and the myth of the cursed poet/artist in the works of Sima Pandurović and Vladislav Petković Dis.

The Yugoslav avant-garde—the Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, and Hungarian avant-garde in Vojvodina—belonged among the *minor or non-paradigmatic avant-gardes* in the space of Middle or Central Europe. It was close to the Czech, Hungarian, and Romanian avant-garde. It is characterised by expressing an *atmosphere* of modernity, urbanisation, and growing popular culture and mechanical media. It is also characterised by nomadic moving in the domain of *realised artistic freedoms*. Most of the artists associated with it came from intellectual and literary experimental practices, not from the production of fine arts. One might say that the “fine arts” practices and avant-gardist practices indeed remained in their own separate *worlds*, except for rare and brief collaborations between painters and avant-gardist activists, most notably Vilko Gecan with *Zenit* in Croatia, Mihailo S. Petrov with *Zenit* and Aleksić’s Dadaism in Serbia, Jo Klek with *Zenit* and, later, surrealism, in Croatia and Serbia, and Radojica Živanović-No in Serbia. One of the paradoxes of “Yugoslav art” is that all at the same time there were practices of a rather belated radical modernism appearing as “new” (expressionism, cubism, fauvism), emerging interdisciplinary avant-gardes (Dada, Zenitism, and constructivism), and a tendency to revert to order (neoclassicism, constructive painting, pan-realism, intimism) between 1920 and 1924.

With the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes and, later on, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, urbanised cultural spaces took shape in Ljubljana, Zagreb, and Belgrade, and stronger cultural interrelations were established between larger and smaller cities and towns. In cultural and political terms, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes and, later, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia were characterised by the establishment of bourgeois society, the constitution of moderate national modernisms, interethnic tension and rivalry, as well as the forming of international relations and joining of international movements in politics, economy, and culture. In such circumstances, there emerged avant-garde movements with clear programmatic postulates, which stood out from the modernist matrix by way of excess. For instance, in Zagreb, Zenitism referred to the German expressionist magazine *Der Sturm*, Hungarian activist magazine *MA*, and the subversive and rhetorical provocations of Italian

futurism. In Belgrade, Zenitism referred to Soviet radical, critical, and manifesto constructivism and the international avant-garde. Zenit realised the construct of the paradigm of “Balkanism”, owing its mythical impetus to the rhetoric of *Der Sturm*. Aleksić’s Dada performed its initial identifications by way of the Czech avant-garde in Prague and then came across German, let us say Hanover, Dada before transmitting its accomplishments back to Zagreb and Belgrade. Aleksić promoted the notion of Yugo-Dada. The Hungarian avant-garde in Subotica (Szabadka) and Novi Sad (Újvidék) was connected to Hungarian activism in exile, striving to link up with Serbian and Croatian avant-gardists, all the way to Zenit and Dada. Belgrade surrealism<sup>18</sup> was essentially affiliated with Parisian surrealism.

In diagrammatic terms, one may present the relationship of Yugoslav avant-garde phenomena as one of different cities and their cultural networking:

**ZAGREB**

*Vihor*

*Plamen*

*Juriš*

*Dada*

*Zenitism*

*treveleri*

*surrealism*

**RIJEKA (FIUME)**

*futurism/fascism*

**OSIJEK**

*Aleksić matinée*

**VINKOVCI**

*Dadaist conference*

**SISAK TOPUSKO PETRINJA**

*Zenitist vespers*

**ZADAR**

*futurism: Zvrk*

**LJUBLJANA**

*Svetokret*

*Rdeči pilot*

*Ferdo Delak*

*Tank*

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Milanka Todić (ed.), *Nemoguće Umetnost nadrealizma* (Belgrade: Muzej primenjene umetnosti, 2002); Jadranka Vinterhalter (ed.), *Prodori avangarde u hrvatskoj umjetnosti prve polovice 20. stoljeća* (Zagreb: Muzej suvremene umjetnosti, 2007).

**NOVO MESTO**

*Anton Podbevšek*

**TRIESTE**

*constructivism*

**BELGRADE**

*Zenitism*

*Post-Dada*

*Hipnos*

*surrealism*

**NOVI SAD/SUBOTICA**

*activism: Ūt and Hírlap*

**MOSTAR**

*Dimitrije Mitrinović*

The first interwar and entirely authorial and avant-garde periodical was *Svetokret: List za ekspediciju na severni pol čovekovog duha*, edited by Virgil Poljanski (Branko Micić, Branko Ve Poljanski) in Ljubljana in 1921. The magazine was entirely Poljanski's work. The rhetoric of its manifesto and contributions was mostly eclectic: expressionist-futurist. *Svetokret* had a prominently cosmopolitan and Yugoslav character; it was published by a Croatian Serb, as a pro-Dadaist, which means transgressive, intervention in Slovenian culture.

In Croatia, following its pre-WWI expressionist and futurist avant-garde, the early 1920s saw the emergence of a post-expressionist and pro- or post-Dadaist avant-garde. In 1921, the poet Ljubomir Micić founded in Zagreb the international magazine *Zenit*. In manifesto terms, he established a new “avant-garde Balkan movement”, which would, over the course of its six-year existence, come to embrace traits of post-Secession, expressionism, futurism, Dadaism, and constructivism. In the Yugoslav cultural space, Micić's work was characterised by paradoxical and polemical confrontation and clash between Croatian and Serbian culture; in other words, between two conflicting national ideologies following World War I. Zenitism emerged and was initially active in Zagreb between 1921 and 1923 before relocating to Belgrade between 1924 and 1926. In 1921–23,

Mićić and Poljanski formed an informal *Zagreb avant-garde circle* or *Zagreb avant-garde*.<sup>19</sup> However, Mićić was also in permanent conflict with Zagreb's official culture and therefore had to leave Zagreb in 1923 and move to Belgrade. On the other hand, the November–December 1921 issue of the Zagreb-based journal *Kritika* also marks a break between the avant-gardists and the modernists in Belgrade surrealism. The Belgrade-based literary group *Alfa* (Alek Braun, Miloš Crnjanski, Stanislav Krakov, Dušan Matić, Rastko Petrović, Boško Tokin, and Stanislav Vinaver) distanced themselves from Ljubomir Mićić's Zenitism.

Experimentation in the domain of theatre or, conditionally speaking, performance art was anticipated in the work of a group of *younger Zenitists* (Dragutin Herjanić, Josip Klek, Višnja Kranjčević, Zvonimir Megler, Vlado Pilar, Dušan Plavšić Jr., Čedo Plavšić, Miloš Somborski, and Miho Šen) called "Putnici" (Travellers) or "Treveleri" and active from 1922 to 1923 in Zagreb and partly in Belgrade. Two Dadaist international magazines were published: Dragan Aleksić's *Dada Tank* and *Dada Jazz* in Zagreb in 1922.<sup>20</sup> Branko Ve Poljanski published the anti-Dadaist magazine *Dada Jok*. *Dada Tank* and *Dada Jazz* collaborated with major European Dadaist artists, including Tristan Tzara, Kurt Schwitters, and Richard Huelsenbeck. In Vinkovci, Aleksić formed an informal Dadaist group. Aleksić also introduced the notion of *jugo-dada*, featuring Dadaist events (matinées) in several Yugoslav cities and towns: Zagreb, Belgrade, Osijek, Vinkovci, Novi Sad, and Split.

Another extraordinary phenomenon in the political, cultural, and artistic "situation" of Croatia, Yugoslavia, and Italy was the case of Rijeka between 1919 and 1945.<sup>21</sup> The Italian poet, nationalist, and fascist paramilitary leader Gabriele D'Annunzio, along with his paramilitary troops, i.e. legionary units, captured the city of Rijeka (Fiume) and established a micro-state there in September 1919. It was a period of unbridled and brutal violence and terror, especially against the city's non-Italian population. Military rule was imposed between late 1920 and early 1921, and the city was annexed by Italy in 1924. Along with D'Annunzio's

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Vera Horvat Pintarić, "Zagrebačka avangarda", *Josip Seissel* (Zagreb: Galerija Nova, 1978), pp. 7–12.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Gojko Tešić (ed.), *Dragan Aleksić Dada Tank* (Belgrade: Nolit, 1978).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Daina Glavočić, "Avangardne likovne pojave u Rijeci", in Jadranka Vinterhalter (ed.), *Prodori avangarde u hrvatskoj umjetnosti prve polovice 20. stoljeća* (Zagreb: Muzej suvremene umjetnosti, 2007), pp. 51–62.

troops, several Italian intellectuals close to Marinetti's futurist project also came to Rijeka. On that occasion, they also published a futurist manifesto, wherein they advocated resistance to every notion of control and military hierarchy, arguing for an active life, free love, and the *carnivalisation* of everyday life. A group of legionnaire-intellectuals advocated the founding of the society and movement called "Yoga – A Community of Free Spirit Striving for Perfection" (*Yoga – unione di spiriti liberi tendenti alla perfezione*). Rijeka's paramilitary, state, and futurist turmoil also involved the Danish musician and philosopher Léon Kochnitzky; American publicist Henry Furst; Ludovico Toeplitz; the writer Mario Carli; poet and futurist promoter Giovanni Comisso; and Swiss pilot, naturist, and vegetarian Guido Keller. In 1919, F. T. Marinetti was also briefly in Rijeka. The poet Mario Carli established his fascist-futurist platform of Rijeka (*fascio futurista fiumano*). At *Teatro Verdi*, he also staged a futurist play, announced as a new type of theatre. The legionnaire Umberto Gnata was active in painting, sculpture, architecture, and the construction of a contraption called the "syncromophone," which turned sounds into coloured lights. Rijeka's futurist movement was discontinued when regular units of the Italian army entered the city and imposed military rule during the "Bloody Christmas" of 1920. After Italy's annexation of Rijeka, the city's artistic scene was dominated by a group of artists who founded an artists' syndicate (*Sindacato di Belle Arti della Provincia del Carnaro – Fiume*), as well as apolitical artists whose individual development paths took them towards modernist painting, sculpture, and architecture, with Romolo Vennuci developing the most elaborate modernist oeuvre.

As a delegate of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, the poet August Cesarec visited the USSR in late 1923 and early 1924. For the leftwing pro-avant-garde magazine *LEF*, he wrote an informative piece, "LEF u Jugoslaviji" (LEF in Yugoslavia), and for *Književna republika* (Zagreb, 1924) published a text titled "Savremeni ruski slikari. Umetnost u revoluciji i apstrakcija u umetnosti. Kandinski, Maljevič, Tatlin" (Russian Contemporary Painters. Art in Revolution and Abstraction in Art. Kandinsky, Malevich, Tatlin). In that text, Cesarec mounted a radical leftist critique of liberal modern and avant-garde art, pointing to problems in the reception of avant-garde works in mass socialist culture, i.e. by the working class. Cesarec highlighted the complexities and contradictions of the emerging "socialist" art in the USSR.

Croatian surrealism<sup>22</sup> emerged during the late 1930s. Unlike Belgrade surrealism, it did not form as a movement but instead exhibited features of individual poetics. It was realised in the activities of theatre director Vlado Habunek, who maintained close ties to Belgrade surrealists, the architect Josip Seissel or Jo Klek in his post-Zenitist phase, and two poets close to surrealism, Šimo Vučetić and Drago Ivanišević; somewhat later, the leading figure of Croatian surrealism became Radovan Ivšić, who after WWII established strong links with the French leader of the surrealist movement, André Breton.

In the 1920s the avant-garde in Serbia<sup>23</sup> was characterised by rival trends: the activities of the Micić brothers and the Dadaist Dragan Aleksić from 1923 (this tendency might be defined as a Belgrade avant-garde represented by Serbs from Croatia) and a Belgrade avant-garde that emerged from modernist reconsiderations leading from the magazine *Putevi* (1922–24) via the almanac *Crno na belo* (1924) and the magazines *Hipnos* (1922–23), *Svedočanstva* (1924–25), and *50 u Evropi* (1928) to the Belgrade surrealist movement (*Nemoguće*, 1930; *Nadrealizam danas i ovde*, 1931–32; and various other surrealist publications). The avant-garde in Belgrade was characterised by publishing activities, most of all programme-oriented magazines and almanacs: Moni de Buli's *Crno na belo*, 1923; Branko Kovačević's *Almanah Branka Radičevića*, 1924; Maksim Goranović and Boško Tokin's *Čaša vode*, 1925; *Novi istok*, 1927; Zvezdan Vujadinović's *50 u Evropi* and *Nemoguće*, 1930; etc.

The avant-garde in Belgrade began with a multitude of competing, transgressive, innovative, and inter-media modernist, expressionist, futurist, pro-Dadaist, and surrealist events, realisations, and acts, and ended as a *post-avant-garde* by establishing and transcending surrealism in the direction of bourgeois liberal art or socialist realism.

In Zagreb, Ljubomir Micić initiated “Zenit – International Gallery of New Art” on the occasion of a “Zenitist vespers” held on 31 January 1923. Then, at the Stanković School of Music in Belgrade, he organised the *First Zenit International*

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Igor Zidić, (ed.), *Nadrealizam i hrvatska likovna umjetnost* (Zagreb: Umjetnički paviljon, 1972).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Gojko Tešić, *Srpska avangarda u polemičkom kontekstu (dvadesete godine)* (Novi Sad: Svetovi, 1991).

*Exhibition of New Art* in 1924. As a member of the Zenitist movement, Jo Klek exhibited his works at the exhibition *Contimporanul* in Bucharest, Romania and an exhibition of the group *Der Wurf* in Bielefeld, in Germany in 1924. In 1926 Ljubomir Micić, Marijan Mikac, and Branko Ve Poljanski represented the Yugoslav avant-garde at the international *Exhibition of Western Revolutionary Art* in Moscow. These exhibitions constituted a step forward, from a “magazine-based avant-garde” or “avant-garde of almanacs” towards a *fine-arts avant-garde*. The exhibition as a “medium” was thereby posited as a problem in artistic expression, presentation, and then also archiving.<sup>24</sup>

In Vojvodina—in Novi Sad and Subotica—the 1920s saw the activities of a post-expressionist, activist, and pro-Dadaist circle of émigré artists who had fled Horthy’s rightwing military dictatorship in Hungary.<sup>25</sup> These artists gathered around the Hungarian-language avant-garde magazine *Út* (1922–25) and newspaper *Hírlap*. *Út* was close to the Hungarian activism of Lajos Kassák, while Subotica-based Dadaists, gathered around the city’s Dada club and action programme of its Dada matinées (Zoltán Csuka, Endre Arató, Árpád Láng, and Miklós Fischer), were closer to Sándor Barta’s Dadaism. These Subotica Dadaists were in direct contact with Ljubomir Micić’s Zenitism and the Dadaism of Dragan Aleksić.

In Slovenia, avant-garde<sup>26</sup> movements were associated with Poljanski’s magazine *Svetokret* (1921), Anton Podbevšek’s magazine *Rdeči pilot* (The Red Pilot, 1922), *Ljubljanski zvon*, Ferdo Delak’s *Novi oder* (1924) and *Tank* (1927–28), as well as Srečko Kosovel’s experiments in poetry (1926) and Černigoj’s experiment in constructivist fine arts in Ljubljana (1924) and Trieste (1925–29). In April 1925, Poljanski organised a Zenitist vespers in Ljubljana’s *Mestni dom*. Ljubomir Micić was the Paris correspondent for the magazine *Tank*, where he tried to renew the ideas of Zenitism. Černigoj spent a semester at the Bauhaus avant-garde constructivist school in Weimar, where he studied with Wassily Kandinsky and

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Irina Subotić and Vidosava Golubović, *Zenit 1921–1926* (Belgrade: Narodna biblioteka Srbije, Institut za književnost i umetnost and Zagreb: SKD Prosvjeta, 2008).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Marija Cindori, “Aktivistička dadaistička matineja u Subotici”, in Dragomir Ugren (ed.), *Centralno-evropski aspekti vođođanskih avangardi 1920–2000. Granični fenomeni, fenomen ni granica* (Novi Sad: Muzej savremene likovne umetnosti, 2002), pp. 31–49.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Igor Zabel and Breda Ilich Klančnik (eds.), *Tank! Slovenska zgodovinska avangarda* (Ljubljana: Moderna galerija, 1998).



László Moholy-Nagy. In Trieste, Černigoj founded a constructivist group that included Giorgio Carmelich, Edvard Stepančič, Zorko Lah, Josip Vlah, Ivan/Giovanni Poljak, and Tea Černigoj. Černigoj's constructivist group accomplished a radical form of constructivist expression in the fine arts; his ideas may be compared with the results of Bauhaus constructivism and El Lissitzky's Soviet constructivism.<sup>27</sup> Trieste and Gorizia were home to the activities of the futurist group *The Futurist Movement of Venezia-Giulia*, led by Giorgio Carmelich, Emilio Dolfi, and Pocarini, who was close to the Slovenian avant-garde artist Milko Bambič. Following his constructivist phase and travels around Europe (Florence, Vienna, Brno, and Prague), Edvard Stepančič studied painting at the *Académie moderne* in Paris in 1930 and part of 1931. In 1931 he settled in Belgrade, where he remained until his death in 1991.

One might also mention certain other links between artists and students at the Bauhaus with former Yugoslavia's cultural space. According to the Bauhaus's lists of students, the following students were also from the Kingdom of Yugoslavia or the South Slavic space: Maria Bárányai, Otti Berger, Avgust/Augusto Černigoj, August Bohutinski, Selman Selmanagić, Ivana Tomljenović, and Henrik Stefan.<sup>28</sup>

Even in its most radical aspects, the fine arts world was far from avant-gardist reflections, closed off in its modernist struggles for the autonomy of its media, whether in painting, sculpture, or graphic art. It produced no specific notion of a Yugoslav (Dragan Aleksić) or Balkan (Ljubomir Micić) avant-garde. Some specificities may be singled out and recognised in the domain of the inter-textual, inter-pictorial, and inter-media overlappings of the literary and media arts. A common feature of the Croatian, Serbian, Hungarian, and Slovenian avant-garde was the initial moment of literary experiments, which were transformed, by means of producing magazines as works of art, into an *avant-garde inter-textual and poly-generic model of expression*. The fundamental junctures in the history of the Yugoslav avant-garde from 1921 to 1932 were marked by the magazines *Svetokret*, *Zenit*, *Dada Tank*, *Dada Jazz*, *Dada Jok*, *Út*, *Hipnos*, *50 u Evropi*, *Rdeči*

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Peter Krečič, *Slovenski Konstruktivizem in njegovi evropski okviri* (Maribor: Založba Obzorja, 1989).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Želimir Košćević (ed.), *Tendencije avangardi u hrvatskoj modernoj umetnosti 1919–1941* (Zagreb: Galerija suvremene likovne umetnosti, 1982–1983).

*pilot*, *Novi oder*, and *Tank*; and by the almanacs *Nemoguće* and *Nadrealizam danas i ovde*. These magazines were not only literary works or mediators (communicators) with a specific fine-art typography, but also inter-textual and inter-pictorial experimental creations that constituted a specific avant-garde model of textual-visual expression. The magazine was an avant-garde artistic product or *avant-garde work of art*. It was the main medium and space for the intervention of the Yugoslav avant-gardes during the interwar period. Yugoslav avant-gardists' creative and activist procedures underwent similar evolutionary paths, from an expressionist and revolutionary, heightened poetic and manifesto rhetoric, characteristic of the spiritual climate of the trauma and drama of WWI, to the collage-montage techniques of linking words and images into an inter-generic creation of visual text (visual poetry, collages, and montages) and the designing of magazines and artists' books (the Dadaists, Zenitists, surrealists, and constructivists).

In certain authors, one may note moving from literary-fine-arts experiments towards para-theatrical experiments (performance art): the Zenitist vespers in Zagreb, Belgrade, Ljubljana, Petrinja, Topusko, and Sisak; the Dadaist matinées and actions in Prague, Zagreb, Belgrade, Osijek, Vinkovci, and Subotica; and Delak's futurist-constructivist theatre experiments in Ljubljana and Gorizia.

The International Theatre Exposition, a major international exhibition curated by Friedrich Kiesler and Jean Heap, held at the Steinway Building in New York between 27 February and 15 March 1926, offered a presentation of international avant-garde in theatre and stage design: Frederick Kiesler, Josef Čapek, Georges Braque, Fernand Léger, Francis Picabia, Marcel Brauer, Vera Idelson, Hans Richter, Oskar Schlemmer, Vilmos Huszár, László Moholy-Nagy, Farkas Molnár, Fortunato Depero, Enrico Prampolini, Luigi Russolo, Léon Bakst, Aleksandra Ekster, Meyerhold's theatre, Nijinski, Alexander Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova, *Revolutionary Theatre*, etc. Yugoslavia was represented by stage designers Ljubo Babić and Sergej Glumac.<sup>29</sup>

Movements and groups are typically led by strong individuals: Zenitism was led by Ljubomir Micić, Yugoslav Dadaism by Dragan Aleksić, hypnism by Rade

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Ivan Berislav Vodopija (ed.), *Avangardni teatar Sergija Glumca* (Zagreb: Ex Libris, 2004).

Drainac, Yugoslav constructivism by Avgust Černigoj, and Yugoslav surrealism by Marko Ristić. It often happened that an entire movement came to be identified with the activity of a single figure: thus Dragan Aleksić was the “Dada-man” or carrier of the entire movement, while Ljubomir Micić was the leader and at certain times the only consistent adherent of Zenitism, who assembled *external* collaborators. Marko Ristić was the organiser and most active Belgrade surrealist, and, adhering to the tradition of surrealist movement, he was also its authoritarian leader (*traumatic father*), like André Breton.

The Yugoslav avant-garde was characterised by relations of rivalry and conflicted polemics between the avant-gardists and modernists, the Zenitists and Dadaists, the Zenitists and surrealists, the avant-garde artists and socially engaged artists, the Party’s intellectual left and the intellectual left that was not affiliated with the Communist Party. In terms of ideology, the Yugoslav avant-gardes were left-oriented avant-gardes, which means that they were either directly and politically (via the Party) or indirectly (via manifestoes) associated with Marxism and the activities of the communist party; in other words, they were critically subversive regarding the values, meanings, and models of expression of modern bourgeois society and its culture, and they were anti-authoritarian, anarchic, and excessive in terms of their specific and intra-avant-garde characteristics (ideals of freedom, difference, and otherness).



## Povzetki | Abstracts

Guillaume Sibertin-Blanc

### **Psychoanalysis, Anthropological Differences, and Political Forms: For an Intensive Difference**

Key words: democratic discourse and repetition, intensive-extensive universalities, equality and difference, political anthropology, Balibar

This article deals with the programme of a “topography” of the political subject: it is an attempt at writing the politics of “modernity” and the typical aporias inherent in its discursive regimes, in order to correlate the question of political subjectivation with the unconscious. Its purpose is not an “applied psychoanalysis”, nor a political psychology, but a problematisation of what repeats itself in politics, and what constitutes a “symptom” in such a repetition. Following Etienne Balibar’s analyses of the “*proposition d’égalité*” and the “three concepts of politics”, I attempt to articulate three components of the political modernity: the order of *repetition*, of which we have to understand the logics to catch its binding effect; the *equivocity* of the figures of the political subject, which is the main effect of this compulsion of repetition, but yet the only way to make it politically and subjectively productive; the contradiction between the universality of political discourse and its *limit*, a limit that politics confronts less as a border with its “extensive” other (as being “non-political”) than as the internal intensive differences putting politics into crisis (as being “impolitical”).

Guillaume Sibertin-Blanc

### **Psihoanaliza, antropološke razlike in politične forme: za intenzivno razliko**

Ključne besede: demokratični diskurz in ponavljanje, intenzivno-ekstenzivne univerzalnosti, enakost in razlika, politična antropologija, Balibar

Pričujoči članek se ukvarja s programom “topografije” političnega subjekta. Je poskus pisanja politike “moderne” in tipičnih aporij, notranjih njenim diskurzivnim režimom, zato da bi izpostavil zvezo med vprašanjem politične subjektivacije in nezavednim. Članek ne meri na “uporabno psihoanalizo”, niti na politično psihologijo, temveč na problematizacijo tistega, kar se v politiki ponavlja, kar tvori “simptom” v takem ponavljanju. Sledeč Balibarjevimi analizam “propozicije o enakosti-svobodi” in “trem pojmom politike”, avtor artikulira tri sestavine politične moderne: red *ponavljanja*, čigar logiko moramo dojeti, zato da bi lahko zapopadli njegov učinek povezovanje: *ekvivokacija* figure političnega subjekta, ki je poglobilni učinek te prisile k ponavljanju, a hkrati tudi edini način, kako ga narediti

politično in subjektivno produktivno: protislovje med univerzalnostjo političnega diskurza in njegovo *mejo*, ki jo politika srečuje manj v obliki meje z njenim “ekstenzivnim” drugim (kot “ne-politično”) kakor v obliki notranjih intenzivnih razlik, ki izzovejo krizo politike (kot “impolitično”).

Rodrigo De La Fabián

### **On the Imperative of Happiness in Contemporary Neoliberalism. A Psychoanalytical Reading of the New Spirit of Capitalism**

Keywords: happiness, enjoyment; Lacan; positive psychology; neoliberalism

The article aims to make a psychoanalytic reading of the evolution of the spirit of capitalism. By reading Lacan, the paper shows that to achieve this we must distinguish between the level of enjoyment and that of happiness. If, in capitalism, the former has always remained the same, the latter, on the other hand, has undergone remarkable historical changes. Returning to the genealogy of neoliberalism made by Foucault in the late 1970s, and by analysing the recent expansion of the new discourses on happiness (positive psychology, the happiness index, etc.), the article shows three moments of the spirit of capitalism: the first, where the promise of happiness is replaced by that of enjoyment; the second, where the entrepreneur of himself finds happiness as a promise; the third, where happiness is not just a promise but also capital that the neoliberal subject must enhance.

Rodrigo De La Fabián

### **O imperativu sreče v sodobnem neoliberalizmu. Psihoanalitično branje Novega duha kapitalizma**

Ključne besede: sreča, užitek, pozitivna psihologija, neoliberalizem

V tem članku avtor poskusi predstaviti psihoanalitično branje razvoja duha kapitalizma. Opirajoč se na branje Lacana, članek pokaže, da je to mogoče doseči, če ločujemo med dvema ravnema užitka in sreče. Če je v kapitalizmu prvi ostal nespremenjen, je druga doživela velike zgodovinske spremembe. Opirajoč se na genealogijo neoliberalizma, kot jo srečamo pri Foucaultu poznih sedemdesetih let, in analizirajoč aktualno širjenje novih diskurzov o sreči (pozitivna psihologija, indeks sreče itn.), članek izpostavi tri momente duha kapitalizma: prvič, moment, ko obljubo sreče zamenja obljuba užitka; drugič, moment, ko sam podjetnik odkrije srečo kot obljubo; tretjič, moment, ko sreča ni več obljuba, temveč kapital, ki ga mora neoliberalni subjekt krepiti.

Vladimir Sařatle

### **A Certain Latitude: Normativity and Contingence in Georges Canguilhem's Biopolitics**

Keywords: normativity, contingency, life, biopolitics, Canguilhem, errancy

The article aims to discuss the concepts of normativity and contingency in Georges Canguilhem's work. This discussion will open a path to a reinterpretation of the notion of biopolitics, and seeks the reintegration of a renewed vitalism within the contemporary political debate.

Vladimir Sařatle

### **O neki določeni řirini: normativnost in kontingenca v biopolitiki Georgesa Canguilhema**

Ključne besede: normativnost, kontingenca, řivljenje, biopolitika, Canguilhem, tavanje

Priujuoči članek raziskuje koncepta normativnosti in kontingenca v delu Georgesa Canguilhema. Ta raziskava naj bi odprla pot za novo interpretacijo pojma biopolitike in na tej podlagi omogočila vključitve obnovljenega vitalizma v sodobno politično razpravo.

Cindy Zeiher

### **The Subject and the Act: A Necessary *Folie à Deux* to Think Politics**

Keywords: Act, Event, Subject, *Folie à Deux*, Politics, Desire, Sacrifice

The universalization of the symptom, it can be argued, is most visible within the realm of politics. The symptom allows for contingency to take over the subject, à deux, and in turn to reveal a disarming vulnerability. At this juncture the Real of enjoyment and the signifying structure expose an antagonistic relation, particularly in so far as this points to the subject's ambivalence in confronting the problem of freedom from the symptom. Although Lacan seldom uses the word, freedom permeates his seminars and is precisely located within the psychoanalytic act: that is, subjects reluctantly desire to be freed from the bondage of their symptom through a confrontational and deliberate handling of it. However, the subject and the act (which is the unseen, omnipotent Other) although entwined are never truly connected as one within unavoidable misrecognition. Whereas the political act can be considered indeterminable, the political subject is equally so. It is here that for the divided subject the proximity of desire determines the act which in turn requires recognition, even transgression of the subject's symptom. A curious and inevitable illusion manifests, that in order for the subject to remain in politics, a kind of symbolic inner voice or faithfulness to the fantasy, must emerge, a *folie à deux*. In this the subject's drive for politics remains both elusive yet intact because of its function in keep-

ing alive the symptom driving desire for emancipation via the political act. Through exposing the political act to a serious recognition of the symptom, the subject must bear the consequences of this identification, for better or worse. Here, a truly mad phenomenon occurs where the subject recognises him/herself only through both the inevitability and the subsequent failure of the political act, thereby validating recognition of the symptom but never attaining complete freedom from it.

Cindy Zeiher

### **Subjekt in dejanje: nujnost *folie à deux* za mišljenje politike**

Ključne besede: dejanje, dogodek, subjekt, *folie à deux*, politika, želja, žrtev

V pričujočem tekstu trdimo, da je univerzalizacija simptoma najbolj vidna na področju politike. Simptom omogoča kontingentnosti, da zajame subjekta *à deux*, hkrati pa omogoči razkritje njegove razorožujoče ranljivosti. V sedanji konjunkturi se pokaže, da je razmerje med realnim užitka in označevalno strukturo antagonistično, še zlasti zato, ker tako razmerje razkriva subjektovo dvoumnost pri soočenju s problemom svobode z vidika simptoma. Četudi Lacan le redko uporablja ta izraz, svoboda preveva njegove seminarje, natančneje pa je locirana v problematiko psihoanalitičnega dejanja, se pravi, subjekti se le redko želijo osvoboditi se spon njihovega simptoma tako, da se z njim soočijo oziroma da z njim odločno rokujejo. Po drugi strani pa subjekt in dejanje (ki je nevidni, vsemogočni Drugi), četudi med seboj prepletena, nista nikdar zares povezana kot eno, ne da bi to vključevalo neogibno spregledanje. Če je mogoče politično dejanje obravnavati kot nedoločno, to velja tudi za političnega subjekta. Tu lahko pokažemo, da za razcepljenega subjekta bližina želje dejanje terja pripoznanje, še več, preseženje subjektovega simptoma. Nenavadna, a neogibna iluzija kaže, da je pogoj za to, da subjekt, če naj ostane v polju politike, nekakšen notranji glas ali zvestoba fantazmi oziroma vznik *folie à deux*. V tej konstelaciji ostaja subjektov gon k politiki nekaj izmikajočega se in hkrati neodpravljivega, ker je prav ta gon tisti, ki – prek političnega dejanja – ohranja živo željo po emancipaciji, ki jo implicira simptom. Vzpostavitev povezave med političnim dejanjem in pripoznanjem simptoma zahteva od subjekta, da nosi posledice te identifikacije. Resnično nor pojav pri tem pa nastopi, ko subjekt prepozna sebe edino prek neogibnosti političnega dejanja in njegovega posledičnega spodleta. Simptom je na ta način sicer potrjen, čeprav ni osvoboditev od sintoma nikdar popolnoma dosežena.



Rok Benčin

## Melancholy, or the Metaphysics of Fictional Sadness

Key words: melancholy, metaphysics, lost object, possible world, Sigmund Freud, Walter Benjamin, Theodor W. Adorno, Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou

In relation to Badiou's "metaphysics of real happiness", the essay explores psychoanalytical (Freud) and philosophical (Benjamin) accounts of melancholy with a view to developing a complementary metaphysics of sadness. It argues that melancholy is not restricted to the suffering of an individual confined to his or her finitude, but is itself, like Badiou's real happiness, related to infinity, subjectivity, and truth. The essay shows this by demonstrating how the principle characteristic of the melancholic object is not its status as being lost, but rather its indeterminacy and its monadic structure. Melancholy generates such objects, which seem, on the one hand, alien to reality, and yet, on the other, which enable the subjective and fictitious development of other possible worlds.

Rok Benčin

## Melanholija ali metafizika fiktivne žalosti

Ključne besede: melanholija, metafizika, izgubljeni objekt, možni svet, Sigmund Freud, Walter Benjamin, Theodor W. Adorno, Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou

Na sledi Badioujeve »metafizike realne sreče« razprava raziskuje psihoanalitične (Freud) in filozofske (Benjamin) razlage melanholije, z namenom razviti komplementarno metafiziko žalosti. Trdimo namreč, da melanholije ne moremo zvesti na trpljenje posameznika, obsojenega na svojo končnost, temveč je tudi sama, podobno kot Badioujeva realna sreča, povezana z neskončnostjo, subjektivnostjo in resnico. Do te teze pridemo tako, da pokažemo, kako osrednja značilnost melanholičnega objekta ni njegova izgubljenost, temveč njegova nedoločenost in monadična struktura. Melanholija proizvaja takšne objekte, ki se po eni strani zdijo realnosti tuji, po drugi pa omogočajo subjektivno in fikcijsko razvitje drugih možnih svetov.

Marcus Coelen

## Prolegomena to the Writing of Affect

Key words: affects, psychoanalysis, politics, Freud, identification "Hilfslosigkeit", writing

The article is a critical discussion of the concepts of "affect" in some of those positions of contemporary political theory that are based in (a critique of) psychoanalysis. Freud's definition of "identification" – the key notion in his *Group Psychology and the Analysis of Ego* – as both a psychic mechanism and an affect – helps to elucidate the aporetic status of affects (and mechanisms) in psychoanalysis and thus in psychoanalytically informed

political theory. Instead of providing a link or shuttle between psychoanalysis and political thought and practice, affect, understood as the fundamental “*Hilfslosigkeit*”, and as the enigma of identification, severs psychoanalysis from the political. This cleavage is a place of incalculable invention: writing might be a name for it.

Marcus Coelen

### **Prolegomena k pisanju afekta**

Ključne besede: afekti, psihoanaliza, politika, Freud, identifikacija “*Hilfslosigkeit*”, pisanje

Pričujoči članek je kritična razprava o pojmu afekta, kot nastopa v tistih stališčih sodobne politične terorije, ki se opirajo na psihoanalizo oziroma jo kritizirajo. Freudova definicija “identifikacije” – ključnega pojma v njegovi *Množični psihologiji in analizi jaza* – kot psihičnega mehanizma in hkrati afekta – nam omogoča pojasniti aporetični status afektov (in mehanizmov) v psihoanalizi in, posledično, v politični teoriji, kolikor se opira na psihoanalizo. Namesto da bi vzpostavil vez med psihoanalizo in politično mislijo ter prakso, afekt, dojet kot izvorna “*Hilfslosigkeit*”, in kot zagonetka identifikacije, odreže psihoanalizo od politike. Ta razcep je obenem kraj za nepredvidljivo invencijo: pisanje bi lahko bilo ime za tako invencijo.

Mojca Puncer

### **The Politics of Aesthetics of Contemporary Art in Slovenia and its Avant-Garde Sources**

Key words: avant-garde art, participation, contemporary art in Slovenia, politics of aesthetics, Jacques Rancière

In addressing contemporary participatory, community-based art practices in Slovenia, this paper is inspired by Jacques Rancière’s rehabilitation of aesthetics as a new philosophy of *aisthesis*. This new philosophy of sensation and perception is radically different from the aesthetics and philosophy of art that primarily concern the aesthetics of a work of art. Rancière prefers to talk about the aesthetic regime of art that addresses the complex and contradictory relationship between the autonomy of art and the overcoming of the boundaries separating art and life. Such an overcoming is in the foundation of both avant-garde art as well as contemporary art practices, which are the focus of our discussion. The efforts of emerging participatory art in the 1990s to achieve social change follow the avant-garde movements of the 20th century. The paper aims to contribute to the analysis of community-oriented art from aesthetic and political perspectives and to evaluate the significance of the avant-garde heritage with respect to continuity in the articulation of *common/community* in art.

Mojca Puncer

## Politika estetike sodobne umetnosti na Slovenskem in njeni avantgardni viri

Ključne besede: avantgardna umetnost, participacija, sodobna umetnost v Sloveniji, politika estetike, Jacques Rancière

Prispevek se pri obravnavi sodobnih participatornih, skupnostno naravnanih umetniških praks na Slovenskem navdihuje v Rancièrovi rehabilitaciji estetike kot nove filozofije *aisthesis*. Ta nova filozofija čutenja in zaznave se bistveno razlikuje od estetike kot filozofije umetnosti, ki je predvsem estetika umetniškega dela. Rancière raje govori o estetskem režimu umetnosti, ki postavlja v kompleksno in protislovno razmerje avtonomijo umetnosti in preseganje meja med umetnostjo in življenjem. Takšno razmerje je v temelju tako avantgardne umetnosti kot tudi tistih sodobnih umetniških praks, ki so v fokusu naše razprave. Vzponu participatorne umetnosti v devetdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja v njenih prizadevanjih za družbeno spremembo predhodijo avantgardna gibanja 20. stoletja. Razprava želi prispevati k analizi pojava participatorne umetnosti z estetske in politične perspektive ter pri tem ovrednotiti tudi pomen avantgardne dediščine v luči kontinuitete artikulacije skupn(ostn)ega v umetnosti.

Wang Jianjiang

## The Bustle and the Absence of *Zhuyi*. The Example of Chinese Aesthetics

Key words: Chinese philosophy and aesthetics, bustle of *Zhuyi*, absence of *Zhuyi*, construction of *Zhuyi*

Compared with the rapid development of Chinese economy, which is the leading one in the world, modern philosophy and aesthetics in China are in a position that is subordinate to the West. In contemporary Chinese aesthetics, for instance, there have occurred heated discussions of and a craze for aesthetics as well as various rampant *Zhuyi* in the 1950s and 1980s. However, the debate of *Zhuyi* in the 1950s was described as politicized and of a low level. The bustle of *Zhuyi* in the 1980s bore witness to all kinds of doctrines and “-isms” in Western philosophy and aesthetics that also found their way into China, though Chinese philosophers and aestheticians remained merely spectators to these processes. A closer look can disclose the reasons behind the absence of *Zhuyi* in Chinese philosophy and reveal the roles played by aesthetics and the humanities as a whole in the earlier bustle of *Zhuyi*. There are subjective and objective reasons for the weakness of Chinese academic power. There exists a severe imbalance between underdeveloped Chinese philosophy and aesthetics and the developed economy. Eliminating

the imbalance is essential for China to pursue development further, but the emergence of a new balance is not possible without the establishment of *Zhuyi* and schools.

Wang Jianjiang

### **Zmešnjava in odsotnost *Zhuyi*. Primer kitajske estetike**

Ključne besede: kitajska filozofija in estetika, zmešnjava in odsotnost *Zhuyi*, izgradnja *Zhuyi*

V primerjavi s hitrim razvojem kitajskega gospodarstva, ki je vodilno v svetu, se moderna filozofija in estetika na Kitajskem nahajata v podrejenem položaju glede na Zahod. V sodobni kitajski estetiki na primer, so potekale vroče razprave o estetiki, nad njo so se navduševali, v petdesetih in osemdesetih letih pa je prišlo tudi do raznih nekontroliranih *Zhuyi*. V petdesetih letih so debate okrog *Zhuyi* opisovali kot politizirane in na nizki ravni. Navdušenje nad *Zhuyi* v osemdesetih letih je pričalo o vsakovrstnih doktrinah in »izmih« v Zahodni filozofiji in estetiki, ki so našle pot na Kitajsko, pa čeprav so kitajski filozofi ostali le goli opazovalci procesov. Podrobnejši pogled lahko razkrije razloge izza odsotnosti *Zhuyi* v kitajski filozofiji in razkrije vloge, ki sta jih estetika in humanistika kot celota igrali v zgodnejši zmešnjavi okrog *Zhuyi*. Obstajajo subjektivni in objektivni razlogi za šibkost kitajske akademske moči. Obstaja tudi izrazito neravnovesje med slabo razvito kitajsko filozofijo in estetiko ter razvitim gospodarstvom. Odstraniti to neravnovesje je za Kitajsko bistveno, v kolikor se hoče razvijati naprej, toda nastop novega ravnovesja ni možen brez vzpostavitve *Zhuyi* in šol.

Aleš Erjavec

### **Revolutions and the Avant-Gardes**

Key words: revolution, aesthetic revolution, art, aesthetic avant-gardes, aesthetic revolution, André Malraux, Jacques Rancière

The author explores the meanings of “revolution” in the last two centuries and points to the ways in which the term was employed in philosophy, sciences, and in relation to avant-garde movements in art. He shows how the paradigmatic and subversive meaning of the term arose soon after the French Revolution and was developed by a series of authors, ranging from Immanuel Kant to André Malraux and recently Jacques Rancière, only to be widely proclaimed as obsolete in the last decade. He then explores various usages of the term “aesthetic revolution” and argues that it can serve a very productive function in determining some of the specifics of the avant-gardes. Then the essential connection between political and social revolution and revolution in art is the revolution in art is demonstrated. In this respect the author agrees with Miklós Szabolcsi, who in 1970s suggested that the two are essentially linked and interdependent, and that one cannot ex-

ist without the presence of the other. In the conclusion the author explores ways in which the avant-gardes might reappear.

Aleš Erjavec

### Revolucije in avantgarde

Ključne besede: revolucija, estetika, estetska revolucija, umetnost, estetske avantgarde, estetska revolucija, André Malraux, Jacques Rancière

Avtor obravnava pomene »revolucije« v zadnjih dveh stoletjih ter izpostavi načine, na katere je bil izraz uporabljen v filozofiji, znanostih ter v odnosu na avantgardna gibanja v umetnosti. Pokaže kako je paradigmatični in subverzivni pomen izraza nastopil kmalu po francoskih revoluciji in kako ga je dalje razvijala vrsta avtorjev, ki segajo od Immanuela Kanta do Andréja Malrauxa ter pred nedavnim tudi Jacquesa Rancièra, da bi izraz v zadnjem desetletju proglasili za zastarelega. V nadaljevanju avtor razišče pomene izraza »estetska revolucija« ter trdi, da lahko služi produktivnemu namenu pri določanju nekatereh značilnosti avantgard. Nato opozori na bistveno povezavo med politično in socialno revolucijo ter revolucijo v umetnosti. V tem pogledu se strinja s Miklósem Szabolcsijem, ki je v sedemdesetih letih preteklega stoletja predlagal, da sta obe avantgardi bistveno medsebojno povezani in odvisni, ter da ena ne more obstajati brez navzočnosti druge. Avtor zaključí z raziskavo načinov, na katere bi se avantgarde lahko znova vrnil.

Miško Šuvakovič

### Avant-gardes in Yugoslavia

Keywords: the avant-garde, Yugoslavia, Yugoslav avant-gardes, modernist culture, futurism, Dada, *Zenit*, activism, surrealism, internationalism

In his paper the author presents theoretical interpretations of artistic and cultural relations between different avant-garde practices (Dada, Zenitism, surrealism, constructivism) in the territory of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The avant-garde was the *leading formation*, perhaps also *vanguard*, of the “historical development” of modernism. For the most part, the notion of modernity comprises the culture of Western societies from the mid 18th century to the final third of the 20th century. The notion of modernism denotes the culture and art of modern liberal society, although one could also speak of complex reactions to “liberal modernism” in the political practices of *modern totalitarianisms* (National Socialism, fascism, Bolshevism). Liberal modernism is predicated on a progressive development of society, culture, and art, as well as projections, positings, and realisations of *projects of modernisation*, i.e. *modernity*. Modernist culture and art are practices of industrial society and the high degree of professionalization attained thereby, as well as the cultural,

political, and aesthetic autonomy of the social disciplines. Avant-garde art emerges within modern art, culture, and society as a radical, excessive, transgressive, and experimental artistic and cultural practice. “Yugoslav avant-gardes” refers to a multitude of transgressive, experimental, inter-media, and interdisciplinary phenomena in the inter-space between literature and the visual arts in the Slavic south (Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina) between 1918 and 1935. In the 1910s, ’20s, and early ’30s, the South Slavic cultural space saw the formation of specific avant-garde cultures, such as the Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian avant-gardes. These avant-gardes were not mutually isolated, but defined by international, inter-textual, and inter-subjective influences and exchanges.

Miško Šuvaković

### **Avantgarde v Jugoslaviji**

Ključne besede: avantgarda, Jugoslavija, jugoslovanske avantgarde, modernistična kultura, futurizem, Dada, *Zenit*, aktivizem, nadrealizem, internacionalizem

V članku predstavi avtor teoretske razlage umetniških in kulturnih odnosov med različnimi avantgardnimi praksami (dada, zenitizem, nadrealizem, konstruktivizem) na ozemlju Kraljevine Srbov, Hrvatov in Slovencev ter Kraljevine Jugoslavije. Avantgarda je bila vodilna formacija, morda tudi avantgarda »zgodovinskega napredovanja« modernizma. Pojem modernosti zajema zlasti kulturo zahodnih družb od srede osemnajstega stoletja do zaključne tretjine dvajsetega. Pojem modernizma označuje kulturo in umetnost moderne liberalne družbe, čeprav bi lahko govorili tudi o kompleksnih odzivih na »liberalni kapitalizem« v političnih praksah *modernih totalitarizmov* (nacionalsocializem, fašizem, boljševizem). Liberalni modernizem temelji na napredujočem nadaljevanju družbe, kulture in umetnosti, kot tudi projekcij, postavitev in uresničitev *projektov modernizacije*, t.j. modernosti. Modernistična kultura in umetnost sta praksi industrijske družbe in visoke stopnje profesionalizacije, ki sta jo tako pridobili, kot tudi kulturne, politične in estetske avtonomije družbenih disciplin. Avantgardna umetnost se pojavi znotraj moderne umetnosti, kulture in družbe kot radikalna, presežna, eksperimentalna umetnostna in kulturna praksa. Izraz »Jugoslovanske avantgarde« se navezuje na množico presežnih, eksperimentalnih, inter-medijskih pojavov v medprostoru med literaturo in vizualnimi umetnostmi na slovanskem jugu (Srbija, Hrvaška, Slovenija ter Bosna in Hercegovina) med leti 1918 in 1935. V prvem, drugem ter v zgodnjem delu tretjega desetletja preteklega stoletja je bil južnoslovanski prostor priča oblikovanju specifičnih avantgardnih kultur, kakršni so bile srbska, hrvaška in slovenska. Te avantgarde niso bile medsebojno izolirane, pač pa so jih določali, mednarodni, intertekstualni in intersubjektivni vplivi in izmenjave.

## Obvestilo avtorjem

Prispevki so lahko v slovenskem, angleškem, francoskem ali nemškem jeziku.

Uredništvo ne sprejema prispevkov, ki so bili že objavljeni ali istočasno poslani v objavo drugam.

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1. Gilles-Gaston Granger, *Pour la connaissance philosophique*, Odile Jacob, Pariz 1988, str. 57.
2. Cf. Charles Taylor, "Rationality", v: M. Hollis, S. Lukes (ur.), *Rationality and Relativism*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1983, str. 87–105.
3. Granger, *op. cit.*, str. 31.
4. *Ibid.*, str. 49.
5. Friedrich Rapp, "Observational Data and Scientific Progress", *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, Oxford, 11 (2/1980), str. 153.

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1. Gilles-Gaston Granger, *Pour la connaissance philosophique*, Odile Jacob, Paris 1988, p. 123.
2. Cf. Charles Taylor, "Rationality", in: M. Hollis, S. Lukes (Eds.), *Rationality and Relativism*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1983, pp. 87–105.
3. Granger, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
5. Friedrich Rapp, "Observational Data and Scientific Progress", *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, Oxford, 11 (2/1980), p. 153.

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# Filozofski vestnik

ISSN 0353-4510

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Izid revije je finančno podprla Javna agencija za raziskovalno dejavnost Republike Slovenije. Filozofski vestnik je ustanovila Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti.

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*Filozofski vestnik is published with the support of the Slovenian Research Agency. Filozofski vestnik was founded by the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts.*





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