
Žarko Paić: NEOLIBERALISM, OLIGARCHY AND POLITICS OF THE EVENT: AT THE EDGE OF CHAOS.

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If the task of philosophy has traditionally been defined as the task of thinking the time in which it takes place, then attempting to rethink the essence and modernity of the epoch in which we live today is a very challenging task. The question of human essence as a necessary pre-condition of any philosophy concerns, in fact, how one relates to oneself. In this sense, one of the most prominent Croatian philosophers, Vanja Sutlić, in his book *Essence and Contemporaneity* (originally published half a century ago), lapidary concludes that the basic task of contemporary philosophy is the thought of reaching into the historical composition of being human and being itself. To reach the essence of the modern world philosophically—that is the task of true thinking. Precisely in the wake of such a predicament arises the new book by Žarko Paić *Neoliberalism, Oligarchy and Politics of the Event*, symbolically subtitled: *At the Edge of Chaos*. In the wake of the abovementioned uneasiness regarding the determination of the contemporary world, Paić gives a very precise and unambiguous formulation: the title itself indicates that in order to understand today's socio-political constellation, it is necessary primarily to understand the

techno-scientific set of information and communication technologies, and to grasp that they largely determine the postulates of modern politics.

In the effort to respond to this aporia, Paić critically refers to numerous contemporary theories of sovereignty, the spiritual crisis of Europe, the metapolitics of identity, and the post-history biopolitics, leading a dialogue with fundamental thinkers in comprehensive, studious, brilliantly argued, and multifaceted chapters, as well as reflecting on the 21st century “philosophical classics”—from Kojève to Carl Schmitt, from Rancière to Badiou. As the author himself points out, this book deals with “an analysis of the effects of a global order that governs the environment through the logic of a self-generated network. The system is, however, formally based on a framework of liberal democracy. But in reality, ideas of freedom are transformed into their opposite. Instead of establishing the power of a sovereign people, the rule of the corporative constituted elites is at work.” This is precisely the main aspect of Paić’s reflections: if in many previous books the emphasis was on the technical character of human existence, the starting point here is the problem of freedom and the so-called political deficit, according to the model of a (Derridean-like articulated) “dehumanized desert:” “the uniformity of the technically shaped space necessitates the uniqueness of abstract time.”

324

Here, Paić extensively discusses the idea and crisis of Europe, its political future during the reorganization of empires, the civil war, and total mobilization at a planetary level, political theology, and attempts to think events beyond the metaphysical “big story” regarding philosophy of politics for the new age, and oligarchic rule in the age of today’s networked societies. In this sense, contextualization, i.e., an analysis of the rule of corporate elites as a contemporary form of oligarchy, becomes crucial. Namely, if neoliberal capitalism is the result of techno-scientific advancement and dispensation of a liberated desire, it means that “the desire for wealth and power destroys all the spiritual virtues that modern humanity has set as the goal of its own meaningful action.” The context of a re-humanizing of the humanity has become archaic, rather than introducing us to the intricate social labyrinth of entropy that governs the network as a fluid term for a world, in which the fundamental philosophical question concerns how to think the difference between the political and politics, if action today is controlled by post-human

networks of rhizomatic capitalism, and in which politics has given rise to the pseudo-event media spectacle.

Starting primarily from Foucault's insights on biopolitics, but also by deepening his analysis of the psycho-techniques of controlling desire and deconstructing criticism of political economy, Paić formulates the thesis that the oligarchic model of political and cultural governance today is the result of the ups and downs of mass political movements, which means that, *in ultima linea*, he rightly believes that in the age of transnational corporations and the cybernetic model of market management in today's neo-liberal 21st century there is no basis for a "revolution" or subversive upheaval, because the disappearance of the notion of society also disintegrates the solidarity of class and social actors. This is also the main backbone of this book, with many erudite chapters meandering through. For the issue of freedom, it is crucial to reflect on "political theology," that is, to transform all metaphysical categories of sovereignty into concepts of the political work of autonomous human freedom, while it is self-evident that the author's primary interlocutors are Foucault and Carl Schmitt, to whom he devotes a whole chapter on the logic of the state of emergency and catechetic of history within political theology. Certainly, the more careful reader will quickly notice that many of the constituent themes and theses are present in Paić's earlier books—e.g., the problem of culture as ideology and multiculturalism, art in the age of digital anti-humanism, the dominance of spectacle in the time of the collapse of the metaphysical structure of the world—, but this also deepens with a whole new set of topics: the re-articulation of the political and the general thinking of politics in the entropy network.

325

As in the previous books, from the *Posthuman Condition*, through *Freedom Without Power*, all the way to the *Third Country*, *Totalitarianism*, and, finally, the grand project of the *Technosphere* in five volumes, one of the most important achievements of this book is the consciousness about the creation of a new categorical apparatus, because the essence of man can no longer be determined upon the classical humanist tradition of philosophy, and here we necessarily return to some of the congenial insights from the already mentioned Sutlić's book. Paić is aware that without transcending the classical interpretive framework, not only can we not describe the world we live in, but

we cannot even philosophically articulate it. That is why this book is also a sort of a “manual” for how to navigate through the distribution of technological-political power, where the source of power comes into play with the question of the limits of human freedom. And precisely this freedom is “powerless:” by losing its ontological meaning to politics, it also loses the foundation of that universally political one. The only remaining solution is to establish a theory of an upcoming event beyond all metaphysical differences in contemporary history, a “futurological opinion” beyond the desubstantialized utopia.

326 The logical question that arises primarily here is: what are the real alternatives to de-politicization and re-politicization? Politics is, as Paić rightly points out, the constant risk of freedom, the risk of taking responsibility for changing the situation and, in general, of making sense in the time of the collapse of the global order. But without the illusions of human power, the reach of democracy, sovereignty—“all that remains is to think political and politics beyond the small stories of micro-utopias and the macropolitics of identity.” In earlier argumentation, the author put it determinedly: “It is time for the politics of events of absolute freedom.” It is precisely this event that “neither happens fatefully nor is owned by the subject of radical change in the world.” Namely, the logic of the world-historical progress of the cybernetic system of governance and the new way of legitimizing capitalism in the 21st century unequivocally leads to the suspension of fundamental ideas. Modernity policies include freedom, equality, justice, and solidarity. Paić is also quite right in insisting that this is not merely a formal defense of human and civil liberties, because it politically no longer allows the condition for a new theory of action—it is essentially a matter of choice itself; not at the end of history, but at the end of historically ubiquitous patterns of social change.

In this context, the concept of events as defined by the author has nothing to do with the attempts to open up the space of opportunity in the aesthetic, political, and ethical realms (starting from Deleuze to Badiou) or to think the “second beginning,” as was the case in Heidegger’s thought. Therefore, the event must be thought beyond all mysticism of coming in terms of hope and expectation of a salvage return to the sources. Paić is aware that in his theoretical attempts it is not easy to build a new matrix or a new platform of power to counter the technosphere, which is not a defeatist move at all, but

a very clearly articulated awareness that the thinking of the political “today” should be freed from false belief in the Messianic deliverance and from the autonomous action of the monstrous power of the technosphere “which reduces everything” human “to the applications, functions and structures of the inhuman.” The oligarchic power of the elites in modern times is almost evenly distributed across the global order, regardless of political differences and cultural values. That is why we are talking about the network of power, in which the fundamental problem is that “the politics of oligarchy and meritocracy as a post-democratic struggle to preserve privileges in the frozen state of elite rule over social classes is happening as an ethical-legal consensus on the permanent reforms of the same.”

In conclusion, this book is a true philosophical reflection upon the proper meaning of politics and freedom, upon the classic idea of the common good, the idea of a society in which freedom, equality, and justice have power. In the wake of Derrida’s writings, Paić accurately observes that this process of the deconstruction of politics is all that remains of the great history of Western metaphysics. The aforementioned philosopher Sutlić allegedly said on one occasion: “If a man can no longer be a Casanova or a Don Juan, he can become a good engineer and sleep with his machine,” which is not only a witty and humorous, but also a gloomy summary of the state of affairs in today’s world, the world as technosphere that is both our “essence” and “contemporaneity.” Paić’s significant book, with a highly articulated philosophical categorical apparatus, addresses this problem with crystal clearness and precision.

327

Tonči Valentić
