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Elements for a Critique of Post-Socialism

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Contents

Abbreviations

FM Althusser, Louis (1969) *For Marx,* Harmondsworth: Penguin.

RC Althusser, Louis and Balibar, Etienne (1970) *Reading Capital* (*RC*), London: New Left Books.

MIL Althusser, Louis 'Marx in his limits' (MIL) in: (2006) *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings,* London: Verso.

LP Althusser, Louis 'Lenin and Philosophy', in: (1971) *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays,* London: Verso.

ISA Althusser, Louis 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Towards an Investigation', in: (1971) *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays.*

RJL Althusser, Louis 'Reply to John Lewis', in: (1976) *Elements of Self-Criticism,* London: Verso.

SLR Althusser, Louis (1995) *Sur la reproduction* (*On Reproduction*) Paris: PUF.

ISMP Althusser, Louis 'Is it Simple to be a Marxist in Philosophy', in: (1976) *Elements of Self-Criticism,* London: Verso.

ESC Althusser, Louis 'Elements of Self Criticism', in: (1976) *Elements of Self-Criticism,* London: Verso.

TF Althusser, Louis 'Le marxisme comme théorie « finie »', in: (1998) *Solitude de Machiavel et autre textes,* Paris: PUF,

SPN Gramsci, Antonio (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks,* London: Lawrence and Wishart.

FSPN Gramsci, Antonio (1995) *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks,* London: Lawrence and Wishart.

HSS Laclau, Ernesto and Mouffe, Chantal (2001, [1985]) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy,* London: Verso.

Criticism itself does not require any further understanding of this object, for it is already clear about it. Criticism is no longer an *end-in-itself*, but simply a *means*. The essential force that moves it is *indignation* and its essential task is *denunciation*.

Karl Marx, Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction (1844)

In the countries of the East, as those of the West, the history of politics commences. It barely c*ommences*. The ruin of all statist presentation of truth opens this commencement. Everything remains to be invented.

Alain Badiou, *Of an Obscure Disaster: On the End of the Truth of the State* (1998)

Introduction: After 1989

The year 1989 opens an odd chapter in history. A chapter of historical oddities. For that which we commonly refer to as post-socialism is a particularly odd historical state. What is it exactly that begins with 1989? If we look at the question a bit more carefully, we cannot avoid noticing the paradoxical play on time that history presents us with here. Every beginning is difficult, as one philosopher famously remarked, but beginning for the post-socialist situation seems to be particularly neuralgic. This is a very peculiar beginning. A beginning which seems already one step behind itself, already one step in the past. How does post-socialism begin? The troubles of the post-socialist beginning begin already at the level of nomination. As its proper name shows, the post-socialist situation bears an immense mark of the past. The mark of an end. The beginning of post-socialism, its historical inception, immediately presents itself as an end, a beginning in and through an end: the end of socialism, the end of communism. But is this end, this negativity towards the past, all there is here? Is post-socialism simply an announcement of something that ended, something that passed? Because, one might also ask: what is it that begins properly speaking, after the end? Is there something that post-socialism can claim as its own outside of the simple fact of the negation of its anteriority? But, then again, is there a beginning here in the first place? If we look even closer, we can see that it is not simply the past that haunts the beginning of post-socialism. It is also the future. For there seems to be no end to the beginning of post-socialism. If it is already displaced in the past, behind itself,

post-socialism seems to be also immediately ahead of itself: in a state of anticipation, a state of suspension. Before we can see it being properly formed, before we can see it taking a shape of its own, the historical essence of post-socialism seems to already run ahead of the eye's gaze. Its entire consistency is projected into a certain future tense, into a promise of the future. The social scientists have aptly demonstrated this fact – not without a certain dose of embarrassment – when they meticulously measured the vectors of the post-socialist 'transition', thus providing the scientific bases for the ideological constructions of neo-liberal capitalism.[01]

Not anymore, not yet: post-socialism presents itself as a temporal caricature. It presents itself as a floating historical state, stranded between negation and anticipation, between the past and the future. We are all familiar with the catchwords here. The 'escape from communism', the end of 'really existing socialism', the collapse of authoritarian apparatuses, the end of stagnating economies, on the one hand. On the other, that irresistible desire for 'liberalisation', for 'privatisation', for 'democracy', the teleology of economic growth and social stability under the auspices of the *laissez faire* market model, but also, the promises of 'Europe' and of the inclusion into the global circuits of the capitalist economy.

But what can we say about the post-socialist present? How can we talk about the actuality of this historical situation? The problem here is that post-socialism, from within itself, in terms of its own 'self-consciousness', seems unable to offer any positive responses to this question.

As soon as it is interrogated about its present, about its actuality, the post-socialist consciousness starts playing an endless game of displacements, constantly shifting the question back and forward, constantly pointing either to what it is not any longer, to its supposed break with the past, or to what it is not just yet, to what it ought to be. This bizarre misplacement in time reveals a striking feature of the historical situation that we are facing: its unconsciousness. Between the ideological promises of its future and the traumatic encounters with its past, no less ideological in their form, post-socialism is a state marked by a stark ignorance of its own present.

And yet it is exactly this present which addresses us, and does so in a disturbing manner. This is a present of momentous social transformations, of immense societal change, taking place on the backbone of the exacerbation of social and political contradictions. Whatever value we may attach to the tendencies which manifest themselves currently in post-socialism, one thing is certain: the content of the most general features of this historical situation is a rapid decline of all the important aspects of social and economic well-being, a rapid decline of the social manifestations of equality. As one commentator recently pointed out, the empirical data collected across the post-socialist socio-economic realm exhibits only two stable parameters: the increase of poverty and the rise of inequality.[02] These are the immediate 'costs' of the introduction of the free market model and its 'shock therapy' into countries which were defined, for more than half a century, by the politics of social redistribution,

development, equality and welfare. But, at the same time, the situation is dominated by a de-politicisation of all issues related to these socio-economic transformations, and to the economy in general.[03] The dominant post-socialist political rationality thus seems to oscillate between, on the one hand, a too uncritical endorsement of different 'apolitical' figures of politics, such as the rule of consensus, the *rule of Law*, the rule of human rights and juridical liberties, the rule of parliamentary procedures and forms (the same ones which we have seen announcing their crisis a moment ago),[04] and, on the other hand, by a re-politicisation of culture. Witness the strange attraction in post-socialism with all sorts of political anachronisms, particularly those imported from the excessive episodes of nineteenth century nationalisms.[05]

This actuality of the post-socialist condition poses critical demands in front of thought. How can we think this present critically? How can we unravel the contradictions which define it? And, most importantly, how can we think beyond it?

These questions, however, are not simple. They are not simple because they fold back upon a specific intricacy that thought encounters here. The object of post-socialism presents thought with a veritable difficulty. Not that it would be an object too uncanny to grasp. Post-socialism is a difficult object because it engages thought in a difficult manner: on the one hand, it provides thinking with a real impetus – due to its internal contradictions, its anomalies, its tensions; and yet, on the other hand, it raises an arresting blockade upon it. Post-socialism provokes

thought, we might even say that it calls for it, whilst at the same time forcing it into a retreat.

The roots of this paradox reside in a peculiar *Denkverbot,* as one commentator called it,[06] that the post-socialist situation imposes. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, what we saw taking place almost in a uniform manner in Central and Eastern Europe, in the Balkans and in the post-Soviet sphere, was not simply the disappearance of all sorts of subjective and objective political forms which the 'really existing socialisms' had developed in their historical domain. What we also saw taking place here was a specific disappearance of thought. Together with the flight of all those uncanny political figures proper to the bureaucratic capacity, or better, the 'incapacity' of the party-States – an uncanny flight in itself, as these same figures immediately returned in the new robes of liberal-managerial technocracy – it was the theoretical figure of Marx that the year 1989 brushed away from sight.

This evacuation was made possible on the backbone of a simple ideological construction: if Marx is not *passé,* if he is not stomped over by the movement of history itself, then he is fundamentally discredited by the consequences of his own words, by the apparent failures of the 'realisation' of his philosophy. Is Marx, and Marxist theory in general, not to be held directly responsible for all the dramatic disasters of 'really existing socialisms', from the inefficiencies of the economies of the plan or the dictate, to the terror of the Gulag?[07] And do not these failures, at the same time, announce an obvious 'end of history', affirming the victory of political economy over its 'critique', the triumph of

capitalism and the market model, together with its political representative, liberal democracy?

But if we are already dealing with obviousnesses, it is not difficult to notice that there is something gravely problematic with this construction. Frederic Jameson points this out with force: "Marxism is the science of capitalism, or better still, in order to give depth at once to both terms, it is the science of the inherent contradictions of capitalism. This means [...] that it is incoherent to celebrate the 'death of Marxism' in the same breath with which one announces the definitive triumph of capitalism and the market. The latter would rather seem to augur a secure future for the former, leaving aside the matter of how 'definitive' its triumph could possibly be".[08]

The actuality of post-socialism seems to strikingly attest to this fact. Marxism, instead of being disputed and falsified, seems to be confirmed, even in its most 'vulgar' forms, those of crude 'economism', already at the most visible level of the sociohistorical processes which take place in the post-socialist domain. One of the central theses of the *Communist Manifesto* – that the State is but the bearer of the political power of capital – acquires a remarkable breath of new life in a situation where the processes of 'transition' patently reveal the State as the primary instrument of the 'primitive accumulation' of capital, with the new post-socialist governments trying to auction off, under the rubrics of 'denationalisation' or 'privatisation', the entire productive capacity of their societies, as if the race for profit on the marketplace is the sole ingredient of the social bond.[09] As Alain Badiou pointed out, what we have here,

for the first time in the history of political struggles against capital, is an open 'admission' of the necessary relation between the liberal-democratic sphere of politics and the inequalities inherent to the market economy: "The organic relationship between the private ownership of the means of production, between structural and radical inequality on the one hand, and 'democracy' on the other, this is what is not anymore a matter of a polemic with socialist tendencies, but a rule of consensus".[10]

Judging from the level of the 'obvious', from the surface, rudimentary level of what an analytic gaze can reveal in terms of the social and political contents of the post-socialist situation, Marxist theory, rather than being 'exhausted', seems to be announcing its necessity in a quite forceful way. If we cannot go as far and assert, with Hegel, that what Marxism represents for post-socialism is its own 'truth', the veritable content of the post-socialist 'unconscious', then we cannot have doubts about the fact that Marxist theory stands for one of the fundamental elements of a critical analysis of post-socialism. A critical confrontation with the post-socialist present seems unachievable without the theoretical and political figure of Marx, without the analytical and political inventory of Marxist theory, in its ability not only to critically examine the socio-economic, political and ideological realities of capitalism, but also to formulate political alternatives to it.

But if the relationship that Marxist theory displays towards the post-socialist situation is one of necessity, this relationship is also a relationship of impossibility. Because it is at this same level of 'obviousness' that post-socialism

discredits Marxist theory. It is from this same self-evident gaze, that the post-socialist consciousness, imbued with the Cold War ideological arsenal of anti-Marxism and anti-communism, seeks to falsify each Marxist statement on history, society and politics. Do not the failures of 'really existing Marxism' in its role of the ideological cornerstone of the socialist States in the East attest to the necessity of this falsification?

We have to be careful here. For this paradoxical position, and the false dilemma associated with it – the dilemma orienting questions such as "wither Marxism?" – is not only an ideological construction. It would certainly not be so tenuous were it simply an element on the ideological and theoretical battlefront that we inherit from the Cold War. The real problem is that this paradox also exists internally to Marxist theory, that it strikes Marxist theory from the inside, resonating all the way down to its core.

What generally exists under the name of 'post-Marxism' gives us the primary attestation of this fact. Post-Marxism, in general terms, represents that theoretical and political trajectory stemming from within Marxist theory which shares with post-socialism the announcement and the acknowledgement of the 'death of Marx'.[11] Post-Marxism and the post-socialist ideology alike both draw the consequences from the alleged 'collapse' and 'demise' of Marxism. This complementarity is concentrated on two levels. First, in line with the 'evidence' of post-socialism, post-Marxism sustains the idea that Marxist theory has, in a general sense, lost its grip on history and on politics,

that the analytical capacity of Marxism has entered a terminal phase of bankruptcy, and that we should look for something else to replace it. The paradigmatic assertion here seems to be the one of Laclau and Mouffe: "It is no longer possible to maintain the conception of subjectivity and classes elaborated by Marxism, nor its vision of the historical course of capitalist development, nor, of course, the conception of communism as a transparent society from which antagonisms have disappeared".[12] In the second place, post-Marxism also shares with the post-socialist consciousness the exhibit of the demise and the untenability of Marxist politics. It shares the claim that the inventory of political concepts which has characterised the historical fusion of Marxist theory and the workers' movement, especially in its centredness around the notion of the revolution, has been exhausted, to say at least, if not historically and politically compromised to the utmost. In place of the universality of revolutionary politics which Marxism represented, post-Marxism, participating in the post-socialist 'revival' of the liberal consensus, proposes a diminution of the scope of politics, a diminution of its goals, whilst also introducing a significant shift of terrain – from class struggle it moves us to the scene of minorities and particularistic movements, from the magnitude of the question of the exploitation of labour it shifts us to the intimate sphere of identities, from the provocative link which Marxism maintained between the economic sphere and politics, it shifts us to the more comfortable abode of the struggles in 'civil society', and finally, from the universality and the radicality of the question of

emancipation, it moves us towards the plurality and the finitude of particular liberties, towards the discourse of rights and juridical freedoms.[13]

In these general terms in which it participates in the celebration of the 'death of Marxism', post-Marxism should nevertheless not simply be seen as a theoretical correspondent of the post-socialist ideological consciousness. It should be seen, properly speaking, as a theoretical symptom of the post-socialist condition. Post-Marxism is a theoretical symptom of post-socialism (if not *the* theoretical symptom of post-socialism) inasmuch as it is a theoretical reflection of a historical and political *status quo*, a reflection of a thoroughly blocked historical situation. If Marxism was *the* theoretical orientation which entertained and sustained the questions of emancipation and of radical political change, maintaining an organic relationship to the problem of the revolution, and if, at the same time, Marx's theoretical endeavour provided the exemplar of an uncompromising notion of *critique*, then the post-Marxist participation in the 'death of Marx', and its celebration of notions of limitness, finitude,[14] and what one commentator would name an 'enthusiasm of resignation',[15] represents a symptomatic evacuation of critical thinking: it represents that precise point at which thought is forced into a compromise with the 'existing state of affairs'.

But, at the same time, and even before being symptomatic of post-socialism, post-Marxism represents a symptom of Marxism itself. If something makes post-Marxism, or post-Marxisms possible, then this is not the victory of anti-Marxism on the ideological battlefront

of the Cold War, nor the plain 'evidence' of historical or socio-political facts. It is something internal to Marxism as a body of thought. Post-Marxism – if one could not envisage it without the specific pathos of the post-socialist 'obviousness' – nevertheless draws its primary conditions of possibility, the seeds of its existence, from a space within Marxist theory. In fact, it draws its preconditions from the very core of the Marxist theoretical apparatus: from the idea of the primacy of practice over theory. Post-Marxism is, properly speaking, a symptom of the peculiar centeredness of Marxism upon practice and upon history, of the peculiar credit that Marxism sought to find in real history and in actual political practice. It is a symptom of what some have called the *self-referentiality* of Marxist theory.[16] For is not Marxism the theoretical orientation par excellence which sought its entire substance and its validity in practice, in the self-evidence of the forms of its own 'historical realisation'? We only need to think of Lenin who enthusiastically proclaims, in 1913, in a pamphlet entitled *The Historical Destiny of the Doctrine of Karl Marx,* that "the dialectic of history was such that the theoretical victory of Marxism compelled its enemies to *disguise themselves* as Marxists".[17] From this perspective, the scene of the collapse of 1989, the scene of the destruction of the socialist States in the East of Europe is indeed an event internal to Marxism. An event with profound consequences for Marxist theory. With the demise of the historical referent of the 'really existing socialisms', what places Marxism in doubt, what discredits it, are its own criteria of self-constitution, its own criteria of validity.

These are the criteria of the *practicality* of theory, the criteria of the practical *realisation* of philosophy. Marxism is compromised from within itself at that precise point at which its theoretical contents seek a direct reflection in history and in politics, at that precise point at which its concepts, categories and theoretical operations attain the status of unquestionable practical truths.

To stop here, however, would be a dangerous oversimplification. It would presume lapsing straight into the charge of dogmatism which Marxism has attracted too often. It would presume accepting a dogmatic construction of Marxism, a dogmatic construction of the *identity* of theory of practice, the same one which expressed and maintained the dogmatism and the political and ideological disasters proper to a specific tendency in the politics of the communist parties, present if not dominating throughout, from different Stalinist and post-Stalinist trajectories to the pioneers of Eurocommunism. More precisely, stopping here would presume endorsing that ingenious ideological construction proper to the Stalinist mode of politics, that ingenious mirror relationship, on the background of which one could deduce immediate practical implications, political directives, plans and programmes, straight from the general 'laws of the dialectic', whilst at the same time automatically confirming the 'lawfulness' of this deduction from the self-evidence of practice itself. In the last instance, stopping here would amount to a direct identification of Marxism, of Marxist theory and politics, with the State, inscribing Marxist theoretical concepts and categories at the heart of the *raison d'Etat*.

The identification of Marxism with the State seems to be a thoroughly fallacious move. It seems to immediately deprive us of the very core of Marx's theoretical invention, of that singular trait of his theory, which professed itself to be, at the same time, both 'critical and revolutionary'. Most importantly, the reduction of Marx to a personage proper to the *raison d'Etat* deprives us of the fact that it was precisely the theoretical work of Marx which represented the critical political endeavour *par excellence* in the last century and a half – a real, effective 'ruthless critique of everything that exists' – not simply in the forcefulness of its critical analysis of capitalist exploitation and of the domination internal to bourgeois forms of politics, but also, in its capacity to produce revolutionary effects in the field of historical and political struggles, in its ability to translate itself into an effective practical 'overcoming of the existing state of affairs'.

It is not enough to repeat the old dictum here, attributable to Marx (and also to Lenin), who openly refused being identified as Marxist. It is not enough to separate a pure theory, or a pure theoretical position, from the stains of ideology, politics and history, divorcing ideas from their insertion into practice and into 'consciousness'. The proper way to proceed – which seems to be, at the same time, the only correct Marxian or Marxist way – is to submit the history of Marxism itself to the criterion of historical and political division, to apply the Two that Marxist critique has never ceased producing to Marxism itself. This implies recognising the historicity of Marxism as a profoundly contradictory reality, always already

submersible to the 'laws' of class struggle, standing under the decisive but permanently uncertain determination of real historical and political clashes. Beyond the mourning or celebration of 'death', we need to acknowledge that the 'crisis of Marxism'– the principle motif of discussions on the Left from at least the sixties onwards – is in fact Marxism's permanent state of being, and, moreover, that this crisis is something upon which Marxism constantly feeds, something which secures its own vitality.[18]

This, in turn, involves a radical rearticulation of the formula which stands at the heart of Marxist theory. The idea of the *primacy of practice over theory*, in fact, seems to have a more profound, more radical meaning than the doxical interpretation of Marxism seems to imply. Far from paving the way for the translation of theoretical concepts into ideological dogmas, far from legitimising the transformation of a critical theoretical instrumentarium into a political vulgate, the primacy of practice over theory is that formula which allows us to inscribe a permanent void into any notion of 'unity-of-theory-and-practice'. It is that formula which, whilst indubitably exposing the practical and political nature of the theoretical, whilst exposing the essential dependence and determination of theoretical investigations by practical struggles, forces us to acknowledge that there does exist an unsurpassable gap between concepts and slogans – not simply because of the specificity of the two moments, and because of the ineradicable surplus that becoming 'practical' or 'material' of theoretical ideas necessarily entails, but, more profoundly, because real historical and political practice

stands ever ahead of its theoretical 'realisation', because the aleatory becoming of history and politics always already escapes theoretical apprehension, whilst at the same time exerting constant transformative pressure on it.

Where does this leave us then in terms of the problems which we pose here, in terms of the question of how to *orient* oneself critically in the post-socialist situation?

If a critique of post-socialism seems incomplete without Marxist theory, then this critique is also untenable without an immanent criticism, without the 'self-criticism' of those tendencies within Marxism which led Marxist theory and politics to assume the form of sacrosanct principles of authority, to appear as theoretical and political *doxa*. A critique of post-socialism, a critical confrontation with the uncertainties and the impossibilities of our present, in other words, necessitates a critical historicisation of Marxism itself, and in that, an acknowledgement of 'class struggle in Marxist theory', to paraphrase a famous dictum, with the view of extracting those tendencies, those living elements of Marxist thought which resisted the identification of theory with orthodoxy, which resisted the annulation of the critical discoveries of theory and science, those tendencies which, in the last instance, opposed the 'etatisation' of politics, thus providing a permanent opening for the project of emancipation.

This critical historicisation is the background for the first part of this work. My aim here is to return to what André Tosel named 'the last great theoretical debate of Marxism',[19] the debate between Gramsci and Althusser. This debate – which remains unresolved, and largely

obscured today – is important for several reasons. It is important, in the first place, because it pushes the critical thrust of Marxist theory to the utmost, especially in what concerns the theorisation of the 'superstructures': of the critical analysis of the State, of ideology and of historical forms of politics in capitalism, on the one hand, and, on the other, of the reflection upon the singularity of revolutionary politics, and its irreducibility to the State form. Secondly, it is important because it directly links, albeit through a set of peculiar transfigurations, to the contemporary formulations of post-Marxism, and primarily to the work of Laclau and Mouffe, which seeks its main source of theoretical legitimacy here. Revisiting the debate between Gramsci and Althusser, and primarily, reassessing Althusser's criticism of Gramsci, seems as necessary step for a critique of post-Marxism and its theoretical and political impasses. At the same time, it seems as one of the most productive paths for a contemporary reinvigoration of Marxist philosophy. Returning to Gramsci, and especially to Althusser, means reaffirming the critical force of Marxism's take on politics and political phenomena, and in this, reappropriating the theorisation of the link between capitalism and the liberal State, together with the forceful subtraction of the question of (revolutionary) politics from the general domain of the 'political', that is, from the domain of the State, of the Law and of 'public action'.

But this discussion acquires its full scope inasmuch as it brings forward critical concepts with which we can confront the current post-socialist political consensus, the consensus which is primarily structured around an

evacuation of the very questions of emancipation and of revolutionary change. This is why I intend to measure, in the second part of this work, some of these critical effects in a direct confrontation with the post-socialist political rationality.

The first part of the book starts with a discussion of Gramsci and his central concept: the concept of hegemony. The aim of the first chapter is to expose and disentangle Gramsci's difficult and multilayered construction of the logic of hegemony, whilst assessing both the progressive and the regressive implications of the notion. Against the deterministic readings of Marx's topography of *base* and *superstructure*, prevalent in the theorists of the Second International, Gramsci theorises the particular effectivity of politics and ideology, whilst defining the latter as practices *sui generis*, irreducible to simple economic determination. Gramsci does so by localising this effectivity within a particular space, which he constructs by recasting the 'classical' dualism of State/civil society, and by reshaping of the problem of ideology – divorcing it from its critical, 'negative' status in Marx, and linking it to 'positive' issues of political consciousness and political will. Gramsci thus situates politics, its possibilities and impossibilities, in the sphere of 'civil society', defined as a general sphere of hegemony and consent, a sphere of consciousness and of intellectual and political organisation. This specific theoretical topography is what arguably makes Gramsci the principle Marxist thinker of political autonomy, or, more exactly, of the *autonomy of the political*. But this is also what opens the path for numerous difficulties relating

to his work. Difficulties which have to do, in the first place, with the fact that Gramsci places in brackets some fundamental elements of Marx's materialistic approach of history, namely, the very critical link that Marx establishes between the exploitation of labour in the sphere of capitalist production and the 'freedom' existing in the bourgeois State apparatuses. But also, difficulties which traverse Gramsci's entire attempt to redefine Marxism as a *philosophy of praxis:* where Marxist philosophical and scientific statements come to be directly subordinated to the normativity of political action.

The second chapter explores these difficulties further, by tracing them to the post-Marxist and post-modern recasting of the notion of hegemony in the work of Laclau and Mouffe. Laclau and Mouffe, as I attempt to demonstrate, transform Gramsci's notion of hegemony into an idealistic construction in which politics is autonomised to the point where it becomes a transcendental space, standing above and outside all material determinations. Being read through the post-structuralist combinatorial model of language, hegemony becomes a general ontology of socio-political relations, where politics comes to be coextensive with the notion of discourse, and more generally, with linguistic and rhetorical tropes, such as metaphor and metonymy. Instead of resolving Gramsci's difficulties, Laclau and Mouffe explode the idealistic elements in his thought, whilst leaving us with a specific 'reductionism in reverse', where ideology takes absolute precedence over material determinations of the economic sphere, where being is fully submerged into consciousness,

and where a certain voluntarism associated with the linguistic conception reigns supreme. The political correlate of this is an apologetic endorsement of the sphere of liberal rights, and of the liberal democratic State, which the Laclau and Mouffe posit as the ultimate ground and guarantee of any emancipatory political action.

The third chapter cuts a transversal in these discussions by exploring the work of Althusser, particularly in the light of his criticism of Gramsci. Suggesting a novel interpretation, I read the Althusserian concepts as correctives, as attempts to go beyond a certain 'deficit of materiality' in Gramscian approaches, especially vis-à-vis their treatment of the problems of ideology and the State in capitalism. Althusser's analyses of the relationship between the State and class struggles eclipse Gramsci's problematic at a number of critical points: in the first place, by outlining the complexity of the material dimensions of the State apparatus and its ideological supplements. Althusser reshapes the critical thrust of the concept of ideology, by linking ideological phenomena to the question of individual consciousness, and in this, by inviting us to rethink the bond between the legal-political institutions of liberalism and the exploitative relations of capitalist production. At the same time, and through his conception of philosophy as a divisive practice, Althusser offers a powerful solution to Gramsci's historicism, and a forceful reconfiguration of the Marxian idea of the practicality of philosophy, without collapsing thought into ideology.

However, a reinterpretation of Althusser, as I also suggest, has to start with an acknowledgment of

the originality of his reformulation of the problem of revolutionary politics. Althusser points to a way of resolving the question that Gramsci sets out – how to define the coordinates for an autonomous political practice – without introducing topographical considerations. Revolutionary politics, for him, cannot be located in the sphere of the 'autonomy of the political', that is, in the general sphere of the State, of Law, and ideology, as it also cannot be located in a pre-determined space of 'civil society'. Political autonomy can be grasped only outside aprioristic theoretical localisations – outside of any attempt to subsume politics under the generality of laws – in the register of singularity, that is, in the evental and aleatory dimensions of history.

These theoretical and critical gestures of Althusser, as I argue, offer exceptional grounds for recasting and reinvigorating the critical potential of the Marxist tradition, and, more generally, for systematically rethinking and reshaping the contours of the politics of emancipation.

This is why I also attempt to translate this perspective, as well as the discussions which surround it, into critical analyses of the post-socialist situation, which form the second part of the book. Here I present three 'concrete analyses' of post-socialism, the focus of which is on the collapse and destruction of the Yugoslav socialist federation. By drawing on the Marxian critical apparatus, and particularly on Althusser's conceptualisation of problems of ideology and the State, I aim to critically confront the post-socialist political rationality in what I consider to be its three main dimensions: 1) the dialectic

between 'civil society' and the 'State' as the ground of political liberty and emancipation, 2) the idea that liberal-democracy represents a non-contradictory universalistic framework of recognition and reconciliation and 3) the normative identification of politics with the Law. In the process, I also attempt to portray not only the symptomatic ideological complementarity of the post-Marxist perspective with the politics of post-socialism, but its actual, practical role in the making of the post-socialist situation.

The fourth chapter takes issue precisely with this, by analysing the historical context of the 'Slovenian Spring' in the late 1980s, with the aim of exposing the embeddedness of the post-Marxist theoretical discourses in post-socialist politics. Here, I focus on the so-called *Alternative*, a wave of socio-political and cultural movements which dominated Slovenian politics in the 1980s. I trace the development of the Slovenian *Alternative* from the paradigm of the 'new social movements', to its twin formulation of the notions of 'civil society' and 'radical and plural democracy', which took direct inspiration from Laclau and Mouffe. The most interesting thing here, however, are the lessons that can be drawn from the *Alternative's* historical fate: from its recuperation by nationalism. I argue that this is the moment where we can easily become aware of some vexing problems in the political theory of Laclau and Mouffe: namely, the fact that the purely formal combinatorial framework of hegemony, the emphasis of which is on the discursive construction of political universality out of a conjunction of particulars, remains structurally short-

sighted vis-à-vis the phenomenon of nationalism, but also vis-à-vis the structural dimensions of the State apparatus.

In the fifth chapter, I explore further the contradictions of post-socialist politics by looking at the so-called processes of 'democratisation' in the context of the dissolution of Yugoslavia. If one of the primary ideological motifs of the post-socialist political rationality is the idea that liberal-democracy represents a universal model of political reconciliation, I propose to turn this perspective around, by inquiring about the inseparability of liberal-democracy from the political conflicts and nationalist upheavals which surrounded the destruction of the Yugoslav federation. In this sense, I analyse certain processes in Croatia where violent nationalist politics can be seen inscribed in the very process of the implementation of liberal-democratic institutions. In order to interpret this articulation, I take cue from Balibar's analysis of nationalism and the liberal State, and his reformulation of Althusser's conception of the State and its ideological apparatuses. The basic idea here is that violent nationalist politics, instead of being opposed to the liberal political community, represents its immanent necessity, proceeding from the structural incapacity of the liberal-democratic State to reproduce its own subjective substance: to reproduce the 'people' as a lasting homogeneous representation of the social bond, over a heterogeneous population, against constantly changing historical circumstances, and against the permanent threat of class conflicts.

Confronting one of the influential political analyses of Yugoslavia, Zoran Đinđić's book *Yugoslavia as an Unfinished State*, the aim of the last chapter is to formulate a critique of the normative identification of politics with the Law characteristic of the post-socialist political rationality. Whilst seeking to produce a 'heretic' reading, I return to the year 1943, the revolutionary event of Yugoslavia, in order to examine the questions of political novelty introduced by the Yugoslav Partisans. I argue that the classical arsenal of liberal political concepts, concepts such as 'sovereignty of the people', 'constitutive power', and 'national self-determination', fall dramatically short of accounting for the historical specificity and the singularity of politics of Yugoslavia. In its political essence, Yugoslavia cannot be understood as a statist project, a project of the development and the perfection of the institutions and the apparatuses of the State, but as a project of revolutionary transformation of and emancipation, fundamentally rooted in the Marxian idea of the withering away of the State. Against Đinđić, I read Yugoslavia as an *unfinishable State*: a dialectical political reality, predicated upon historical and political invention, and upon the peculiar practice of self-revolutionisation, which inscribes the Two of political novelty into different forms of being-together. This seems to me as a forceful exemplification of Althusser's theoretical placement of politics in the register of singularity.

PART ONE

The Problem of Politics in Marxism and at the Limits of Marxism: From Autonomy to Singularity

1. Gramsci and the Limits of Marxist Politics: Autonomy, Hegemony and the 'Philosophy of Praxis'

1.1. The ambivalence of Gramsci

The work of Antonio Gramsci assumes a peculiar position within the history of Marxism. Peculiar, in the first place, because of its originality and its inventiveness – which has undoubtedly been and continues to be an inspiring source for many political and theoretical projects. But peculiar also because of the intense ambivalence which traverses it. Probably no other Marxist thinker – if we count out Marx himself – gave rise to such drastic oppositions and contradictions in the field of reading, probably no other Marxist thinker has been claimed as the origin of so many divergent and mutually exclusive paths in politics and in theory than Gramsci. Whilst recounting the balance sheet of what came to be known as 'Gramscianism', Christine Buci-Glucksmann notes the perverse effects of these divergences and oppositions: "the work of Gramsci has always been suspect of a certain sort of heresy: neo-Crocean, historicist, reformist, or also, Leninist".[01] Ambivalence profoundly surrounds the reception of Gramsci's work: it is deeply inscribed in the hermeneutic, and therefore also, the political effects that his work engenders. But, at the same time, ambivalence penetrates Gramsci's thought from the inside. It traverses Gramsci's analyses and his theoretical operations, his methods and modes of presentation, his concepts and conceptions, all the way down to the peculiarity of the discourse that he adopts, the discourse that he is forced to adopt whilst composing the scattered manuscript of *Quaderni di carcere* (*Prison Notebooks*) under the vigilant

eye of the fascist censor in the Turi prison. One cannot but be amazed by the duality of figures which constantly appear one against another in Gramsci's writings, creating a profound tension as to the status of his 'object', as well as to the 'subject' standing behind them: at times Gramsci presents us with a systematic, or 'detached' thinker, at times with a strategist and a political militant, one that zealously surrenders his observations to the urgency of the moment; at times his writing present a philosopher or a political theorist, struggling passionately with generalisations and abstractions, at times a brilliant historical analyst, endowed with an immense capacity for detail; at times we can find Gramsci continuing in a direct and scrutinised manner the tradition of theoretical and political concepts elaborated by Marx, Engels and Lenin, at other times, we can find him taking excursions into other conceptual fields, such as those of the tradition of Italian political sociology of Pareto and Mosca, or the hegelianism of Croce.

The concept of hegemony resides at the centre of the proliferation of these ambivalent personages and these opposed effects of reading.[02] And without doubt this is so because hegemony, at least in Gramsci's rendering of the term,[03] is itself a peculiar concept, a concept with a unique status: being invested by its author with an enormous and difficult role of effectuating nothing less than an essential restructuration or reform of Marxist theory. Gramsci develops the notion of hegemony, and the theoretico-philosophical apparatus which supports this notion, with an aim to expose and rectify the limitations and dead-ends of Marxism – both as a theoretical discourse 'interpreting'

the condition of capitalism, and as an organisational and directive force operative in the struggles the workers' movement. He does so, moreover, not only in order to confront Marxism with the porosity of its own limits, but also in attempting to step beyond these limits, in striving to embrace and appropriate the 'outside' of these limits for Marxist theory and Marxist politics. This is the essential stake of Gramsci's thought, the stake orienting his originality and his difficulty. But, at the same time, this is also the locus of its most acute ambivalence, its paradoxical site. For Gramsci does not only authorise a peculiar appropriation of the limits of Marxism, but also paves the way for an obscure regression and collapse of Marxist theory in front of these limits. Numerous genealogies which lead from Gramsci's thought to the reformist and revisionist turns that the politics of the workers' movement had taken in the latter half of the 20th century – turns towards Eurocommunism and 'socialist democracy', but also, more recently, turns towards post-Marxism, are a precise attestation of this fact.

But all this makes Gramsci's notion of hegemony even more interesting: because it is a notion of the limit, a notion exposing with force the limits of Marxist theory. This encounter of the limit, or of limits, will be the fundamental object of this chapter. I will start by presenting the problems entailed in Gramsci's concept of hegemony, by presenting the content of his concept, whilst examining the coherence of the theoretical apparatus which Gramsci builds up in order to support it. This examination will not only take us through Gramsci's political theory – and

its fundamental problem: the autonomy of revolutionary politics – but also through Gramsci's philosophical constructions, through that area where Gramsci indeed proposes a peculiar philosophical path, that of the 'philosophy of praxis'.

1.2. An essential limit: the autonomy of politics

But first of all, it is important to note that the limits that haunt Gramsci are determinate and real limits. They are the limits imposed and exposed by a crisis, by a historical situation of crisis. "In order to understand the significance of Gramsci's contribution to the development of marxism", Nicola Badaloni writes, "one should use as a starting-point [...] the crisis in socialism and, in a more general way, the crisis in theoretical marxism".[04] The crisis that instructs Gramsci's thinking, the crisis invested in the concept of hegemony is, as Badaloni rightly points out, double: a political crisis, on the one hand, and a theoretical crisis on the other.

A political crisis: Gramsci clearly recognises the political impasse that the socialist and communist movement had experienced in the 1920s and the 1930s. After several decades of schisms and retreats, decades which have divided the 'orthodoxy' from 'revisionism', the Second from the Third International, and, most acutely, the 'West' from the 'East' – with both the tragic experience of defeat of the attempted revolutions in the West, and the growing awareness of the contradictions and failures

inherent to the Stalinist model of 'socialism in one country' – the communist project was displaying a serious weakness and immobility, especially in the face of a new historical situation opened by the movements of stabilisation and expansion of capitalism, themselves followed by the rise of fascism, a mass ideology effectively gripping and neutralising workers' class struggles.

How to respond to this new situation politically? How to revive the prospects of the emancipation of labour and of the proletarian revolution in a situation of crisis and retreat?

A theoretical crisis: for these same political problems and uncertainties resonated within the domain of theory, within the very form of 'unity of theory and practice' which has characterised the 'fusion' of Marxism with the workers' movement. What Gramsci registers here, and what he attempts to respond to, is a critical disjunction between the theoretical and the practical levels, a disjunction to be measured not only in terms of Marxism's explanatory grip on the historical and political process, its capacity for interpretation and critique of the real tendencies which display themselves in the current capitalist configurations, but also, in terms of its ability to participate, in person so to speak, in the historical process, by becoming an active organising and inciting element of the proletarian struggle against capital.

How to proceed from the 'critique of political economy', from the elaboration and explanation of the laws of capital and its mechanisms of exploitation, to politics and to its active matter, to the expansion of revolutionary

consciousness amongst the exploited masses? How can the critique of capitalism become an active element of the revolutionary political subjectivity in a conjuncture of retreat?

Gramsci located the principle sources of this political and theoretical impasse in the general 'forgetting' of politics, in the underestimation of the critical role of political struggle and political consciousness within the strategic domain of Marxism. Against the deterministic and evolutionist conceptions of authors like Kautsky and Bernstein, but also against the Stalinist formulation of the linear and objective succession of modes of production, Gramsci called for a reaffirmation of politics and of the political moment proper, for a reinstatement the principles of will and of subjectivity, of consciousness and organisation, at the forefront of Marxist theory. He would thus speak, paradoxically, of a "revolution against *Capital*",[05] of a break with the lethargic 'orthodoxy' of the Second International, which had used the authority of *Das Kapital* in order to assert the mechanical necessity of economic development – fashioning the idea of the historical inevitability of the break-down of capitalism.[06] Against this political passivism, we could see Gramsci exclaiming: "It is necessary to be more political, to know how to use the political element, and have less fear of doing so".[07]

'Being more political', entailed in the first place, rejecting the economicist and mechanicist conceptions of the Second International, conceptions which have relegated politics to little more than a secondary moment within the laws of economic development, an epiphenomenon of the

structure of capital. "The claim [...] that every fluctuation of politics and ideology can be presented and expounded as an immediate expression of the structure, must be contested in theory as primitive infantilism".[08] Politics needs to be 'emancipated' from economic determination and its inertia, it needs to be recognised as a crucial dimension of the historical process on its own terms – possessing a unique effectivity and locality, outside of the mechanical confines of the development of the laws of production. The prospects for a revolutionary strategy of the workers' movement, as Gramsci insists with force, a strategy that would be adequate to the difficult historical situation opened by the crisis of Marxist politics, by new forms of expansion and consolidation of capitalism, and by the rise of fascism, are essentially connected with the acknowledgement of this particular effectivity and autonomy of the political moment. No detours or withdrawals can be made in front of the need to recognise problems of politics and of political strategy – at the distance from the analyses of the laws of motion of capital – as the quintessential theoretical and practical problems, which critically instruct the possibilities of the emergence and the victory of the proletarian revolution.

But 'being more political' also meant recognising the centrality of strategic and tactical issues for Marxist theory and practice. And here we see the Italian communist theorist putting tremendous emphasis on the idea that consciousness, organisation and mobilisation are the central elements in the revolutionary strategy of the proletariat, and that, consequently, revolutionary politics cannot but be a matter of difficult and patent work of

preparation: "The decisive element in every situation is the permanently organized and long-prepared force [...] Therefore the essential task is that of systematically and patiently ensuring that this force is formed, developed, and rendered ever more homogenous, compact, and self-aware".[09] The subject of the revolution does not arise spontaneously, nor is it simply a consequence of crises in the socio-economic system; rather, it is a process, fundamentally related to ideological struggles and the capacity for mass mobilisation, organisation and leadership. Revolutionary politics is therefore, for Gramsci, first of all, a matter of a gigantic endeavour of the 'background', it is a matter of arduous battles in the 'trenches and fortresses' of popular consciousness and ideology, battles whose aim is first of all to secure the critical unity and the broadness of the bond of the revolutionary political subject.

Behind these two appeals, Gramsci is formulating a very precise problem: the problem of the autonomy of politics. How to approach theoretically the problem of politics as an autonomous and active historical force in capitalism? Or, what amounts to the same: how to theorise the autonomy of the revolutionary politics of the proletariat? It is in these questions that Gramsci recognises the essential limit of Marxism, and it is here that he inscribes his difficult effort of reconstruction and 'reform' via the conceptual logic of hegemony.

1.3. Hegemony, civil society and the State: from Marx to Gramsci

Right from the start, however, Gramsci approaches the problem of autonomy as a problem of space: the entire question of hegemony, and of politics as such, begins as a spatial question, as a question of the topography of the social and historical world. Where is revolutionary politics to be located as an autonomous activity? Where do the potentialities of revolutionary action reside?

And the initial move that Gramsci makes here is indeed peculiar: the re-appropriation and reformulation of the traditional opposition between civil society and the State.

The opposition between civil society and the State, inescapable and canonical as it may have been for any theorisation of politics, society and the economy in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, especially amongst those philosophers which we now regard as foundational for liberal political philosophy,[10] was not a foreign territory for Marxism. It was Marx himself, who, in his youthful works, frequently elaborated on the two terms of the opposition (and on their interrelationship) whilst inscribing these elaborations into a critique of Hegel.

However, Gramsci proposes a very peculiar reading of the two dichotomous figures. As he writes: "What we can do, for the moment, is to fix two major superstructural 'levels': the one that can be called 'civil society', that is the ensemble of the organisms commonly called 'private', and that of 'political society' or 'the State'. These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of 'hegemony'

which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of 'direct domination' or command exercised trough the State and 'juridical government'".[11]

We should immediately note the distance that separates Gramsci from Marx. Gramsci locates both of the terms of the opposition civil society and State on the terrain of the *superstructures*, on the terrain standing at a remote from the material, economic base of society. This is in direct contrast to Marx, for whom 'civil society' was primarily a determinate economic reality. When Marx employs the term 'civil society' (Marx actually speaks of *die bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, which in itself is already a provocation, as it literally translates as 'bourgeois society') in works such as *The Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State, On the Jewish Question* and even *The German Ideology,* he uses it in order to depict a peculiar economic realm, a peculiar economic world: a world peculiar, in the first place, because of its negative and self-destructive character. Marx's 'civil society' depicts a sphere of atomised individuals caught in a lethal and irresolvable struggle, into a deadly competition between their selfish particular interests, like in the Hobbesian scenario of a 'war of each against each'. As Marx would write: "The only bond which holds [the individuals] together [in civil society] is natural necessity, need and private interest, the conservation of their property and their egoistic persons".[12]

But unlike the Hobbesian myth of nature, Marx's 'civil society' is a determinate historical reality. What reigns supreme in 'civil society', what lies at the very root of its

destructive and 'alienating' nature, are modern property relations, the relations instituted by the development of modern capitalism and the market. If the realm of modern production and exchange destroyed all the 'natural' dependencies and inequalities of the feudal order, it also started destroying all the markers of commonality and solidarity, the very possibilities of the social bond. This is why, for young Marx, 'civil society' would become "the expression of the *separation* of man from his *community,* from himself and from other men".[13]

Like for Hegel, Marx's emphasis on the contradictory, self-destructive nature of the sphere of economic individual exchanges is geared towards a critique of the social and political philosophies of liberal theorists such as Adam Smith and John Locke, where the individualistic 'civil society' represented the very positive ground of the political or social world based on contract and natural right. But if Hegel sought to derive the necessity of the State from this 'unreality' of civil society (whose contradictions, the State, as the embodiment of reason and universality, is supposed to overcome),[14] Marx's claim is exactly the opposite: the 'crass materialism', the 'vulgar' reality of civil society also explains the 'unreality' of the State. The modern, liberal-democratic State is itself a product and a result of the reign of particularisms of the 'civil society', it is a result of the development and domination of private property and capitalist production over social relations: "[T]he political constitution as such is only developed when the private spheres have achieved an independent existence [...] The abstraction of the *state as such* was not

born until the modern world".[15] In the abstract, formal equality of citizenship that it proposes, the modern State seeks to resolve the conflictual nature of society, by positing itself above the particularisms and inequalities proper to the economic realm of property and production. But this solution is false, according to Marx, as the abstract and formal State remains impotent over the particularisms and contradictions of 'civil society'. What is more, in its formalism and its abstractness, the modern political sphere cannot but reproduce these particularisms and these inequalities: "The State stands in the same opposition to civil society and overcomes it in the same way as religion overcomes the restrictions of the profane world, i.e. it has to acknowledge it again, re-instate it and allow itself to be dominated by it".[16] Or, again: "the perfection of the idealism of the state was at the same time the perfection of the materialism of civil society. The shaking-off of the political yoke was at the same time the shaking-off of the bonds which held in check the egoistic spirit of civil society".[17]

Marx's lesson is uncompromising: the absolute limit of political emancipation in the sphere of universal citizenship, the absolute limit of the modern liberal State, is the reign of private property, and the inequality proper to this reign. "The political constitution at its highest point is thus the *constitution of private property.* The loftiest *political principles* are the *principles of private property*".[18]

Even if Marx does not speak here yet about social classes, and about the particular antagonism in the sphere of production, the critical dimensions of the notion of 'civil society' already exhibit the fundamental contours

of what Balibar would call Marx's *theoretical short circuit,* and what arguably represents one of the most decisive moments of Marx's entire venture of criticism – from his early critique of philosophy and politics to the 'critique of political economy'.[19] The key is precisely the abrupt link, the short circuit that is established between politics and the economy, between the sphere of production and that of political representation in the State. The modern, bourgeois institutions of law and the representative State make sense only from the point of view of the conflicts and contradictions in the sphere of economic production and circulation, they make sense only as expressions (and instruments) of class struggle. The political 'superstructures' are always already the expressions of the contradictions in the economic 'base'.[20]

Now, does it not seem that Gramsci is overturning this conception? If we return to the quoted passage from the *Prison Notebooks*, we see Gramsci relating the opposition civil society/state with the opposition of base/superstructure, not by drawing an analogy between the respective terms, but by inscribing the first dichotomy within one of the terms of the second. It is the 'superstructure' which is, according to Gramsci, divided by the opposition civil society/State. Or, again, there are "two major superstructural 'levels': the one that can be called 'civil society', that is the ensemble of the organisms commonly called 'private', and that of 'political society' or 'the State'".[21]

What is Gramsci doing here? In the first place, he is transforming the very structure of the architectonic conception. The dualistic schema of base and superstructure

is supplemented by an intermediary instance, located at the same time within one of its constitutive terms, or 'levels'. Civil society, which belongs to the terrain of the 'superstructures', assumes the role of mediation between the two fundamental instances of the Marxian historical architecture. As Gramsci writes: "Between the economic structure and the State with its legislation and its coercion stands civil society".[22]

The reason for this transformation is no doubt critical and political. Clearly, like young Marx, Gramsci wants to stress the determinate role of 'civil society' in the historical and political process, he wants to stress the fact that the 'truth' of politics, the very possibilities of the proletarian revolution and the overthrow of capitalist relations of exploitation, is to be found outside of the sphere of the State, outside of that Hegelian 'crown' of history. Unlike Marx, however, Gramsci insists upon the fact that civil society represents a positive and not a negative ground for politics. A ground, moreover, that is essentially political and not economic in nature.

As we already pointed out, Gramsci's fundamental stake here is precisely the determination of a particular ground or a space for politics and for political activity. His aim is to isolate a space proper to politics, a space which would not be reducible to the crude fact of economic determination, and which would neither be coextensive with the State in the narrow sense – the State as an instrument of coercion and violence. Buci-Glucksmann is right to note in this regard that "Gramsci reshapes the distinction proper to Marx between civil society and the

State as productive of a new dimension of politics: politics at large, whose frontiers do not stop at the State".[23] Between the sphere of economy, conceived as the space of mechanical laws of capitalist production and expansion, and the State understood as the machinery and instrumentarium of violence, Gramsci discovers 'civil society' as a depository of political potentiality, as the proper and autonomous space of politics and of revolutionary political engagement.

The space of potentiality of 'civil society' is the space of hegemony. As Buci-Glucksmann writes: "civil society, for a long time considered as pre-political, becomes, as an ensemble of institutions, private and public organisations where a group, or a class, exercises its leadership over the others, the place of inscription of what Gramsci calls the 'hegemonic system' or the '*apparatus of hegemony*'".[24]

But what does hegemony denote here?

The political usage of term 'hegemony', even in the particularity of its strategic meaning which is central here – the meaning of political leadership, the leadership in a political sequence, and not *stricto sensu* domination, as its conventional signification might suggest – is not in any case Gramsci's originality. As many interpreters have demonstrated, Gramsci takes the problem of hegemony from the context of the political and ideological debates within Russian 'social democracy', from the theorists of the Second and the Third internationals, such as Plekhanov and Axelrod, and even more, from Lenin and Trotsky.[25] Within this context, hegemony is, first and foremost, a notion related to the proletarian political strategy, a notion which brings to the fore the problems of political alliances

and of political leadership as part of the revolutionary process. For Lenin, to take one example, the political dimension of hegemony arises out of the historical and political necessity of the alliance of popular classes against the capitalist apparatuses of oppression and exploitation. It arises in a context in which the proletariat, as the central revolutionary element of capitalist society, must unite itself with other oppressed classes – in the first place with the peasantry, but also with elements of the petty-bourgeoisie and other groups – in order to build a critical mass for the effectuation of a political and social revolution. In the words of Lenin, written in the aftermath of 1905: "The tasks of the proletariat that arise from this situation are fully and unmistakably definite. As the only consistently revolutionary class of contemporary society, it must be the leader in the struggle of the whole people for a fully democratic revolution, in the struggle of *all* the working and exploited people against the oppressors and exploiters. The proletariat is revolutionary only in so far as it is conscious of and gives effect to this idea of the hegemony of the proletariat".[26]

This strategic understanding of hegemony, with its emphasis on political alliances political leadership, decisively orients Gramsci's writings, who himself openly voices his indebtedness to 'Ilich' on this account.[27] Gramsci's main intuition is indeed profoundly Leninist: how to secure the conditions for the victory of the proletarian revolution, conditions which, as Gramsci himself would state, are to be sought on the terrain of political alliances and composite formations in class

struggles, whereby the proletariat cannot spare the moment of direction and unification with other exploited groups.[28]

And yet Gramsci inserts something more into the concept. If he theorises the strategic question of political alliances and leadership, Gramsci also transforms this question. In the first place, he does so by extending its reach, by expanding the range of the subjects, the socio-historical groups to which the practice of hegemony would correspond. Hegemony thus appears in Gramsci not only as something which would be exclusive to the proletariat – a political strategy adequate to the tasks of *its* own revolution – but also pertains to other social classes, especially to the bourgeoisie. In his analyses of the Italian *risorgimmento,* for example, Gramsci would openly speak of a 'bourgeois hegemony', or a 'hegemony of the bourgeoisie'.[29] But at the same time, Gramsci transforms the Leninist problematic in its substance. If the question of 'hegemony', as a question of alliances, was, in its very essence, a question of the socio-political bond, Gramsci attempts to think this bond beyond the simple fact of political leadership and unity. He attempts to conceive of a bond in a much stronger sense: the sense which he would call 'intellectual and moral leadership' or 'intellectual and moral unity'. Hegemony becomes something beyond the simple matter of negotiation and accordance of different political or socioeconomic interests. It becomes a matter of the creation of 'collective consciousness', of an ideological bond which unites different classes or social groups into a specific 'collective will' or a collective subject. Behind hegemony, Gramsci would not find anymore a

simple alliance of classes or class fractions, but a veritable 'collective man', shaped as a "'cultural-social' unity through which a multiplicity of dispersed wills, with heterogeneous aims, are welded together with a single aim, on the basis of an equal and common conception of the world".[30]

From a thoroughly 'engaged' and practical notion, a notion founded upon the concrete problems of the unfolding of the proletarian revolution, hegemony now acquires a more abstract dimension. The strategic and tactical problems are still here, and yet Gramsci seeks to invest these problems in the delineation of an abstract dimension of politics and of history, and, moreover, into an abstract dimension of power. This dimension is the dimension of the politics of the masses, of what Gramsci would call the 'consent' of the masses. The vital question of the politics of hegemony becomes the question of the capacity for mass political organisation and unification, the capacity for the production of 'ideological cement' and consent at large. This is why we can see Gramsci attributing a central role to the intelligentsia, in regarding the intellectuals as the 'functionaries of hegemony'.[31]

But this is also why Gramsci localises hegemony within the space of civil society: civil society is the space of hegemony because it is the space *par excellence* of 'consciousness' and of ideology. Unlike the Marxian scenario of a war between egoistic interests, what Gramsci seeks to place under this concept is the entire array of institutions and organisations, associations and groups that produce and reproduce the 'subjective' life of a society: all those different forms of political or cultural organisation

at a remote from the 'official' sphere of the State, such as political parties, trade unions and councils, together with bodies of 'public debate' and 'propaganda' such as the press and publishing, but even more generally, the organs responsible for the moral and cultural life of society – from the family to the church, from the school to the education system at large, including the arts and literature, as well as sciences and philosophy.

Civil society, of course, stands in opposition and in contrast to the State. But the very dimension of hegemony allows Gramsci to transform the content itself of the concept of the State vis-à-vis the Marxist tradition. Drawing on Machiavelli, Gramsci argues for the necessity of a 'dual perspective', that is, he argues that the State has to be conceived in terms of the "dual nature of Machiavelli's Centaur – half-animal, half-human".[32] The Centaur is both beast and human, he is both the embodiment of violence and an educator. The State, according to Gramsci, cannot simply be reduced to the moment of coercion or violence – to the fact of the 'monopoly of violence'. It has to be also understood in terms of its sway over the consciousness of the dominated classes. The state includes both 'force and consent', both the force of coercion and the force of consent. The enlarged Gramscian State is a State which spreads beyond its official face and form – that is, beyond the governmental office, the parliaments and the courts, beyond the police and the army, towards the entire web of 'hegemonic apparatuses' which make up the scattered terrain of 'civil society', towards the entire set of 'private organisms' like the churches, the family, the media and

culture, in which the ideological submission, the 'consent' of the dominated classes and masses is produced and secured on a daily basis. Gramsci would insist that the State is made up of "the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules".[33]

This expansion of the concept of the State is quite important in theoretical terms, as it allows for an establishment of a decisive relation between the problematic of the State and the problematic of ideology. The power of the bourgeois State, as Gramsci would claim, does not only consist in repression – the State cannot be reduced to its coercive aspect only, to the existence and the functioning of the legal-political apparatuses of control and violence. The dimension of ideology and of ideological power is also crucial. For it is in the domain of ideology where a silent but crucial battle is being fought: it is here the ruling classes have to test their capacity to unify society by imposing their hegemony over the social forces, by producing and reproducing the consent of the dominated classes and the popular masses.

There is also an immediate political importance of this reshaped notion of the State. Gramsci's stake is to construct a theory that would be able to bring forth a new political line for the workers' movement, one that would be aware of the grave difficulties of the repetition of the event of the October 1917 in the West. The transformed structure of bourgeois States in the western societies, as Gramsci is at pains to demonstrate, is such that the

advance of revolutionary consciousness is already stifled by a dense network of institutions and organisations that condition and direct the 'thought' of the masses, forcing them to accept the ideological consensus imposed by the ruling classes, and thus effectively neutralising and pacifying their rebellious potential: "The massive structures of modern democracies, both as State organisations, and as complexes of associations in the civil society, constitute for the art of politics as it were the 'trenches' and the permanent fortifications of the front in the war of position".[34] In contrast to the imagery of swiftness which so vividly characterised the Bolshevik seizure of power in the October Revolution, Gramsci's proposal for a proletarian revolutionary strategy falls under a specific conception of a prolonged struggle – a 'war of position' – in which the main task of the revolutionary party of the proletariat is to lead a silent and protracted war in the domain of mass consciousness, a struggle in the fields of ideology and culture, in order to win the 'width' of a mass politics – not only by organising and leading the working class and its allies, but also by expanding its sway towards the 'civil society' as a whole.

1.4. A topographical gap

By isolating the dimension of the politics of hegemony (as the politics of the production of 'consent'), and also by placing particular importance on the terrain of 'civil society' (the terrain of 'consciousness' and association)

in the political struggles over the power of the State, Gramsci is thus doing two things. In the first place, he is constructing a theoretical space for an analysis of the complex structures of power proper to 'advanced' capitalist societies, a theoretical space within which the problems of ideology and of ideological struggles over hegemony receive a central location in terms of the analytic of the constitution and the structure of bourgeois States. At the same time, Gramsci is also delineating a particular theoretical space of political potentiality, a space *for* revolutionary politics of the proletariat. A space for politics *par excellence*: "In any given society nobody is disorganised and without a party, provided that one takes organisation and party in broad and not a formal sense. In this multiplicity of private associations (which are of two kinds: natural, and contractual or voluntary) one or more predominates relatively or absolutely – constituting the hegemonic apparatus of one social group over the rest of the population (or civil society): the basis for the State in the narrow sense of the governmental-coercive apparatus".[35]

In doing so, Gramsci reshapes and re-actualises the terrain of the superstructures. He sets a decisive path here for the *autonomisation* of superstructural moment, for the recognition of the particular determination that the latter is capable of producing in the historical process, whilst acting 'in return' on the economic base. This is why Jacques Texier, for example, would dub Gramsci *the theoretician of the superstructures,*[36] or why Terry Eagleton would insist that "the concept of hegemony extends and enriches the notion of ideology, [and] it also lends this otherwise somewhat

abstract term a material body and a political cutting edge".[37]

And yet, besides these theoretical advances, Gramsci's construction is not without problems. Gramsci also leaves us with is a profound theoretical and political ambivalence: an ambivalence which concerns the precise status of the autonomised terrain of politics qua *hegemony*.

Gramsci does speak, as we saw a moment ago, about the fact of mediation, he does locate hegemony and 'civil society' "between the economic structure and the State with its legislation and its coercion".[38] Buci-Glucksmann would also insist in this regard that the Gramscian "organised civil society [represents] a veritable bridge between the State-domination and the economy".[39] But what is this 'veritable bridge'? How does Gramsci's 'civil society' stand between or mediate between the economic structure of capitalism and the legal-political sphere of the State? And does this relation of mediation imply the short circuit that Marx forcefully imposes between the economic and the political spheres, between the sphere of capitalist production, that is between capitalist exploitation, and the sphere of the political representation in the State? Or rather, does Gramsci's formula of mediation amount to the negation of this critical link between the economic and the political?

The problem is that Gramsci does not leave us a lot of precise clues. The entire conceptual topography behind the logic of hegemony, the topography through which we see the space of the State separated from that of 'civil society', the dimension of force distinguished from the dimension of consent, the fact of dictatorship contrasted to the fact of hegemony, remains curiously silent in this regard.

Of course, Gramsci certainly cannot be said to not be aware of the determinate reality of the economic sphere, the reality of economic exploitation and of class struggles which defines the structure of capitalist production – not only because he devotes a significant part of his prison research to a set of very precise analyses of the transformations in the domain of capitalist production, but, first of all, because of his unquestionable 'vocation' as a Marxist and as a revolutionary communist leader. And yet, he does not make this link apparent, he does not scrutinise the exact relationship between the autonomised sphere of 'civil society' and the sphere of 'material' production. As he also doesn't – apart from a general evocation of Force or Dictatorship – theorise in a direct or explicit manner the problem of the *materiality of the State apparatus*, the problem – which Marx and Lenin exposed with all critical rigour – of the very form of the State as a machine or an instrument of class struggle.[40]

All that we are left with are a set of allusions, and even more, a set of allusive and ambivalent concepts – such as the concept of the 'historical bloc', which, if we scrape beneath the set of astonishingly diverse meanings that Gramsci attaches to it,[41] seems to amount to nothing more than an acknowledgement of the simple fact of 'unity' of the structure and the superstructures.

The perplexing result of Gramsci's construction of hegemony, together with his entire theorisation of the separate domain of 'civil society' – even if the latter purports to radically expand the terrain and the problems of politics within Marxist theory – is a strange silence

about some of the most elementary critical relations which Marx detects within the space of capitalism, a silence about the fact of class struggle which takes place in the economic sphere, in the sphere of the exploitation of wage labour, a silence about the determinate role of the legal-political apparatus of the liberal State in the perpetuation and reproduction of this exploitation.

That this silence and the ambivalence that surrounds it is not only astonishing, but very problematic, can be seen from the fact that it is precisely on this account that a set of opposed and contradictory readings have surrounded Gramsci, with some of them taking Gramsci's notions and political propositions far away from the critical theoretical dispositive of Marx. Schematising things to certain degree, we can note two essentially different, if not drastically opposed readings of Gramsci here.

The first is the one which tries to maintain an unbroken continuity between Gramsci and Marx's prodigious venture of critique, and, even more, between Gramsci's theoretical propositions on politics and Lenin's reformulations of the Marxist theory of politics and the State. This reading insists that Gramsci's theory stays true to the critical short circuit which Marx established, and in the first place, to the very idea of the primacy of economic determination and of class struggle. As Jacques Texier would insist: "for Gramsci, the infrastructure is indeed 'primary' and 'conditioning' ('*subordinante*') and in this he is a marxist. But this in no way means that the superstructures are not active at all times, nor even that men's superstructural activity does not become 'determinant' ('*subordinante*') in relation to

the infrastructure when a period of 'social revolution' commences that is, when relations of production have become irrational".[42] This interpretation also regards Gramsci's theorisation of politics and of hegemony if not a direct extension of Lenin (according to Massimo Salvadori, for example, Gramsci's theory of hegemony is the "highest and most complex expression of leninism"),[43] then at least asserts a profound complementarity between the two thinkers on the questions of the state and the revolution. Gramsci's 'silence' is therefore only a camouflage for the centrality of the notion of class struggle, a camouflage for the idea that State apparatus cannot but be a material instrument of class struggle, an instrument perpetuating the domination of the ruling class.[44] Or better, the entire theorisation of the autonomised space of 'hegemony' is nothing but a profound indication of Gramsci's powerful critique of the State-form, an index of his awareness of the necessary external nature of proletarian politics, as a politics of emancipation, to the very form of the bourgeois State.

But, at the same time, there is also another reading, a reading which turns Gramsci into a consequential thinker of the 'autonomy of the political'. This reading erases the line of continuity between Gramsci, Marx and Lenin, and instead links Gramsci to the reformist political tendencies of Eurocommunism, as well as to contemporary versions of post-Marxism.[45] What is collapsed here is, first of all, the very notion short circuit between the bourgeois State and economic exploitation. The State, instead of representing a 'class state', an instrument of class domination, becomes

a neutral and autonomous terrain, an empty shell to be filled with different contents provided by the contingent struggles over hegemony on the terrain of 'civil society'. Buci-Glucksmann sustains one such interpretation: "In fact, far from reducing the State to a simple instrument or to a mere governmental fact, Gramsci conceived it as the synthesis of a hegemonic system ramified in the civil society".[46] As does Anne Sassoon: "Gramsci goes beyond a view of the State as an *instrument* of a class. The State is a class State in that it creates conditions under which a certain class can develop fully, but it acts in the name of universal interests within a field of constantly changing equilibria between the dominant class and subaltern groups".[47]

But at the same time, this reading would also seek to hypostasise the very notion of 'hegemony'. At certain extremes of interpretation, the totality of the historical process, all the conflicts and contradictions of social life would become matters internal to hegemony: to the production of political consent. Gramsci's 'mediation' would become a veritable moment of synthesis, as hegemony would be presented as the solution to the whole array of problems that are defined in the sphere of production, the very real material consequences and constraints of the struggle between classes, with all the effects of violence produced by capitalist exploitation and domination. And since hegemony is a matter of ideology, the movement of history would seem to reside in struggles over ideology and culture, a struggle over consciousness and ideas, a struggle whose decisive and critical elements

reside in the labour of intellectuals, priests, party demagogues, artists, in short amongst all those personae of 'civil society' who are responsible for cultural, moral and spiritual life of a society. [48]

Regardless of which particular avenues these two opposed readings take so in order to built their arguments, it should be clear that it is the problematic nature of Gramsci's own text – the numerous contradictions, ambivalences and silences which mark it – which allows both of them. Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* – due to their complex, dense and heterogeneous nature – open the road to both interpretations. And yet, inasmuch as this ambivalence remains irresolvable within the domain of the passages that Gramsci devotes to directly theorising the politics of hegemony, it seems that Gramsci himself offers us a solution to the riddle of hegemony, although at some other places, at those places in which he inscribes the political logic of hegemony in a specific philosophical project, into a specific philosophy, the *philosophy of praxis*.

1.5. Philosophy as history: Gramsci's 'absolute historicism'

Philosophy of praxis is not only a euphemism for Marxism, a term through which Gramsci sought to deceive the prison censor who meticulously controlled his notebooks. It is also the name for a peculiar philosophical ground that Gramsci sought to accord to Marx and to Marxist theory.[49]

The centre of Gramsci's problematic of 'philosophy of praxis' is the notion of *praxis*, human creative and self-creative activity. According to the classical definition – that of Aristotle – *praxis* denotes the sphere of thinking and acting in ethical and political life, opposed to *theoria,* in the strict sense of speculation and logical deduction. But Gramsci's notion is not Aristotelian; rather, it proceeds from Marx. Or better, it proceeds from that prodigious gesture of youthful critique, where young Marx, the German journalist in exile, attempted to read both Feuerbach into Hegel, and Hegel into Feuerbach, whilst achieving a "genial synthesis of Feuerbach and Hegel" as Althusser noted.[50] For young Marx, the centrality of praxis, or of practice, implied a critical rejection of speculative philosophy, a critique of philosophical idealism, and the concomitant reorientation of philosophy towards the realm of the practical, towards the practical and concrete 'nature of man'. Marx claimed that philosophy needs to posit Man in his creative and self-creative activity, Man as creator of the world around him and of himself – and not as a detached, contemplative theoretical animal. In this way, Marx wanted to affirm the *diesseits*, the 'this-sidedness', or the 'immanence' of the human world, against the 'other-worldliness', the *jenseits* or the transcendence of metaphysical philosophical constructions. The 'essence of man', as young Marx insisted, is essentially practical, which means non-speculative and non-transcendent; but, at the same time, it is determined by the here and now, by concrete history, by the set of real, determinate social and historical relations and conditions. There is nothing

otherworldly, metaphysical or suprahistorical in the human. 'Man' is but the 'ensemble of social relations' – according to the definition from the *Theses on Feuerbach* – he is his own historical and social praxis, his own 'concrete practical activity', and not a "dumb generality which naturally unites the many individuals".[51]

In his own attempt at formulating a 'philosophy of praxis', Gramsci continues this eminently humanist and historicist thematic of young Marx. He continues it in a rigorous way, whilst expanding or radicalising some of its presuppositions: "That 'human nature' is the 'complex of social relations' is the most satisfactory answer, because it includes the idea of becoming (man 'becomes', he changes continuously with the changing of social relations) and because it denies 'man in general'" [...] One could also say that man is 'history'".[52] Or, again: "The philosophy of praxis continues the philosophy of immanence but purifies it of all its metaphysical apparatus and brings it onto the concrete terrain of history".[53] Historicity of being, historicity of the human, and, at the same time, the humanity of history, the primacy of praxis over speculation, the primacy of the human over the transcendent: these are the themes that Gramsci takes from young Marx.

But Gramsci also takes this Marxian humanism and historicism to a certain extreme. 'Philosophy of praxis', for him, is not only a humanist and historicist approbation of 'man' against the idealist or metaphysical constructions. It is not only, or not merely, philosophically speaking, a historicism and a humanism. It is an *absolute* historicism and humanism:

"The philosophy of praxis is absolute 'historicism', the absolute secularisation and earthliness of thought, an absolute humanism of history".[54]

The notion of 'absolute historicism' is a curious one, not least because Gramsci employs it only three times in his *Prison Notebooks*,[55] and does so mostly in a polemical manner, but also because we are speaking of a term borrowed from Benedetto Croce, against whom Gramsci decisively directs his 'weapons of criticism'.[56] And yet, it seems that the term does express the essence of Gramsci's philosophical position. One might say that historicism, the entire problematic of human historical praxis that young Marx sets out, truly becomes 'absolute' with Gramsci, because it is radically and consequently applied. Applied, in the first place, in the direction of that veritably creative and critical sphere of human praxis, the practice of intellectual labour. For what is at stake in Gramsci's 'absolutisation' of historicism is an attempt to subsume the entirety of the realm of human thought and human knowledge under the sway of historical praxis. It is not only the 'idea of man' which is to be historicised and rendered 'concrete', that is, grasped in terms of the historical and social 'world of man', but also, and most importantly, it is the very ideational practice of human beings, their apprehension and cognition of the world, which is to be submitted to the criteria of history. Problems of knowledge, cognition and consciousness, problems of philosophy and science, are to be examined only from the point of view of *praxis,* and in relation to historical *praxis*, in relation to the historical becoming of humanity. As Gramsci would maintain:

"We know reality only in relation to man, and since man is historical becoming, knowledge and reality are also a becoming and so is objectivity, etc".[57] Or, again: "Objective always means 'humanly objective' which can be held to correspond exactly to 'historically subjective'".[58]

At the core of Gramsci's 'philosophy of praxis' we find an intimate relationship between thought and history, between ideas and historical reality. Gramsci wants to bring human thinking and human knowledge as close as possible to the immediacy of the historical process. And he does so by positing history, the very unfolding of the historical movement, as an absolute measure of problems of knowledge and cognition. We cannot anymore speak of a scientific or philosophical objectivity at the remote from the 'ensemble of social relations', at the remote from actual socio-historical processes. As Leszek Kolakowski would point out: "Knowledge of social processes is not, for Gramsci, their 'observation' made from the outside: such an observation does not exist at all. Knowledge is part of the social development, an 'aspect', or an 'expression' of this development, on equal footing with economic transformations".[59] Our cognition of the social and historical world is a part of this world, and cannot be understood apart from the origin and function that it has here. Scientific and philosophical truths do not make sense outside of the context of their formation, outside of the role that they play in the social environment in which they appear or the global historical processes of which they form part. "[T]he 'truth' of philosophy, as well as the 'truth' of science, is the 'truth' in a social, pragmatic sense: what is truthful is

what in a determinate historical situation expresses the real developmental tendency of this situation. Both philosophy and science are not to be judged by criteria other than those which we use in the examination of social institutions, religious beliefs, emotions and political movements".[60]

If Gramsci's 'absolute historicism' sets the example here for different attempts at a social or historical relativisiation of knowledge – attempts which pass from Karl Mannheim's project of the sociology of knowledge, to the Foucauldian archaeology of epistemes – it is important to bear in mind that Gramsci's endeavour to bring together thought and history, the process of knowledge and the process of transformation of the human world, truly explodes this problematic, by developing some of its consequences to an acute degree.[61] Gramsci does not only seek to reduce ideas and concepts to their historical and sociological origin. He does not only seek to define thought by history, but to identify the two in a radical sense. Human thinking, and, in particular, philosophy and science, are not only measured in terms of their historicity – they become, for Gramsci, historicity as such, they become the active matter of the historical process: "One could say that the historical value of a philosophy can be calculated from the 'practical' efficacity it has acquired for itself, understanding 'practical' in the widest sense. If it is true that every philosophy is the expression of society, it should react back on that society and produce certain effects, both positive and negative. The extent to which precisely it reacts back is the measure of its historical importance, of its not being individual 'elucubration' but 'historical fact'".[62]

How do ideas translate themselves into practice, how do theoretical reflections become a matter of real history? And how does history unfold on the basis of the activity of ideational systems, on the basis of the practicality of ideas? Gramsci would reach for Croce at this juncture, and by adopting and modifying the latter's conception of religion, he would attempt to grasp the entirety of the products of intellectual labour – philosophy and science included – in the sense of *Weltanschauungen,* in the sense of 'conceptions of the world' or 'ideologies' which are active in the practical lives of men: "Accepting Croce's definition of religion as a conception of the world which has become a norm of life (since the term norm of life is understood here not in a bookish sense but as being carried out in practical life) it follows that the majority of mankind are philosophers in so far as they engage in practical activity and in their practical activity (or in their guiding lines of conduct) there is implicitly contained a conception of the world, a philosophy. The history of philosophy as it is generally understood, that is as the history of philosophers' philosophy, is the history of attempts made and ideological initiatives undertaken by a specific class of people to change, correct or perfect the conceptions of the world that exist in any particular age and thus to change the norms of conduct that go with them; in other words, to change practical activity as a whole".[63] As each particular historical practice carries with, implicitly, a certain philosophical orientation, in the sense of its own self-consciousness, so do the most elaborate and 'lofty' philosophical or scientific elaborations find their direct reflection in the practical

conduct of men. Philosophy and the sciences, instead of being separated from practice, as theoretical reflections formulated at a distance, are now directly intermeshed with practice and practical activity, as they pass into the nooks and crannies of social and practical life, providing the masses with both an insight into the course of history and a norm of practical conduct for making history. "What matters is that a new way of conceiving the world and man is born and that this conception is no longer reserved to the great intellectuals, to professional philosophers, but tends rather to become a popular, mass phenomenon, with a concretely world-wide character, capable of modifying [...] popular thought and mummified popular culture".[64]

Gramsci effectively makes history and philosophy one: in their practical existence, that is, in their existence in the hearts and minds of men, in the 'common sense' of the popular masses, scientific ideas and philosophical concepts become the active and essential ingredients of the historical process. They provide a 'historical methodology', as Gramsci would say with Croce, for the actual practice of the transformation of the world: "The philosophy of an historical epoch is, therefore, nothing other than the 'history' of that epoch itself, nothing other than the mass of variations that the leading group has succeeded in imposing on preceding reality. History and philosophy are in this sense indistinguishable: they form a bloc".[65]

Marxism and Marxist theory are to be read strictly according to these criteria of practicality and historicity. Before attempting to 'explain reality', that is, before producing a critique of the conditions and contradictions of

capitalism – a critique from which one is then to deduce the rules of successful political practice – Marxism is a body of thought which is directly immersed in political action. Before being a critical scientific doctrine, Marxist theory is a real ideational force, an active political orientation and a mass point of view.

In opposition to the 'bookish' Marxism which has characterised the period of the Second International, Gramsci here wants to call for directly 'changing the world', he wants to call for political action and political consciousness, and for an 'activist' approach to problems of theory and practice. Against the passivising expectation that historical and political problems are going to be resolved by themselves, Gramsci decisively points towards the necessities of political practice, as well as towards the active role of theoretical elaboration in the formation of this practice. Theory and practice should not exist as two discrete domains, separated by a wall of 'specialisation', but should be united under a forceful common denominator, fused into a veritable revolutionary force.[66]

But if this represents an attempt to resolve one of the central problems of Marxism – the problem of the unity of theory and practice – there are some serious problems with the engaged approach that Gramsci proposes here. At the very core of his philosophical 'activism', Gramsci seems to be effectively annulling the entire caesura between science and ideology, constitutive as it was for Marx and Engels, and for the entire venture of 'historical materialism'. With the criterion of practicality and historicity of ideas applied thoroughly and consequently, there is hardly any room to

draw a distinction between truth and falsehood, between rationality and irrationality, between philosophy and religion, or common sense.

And indeed, at the apex of Gramsci's 'absolute historicism' the categories of Truth and Reason are to be read as nothing more than expressions of real historical struggles. What matters is not the adequacy or inadequacy of scientific or philosophical concepts in the face of social or historical objectivity, their capacity to explain the world or gain knowledge of reality, or even to confront this reality in a critical manner, but the way in which these concepts or ideas can become active and practical, the way in which they can pass into real history, by intruding into historical practice and seizing the consciousness of the actors involved in it. All thought is sized and validated only according to its immediate practicability, all thought becomes a function of 'seizing' the masses. As Gramsci would assert: "Mass adhesion or non-adhesion to an ideology is the real critical test of the rationality and historicity of modes of thinking".[67]

Gramsci's 'philosophy of praxis' thus effectively does away with all general markers of epistemology, all general problems of knowledge, as it also collapses any pretensions to scientificity that Marxist theory can lay claims to. Everything proceeds from history, everything is already given at the level of real historical practice, which philosophy directly expresses in its conceptual and categorical formulations, simply in order to return to it as its self-conscious moment, by elaborating a historically effective 'conception of the world'. Philosophy

is thus effectively transubstantiated: it becomes nothing more than an ideology, an ideology whose function is to cement and unify the subjectivity of political actors and historical forces. Or, to use a famous phrase, it becomes 'identity thinking', it becomes the very self-consciousness of the historical process, with the latter taking place on the backbone of the struggles between classes and their competing *Weltanschauungen*. With Hegel, Gramsci can indeed say that the rational is real, and that the real is rational – but on the condition that reason and truth are but mere expressions of the dominant consciousness of a given historical moment, that is, expressions of the self-consciousness of the dominant class: "But at this point we reach the fundamental problem facing any conception of the world, any philosophy which has become a cultural movement, a 'religion', a 'faith', and that has produced a form of practical activity or will in which the philosophy is contained as an implicit theoretical 'premise'. One might say 'ideology' here, but on condition that the word is used in its highest sense of a conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life. This problem is that of preserving the ideological unity of the entire social bloc which that ideology serves to cement and to unify".[68]

As a corollary to this radical identification of philosophy and real history, philosophy also becomes identified with real politics. If concepts are immediately practicable, and if philosophical or scientific thought finds its direct correlate in the practical conduct of the masses, in their practical,

i.e. political struggles, then there is no point of making a strict difference anymore between a philosopher and a politician, between a philosophical notion and a political slogan. Political action and the consciousness of this action are two aspects of the same phenomenon, which means that professional philosophers or scientists are, essentially, politicians, and, conversely, that politicians as such are also in their essence theorists. As Gramsci would remark: "the real philosopher is, and cannot be other than, the politician, the active man who modifies the environment".[69] What philosophers and scientist do, what they cannot but keep doing, is to elaborate concepts and categories in the service of politics and political action: "Everything is political, even philosophy or philosophies [...] and the only 'philosophy' is history in action, that is, life itself".[70]

This tendency of historical relativisation that we find in Gramsci has, undoubtedly, been subject to an artillery barrage of critique. Many interpreters have criticised the Italian communist thinker precisely for fact that he rejects any recognisable criteria of truth and knowledge. As Althusser would point out, for instance: "[Gramsci] so easily identifies religion, ideology, philosophy and Marxist theory, without calling attention to the fact that what distinguishes Marxism from these ideological 'conceptions of the world' is less the (important) formal difference that Marxism puts an end to any supra-terrestrial 'beyond', than the distinctive *form* of this absolute immanence (its 'earthliness'): *the form of scientificity*".[71]

But does this obscure plight into ideology also not carry potentially disastrous political consequences? If

the truth of politics and of history is always relative to the development of a specific class consciousness at a given historical moment, how are we to privilege a certain type of consciousness from another, how can we say that one is politically sounder than another? Even if we adopt the criterion of 'effectivity' that Gramsci puts forward, is there any way to differentiate between truth and demagogy, between truth and 'beautiful lies'? As Terry Eagleton remarked: "If those ideas are true which serve to realize certain social interests, does this not open the door to a cynical pragmatism which, as with Stalinism, defines objectivity as whatever happens politically to suit you?".[72] In the last instance, Gramsci indeed seems to be spontaneously discovering the theoretical principle for any type of dogmatic and instrumental manipulation in politics.

1.6. Hegemony and class consciousness

Let us also note the immanent theoretical effects of Gramsci's 'absolute historicism': Marxism, as a theory of history, or as a theory of the historical contradictions of capitalism, will now become primarily, if not exclusively, a *theory of consciousness*. That is, it will become a theory whose principle theoretical and practical concern is the formation of the class consciousness of the proletariat, its shaping into a subject of history and of politics. How does the proletariat gain knowledge of its position and its role in history, its objective place in the structure of capitalism

and its mechanisms of domination? How can the exploited classes avoid being stranded in a 'common sense' which renders them subaltern, which subordinates their mode of life to the dominant forces? And, in the end, how can the workers' struggle attain that necessary degree of political unity and political consciousness which is a precondition for any revolutionary action?

At the centre of the problematic that Gramsci sets out, we thus find the Hegelian topoi of the *an sich* and *für sich* through which Marx attempted to describe the historical and political formation of social classes and their 'consciousness', we find the problem of the relationship between a class 'in itself' and a class 'for itself'.[73] This is the political substrate of Gramsci's 'philosophy of praxis', this is the principle stake of the historicist construction elaborated in the *Prison Notebooks*.

But what Gramsci makes here from a somewhat lateral conceptual couple in Marx is not only the central point for Marxist theory, but a point at which Marxism exhausts itself. Marxism exhausts itself in the problem of consciousness because it can only respond to this problem directly: by theorising the direct intrusion of scientific and philosophical ideas into history and politics, by theorising its own passage into proletarian consciousness. Before rationality, we find an active desire or will, before knowledge we find consciousness and self-consciousness of socio-historical groups. *Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will*, as Gramsci would say.

There are, of course, direct parallels which we can draw here with other thinkers which have characterised

the field of 'Western Marxism'. In the first place, we can think of Lukács, whose *History and Class Consciousness* also sought to translating Marxism straight into political consciousness, whilst proposing the phenomenon of 'class consciousness' as the solution to the dire economic contradictions of capitalism.[74] But Gramsci is very precise here: as he goes to 'operationalise' his theory of consciousness by providing it, through the concept of the intellectuals, with a concrete sociological form.[75] If important social and political processes are realised according to the development of class consciousness, this development cannot take place without organisation and without the intellectuals. Social classes do not gain knowledge and awareness of themselves spontaneously, but only with the help of specialised and autonomised intellectual labour: "Critical self-consciousness means, historically and politically, the creation of an *elite* of intellectuals. A human mass does not distinguish itself, does not become independent in its own right without intellectuals, without organisers and leaders, in other words, without the theoretical aspect of the theory-practice nexus being distinguished concretely by the existence of a group of people 'specialised' in conceptual and philosophical elaboration of ideas".[76] The intellectuals – and especially those whom Gramsci calls 'organic intellectuals', those who stand in an immediate relationship to social classes, as opposed to the 'traditional intellectuals' who attempt to maintain an aura of 'detachment' and intellectual 'autonomy' – are the true mediators between philosophy and history, between theory and practice,

between self-consciousness and revolutionary activity. It is the intellectuals who are responsible, in the last instance, for the very existence of social classes as political and historical actors, as they provide a guarantee for their social cohesion, by the elaboration and reproduction of their *Weltanschauungen*, by the preservation of their 'intellectual and moral unity', by the active, organisational formation of their 'wills'. As Gramsci would write: "The mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, 'permanent persuader' and not just a simple orator".[77]

At this point we can clearly see Gramsci's philosophical ruminations coming full circle with his conception of politics. We can see how the entire attempt of the autonomisation of the terrain of civil society finds its direct correlate in the autonomisation of consciousness, and in the embodiment of consciousness in the labour of intellectuals in the media of civil society.

But this is also the point where the paradoxes of Gramsci's theoretical constructions of politics can be properly exposed. If we already saw how Gramsci's autonomisation of hegemony leaves open a perilous ambiguity, the same problem can be noted with regard to Gramsci's attempt to elaborate and autonomise a theory of consciousness in history. Gramsci's 'consciousness' also falls under the impression of 'hanging in the air'. It also seems as being secluded from the material realities of class struggle, as if Gramsci had placed in brackets the structural

constraints of history and politics in capitalism, only to equate the historical movement with the unfolding of will and ideas – even if the latter are embodied in 'sociological objects', such as the intellectuals, and not in pure thought or contemplation.

The crux of the matter, again, hinges upon the way in which Gramsci binds together economic realities with politics and ideology in the domain of consciousness. The key in this regard is what he would term *catharsis*. Another beautifully ambivalent word, fully predisposed to deceive the prison censor, and, at the same time, another borrowing from Croce's language. But Gramsci accords a resolutely political meaning to the term: *catharsis* is a concept denoting the very process of the transformation of the proletariat into a revolutionary class, a concept depicting the process of the 'acquisition of consciousness'. As Gramsci writes: "The term 'catharsis' can be employed to indicate the passage from the purely economic (or egoistic-passional) to the ethico-political moment, that is the superior elaboration of the structure into superstructure in the minds of men".[78]

At first glance, Gramsci seems to be effectively employing here the Marxian *an sich* and *für sich*, as an opposition between unconsciousness and consciousness relating to the formation social classes. *Catharsis* seems to be a matter of making explicit and active in consciousness, in the domain of politics and ideology, that which remains latent and potential in the infrastructure. What is being 'purified' and 'set free' are economic tensions, contradictions that exist in the sphere of capitalist

production, largely in an unconscious manner, and which are now being 'cathartically' transformed into a particular type of consciousness, into the consciousness of social classes. The development of the political and ideological class struggle is therefore a reflection, a conscious reflection of the existent economic contradictions of capitalism. From a purely passive sociological entity, the proletarian class passes into an active historical and political subject, becoming conscious of the contradictions out of which it was born, and seeking to overcome them.

But this is not all that Gramsci presents us with here. He also adds a corrective to the Hegelo-Marxian schema. A corrective in the form a qualification: the effect of *catharsis,* the advent of the 'ethico-political' moment, represents a 'superior elaboration', a higher or a more progressive mode of consciousness. The relationship between the *in itself* and the *for itself* is thus not a simple relationship of reflection. There seems to be a definite dimension of progression in the passage from 'social being' to consciousness, a dimension where the political moment is constituted by developing away from the economy. And indeed, if we look elsewhere in the *Notebooks*, we can see that Gramsci even formulates a specific gradation of this development, according the ascent of consciousness with a scale and a set of degrees. In fact, with three particular degrees which mark the movement from 'corporatism' to 'hegemony':

"The first and most elementary of these is the economic-corporate level: [...] the members of the professional group are conscious of its unity and

homogeneity, and of the need to organise it, but in the case of the wider social group this is not yet so. A second moment is that in which consciousness is reached of the solidarity of interests among all the members of a social class – but still in the purely economic field [....] A third moment is that in which one becomes aware that one's own corporate interests, in the present and future development, transcend the corporate limits of the purely economic class, and can and must become the interests of other subordinate groups too. This is the most purely political phase, and marks the decisive passage from the structure to the sphere of complex superstructures. It is the phase in which previously germinated ideologies become 'party', come into confrontation and conflict, until only one of them, or at least a single combination of the, tends to prevail, to gain the upper hand, to propagate itself throughout society – bringing about not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity, posing all the questions around which the struggle rages not on a corporate but on a 'universal' plane, and thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups".[79]

Gramsci seems to be a good Hegelian here: the immediate self-consciousness, the immediate experience of oneself, is only partial and thus false. The direct sentiments of economic classes, the awareness of their own conditions and struggles, do not provide the key to the political or the revolutionary moment proper. This is not enough to move history. Consciousness can become true and historically effective only after it is able to grasp the totality and act

upon the totality, only after it abandons the limitations of the self, the limitations of its own particular origin.

Again a parallel between Gramsci and Lukács comes to mind, between the *Prison Notebooks* and *History and Class Consciousness*, a parallel in terms of the centrality of the notions of self-consciousness and totality. But we should be careful: the whole that Gramsci is interested in is not the whole of *cognition*, it is not the critical knowledge of the whole – the knowledge of the socio-historical totality, of the capitalist relations of production and their effects of exploitation and domination – which Lukács places at the centre of the development of the class consciousness of the proletariat, and which, moreover, can only arise from the 'point of view of the proletariat'.[80] Gramsci's totality of consciousness is a *practical* totality, whose realisation takes direct leave from Lukács's emphasis on the conscious deepening of the rift in capitalism. Instead of gripping upon the critical function of the Two, of the antagonistic class struggle at the heart of capitalism, Gramsci seems to be taking us away from the Two, as he envisages a political and historical movement of 'totalisation' the essence of which is a process of political, ideological and cultural unification beyond and outside of the fundamental class division of capitalism.[81] Once constituted as political subjects, as active agents *in* history, social classes must transcend their own 'classist' limitations, they must transform their own particularities and particular interests – which proceed from the economic sphere – whilst seeking to create an alliance or a fusion with other groups, their interests and demands, so that their strivings can become

effectively universalised and so that they can become proper agents *of* history.

Again, Gramsci autonomises politics, or the political moment proper, from the economic sphere. History does not find its political substance, its *motor*, in the determinate role of the economic contradictions of capitalism, in the critical awareness of the socio-economic conditions of exploitation of labour; rather, there seems to be a move away from these contradictions and their determination. It is not class struggle as such which makes history, but the progression of political consciousness away from the fundamental antagonism defined in the sphere of production. History progresses through a progression and expansion of political consciousness towards the plural and complex totality of the social realm.

At a certain register, we can understand how Gramsci here opens the door to the entire domain of political pluralism, and to many different variants of post-Marxism which have exploited this domain. But this opening is made possible at the price of a grave theoretical sacrifice. The Gramscian schema of the 'acquisition of consciousness' not only dismantles the rigidity of the figure of the Two of class struggle for each strategic and tactical consideration, it also seems to be dismantling the *short circuit* between the economic sphere and politics. The political moment proper, for Gramsci, is not constituted anymore, as it is for Marx, by a critical conjunction of the economic and the political: by the short circuit which upsets the normal order of representation of politics by linking political realities directly with the economic sphere, by pointing out

that the official sphere of 'the political' rests directly upon economic exploitation and domination, upon class struggle, which it obscures and reproduces. The Gramscian political moment – what he calls, again, with Croce, 'the ethico-political' moment – is constituted by a move *away* from the economic sphere, by an autonomisation of politics and political consciousness from the determination of economic realities. If Gramsci sees in corporatism the moment where "politics [is] grafted directly on to the economy",[82] then the moment of hegemony, which is politically superior, and indeed, which represents, "the most purely political phase", is the moment where politics is separated and disjointed from the economy.

Of course, Gramsci is very careful whilst moving on this delicate terrain, and he does insist that "though hegemony is ethical-political, it must also be economic, must necessarily be based on the decisive function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity".[83] But even here, it seems hard to avoid the impression that the "decisive nucleus of economic activity" never passes directly into politics and political activity. It seems hard to avoid the feeling that Gramsci tends to keep politics permanently at a distance from the economic structure of capitalism. At best, he leaves completely open the question of how and in which form the economic contradictions penetrate into the 'ethico-political moment', he leaves completely open the question of whether the political moment proper, the synthetic movement of hegemony, is, in the last instance, a politicisation of the economic structure of capitalism. If the struggle of class

against class, as Marx said, is a political struggle, is this struggle still, with Gramsci, class struggle?

In the end, and this is perhaps *the* vexing point of Gramsci's entire schema, this ambiguity is effectively supported by a stupefying conceptual confusion: for if the Gramscian 'catharsis' does rest upon a crucial reference to the economy, we should note that what we are speaking of here is not the determinate materiality of the economic sphere. The 'economic' moment in the *passage* from corporatism to hegemony does not denote the structure of economic production and reproduction, but the *subjectivity* that is produced in an immediate contact to it. The 'economic' is the most 'vulgar' moment of consciousness: the immediate particularity of the class interest or a class point of view, which is to be both included and surpassed in the universalising movement of hegemony. It is a specific element of *consciousness,* and thus of the *superstructures*.

As we can see, the entire problematic of the historical becoming of classes, of the acquisition of their 'self', of their preparation for a decisive historical scenario which culminates in the revolutionary act, this entire theoretical space as defined by Gramsci rests upon a silence about what actually goes on in the *infrastructure*, about the processes and struggles that take place in the sphere of production. Gramsci's theory of class consciousness leaves a looming shadow over those precise problems that Marx sought to define vis-à-vis the structure of capital: problems of the exploitation of labour through the extraction of surplus value, problems of class struggle and class domination which are fundamentally related to these contradictions,

and problems of the role of the juridical, political and ideological apparatuses in the reproduction of the conditions of capitalist exploitation and domination. Even if Gramsci does mention, at some points, that each historical situation is always in the last instance "closely linked to the structure, objective, independent of human will, and which can be measured with the systems of the exact of physical sciences",[84] at the same time, he seems to acknowledge too readily that these conditions and realities are transitive limitations which are to be easily overcome with the development of hegemonic consciousness. For example, in the following passage: "Structure ceases to be an external force which crushes man, assimilates him to itself and makes him passive; and is transformed into a means of freedom, an instrument to create a new ethico-political form and a source of new initiatives".[85] This is certainly why the *Notebooks* have themselves directly allowed for many idealist and voluntaristic readings, paving the road for a reinterpretation of Marxism as and idealistic philosophy of Consciousness and Freedom. See, for example, Norberto Bobbio: "The superstructure is the moment of catharsis, that is the moment in which necessity is resolved into liberty, understood, in a Hegelian way as the awareness of necessity [...] the very moment in which the material conditions are recognised, they become degraded to an instrument for whatever end is desired".[86]

By way of concluding here: the unquestionable merit of Gramsci is to have reinscribed the political moment proper

at the heart of the theoretical problematic of Marxism. Gramsci decisively expands the horizon of Marxist theory in the direction of the *superstructures,* whilst at the same time detaching politics and political practice from the mechanic movement of economic laws, from the pessimism and the evolutionism which has characterised the period of the Second International. He also brings out the importance of strategic issues of organisation, mobilisation and consciousness in the struggle over political autonomy. But Gramsci effectuates this inscription of the 'political' at a price of a profound paradox. In his obstinate attempt to localise the moment of the autonomy of politics – in the space of civil society, and in the historical movement of consciousness – Gramsci ends up obscuring if not dissolving some of the most critical elements of Marxist theory and Marxist politics. The result of 'absolute historicism' seems to be the suspension of the very core of Marx's critical discovery: the short circuit between the sphere of capitalist production and the political and ideological apparatus of the State. Bearing this paradox in mind, we will explore its dramatic effects in a specific attempt of the transposition of the Gramscian problematic far beyond Marxism: in the post-Marxist perspective of Laclau and Mouffe.

2. The Post-Marxist Impasse: Laclau and Mouffe, Hegemony, and Radical Democracy

A so-called 'going beyond' Marxism will be at worst only a return to pre-Marxism; at best, only the rediscovery of a thought already contained in the philosophy which one believes he has gone beyond.

(J.P. Sartre, *Search for a Method*)

2.1. Post-Marxism today

"Postmarxisms", as Fredric Jameson tells us, whilst putting the term in inverted commas, "regularly emerge at those moments in which capitalism itself undergoes a structural metamorphosis".[01] Whenever a significant historical transformation in the capitalist 'world-system' – its expansion, its modification, its critical and cyclical reinvigoration – changes the shape and the configuration of socio-economic realities, the contours of the relation between capital and labour, thus redefining the dimensions of the process of production, the role of the State vis-à-vis capital, the form of commodities and their reach, but also the terrain of actual struggles, both political and ideological, which surround the domain of capitalist exploitation, one can expect an opening of the space for theoretical reactions, for modifications and reformulations, re-foundations and revisions, and even open crises. Sartre once famously remarked that "'revisionism' is either a truism or an absurdity" and that "[t]here is no need to readapt a living philosophy to the course of the world; it adapts itself by means of thousands of new efforts, thousands of particular pursuits, for the philosophy is

one with the movement of society".[02] A theoretical crisis, from this angle, is simply an index of the historicity of concepts, an index not only of their capacity to confront in a critical manner the ever changing historical terrain of capitalism, but also of the position of these concepts within the fluctuating configurations of philosophy, science and ideology, always close as they are to the field of power and the clash of historical forces – Louis Althusser, as we will see later, spoke of 'philosophical battlefronts' in this regard.

But at which point does the labour of rectification and adaptation become the labour of renunciation and dismissal? For crises can also explode and exacerbate, and steered by endogenous and exogenous causes, lead to disenchantments and rejections, even violent repudiations. Jameson is certainly right to note a structural connection between cycles of permutations of the capitalist system and the emergence of immanent attempts at abandoning or 'overcoming' the Marxian or Marxist critical paradigm. From Bernstein's 'evolutionary socialism', through the post-war 'Eurocommunist' shifts towards social-democracy, until today's intellectual fascination with post-modernism, post-Marxism has been a recurrent phenomenon within the heterogeneous history of Marxism.[03]

One of the principal theoretical foundations of what we call 'post-Marxism' today draws its origins from a 1985 book by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, titled *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*.[04] This book, a self-professed manifesto for post-Marxism, is, as one observer noted, 'beautifully paradigmatic'.[05] Beautifully paradigmatic because it not

only condenses an entire set of theoretical and political tendencies which were moving the Left in a rightward direction in the 1970s and 1980s, but also because it shows us an immanent unfolding, from within Marxism itself, of that political consciousness which provided the theoretical 'superstructure' for the restructuring of capitalism at the beginning of the 1990s in Eastern Europe, but also in Latin America and on the Indian subcontinent.[06]

The centre stage of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is occupied by an open announcement of the 'demise' and the 'end' of Marxism. Laclau and Mouffe present this in the guise of a natural occurrence – a logical forward movement in the life of history, almost as a biological process of ageing. Times have changed, both theoretically and politically, and we should move on. Marxist theory, according to Laclau and Mouffe, has been exhausted both as an explanatory framework – as a theory of history and of socioeconomic and political struggles – and as a concrete orientation for political action – a political ideology or a political movement. In any case, it is wholly inappropriate for our post-modern world, for the condition of 'advanced industrial societies', where the increase of 'social complexity' and of the conflicts related to this readily collapses any attempt at subsuming the sphere of social struggles under the dualistic schemas characteristic of Marxist theory. In the opening words of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*: "The 'evident truths' of the past, the classical forms of analysis and political calculation, the nature of the forces in conflict, the very meaning of the Left's struggles and objectives – have been seriously challenged by an avalanche of historical

mutations".[07] When the plethora of the particularistic struggles and issues associated with the phenomenon of the 'new social movements' start squeezing out and displacing the typical figures of class conflict, the capitalist boss and the labourer, Marxism is not only pushed into a theoretical crisis, but is forced straight into admitting its own theoretical capitulation.[08] The entire arsenal of concepts which defined Marxism's grip on history and on historical development – concepts of class struggle, of commodity fetishism, of the exploitation of labour in the process of production, but also types of political analyses which Marxism has produced, essentially related to the notion of the *revolution* and to an understanding of socioeconomic and political *crises* – founders directly in front of the political 'complexity' of the present, and should thus be rejected *in toto*: "The plural and multifarious character of contemporary struggles has finally dissolved the last foundation for that political imaginary".[09]

In place of the figures of class struggle, of the 'State and Revolution', Laclau and Mouffe propose a new theoretical framework for politics, based upon a radical recasting and deconstruction of Marxist concepts: "To reread Marxist theory in the light of contemporary problems, necessarily involves deconstructing the central categories of that theory".[10] But, at the same time, they present this framework as the only suitable heir to Marxism: as the only one which enables us to continue today the emancipatory impulse which Marxism had provided in the twentieth century, to continue the radical thread of politics which is critically oriented against capitalism. Thus: "post-Marxism restores to Marxism the only thing that can keep it alive: its relation with the present and its historicity".[11]

It is interesting for us to examine the approach of Laclau and Mouffe for two reasons. In the first place, because it directly links to the problems of Marxist theory which we are attempting to trace here: problems of revolutionary politics and its autonomy, of the State and of ideology, and the debates surrounding the work of Gramsci and Althusser. What Laclau and Mouffe present us in this regard is an interesting limit case. Inasmuch as they draw directly from Gramsci's conceptual apparatus, they allow us to further seize the depth of problems surrounding the interpretations of Gramsci, whilst pointing to some real perils of Gramsci's historicism. As I will attempt to demonstrate below, these perils are condensed precisely around the exacerbation of the idea of the 'autonomy of politics'. At the same time, Laclau and Mouffe are interesting due to the ideological complementarities that their approach exhibits with regard to the dominant political discourses of post-socialism. In one of the subsequent chapters, I will try to show how the two even stand in direct contact, by tracing the embededness of Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical apparatus in post-socialist politics.

2.2. Gramsci for the post-moderns: the theory of hegemony

The post-Marxist alternative to Marxism is presented in the guise of a 'theory of hegemony'. A theory which finds its roots in Gramsci, but takes things far beyond the limits of the Italian Marxist, by drawing extensively from other

theoretical fields, fields such as structural linguistics and structural anthropology, and from the post-structuralist and deconstructivist approaches, Lacanian psychoanalysis, as well as the philosophical investigations of Heidegger and Wittgenstein.

But why Gramsci in the first place?

Gramsci is, according to Laclau and Mouffe, not only an *enfant terrible* within Marxism – one who presumably openly points out, although despite himself, the fatal gaps in Marxist theorisations of politics and of history – but also one who formulates, without being aware of it, a conceptual framework adequate to the historical condition of capitalist post-modernity, where the plurality of social struggles and antagonisms, in their contingency and their unbridled dispersion, reigns supreme: "The Gramscian theory of hegemony [...] accepts social complexity as the very condition of political struggle and [...] sets the basis for a democratic practice of politics, compatible with a plurality of historical subjects".[12] Hence, as Laclau and Mouffe would claim: "the expansion and determination of the social logic implicit in the concept of 'hegemony' – in a direction that goes far beyond Gramsci – will provide us with an *anchorage* from which contemporary social struggles are *thinkable* in their specificity, as well as permitting us to outline a new politics for the Left based upon the project of a radical democracy".[13]

What particular shape does this post-modern reading of Gramsci take? And how can we concretely trace the peculiar 'loan' that the authors of *Hegemony* want to accord to the Italian communist theorist?

Laclau and Mouffe start with the fundamental issue associated with the notion of hegemony, the issue of political association. As we saw in the previous chapter, the problem of hegemony, for Gramsci, was essentially the problem of the construction of political unity, the construction of the political bond – not simply through forms of strategic negotiation and bargaining, a give-and-take game between different political groups and organisations, but rather through a substantive transformation of the very identity and self-perception of these political actors. In the hands of Laclau and Mouffe, however, the scenario of the construction of political and historical subjectivities in the plural and heterogeneous realm of 'civil society' gets expanded beyond the level of a conceptualisation of a particular domain of social life. The Gramscian scene of hegemony now becomes a skeleton for the formalisation of an abstract theoretical framework, a social ontology. Hegemony becomes the general scene of the construction of social relations and social identities, and of the constitution of society as such.

But things have gone quite far. If Gramsci, in conceptualising the 'collective will', or the collective subject of hegemony in terms of the fusion and the remoulding of different social and political elements, gave an example of the transformative power of political relations, Laclau and Mouffe take this observation to an extreme. They come to conceive the entirety of social identities, the entirety of objects and subjects that make up the social terrain in terms of the logic of relations and relationality. Instead of being fixed and

pre-determined, all the elements of society are seen only from the perspective of their mutual interrelations and ties. And, what is most important, it is these relations in themselves, and nothing else, which determines the very being of these elements. If, for Ferdinand de Saussure, language was of a system of differential relations between signs, without any positive and firm objects,[14] Laclau and Mouffe, in their turn, propose a conception of society based fully upon such a logic of differential relations and combinations: "The necessity of the social is the necessity proper to purely relational identities – as in the linguistic principle of value".[15] Analogous to the assumption that the *value* of linguistic elements can only be derived from the interrelational nexus in which these elements are involved, or better, that signs do not possess a meaning in themselves, apart through their differentiation with other elements in the linguistic system, Laclau and Mouffe claim that society and its constitutive elements – social groups and interests, political ideologies and institutions, social movements, economic tendencies – cannot be accounted for as meaningful objects apart from and prior to their relations within the totality of a social system of mutual interrelations. Reaching for de Saussure, and even more for the post-structuralist radicalisation of the structural model of signification, they argue that any discrete element of the structure of society, any particular fragment of the social body, can be reconceptualised in terms of the logic of signifying system, the logic of the signifier. Each of these social elements, in itself, possesses a solely differential and positional nature – just like a signifier in a signifying chain,

it is what the other signifiers in this chain are not. This means that, ultimately, society contains no positive terms, that there are no social objects which would be given in advance, but that there exist only sets of relations. The logic of the social is purely combinatorial.

This comparison with structuralist and post-structuralist conceptions of language is, however, not merely coincidental. It is substantive. For Laclau and Mouffe do not only seek to establish an analogy between linguistic and symbolic systems and socio political realities, but to build a deep homology and unity between the two terrains, as they venture into redefining the social in its entirety in terms of the symbolic, and ultimately, into asserting an indiscernibility between the social and the discursive: "Our analysis rejects the distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices. It affirms: a) that every object is constituted as an object of discourse, insofar as no object is given outside every discursive condition of emergence; and b) that any distinction between what are usually called the linguistic and behavioural aspects of a social practice, is [...] an incorrect distinction".[16] Social relations are thus immediately and inseparably fused with discursive relations, that is, they both unfold and intersperse themselves at one and the same terrain: "There are not two planes, one of essences and the other of appearances, since there is no possibility of fixing an *ultimate* literal sense for which the symbolic would be a second and derived plane of signification".[17]

This does not mean, according to the authors of *Hegemony,* that the social world is completely reduced to

words, thoughts and ideas, whether beautiful and truthful or not, but rather that discourses and practices, words and things, concepts and realities, ideologies and institutions, subjects and objects, all form an inseparable whole, and are thus open to that peculiar type of theoretical probing which is proper to a linguistic or a semiotic structural analysis. Laclau and Mouffe go as far as to claim that as a consequence of their approach, linguistic concepts and discursive tropes, such as metaphor and metonymy, are not to be taken only as analogical tools which may help broaden our understanding of social relations, but can be seen and analysed as real logics present in the actual working of society: "Synonymy, metonymy, metaphor are not forms of thought that add a second sense to a primary, constitutive literality of social relations; instead, they are part of the primary terrain itself in which the social is constituted".[18] Henceforth, it becomes possible to analyse the entire field of social and political relations in the same manner in which one would analyse the structuration and restructuration of discursive surfaces – in terms of 'text' and 'context'. And if it is not simply a matter of de Saussure's or the Levi-Straussian depiction of the combinatorial logic of signs and their endless differentiations in a system of signification, then it is Derrida with his rejection of the conception of language as a fixed system of objectivities,[19] and the concomitant introduction of contingency and indeterminacy into the structuralist combinatory that will provide the theoretical key to all the secrets of the social world. The Derridean marrying of structuralism and phenomenology, and his

critique of the 'metaphysical' nature of the structuralist model of language, would put markers of indeterminacy, contingency, and ambiguity at the forefront of Laclau and Mouffe's conception of social relations. With Derrida, the two authors would exclaim: "The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely".[20]

In the end, we get a very peculiar ontological picture of society and of social relations. In the first place, society, for Laclau and Mouffe, is an entirely made up and constructed world. All social and political objects, all social identities are "the outcome of discursive construction [...] and the social is entirely reconceptualized [...] in terms of discursivity".[21] Laclau and Mouffe advance a specific constructivist conception, and a radical constructivism in that: "Human beings socially construct their world, and it is through this construction – always precarious and incomplete – that they give to a thing its being".[22]

This shifting world of constructions of society is at the same time essentially unstable and fluid. It is characterised by a permanent malleability, by constant flux, where indeterminacy and plurality of meanings constantly overload and threaten any permanent fixation. There are no social structures are which are firm and rigid, which may present themselves to us as 'essences', and which may possess an objective logic, independent of human will and meaningful interactions. The meaning of social identities, positions and functions ultimately depends upon contingent and transient discursive constructions. A social element, that is, a specific fragment of the social

structure, a particular social group, a political position or an ideological *topos,* is always subject to constant metaphorical and metonymical interventions, to the precarious play of discursive rearticulations and remouldings: "Society and social agents lack any essence, and their regularities merely consist of the relative and precarious forms of fixation which accompany the establishment of a certain order".[23]

The purpose of this constructivist, or as Laclau and Mouffe would have it, 'anti-essentialist' or 'anti-foundationalist' ontology is the following: to affirm the plurality and heterogeneity of contemporary social relations, and especially, the plurality of contemporary political struggles. Laclau and Mouffe are categorical in this regard: "If [...] we renounce the hypothesis of a final closure of the social, it is necessary to start from a plurality of political and social spaces which do not refer to any ultimate unitarian basis. Plurality is not the phenomenon to be explained, but the starting point of the analysis".[24] Inasmuch as society is not conceived as an organic or systemic totality, but as a plurality of shifting signifiers, each of which does not possess a fixed meaning or a fixed signified, as it is prone to constant sliding, remoulding and transformation, then we are basically speaking of an 'irreducible complexity of society', the 'infinitude of the social' or the 'growing proliferation of differences'.

At the same time, this is also the fundamental tool of Laclau and Mouffe's critique of Marxist analyses of history and politics. Against what they hold as Marxist 'essentialism' and 'monism' – where, as they see it, a single principle, a substance, or an essence, is posited as the

truth of all things that appear, always being present in them, determining all their properties – the purpose of the pluralistic relational ontology is to comprehend the wealth and multiplicity of the empirical realm of politics, the entire realm of historical appearances in its concreteness and its givenness. In Marxism, according to Laclau and Mouffe, "the concrete is reduced to the abstract. Diverse subject positions are reduced to manifestations of a single position; the plurality of differences is either reduced or rejected as contingent; [...] history, society and social agents have [...] *an essence which operates as their principle of unification.* And as this essence is not immediately visible, it is necessary to distinguish between a *surface* or appearance of society and an *underlying reality* to which the ultimate sense of every concrete presence must necessarily be referred".[25]

An embrace of the pluralistic, post-structuralist scenario represents an emancipation of the political moment proper from the monistic conception: "The terrain of politics [in Marxism] can only be a superstructure, insofar as it is a terrain of struggle between agents whose identity, conceived under the form of 'interests', has set itself up at another level. This essential identity was thus *fixed,* once and for all, as an unalterable fact relating to the various forms of political and ideological representation into which the working class entered".[26]

But where is the political moment located for Laclau and Mouffe? Politics, and specifically, the politics of hegemony, resides at the very centre of their relational ontology. In fact, politics is nothing but the very practice of discursive construction, the practice of 'articulation'. If

articulation is generally "any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice",[27] then hegemony is the political dimension of this process. It is a "practice instituting nodal points which partially fix the meaning of the social in an organized system of differences".[28] Political practice is essentially related to the discursive construction of social meaning – or better, it is nothing but the discursive construction of social meaning.

Laclau and Mouffe therefore locate politics not simply at the centre of society and social relations, but at each particular and possible place. Politics is not anymore a specific region, or a sphere of society, but the condition of possibility of social relations as such: a horizon. As Dallmayr would put it: "What society needs to gain contours is some kind of political articulation, that is, the formulation and establishment of a hegemonic political relationship".[29] In short, everything is political, and politics in the broad sense permeates all social spaces and relations – from the economy and production to the family and the church, from political meetings to literary gatherings, semiotic workshops and acts of naming a ship. Hegemony has, in other words, "become a name for the general logic of the political institution of the social. As a consequence of this move, the realm of politics was significantly extended to the institution of the social as such, where political identities are articulated on a terrain which is primary and not derivable from any underlying 'reality', such as the economic 'laws of motion' that govern the relations of production".[30] This is why Dallmayr would also say that

"hegemony involves centrally a revalorization of politics against all forms of reductionism (subordinating politics to other domains)".[31]

And how can it be otherwise, for there can be no 'underlying reality', there can be nothing else to reduce politics to. There is only one space, only one 'horizon' for Laclau and Mouffe, and this is the inseparable interspersing of social and discursive relations. If everything is discourse, and if discourse is at the same time nothing other than politics, we cannot look for the meaning of political relations in another social space. It is incoherent to speak of the distinctions between regions or spaces of social practices beyond or outside of political articulation: "the separation between the political and the economic [...] is the result of discursive practices, and it is not possible to immunize it a priori from every discourse constructing their unity".[32] Politics qua hegemony fixes the meaning of the incessant diversity of significations, it arrests the endless game of discursive substitutions, as it also determines the distinctions between all institutional spheres and regions of social relations. As Mouzelis pointed out: "To start the analysis with 'pre-constituted' economic and political spheres in order to examine their alleged inter-relationships is thus, in their view, to fall again into the essentialist trap".[33]

But the drive inherent to the ordering operation of hegemony is not chaotic and disorderly. It has a definite form and direction. The problem of hegemonic articulation is essentially the problem of the construction of a political formation, a chain which unifies different and disparate

elements, whilst bestowing upon them specific marks of commonality. According to David Howarth: "The major aim of hegemonic projects is to construct and stabilize systems of meaning or 'hegemonic formations' which, on a societal level, are organized around the articulation of *nodal points*. The latter are defined as privileged condensations of meaning that partially fix the identities of a particular set of signifiers".[34] Like in the semiotic notion of the signifying chain, Laclau and Mouffe speak of 'chains of equivalence' which are central to the practice of hegemonic articulation. Chains of equivalence unite and transform the signifying elements by condensing their meaning and by giving them a temporary fixation. Since everything is constructed, so is the meaning of each of the elements, of each particular political position which enters into a combination. The meaning of such positions is only the result of the articulatory practice, where the elements are aligned and combined. For example, when it comes to the question of the meaning of political struggles, such as the new social movements: "The political meaning of a local community movement, of an ecological struggle, of a sexual minority movement, is not given from the beginning: it crucially depends upon its hegemonic articulation with other struggles and demands".[35]

Politics is thus in its essence a question of unity or a question of a bond. Politics exhausts itself in discursive totalisations, whose aim is the formation of a political link, a 'collective man', as Gramsci would say.

What is crucial here is the transposition of the Gramscian idea of the 'ascent' of hegemonic consciousness,

its passage from economic 'autarchy' to political universality. Like the way in which, for Gramsci, economic 'class consciousness' attains its true meaning and political force only when it abandons the shackles of its 'corporatism' and enters into a liaison with other interests and groups, thus creating a sphere of universality, so particular 'floating signifiers' attain their full strength in a political field only when their particularity is subverted and they are articulated in a broad front with other elements: "This relation, by which a certain particularity assumes the representation of a universality entirely incommensurable with it, is what we call a *hegemonic relation*. As a result, its universality is a contaminated universality: (1) it lives in this unresolvable tension between universality and particularity; (2) its function of hegemonic universality is not acquired for good but is, on the contrary, always reversible".[36] If politics starts from particularities, if it starts from the irreducible plurality of discourses and political positions, its goal is the construction of a 'universal bond', a surface of totalisation out of the sphere of particulars. But with the proviso that the particularity of the elements is not completely annulled. If hegemonic articulation adds a second layer of meaning to the diverse set of political positions or elements it does not collapse their particularity and their plurality. A totalistic surface, or the surface of hegemony, co-exists with the particularities that it unites. Although it exists only for a certain period of time, to be replaced by some other configuration.

2.3. Absolute historicism at its extremes

Assessing the peculiarity of this loan from Gramsci, what first strikes the eye is that Laclau and Mouffe have taken on board all the problematic points of Gramsci's historicism that we discussed in the previous chapter. And not only taken on board, but exploded in a veritable way. Gramsci's absolute historicism – or better, to acknowledge the essential ambiguity present in the work of the Italian communist theorist, the idealist side of Gramsci's philosophical and scientific investigations, gets, in the hands of Laclau and Mouffe, a specific theoretical boost and further expansion. Even to the point of paroxysm.

The perilous consequences of the extended sign of equality which Gramsci wanted to place between philosophy, science, religion, ideology, politics and real history are felt straight at the heart of Laclau and Mouffe's approach. If Gramsci sought to find a direct bond between philosophy and history, between thought and practice, whilst opening the path towards an idealist rendering of historical processes, Laclau and Mouffe continue this path in a direct way. But they do so beyond Gramsci, by collapsing the very distinction between thought and language on the one hand, and social practices or social reality on the other. "The category of discourse" as Terry Eagleton noted "is inflated to the point where it imperializes the whole world, eliding the distinction between thought and material reality".[37]

Laclau and Mouffe would try to rebuke against an accusation of idealism here, by claiming that this

'identification' does not affect the problem of materiality, as we have to acknowledge that discursive practices are, in themselves, material practices, that language has definite material aspects and effects, precisely inasmuch as it is inscribed in the actions of social and historical agents as meaningful actors.[38] But this claim does not resolve the problem. In the first place, because it presumes that we render as equivalent – and thus cancel the differences between – very distant layers of materiality, very different layers of material practices. Even if we recognise the performative, and thus material force of speech acts, it is hardly possible to persuasively argue that the material effects of the act of naming a ship can be rendered equivalent to the material effects of the process of construction of such naval vessel. We rather need to speak of two completely different types of materialities, with two completely different types of material effects.

But, at the same time, it is clear that the purpose of the 'identification' that Laclau and Mouffe propose is not simply to equate different practices, to equate the discursive and the social, but to assert the primacy of the linguistic and discursive over the social. This is clearly visible from their attack on Marxist 'essentialism': when the economy is, as they claim, not a matter of an 'essence' but of discursive construction, then there can be no talk of the primacy of economic determination, even if this determination is already displaced in a certain 'last instance'. For this last instance is, according to Laclau and Mouffe, always already a discursive instance: economic relations, as relations between humans as meaningful agents, are mediated in

language and through signifying constellations. In the end, political economy is not really economic at all, but political and discursive through and through. In fact, it is nothing else but politics and discourse. This is why the Marxian schema of the *in itself* and *for itself* which was so crucial for Gramsci would end up being fully overturned: "[T]he Gramscian subject is in a *contingent* relation to its own material conditions [...] There is no longer any question of an objectivity which necessarily imposes its own diktats, for the contingent interventions of the social actors partially determine such a structural objectivity".[39]

This is a veritable radicalisation of Gramsci: if Gramsci's 'absolute historicism' imposed a certain silence on material social practices, institutional forms, forms of property, forms of economic exploitation of labour, and the materiality of the State (its essential link to the violence of class struggle and class exploitation), Laclau and Mouffe turn this silence into a determinate absence. If Gramsci had placed in brackets, in his vigorous opposition to the economic determinism of the Second International, the most fundamental markers of the materialist approach to society and history, whilst suggesting that consciousness, that is, the general realm of ideology and culture, is the place where the societal contradictions can be resolved, Laclau and Mouffe, in their turn, completely drown material practices in the realm of consciousness and discourse.

The main problem with this construction, as Eagleton rightly pointed out, is that it simply gives us vulgar economic determinism standing on its head: "Whether

'economics' gives rise to 'politics', or *vice versa* as post-Marxism would hold, the relationship in both cases is essentially causal. Lurking behind the post-Marxist view is the Saussurean notion of the signifier as 'producing' the signified".[40] Like in the crudest conception of economic determination, which readily collapses any idea of the complexity of the articulation between different types of material practices, between different instances of the social whole, Laclau and Mouffe's idea of discursive hegemony effectuates a violent reduction of different social and material realities to the fact of language. The picture is simply turned upside down: things are not under the command of the 'evolutionary laws of capitalism', which determine and produce everything else, namely politics and ideology, but under the command of language or discourse alone, under the command of the signifier, which is in its own terms the source of material reality. In the language of classical idealism, we get *being* simply reduced to *consciousness*, we get material practices simply reduced to ideas or to the (discursive) representations of these practices.[41]

This primacy of consciousness brings us only one step short from a voluntaristic representation of the historical process: the idea of the absolute malleability and makeability of social and historical relations. To be correct, Laclau and Mouffe are at pains to come up with a specific conception of structuration or fixation. The whole point of the application of a theory of the signifier to society is to show that there are signifying structures which possess a degree of permanence: "The impossibility of an ultimate

fixity of meaning implies that there have to be partial fixations [...] If the social does not manage to fix itself in the intelligible and instituted forms of a *society,* the social only exists, however, as an effort to construct that impossible object. Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre."[42] But the peculiar thing about these moments of structuration – which Laclau and Mouffe, following Lacan, call 'nodal points' – is that, in the last instance, they represent discursive or linguistic realities: structures rooted in the ambivalence of linguistic signs. This means that things are again under the command and primacy of language, and moreover, under the primacy of the discursive and rhetorical aspects of language. But when the distance between the concept or discourse and practice is annulled in such a radical way, we cannot but be left with a precarious and fluid world where human ideas and consciousness, and the practices of speech and rhetoric, are free to transform history and society, only to be constrained by the prevailing linguistic conventions.

At the limits of Gramsci's historicism we discover the fallacies of the critique of 'essentialism'. Laclau and Mouffe's 'revalorisation of politics', as some interpreters put it, is itself a peculiar 'essentialist' and reductionist theoretical operation. It implies a hypostatisation of consciousness, an encroachment of the discursive over all other social spheres, and particularly, over the material realities of production. If Laclau and Mouffe seek to 'emancipate politics from the economy', they end up autonomising the domain of consciousness and ideas from everything else, leaving us

with a space of floating rhetorical and discursive practices which are nevertheless posited as the source of all social relations – a single 'essence' present in economic relations and structures, in political institutions, in subjective struggles, etc.

We should note in passing here that entire critique of Marxist 'essentialism' which Laclau and Mouffe suggest presupposes a peculiar ideological disfiguration of the relation that Marx establishes between the spheres of the economy and politics. Marx certainly does not want to reduce politics to the economy – and do it in a finalistic, necessitarian and mechanicist manner as Laclau and Mouffe suggest[43] – but to create a *short circuit* between two realities which are essentially disjointed in the dominant representations of society and history in the capitalist epoch. The economy does not function in Marx as the 'essence' of politics, as the point of deterministic necessity, but as its *excess,* as that point which brings out the limits of the liberal representation of the political sphere – a representation which is prepared to accommodate everything, in its abstractness and its formality, but the fact of an essential connection between liberal juridico-political forms and the exploitative mechanisms of capital. In this sense, one could argue that it is precisely the absolute separation between politics and the economy – the emancipation and autonomisation of the 'political' – which is one of the principle traits of 'essentialist' thinking today, as it blocks the possibility of a critical reflection on the ideological mechanisms which help reproduce the capitalist relations of production.

2.4. A critical and explanatory vacuum

Laclau and Mouffe also replicate Gramsci's slide into idealism at the epistemological level. If the distance between different spheres of material practices, between different social instances, is levelled on the terrain of discourse, so does this terrain in itself level all the differences internal to it: the 'horizon of discourse' equalises all different types of speech acts, all different types of discursive practices, whereby the practices that produce knowledge and cognition find themselves indiscernible from 'beautiful lies'. Laclau and Mouffe readily efface any viable distinction between science and ideology or between knowledge and rhetoric. When everything is a matter of discourse and language, then there is no metalanguage as Lacan would say, there is no position that one can assume – in science, or philosophy, or politics, for example – from which the truth of social relations and political struggles can be conceived or spoken of. As Eagleton pointed out: "All discourse is aimed at the production of certain effects in its recipients, and is launched from some tendentious 'subject position'; and to this extent we might conclude with the Greek Sophists that everything we say is really a matter of rhetorical performance within which questions of truth or cognition are strictly subordinate".[44] Science and philosophy, and the entire realm of human knowledge, are to be judged solely from the point of view of 'language games', from the point of view of the discursive effects that they produce – which, in the last instance boil down to rhetorical and ideological effects. At the apex of discursive

historicism, the question of reason and of rationality itself would become an element immanent to the hegemonic game.

While it is without doubt that scientific concepts and philosophical categories are essentially rooted in language, and thus also prone to a discursive analysis, this does not mean that one can wholly reduce the 'point of enunciation' of philosophy or science to a mere rhetorical power play. If for nothing else, then not to fall into a relativist gloom, where all the cows are grey, and where each assertion of knowledge simply collapses. If one can recognise a definite need for a historicisation of truth claims, and thus also, for the historicisation of knowledge effects, there still need to be certain criteria so in order to judge the falsity or the truthfulness of the *contents* of philosophical or scientific statements, regardless of their, or precisely because of their contextual appearance. Otherwise we lose the very ground from which we can make any meaningful explanatory statements about the reality of history and social relations. As Adorno once pointed out in his polemic against sociology of knowledge: "A sociology of knowledge fails before philosophy: for the truth content of philosophy it substitutes its social function and its conditioning by interests, while refraining from a critique of that content itself, remaining indifferent toward it ... [It thus] denies not only the objective structure of society but the idea of objective truth and its cognition".[45]

Adorno is right to immediately add that this reduction of thought and truthfulness to rhetoric also involves an emptying of the concept of ideology: "[A sociology of

knowledge] fails equally before the concept of ideology, which it will stir into its broad beggarly broth; for the concept of ideology makes sense only in relation to the truth or untruth of what it refers to. There can be no talk of socially necessary delusions except in regard to what would not be a delusion".[46] This is particularly true with regards to Laclau and Mouffe. When everything is a matter of discursive construction, and when social reality itself is but an effect of language games, then there is nothing left to hide, to mask or to distort. With ideology rebaptised into discourse, there is no distance anymore between social reality and its representation, between ideology and the structure of capitalism. The reality of capitalism is exactly what discourses construct it to be. There is thus no question of criticising the distortive social phenomena, such as commodity fetishism, for their distortiveness, as there is also no question of trying to understand the ways in which the ideology of the State's universality, and of the putative formal nature of the official political sphere, conceals real fissures and societal antagonisms. If the science and ideology couplet provided Marx with one of the principle oppositions for a critical examination of the 'superstructures' of capitalism, Laclau and Mouffe completely deprive us of the possibility of such a critical reflection. Through their relativisiation of knowledge and of criticism, they readily deprive us of a set of critical operations through which Marxism has enriched social and historical analysis.

All that we are left with is a constructivist social ontology. But a social ontology which does not tell us much

in theoretical and analytical terms, apart from the simple fact that social and political identities are constructed, that discourse plays a central role in this construction, that the being of social relations is pluralistic, and that all social structures are historically precarious. If this constructivist stance helps us deconstruct any established identity and denaturalise social structures, does it provide us with real analytical tools with which we might be able to analyse political situations in capitalism in their complexity? "[M]any of the concepts of classical analysis – 'centre', 'power', 'autonomy', etc. – can be reintroduced", so Laclau and Mouffe claim, "if their status is redefined: all of them are contingent *social logics* which, as such, acquire their meaning in precise conjunctural and relational contexts, where they will always be limited by other – frequently contradictory – logics; but none of them has absolute validity, in the sense of defining a space or structural moment which could not in its turn be subverted".[47]
But this does not amount to much in theoretical and analytical terms. It is not sufficient to simply say that the world in which we are living today is one of incessant constructability, because this leaves us with no means to wage out the significance of one discursive construction of social relations over another. It leaves us with no means to explain why certain social structures – like capitalism, for instance – endure, and why do so in a violent way. It certainly leaves with no tools to understand where certain constructions come from, and why they do so. In this regard, Norman Geras is right in asking: "Are some hegemonic practices, for example, more likely than others to

prevail, or to prevail in certain conditions, and if so, why or in what conditions? [...] Would it have anything to do with material or other resources in different subject positions? [...] Would it depend on already existing structures, political or other, and if so, what would be the nature and scope of this dependence? Or must we just assume that openness and indeterminacy of the social mean, here, such a free play of discourses and articulatory practices that *any number* of outcomes is always possible, so that no particular outcome, no specificity, *can* be understood or explained?".[48]

A case in hand here is the way in which Laclau and Mouffe seek to theorise the State and its autonomy, relativising not only the structural location of the State vis-à-vis capital, but also the existence of the structure of the State as such: "The autonomy of the State as a whole – assuming for the moment that we can speak of it as a unity – depends on the construction of a political space which can only be the result of hegemonic articulations".[49]

2.5. From Saussure to reformism: a radical and plural liberal democracy

The important thing here is the way in which this discursive idealism feeds into a political project. It is here that we can truly seize the effects and the impasses of the post-Marxist theorisations.

The crux of Laclau and Mouffe's project of 'radical and plural democracy' involves a normative appreciation of the phenomena of the new social movements: "What interests

us about these new social movements [...] is [...] the *novel* role they play in articulating that rapid diffusion of social conflictuality to more and more numerous relations which is characteristic today of advanced industrial societies".[50] But not only conflictuality, but also, and primarily so, a diffusion of emancipatory potential, as the point is to affirm the new political movements of the 1970s and 1980s as veritable subjects of history and of emancipatory politics.

For the authors of *Hegemony,* however, this apology is unthinkable without an explicit critique of Marxist politics: "the basic obstacle [...] has been *classism:* that is to say, the idea that the working class represents the privileged agent in which the fundamental impulse of social change resides".[51] Marxism, according to this argument, has illegitimately privileged the proletariat as the subject of political struggle and the locus of social emancipation, representing it as a *universal class*, a class which incarnates in itself the historical emancipation of humanity as a whole. But the question of emancipation, for Laclau and Mouffe, cannot be posed in the singular. It has to be posed in the plural. There is not simply one single point in society where social inequalities and forms of oppression are concentrated, but a plurality of such points: "a polyphony of voices, each of which constructs its own irreducible discursive identity".[52] The entire attempt to bring together a theory of history and a conception of political universality has never been anything else than an "essentialist apriorism, the conviction that the social is sutured at some point, from which it is possible to fix the meaning of any event independently of any articulatory practice".[53] For Laclau

and Mouffe, it is impossible to construct a totalisation of history or society in an aprioristic or general manner – such as through a theory of capitalist exploitation, or the theory of class struggle – because the totality of the historical process and of political struggles can only be a *result*, an agglomeration of irreducible empirical and particular moments: "universality is no longer the privilege of an 'unlimited' social actor – like the working class in Marxism – it can only be pragmatically constructed through the 'equivalential' effects of struggles carried out by actors that are always limited".[54]

But it is not only Marxist theory of history which is under fire here, it is also the very concept of the revolution: "[If] we look for the ultimate core of this essentialist fixity, we shall find it in the fundamental nodal point which has galvanized the political imagination of the Left: the classic concept of 'revolution', cast in the Jacobin mould".[55] At the base of the concept of the revolution we are supposed to find a 'privileged' conjunction of *savoir* and *pouvoir*: "the postulation of *one* foundational moment of rupture, and of a *unique* space in which the political is constituted".[56] Against that, Laclau and Mouffe claim, it is necessary to affirm that historical change is plural and pluralistic by definition, not only in the sense that it comes from a multiplicity of places, but also in the sense that it comprises a plurality of subjectivities, a dispersion of conceptions and experiences which cannot be reduced to one single point in the political struggle: "the autonomisation of the spheres of struggle and the multiplication of political spaces [...] is incompatible with the concentration of power and

knowledge that classic Jacobinism and its different socialist variants imply".[57]

The affirmation of political phenomena of the new social movements thus has two basic theoretical prerequisites: the abandonment of the Marxist theory of politics, centred around notions of class struggle and the revolution, and, more generally, the abandonment of each totalistic, general concept of political subjectivities in history.

The main problem here is that as soon as the two abstract moments which have characterised Marxist theory are evacuated from the theoretical realm, we find out that all the particularistic and plural struggles of the new social movements, in their contingency and their irreducible particularity, are nevertheless readily referred back to theoretical abstractions. If Marxism was reproached for attempting to provide a too general unifying thread to diverse historical and political phenomena, all the multiple subjects and political pluralities that Laclau and Mouffe want are readily given a new totalistic principle, a new abstract common denominator. Most paradoxically, under what was presented as most problematic in the first place: the notion of the revolution.

All of the diverse post-68 political figures – sexual minorities, cultural and religious groups and their claims of identity, the ecological and peace movements, feminism, various human and civic rights campaigns, anti-racists and anti-authoritarian fronts, claims for of human rights, etc. – find their proper political meaning according to Laclau and Mouffe, only by reference to the French Revolution of 1789.

How is this possible?

The importance of 1789, according to Laclau and Mouffe, is that this is the precise date when the logic of constructivism and historicism makes an abrupt entry into history and politics. When the French revolutionaries decapitated the king and had done away with the Old Regime, whilst investing the political power in the body of the people, they did not simply change the contours of a political regime or transform the nature of political power, but implemented a crucial political innovation. This innovation is the idea that a social or a political order can find no *a priori* foundation or guarantee. There is no 'divine providence', no 'human nature' which would legitimate the rule of the monarch, the aristocrat or the clergy. Moreover, there is no 'natural' hierarchy within a society, no basis for the privileges bound to specific statuses and orders, such as those which were characteristic of medieval, pre-modern societies. Politics is emancipated from what Marx once called the *naturwüchsig* social bonds, from all different markers of transcendence which have characterised the *ancien régime*. The social and political order is thus entirely historicised – it is seen as something contingent, man-made, historical through and through.

But the essence of this deconstructive momentum of the French Revolution, according to the authors of *Hegemony,* is not to be found in the actual political ascent of the 'third estate', in the abrupt entry of the people on the scene of politics. It is to be found in the ideology of this political emergence: in one of the fundamental documents of the French Revolution, the *Declaration of*

the Rights of Man and Citizen. "[T]he Declaration of the Rights of Man, would provide the discursive conditions which made it possible to propose the different forms of inequality as illegitimate and anti-natural, and thus make them equivalent as forms of oppression".[58] When the discourse of rights and liberties comes to annul all medieval political privileges whilst recreating every individual as abstractly equal and free in his or her political capacity, all social relations come under the scrutiny of historicity and contingency. The formal figures of juridical positivity, the figures of the *man* and the *citizen*, provide politics with a universal discourse against the backdrop of which one is able to question any established authority or hierarchy, to oppose any form of inequality and oppression. They provide the permanent condition of possibility for a politicisation of social relations: inasmuch as anybody can claim the universal rights to freedom and equality, every social relation, every inequality and every established privilege can be put into question and become the object of a political struggle or contestation.

This is then the common denominator for all the particularistic struggles of the new social movements. The plethora of the political phenomena of the seventies and the eighties find their own conditions of possibility in the formalistic framework of the *Declaration*. The contemporaneity of the French Revolution appears at each moment where in order to direct the struggles against inequalities, in order to give voice to emergent forms of resistance to subordination, it is necessary to refer them back to the formal principles of equality and

liberty. And this necessity is not relative, but absolute: according to Laclau and Moufffe, it is only in and through this discursive mediation, it is only through a specific consciousness of rights to equality and liberty, that different relations of subordination and inequality can be transformed into effective political struggles and claims.

This interpretation of the French Revolution is not only remarkable due to its idealist hermeneutics: the privileging of juridical and ideological forms over social and historical forces. It is remarkable because of its idealist political operation: the submission of politics under juridical concepts and forms. For all their talk of a reinvigoration of a radical tradition of emancipation and the continuation of socialist politics for the post-modern age, Laclau and Mouffe have ended up submerging emancipatory politics under the institutions of liberal-democracy. The idealism of their notion of discourse perfectly corresponds with an uncritical endorsement of liberal political principles. Eagleton was right to argue that "a particular brand of semiotics or discourse theory was the vital relay by which a whole sector of the political left shifted its political ground from revolutionism to reformism".[59] Once the possibility of a critical historical reflection on the concrete forms of interrelationship between political liberalism and capitalist exploitation gets ruled out – being rejected due to its abstraction, and essentialism – politics finds its ultimate guarantees on the abstract ground of the juridical instances the liberal State. "For all its anti-universalism", as Wood pointed out "this post-Marxist concept turned out to be – could *only* be – far more abstractly universalistic, and far

less sensitive to social and historical specificity, than the 'essentialist' Marxist conception of socialism it was meant to replace".[60]

It should thus be of no surprise that for Laclau and Mouffe, liberal-democracy has no essential relationship with concrete class struggles. In a world of sliding signifiers and essentially unstable meanings, liberalism is simply one of the signifiers that can be reappropriated for the socialist cause. Its meaning is empty: "liberal discourse on individual rights is not definitely fixed; and just as this unfixity permits their articulation with elements of conservative discourse, it also permits different forms of articulation and redefinition which accentuate the democratic moment". [61]

However, this whole-hearted embrace of liberal-democracy should be truly singled out for its regression. For the claim here is not only that the terrain of liberal politics should be revalorised and positively embraced for a contemporary politics of the Left. The claim is that there can be no emancipatory politics as such, no struggle against oppression at all, without the discursive and ideological guarantees which liberalism and the liberal State provide. Laclau and Mouffe are very clear about this: "The struggle against subordination cannot be the result of the situation of subordination itself".[62] Rather: "it is only from the moment when the democratic discourse becomes available to articulate the different forms of resistance to subordination that the conditions will exist to make possible the struggle against different types of inequality".[63] One may be conscious of the fact that he or she is in a

relation of inequality or subordination – such as a slave or a serf certainly are in their respective domains of enslavement and serfdom – but only once this consciousness is also the consciousness of rights and freedoms to claim will people come to politicise their situations. The situation of inequality, and the consciousness of this inequality, does not, by itself, lead to any political action, it does not lead to revolt or dissent. Only when one has a clear idea that the position of subordination in which he or she finds himself or herself is illegitimate, and is so according to the prevailing discursive norms of the situation, can one take action against his or her own oppressive situation. This is why the entire history of the struggles for emancipation cannot be other but the continuous reclamation of the sphere of rights: "it is because women as women are denied a right which the democratic ideology recognizes in principle for all citizens that there appears a fissure in the construction of the subordinated feminine subject from which an antagonism *may* arise. It is also the case with the ethnic minorities who demand their civil rights".[64] And the same applies to the struggles of the working class: "Many workers' struggles in the nineteenth century constructed their demands discursively on the basis of struggles for political liberty".[65] The entire project of socialism ends up as a moment internal to the unfolding of the 'democratic revolution': "socialism is *one* of the components of a project for radical democracy, not vice versa".[66]

What we are left with here is an astounding reversal of the order of things: if Laclau and Mouffe start from an affirmation of change, plurality and contingency, they end

up reconfiguring politics as a very 'conservative' gesture – always bordering upon and tacitly endorsing the *status quo*. This is because the horizon of politics is always a pre-existent discursive structure: in fact, it is the given juridico-political framework of the liberal-democratic order. Instead of theorising politics on its own terms, as a vehicle for a radical transformation, as the singular and immanent source of historical invention and emancipation, Laclau and Mouffe subsume it under the unfolding of a 'reformist' logic of the system. Politics is not a manner of inventions and breaks, but of reclamations of rights within the existent order, of discursive and rhetorical forms and reforms under the umbrella of liberal-democracy.

But besides the uncritical positing of the liberal-democratic State as the transcendental structure, there is another idealist reversal that Laclau and Mouffe effectuate vis-à-vis the Marxian revolutionary political conception. For the peculiar thing about all the concrete and pluralistic struggles that find themselves expressed in and through the discourse of rights in Laclau and Mouffe is that all of them are in the last instance struggles of identity. They are all forms of identity politics. This is clear from the way in which Laclau and Mouffe conceptualise the problem of social antagonism. As Howarth pointed out: "Laclau and Mouffe argue that social antagonisms occur because social agents are *prevented* from attaining their identities (and attendant interests) by an 'enemy' who is deemed responsible for this 'failure'".[67] A political conflict or a form of political dissent does not arise for material reasons, for reasons of oppression and exploitation, for

reasons of an unbearable domination, but essentially due to identitary contradictions, contradictions of the self. Concrete political demands, and moreover, demands for political emancipation, are only ever a response to a crisis of identity: "it is because a peasant *cannot be* a peasant that an antagonism exists with the landowner expelling him from his land".[68] Even the struggle for the emancipation of labour from capitalist exploitation would become wholly internal to the identitary perspective, a form of identity politics: "it is the defence of a certain identity which the workers have acquired (their skills or their organizational functions in production) which leads them to rebel".[69] Ultimately, the question of political and social emancipation can never find its end in a radical transformation of the existing state of affairs. In its essence, politics – qua identity politics – can never be a transformative, transgressive operation: it is always a defence of the given state of affairs, a defence of the given identity of social and political subjects.[70]

2.6. The paradoxes of autonomisation

The most important conclusion to be drawn here concerns the paradoxes of autonomy. If with Gramsci we saw how the problem of the autonomy of politics against economic determinism exposed the ambivalence of the limits of Marxist theory, with Laclau and Mouffe we can see the perils of the explosion of these limits, and a regression to a clear pre-Marxist standpoint. Balibar was right to say that "the critique of economism is most often undertaken in

the name of a claim that the political sphere and the state are autonomous, either in relation to the sphere of the market economy or in relation to the class struggle itself, which comes down practically to reintroducing liberal *dualism* (state/civil society, politics/economics) which Marx criticized so tellingly".[71] This is a stark consequence of Laclau and Mouffe's attempts of a 'radicalisation of Gramsci'. Once the link between the politics of hegemony and material realities is severed, once the notion of hegemony gets definitely separated from any material base, both in the relations of production and in the structure of the State, we not only have an evacuation of the Marxian critical short circuit, but we loose the very grounds where we can think a revolutionary political subjectivity in its radical opposition to capitalist exploitation and its juridico-political conditions. The endpoint of the tendency to autonomise revolutionary politics from economic determinism is the autonomisation of the liberal State, and the establishment of its determination over revolutionary politics. In this, Laclau and Mouffe clearly point to the precise place where a revolutionary conception of politics falls into a systemic and reformist one.

In what follows we will explore another, radically different solution to Gramsci's conundrums: Althusser's theory of politics.

3. Politics, Philosophy, Ideology: Althusser's Singularity

3.1. From Althusser to Gramsci, and back

The trajectory of the thought of Louis Althusser is complex and contradictory. It is a trajectory strained by obscurely shifting patterns, intriguing moves and reversals, by incompletions and detours. But it is also, and partly because of its complexity and its convolution, a trajectory marked by its provocative character. As one of the radical figures of the philosophy of the 20th century, Althusser remains notorious for the immense disturbance his writings caused in academic and political circles, whether in the form of impassioned theoretical salutations or vehement philippics and denunciations.

The centre of one controversy was an article written in the tumultuous days of the aftermath of May 1968 in France, named "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", itself only an extract from a larger study on the 'superstructures' which Althusser never came to finish.[01] What is interesting about this text, first published in 1970, is not simply the degree of provocation which the theses and remarks elaborated in it induced, it is rather the fact that it reveals, in conjunction with several short philosophical expositions which Althusser has written roughly around the same time, and which include *Lenin and Philosophy* (1969) and *Elements of Self-Criticism* (1974), a specific phase in the thought of the French communist philosopher, a phase dubbed as 'politicist' by some of Althusser's most meticulous commentators.[02] Inasmuch as this specific moment is marked by a certain coherency and consistency – and this is precisely what I would like

to examine here – then we can say that here Althusser offers us an original, and radical treatment of the problems of philosophy, politics, science and history, and of their systematic juxtaposition. The goal of this chapter will thus be to look back at this segment of Althusser's thought, not only by critically examining the congruity of the arguments, concepts and categories that comprise it, but also by trying to assess the singularity of Althusser's place within Marxism, a singularity which seems to emerge precisely at that point at which Althusser thinks the problem of political singularity.

The main task in this sense is to show how Althusser addresses the problem of political autonomy that Gramsci had opened, how he offers us a way out of the impasse, where the question of the autonomy of revolutionary politics ultimately succumbs to an idealistic conception which collapses the critical link between politics and the struggles within capitalist structure.

But before commencing, we cannot avoid facing the controversy surrounding Althusser. The reflection upon the heated debates around Althusser's work, and in particular those around the ISA essay, will help us set the path straight for this analysis. Not in terms of a positive frame of reference, but as a negative starting point. For what is most striking about the discussions which surround the ISA essay is the extent of the misapprehension involved in them. It seems far from exaggerated to say that for most part the prodigious theoretical elaborations of Althusser's 'politicism', even when they were appraised, were subjected to dubious and fallacious interpretations and in the end

distorted and obscured. The symptomatic case is to be found in the Anglophone context of the social sciences, and in particular amongst social and political theorists in Britain, where the French philosopher left a decisive stamp, in disciplines such as sociology and the nascent cultural studies, as well as in various other fields such as film studies, literary theory and feminism. Althusser's take on the questions of ideology and politics, his elucidations of the notion of 'relative autonomy', his complex schemas of causality and determination seemed to have provided a philosophical warrant for the opening of new avenues of research in fields of social and human sciences which stood in close proximity to Marxism, permitting unrestricted access to the study of 'ideology', 'discourse', 'culture' and 'subjectivity' as socially and politically effective elements of the superstructure.[03] But the influence of Althusser spread under a peculiar condition. For paradoxically, those who considered themselves part of the Althusserian current could be seen sharing, at the same time, a certain sentiment with its most ferocious opponents. Both could agree that there was something deficient in Althusser's approach, that his conceptualisations exhibited contradictory elements and permanent flaws. The malady was diagnosed as 'determinism' and 'functionalism'.

"Althusserian structuralism", as Stuart Hall wrote, "is open to the charge, which has been made against it, of a creeping Marxist functionalism. Ideology seems to perform the function required of it [...] to perform it effectively, and to go on performing it, without encountering any counter-tendency [...] But a notion of reproduction which

is only functionally adjusted to capital and which has no countervailing tendencies, encounters no contradictions, is not the site of class struggle, and is utterly foreign to Marx's conceptions of reproduction".[04] Likewise, according to Paul Hirst, "Althusser, himself, far from advocating 'autonomism', is the victim of certain persistent economistic deviations. In the ISAs essay [...] ideology and the state are simple pre-given functions; mechanisms derived by a transparent causality from elsewhere, ie, the economy".[05]

The standard line of criticism, elaborated by Hall, Hirst and other social and political theorists in Britain, claimed that Althusser set forth a too deterministic conception of politics and history, one which is blind to the specificities of diverse social and historical conjunctures, one which too eagerly pays service to trans-historical structural laws, and most importantly, one that is incapable of theorising resistance, whether in terms of class struggle, or other forms. The political setting of the essay on 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' seemed overtly reductionist, and fatalistic: too readily reducing politics to economic realities, and too hastily submitting diverse social and political instances under the rubric of domination by the ruling social class. There appeared to be a stark contradiction between the 'politicism' of Althusser's rhetoric and his way of conceptualising politics and political realities. Even Gregory Elliot would object that "in the class struggle in ideology the cards are always already stacked in favour of the ruling class because its particular interests coincide with the universal functional requirements of social reproduction. No space is left for

oppositional ideology, little efficacy can be assigned to the oppositional ideologies Althusser nonetheless posits".[06]

Parallel conclusions were drawn in other theoretical fields. Althusser's historical and political determinism seemed to be in perfect coincidence with his treatment of the problem of subjectivity. His conceptualisations of subjectivity were dubbed as 'hopelessly circular', whilst his reflections on the nature and role of philosophy were reproached for being 'conservative'. Specifically with regard to the question of the subject, Althusser was seen as a resolute determinist, relinquishing all space for 'free subjectivity', for creativity and innovation. Michèle Barrett would, for example, agree with "many critics [who] have found Althusser's account to be one that strips 'the subject' of power of agency in its unduly mechanistic approach to the process whereby individuals are constituted as 'subjects' in a social formation".[07] This seemed especially clear when Althusser's conceptions of subjectivity were compared to Lacan, who was understood to be their source. As Eagleton would remark "for Lacan, the imaginary dimension of our being is punctured and traversed by insatiable desire, which suggest a subject rather more volatile and turbulent than Althusser's serenely centred entities. The political implications of this misreading are clear: to expel desire from the subject is to mute its potentially rebellious clamour, ignoring the ways in which it may attain its allotted place in the social order only ambiguously and precariously".[08]

In order to cure these maladies, those who found inspiration in Althusser's conceptual innovations reached

for other figures of theoretical authority, standing close to the perimeters of his thought. And if Lacan seemed to provide the warrant against the 'functionalist deviation' at the level of theories of subjectivity, for those more directly concerned with politics, Althusser's determinist flaws were corrected with Gramsci. In contrast to Althusser, Gramsci seemed much more in touch with the actual realities of politics, possessing an unmistakable sensibility for the 'concrete', for the complex and conjunctural relations of forces, and the diversity of historical situations. Gramsci's scenario of hegemony appeared superior to Althusser's schema of *ideological state apparatuses* for precisely its ability to grasp, in a 'non-reductionist' or 'non-determinist' way as it was claimed, the complexity of political settings and historical contexts, to elucidate the struggles of the dominated ideologies and forces against the dominant ones, and to think the various forms of resistance. As Hall would note: "Gramsci powerfully corrects the ahistorical, dangerously abstract, formal and theoricist scheme, towards which structuralist theories naturally tend in their practices. His thought is always historically specific and 'conjunctural'".[09]

At the same time, Gramsci's analyses of hegemony, where the 'State' and 'civil society' are sustained as discrete entities, and where the agencies of 'private institutions', operating outside the dictates of state structures, retain decisive political impact, seemed to be much more politically sound, particularly with regard to Althusser's proposal to collapse the very distinction between the 'State' and 'civil society'. Such a move was treated as theoretically

regressive, erasing the complexity of the problem of State *legitimation*.[10] But it was also seen as politically perilous: being only one step short from loosing sight of the very notion of class struggle, and thus rendering any type of politics of resistance unthinkable. According to Hall: "The 'Ideological State Apparatuses' essay [...] unproblematically assumes an identity between the many 'autonomous' parts of civil society and the state. In contrast, this articulation is at the centre of Gramsci's problem of hegemony [...] A critical question in developed liberal democracies is precisely how ideology is reproduced in the so-called *private* institutions of civil society – the theatre of consent – apparently outside of the direct sphere of play of the state itself ".[11]

Reflecting back upon this episode of the Althusserian controversy, at a distance from the theoretical and especially the political stakes involved in it, it seems that the interpretations noted above did not only entail a certain dose of misunderstanding, but were based upon complete misconceptions. They seem to have completely missed not only the direction and the aims of Althusser's arguments, but also the originality of his position.

It is certainly erroneous to speak of a deficit of politics in Althusser's *oeuvre*. In defining the very endeavour of philosophy as, in the last instance, 'class struggle in theory' Althusser could not have gone further in according a dominant place for politics in his theoretical system. The pre-eminence of a critical reflection on politics, at a remote from determinist or functionalist explanations, is also clear from the ISA essay itself, and Althusser would not refrain

from stressing this fact openly: "We can say in effect that the specificity of a theory that we can draw from Marx with regard to ideology is an affirmation of the *primacy of the class struggle* over the functions and the functioning of the State apparatus, and the ideological State apparatuses. A primacy which is incompatible with all functionalism".[12]

But the true degree of misconception, however, can be read from the very 'correctives' that we saw being applied here. Especially from the backward projection of Gramsci into Althusserian categories.

For when it comes to the relationship between the two thinkers, it is hard to overlook the fact that the substance of Althusser's project owes its substance to critical confrontation with Gramsci. Instead of being in drastic need for its rectifying touch, Althusser's ISA essay is precisely constituted in a critical reaction to Gramsci and to 'Gramscianism', that is, as a critical reaction to the political ambiguities inherent in Gramsci's approach.

I would like to expose this relationship in what follows: in the first place, by examining Althusser's attempts to define the very nature of philosophy against the idealist residues in Gramsci's thought; and then by looking at Althusser's careful examination of the problems of the politics, ideology and the State against the Gramscian analyses of hegemony, and against Gramsci's attempts to define a specific *space* of political autonomy.

3.2. Philosophy and its conditions

Starting with the question of philosophy should not be surprising. The very question 'what is philosophy?' concerns the substance of Althusser's writings around 1968. These writings contain a number of revisions of his earlier positions, but also radical reversals, with Althusser engaging in a comprehensive practice of *self-criticism*.[13] The move is a move away from 'theoreticism', away from Althusser's earlier definition of philosophy as a 'theory of theoretical practice',[14] and away from the general epistemological orientation of his theoretical project. Instead of a broad concern with a theory of knowledge – which was expressed through the thematic of *coupure épistémologique* or *the epistemological break* – Althusser proposes a different path, a path standing in direct confrontation with the concrete realities of politics.[15] We are presented with the following thesis: "Philosophy is, in the last instance, class struggle in field of theory".[16]

What does this provocative thesis tell us? Does it amount to reducing philosophy, in its entirety, to politics and political practice, as many of Althusser's critics were to maintain? Does it announce the end of the philosophical venture in a blind submission of theory to the political act?

In fact, Althusser is formulating a notoriously complex problem here. A problem which is certainly not a matter of identity or of vulgar reduction. If anything, he is at pains to assume a distance precisely from those conceptions which involve a stark political reductionism of philosophy. Witness the fact that his principal opponent here seems to

be exactly Gramsci, with his historicism and his 'philosophy of praxis': "[For Gramsci], a philosopher is, in the last instance, a 'politician'; for him, philosophy is the direct product (assuming all the 'necessary mediations') of the activity and experience of the masses, of politico-economic praxis: professional philosophers merely lend their voices and the forms of their discourse to this 'common-sense' philosophy, which is already complete without them and speaks in historical praxis – they cannot change it substantially. Gramsci spontaneously rediscovers, as an opposition indispensable to the expression of his thought, the very formulations which Feuerbach used in a famous text of 1839 which opposed the philosophy produced by real history to the philosophy produced by philosophers – the formulations opposing praxis to speculation".[17]

Against Gramsci's reduction of philosophy to history and to politics, Althusser proposes to rethink the moments of the scientific and the philosophical for themselves. Hence even the significance of his early category of 'theoretical practice', the purpose of which was, as Althusser comes to acknowledge retrospectively, "to justify the thesis of the relative autonomy of theory and thus the right of Marxist theory not to be treated as a slave to tactical political decisions, but to be allowed to develop, in alliance with political and other practices, without betraying its own needs".[18] But whilst criticising Gramsci's reductionist model, and whilst reaffirming the autonomy the theoretical space from its historicist renderings, Althusser still attempts to sketch a decisive bond between philosophy and politics. 'Theoretical practice' is, after all, a practice, which means

that theory, in opposition to the idealist notion of its purity, bears an unrelenting stamp of materiality. And in fact, this is the whole difficulty: to rethink the theory and practice relationship in a manner that does not simply collapse their distinction under the dominance of one term. If in early Althusser, the problem of theory/practice suffered from an excess of epistemological concerns, if it was moving in the direction of a one-sided insistence on the pole of theory, in the post-68 writings Althusser reverses the course. The result, apart from the provocative convocation of 'class struggle in theory', is also the formula of the *double inscription* of theory into practice.[19] Theory is doubly inscribed, as Althusser claims, in its mode of existence in reality: on the one hand, it exists in the form of *theoria*, as reflection upon the world and as knowledge of this world. In this mode of existence, the essence of theory, and primarily of scientific theory, is that it puts forward principles of analysis and intelligibility of its object – history, society, nature – whose totality it seeks to grasp. But on the other hand, theory also exists as a part of the very object that it submits to conceptual and analytic scrutiny, and moreover, it assumes a very particular location in this object. This second mode of material existence of theory brings forth Marx's problem of the 'materiality of ideas',[20] the problem of the active, practical role of thought in history, its capacity to shape the course of the historical process and contribute to the practical transformation of the world. Here, theoretical concepts do not represent anymore simple principles of explanation of the given whole, but change their shape and their nature. They are

translated into the element of the 'superstructures', they become 'ideological forms' inscribed in the practices of classes engaged in a bitter struggle.

Thus doubling of theory within the real inserts a drastic contradiction within the very category of *truth*, now submitted to the force of practice. "Hence the distance", as Althusser would say, "between the '*truth*' of ideas which cover the whole of their object, and *the efficacy* of these ideas which are situated in a small part of the 'space' of their 'object'. Hence the essential thesis that ideas, even if they are true and have been formally and materially proven, can never be historically active in person, as pure theoretical ideas, but can become active only in and through the *ideological forms – mass ideological forms,* it must be added, for that is fundamental – caught up in the class struggle and its development".[21] Interpreting the world and changing the world are thus united but not reduced to each other.

But what is it that bridges this distance between *truth* and *efficacy*?

In a short essay, entitled *Lenin and Philosophy*, Althusser proposes a remarkable albeit complex solution to this problem. The thesis 'philosophy represents class struggle in theory' is here specified in the following way: "Philosophy represents politics in the domain of theory, or to be more precise: *with the sciences* – and, *vice versa,* philosophy represents scientificity in politics, with the classes engaged in the class struggle".[22] Or, as Althusser would add: "[P]hilosophy exists somewhere as a third instance between the two major instances which constitute it as itself an instance: the class struggle and the sciences".[23]

What is the meaning of this condensed formula?

In the first place, it is important to grasp that Althusser strictly separates three different instances – philosophy, science and politics. There is no question of reducing one of these instances to the other two. Each of the three instances represents a reality in and for itself, each of them produces effects which are *sui generis*. In this sense we can speak of the specific domains of the scientific, of the philosophical and of politics. This act of separation already has tremendous theoretical consequences. Firstly, it presupposes that we cannot reduce philosophy to science, that philosophy is different from the sciences. This is a strong anti-positivist foundation of Althusser's project: "Philosophy is not a science [...] Philosophical categories are distinct from scientific concepts".[24] But at the same time, theory, either philosophical or scientific, cannot be reduced to politics. The recognition of the specificity of the theoretical moment is a warrant against all kinds of dogmatism, a warrant which averts philosophy from its fall into ideology. As Althusser would say, this prevents "the living freedom of science from being buried under its own results".[25] At the same time, politics is also recognised as an irreducible instance, an instance with its own practical and theoretical meaning, not reducible to its scientific or philosophical reflections.

But if Althusser isolates the three instances – the sciences, philosophy and politics – how does he then put them back together? This is the intricacy of the schema of *Lenin and Philosophy*. And this is where Althusser starts giving us an original answer to the Marxian materialist

call for the practicality of philosophy – the injunction to change the world – by placing philosophy *under conditions*. The entire schema, in fact, resides upon a fundamental asymmetry, an asymmetry where philosophy is placed in a determinate relationship of posteriority. Philosophy, according to Althusser, only exists as a separate instance inasmuch as it comes after the two other, primary instances – after politics and after the sciences. "Marxism affirms the primacy of politics over philosophy", we read.[26] But also: "philosophy is [...] always a long day behind the science which induces the birth of its first form and the rebirths of its revolutions".[27] In being posited in posteriority to the two fundamental externalities, to the sciences and politics, philosophy is placed under conditions.[28] This does not annul philosophy, nor does it reduce it to a simple servant of scientific or political aims. Philosophy has a definite purpose and role, which is to make possible the interrelationship between the two conditions. This is the central point: philosophy, whose existence is possible only under the condition of both the sciences and politics, mediates the relationship between its two conditions. Or, to put this in another way, it is philosophy that makes possible, in theory, the relationship between theory and practice.

But how does philosophy perform this difficult role?

Althusser gives us a laconic and remarkable answer to this question as he sketches the fundamental contours of a philosophy of the Two: the crucial function of philosophy is *division*. Philosophy does not construct, it divides: "If science unites, and if it unites without

dividing, philosophy divides, and it can only unite by dividing".[29] Another strikingly provocative thesis – one which affirms the non-universality of philosophy, or, as Althusser would insist, the 'partisanship in philosophy'. Scientific theory and practice, according to Althusser, do possess a specific dimension of universality. The sciences strive to construct their objects as universal – as for instance, the object of *history,* or of the *unconscious* – whilst submitting these objects under the universality of laws and explanatory regulations. But philosophy is not universal. This is because in its essence, and unlike the sciences, it is not here to grasp the 'totality' of an object, to form a systematic elaboration of the whole. Its essence is to divide and separate, and in doing so, to assume a position (*prise de position*): "An entire philosophical tradition since Kant has contrasted 'dogmatism' with 'criticism'. Philosophical propositions have always had the effect of producing 'critical' distinctions: that is, of 'sorting out' or separating ideas from each other, and even of forging the *appropriate* ideas for making their *separation* and its necessity visible. Theoretically, this effect might be expressed by saying that philosophy 'divides' (Plato), 'traces lines of demarcation' (Lenin) and produces (in the sense of making manifest or visible) distinctions and differences. The entire history of philosophy demonstrates that philosophers spend their time *distinguishing* between truth and error, between science and opinion, between the sensible and the intelligible, between reason and the understanding, between spirit and matter, etc. They always *do* it, but they do not say (or only rarely) that the practice of philosophy

consists in this demarcation, in this distinction, in this drawing of a line. *We say it* (and we will say many other things). By recognizing this, by saying it and thinking it, we separate ourselves from them. Even as we take note of the practice of philosophy, we exercise it, but *we do so in order* to transform it".[30]

The entirety of the field of philosophical practice, according to Althusser, is akin to what Kant designated as the *Kampfplatz*, a field of struggle between opposing tendencies. For Althusser, these tendencies are in the last instance reducible to two fundamental ones: materialism and idealism. Primacy of matter or the primacy of ideas. But, as Althusser would immediately add, this opposition is always already taken outside itself, as its significance resides in the effects that it bears upon its two conditions, upon the sciences and politics. By drawing, like Marx did, a conceptual analogy between idealism and ideology, Althusser would claim that the true stakes in the struggle between opposing tendencies in philosophy concern the sphere of ideology in its practical existence in the sciences and in politics. Drawing a distinction between materialism and idealism thus presumes, at the same time, "'drawing a dividing-line' inside the theoretical domain between ideas declared to be true and ideas declared to be false, between the scientific and the ideological".[31]

Philosophy is therefore, in its essence, founded upon a critical function, upon a critical act – and this cannot but remind us of the forceful elaboration of the idea of a 'ruthless critique of all that exists' in the early writing of Marx. But Althusser is specific here: the

philosophical act of division is here to assist the sciences in their practices whilst guarding them from falling into ideology. Philosophy protects the scientificity of sciences by nominating those instances where sciences are tainted with ideological notions, those instances where the *objects* of sciences are conditioned by *objectives* external to them, *objectives* which proceed from directly political and ideological gains which are distortive – and Althusser would not hold back from drawing a certain list here: economism, voluntarism, empiricism, historicism, humanism, evolutionism, dogmatism.[32] The stake in the struggle over scientificity is always, in the last instance, the openness of science to novelty and invention. In contrast to the ideologies, and to ideological theories, which circulate around mummifying notions, which maintain the life of a closed system, philosophy makes sure that sciences are "opened to the 'infinitude' [...] of [their] object, that is, designed ceaselessly to pose and confront new problems and ceaselessly to produce new pieces of knowledge".[33] But whilst struggling over the faith of the scientific, philosophy also maintains a decisive relationship to politics, as it assures that politics is provided with the permanent objective reflection about its own tendency, with the knowledge of its possibilities and impossibilities in history. There is thus always a double relation of reciprocity that philosophy maintains: "constantly intervening 'politically' in the disputes in which the real destiny of the sciences is at stake, between the scientific which they install and the ideology that threatens them, and constantly intervening 'scientifically' in the struggle in which the fate of the classes

is at stake, between the scientific that assists them and the ideological that threatens them".[34]

But is this critical function of philosophy essentially reducible to a 'critique of ideology'? We should be careful here. For the distinction between science and ideology that Althusser sketches is not a simple distinction between Truth and Error, between facticity and its mystification. The question is not one of the 'arbitration of Truth', from a transcendental position of Reason. Philosophy is not critical in the sense of having science and its essence, the production of knowledge, as its essential object of (epistemological) reflection. Philosophy should rather, according to Althusser, be seen as having no object at all. And this is the key point. For if philosophy can serve to incessantly inscribe the distinction between the scientific and the ideological this is precisely because it does not have an object, because it is objectless. There are no objects properly speaking in philosophy: philosophical concepts and categories are not constituted in the guise of objects, that is, in the guise of a theoretical reflection upon the world. Instead of objects, philosophy has stakes, stakes which are defined in a wholly conjunctural manner, by the current state of the antagonistic tendencies in the sciences, and by the actual contradictions inherent in the field of class struggles. Philosophical categories such as 'being' or 'matter' are not 'objective', they are not *reflections,* in theory, of actually existing objects – they do not mean anything in terms of the cognitive apprehension of the world.[35] Their being resides wholly outside of themselves, in the division lines that they produce in and out of philosophy,

in the *practical* effects that they produce in the practices of sciences, and in politics.

Inasmuch as it is essentially predicated upon division, and inasmuch as it is without an object, philosophy does not simply exist as *theoria,* but as a practice. A practice which is essentially an act, an intervention of demarcation. But also, a practice which is, as such, strictly speaking, equal to 'nothing': "For the intervention of each philosophy [...] is precisely the philosophical nothing [...] since a dividing-line actually is nothing, it is not even a line or a drawing, but the simple fact of being divided, i.e. *the emptiness of a distance taken*".[36]

Althusser's insistence on nothingness or emptiness thus gives us something which can be called a *conjunctural definition* of philosophy, of philosophy under conditions. Philosophy is not the 'Science of sciences', the transcendental place of Reason. The problem of the relationship between science and ideology, that is, the problem of the distinction between the scientific and the ideological, in which philosophy plays a crucial role, is completely severed from the general epistemological field, and the teleological guarantees of Reason. It is a matter of singular philosophical interventions into a given conjuncture, a conjuncture which is fundamentally predicated upon an uncertainty, on the vicissitudes of scientific and political developments. This is why singular philosophical interventions have to be incessantly repeated under new conditions: "The terms that designate the scientific and the ideological [...] have to be *re-thought* again and again".[37]

The crucial stake in each of these interventions is precisely the moment of the void. This is what is central for the separation the scientific from the ideological, and also, for the very distinction between idealism and materialism. For it is precisely the materialist position, according to Althusser, that is constituted in and through its insistence upon emptiness, in and through the evocation of the void. And conversely, it is the idealist tendency which denegates this void, as it recognises in itself the direct representation of the objects in the world, as it claims to bring about the Truth of the world, to discover its Logos, its fundamental principle.[38] Keeping the void open, this means acknowledging the relentless transformative and inventive capacity of scientific practices (and also of politics), it means guaranteeing that the objects that these practices work upon, namely social relations and knowledge, are infinite. According to Pierre Macherey: "Rather than being a seizure of the real, philosophy effectuates a certain taking up of a distance towards the real: taking up of a distance towards the real which, at the same time, places the real at a distance towards itself, and thus opens the necessary space for its transformation, or transformations".[39] Or as Macherey would add: "Philosophy expresses, not the fullness of the world, but its void, in other words, the fact that its order, which the sciences apprehend in the course of their indefinite progression, is non-totalisable, and thus impossible to subsume under a certain jurisdiction, or under the goals which would be radically foreign to it".[40] But this void is not only a matter of scientific appropriation, experimentation and invention.

It is also the void of historical contingency and singularity, it is the void of class struggle in its incessant practice of the transformation of the social world. Thus we should also add: philosophy expresses politics inasmuch it represents its real, inasmuch as it translates, from within its own mode of existence, the imagination, creativity and the singularity of the revolutionary class struggle. And this doubling of the void, of course, gives us a confirmation of the fact that the question of scientificity and scientific invention is inseparable from the constant revolutionisation of the world through the political struggle between classes.

What we have here, in effect, is a remarkable transfiguration of Marx's *eleventh thesis* on Feuerbach. Far from being a discourse which 'interprets' the world, philosophy is a practice – Althusser would say 'a new practice' – and in that a practice *sui generis,* implicated in the transformation of the world. Its power resides in its 'emptiness', in its declaration of the void, through which philosophy is capable of representing the very real of this transformation with regard to the sciences and with regard to politics. The 'task' of philosophy is precisely to bring the real of politics, its aleatory, inventive capacity, in contact with the sciences, and vice versa, to bring the process of the production of knowledges, with its own uncertainties and discoveries face to face with politics.

By guaranteeing this double relation of reciprocity, philosophy, which in itself has no history according to Althusser,[41] reconciles itself with history. It becomes its 'theoretical weapon'.

Are there any procedures proper to this particular philosophical practice? The most important one can probably be found in that place where Althusser discusses Machiavelli's 'rule of method', the tenacity of the Italian political theorist to 'think in extremes'. Thinking in extremes means formulating radical theses, theses which, through their divisive and polemical nature, are capable of taking up the position of the void, assuming the necessity of the transformation in the real. Thinking *in extremes*: "which means within a position from which one states borderline theses, or, to make thought possible, one occupies the place of the impossible".[42]

One example of this exceptionally complex operation of thought is to be found precisely in the ISA essay. But before examining this prodigious conceptual terrain, we should take into account a couple of very specific methodical remarks that Althusser puts forward, and which determine the vantage points of his scientific and critical approach to history.

3.3. Class struggle and abstraction

In the postscript to the ISA essay, Althusser makes an interpretative caveat: the reader should be alert about the peril of abstractness which lurks behind the text. The entire set of conceptual elaborations on the problems of ideology, the State, politics and subjectivity elaborated in the essay may, according to Althusser, remain abstract, remain dissociated from the actual historical realities,

if they are not apprehended through the prism of class struggle, if they are not as understood as class realities. The problem of the relationship between the superstructure and the infrastructure, that is, the problem of the specific determination of political and ideological realities, of their material and historical effectivity – which Althusser attempts to think through the category of 'reproduction' – cannot be dissociated from the incessant struggle between the social classes. In fact, the entirety of the process of reproduction is not an automatic, 'objective' process, but a fundamental moment in class struggle. As Althusser writes: "The *total process* of the realization of the reproduction of the relations of production is therefore still abstract, insofar as it has not adopted the point of view of this class struggle. To adopt the point of view of reproduction is therefore, in the last instance, to adopt the point of view of the class struggle".[43] In other words, it is only by the introduction of the concept of class struggle that a dimension of concreteness of Althusser's analyses is revealed, it is only under the prism of class contradictions and class antagonisms that the scientific concepts elaborated in the essay on the *ideological state apparatuses* can be said to correspond to concrete historical realities.

A surprising thing then is that Althusser would be reproached precisely for functionalism and for irremediable abstraction, for a deficit of the concrete dimensions of politics and of class struggle – a criticism which E.P. Thompson perhaps expressed most virulently: "Althusser's structuralism is a structuralism of *stasis*, departing from Marx's own historical method ... [His] conceptual universe

has no adequate categories to explain contradiction or change – or class struggle [...] Althusser ... [is] unable to handle, except in the most abstract and theoretic way, questions of value, culture – and political theory".[44]

The entire problem here perhaps revolves around the fact that Althusser does place a specific emphasis on the 'abstract', on the moment of abstraction in thought, especially in relation to the reality of class struggle. And yet, the moment of the abstract has a precise theoretical meaning here – one which has nothing to do with the common sense conception which opposes the abstractness of the space of speculation and thought to the concreteness of the sensuous, empirical world. If Althusser does accord a central role to abstraction, then he does so in order to stress the centrality of scientific abstraction in the process of the production of knowledge. Quite the opposite from an empiricist gaze which starts from the immediately given, from readily available intuitions and representations, the process of knowledge, for Althusser, is grounded in conceptual elaboration and scrutinisation, and ultimately in the systematic development of concepts through the work of theoretical abstraction. Concepts are abstract entities, that is, entities constituted by the process of abstraction, and, as such, not immediately deducible from sensuousness or experience. But this does not mean that they can be deemed abstract in the sense that they are mere speculative follies, which do not correspond to existing empirical reality: "[T]he 'concrete', the 'real', these are the names that the opposition to ideology bears in ideology. You can stay indefinitely at the frontier line, ceaselessly repeating

concrete! concrete! real! real! [...] Or, on the contrary, you can cross the frontier for good and penetrate into the domain of reality and embark 'seriously on its study', as Marx puts it in *The German Ideology*".[45] Althusser is profoundly anti-empiricist: the scientific knowledge of the real, or scientific objectivity, is the precise opposite to experience – it is the result of abstraction and conceptual construction, and not of direct, unmediated experience, of the 'concretely given': "What makes abstraction scientific is precisely the fact that it designates a concrete reality which certainly exists but which it is impossible to 'touch with one's hands' or 'see with one's eyes'. Every abstract concept therefore provides knowledge of a reality whose existence it reveals: an 'abstract concept' then means a formula which is apparently abstract but really terribly concrete because of the object it designates. This object is terribly concrete in that it is infinitely more concrete, more effective that the objects one can 'touch with one's hands' or 'see with one's eyes' – and yet one cannot touch it with one's hands or see it with one's eyes".[46]

What we approach here, in fact, is Marx's famous 'rule of method', elaborated in the 1857 'Introduction' to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. As Marx put it minimally and forcefully: the 'scientifically correct method' consists in "rising from the abstract to the concrete".[47] Displacing the positivist temptation, Marx here shows us that the 'concrete' is not what is empirically given – the ensemble of sensuous, perceptive data – but a synthetic construct, the product of the labour of the scientific concept, of abstraction and conceptual

determination. Instead of being given in advance, instead of proceeding from reality or from its immediate phenomenic observation, the concrete, which itself is internal to the process of knowledge, is a result of a conceptual synthesis. Marx would thus speak of the totality of thought or 'concrete-in-thought' (*Gedankenkonkretum*). Quoting the famous 'Introduction': "The concrete concept is concrete because it is a synthesis of many definitions, thus representing the unity of diverse aspects. It appears therefore in reasoning as a summing-up, a result, and not as the starting point, although it is the real point of origin, and thus also the point of origin of perception and imagination".[48]

It is here that we find a forceful rejoinder to some of the post-Marxist critical objections that we touched upon in the previous chapter. Against Laclau and Mouffe's claim that the Marxian conceptualisation of the relationship between the economy and politics is epistemologically invalid and reductive, as it implies a separation between the realm of essences and that of appearances, where concrete social objects are never recognised in themselves, but are always reduced to another, more abstract or more essential reality, Althusser points to the fact that the 'reductionism', or the process of abstraction inherent in Marxian concepts is a veritable epistemological and explanatory advantage. The strength of the Marxist theoretical apparatus lies precisely in its capacity for generalisation and abstraction: in the ability to offer a set of conceptual syntheses and complex determinations which, abstracting from the immediately given representation of reality, provide us with

precise scientific means of production of the knowledge of this reality.

This is the register from which we should approach the concept of class struggle. Class struggle, for Althusser, is just one such 'terribly concrete reality', which it is impossible to fully 'see with one's eyes' or 'touch with one's hands'. Before being treated in terms of a set of empirical phenomena, it should be seized as a structural reality, and in that as a fundamental structural reality of capitalism. Althusser evokes the central thesis of the *Communist Manifesto*, 'class struggle is the motor of history', in order to posit the form of the Two, the form of division, as the essential structural form underlying social relations in capitalism. In this he wants to remind us of the importance of Marx's theoretical depiction of the wage relation as the relation of exploitation, an 'abstract' relation as it is, but with dramatic effects in the 'real', in the 'concrete'. Class struggle being the 'motor of history' ultimately signifies, for Althusser, that the totality of the social relations within a given mode of production resides on an insurmountable structural contradiction, a contradiction for which we can discern both objective and subjective aspects. Class struggle is at the same time both the objective contradiction of the capitalist system – the contradiction between capital and labour, the contradiction contained in the process of capitalist exploitation, in the extraction of the *surplus-value,* and in general in the 'social division of labour' that the capitalism imposes; but it is also the subjective antagonistic form arising from this objective relation.

What is important to note is that we are very far from a typical sociological representation of classes and of their struggle here. The schema that Althusser adopts is a dialectical and structural one – it ultimately rests upon the philosophical idea of the primacy of contradiction over the terms of the contradiction. Classes are not entities which can be defined aprioristically, in a descriptive, statistical or empirical manner. They are not autonomous 'substances' which enter, as such, as pre-given, into an antagonistic struggle. Rather, they are the result of this very struggle, the consequence of the movement of division. "The class struggle is not a product of the existence of classes which exist *previous* (in law and in fact) to the struggle: the class struggle is the historical form of the *contradiction* (internal to a mode of production) which *divides* the classes into classes".[49] Or again: "In order for there to be classes in a 'society', the society has to be *divided* into classes: this division does not come *later in the story*; it is the exploitation of one class by another, it is therefore the class struggle, which constitutes the division into classes. For exploitation is already class struggle".[50] What this means is that the movement of capitalist production carries within itself the terrible characteristic in that it does not constitute a social relation, it does not unite people, without dividing them into two opposed classes, into the exploiters and the exploited, the dominant and the dominated. As Balibar put in his *Five Studies in Historical Materialism*: "It is class struggle in production that drives the material existence of classes, their 'subsistence': it is the quotidian class struggle pursued in production *by capital* which makes the process

of labour a process of the production of surplus-value (and thus of profit, which is but a fraction of the latter), the material basis for the existence of the capitalist class; it is the quotidian class struggle in production pursued by the workers which assures, against the tendency of capital towards maximum profit, the material conditions (namely, the level of wages) necessary for the *reproduction of the force of labour,* for the existence of the working class".[51]

But this structural embeddedness of class struggle, of the movement of the Two at the heart of the capitalist mode of production, and the relations which are proper to it, points to another 'terribly concrete' characteristic of the 'abstract' notion of class struggle: the fact that the contradiction on which it rests is fundamentally asymmetrical. As Althusser would point out: "contradiction, as you find it in *Capital,* presents the surprising characteristic of being *uneven,* of bringing contrary terms into operation which you cannot obtain just by giving the second a sign obtained by negating that of the first. This is because they are caught up in a *relation of unevenness* which constantly reproduces its conditions of existence just on account of this contradiction".[52] This implies that it is erroneous to conceive of the antagonism between social classes as a simple dialectical confrontation between two 'subjects' – the bourgeoisie and the proletariat – each of which equally represents the negation of the other. One of the terms in this contradiction is always predominant. And moreover, one of the terms defines the very terrain on which the class struggle takes places. In capitalist societies it is the capital relation, which is the class struggle

of the bourgeoisie, that dominates over social relations whilst subordinating the class struggle of the proletariat to itself – in the sense that it puts fort the contours of the 'social division of labour' based on exploitation, in the sense that it produces the proletariat as the class exploited in the extraction of the surplus-value, a class whose material existence stands in the very contradiction to the premises of the capitalist societies, and yet constitutes its necessary element.

3.4. The State machinery: on the materiality of the State form

The structural notion of the class struggle, together with its essential dissymmetry, is crucial for understanding the context of the entire ISA essay. This 'abstract' positing of the problem of the historical movement becomes particularly important for the way in which Althusser treats the problem of the State. In fact, here we can speak of a third moment of a 'terrible concreteness'. How does Althusser conceptualise the State? Ultimately, in a manner which is as 'minimal' and 'abstract' as his propositions on the class struggle, and, moreover, in a way which points to the fact that the two problems – of the State and of class struggle – are inseparable. The State, according to Althusser, is essentially a class reality, a reality of class struggle, and in that, a repressive reality: "The State is a 'machine' of repression, which enables the ruling classes (in the nineteenth century the bourgeois class and the 'class' of big landowners) to ensure

their domination over the working class, thus enabling the former to subject the latter to the process of surplus-value extortion (i.e. to capitalist exploitation)".[53] Althusser here keeps a straight line with regard to the Marxian *short circuit*. The State cannot be conceived of as a neutral terrain, a terrain defined in universal and formal terms, but only substantially, in relation to the fundamental social classes and their struggle. The State is not above classes, hovering above their conflicts like an empty and neutral shell whilst mediating and potentially resolving these conflicts, but is itself an element of class struggle, an instrument in the hands of the dominant classes. Each particular form of the State is in the last instance a class State, a social and historical form which assists the class struggle of the ruling classes against the dominated ones (which means that it is impossible to simply 'overturn' it for a socialist cause, to fill it with socialist contents which would negate its capitalist form). In the capitalist mode of production, it is the bourgeois State, or in fact, the liberal-democratic State, defined in terms of formal rights of freedom and equality, which safeguards the interests of capital and assures the conditions for the reproduction of the capitalist relations and for the perpetuation of the exploitation of labour by capital. As Marx put it forcefully in the *Civil War in France*: "At the same pace at which the progress of modern industry developed, widened, intensified the class antagonism between capital and labour, the state power assumed more and more the character of the national power of capital over labour, of a public force organized for social enslavement, of an engine of class despotism".[54]

But in which sense is the State a 'machine', or an 'apparatus'? The mechanistic metaphor that we can find already in Marx, who speaks of the *Staatsmaschinerie*, for example, in the *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,* is particularly important.[55] It is important in the sense that it fleshes out not only the relationship between the State and the class struggle, but also the material dimension of this relationship, what we can call the *materiality* of the State form. The main point here is precisely the link between the State and violence. The image of the 'machinery of the State' immediately confronts us with an entire array of administrative, governmental, judiciary, policing, penal and military organs, and with their practices of control and repression. It confronts us with the idea that at its source, according to its principal apparatuses or machines, the State resides upon coercion and violence. The State in the sense of a machine – a bureaucratic machine, as well as a policing machine, a juridical machine, and as Marx would add, a 'parasitic machine' – is at its core an instrument of repressive execution, a coercive instrument in the hands of the ruling classes. This is why Althusser would claim, in terms somewhat close to Max Weber, that the State at its very essence displays the "presence of a public, armed physical force which has its place at the heart of the state and makes itself felt in all state activities" – a force which may be hidden from sight, which may intervene only intermittently, but is nevertheless essential in the last instance.[56] At a distance from Weber, however, the locus of this presence does not reside in the public control of coercion and a 'monopoly of violence', but precisely in the

peculiar dialectic of violence and the Law, a dialectic of juridico-political universality and the violent force of class struggle, which predates – and provides the very grounds for – the establishment of public and political institutions. The key here is Lenin's idea from *The State and Revolution,* where the State is depicted as "a power standing above the law".[57] As Balibar pointed out in his close reading of the text: "In Lenin's definition the essential factor is not repression or repressive violence, as exercized by the State apparatus [...] and by its specialised organs – police, army, law courts, etc. He does not claim that the State operates *only* by violence, but that *the State rests on a relation of forces between classes,* and not on public interest and the general will. This relation is itself indeed violent in the sense that it is in effect unlimited by any law, since it is only on the basis of the relation of social forces, and in the course of its evolution, that laws and a system of legislation can come to exist – a form of legality which, far from calling this violent relation into question, only legitimates it".[58]

But at the same time, the metaphor of the machine also points to the fact that the State is a tremendous material presence in itself. A presence which cannot be simply overturned by the capturing of State power, let alone by a change in the political contents of a regime, of a government or the parliaments. This is surely, as Althusser would not cease pointing out, one of the tragic lessons of the revolution of 1917. The idea of the State as a machine or an apparatus shatters the illusions of liberal political theory, the illusions proper to the theories of Natural Law or of the Social Contract, as it also shatters all the

illusions of Eurocommunism and of the 'democratic roads to socialism'. The State as a machine cannot be conceived as a result of a 'social contract' between the individuals, as it also cannot be thought of as an expression of the 'sovereign will of the people', an essential expression of the democratic subject. The State leads an existence – a brute and determinate existence – outside of the actions of its citizens, it is exterior to social groups or individuals and their subjective political expressions or volitions. Its unity and its fundamental principle cannot be found in the morality of its citizens (as Hegel thought), but in the material mechanisms of repressive control and regulation that it exerts over the citizens, over individuals and groups. Moreover, far from being a result of a subjective expression, the State in the sense of a 'machine' or an 'apparatus' is essentially impersonal, it is a non-subjective reality, which nevertheless exerts tremendous power over its 'subjects'. This is precisely one of the reasons why Marx recognised the historical continuity of the State beyond the contents of different historical revolutions: "All revolutions perfected this machine instead of smashing it". [59]

The separate existence of the State machine is at the same time the locus of its being a class State, an instrument of class struggle. There is no inconsistency here. For it is precisely as a separate entity, a machine or an apparatus, leading an existence at the distance from the class struggles, that the State expresses its class character most strongly, that it becomes a powerful instrument in the hands of the dominant class. By placing itself 'above' society, above its tensions and its struggles, the State abstracts itself from any

particular content and assumes the form of universality – it emerges as a universal power, a 'public service' possessing a 'monopoly of violence' over the clash of particular social forces, and regulating their affairs through the formalism of the law. And yet, it is exactly through its formal shape and its putative universality, through its claims on the 'national interest' or the 'general will', that the State effectively becomes an extension of the power of the dominant class, capable of intervening in class struggle. The appearance of universality and neutrality masks the force on which the State resides, the force of ruling classes. As Balibar put it: "In the functioning of the State apparatus, the relation between classes is *concealed*, and it is concealed by the same mechanism which realises it".[60] In other words, that the State is separated from class struggle solely in order to be able to effectively intervene into it, solely in order to be able to further the gains of the ruling classes. The State intervenes in the class struggle of the proletariat by blocking the realisation of the popular grievances of the exploited masses, by keeping their dissent within the bounds of 'order', by ensuring that they do not threaten the conditions of the existing relations of production. It also intervenes in the class struggle internal to the dominant class, overcoming the divisions and fractional cleavages within it, unifying the dominant class and thus securing its domination.

But Althusser also broadens the scope of the idea of *die Staatsmaschinerie*. The State machine does not only include the repressive State apparatus (the courts, the ministries, the army, the death squads, etc.), but also the *ideological*

State apparatuses. The problem of the repression exerted by the State apparatus is complemented with the question of the ideological effects of the State and its apparatuses. Althusser, in other words, steps on the path of Gramsci, who, as we saw in the first chapter, expanded the Marxian analysis of the State with the question of non-coercive aspects of capitalist domination, with the analyses of ideology and of the production of ideological consent via hegemony. But Althusser also goes beyond Gramsci. In fact, he reacts to Gramsci's formulations in a direct and profound way, first and foremost, by rejecting the very distinction between the State and the civil society. The State is always, for Althusser, a State in the 'enlarged sense', encroaching upon and encapsulating the whole of the civil society. The very distinction between the State and civil society, between a 'public sphere' on the one hand, opposed to the 'private' life of individuals and groups in the autonomous region of 'civil society' on the other, is falsely construed. There is no autonomous terrain of 'private', 'specialized' institutions or organisations, as all of these institutions and organisations have to be essentially defined via their relationship to the State. Althusser would in fact follow Marx word for word: "the State enmeshes, controls, regulates, superintends and tutors civil society from its most comprehensive manifestations of life down to its most insignificant stirrings, from its most general modes of being to the private existence of individuals".[61]

The ideological State apparatuses in this sense include a multiplicity of different institutions, organisations and practices, which extend to the most minute aspects

of 'private' life – from the School to the Church, from trade unions to political parties, from consumer groups to NGO's, from cultural organisations to mass media, with even the institution of the family not being excluded. All of these compose the 'machinery of the State' in the large sense, all of them are to be conceived as ultimately performing a certain function of the State. That is, all of them in the end play a role in the reinforcement and perpetuation of the relations of class domination and exploitation in the service of the ruling classes. "All ideological State apparatuses, whatever they are, contribute to the same result: the reproduction of the relations of production, i.e. of capitalist relations of exploitation".[62]

This stands in a stark contrast to Gramsci, who saw the elements of the 'civil society', or the 'hegemonic apparatuses' as he called them, representing neutral and empty forms, forms which depend in the last instance on the ideological 'consensus' created by the 'organic intellectuals', that is, on the subjective expressions of a class, and which can therefore be modified and 'won over' in the struggle for hegemony. This is why Gramsci sought the potentialities of the proletarian revolution precisely in 'civil society'. For Althusser, by contrast, the cards are always already stacked in the favour of the ruling classes. This is the fundamental asymmetry of class struggle. We cannot think of an autonomous, separate terrain of 'the political' in which the potentialities of revolutionary politics reside. There is no pre-guaranteed terrain of political 'resistance' as such. The 'private' institutions of civil society, however distant they may appear from class struggles, already

maintain a necessary, organic relationship to the State, and thus to the domination of the ruling classes: "hegemony is exercised under forms which are, even if their origin is 'spontaneous' and 'private', integrated and transformed into ideological forms that have an organic relationship to the State: the State can 'find' these forms already made, forms more or less devoid of form – and this is what always happens in history – it can 'encounter' them without having produced itself: it has never ceased integrating and unifying them under forms proper to ensure hegemony".[63]

But this whole scenario is not a deterministic one. Althusser is at pains to show that the power implicated in the ideological State apparatuses does not proceed from a single source, that it is not expressed in a linear, one-dimensional manner. The 'enlarged' terrain of the State implies a dense and complex set of interrelations, mediations and levels, it is a terrain which is by definition 'pluralistic'. And indeed, Althusser insists on the fact that the ideological State apparatuses maintain a crucial degree of autonomy, that they are essentially defined by their distance vis-à-vis the State. They are indeed private and particular, specialised institutions and organisations, heterogeneous bodies, each of which is enmeshed in its own irreducible practice, each of which possesses its own idiosyncratic mode of operation. There is thus no question of reducing in advance the ensemble of the ideological State apparatuses to the direct control of the State and its executive institutions. For all of these apparatuses are essentially realising their own material practices, whose contents may not have to do anything directly with the

State, and may be even in contradiction to it. And yet at the same time, each of these apparatuses puts forward and reproduces an ideological surface which is organically related to the State, to its legitimation and normalisation of the relations of capitalist exploitation. As Althusser writes: "Each of them contributes towards that single result in the way proper to it. The political apparatus by subjecting individuals to the political State ideology, the 'indirect' (parliamentary) or 'direct' (plebiscitary or fascist) 'democratic' ideology. The communications apparatus by cramming every 'citizen' with daily doses of nationalism, chauvinism, liberalism, moralism, etc, by means of the press, the radio and television. The same goes for the cultural apparatus (the role of chauvinism is of first importance), etc. The religious apparatus by recalling in sermons and other great ceremonies of Birth, Marriage and Death, that man is only ashes, unless he loves his neighbour to the extent of turning the other cheek to whoever strikes first. The family apparatus ... but there is no need to go on".[64]

This is the crux of Althusser's schema of the reproduction of the capitalist relations of production: the problem of securing the perpetuation of capitalist exploitation, of the continuous domination of the ruling class, cannot be simply posed at the level of crude material force in the economic sphere, as it can neither be sufficiently explained by the exercise of repression through the instrument of the State. A crucial role is played by 'non-coercive', ideological means, which assure the reproduction of capitalist production and exploitation

on a daily basis, in the most delicate of ways. This is the essence of the ideological machinery of the State, of all the myriad elements of the 'civil society', such as the school, the family, the church, the media, etc. The ideological function of these elements is essentially to enforce the 'normality' of the relations between classes in capitalism, to portray the 'obviousness' of what is understood as 'universal social functions' of the State and of capital, to enforce the recognition of the existing 'social division of labour'.[65]

Althusser thus leaves us with a powerful theoretical scenario depicting the disturbing problem of how power and domination are reproduced in most ordinary quotidian practices, at a far remote from State repression and class violence. He leaves us with the problem of that 'subtle everyday domination' extending throughout the nooks and crannies of social relations, whilst being ultimately distilled through a multiplicity of social institutions, organisations, practices, each of which, in itself, already presents a form of class domination.[66] This picture is not functionalist, not the least, as Althusser insists that 'class struggle never ceases', that it is present in and around each of the specific ideological State apparatuses, the installation and the functioning of which ceaselessly runs against determinate obstacles, obstacles in the guise of their internal contradictions, but also the effects of the class struggles of the subordinated classes, their resistance to domination.[67] And if it also necessary to point out, there is no loss of empirical concreteness here, there is no question of reducing the complexity of instances and levels through which the problem of domination is posed,

as there is equally no question of loosing from sight the specificity of forms of class struggle, forms of opposition to the dominant ideology and to capitalist exploitation throughout the State and the social realm. Instead, there is a real critical and theoretical gain, as all of these particular forms of struggle acquire a precise meaning in relation to the structure of the capitalist system as a whole, with regard not only to relations of production which make its *infrastructure*, but also in terms of different *superstructural* forms that are implicated in its reproduction. If the theoretical space of the ideological State apparatuses is an extreme one, then it is precisely this extremity which enables Althusser to pose some critical problems which take us beyond the obviousness of the dominant ideologies and institutions in the capitalist world. Behind a set of ideological screens, Althusser forces us to acknowledge that the origins of the modern State – which is the State of capital – cannot be depicted through a beautiful picture of the reconciliation of the state of nature in the social contract and positive law: the origins of the State reside in relations of force, in the perpetuation of the violence of one class over another.[68] From a different angle, this is the same problem that preoccupied Marx, and which, as Jacques Bidet rightly noted, one can hardly consider outdated today: "under which conditions, in a society that proclaims the ideals of liberty and equality, the domination of ones over the others is being reproduced over and over again".[69]

This brings us exactly in front of the problem of ideology and its relationship to the Law.

3.5. Ideology, Law, the Subject

How to situate Althusser's conception of ideology in relation to the project of the critique of ideology, as famously formulated in *The German Ideology*? In the ISA essay, Althusser seems to be taking a noticeable distance from the 'foundational text': "*The German Ideology* does offer us, after the *1844 Manuscripts*, an explicit theory of ideology, but ... [this theory] is not Marxist".[70] How come this paradox? The problem with the critical project of Marx seems to be in that it went too far in its critical pretensions. Althusser's claim is that *The German Ideology* ultimately formulates only a negative theory, a theory which denies any positive reality to the phenomenon of ideology, as it maps it entirely to the distinction between Truth and Error. By stretching to a critical point the opposition between the idealistic nature of thought and the materialism of the real world of social production and intercourse, Marx could not do much but to relegate the sphere of ideas and of ideologies – and philosophy would figure most prominently amongst the latter – to the status of secondary 'reflections', the epiphenomena of the material world of social relations. Marx's critique of all kinds of philosophical, scientific and social illusions amounted to treating the phenomenon of ideology as a "pure dream, empty and vain, constituted by the 'day's residues' from the only full and positive reality, that of the concrete history of concrete material individuals materially producing their existence".[71] But ideology, according to Althusser, cannot be dismissed as a phantasmagoria. Ideology produces

tremendous effects which are not only the effects of an illusion, but real material effects. Ideology is inseparable from a set of complex and dense material practices in which it is inscribed, it is inseparable from the practical lives of men. In Althusser's words: "an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material".[72]

Judging from this, it should not be surprising that many would seek to immediately situate Althusser amongst those thinkers who treated ideology in a manner quite at a remote from Marx, as a positive reality, amongst those who saw in ideology a phenomenon which is socially and politically necessary, whether as an expression of the political consciousness of classes, or as a guarantee for a 'social bond' between the members of these classes. If read in this vein, the ISA essay seems truly akin to some like Gramsci, who, as we saw in the first chapter, regarded ideology as a 'neutral' phenomenon related to class political consciousness, to Gramsci for whom the ideological sphere was not a matter of illusions, distortions or mystifications, but a general "terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc".[73] This is how Althusser would become an important figure for many attempts at a 'rectification' of the Marxian problem of ideology, via the language of Gramsci, or Lacan and the post-structuralist and semiotic systems, attempts which sought to derive the crucial coordinates for a contemporary 'politics of resistance' straight from the reality and positivity of ideology.[74]

And yet it seems necessary to insist, against this entire corpus of interpretations, that Althusser retains an essentially critical, and negative concept of ideology. This is crucial for understanding the theoretical force of the propositions presented in the ISA essay. If Althusser does take a distance from Marx, he does so not in order to abandon the critical potential of the concept, but to incorporate the latter within a more complex theoretical problematic. Ideology is still, and primarily so, distortive for Althusser: but this distortion is not a mere matter of consciousness and knowledge, but has specific material dimensions.

Everything here revolves around Althusser's 'central thesis' on ideology: "ideology interpellates individuals as subjects".[75] This is quite a remarkable theoretical scenario. Althusser's aim is to paint the picture of the 'everyday' functioning of ideology by exposing the relationship that each individual maintains vis-à-vis ideology, or better, the relationship that ideology always maintains with regard to the individuals. Put simply, ideology 'works' in that it addresses the individuals, by hailing or interpellating them, whilst the individuals respond to this address by recognising themselves in it, and, through this response and this recognition, subject themselves to the ideological sway. The critical moment is precisely the moment of (self) recognition, where the problem of ideology encroaches on the question of the subject. Althusser would write: "*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects,* by the functioning of the category of the subject".[76] What this means is that the centre of the ideological

mechanism resides in the phenomenon of individual self-consciousness, in the moment of the self of the *Cogito*, in that 'primary obviousness' as Althusser would say, in which we recognise ourselves as being truly ourselves, as the authors or originators of our thoughts, our actions, our volitions. As Rastko Močnik observed: "The individuals which are addressed by the ideology recognise themselves as the addressees, and through this (self)recognition they gain a *recognition* or acknowledgment that they are precisely that what they have become by their response, namely 'addressed subjects' [...] By responding to the ideological discourse, the interpellated individuals constitute themselves as subjects precisely in that they 'recognise' themselves in the place in which ideology *has placed* them".[77] The mechanism of ideological interpellation, in other words, is a mechanism of vicious circularity: ideological interpellation presumes a free individual self-consciousness to begin with, and, at the same time, it is responsible for this self-consciousness, it constitutes it by subsuming it under its own field of influence. Ideological subjection and the constitution of individuals as self-conscious subjectivities are one and the same. This is why Althusser would play on the linguistic ambiguity of the term 'subject': which is both a free subjectivity, a self-determining agency, and a subjected being, one that submits to a higher authority. "[T]he *individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection,* i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection 'all by himself'". [78] Or again: "The subjects

'work by themselves'... They 'recognize' the existing state of affairs (*das Bestehende*), that 'it is really true that it is so and not otherwise', and that they must be obedient to God, to their conscience, to the priest, to de Gaulle, to the boss, to the engineer, that thou shalt 'love thy neighbour as thyself', etc. Their concrete, material behaviour is simply the inscription in life of the admirable words of the prayer: '*Amen – So be it*'".[79]

The scenario of interpellation involves a significant reconstruction of the critical dimensions of the concept of ideology. Ideology is not individual illusion, an act of fallacious imagination, but a system of concepts, and a rigorous system in that. And yet, this system, which is mediated through a complex web of practices, rituals and ideological (State) apparatuses, can only work if it is ultimately rooted in the individual self-consciousness, in the representations that individuals hold towards themselves and their selves. This is where the locus of the distortion resides.

Althusser is effectuating a violent reversal of the order of things: the question of individual agency, of individual self-determination, cannot be posited as the starting point, but only as a result, an ideological result. This is a decisive critical moment: a critique of the centrality of individual subjectivity, a critique of the illusions of individual self-consciousness. And this is what connects Althusser to Marx and his critique of liberalism. For indeed, it is not simply a 'private', internal 'voice of conscience' which interpellates me, but a 'public' voice, that constitutive voice of political modernity which declares me a free subject, a legal person,

a citizen, and also, a bourgeois, a possessor of property. Following upon Marx, Althusser would make powerful use of the idea that the reality of the modern juridico-political figures of equality and liberty resides completely outside themselves, that the absent content of the formal political sphere is in the economy. In the liberal juridico-political ideology there exists nothing but individuals, nothing but free subjects and free wills. But what is expressed though these 'free wills' are, in reality, the dominant relations of production. As Marx put it in the first volume of *Capital*: "This juridical relation, which thus expresses itself in a contract, whether such contract be part of a developed legal system or not, is a relation between two wills, and is but the reflex of the real economic relation between the two. It is this economic relation that determines the subject-matter comprised in each such juridical act".[80] The juridico-political sphere, with its abstract personae, provides a necessary counterpart to the exploitation of labour as a commodity. The wage worker is free, or, in other words, he is interpellated as free. But this freedom does not make sense outside the limits of the wage relationship, outside of capitalist exploitation. And the same goes for the freedom of the citizen, the freedom of the bearer of the public vote; for the moral sphere, for the sphere of circulation, of consumption, etc. The entirety of the abstract legal and political sphere, that 'Eden of liberty, equality, property and Bentham' as Marx would say, is but a mystifying form which enables one class, the proprietary, or the capitalist class, to dominate over and to exploit those who possess nothing but their force of labour. And again, everything

goes on 'all by itself', everything works without the need for external coercion or repression, as it is guaranteed by the 'naturalness' of my own individual liberty – in my acting as a 'free' subject.

But there is more implied in this theoretical reconfiguration. In the same *coup de force,* Althusser seeks not only to displace the 'juridical fiction' which masks social exploitation and domination behind the ideal of free individuality, but also to undermine the very foundations of the philosophical orientation which placed the figure of the subject, the phenomenon of individual self-consciousness, at the centre of problems of cognition, ethics, and aesthetics. The concept of ideological interpellation thus also emerges as a critique of the entire scope of philosophical modernity predicated upon the centrality of the philosophical category of the individual subject (the ego of *cogito,* the transcendental subject, but also, the Feuerbachian Man, etc.). Althusser here stands on the side of someone like Spinoza, for whom the idea of individual self-consciousness as a primary datum was thoroughly illusory. As, for example, the Appendix to the first book of the *Ethics* reads: "men believe that they are free, precisely because they are conscious of their volitions and desires; yet concerning the causes that have determined them to desire and will they do not think, not even dream about, because they are ignorant of them".[81] Althusser maintains a radical thesis in this regard: the entirety of the philosophical question of the *Cogito* is but a moment of the superstructures of the capitalist system, an expression of the modern juridico-political sphere which

supports the capitalist relations of production. He writes: "The dominant classical bourgeois philosophy is built on legal ideology, and its 'philosophical objects' [...] are legal categories or entities: the Subject, the Object, Liberty, Free Will, Property (Properties), Representation, Person, Thing, etc".[82] While thinking through the notion of the subject as 'Free Will' and 'Origin', while identifying freedom with the rationality of the individual, philosophy is thinking from the point of view of bourgeois Law and the bourgeois State, from the point of view of the dominant social order and its reproduction. Or, as Balibar would note: "the subject as that abstract, philosophical *name* for the man, or the individual, concentrates in itself the common effects of different bourgeois 'theoretical ideologies': philosophy of history, economy, natural law, all induced by the capitalist structure".[83]

We can thus understand the ferocity of Althusser's attack on 'humanism' and on the various exaltations of the figure of Man as Subject. Quoting one of his later essays: "Marx's theoretical anti-humanism, as it operates within historical materialism, thus means a refusal to root the explanation of social formations and their history in a concept of man with theoretical pretensions, that is, a concept of man as an *originating subject,* one in whom originate his needs (*homo oeconomicus*), his thoughts (*homo rationalis*), and his acts and struggles (*homo moralis, juriducus* and *politicus*). For when you begin with man, you cannot avoid the idealist temptation of believing in the omnipotence of liberty or of creative labour – that is, you simply submit, in all 'freedom', to the omnipotence of the

ruling bourgeois ideology, whose function is to mask and to impose, in the illusory shape of man's power of freedom, another power, much more real and much more powerful, that of capitalism".[84]

But this also exposes the erroneousness of any attempt to 'complement' Althusser with a theory of the subject, and to 'expand' the notion of interpellation in the direction of the problem of the constitution of a 'subject of politics' or a 'subject of history'. Indeed, it seems necessary to insist upon this especially in the light of all those endeavours that sought to bring together the problematics of Althusser and Lacan, and to read Lacan's *split subject* into the Althusserian schema of ideology.[85] Despite some of his flirtations with psychoanalysis, Althusser accords a completely different theoretical role to his subject of ideology, than the notion of the subject in Lacan. The category of the subject in Althusser cannot have an ontological status as it does for Lacan – it is a critical concept. There is thus no question of locating the problem of revolutionary politics in the figure of interpellation – as there is equally no question of deriving a politics of emancipation straight from the reality of ideology. As Badiou would point out in his *Metapolitics*: "It is crucial to note that ideology, whose materiality is given by the apparatuses, *is a statist notion,* and not a political notion. The subject, in the sense of Althusser, is a function of the State. There is thus no subject of politics, because the revolutionary politics cannot be a function of the State".[86] In opposition to the entire lineage of Hegelianism in the history of Marxism, in opposition to a thinker like Lukács who would seek to philosophically

elevate the proletariat as the subject of history and politics, Althusser would sustain the idea that there is no proper 'subject of politics' or a 'subject of history' philosophically speaking. Revolutionary politics and political practice cannot be subsumed in an aprioristic manner under the scope of the universal theoretical personae that philosophy constructs within its own domain. The concept of the subject is ideological, for Althusser, and ideology is proper to the domain of the State. Which means that philosophy pretending to explain politics under the figure of the subject, pretending to seize and determine it directly, does nothing more than reduce the entire question of politics to the State.[87]

But where can we think revolutionary politics then? How does Althusser propose to solve the lacuna of Gramsci's topography?

3.6. Politics as singularity

In order to seize the significance of Althusser's thought on politics, we need to revisit one more time the schema from *Lenin and Philosophy* that we discussed above. And in the first place we need to revisit one of the theoretical motifs evoked there – the primacy of politics over theory, the primacy of politics over science and philosophy.

Asserting that politics is prior to philosophy (or science) presumes in the first place an affirmation of the significance of politics in history, its historical effectivity. In Althusser's language, this amounts to acknowledging

the reality of class struggle as a 'motor of history',[88] class struggle which has to be posited both in the abstract terms of a fundamental dialectical or structural principle of history and at the same time as a profoundly conjunctural reality. But at the same time, the affirmation of the primacy of politics over theory presupposes something more. It presupposes that politics is always in an irreducible excess over the theory which tries to seize it. Politics stands ever ahead of its philosophical or scientific apprehensions: it necessarily escapes them, runs ahead of them, as it represents the very capacity of the production of the new in history. "Class struggle is permanent, but it takes place through constantly changing forms" – this is a forceful acknowledgement of the inventive, aleatory character of political practice.

This motif has profound theoretical consequences. For in order to be able to account for politics in the register of the aleatory, one needs a very specific theoretical dispositive. Althusser acknowledged this with particular clarity, when, in one his later essays, he spoke of Marxism as a *finite theory*. He states: "Only a 'finite' theory can be really *open* to the contradictory tendencies which it detects in the capitalist society, and open towards their becoming aleatory, open to all the unpredictable 'surprises' that have not ceased to mark the history of the labour movement, open thus attentive, capable of taking seriously and grasping *in time* the incorrigible imagination of history".[89]

What is it that makes a theory finite? A finite theory, in Althusser's sense, is a theory that abandons its pretensions to include the entirety of social relations under the object

that it constructs, a theory that does away with the ambition to totalise the whole of the process of history, whether under a single principle, or under a set of formal elements and their relations. Theory is finite when it is conscious of the fact that it cannot exhaustively conform the world to its practice of systematic apprehension, that there would always be something which would resist its inclusion in the whole, however complex the latter may be. Or, it is finite when it is aware that it cannot determine, in a teleological way, all the possible conditions and variations of forms of historical becoming. It is thus not surprising that Althusser would sharply state his opposition to philosophies of history, to all attempts at a transcendental foundation of the historical movement: "To say that Marxist theory is 'finite', this means endorsing the essential idea that *Marxist theory is the precise opposite of a philosophy of history* which 'encloses', whilst thinking it effectively, the whole of becoming of humanity, and is thus capable of defining in advance the term: communism, in a *positive* manner".[90]

What this means is that the problem of politics, which makes one with the problem of communism – the 'real movement which abolishes the present state of things' (and this minimal definition is probably the only one from the Marxian legacy that Althusser would fully conform to) – cannot be in the last instance an object of a totalistic theory, it cannot ultimately be a matter of prediction, of aprioristic construction from within the realm of theoretical construction. Communism is not utopian. But it is also not scientific in the strict sense, for politics escapes the positivity of a science. Althusser's proposal for

a theoretical apprehension of politics is quite at odds to the model of formation of a positive knowledge. Marxist theory, according to Althusser, should in this regard be at a distance from a pure positive science, at a distance from something like a 'science of politics' properly speaking, which tries to deduce, form a certain set of general laws, from a certain number of formal elements and their combinations, the general conditions of possibility of the social and political world, and thus also to predict in advance all the possible variations or manifestations that might take place within this world. If Marxist theory does apprehend politics, it does so under very different conditions to that of the closed space of positive scientific objectivity. Or rather, the problem of the relationship of scientific objectivity to politics is founded on a problem which stands at a distance from the question of the 'nature of things in general'.

There is one thinker who left a profound impression on Althusser here, probably even more than Marx: Machiavelli. What Althusser would flesh out in his heretical but innovative reading of the Florentine philosopher is a thinker of *singularity*, a thinker who registers politics in the brutality of its historical appearance – and this does not mean reducing politics to naked violence alone, but theorising and acknowledging its innovative historical force, its violent urge to go beyond the 'present state of things'. Machiavelli, for Althusser, is not the founder of modern political science, he is not that terrible political realist whose separation of politics from morality, its reduction to power alone, long ago entered

into the proverbial realm. He represents something very different: a thinker of the New, a thinker of political novelty which radically ruptures with the coordinates of the present: "[Machiavelli is the] theoretician of the political preconditions of the conditions of the constitution of a national state, the theoretician of the foundation of a new state under a new prince [...] This is a quite original position, since he does not think the *accomplished fact of absolute monarchies* or their mechanisms, but rather thinks *the fact to be accomplished,* what Gramsci called the 'having to be' of a national state to be founded, and under extraordinary conditions, since these are *the conditions of the absence of any political form appropriate to the production of this result*".[91] How to think the new in a total absence of its conditions? As Antonio Negri pointed out here: "After recuperating the traditional interpretation of Machiavelli, Althusser, in fact, turns it upside down: it is no longer the project that counts, but, rather, the radicalism expressed by Machiavelli's thought when it clashes against the impossibility of realizing the project: the thought of the new, therefore, in the absence of all conditions".[92] In Althusser's reading, the entire theoretical dispositive of the *Prince* is thus not formed around the question of the general laws of politics (although Machiavelli does indeed propose them), and neither is it framed around the question of the typology of forms of power; rather, its significance resides in the fact that it announces and opens up the space for political novelty. Althusser writes: "What does Machiavelli do? In order to change something in his country's history, therefore in the minds of the

readers whom he wants to provoke into thought and so into volition, Machiavelli explains, off-stage as it were, that one must rely on one's own strength, that is in fact *not rely on anything,* neither on an existing State nor on an existing Prince, but on the non-existent impossibility: a new Prince in a new Principality".[93] A new Prince and a new Principality: this is irreducible dimension of political singularity that Althusser discovers in Machiavelli.

The 'detour' through Machiavelli, Althusser would not refrain from acknowledging, has powerful consequences for Marxist theory. It allows its refoundation (and one can probably say that this is the substance of Althusser's 'politicism') around the problem of how to grasp theoretically – through which concepts, through which operations, through which theoretical dispositions – the profound aleatory and singular being of politics; how to grasp the aleatory becoming of communism, how to account for the fact that one cannot predict, locate, define in advance the question of where and when, in which form and from which site, is communism to emerge and develop.

In *Marxism as a 'Finite' Theory,* Althusser would indicate two modalities in which theory can approach this difficult problem: the modality of *anticipation,* on the one hand, and the modality of *critique,* on the other. He would write: "All that [Marxist theory] can say about the future is the extension *in outline* [*en pointillé*], and *in the negative* of the possibilities of an *actual* tendency, the tendency towards communism".[94] Critique and anticipation. This indication, in turn, is simply the reaffirmation of the remarkable character of the relationship between politics,

science and philosophy that Althusser establishes in *Lenin and Philosophy*, and practices in 'analytical' works such as the ISA essay.

The moment of *critique*: this is where we find once more the importance and the irreducibility of science and scientific knowledge, of the 'science of history' in terms of its adhesion to politics. Althusser would never stop insisting on the necessity of that what Lenin called a 'concrete analysis of a concrete situation', on the necessity of scientific, objective knowledge of the conditions, forms and structures that characterise class struggle, knowledge about the relations of forces existing in the current situation, of the real possibilities and impossibilities that determine the development of the actual tendencies of politics from within the present conjuncture. 'Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement'. It is this critical knowledge which is to play a practical role in actual struggles, not in the sense of the Gramscian-Hegelian expressive model of the 'elevation of consciousness', but in the sense that this knowledge might aid an existent, real politics in the proper development of its innovative tendency. And aid it in the negative: by preventing its reduction to existing forms, models, solutions, and, most importantly, by pointing to the *fundamental dissymmetry of the conditions* in which it finds itself, the profound inequality whereby the entire terrain on which it operates is already occupied by its adversary. Scientific theory, in other words, seeks to defend negatively the autonomy of revolutionary politics against the encroachment of ideologies and institutional forms which seek to neutralise

it and annul it. We can thus understand the importance of the critical arguments on the State and its apparatuses in the ISA essay, we can understand the significance of Althusser's attempts to extend the Marxian critique of law and human rights, as well as his entire attempt to pose the question of the revolution by theorising the moment of the utmost synchronicity – the reproduction of the relations of production. As Althusser himself would note: "In what concerns politics, it is crucial, before everything else, not to reduce it to the forms officially consecrated as political by the bourgeois ideology: the State, the popular representation, political parties, political struggle for the possession of the power of the existing State, etc. If one enters into this logic and stays there, one risks falling not only into 'parliamentary cretinism' [...] but above all *into the juridical illusion of politics*: because politics is defined by the law, and this law consecrates (and consecrates only) forms of politics defined by the bourgeois ideology, which includes the activity of parties".[95] Scientific knowledge, far from being repressive, is productive, as by of force of critical insight it aims to set the course straight for revolutionary politics.

The moment of *anticipation*: inseparable, in fact, from the former moment, it designates the obstinacy of thought to open itself towards the new, towards novelty in history, both with regard to politics as well as with regard to the sciences. It is here that 'Machiavelli's rule of method' of thinking in extremes appears in all its force. Thinking in extremes means assuming the position of the necessity of a radical innovation, the necessity of the profound

overcoming of the present – the place of the 'impossible'. It means drawing the consequences within the realm of theory from the perpetual figuration of novelty in history. And especially with regard to politics, thinking in extremes means recognising the immanent capacity of politics for surprise, its capacity to produce novelty beyond all prediction, to invent new forms out of the impossibilities of the present. And again, there is no question of reducing this immanent political capacity by an aprioristic inclusion under the strict rule of the object of knowledge. All that theory can do, from within its own proper space, is to recognise it and anticipate it, "in certain radical formulae, which cause the relation of force between the new ideas and the dominant ideas to be felt in the very statement of the theses themselves".[96] Radical formulae: this is where we can truly grasp the importance of Althusser's attempt to define the entire venture of philosophy as one of (class) struggle, and in that, as one of division and demarcation. Althusser writes: "this *extremism* in the formulation of theses, belongs quite properly to philosophy".[97] Extremism, but not dogmatism. Because, as we already saw, it is the essence of materialism, of the materialist position in philosophy, according to Althusser, to remain open towards the real, to recognise its aleatory emergence, whilst seeking to constantly reinscribe its consequences in the realm of philosophical 'objects' – concepts, categories and their relations – against the idealist temptations of totalisation and systematic closure.

3.7. A theoretical atopia of politics

The singular contribution that the work of Althusser which we examined here brings to Marxist theory, and to philosophy and social theory in general, can be registered at a number of different levels: in the powerful reconceptualisation of the problem of ideology, in the expansion and deepening of the analysis of the capitalist State, but also in the re-examination of the status of philosophy vis-à-vis political practices and the sciences. Althusser's critical analyses of the State, of its relationship with class struggles, and thus also of its role in the reproduction of capitalist relations of production and exploitation, surpass Gramsci's problematic at a number of crucial points, especially by displaying the complexity of the material dimensions of the State – which include, as an important element, the workings of the ideological State apparatuses. At the same time, Althusser reshapes the critical thrust of the notion of ideology, by linking the phenomena of ideology to the question of subject and the problem of individual subjectivation, but also by linking these questions to the fundamental legal institutions of capitalist modernity. Althusser also proposes a powerful redefinition of philosophy which tries to stay true to Marx's injunction to 'change the world' without making of philosophy, and thought in general, a simple 'servant' of politics, without reducing philosophy in its entirety to politics pure and simple.

But in and through these critical moments, Althusser also powerfully reshapes the entire problematic of revolutionary politics and its location in Marxist theory. If the question

of the autonomy of revolutionary politics, and thus of the autonomy of the practice of emancipation, brings about not only theoretical urgencies for Marxism, but also, as we saw in Gramsci, and especially in the post-Marxism of Laclau and Mouffe, serious theoretical difficulties and impasses, the importance of Althusser resides in the fact that he points to a way of resolving this problem without sacrificing the radical nature of the modality of the break of revolutionary politics. Politics, according to Althusser, can only be rendered autonomous, it can only be seized in its proper autonomy, if it is subtracted in a radical way from the so-called 'autonomy of the political', which means, if it is expatriated from the domain of the juridical and constitutional sphere of the State: from the official domain of the 'political', and also from the space of civil society. And even more radically, the true question of the autonomy of the moment of politics can be posed only when we exclude politics from any topographical considerations, from any attempt at its aprioristic theoretical localisation.[98] There is no general space of revolutionary political potentiality that theory can delineate. Moreover, each theoretical topography of politics – such as a topography of the subject, or of the Gramscian space hegemony – is a fundamental theoretical mistake, as, according to Althusser, we need to acknowledge that the entirety of the socio-political space is already stacked in the favour of the adversary. Politics in the guise of a radical break, politics as revolutionary practice, can only be seized if subtracted from this space, if seized as an irreducible singularity, as an aleatory, evental emergence.

If Gramsci approached the problem of revolutionary politics with a visible theoretical and intellectual optimism – in fact: with a 'pessimism of Reason, and optimism of Will' – Althusser's perspective seems pessimistic. But the pessimism of his theoretical *atopia* is nevertheless a source for a renewed critical work. If theory cannot delineate the general space of revolutionary and emancipatory politics proper, it can anticipate this politics, it can perpetually aid it via the labour of the 'negative', "keeping alive", as Jameson would say, "that place from which the new can be expected, unexpectedly, to emerge".[99]

PART TWO

Towards a Critique of the Post-Socialist Political Reason

Why speak of the post-socialist political reason? What is the specificity of the political rationality which emerges after 1989?

Alain Badiou recently remarked that today we live in an *obscure present*.[01] A present where our own subjective grip on history, our own relationship to historical time and historical change, seems completely divorced from the immediacy of the present, from its creative and disruptive character, and where, as a consequence, the very idea of changing the world in a radical sense disappears. An 'obscure present' is a present voided of the 'presence of the present', of the presence of any substantive idea or a conception of radical change in the here and now, a present where a radical transformation of our social condition seems not only improbable but also impossible.

Post-socialism is a privileged historical place vis-à-vis Badiou's philosophical observations: a place where politics which maintained an intimate relationship to the present, a revolutionary and emancipatory politics, as it was understood in the communist and socialist projects, is replaced, in the first place, with an overwhelming affinity for the past. It is hard to overlook the excessive fascination of post-socialist politics with nineteenth century nationalisms and with all the identitary and racial ideologies which have followed this historical doctrine of politics.[02] As if post-socialism, evoking the 'certainty' and simplicity of nationalist imaginaries, had finally come to reverse the curse of Alexis de Tocqueville, who once stated, following the unstoppable development of 'democracy in America' that "[t]he past has ceased to throw its light upon

the future, and the mind of man wanders in obscurity".[03] But, at the same time, post-socialism is also a place where we can see the present being forcefully divorced from politics conceived in any radical way, where our sense of being in history is separated from emancipatory and revolutionary political gestures, from subjective revolts oriented against the status quo, only to be left to the 'realistic' managing of the effects of the vagaries of the market, to the administrative and parliamentary alleviation of the destructive rhythms and cycles of global capitalist production, reproduction and exchange. One of Badiou's foremost philosophical interlocutors, Jacques Rancière, named this the logic of *consensus*: "Consensus means erasing the contestatory, conflictual nature of the very givens of common life [...] Consensus knows only: real parts of the community, problems around the redistribution of powers and wealth among these parts, expert calculations over the possible forms of such redistribution, and negotiations between the representatives of these various parts".[04]

Between the two poles – the reduction of politics to the past, to history and its 'essentialisations', on the one hand, and, on the other, the reduction of politics to the 'management of the possible', to an adaptation to the consequences of global economic necessity – one can clearly map the dominant post-socialist political realities: from numerous manifestations of identitary politics, the politics of the nation and nationalism, but also of ethnic and religious claims, to a renewed enthusiasm with the establishment of the liberal-democratic political

institutions, parliamentary debates and party contestations, but also juridical principles of Right, legality, legitimacy and accountability. But what is most important here is precisely what lies beneath these two poles, and what Badiou and Rancière forcefully emphasise: a profound *depoliticisation* inherent to the political rationality of post-socialism. One of the most dramatic effects of the collapse of the 'really existing' socialisms is to be measured exactly in terms of the evacuation of all revolutionary political thought, the thought of politics which seeks its finality beyond the coordinates of the given: in the egalitarian transformation of social relations. The post-socialist political rationality is a rationality which purges from the space of thought all radical attempts to counter the alignment with the way of the world (which, in the last instance, is always an alignment with capital). Thus its fascination with the figures of consensus, with juridical universality, with mechanisms of political pacification and 'normalisation', but also with history in its conservative guise.

In the following three chapters, I would like to propose the possibilities of approaching this political rationality in a critical manner.[05] Whilst doing so, I aim to show in the first place the pertinence of the Marxist philosophical theory – especially in the light of the discussion of Gramsci and Althusser which preceded this part. If the discussions in the first part of the book circled around an attempt at a theoretical scrutinisation of some key analytical and critical moments in the Marxist tradition, namely, around the concepts of ideology, the analysis of the State and of the

'short circuit' between the liberal and bourgeois political forms and capitalist exploitation, around questions of the localisation of revolutionary politics in Marxism and at its limits, but also around the problem of the relationship between philosophy, social theory and revolutionary political practice, the second part offers a concrete historical grounding for these discussions, their immediate historical 'interlocutor'. And even more than that, it provides these discussions with a veritable laboratorial space – a space to seize the effectivity of concepts and philosophical categories, a space to assess, experiment with and demonstrate the significance of the Marxian critical method in its capacity to produce a forceful antithesis to the 'obscure present' of post-socialism.

To this aim, I focus on three particular moments of the post-socialist rationality, each of which constitutes the subject matter of one of the three subsequent chapters:

the ideological and conceptual contiguity between the post-Marxist conception of politics qua 'radical and plural democracy' which can be found in the work of Laclau and Mouffe, and one of the preeminent post-socialist political concepts: the concept of civil society of the late 1980s. I examine this contiguity by inquiring into the context of the political struggles in Slovenia in the late 1980s.

the contradictions which surround the idealisation of liberal-democracy after 1989: especially in the light of the paradox between, on the one hand, the idea of liberal-democracy as an effective resolution and pacification of social and political conflicts, and, on the other, the effective role of liberal-democratic political forms in the explosion of

nationalism and nationalist violence in the 1990s. I examine this paradox by looking at the process of 'democratisation' in Yugoslavia, and more concretely at the political and armed conflicts in Croatia in the early 1990s.

the 'obscurantist' ideological consequences of the positing of the State of Right as a universal political form and norm, and, consequently, of the subjection of politics to juridical conceptions. I try to assess these consequences by examining one of the most influential readings of the socialist Yugoslavia in Yugoslav political philosophy: the work of Zoran Đinđić.

The three moments are not selected arbitrarily – I see them as symptomatic moments which reflect some of the key elements of the post-socialist political rationality: a) the formalisation of the question of the subject of democracy via the collapse of the distinction between 'formal' and 'real' democracy, and an assertion of the superiority of the former over the latter b) the celebration of liberal-democracy as a universal historical and political model, a model bringing an effective 'end of history', whilst reconciling and pacifying all forms of rebellious political subjectivity connected to social struggles c) the normative identification of politics with the Law, and its historical form: the State of Right (*Rechtsstaat*).

One last note about the method: even though the three analyses that I present here focus on a set of concrete philosophical and theoretical works: the post-Marxism of Laclau and Mouffe, the notion of civil society amongst Western and Eastern philosophers and social scientists, the political philosophy of Zoran Đinđić – and even

though they start from very concrete political contexts and situations: namely, the different political situations which surround the destruction of Yugoslavia – they are all undertaken in the light of a more general aim: an attempt at a critical confrontation with post-socialist political rationality as a whole. In this sense, it is important to point out that what I seek to approach here is not simply a body of particular academic positions, nor only a body of concrete historical contexts and situations, but precisely a global condition – an ideological spectrum – which unites concrete political situations, concrete actors, such as state administrations and political movements, with more abstract, more detached scientific and philosophical debates. Therefore the particularity of the method that I adopt here – a method bordering between a socio-historical analysis and a critical examination (but also an application) of philosophical concepts.

4. Springtime for Hegemony: Laclau and Mouffe and the 'Slovenian Spring'

4.1. Prologue

In the autumn of 1987, the Slovenian journal *Mladina* published a large interview with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, under the heading: "Once Was a Revolution: Large Interview with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe".[01]

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

"We cannot think of socialism anymore in mere terms of the socialisation of the means of production, because all of this is too much related to the struggle against only one form of social inequality – that of class – whilst at the same time, all other forms of inequality, which have no class basis, but are nevertheless as important, are overlooked. The project of radical democracy attempts, on the one hand, to recognise this extension of social conflictuality; on the other hand, it aims to pose the question of politics in a non-essentialist way. This means that it does not presuppose some sort of a 'human nature', whose essence would be the struggle against subordination, but rather conceives each antagonism as discursively constructed [...] This is why we placed such an emphasis on the significance of the 'democratic revolution' in our book. Because it is the democratic revolution that offers the language through which more relations of subordination can be effectively translated into relations of oppression. Plurality also brings about the realisation that the idea of a total, homogeneous collective will is something extremely dangerous – it leads to totalitarianism".[02]

These statements are interesting. Not because they represent a condensed recapitulation of the most important theses of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, which we already explored in the second chapter. They are interesting in relation to the context in which they appear and thus also in terms of their meaning in this context. Although this interview was conducted at the time when the educated public in Slovenia was expecting to see the light of the day of the translation of *Hegemony* into Slovenian language, one cannot say that this context was simply a matter of intellectual exchanges. The significance of these statements cannot be confined to the level of theory alone.

In fact, the very appearance of Laclau and Mouffe in *Mladina*,[03] a Slovenian weekly standing at the forefront of the political forces which were announcing, from the inside, so to speak, the historical transformations of the 'real socialist regimes' at the end of the eighties, should tell us something important about their theoretical propositions, about the concepts of 'hegemony' and 'radical democracy'. This appearance invites us to look for the reach of these concepts beyond the realm of pure theory, to explore the actual involvement of these theoretical ideas in political and historical struggles. If it is without doubt that Mouffe's statements in *Mladina* exhibit a certain degree of analytical force – capturing, so to speak, the sprit of that moment – from today's perspective, we might rather consider them as being programmatical. Indeed, we could even go as far as saying that if the theoretical propositions of Laclau and Mouffe had ever seen their materialisation in concrete politics, if they ever had a concrete grip on history, not

simply in terms of conceptual adequation, but in terms of real, practical effects, then we have to search for these in the historical episode of the 'Slovenian Spring'.

The analysis that follows here is an attempt to understand this practical involvement of a theory, and to draw some consequences from it. In a sense, this would presume that we take the Laclau and Mouffe theory in a consequential way. For as we know, one of the fundamental presuppositions of their theorisation – and in this sense, their post-Marxism has clear Marxist roots – is the idea of the unity of theory and practice, a unity which Laclau and Mouffe attempt to conceptualise in an unmediated manner. But this excursion of theory into practice seems to reverse the normal order of things. The point of the historical appearance of Laclau and Mouffe in Slovenia is not the point at which we can learn from the theoretical enrichment of practice. Quite the opposite, it is the point at which practice teaches us important lessons about theoretical constructions. The episode of the 'Slovenian Spring' gives us a vivid historical example of the political problems underlying the Laclau and Mouffe project. And in this, it also reveals the precise points at which the post-Marxist construction becomes a peculiar theoretical symptom of the post-socialist political reason: the points at which we can draw a direct connection between the theoretical apparatus of Laclau and Mouffe and the contradictions and paradoxes of the political rationality of 1989.

4.2. Socialism, democracy and the *Alternative*

The themes that Laclau and Mouffe were discussing in this 1987 interview – themes such as socialism and democracy, political pluralism, new social movements and civic liberties – were veritable signs of the times. These themes were at the forefront of the political strivings that characterised the decades of the seventies and the eighties in the East of Europe, where the structural pinnacles of the 'socialist bloc' were experiencing a compelling drive for transformation, both from 'above' and from 'below'. If the entire conceptual construction of 'radical and plural democracy' proposed by Laclau and Mouffe cannot be seen as direct theoretical expression of this concrete political conjuncture – as this would involve some slight stretching – the approach that they sketched definitely shared its broad spirit.

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

In the midst of the theoretical and political crisis that the post-War period had uncovered, the discourse of 'democracy' re-emerged as a crucial ideological *topos*. It became a beacon of new times for the entire socialist world. From the East to the West, from the 'official' to 'unofficial' spheres, amongst the intellectuals and in the party structures, 'democracy' surfaced as an indicator of a momentous change, a dramatic shift of direction. One can think of all those names inscribed in the history of 'democratization' of Marxism: from Dubček to Berlinguer, from Marchais to Bahro, from Bobbio to Hobsbawm, from Kuroń to Carillo, from Korčula to Budapest, from KOR to Charter 77, from *compromeso storico* to the *New Left*. Here the discourse of 'democracy' provided the point of opposition to the repressive nature of the apparatuses of State socialism: it was seen as a necessary 'corrective' which could measure the excesses of the party-States. But at the same time it was also a ground for new utopian hope, as some saw in it the possibilities for a rebirth of the subject of history and politics, that one which was reduced to frostbite by the realities of the Cold War. The Hungarian Marxist, Iván Szelény, could still write in 1979: "The issue of human rights, democratic freedoms, freedom of speech, assembly and association, crosscuts ideological divisions amongst the dissidents and it offers a basis for a broad 'national front' into which all democratic forces of Eastern Europe can be integrated and from which socialists just cannot isolate themselves. The idea of 'democratic socialism' is the most appealing one. This is why Eurocommunism attracts much attention".[04]

The result of this ideological transformation, however, was a pacification of the radical political subjectivity which sought inspiration in Marxist theory: as the dissident intellectuals and reformist communists in the East started openly embracing the formalism of equality and liberty, their counterparts in the West were hastily getting rid of the Marxist-Leninist conceptions of politics,[05] whilst at the same time fully adopting the terrain of liberal democracy, in both its political and economic aspects. With Marxist politics steadily loosing ground, it also seemed that Marxist theory, in its official version at least, lost its grip with the movement of history. This is why the *parole* of the students of May 1968, in Paris and in Prague, in Belgrade and in Rome, in Budapest and in Ljubljana, would come up with a witty inversion of Lenin's remark: 'Communism as a geriatric deviation'. A political and theoretical decentering of Marxism would get condensed in the idea that the question of emancipation cannot be posed anymore in the singular. Instead, a whole range of particular and plural social concerns, embodied in the struggles of women, sexual minorities, students, youth and alternative cultures, exploded onto the political scene, articulating their own symbols of social change.

It is in this political and historical context that we can locate the episode of the 'Slovenian Spring'. As elsewhere in the socialist East, the seventies and the eighties in Slovenia unfolded primarily under the banners of 'democracy' and 'pluralism'. But at the same time, the Slovenian episode drew its strength from the paradigm of new social movements. The roots of the alternative

political subjectivity which marked the 1980s in Slovenia – a subjectivity which came to stand self-consciously under the name of the *Alternative* (*alternativa*) – resided in the 'new' social and political movements which were gaining momentum in this Yugoslav republic from the late 1970s onwards. The *Alternative* grew out of various forms of student activism, from different artistic and subcultural expressions (from alternative theatres and various experimental performing arts, to the punk movement), from squatters' initiatives to alternative trade unions, but also from political movements oriented around the issues of gender and sexual inequalities, demilitarisation, conscientious objection and nuclear disarmament.[06]
As a heterogeneous and diversified social and political consciousness, the *Alternative* in Slovenia practiced, in the first place, a specific form of 'anti-politics',[07] as it struggled for the creation and protection of niches of difference, for the production of plural and autonomous social fields at the distance from the State and its power, and for the politicisation of aspects of everyday life. But, at the same time, the *Alternative* had definite political targets: it attacked the ruling Communist Party, it launched severe criticisms of the socialist system and its ideological underpinnings,[08] whilst articulating an internal critique of socialism and Marxism, framed as a 'democratisation of socialism'. In all of these aspects, the 'alternative sphere' in Slovenia in the eighties was a harbinger of a new, post-Marxist political subjectivity, a subjectivity which was openly saying 'farewell to the proletariat'.

But what is most interesting about the *Alternative* for our purposes here is that it the came to openly embrace the political project of Laclau and Mouffe. The entire theoretical baggage which supported the notion of 'radical and plural democracy' was readily absorbed by the theoreticians associated with the *Alternative,* especially by those Slovenian philosophers and intellectuals who were attempting to reconstruct a productive exchange between Marxism, structuralism and psychoanalysis.[09] These theorists were providing the practices of the *Alternative* with a theoretical and ideological 'superstructure', with a 'self-consciousness' and a political strategy, precisely via the terminology of 'hegemony' and 'discourse', with the language of 'floating signifiers' and 'chains of equivalence', 'pluralism', 'democracy' and 'post-Marxism'.[10] And to such extent that the very motif of the struggle for ideological and cultural hegemony and the general urge for blurring the boundaries between politics and culture became the principle *modus operandi* of the practices of the *Alternative*.[11] As Rastko Močnik pointed out: "The alternative as a cultural undertaking in the widest and most dramatic sense was nothing other but 'discursive articulation'".[12]

However, the concept of 'radical and plural democracy' had to compete here with another political notion, a notion which the emergent political forces in Eastern Europe resurrected from the historical inventory of liberalism: the notion of civil society. Just as in Hungary, Poland or Czechoslovakia, it was exactly this notion which proved to be the critical for the political transformations in Slovenia. By the mid-1980s, the *Alternative* came to embrace 'civil

society' in a strong sense: both as a mobilisational slogan and as an open political programme. 'Civil society' proved to be a particularly effective symbol, as it allowed the *Alternative* not only to address the 'public sphere' at large and to expand its political reach, but literally to dominate the political processes in Slovenia.[13] This is why Mastnak could claim that "the new social movements were those who have not only intrigued, but also by the mid-80s hegemonised the social consciousness".[14]

The peculiarity of the *Alternative*, nevertheless, resided in the fact that it managed to achieve an effective combination of the two concepts: the concept of civil society and that of hegemony *qua* radical and plural democracy. In the Slovenian *Alternative* the paradigm of the new social movements came to coexist side by side with an immanent critique of Marxism, inspired by the post-structuralist and post-modernist ideas, and also with a reaffirmed political liberalism, which expressed itself in terms of the opposition between the State and civil society. This can perhaps most vividly be seen from the writings of Mastnak, at that time one of the *Alternative's* principle theorists: "If we designated the system in Eastern Europe as inverted post-structuralism, with the help of Laclau and Mouffe – post-*Marxists* will understand: we put it back on its feet. We thus gained civil society, which can be – although partially, included in the scenario of radical democracy".[15]

4.3. Theoretical excursus: the hegemony of civil society

It should not be surprising that the notions of 'radical democracy' and 'civil society' appear together in the political and ideological practices of the Slovenian *Alternative*. Genealogically speaking, both notions have a definite place within the development of the dialectics of democracy and socialism which marked the shift of Marxist politics from the 1970s onwards – a development which ended with a peculiar point of synthesis or resolution, where we see the first term engulfing and collapsing the second. Put differently, both terms are being formulated at the peculiar meeting point between Marxist theory and the liberal tradition, at the precise point where the contours of Marxist politics begin to dissipate in front of the ideals of democracy. In the case of 'radical and plural democracy', as we already saw in the second chapter, it was a matter of revalorising fundamental liberal political concepts, such as formal liberty and equality, at the heart of the Marxist political strategy in the West. In the case of 'civil society', it was a matter of domesticating a classical liberal concept – the dichotomy of state/civil society – in the context of the struggles internal to the socialist states in the East. If the former appropriation of liberalism appears as a peculiar leftist reaction to the impasses of Western Marxism in the face of post-68 diversification and pluralisation of the political scene, the latter notion surfaces as an equally leftist 'corrective' to the contradictions of Marxist politics in its reduction to the State apparatus.[16]

But it is not only the historical complementarity between the two perspectives which is important here. It is first and foremost, their logical and thematic connection. When it comes to comparing the Laclau and Mouffe notion of 'radical and plural democracy' with the revived version of the politics of 'civil society', the correspondences are indeed remarkable.

Both of these conceptions are, before anything else, formal or formalist conception of politics. Both are fundamentally bound to that what the revolutionary tradition named 'formal democracy'. Instead of trying to seize politics in a substantive, subjective manner, they are both interested first of all in providing politics with formal conditions of possibility. Indeed, the crux of the project of the reconstruction of the nineteenth century liberal dichotomy between the civil society and the State, which the 1980s saw being propelled both by the 'dissidents' in the East and various liberal-democratic theoreticians in the West,[17] was to come up with the formal conditions of democracy. The 'resurrection' of the eighteenth-century distinction between the State and civil society was in this sense seen as a recuperation of the ground from which one can speak about the real possibilities of democracy and of democratic politics. "The distinction between civil society and the State, and in this the existence and the functioning of an autonomous social sphere, was conceived as a necessary condition of democracy", as Mastnak would claim.[18] The crucial moment here was precisely the formal, that is, the institutionalised separation of the two realms – civil society and the State. This separation was not only

to place 'checks and balances' on the functioning of the State apparatus and its excess of power, but at the same time to provide the formal guarantees for the existence of a space for an unbridled political liberty, a space of free association, of social autonomy and of pluralism.[19] In its formal separation from the State, the realm of the civil society, conceived "as a sphere of social interaction between economy and state, composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of association (especially voluntary associations), social movements, and forms of public communication",[20] was thus identified as *the* terrain for autonomous social and political expression, and as such, as a necessary and inescapable terrain of democracy.

This formalisation of politics and of democracy is also at the heart of the political project of Laclau and Mouffe, as we already saw in the second chapter. The scenario of political life represented in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* bears a striking resemblance here. The questions that Laclau and Mouffe place at centre of their political conception, just as for the theorists of 'civil society', are precisely the questions of the conditions of possibility for the autonomous production of social and political life, the conditions of possibility for association, organisation and cohesion.[21] As we already saw, Laclau and Mouffe would explicitly depict the substance of their political project in terms of the opening of the space, or rather, of the *spaces* for the emergence of democratic subjects in society: "the project for a radical and plural democracy, *in a primary sense,* is nothing other than the struggle for a

maximum autonomization of spheres on the basis of the generalization of the equivalential-egalitarian logic".[22] And the fundamental theoretical problem of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* in this sense is precisely to provide formal conditions of possibility for this autonomisation: "Our central problem is to identify the discursive conditions for the emergence of a collective action, directed towards struggling against inequalities and challenging relations of subordination".[23]

The second point of comparison is the fact that this 'reinvention' of formal politics is framed, in both cases, as an explicit reaction to the 'substantialism' and 'essentialism' of Marxist politics. The proponents of civil society meet with Laclau and Mouffe at the point of criticism and rejection of Marxist politics, and especially of the notion of class struggle. The concept of class struggle, as the argument goes, and this is an old argument indeed,[24] is not only reductively particularistic, but also particularly reductionist, which means both indifferent to the plurality of social spaces, demands and identities in civil society. At the same time, it is dismissive of the historical significance of the formal sphere of democratic rights and liberties. As Ellen Wood pointed out: "One of the principal charges levelled against Marxism by the advocates of 'civil society' is that it endangers democratic freedoms by identifying Western 'formal democracy' – the legal and political forms which guarantee a free space for 'civil society' – with capitalism: 'civil' = 'bourgeois' society. The danger, they claim, is that we might be tempted to throw out the baby with the bath water, to reject liberal democracy

together with capitalism. We should instead, they argue, acknowledge the benefits of formal democracy, while expanding its principles of individual freedom and equality by *dissociating* them from capitalism in order to deny that capitalism is the sole or best means of advancing these principles".[25]

The problem with this criticism is not simply in that it invites for a simplification and distortion of Marxism, depicting Marxist theory as overly reductionist and deterministic, whilst portraying the realities of socio-economic classes as absolute 'monistic' substances, absolutely irreconcilable with the existence of a complex social world. What is most problematic are its political effects: the open rejection of the very possibility of a critical reflection on the link between liberal-democracy and capitalist exploitation. In the end, we are simply led towards a fetishisation of the liberal democratic model and parliamentarianism as the only acceptable political forms, as universals – as the following moment of intellectual enthusiasm of Timothy Garton Ash certainly bears witness to: "When it comes to politics, all Easterneuropeans claim: there is no socialist democracy, but only democracy. And with democracy, they understand multiparty parliamentary democracy, as practised in contemporary Western, Northern and Southern Europe. Everybody is saying: there is no 'socialist legality', just legality. And with this they understand the rule of law, which is guaranteed by the constitutionally determined independence of the judiciary. Everybody is saying, and this is perhaps the most important viewpoint for the Left: there is no

'socialist economy', there is just economy. And economy does not mean socialist market economy, but social market economy".[26]

An important corollary of the embrace of democratic formalism in both the post-Marxist and civil society perspectives is that politics ultimately lapses into being conceived and structured around juridical terms. For what the 'formal conditions of possibility' of democratic practices boil down to is nothing but the sphere of liberal Law in all its different ramifications: the sphere of civic and human rights, the sphere of modern citizenship, of the constitutional state, of the separation of powers, of juridico-normative procedures. Thus, whilst we see the theorists and activists of 'civil society' in Eastern Europe trying to reinvent the liberal question of legality and legitimacy, to resurrect the problem of the *Rechtsstaat,* whilst we see them uncovering all the classical liberal *topoi* of politics such as constitutional rights, civil liberties, mechanisms of political representation and principles of contract,[27] Laclau and Mouffe are engaged in rethinking at large the implications of the bourgeois revolutions and of their universalistic juridical propositions. In both cases, the centre stage is occupied by the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*. This foundational text of the juridico-political modernity acquires new life as it resurfaces in the shape of a formal guarantee for the autonomisation of social spaces and the politicisation of various issues and concerns. The other side of the political pluralism of the new social movements, the other side of the heterogeneity of civil initiatives and democratic oppositions in Eastern

Europe is therefore legal universality. As we already saw, Laclau and Mouffe truly go far in this direction, positing the very conditions of possibility of emancipatory politics in the abstract personae of man and citizen who are both 'free' and 'equal': anybody can claim to be the subject of freedom and equality, at any time, anywhere, there are no social relations or locations which could not be a matter of the discourse of civic liberties and human rights, which is here precisely to provide a condition of possibility of their politicisation. Politics ultimately finds its beginnings, its *perpetuum mobile* in juridical consciousness. And this is true even, and perhaps above all, for questions of social emancipation: "the nature and degree of the resistance against capitalist relations of production will crucially depend on the consciousness of their rights that people have in a certain historical moment".[28] Laclau and Mouffe thus not only subordinate politics and the problem of emancipation to the theme of the Law, to the theme of legal equality or equality in rights, but at the same time openly start endorsing what Marx long ago criticised under the rubric of a 'partial emancipation'.[29]

The main issue here, however, is that in this return to the theme of Law, political formalism does not only subordinate politics to juridical principles and norms, but ends up identifying politics and democracy *tout court* with the State and its institutional matrix. As Wood pointed out: "Now, the purely 'formal' principles of liberalism have come to be *identified* with democracy. In other words, these formal principles are treated not simply as good in themselves, nor even as necessary conditions for democracy

in the literal sense of popular rule, but as synonymous with it or as its outer limit".[30] Democracy and democratic politics, instead of being subjective political principles, principles which edify the emergence of a political subject, become questions of the State's own normativity, they become ideological instruments of the State.

Besides political formalism, and the reduction of politics to Law, there is one more level at which we can compare and identify the two concepts. The perspectives of 'civil society' and 'radical and plural democracy' also share an identical philosophical substance, an identical epistemological vantage point, expressed under the slogan of the 'return to the concrete'. 'Return to the concrete' implies a double rejection: on the one hand, the rejection of all 'utopian' dimensions of thought, of all 'impossible' social and political demands; on the other hand, the rejection of all 'abstract' philosophical and theoretical statements on history, society and politics, of all statements which do not proceed from the factual, immediate social reality. This double rejection was indeed the primary medium through which the political approaches of the seventies and the eighties sought to oppose themselves to Marxism as a theory of history. Against the centrality of the Marxian Two of the class struggle, against the very notion of the dialectic, these perspectives propose very peculiar ideas of the 'concrete analysis of the concrete situation', quite at odds with Lenin. The question of the apprehension of politics becomes here a question of the concrete given – of the immediate 'living problems', of empirically visible and tangible issues and demands, of particular social and

historical forces, of strategic and tactical orientations, of pragmatic calculations, of innumerable opinions of individuals and groups, all of which need to be recognised in what they are, both *de facto* and *de jure*. From the distance and critical potentiality that the notion of scientific abstraction provided – and which was the cornerstone of Marxism's grip on history – these perspectives shift us towards a crude empiricism, which recognises nothing but the obviousness of the concretely given – which is always the obviousness of the *status quo*.[31]

The attempt to dispose of the terms 'abstract' and the 'speculative' with regard to politics was a cornerstone for many East European 'civil society' and dissident intellectuals. A particularly illustrative case here is the one of Mihaly Vajda, who probably elaborated the fundamental theoretical principles of post-Marxism *avant la lettre*: "If I give up this reductionism, there is no capitalism and socialism *in abstracto* any more. There are societies determined by concrete, special historical traditions and special historical [...] endowments. If I give up this reductionism, the class division of society ceases to be the only important and decisive factor in the constitution of social groups [...] If there are other factors of group-constitution as well, either subordinated to class differences, or equal to them, sometimes even playing a more essential role than such differences (if they exist at all), then in order to comprehend a society, I have to see first of all the rather heterogeneous factors of social group-constitution, the interest-relations, the dependencies of the existing and constantly changing social groups which also intersect with each other".[32]

But the post-Marxist theory of hegemony seems to represent the apex of this entire endeavour. With their rejection of the Marxist 'essentialist apriorism' and 'reductionism', Laclau and Mouffe do not only want to drown all the global, structural dimensions of social and political processes, but to espouse a peculiar pseudo-realism of discourses, where the attributes and appearances become the matter of the essence.[33] Their version of the 'return to the concrete' depicts a social and historical space composed of a plurality of languages, each of which is irreducible in its givenness and immediacy. The ruling principle in this space, which is also the ruling principle of politics, is not social structure, nor historical sense, but rhetoric and rhetorical construction. As Bennett pointed out: "Abandoning earlier conceptions of politics in which political actors as well as the lines of alliance/opposition between them are held to follow from structurally determined positions and interests, this logic [...] views political relations as essentially rhetorical constructs. Where and how lines of political alliance/opposition are drawn and who ends up struggling with whom, and against whom are questions which are not resolvable independently of the ways in which discourse organises political antagonisms".[34]

It is not hard to realise that a corollary of this position is also the collapse of all fundamental modern political concepts and forms, the evacuation of not only the classical questions of power and sovereignty, of the State and the historical forms of politics, but also of the substance all modern political distinctions, such as Left/

Right, Revolution/Reform, liberalism vs. conservatism vs. socialism, etc. Inasmuch as the combinatory potential of discursive elements is infinite, politics, for Laclau and Mouffe, is solely the matter of the pragmatics of attribution. This, in turn, means that all political concepts, even the most fundamental ones, such as liberty, equality, property and security, become what Laclau and Mouffe would call 'contested signifiers', that is, they become concepts which, in themselves, are completely vacuous and empty, concepts whose contents depend solely on the contingency of different political attributions. Quoting *Hegemony*: "The exploding of the uniqueness of meaning of the political [...] dissolves every possibility of fixing the signified in terms of a division between left and right".[35]

And indeed, what seems to be radical in 'radical democracy' is its combination of empiricism and relativism: the insistence of Laclau and Mouffe on the recognition of the actual pluralism of discourses, of the subjective expressions of political positions, of demands and revendications, all of which are, at the same time, absolutely malleable, context specific, contingent. Politics, for Laclau and Mouffe, begins at the level of discursive immediacy, and quite at a remote from all the 'grand narratives' of political modernity, such as the State, the Nation, the Party, the Revolution, it finds its end in pure rhetorical constructions and discursive articulations.

The other side of this discursive relativism, the other side of the 'irreducible pluralism' of discourses, is, nevertheless, the very idea of legal universality, and thus also the materiality of liberal-democratic order.

Philosophical questions of relativism and pluralism have as their conditions of possibility the formal, that is, juridical framework of liberal-democracy. If Laclau and Mouffe would not go as far as offering a strict theoretical admission of this fact, it is amongst the theorists of 'civil society' that we can find its explicit articulation. For example, with John Keane: "[relativism] implies the need for democracy, for institutional arrangements and procedures which guarantee that protagonists of similar or different forms of language games can openly and continuously articulate their respective forms of life".[36] Or, again: "a pluralist and self-organizing civil society is an implied condition of relativism".[37]

4.4. Janez Janša, the empty signifier

But what about the practical realisation of these political propositions? What can the Slovenian context tell us about the actual political effects of the 'radical and plural democracy'?

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

On the 31st of May 1988, Janez Janša, then a peace activist and a journalist of *Mladina,* was arrested, together with two other journalists and an officer of the Yugoslav National Army. The four were arrested and put on trial on

the allegation of disclosing confidential State documents to the public. What the journalists of *Mladina* came in possession of were transcripts from a closed meeting of the Federal Presidency of Yugoslavia, where there were discussions about possible military involvement in Slovenia, in order to curb what was perceived as increasing signs of political instability. Amidst the political turmoil of the end of the eighties not only in Slovenia, but also in Yugoslavia as a whole, this was, of course, a matter of tremendous controversy. Controversial was also the reaction by the Yugoslav military to this journalistic scoop: Janša and others were being tried and sentenced by a military and not a civilian court, which violated a number of republican legal codes, as it also went against the pleas and the demands of the Slovenian political authority.

The most important thing about the trial of Janša and others – otherwise known as the JBTZ process – were, nevertheless, its immediate social and political consequences. Already a few days after the first arrests, the *Alternative* would take the leading role in the politicisation of this event. Their urgent response was the creation of a body named the Committee for the Defence of the Rights of Janez Janša, which was soon renamed into the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights. The Committee swiftly imposed itself as a crucial political actor in Slovenia. It organised public debates and channelled public criticism, it prepared demonstrations and helped to coordinate mass intellectual and political mobilisations. But it also detonated the political implications of the JBTZ process, transforming the arrests and the trials into

symbols of opposition not only to the structures of military and political authority, but to the socialist system as such, to its political, juridical and ideological underpinnings.

The political demands of the Committee were minimal – human rights and civic freedoms for the defendants – but its politics was explosive. The trial of Janez Janša came to personify the trial of the entire span of struggles for democracy, liberty and pluralism, the trial of a whole set of demands posed by the new social movements, by *Alternative* political groupings and conceptions. It was a trial of civil society and radical and plural democracy as such. This is why the political force of the Committee was so momentous. This is why the events of May of 1988 would indeed mark the beginning of drastic political and historical transformations in Slovenia, transformations in which the political institutions of Yugoslav socialism were imploding both from 'below' and from 'above'.

This remarkable political success of the Committee, however, seemed to confirm the political force of the conceptual propositions of Laclau and Mouffe. It is exactly in the Committee, that is, in both the form and the contents of its politics, that the notion of 'radical and plural democracy' would attain the moment of its truth. The Committee was the moment in which both of these political conceptions could look at themselves and say 'I am I'.

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

"[The Committee for the Defence of the Rights of Janez Janša is] an organ which safeguards and opens the very

space of possible political and social pluralism, an organ which expresses the interest of a widest democratic front".[38]

Or, as Žižek would add:

"[The Committee is] a political body, which is not organised corporatively [...] but transcorporatively: it consists of a multitude of individuals and 'corporations' (editorial boards, associations, social groups and organised groups of labour), which are extremely diverse not only in terms of their organisational structure and their status, but also in terms of their ideational orientations: here we can find theologians, communists, [...] the representatives of 'traditional' and 'alternative' culture, individuals and socio-political organisations. What unites them is neither a common ideological project nor a specific political vision (with regards to this, the differences between them are enormous), but a fundamental political consensus on the need to defend the public space of democracy".[39]

Žižek was certainly right to locate this essential political heterogeneity at the heart of the politics of the Committee. Because the Committee *in itself*, in terms of its own political and organisational constitution, was marked by diversity, plurality, even contradictority. In this sense, it truly represented the practical achievement of the political proposition of 'radical democracy'. What was formed on the backbone of the Committee was a massive and heterogeneous democratic subject which was extending throughout Slovenian society, a subject capable of overcoming all the political, ideological and social differences, of uniting a plurality of actors without collapsing their diversity and heterogeneity. New social

movements, the 'alternative culture', liberal 'dissidents', Marxist and post-Marxist theorists, the nationalist intelligentsia, socialist and post-socialist political cadres, the Catholic Church, workers' organisations, the associations of Slovenian peasants, socialist youth groups and others. This is precisely what Laclau and Mouffe would call 'chains of equivalence', unity in heterogeneity. And this is why Janez Janša himself would represent an 'empty signifier' in the latter's sense,[40] a signifier capable of overdetermining an entire ensemble of social differences and diversities.

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

As Žižek would also remark:

"The Committee is not a political body, it does not represent any determinate political orientation [...] rather, it consciously limits itself to a 'common denominator' of the democratic public: the defence of human rights".[41]

The entire political thrust of the Committee resided in this emptiness and this formalism. Behind this scarcity in the formulation of demands lay the entire strength of the formal opposition between the 'State' and 'civil society'. The demand for human and civic rights of the detainees was nothing but a for the institutionalisation of political pluralism, for a concrete embodiment of 'radical and plural democracy'.

And, as Žižek would rightly note, this demand was particularly neuralgic with regard to the apparatuses of the socialist State: "Exactly as such, as 'apolitical', the Committee places the Slovenian state institutions in front of an inexorable ordeal: faced with the demands of the Committee the latter need to prove not whose are they in the struggle for power, but more simply and more radically, are they still legitimate institutions".[42]

In fact, it was not only neuralgic, but immensely effective. The trial of Janša truly represented a turning point in the political dramas at the end of the eighties in Slovenia, as well as in Yugoslavia as a whole. It marked the formal beginning of a proper post-socialist political sequence. The actual event of arrest, trial and detention was rather short-lived: although sentenced for much longer, Janša and the two other journalists were released from imprisonment already by August 1989 (the officer of the Yugoslav People's Army stayed incarcerated for slightly longer). But a decisive point of no return had already been reached. Because the demands for human and civic rights, demands for 'formal democracy' and the rule of law were rapidly finding their way from civil society to the official politics of the socialist State, encroaching upon and subverting the very foundations of the latter. The political success of the Committee brought with itself a dramatic resolution of the dialectic of democracy and socialism. On 28th February 1989, a mass protest in support of the miners' strike in Stari Trg, Kosovo, united the Slovenian Communist Party leadership with the organisations of civil society. Milan Kučan, the president of the Slovenian

League of Communists, would speak openly there about the need to defend human rights, pluralism and the rule of law. And it would take only a couple of months before the Slovenian Assembly would propose and then adopt, in September 1989, the constitutional amendments in order to institutionalise the "rights and freedoms of man and citizen", "democracy and the principles of the *Rechtsstaat*" in the republic.

However, it is precisely at this point, that the tragedy of the entire episode of Slovenian Spring is revealed in all its ironical dimensions. The peak of the political success of the Committee, the very realisation of its demand for 'formal democracy', represented, from the point of view of its origin, a proper historical catastrophe. What is effectively taking shape on the backbone of the political subjectivities and spaces carved out on the terrain of civil society from this moment is a nationalist politics of state-building.

The trial of Janša, in fact, brought out one more issue, an issue which was already the principle site and the stake in the struggles over the legacy of the Yugoslav federation: the issue of national sovereignty. Since the mid-eighties at least, politics in Slovenia had been completely absorbed in questions of sovereignty, as its political elite, the 'reformist' leadership of the Communist Party of Slovenia, was increasingly clamouring and quarrelling about the socio-economic, the fiscal, the redistributionist, the constitutional and the political constructions of federal life.[43] The trial further exploded the problem of sovereignty: was it the freedom of individual citizens which was put on trial, or was the entire process staged by the army a trial of

sovereignty of the Slovenian state? The political elite acted swiftly upon this montage: the constitutional amendments which the Slovenian parliament adopted in September 1989, were not only epitomes of liberty and democracy, they were also the first formal inscriptions of the theme of Slovenian national sovereignty, and as such the first formal announcements of dissociation from Yugoslavia.

But it could not have done so without the pathos of the civil society struggles which were being simultaneously hegemonised into a nationalist genre. Internally to the 'alternative' movements, the problem of sovereignty was most successfully exploited by the cultural intelligentsia gathered around the journal *Nova Revija* (*New Review*'). These nationalist philosophers, writers and intellectuals, who had already formulated a manifesto for Slovenian nationalism and independence two years earlier – dubbed the *Contributions to the Slovenian National Programme*[44] – detonated the 'cultural' question associated with the trial of Janša: the issue of language. The entire proceedings of the military trial of Janša were held in Serbo-Croatian language, and not in Slovenian, which was a violation of the republican and federal laws, namely the right of the defendants to be tried in their mother tongue. But the nationalist intelligentsia succeeded in representing this as a problem of the cultural and political sovereignty of the Slovenian nation within Yugoslavia. Ideas of freedom and human rights were swiftly repainted in national terms – they became questions of the self-determination of the Slovenian nation, and ultimately claims for the sovereignty of the Slovenian State. As Tine Hribar, for example, put it:

"Everything points to the fact that the organs of Slovenian rule – and this means its internal organs – used these events as instruments for an external intervention, as executive instruments for an extra-Slovenian intervention into Slovenian sovereignty. But is the government in Slovenia then still a Slovenian government? What is Slovenian sovereignty, if the forces of dictatorship in Yugoslavia openly proclaim that Slovenia should be pacified violently, if this cannot be done peacefully? How come that SR Slovenia, if it is truly a State, cannot determine its own internal politics?".[45] A nationalist hegemonisation of the massive political subjectivity of the Committee followed suit, culminating in the mass rallies held in Ljubljana in May 1989 around the reading of the *May Declaration,* a political tract openly seeking Slovenian independence from Yugoslavia.[46]

The end display of this process was truly ironical: the entire drama of the birth of the heterogeneous political subjectivity in 'civil society' being resolved in terms of a homogenous nationalist consciousness; the very fulfilment of the 'apolitical' demand for formal democracy, of the demand for the abstract framework liberty and equality, taking the form of a substantial politics of national sovereignty; and the democratic and pluralistic essence of the social movements in Slovenia coming to symbolise, in the light of the conflicts over the legacy of Yugoslav socialism, the very necessity for a sovereign Slovenian State.[47]

How come this paradoxical resolution? Why did civil society, in its very realisation, end up representing, as Tonči

Kuzmanić put it,[48] the 'eve of the nationalist-democratic revolutions'?

There is no space here to account for all the particularly bizarre details of the transformations of the Slovenian alternative political scene at the end of the eighties, transformations through which the massive and pluralistic subject of democracy and liberty constituted around the trial of Janez Janša provided not only the space and the momentum, but also the political contents for the emergence of the so-called DEMOS, a similarly heterogeneous coalition, this time of political parties,[49] which would form the first post-communist government in Slovenia, and do so in strikingly conservative, nationalist and exclusionist terms; transformations in which the Socialist Youth Alliance, the publisher of *Mladina,* and the intellectual and political backbone in many regards of the anti-systemic struggles of the civil society would transform itself into the Liberal Party when entering this post-communist struggle for power (where it would loose dramatically); and finally, and perhaps most dramatically, transformations where the principal *dramatis personae* of the *Alternative,* the delegates of its 'apolitical' politics, would themselves become the pioneers of the new political caste at the moment of the formation of the sovereign Slovenian state out of the crumbling body of the Yugoslav federation (the two most striking examples: Janez Janša, a peace activist and a symbol of political pluralism, liberty and democracy, and Igor Bavčar, the founding member and the president of the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights, would become, in 1991, respectively, the minister of defence and the minister of the interior).

In fact, the problem that interests us in terms of this analysis is not whether this paradoxical transformation of civil society into nationalism was necessary or not, but whether it was conceivable or predictable for those who were engaged in this political shift. The internal aspects of this historical drama, aspects relating to the self-conception, and indeed, the self-consciousness of the 'Slovenian Spring', are revealing in themselves, even in their limited scope. Because if these twists and ironies of history point something out, then they point out, in the first place, that limitedness was at the root of the theoretical conceptions which oriented the episode of 'Slovenian Spring'. What made the *Alternative* susceptible to the paradoxes of history, what made it prone to this recuperation by nationalism, was a definite defect in its theoretical consciousness: an incapacity to grasp the extent and the depth of the historical processes in which it was involved. And this is the precise point where the theoretical optics of Laclau and Mouffe receives a determinate lesson of history.

4.5. Thinking petite

How to seize the dimension of the theoretical failure of the Laclau and Mouffe project here?

The problem emerges already at the most fundamental level of theoretical apprehension, at that level at which theory seeks to construct its own ways of seeing, its own grasp of objects, its own field vision of the phenomena

of politics. Močnik forcefully emphasised this moment: "Because it is not possible to think 'small' without a wider frame, and local thought especially demands a global consciousness, the rejection of 'grand narratives' is suspiciously close to the rejection of thinking as such. Prohibition embraces the alternative stories and in fact prohibits thinking itself: the issue is not simply that one is not allowed to think in long terms, in big moves, and perhaps even to lurk beyond the nearby fence. The issue is that the omission of these 'big' proportions releases those small illusions of various forms of control, critique and refutation, illusions on which the biggest possible system lives".[50]

These 'small illusions' that Močnik refers to are precisely the theoretical shortcomings of that philosophical orientation which sought a 'return to the concrete'. Thinking small, thinking concrete: the neuralgic point of the political consciousness of the 'Slovenian Spring' was precisely the rejection of the dimension of the 'abstract', the rejection of the analysis of global processes and relations. "The Alternative did possess", as Močnik argues, "a 'concept' of its responsibility towards the historical situation, but the 'content' of this concept was deceptive".[51] In both its analyses and its practices, the *Alternative* was unable to see beyond the immediate empirical and discursive realm, beyond what was immediately tangible and merely given. It thought that it is located in a space without abstractions, it was not particularly interested in questions of State power, questions of class struggle and its historical forms, it could not envisage historical

and political realities or projects of global extent. It only wanted to catch sight of the multiplicity of particulars, to recognise the immediate wealth of discursive expressions and articulations, to appropriate, politicise and universalise the given, the empirically 'concrete'. "The *Alternative,* according to its self-understanding, felt so fully responsible to the 'existing state' that it did not see any need for a supplementary construction of 'utopias'".[52] But exactly in this fascination with givenness and concreteness, the *Alternative* was irremediably abstract. It was incapable of conceptualising or even recognising political and historical processes of less immediate shape, processes which were nevertheless dominating its own development. This entire allure of the 'concrete' left the *Alternative* structurally blind: and this is what also made it particularly predisposed to the paradoxes of recuperation, this is what made its expectations, its aspirations and its demands all the more prone to twists, disfigurations and displacements. As Močnik would put it, this is what resulted in that the "formulation of [its] 'demands' took place under the dictate of the system".[53]

Nothing can be more pertinent here for the approach of Laclau and Mouffe. For it is precisely their insistence on the givenness of discursive objects and constructions, their rejection of anything other than the terrain of literality of discourses, which exhibits a bewildering blindness in what concerns some of the most fundamental 'abstract' dimensions of politics and political forms. By collapsing everything into concrete acts of discursive or rhetorical construction and 'articulation', by attempting to redefine the

entirety of social relations in terms of symbolic exchanges, whose meaning we can read off from the 'surface', the approach of Laclau and Mouffe remains incapable of accounting for the structural dimensions of both the State and society in their properly modern guises. When Laclau and Mouffe conceptualise society, or the 'social', as a totalistic horizon of articulation of diversified particulars, a horizon which is wholly immanent to the concrete givens, to actual demands of diversified and multiple social and political actors, they dramatically loose out of sight the fact that this 'discursive horizon' cannot but be already pre-formed, that it already possesses a determinate structure in the guise of the State form and its ideological and representational surface, its ideological apparatuses, as Althusser would call them. Indeed, this is the point where we can seize the importance of Althusser's conception of the 'machinistic' essence of the State – its objective, material dimensions, beyond the subjective facade – as well as his remarks on the State's 'terrible concreteness' which one 'cannot touch with one's hands'. One of the great paradoxes of the entire range of the 'formalistic' political conceptions of the 1989 'democratic revolutions' – including Laclau and Mouffe – was precisely the inability to grasp properly these 'abstract', objective dimensions of the State – its existence beyond the mere subjective domain of actors. But also, an inability to grasp the peculiarity of the 'dialectic' between the State and civil society, in which the State *is* the determinant element. The demands for civil society and for 'radical and plural democracy' in the post-socialist setting were never and could not have been simply demands for

securing the autonomy of different spheres of society at the remote from the State. These demands were, at the same time, and primarily so, demands for the State. It was never simply a matter of counterposing the pluralism of society to the 'monolithic' socialist State, but of demanding from the socialist State to transform itself into a State of Right, into a liberal State, which would then juridically guarantee the free expression of pluralism. "Civil society had to, so in order to constitute itself, also constitute the State", as Mastnak pointed out.[54]

But the same can be said with regard to the 'abstract' phenomenon of nationalism. What gets obscured in the approaches which, like Laclau and Mouffe, sought a 'return to the concrete', is the fact that the social space in modernity is always already structured as One, not only through the State apparatus, but also, and before all, through the symbolic form of the nation. Playing upon the problem of the formal construction of the community out of a plurality of diverse elements, the post-structuralist theory of hegemony remains totally blind for the fact that the One of the modern polity, the form of mass representation of society proper to capitalist modernity, is always already more than a (hegemonic) sum of its parts. It is so because it already has a substantial symbolic embodiment: the nation-form. Nationalism, or the ideology of the nation, cannot simply represent one of the elements of the discursive terrain of immanence, as Laclau and Mouffe would have it, an element on an equal footing with all the others, because it represents the very condition of possibility of the structuring of this space, because it corresponds to

the 'abstract' logic of social representation itself.[55] Even Gramsci clearly acknowledged this fact when he stressed the inseparability of the practice of hegemony from the terrain of the national-State – hegemony was, at its base, always a matter of creating a 'national popular will': "One cannot make politics-history without this passion, without this sentimental connection between intellectuals and the people-nation".[56]

In the following chapter, we will explore further precisely this problem, by looking at the ways in which the positing of the theoretical articulation between nationalism and the 'formalist' conception of politics at the heart of political modernity helps us to unravel the paradoxes of the post-socialist political rationality.

5. Liberal Democracy and Its Discontents: The Case of 'Democratisation' in Yugoslavia

Liberalism is like whiskey: it looks good, it tastes bitter, it is hazardous for the body and the spirit – and anyway, only the rich can afford it.

Rastko Močnik, *How Much Fascism?*

[N]ever in history, has the horizon of the thing whose survival is being celebrated (namely, all the old models of the capitalist and liberal world) been as dark, threatening, and threatened.

Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*.

5.1. *Après la fin, la déluge*?

Post-socialism bears an intimate relationship with liberal democracy. On the ruins of 'really existing' socialist states we witness the unbridled advance of capitalism and the 'free market', coupled with the elevation of the political reign of parliamentarianism and the Rule of Law. In this, post-socialism offers a ready resolve of the principle ideological 'dilemma' of the Cold War, exploding the opposition between 'liberal democracy' and 'socialist totalitarianism' in the 'evidence' of the so-called 'transition' of socialist societies towards capitalism and parliamentarianism. But post-socialism does not only provide the political form of liberal democracy with a definite site of historical actualisation. It also provides it with one of the most potent surfaces for idealisation. A triumphant political consciousness transforms the political hopes of the Eastern Europeans into a veritable political eschatology, evoking

the attainment of the deepest and the most universalistic aspirations of human history. With the events of 1989 collapsing the visibility of the socio-political challenges to capitalism and to its political expressions, liberal political philosophy has not only strived to depict liberal democracy as a system without an alternative, acceptable universally, but has lauded it as the 'most natural form of political government', even as the 'endpoint in the ideological evolution of humanity'. Francis Fukuyama, one of the philosophical representatives of the new American order after the cold war, would go as far as to proclaim an 'end of history', asserting that in liberal democracy we find the ultimate model of universal recognition and reconciliation, that liberal democracy is a political form finally discovered in which all the societal conflicts and antagonisms, all the contradictions which have incited social struggles throughout the history of political modernity, are finally resolved, reconciled, and brought to an end.[01] With the State fashioned upon the rule of law and individual liberties, and based upon popular power expressed in multi-party parliamentary elections, we have Reason itself appearing on the scene of history, universal and non-contradictory, realising the full potential of humanity, pacifying all potential social conflicts, and satisfying all human needs.[02]

Inasmuch as this political eschatology of liberal democracy offers itself in terms of propositions calling upon Hegel and Kojève, one is tempted to deploy the critical method that young Marx once used against Hegelian idealism – to situate 'Reason' in the 'unreason' of

historical existence, to measure the ideal against the actual. And in this, one wants to turn the ideological assertions of the liberal democratic ideology against themselves: to which extent does the universalistic horizon of liberal democracy produce conflicts and contradictions, instead of resolving or pacifying them? To which extent is the very existence of the liberal democratic form inseparable from the political violence that it claims to have overcome and annulled?

Starting from these questions, I would like to pick up from the moment which the analysis in the previous chapter left unanswered – the moment of the articulation of liberal-democracy with nationalism in the post-socialist setting. Examining in more detail the trajectories of the general process of 'democratisation' in Yugoslavia, and more concretely, the case of the establishment of the institutions of the liberal democratic State in Croatia, I will attempt to show how nationalism, and nationalist violence, not only does not stand opposed to the universalistic surface of liberal democracy, but rather seems to represent one of its inescapable elements.

2.1. 'Democratisation' in Yugoslavia

What do we speak about when we speak about 'democratisation' in Yugoslavia? At one level, the facts seem to be clear. When we speak about 'democratisation' in Yugoslavia, or the 'democratic transition', we speak about a substantive transformation in the objectivity of the political institutions. We speak about the institutionalisation of the

liberal framework of the State, of the Rule of Law, of the formal, that is, constitutional and institutional recognition of individual and collective liberties, rights and duties, of the implementation of 'public accountability' and the creation of a juridical and political framework for the mediation, negotiation and compromise between political differences and conflicts. And in this sense, we speak about a process which takes tangible proportions throughout the Yugoslav political space at the end of the 1980s and whose most visible manifestation is the redrafting of the constitutions of different Yugoslav republics in 1989 and 1990. It was in Slovenia first, but soon after, in Croatia and Serbia and other Yugoslav republics, that the former socialist entities would, through a silent but drastic symbolic shift, turn into liberal States proper, into states based on Law, on public representation and accountability, on individual rights and political pluralism.

But this only paints the picture in half. Because when we speak about 'democracy' in Yugoslavia, we also speak about the emergence and the formal constitution of a political subject. We speak about that dramatic moment at the beginning of 1990, when the League of Communists of Yugoslavia steps down from its 50-year political dominance in order to pave the way for the institution of multiparty parliamentary democracy. Again, it was first in Slovenia and Croatia, in April and May that year, and some months after, in other Yugoslav republics that the 'first free elections' of the post-socialist period were to take place, announcing the end of one-party political rule and the beginning of parliamentarianism. This is the moment of the formal

inauguration of the liberal-democratic subjectivity. But as elsewhere in the East of Europe, what precedes this formal instance in the Yugoslav context is an entire span of subjective energies, volitions and conceptions, a multilayered process of formation taking place through a number of different trajectories and shapes. If we look at these different trajectories in their broadest and most significant contours, we can see that the genealogy of the subject of liberty and democracy in Yugoslavia is fully continuous to all those specific subjective episodes of the 'democratic revolutions' of 1989 in Eastern Europe:

It is continuous, first of all, with the waves of popular protest and democratic dissent that characterised the end of the eighties in the socialist East, to those pressures 'from below' through which the people of Poland, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, and other socialist states, expressed their opposition to the repressive nature of the regimes that were in place, to the growing alienation of the official sphere of power from its social base. In Yugoslavia, these processes of 'democratisation from below' were most manifest in the episode of the 'Slovenian Spring', which we examined in the previous chapter, where the *Alternative* movements succeeded in carving out the spaces of human rights and civic freedoms. But the Slovenian moment was by no means the only one. Throughout the 1980s, in fact, the entirety of the Yugoslav social space was being punctured by popular and intellectual pressures, by the demands for a liberalisation of the political sphere, demands for freedom of expression and association, civic liberties and human rights. From Zagreb to Belgrade,

from Kosovo to Bosnia and Herzegovina, the eighties in Yugoslavia was a decade of the ferment of 'formal democracy'.

At the same time, however, the drive of 'democratisation' in Yugoslavia would not exempt the official political sphere. The second moment in which the notions of democracy and liberty acquire a decisive subjective form is the one which concerns the transformations internal to the political regimes themselves, which concerns processes of democratisation 'from above'. We are speaking here of that general drive through which the Communist parties of the East of Europe start transforming their ideologies, whilst embracing elements of the liberal doctrine, and pacifying their political conceptions and strategies. In Yugoslavia, the precise equivalent to *perestroika* was the discourse of 'reforms' (*reforme*), appearing as early as the seventies, but affirming itself manifestly and resolutely from the early-eighties. The official political debates of the decade of the eighties seemed to have entirely revolved around problems of the 'liberalisation' of the political and the economic system, around problems of the transformation of the socialist economy towards the market model and the reshaping of the Yugoslav political institutions along the formal coordinates of the *Rechtsstaat*.[03]

The liberal democratic subjectivity, however, also appears in another space, a space traversing the simple opposition of 'below' and 'above'. It appears amongst the burgeoning nationalist intelligentsia, which begins to fortify itself in the cultural, political and academic institutions. The two most notable examples in this regard are the

Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU), drafted by a number of Serbian intellectuals and academics, which first appears in 1986, and the 57th issue of the Slovenian cultural journal *Nova Revija,* published in 1987 (although written in the same year as the *Memorandum*) under the heading "Prispevki za Slovenski nacionalni program" ("Contributions to the Slovenian National Programme"). Besides the overt rhetoric of, respectively, Serbian and Slovenian nationalism, both the *Memorandum* and the theoretical tracts of the Slovene nationalist intellectuals are being decisively shaped on the backbone of the subject of liberty and democracy. Both of these texts seek to present themselves as the guardians of liberal and democratic traditions of their respective nations, both of them articulate their criticism of the socialist regime and their anti-communism through demands for an 'authentic democratic system', for the rule of law, for the institutional recognition of human rights and civic freedoms.[04] As elsewhere in the East of Europe, the rebirth of democracy goes hand in hand with the national revival in the intellectual realm.

All of these three spaces constitute the fundamental moments of the process of 'democratisation' in Yugoslavia. And in this sense, the redrafting of the constitutions and the setting of parliamentary elections in 1990 can and must be seen as their result and their culmination. But if this formal moment represents the unification and overdetermination of all these different trajectories of democratic subjectivity, we should note that what is actually at play here is a dramatic displacement.

Because the moment in which the League of Communists of Yugoslavia decides to legalise formal political association outside its confines, the moment in which it feels obliged to open up the challenge of the multiparty parliamentary electoral game is also the moment in which the political sphere in Yugoslavia is traversed by the most drastic divisions. The first 'free and fair elections' in socialist Yugoslavia come at the time in which the political and intellectual elites of different Yugoslav republics are pursuing centripetal tendencies of politics to the utmost. They come at a time in which different Yugoslav republics are caught in bitter antagonisms, each against the other, and all against the instance which bound them together. Serbia against its provinces Kosovo and Vojvodina, Slovenia against the Federal Government, Macedonia and Bosnia Herzegovina against the Federal Government, Serbia against Slovenia, Slovenia and Croatia against Kosovo, Montenegro and Macedonia, and so on.

The antagonisms between the political leaderships of different Yugoslav republics draw their roots from the situation after Tito's death at the beginning of the 1980s: from a power vacuum which ensued, and which was only partially filled by a new political institution, a collective presidency of the federation. But also, and in a decisive way, they draw their roots from the drastic economic crisis which hit Yugoslavia in the same period – a crisis fuelled by the global debt crisis of the late 1970s – and which forced the federal government to introduce austerity programmes and economic restrictions.[05] The resulting economic recession and a spiralling inflation in Yugoslavia in the mid 1980s let

to a general political instability, as mass unemployment and social insecurity spread throughout the country.[06] But most importantly, the economic crisis inserted dramatic rifts into the official political sphere, as it created conflicts between the federal government and the republics, and between different republican leaderships themselves, conflicts over crucial issues such as the common budget, the economic and political sovereignty of the republican units, over the federal system of redistribution and aid, and even over the future shape and the viability of the federation as such. In a situation of economic scarcity and austerity, which was exacerbated by the inefficient and destructive policies of economic 'liberalisation' of the federal government, the republican politicians started a struggle for political control over economic resources. "[There was] a growing polarization", as Woodward noted, "between official alternatives: a federal government pushing ever more radical economic reforms and confronting republican governments asserting their sovereignty and 'national' interest with equal conviction".[07]

The two richest republics, Slovenia and Croatia, demanded that the federation be re-organized along confederal lines, where their claims of political and economic sovereignty would be fully recognised, whereas Serbia, on the other hand, pushed for a re-centralised federation where it would claim the upper hand, and where it could also further its own gains of sovereignty, which primarily included the abolition of the autonomy of its two provinces: Vojvodina and Kosovo. At the same time, these three republics started openly subverting the federal

system and its institutions, by refusing to participate in federal systems of welfare, by refusing to accept the jurisdiction of federal courts, and, in the end, by declaring their own particular national interests above those of the other republics and the federation as a whole. At the same time, they started fuelling nationalist rebukes against each other, turning issues of economic competition into claims of national identity: "The language of national exploitation, national integrity, and moral right portrayed these issues in ethical terms, replacing economic ideology and legalistic disquisitions on governments' economic property rights brought on by the severe restrictions of the stabilisation program. This shift only escalated conflict further because it transformed conflict within elite circles over economic choices [...] into non-negotiable questions of identity".[08]

By the end of the 1980s, the conflicts between the republics evolved into open struggles over the legacy of the decaying Yugoslav socialist system as a whole, over its productive capacities, its industries and productive resources, its political institutions, its administrative and territorial apparatuses, its military machine, and its citizens. The logic of the conflicts amongst the republics, and between the republics and the federal government, was a logic of a vicious self-destructive spiral: "Claims for control over economic resources or political authority were necessarily a denial of resources, authority and rights to others. Protectionist economics and aggressive politics tended to incite defensive responses, and the interaction could escalate rapidly if not restrained. Popular protest excited counterprotests, and the rhetoric of national interest

became increasingly nationalist in the sense of defining one group and its goals in opposition to another. The more assertive each republic became in its own political project, the more this impinged on politics in other republics and on the prospects for political and economic activities that crossed republican borders and ignored ethnic identity".[09]

The turning point between the eighties and the nineties thus reveals a situation in which almost all the main political actors, or at least the most significant ones, are fervently engaged in the demolition of the Yugoslav socialist project – and specifically, in the demolition of the mechanisms of solidarity, redistribution and welfare that the federal socialist system set up. In the same moment in which the Yugoslav political sphere was being steeped in the universalistic ideas of liberal-democracy, the entire political life was overflowed with excessively particularistic political demands and claims – ranging from those which sought to impose strict borders on republican politics and economies, and thus to create new nation-states out of Yugoslavia's republics, to those which sought an excess of cultural and 'ethnic' identification in politics, fuelling nationalism behind the republican borders. This is why Branka Magaš would observe that "Yugoslavia today resembles a vast network of trenches, behind which lie encamped conflicting interests spawned by developmental problems, but also by the heady ambitions of competing national leaders. In this war of attrition, each side is counting on rebellion erupting in the enemy's interior, and with some luck also among its front-line troops".[10]

In the context of such an acute political crisis, it is not surprising that the subjective manifestations of democracy of the first multiparty parliamentary elections in 1990 are already but a particular instance in this nationalist ferment. This is evident already from their form: all the elections are taking place at the republican level exclusively. The federal elections, scheduled for December 1990, never saw the light of day. And, in fact, they never had a chance to do so. Not only because all the republican political leaderships had already collaborated together on subverting the authority and the viability of the federal government, and of the federation as an instance.[11] But also because, almost without exceptions, the contents of the emergent democratic scenarios, the contents of the new parliamentary subjects, were nationalist *per definitionem*. Almost all newly appearing political parties, and this undoubtedly applies to the reformed republican branches of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, were set up as national and nationalist parties. They were not set as parties operating on the level of Yugoslavia as a whole, and in this sense addressing its citizens as a whole, but as parties confined in the first place to particular republican territories, that is, to the majority nations which were formally recognised as the political subjects of these territories.[12] And moreover, given that the republican borders in the Yugoslav federation did not strictly coincide with those of national groups, they were set as parties addressing national groups beyond the borders of different republics.[13] An observer recounting the proper names which were appearing in the burgeoning parliamentary-democracy of Yugoslavia at the beginning

of the 1990s would probably be bewildered by a peculiar excess of particular national attributes: the Croatian Social-Liberal Party, the Croatian Peasants' Party, the Serbian Socialist Party, the Serbian Democratic Party, the Slovenian Christian-Democrats, the Social-Democratic Party of Slovenia, the Macedonian National Front, and so on. As if all the new political differences that were constituted in the formal parliamentary-democratic setting needed to be, at the same time, immediately cancelled out and subsumed under the banner of national identity.

In all the republics, it is the particularistic, that is, the nationalist political strategies which won the elections and ended up affirming themselves. Although coming in different guises – liberal, socialist, conservative or other; although differing as to their origin – in the former nomenclature, amongst political dissidents, or from completely new political figures, in all of the republics the platforms which caught the 'hearts and the minds' of the majority of the voters were those which were unable to see beyond their own 'picket-fence', beyond the confines of their respective republic and national group. In this sense, the expressions of formal democratic subjectivity added further momentum and scale to the nationalist conflict and the political disintegration of the country. In fact, the parliamentary elections proved to be the critical turning point of the break-up. Within days after the elections, each of the newly elected democratic governments started openly constructing and expressing the impossibility of Yugoslavia. Slovenia and Croatia unilaterally declared their independence and started drawing plans for secession,

whilst Serbia, which in the meantime abolished the autonomy of its two provinces, started making a bid for its control and domination in the federal political structures, and eventually for the redrawing of the borders of Yugoslavia with an aim of building a greater-Serbian nation-State beyond the current republican borders.

Within this scenario of disintegration, the entirety of idea of democracy, in both its subjective and its objective dimensions, became but an instrument in the hands of these new governments, by which they sought to assert their sovereignty over the administrative apparatuses and the populations which constituted the socialist system, that is, by which they sought to create new nation-States out of Yugoslavia's republics. According to Woodward: "The introduction of multiparty elections did not open a democratizing process in the sense of establishing procedures for managing differences and conflict over policies peacefully and regularly by holding officials accountable and guaranteeing individual rights. The elections gave politicians the courage to escalate their demands and rhetoric to sabotage negotiations".[14] Submerged under the formula of state-building, the formal expressions of the will of democratic subjects became the confirmation of the mutual exclusion of national communities. And democracy itself, at this juncture, was to become a mere metaphor for the sovereignty of national states.

The catastrophic scenario which ensued from this, where nationalist wars and brutal armed conflicts over the creation of 'ethnic States' gave a final blow to the historical

existence of the Yugoslav socialist federation is well known, and there is no need to go into it in detail here. What is interesting, however, is to follow how the germs of the political violence enter the scene and explode precisely around the concrete inauguration of liberal democratic institutional and subjective forms, through the very process through which the Yugoslav socialist republics become liberal States. We will do so here by focusing on one particular case: the case of 'young Croatian democracy', and the conflict between the Croatian state and the rebel Croatian Serbs.

5.3. 'Young Croatian democracy'

Croatia was at the very forefront of the processes of 'democratic transition' which were moving the entire country in the same rhythm with the political momentum of the post-socialist East. It was one of the first republics to implement the transformations in its political and juridical institutions, and thus also in its political and social consciousness, which were taking it towards the formal confines of the rule of law and civic liberties. In the period from February to December in 1989, the League of Communists of Croatia had not only allowed the formation and registration of a number of 'alternative' political groupings – from the intellectual non-party platform of UDJI (the Association for a Yugoslav Democratic Initiative), to an entire array of political parties proper, such as the Croatian Social-Liberal Party, the Croatian

Democratic Union, the Croatian Democratic Party, and more than fifty others which appeared in this time – but had decided to legalise political pluralism and to call for multi-party democratic elections. At this same moment, Croatia also witnessed a proliferation of the intellectual and political activities of 'civil society', as numerous civic initiatives, human rights campaigns, campaigns for the rights of women and peace campaigns were stemming in the republic.

But as substantial as the entire enthusiasm of 'democracy' was in Croatia, this Yugoslav republic was also the place where the entire display of civic passions was to receive the most brutal dose of sobriety. In the same moment of the turn of the decade in which it would experience the fiery advance of formal political liberty and democracy, Croatia would become a veritable scene of the proliferation of nationalism, and of the violence the latter is capable of producing.

Towards the end of the eighties it was plainly visible that the prevailing political sentiment in the Croatian public was openly reflecting the fractures that the Yugoslav political class was creating amongst itself. If nationalist opinion represented only a somewhat moderate partner to the 'democratic changes' both within the League of Communists of Croatia and in other segments of Croatian political life – receiving, nevertheless, its most generous manifestation in the anti-federal positions of the Croatian political leadership and in the refusals of Croatia to contribute to the common federal aid of the undeveloped regions and republics,[15] at the beginning

of the nineties, that is, during the formal setting of the multi-party parliamentary ballot, nationalist politics would openly surface and dominate the political scene. With the electoral victory of Franjo Tuđman and his Croatian Democratic Union (or, as is known by its local acronym, HDZ) at the first post-socialist parliamentary elections in April 1990, a victory which fed upon a rhetoric of extreme nationalism, chauvinism and anti-communism, it became clear that political life in Croatia was wholly permeated with nationalist sentiments. And as much as the speed with which the animosity and the antagonism between Croats and Serbs in Croatia sprung up almost out of nowhere in the short period somewhere between 1989 to 1990 remains bewildering, as much as the imagination with which nationalist ideological and political barricades were constructed and fortified on both sides – especially with the help of neighbouring Serbia and the openly belligerent politics of Milošević – remains an analytical enigma, what was also fascinating was the intransigence and cruelty of the political project of Tuđman – to create an ethnic State for Croats, regardless of the means necessary to do so.

What marked the peak of the liberal-democratic transmutation of Croatia was the deadlock between the obstinacy of the newly elected Croatian government to create a new state out of the vestiges of the Socialist Republic of Croatia, and do so by dissociating itself from Yugoslavia, and the equally militant conviction of the representatives of the Croatian Serbs to seek political and territorial autonomy in the event that Croatia secedes. At the very limit, the entire drama of the 'rebirth of democracy'

in Croatia would reach a debilitating crescendo in an armed rebellion and its violent repression, and later in full-scale military engagements and a civil war. If we count out the 'Ten-Day War' in Slovenia, this is the beginning proper of armed conflicts and wars which would collapse the Yugoslav project. Starting with the summer of 1990 and taking explosive pace by the spring of the subsequent year, the fervour of 'democracy' in Croatia was replaced by the violence of the armed struggle: first between the Croatian army and police and the rebellion of the Croatian Serbs, and later between the Croatian armed forces and the Yugoslav People's Army, which had by then transformed itself into an instrument for the territorial ambitions of Milošević and Serbian nationalism.

But this extremity of the Croatian 'road to democracy' is, nevertheless, also an exemplary point for the entire Yugoslav context. Because as captivating as the scenes of violence and brutality in the war in Croatia at the beginning of 1990s are – especially in the sense of representing an overture to the later tragedies in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Kosovo and Macedonia – what is important here is the fact that the escalation of the political conflict between Tuđman's government and the Croatian Serbs depicts in an almost purified way the genuine paradox in the development of the 'democratic transition' in Yugoslavia – its simultaneity and in consubstantiality with nationalism. What we can trace step by step by looking at the tragedy of the development of the 'young Croatian democracy' is the fact that nationalist politics, far from representing an opposition to liberal-democratic

institutions and procedures, and to the universality of the concept which they carried, was actually practised through these institutions, through this prism of their universality. The crucial moments of the political antagonism which divided the Croatian society in two, and which left it in the wreckage of war, are precisely the same moments which characterised the foundation of democratic institutions, procedures and ideologies in Croatian political life at the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties: the moment of the inauguration of a new liberal constitution, the moment of the redefinition of citizenship of the Croatian Republic through the idiom of individual rights and duties, the moment of first formal expressions of democratic subjectivity, such as the multi-party parliamentary elections and the referenda, and finally, the moment of the definition of Croatia as a sovereign political community based upon the liberal-democratic order.

The first seeds of the conflict with the Croatian Serbs could be found in the drafting of the new, liberal-democratic constitution for the Socialist Republic of Croatia. In the winter of 1989, following similar developments in Slovenia, but also in Serbia and in Macedonia, the Croatian parliament adopted constitutional changes which would redefine the republic as a state based upon individual liberty and the Rule of Law. These constitutional amendments marked the beginning of the process of juridico-political transformation which would culminate in December 1990, where Croatia would be unambiguously defined as "an integral and indivisible democratic social state in which power is derived from the

nation and belongs to the nation as a community of free and equal citizens".[16] At the end, the Croatian republic would not only have stripped off the attribute 'socialist' from its official name, but would also have removed the dense and complex set of institutional, political and juridical elements of socialist politics, which inscribed social rights and the power of the working class explicitly in the constitution, and, moreover, which defined the State itself as the 'community of socialist self-management'.[17]

But what was also being rectified in the new liberal-democratic constitutional arrangement of Croatia was the definition of the political sovereign behind the republican order. The amendments to the preamble of the Croatian constitution proposed in 1989 defined the essence of the sovereignty of the Republic as residing in the 'Croatian nation'. If this symbolic turn of phrase resolved what was perceived according to the new standards of liberal-democracy as legal lacunae and political ambivalences of the socialist order, it also implied a major demotion in the status of the Croatian Serbs, one of the largest minoritarian national groups in Croatia. The Serbs at that time made up around 12% of the population of Croatia, and were granted special juridical and political recognition in the previous constitutional setting. From the equal political and constitutional status – that of the co-constitutional nation – the Croatian Serbs were now to relegated to the legal and political status of a minority, albeit with the promise of special cultural and social rights.[18]

In the midst of the political turmoil which was destroying the ties of mutuality and solidarity of the

multi-national federation as a whole, in the midst of the growing climate of political intolerance, such assurances, however, seemed far from reassuring. When the political leaderships of Serbia, Slovenia and Croatia brought out in the open the question of the dissolution of the federal order as such, such a redefinition in political status seemed to immediately bear upon issues of individual security and citizenship rights. As Woodward noted: "[The Croatian Serbs] were to be granted the cultural and social rights of a minority but not the equal political status and full rights to self-determination that belonged constitutionally to nations in Yugoslavia. Croatia was the state of the Croatian nation, but the implication for rights of citizenship of those who were not Croat but who resided in Croatia, perhaps for many generations, became very uncertain".[19]

When Tuđman came into power in the spring of 1990, with the anti-Serb sentiment that he exploited for his electoral campaign,[20] and with his open plans for dissociation from Yugoslavia, the guarantees that the new political construction was offering to the Croatian Serbs seemed even more alienating. Reassurance was to disappear completely when the new Croatian government made one of its first official moves: the adoption of 'new' historical symbols of statehood, the same ones which were last used in the 1941 Nazi instalment of the Independent State of Croatia, a regime distinguished for its atrocities over Serbs, Jews, the Roma people and its political opponents.[21] In the context in which this symbolic abuse was coupled with the equally violent anti-Croatian nationalist propaganda being spread from Belgrade and Serbia, propaganda which

played on the imagery of victimisation of Serbs, the general sentiment amongst the Serb population in Croatia would become the sentiment of fear and insecurity, and also of nationalism and revolt.[22]

Tuđman's government left no ambiguities in that the constitutional symbolic boundary between the Croats and Serbs would be turned into an instrument of real and violent discrimination. From the beginning, Tuđman's rule was characterised by a massive purge of individuals of Serb origin from public institutions, most notably from the army and the police forces.[23] The government demanded that Serbs in all sectors of public employment sign a loyalty oath. It also made clear that the Latin alphabet was obligatory in all official proceedings, thus stripping the Cyrillic script historically used by the Serbs of its official recognition in Croatia. At the same time, the new Croatian regime started redefining the entire symbolic identity of public institutions, from municipal authorities to health service offices, from the universities to the state media, from official linguistic codes all the way down to primary school textbooks, in accordance with an 'ethnically correct' manner, as it also made sure that acquiring official documents and citizenship status would be encircled by numerous obstacles. New citizenship laws that were instated in Croatia at that time were based upon the notion of the notion of *ius sanguinis*, which meant that ethnic Croats who were not born in Yugoslavia had a priority in obtaining citizenship documents in front of citizens of the republic who were not of Croat ethnicity. By the time the new Croatian constitution was approved,

in December 1990, where the Republic was defined as a "national state of the Croatian nation and the state of the members of autochthonous national minorities", Croatia had successfully institutionalised the political conflict with the Croatian Serbs, just as Serbia had done in 1989, when it revoked the autonomy of the Province of Kosovo, thus stripping the Albanian Kosovar population of political rights and constitutional guarantees.[24] A nationalist division line was inscribed into the most minute pores of Croatian society, all up until it would become internalised in the form of what Fichte once called the 'internal boundary'.[25] On the other side, Milošević's government, already involved in a nationalist media campaign against Croatia, started openly declaring its intent to protect the interests of Serbs beyond the borders of Serbia, stating the possibility of intervention into the other republics.[26]

As much as we can see the antagonism between the Croatian State and the Croatian Serbs being inflamed through the workings of numerous *ideological State apparatuses*, both from the Croatian and the Serbian side, the actual escalation of the conflict followed further the inauguration of the institutions of liberal-democracy.

The first post-socialist seating of the Croatian Parliament on 31st May 1990 announced the rule of multiparty parliamentary democracy. One month afterwards, the parliament also approved constitutional amendments removing the adjective 'socialist' from the definition of the Croatian republic and the red star from its symbols of statehood.

But in this inaugural moment, as much as 'young Croatian democracy' would become homogenised around the universality of the project of 'democratisation',[27] it would also present itself as a political order with a particular limit. During the time of the seating of the new parliament, one parliamentary subject, the Serb Democratic Party (SDS), a party which had a massive appeal in Serb dominated areas, caused a large political stir. The leader of the SDS, Jovan Rašković, had demanded that Serbs be reinstated to the former status of the equal, co-constitutional nation, indicating that the alternative for the Serbs is to demand cultural and political autonomy.[28] Tuđman categorically rejected any such ideas.[29] The SDS decided to leave the parliament. By this symbolic gesture, the first days of the positivation of the liberal-democratic order in Croatia would also come to be known as the days of the beginning of its negation. In the same instance in which Croatia formally eliminated one-party rule and established itself as liberal-democratic State, it would become a state in which a large segment of its citizen population stands at the limits of the political order, openly contesting its authority.

By the transposal of the conflict outside of the official sphere of politics, the political antagonism between the Croatian state and the Croatian Serbs would expand at remarkably violent rate. It would still do so, nevertheless, on the surface of different modes of democratic expression.

On the 25th of July 1990, the Croatian parliament decided adopted a declaration on the 'political and economic sovereignty' of Croatia vis-à-vis Yugoslavia,

whilst also asserting its constitutional right of secession. On the same day, the Serbs in the 'Krajina' region, where they formed the majority, adopted a 'Declaration on the Sovereignty and Autonomy for the Serbian People', and announced their intention to hold a referendum on political autonomy. Tuđman's government proclaimed the Declaration illegal and unconstitutional. It also sent police forces in the region in order to prevent the referendum taking place and to take control of the local government and police offices which the Serbs occupied by force. The Croatian Serbs responded by barricading the roads. This marked the beginning of the armed conflict.

From this point on the political conflict over constitutional recognition and over the definition of the political community would openly present itself as a violent struggle over the legacy of the state apparatuses of the Socialist Republic of Croatia. When the Croatian government made clear that it would yield no compromises in its identification of the republic and its citizenry with the majority nation, and when it tried to violently enforce this identification, it was not only the Croatian Serbs who were encouraged to take up arms. This delicate situation also provided the rationale for the neighbouring Serbia to further assert its own claims over national sovereignty and to expand its own politics of majoritarian nationalism – conducted under the slogan of 'all Serbs in one State'.[30]

After ten months, characterised by the mutual inflaming of political animosities, by the intensification of armed confrontations – which were by then being mediated and controlled, in a thoroughly paradoxical

manner, by the Yugoslav Peoples' Army – the struggle between the Croatian state and the Croatian Serbs would reach its paroxysmal peak. On May 19th 1991, Croatia held a referendum on its independence from Yugoslavia. On the question "Do you agree that the Republic of Croatia as a sovereign and independent state, which guarantees cultural autonomy and all civil rights to Serbs and members of other nationalities in Croatia, may enter into an alliance with other republics?" 93 percent of the 83.6 percent of the electorate who voted, or in total, 79 percent of the population of Croatia, gave its support to independence. The Croatian Serbs massively boycotted the referendum, particularly in the so-called 'Krajina' region, where a referendum on remaining within Yugoslavia and joining with the republic of Serbia was held one week earlier, which the Serbs had vastly approved. Two months after these contradictory expressions of direct democracy, the Yugoslav Peoples' Army would undertake a dramatic political transformation. Whilst abandoning the last remnants of its dogmatic role as the guardian of the constitutional order of socialist Yugoslavia, it would, under the influence of the Serbian political leadership, attack Croatia in the interest of Serbia's expansionist aspirations.[31] As Woodward noted: "The country imploded. The multiple competing nationalisms of the constitutional quarrels, electoral campaigns, and redefinition of political rights became wars over territory and borders to create separate states based on the principle of self-determination".[32]

If this set of events introduces us to the beginning of the end of the Yugoslav project in the brutality of 'ethnic'

wars, it also attracts our attention towards the bitter truth of different assertions of liberal-democracy in this context. At the limit – and this what the catastrophic escalation of the conflict between the Croatian state and the Croatian Serbs brings us straight in front of – we can see the paradox of the subjectivity generated by liberal-democracy, which here ends up becoming a simple declaration of the sovereignty of national collectivities in the conflict over the legacy of republican apparatuses of Yugoslavia. Liberal democracy finds its truth in the violent advance of nationalism. All of the different moments of liberal-democratic foundation, from the constitution to the referenda, are presented to us here as moments in the exacerbation of the particularistic, and particularly violent nationalist politics. This politics, despite its official pronouncements and its self-representation, did not simply aim at introducing the subjective and objective forms of formal democracy, from the multiparty parliamentary system to the principles of the rule of law in the socialist context. It was also, and primarily so, a politics of state-building, a politics which sought to create new nation-States, new citizens and new political communities out of the legacy of the Yugoslav socialist federation.

At the level of ideological discourse, this paradox of 'democratisation' can be clearly seen from one of the statements of the Croatian president during the escalation of the conflict:

'They [the Croatian Serbs] are attempting to bring about a scenario aimed at demolishing the democracy that we have established'.[33]

This inflammatory statement of Tuđman, uttered in October 1990, at the beginning of the explosion of the conflict with the Croatian Serbs, reveals a symptomatic displacement in the ideological spectrum. Democracy is not posited here in the sense of the universality of its forms and contents. Or better, its universality is evoked precisely in order to support a particular political interest, a particular political goal – the establishment of a new State. When Tuđman makes clear that democracy is not something which pertains to the totality of the population of the republic ('the Serbs represent a threat to democracy'), he unambiguously uncovers that the stake of the process of 'democratisation' in Croatia: the endpoint of the 'young Croatian democracy' is the foundation of a *new state*, a national state for the Croatian nation, a State where the Croatian Serbs, as Serbs, have no proper political place.

The paradox here appears even greater when we realise that the continuity between liberal-democratic constitution and the building of 'ethnic' states equally applies to the Kosovo situation, that we can find it in Slovenia and in Macedonia, and perhaps most tragically, in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well. If all the Yugoslav republics sought to constitute themselves as liberal-democratic states, they ended up constituting themselves as national States for the majority nations. Concurrently to the universalisation of the liberal-democratic principle, there was a total dissemination of the particularism of the nation-State: to each nation its own State, to each republic its particular traits of national identity and individuality. And nothing could have been more contradictory in the context of the

federal and socialist construction of Yugoslavia, which not only allowed for multiple and ambiguous identifications between individual and collective bodies, but which placed a particular emphasis on the heterogeneity of these identifications. Nothing could have been more destructive in a situation in which all the republican populations, without exceptions, were nationally heterogeneous, and where most of Yugoslavia's particular national groups crossed the territorial boundaries of the republican administrative apparatuses.

5.4. Liberal-democratic universalism vs. nationalist particularism?

This scenario of 'democratisation' of Yugoslavia readily subverts the picture painted by the ideology of 1989 and the idea of the 'end of history'. Instead of the scene of liberal-democratic reconciliation, we have a scene of the exacerbation of social and political conflicts, ultimately leading to armed confrontations and wars, taking place *on the backbone* of processes of liberal democratic constitution, and, moreover, *through* the very universalistic political institutions of liberal democracy. Instead of a strict opposition between liberal-democratic universality and nationalist particularism, the Yugoslav context is constituted upon us a paradoxical conjunction of the two.

But how can we explain this paradox? How does the polity based upon individual rights, the rule of law, on parliamentary and constitutional democracy citizenship

become an instrument for violent nationalist politics, for a politics of discrimination, exclusion and repression of the non-national, or non-ethnic groups? How can we explain the fact that it is precisely around the 'reinvention' of the universalistic institutions of democracy that we see political violence exploding with such intensity and brutality?

Whilst looking at the domain of scholarly analyses of the break-up of Yugoslavia, and more generally, of the post-socialist 'transition' as a whole, the interesting thing is that there is a clear tendency to relegate this entire paradoxical problem to the realm of historical accidents. The paradox of the continuity between liberal democratic universality and nationalist violence is not to be explained, but rather explained away as a historical eccentricity, as an excessive exception. Such explanatory tendencies take many shapes, albeit we can clearly discern at least three symptomatic patterns.

The first pattern groups the analyses which attempt to safeguard and assert with even greater certainty the ideality of the liberal doctrine, by drawing an absolute distinction between liberal democracy and nationalism, that is, between universalism and particularism. In concrete terms, this idealisation takes the shape of a distinction between the doctrine of individual rights and the doctrines of collective rights or collectivism – which in practice implies mapping the Cold War ideological opposition between 'democracy' and 'totalitarianism' onto the opposition between the liberal democratic polity and the nationalist polity.[34] Post-socialist nationalism is a historical accident and an absolute adversity to liberal democracy because it is a doctrine of

collectivism and not a doctrine of individual liberty and democracy; and, moreover, precisely as such, as collectivist, it is seen proceeding directly, and unambiguously from the socialist ideology and its remains, thus pointing to the 'lags' of the 'transition'.[35]

The analyses that we can group in the second pattern take the form of culturalist arguments, attempting to wed together history and ethnography, or better, to explain concrete historical and political struggles through a reference to abstract models of 'culture' and 'civilisation'. If Samuel Huntington, with his geopolitical evocation of 'civilisational' divides between the West and the East, represents the most notorious global example of such tendencies, in the field of post-socialist studies, the analyses of Stjepan G. Meštrović certainly stand out as an exemplar of excessive 'culturalisation' of politics.[36] Here, again we have liberal democracy standing in a completely contingent relation to the post-socialist phenomena of nationalism: the latter are seen as proceeding from cultural peculiarities and incompatibilities, and ultimately, from cultural and civilisational inequalities: from the inadequacies of the East to follow and fully embrace the universalistic spirit of the West.[37]

The third pattern of explanation is particularly interesting, as it is not only the most sophisticated one, but also because it represents a peculiar synthesis of the previous two. This pattern starts by acknowledging the paradox, by acknowledging the articulation between liberal democracy and nationalism, but it does so, however, only to immediately subvert this articulation, whilst reconstituting

the ideal of liberal democracy in its full, unblemished essence. Contingency, and the principled separation between liberal democracy and nationalism reappears here through a split inserted within the two categories, which are internally doubled. The analyses of this type thus effectively leave us with a distinction between two types of liberal democracy, or better, with a distinction between two types of nationalism: a liberal democratic, universalistic and tolerant nationalism, and a 'nationalist' nationalism, xenophobic, excessive, violent, and particularistic.[38] The first model is based upon individual rights, parliamentary democracy and the universalism of political citizenship, whilst the second exhibits an excess of reference to particularisms: to belonging and to culture, to tradition and origins, and to the exclusion of the Other as a precondition for the constitution of the Same. And yet, the interesting thing with this separation is that as soon as it is established on the level of principles, it is at the same time immediately historicised and culturalised, pointing to the existence of divergent cultural origins of political institutions and forms. The phenomena of a 'democratic' or 'liberal' nationalism on the one hand, and a 'nationalist nationalism' on the other, appear as two separated 'political cultures', one following closely the universalist spirit of the West, and the other one characterising the obstinate particularisms of the cultural sphere in the East, thus explaining the wayward political paths of the entire European periphery or semi-periphery.[39] The element of contingency enters the picture again here, as the problem of nationalism and nationalist violence gets separated from its actual historical locus,

being transferred onto the abstract terrain of history, and interpreted in terms of the 'survival' of specific historical and cultural traditions, traditions which favour the *ethnos* over the *demos,* and where the political community defined in terms of 'tradition' and 'belonging' takes precedence over the one based 'will' and 'consciousness'.[40] Whilst this latter type of analysis defuses to a certain degree the ideological simplifications and mystifications of the previous two patterns, and whilst it broadens our understanding of the differences between political institutions and their forms of symbolic representation, it still falls dramatically short of accounting for the paradoxes of the post-socialist transition on their proper terms. It is insufficient to say that post-socialist nationalism is simply an expression of different paths in 'political culture', of a cultural underdevelopment in relation to the core of the liberal democratic model. The problem is precisely to explain why nationalist particularisms and violence appear at the *exact moment* of the 'reinvention' of liberal democratic political forms in the post-socialist setting.

Instead of looking for answers on the slippery terrains of culture, ideality or contingency, we should try to posit the problem in structural terms: to understand the ways in which nationalism and liberal democracy are bound together and articulated historically and structurally. The terrain which permits us this articulation is the very logic of the historical and structural constitution of the modern, bourgeois and liberal State. Following Jürgen Habermas, we can say that everything seems to revolve around the problem of the constitution of the modern

political community of the State out of the abstract political principles brought about by liberal democracy.[41] If the liberal democratic constitution depicts the origin of the community represented in the State in terms of a double bind of popular sovereignty and subjective rights, that is, if it assembles together the social collective through a 'social contract' expressing the will of each individual, whose freedom and equality is guaranteed through formal and abstract procedures, the problem that emerges is how to make this formal existence of the communal bond durable and lasting, how to represent the popular sovereign as something which extends beyond the sheer formality and abstractness of the juridico-political procedure. This is where nationalism becomes a structural supplement to the liberal democratic State, by filling the gap between the formal constitution of the political community and its historical individuality and durability. As Habermas argues: "an idea was required that could have an appeal to the hearts and minds of the people stronger than those somewhat abstract ideas on human rights and popular sovereignty. This gap was filled by the modern idea of the nation, which first inspired the inhabitants of a shared territory with the sense of belonging to the same republic. Only the awareness of a national identity, which crystallizes around common history, language and culture, only the consciousness of belonging to the same nation, makes distant people spread over large territories feel politically responsible for each other. Citizens thus come to see themselves as parts of the same whole, in whatever abstract legal terms this whole may be constituted".[42]

According to Habermas, there exists a lack, or more exactly, a structural vacuity at the heart of the modern liberal democratic State, which seeks to define itself *in abstracto,* through juridical and formal procedures. Precisely in this abstractness and this formality, the liberal-democratic polity is structurally incapacitated: it is unable to reproduce itself, it is unable to translate itself into a viable and durable political body. How is it possible to form a community under the State which would be identical with itself and thus historically consistent simply on the basis of the act of free choice of equal citizens, solely on the basis of a certain juridico-political framework (taken both materially, as a set of practices, and ideally, as a set of values and notions)? This is where nationalism comes to aid in offering the substance of the communal bond, in representing the political community as a national community. By an investment of a particular substance of commonality, the ideology of the nation immediately translates the simple fact of voting or of civic participation into a fact of common life and shared history, a fact of language and culture, and, by further deduction, a fact of a common genealogical origin.

The structural interrelation between the liberal polity and the national community thus comes at that precise moment at which the liberal-democratic State defined solely through formal political terms, through the artifice of laws, necessitates a further aura of authenticity and legitimacy, a lasting 'substance' in the guise of a historical, cultural or biological continuity. "There is a conceptual gap in the legal construction of the constitutional state which invites

a naturalist interpretation of the nation to be filled in. The scope and borders of a republic cannot be settled on normative grounds. In purely normative terms one cannot explain how the universe of those who originally join ranks in order to form an association of free and equal persons, and to regulate their common life by means of positive in a fair or legitimate way, should be composed – who should or should not belong to this circle. From a normative point of view, the territorial and social boundaries of a constitutional state are contingent".[43]

5.5. Ich, der Staat, bin das Volk: nationalism and the liberal State

And yet Habermas leaves a vital problem unanswered here. In separating the historical development of the 'State' and the 'nation', which according to him 'refer to convergent but different historical processes',[44] Habermas misses to account for the determinant role of the State form in this entire historical and structural scenario. He obscures the question of the extent to which the entire development of the phenomenon of nationalism is always already anchored in the reality of the modern State.

It is insufficient to say that nationalism is simply functional to the modern, bourgeois, or liberal State. This functionality is structural and constitutive: nationalism represents an *integral* element of the modern State form, and, in this sense, has to be seen as both its condition and its necessary product. National ideologies, or the ideologies

of the nation, in all their culturalist or particularist manifestations, do not develop in externality to the State (even when they historically appear in the 'minds' of writers, historians and romantic philosophers, rather than those of lawyers, diplomats and statesmen), but are structurally internal and integral to the logic and the development of the modern State, and, in fact, they represent one of its constitutive moments, if not *the* constitutive moment.

Étienne Balibar should be credited here for developing what is probably the most elaborate conception of the structural relationship between the ideology and politics of the nation – what he calls the 'nation form' – and the liberal State.[45] Rearticulating the Marxian, and especially the Althusserian conception of the State (and its ideological apparatuses), Balibar argues that the effects that nationalism plays out in relation to the liberal-democratic polity cannot be seized in terms of separate ideological (or cultural) developments, nor, indeed, in terms of the self-realisation of the national idea, but as something internal to the modern, bourgeois State, as something arising out of structural necessity. The 'nation form' – which, for Balibar, is an ideology or an ideological State apparatus that provides the political community of the State with a specific 'substance' in the sense of shared history and ancestry – is a critical element for the existence and constitution of the modern bourgeois State. It is something which structurally arises at that precise moment in which the State attempts to establish (and reproduce) itself from historical contingency, whilst striving to assert its authority over a heterogeneous society and a contested territory, in constantly changing

historical conditions. Nationalism seems particularly inescapable, as Balibar argues, when the modern State attempts to control the movements of people, and, above all, to pacify class struggles which are internal to it.

The entirety of this 'existential' problem, according to Balibar, is brought down, in practice, to the State's capacity to reproduce itself by continuously producing its own subjective substance, the 'people':

"The modern State has to 'produce the people', and by this very production (which is material as much as symbolic) constitute its proper modernity".[46]

How does the State produce the 'people', of which it is supposed to be the product?

This is the precise moment where the ideology of the national community presents itself as an essential component of the modern statist construction. As Balibar would say: "Producing the people, this means constituting, in terms of an institutional practice, and as representation or consciousness, the modern *homo nationalis,* a form of individual identity in which the community of reference or the 'ultimate' community is the State, and not the family, class or religious confession".[47] This process of fabrication is crucial for the constitution of the State because it allows for the unification and hegemonisation of all different social particularities, of all the previously existing communal bonds, without suppressing their existence: "the community which creates a national 'identity', rooted in the materiality of practices and institutions, subsumes and transforms the identities of familial groups, of classes, of religious groups, and thus allows the people to reproduce

itself by itself, that means, to presuppose indirectly the State, in each instance of its quotidian existence".[48] And at the same time, it is crucial also because it links the individual directly to the State, because it subjects the individual to the State, whilst also subjectivating him in a double sense of belonging – both to oneself and to fellow co-nationals. This is why the question of the production of the people, according to Balibar, "must at one and the same time be a mass phenomenon and a phenomenon of individuation, must effect an 'interpellation of individuals as subjects' (Althusser) which is much more potent than the mere inculcation of political values or rather one that integrates this inculcation into a more elementary process [...] of fixation of affects of love and hate and representation of the 'self'. That ideological form must become an a priori condition of communication between individuals (the 'citizens') and between social groups – not by suppressing all differences, but by relativizing them and subordinating them to itself in such a way that it is the symbolic difference between 'ourselves' and 'foreigners' which wins out and which is lived as irreducible".[49]

This commanding force of the national ideology is predicated upon a peculiar ideological mechanism, which Balibar calls *fictive ethnicity*.[50] The fiction of ethnicity, or of ethnic belonging, that is, the imaginary representation of the 'individuality' of the community, constitutes precisely the ingredient without which no sense of political being-together can be properly naturalised, without which no State can appear, in its finality, as a national-State, the belonging to which escapes all historical contingency, and

which thus appears as a quasi-natural fact for each of the individuals interpellated as fellow nationals. In this sense, the *ethnos,* as a certain 'supplement of particularity' to the liberal democratic State, plays a decisive double role: it subjects the individuals to the political community (and does so whilst individuating them), and, at the same time, it subjectivises and individuates the State, that is, it confers to the modern State, and to the community united under it, a fiction of individuality and personality: "Neither the juridical form, nor 'patriotism' [...] are sufficient to constitute nationalism: the nation-State, in itself, possess nothing ethnic, quite the contrary. It is thus necessary to construct a substitute of nature common to the co-nationals, an 'ethnicity', *a posteriori,* which produces the people of which it is supposed to be the product. A fiction of the origin, pre-juridical should accord the State with a supplement of national identity, which is supposed to be, as such, default for it".[51]

Of course, the ethnicity in question here is not a matter of actually existing cultural particularities. Or better – and this is precisely what makes it fictive – it is a matter of existing cultural particularities inasmuch as they become an instrument of the State, inasmuch as they are inscribed in the practices of the *ideological State apparatuses* whose task is to ethnicise populations, that is, to nationalise society by 'producing the people'. Because no State has an ethnic origin, each representation of the *ethnos* in the political community, as necessary as it is for the self-reproduction of the latter, is a matter of an *a posteriori*. It is a statist fact, a statist fabrication. This is why Balibar states: "I apply the

term 'fictive ethnicity' to the community instituted by the nation-state. This is an intentionally complex expression in which the term fiction [...] should not be taken in the sense of a pure and simple illusion without historical effects, but must, on the contrary, be understood by analogy with the *persona ficta* of the juridical tradition in the sense of an institutional effect, a 'fabrication'. No nation possesses an ethnic base naturally, but as social formations are nationalized, the populations included within them, divided up among them or dominated by them are ethnicized – that is, represented in the past and future *as if* they formed a natural community, possessing of itself an identity of origins, culture and interests which transcends individuals and social conditions".[52]

If Habermas helps us to understand the structural, and thus necessary articulation between liberal democracy's formal and abstract constitution of the political community and the supplement of 'substance' that the ideology of nationalism brings in to this, then Balibar's discussion of the problem of the 'production of the people' adds a further degree of specificity to this articulation, by rooting it decisively at the very core of the historical constitution and the reproduction of the modern State. In this, Balibar also helps us overturn the idealist element of the liberal democratic doctrine,[53] by pointing out that in what concerns the dialectic of the subjective of the objective elements in the constitution of the State, the terrain is always already determined by the State itself, by its materiality, that is, by its presence as an objective social and political form: "the State, in a given moment and in terms of its historical

continuity, is never 'constituted' by the common act of citizens. Quite the contrary, it is *always already there,* as an 'apparatus' or a 'machine' (administrative, military, and economic), which means, as a material force exterior to social groups and individuals, exercising over them a specific power".[54] As Balibar would point out: "This means admitting that in the dialectic of the State and society such as it was presented for two centuries by the entire philosophy of history, one needs to resolutely settle in favour of the *determinant role of the State*. The myth of the autonomous 'civil society', structured independently of the State, goes in pair with the implicit assumption of the naturalness of the national cadre: what is natural (or immemorial, or inevitable) does not need to be produced. The role of the State is determinant not only after the fact, but also in advance, already in its *anticipations*".[55]

5.6. How much violence?

What are the conclusions that we can draw here in terms of the paradox of the relationship between liberal democracy and nationalism in the post-socialist and especially post-Yugoslav process of 'democratisation'?

In the first place, it should be clear that the very relationship that we encounter here is not a relationship of perversion at all – as it is neither one of identity – but a relationship of articulation, which is both historical and structural. Both the democratic polity and the national community, with the juridical and normative formalism

of the former and the ethnic particularity and 'fiction' of the latter, are internal to the modern, bourgeois State, and, in fact, constitutive for it. The bourgeois State is at once a liberal-democratic polity, a State of Law, and an 'ethnic' State, a State fashioned upon the fiction of ethnicity (even if this ethnicity is not centred and exposed, but exists only in residues, such as in, for example, the proper names of the States). Without the former aspect, the bourgeois State would loose its legitimacy, it would loose its relationship to the political subject (even if this subject, as we have seen, is also produced and imagined), without the latter, no structural permanence of the identification of the political community to the State could be asserted.

But secondly, and even more importantly, this also allows us to posit the problem of violence in another way. It allows us to understand that the violence that nationalism unleashes on the historical scene, and which we have seen employed in all its brutality in the Yugoslav break-up and in the post-Yugoslav wars, is not a matter of contingent exceptions or aberrations to the liberal-democratic State, but constitutes a moment inherent to this State, in the sense of a possibility which is always present in it, even if being constantly in excess of it. The potential for 'ethnic' violence is something which permanently arises from the very constitution of the liberal-democratic political order, or, more exactly, from the tension between the universalism of the abstract legal community and the particularism of the community of origin and faith residing at the heart of the modern nation-State. Or, to put this in another way, the question of nationalist or 'ethnic' violence cannot be

settled on normative grounds with regards to the liberal democratic state, but has to be understood in structural terms, and in this sense, it has to be understood as quantitative question, a question of *degree*, or a question of how much.[56]

But how to then account for the veritable excess of forms of subjective violence and brutality which follows the explosion of nationalism in Yugoslavia?

It seems to me erroneous to interpret this excess simply in subjective terms, in terms of 'excessive' historical actors whom we can easily identify. The structural aspect which was brought out here, the contradiction inherent to the liberal democratic State seems all the more crucial, especially if we read the entire Yugoslav drama in the dimension which is truly determinant for it – the dimension of the formation and establishment of the State. For indeed, the essence of the processes which are realised in the context of the Yugoslav 'democratisation' does not reside in the mere elevation or the 'reinvention' of the liberal democratic forms over a socialist political construction, but precisely in the inscription of these forms in the objective process of State-building itself – in the process of the material transformation of the socialist republics into new national States.

Taking this into account means realising that what is truly at stake in the paradox of 'democratisation' in Yugoslavia, and what all the different violent episodes of the break-up of Yugoslavia depict in all its severity is not simply a scene of relentless and unrestrained subjective violence and destruction, a pre-modern, or a 'Hobbesian'

scenario, as one might say, but rather a scene of the objective logic of violence which follows the process of the constitution of the liberal State. It is necessary to read the excess of the subjective forms of violence in the Yugoslav situation precisely against the backdrop of the objective, structural violence which is inscribed in the very origin of the State. Althusser would portray this problem, whilst paraphrasing Marx and evoking Machiavelli, as the problem of 'primitive political accumulation': "Bourgeois ideologists have long [been telling] in the language of natural law, their fairy-tale history of the state, the history that begins with the state of nature and continues with the state of war, before pacifying itself in the social contract that gives birth to the state and positive law. A completely mythical history, but one that makes pleasant listening, because in the end it explains to those who live in the state that there is nothing horrific in its origins, only nature and law; that the state is nothing but law, is as pure as law, and as this law is in human nature, what could be more humane than the state? ... [By contrast], Machiavelli is perhaps one of the few witnesses to what I shall call *primitive political accumulation* [...] He does not speak the language of law, he speaks the language of the armed force indispensible to the constitution of any state, he speaks of the necessary cruelty of the beginnings of the state [...] When we read him, however informed we may be of the violences of history, something in him grips us: a man who, even before all the ideologists blocked out reality with their stories, was capable not of living or tolerating, but of *thinking* the violence of the birth throes of the state".[57]

This is the critical lesson that the case of Yugoslavia brings for a political and a historical analysis – a lesson on the violence at the origins of the State, a lesson on the structural relationship between the State and violence. If this allows us to seize the relevance – and further develop the implications – of Althusser's attempts to reformulate the critical concept of the State in Marxism, and especially, to add a degree of specificity to the link between violence and the Law, to the essential bond between legal universality and the violent clash of historical forces, it also provides us with a forceful critical position against the consensual logic of the post-socialist political rationality. Fukuyama's ideologems are completely overturned at this juncture: the dominance of the liberal-democratic State after 1989, far from representing an 'end of history', rather points to one of the unquestionable 'motors' of history: to the contradiction underlying the putative universality of juridico-political forms, to the logic of violence which surrounds the constitution and the reproduction of these forms.

6. Beyond Post-Socialist Politics: the Singularity of Yugoslavia

6.1. Yugoslavia as an unfinished State

Amongst many texts which appeared in the late 1980s in response to the growing crisis – political, economic, ideological – of socialist Yugoslavia, one deserves particular attention: Zoran Đinđić's book *Yugoslavia as an Unfinished State*.[01] *Yugoslavia as an Unfinished State* is a remarkable little book. Remarkable in the first place because of its belief in the power of philosophical panaceas. This is precisely what Đinđić sought to provide for the political and historical construction of Yugoslavia which was collapsing before his eyes: a single philosophical solution to a real historical crisis, a speculative, theoretical response to the practical, historical and political ails. All that Yugoslavia needed, according to Đinđić, was an 'authentic interpreter': "When the self-evidence of the fact that we live together becomes a theme which allows for different possible approaches, and when everybody is calling upon common values, whilst deriving diametrically opposed consequences from them, in these times, as by a sort of an inner necessity, there is a growing need for an authentic interpreter. We need someone who is going to – in a way which is binding for everyone – interpret the subjective and objective meaning of the past decisions, who will say what were the motives and what were the effects of the actions on which our community resides".[02]

In which way did Zoran Đinđić see himself as an authentic philosophical interpreter of Yugoslavia?

First of all, it is important to note that Đinđić's thesis – Yugoslavia as an unfinished State – was and remains

a tremendously productive and influential thesis. This thesis opened the door to an entire arena of teleological judgements on the 'defectiveness', 'disfunctionality', 'fragility', 'irreality' and 'unnaturalness' of the Yugoslav project – judgements which have become staple references in a great number of scholarly appreciations of the history of Yugoslavia.[03]

But at the same time, Đinđić's thesis is also important due to its ideological baggage. It is important as it reveals – and it does so with exceptional clarity – one of the principle ideological operations which came to govern the post-socialist political consensus after 1989: the submission of politics to the theme of the Law.

What is the content of the thesis 'Yugoslavia as an unfinished State'? In investigating the symptoms of crisis, symptoms of turbulence and tension within the political sphere which marked the entire decade of the eighties in socialist Yugoslavia, Đinđić saw the problem appearing in a straightforward shape: "It is not difficult to define the basic problem of Yugoslavia. The solution to its worst difficulties lies only in the constitutional-legal State form".[04] The entire crisis that Yugoslavia was experiencing in the eighties, with all its dramatic historical, societal and political contradictions, with all its tragic struggles, was reducible, according to Đinđić, to a single problem: to the problem of the inadequacy of the political and constitutional system which the socialist system put in place, and, in the first place, to the problem of a *defective articulation of sovereignty to the political community*. Yugoslavia was, as Đinđić argued, quite literally an unfinished State, a State without statehood: "The basic general characteristic of the current

statehood of Yugoslavia is the separation of *State* and *sovereignty*. The effects of this are so far reaching that they extend to all forms of life, from global collective agency to the intimate sphere of the citizen".[05]

From this perspective Đinđić went on to locate a single culprit. The source and the cause of Yugoslavia's 'state of statelessness', the source of its vexing lack of statehood, and thus its structural incapacity, resided in the very idea of communist politics, which the Yugoslav Communist Party practiced. Communist politics, with its political privileging of class struggle and of the emancipation of labour, and indeed with its identification of politics with the question of emancipation, readily evacuated all the modern juridico-political concepts and forms, it evacuated even the very notion of the political community, which, according to Đinđić, is unthinkable without a clear definition of its own sovereign boundaries, of its identity with itself: "The specificity of the communist notion of politics is precisely the abolition of the *political community,* which is only another term for an abolition of the national state. A correlate to the metaphysical sovereignty of the 'working class' is the State defined as a 'community of labour'".[06] Or again: "The newly proclaimed bearer of sovereignty is 'class', and then, by mediation, its technical representative, the party. With this transformation, what is unequivocally abolished are all the three central determinations of modern statehood: sovereignty of the people, subjective rights and the parliamentary control of political power. What thus came into being is a new type of organisation of collective life, which we can call a State only in metaphorical terms".[07]

A profound anomaly, a profound error was thus inscribed in Yugoslavia from the very moment of its inception. With the absence of the logic of sovereignty, with the absence of a clear articulation of sovereignty to the political community, the socialist system was devoid of any internal mechanisms of regulation and reglementation: "the existing social system does not possess any means of self-regulation, because these means were never being developed [...] Today's conflicts are *disputes without a judge,* which means that a sentimental gaze in the direction of some alleged supreme norms, whose historical validity would be binding, is useless".[08] And it is this, and solely this, which was, according to Đinđić, driving the entire state construction of Yugoslavia towards its necessary failure and collapse. This is what inevitably led to the incapacity of political and juridical power in front of its structural task of guaranteeing the law of totality, this is what pushed the system inevitably towards the crisis of the 1980s, towards the violent expansion of nationalism which would mark its end.

Đinđić saw only one solution for Yugoslavia, an unambiguous one: the re-articulation of sovereignty to the political community. In practice, however, this solution meant nothing other but the construction of national-States out of Yugoslavia: "The alternative is simple: the political identity of the political community cannot be divided; it belongs either to Yugoslavia or to the member republics. If it belongs to the republican states – as is the dominant opinion today – then it is necessary to clearly and openly draw the consequences of such a decision, and

put on the agenda the question of real, and not as until now ambiguous formation of national states".[09] The key to the entire political and economic crisis that Yugoslavia was experiencing in the eighties, with all its drastic historical contradictions, its schisms and ruptures, was to be found in the clarity and the univocity of the application of the principle of sovereignty. This is why Đinđić would write: "There is no reason for us to mourn the 'common form' (if it is true that this form is only an 'empty structure'). What is important is that all the processes – whether of unification or separation – run *clearly*".[10]

There is undoubtedly an ironic dimension to these conclusions. Đinđić here manages to place himself directly 'on top' of the destructive historical processes which were at play in Yugoslavia in the eighties. With all the force of historical irony, Đinđić's 'authentic interpretation' did come out as truly authentic, and exactly in terms of its normative contents, as it provided the truth of the 'solution' which would finally resolve Yugoslavia's crisis: in the brutality of 'ethnic' violence and nationalist wars. With these wars having, as their primary goal, an unambiguous, clear construction of national-States in the Balkans, one is certainly not mistaken in claiming that the entire destruction of Yugoslavia in the 1990s unfolded precisely in the name of 'finishing the Yugoslav State'.[11]

But it is not only the historical irony of Đinđić's analyses which should astonish us here. What is even more remarkable then the historical falsification of the thesis 'Yugoslavia as an unfinished State' is something internal to Đinđić's analysis: something touching upon its very

conceptual operations. This is the falsity of its mode of apprehension of history and of politics, the falsity of its method.

Where does Đinđić seek to find the reality of politics in his analysis? Where is it that he tries to grasp the essence of the political being of the Yugoslav project? The answer is simple: in Law. Đinđić's intellectual operation is an attempt to discover a fundamental juridical ground behind the political project of Yugoslavia, to run the historicity of the Yugoslav project against a particular set of rules and mechanisms of normative regulation. This is why the essential conceptual points through which he thinks and judges Yugoslavia are the canonical figures of juridico-political modernity: *pouvoir constituant, sovereignty of the people, subjective rights and parliamentarianism. This is why the scene of politics that* Đinđić equates with Yugoslavia is the classical modern scene of law making, of writing the constitution, of constituting the norm and the rules of the political bond, of the establishment of consensus, of legality and legitimacy. It is the scene of political compromise, of political agreement, of the founding of the order of the community, of the grounding of legitimacy of the State. The titles of Đinđić's analyses speak for themselves in this regard: "Where is our *pouvoir constituant*?", "Who is sovereign in Yugoslavia?", "Who is the guardian of the constitution"?

But can such questions fundamentally grasp what is essential in the revolutionary politics which has founded the Yugoslav project? Is this legalistic scenario able at all to approach the creative power, the historical inventiveness

of the dramatic moment of 1943? How can a preconstituted normativity, a fact of established law, render thinkable a historical invention, a project of emancipation? How can it render thinkable that which a political singularity?

As I will attempt to demonstrate below, what Đinđić's analysis of Yugoslavia really offers us here is a genuine display of the contradictions inherent to the juridical paradigm of politics which imposes itself after 1989. When Law becomes the ultimate measure of all things political, politics is silently expatriated from the modality of the break and rupture, only to be reconfigured in the repetitive rhythms of legal procedures and rules. When the principle operator of intelligibility of political events is found in legal universality, politics is separated from any notion of radical change, from emancipation as such, and is consequently reduced to a compromise with the *status quo*.

By confronting Đinđić's analysis in a critical way, and by attempting to offer an alternative reading of the communist project of Yugoslavia, a reading which takes cue from Althusser's stress on the singular and inventive dimensions of politics, I will try both to unravel the contradictions and the peculiar 'obscurantism' behind the post-socialist juridical conception of politics and history, and at the same time, to sketch the contours of a critical position in politics beyond the post-socialist political rationality.

6.2. The event of 1943

We should begin with the beginning itself: what is it that makes 1943, the very founding event of Yugoslavia intelligible?

In historical terms, the immediate origins of the Yugoslav project reside in the turbulent circumstances and the experience of the Second World War. In the most direct sense, these were the circumstances of foreign occupation which had shattered the previous state apparatus, and of the popular resistance and liberation struggle, itself a moment in the world-wide fight against fascism.

After the invasion by the German, Italian, Hungarian, and Bulgarian armies in April 1941, the government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (a state which, from 1918 to 1929, bore the name Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes) signed an unconditional capitulation and fled into exile. The country was torn apart and divided between the Axis powers, with some of its parts annexed, some placed under fascist protectorates, and others placed under the rule of collaborator regimes.

Already a few weeks after the occupation and the capitulation, a popular armed resistance movement started taking shape, seeing its first determinate forms in the cities and the countryside of Slovenia, Serbia and Croatia, and spreading fast to other parts of the country. The first sparks of the liberation movement were spontaneous, but its decisive organisational contours and its country-wide scope were set under the leadership of the Yugoslav Communist Party, a political organisation existing illegally in Yugoslavia

since 1922.[12] At the end of June 1941, the Yugoslav Communist Party had issued a general call to resistance, a call to liberation and emancipation, whilst laying the organisational coordinates of the armed struggle through the formation of the partisan units, the *Peoples' Liberation Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia* (*Narodnooslobodilački Partizanski Odredi Jugoslavije*). This is where the struggle that would give birth to Yugoslavia obtained its decisive subjective shape and its singular name: *the Struggle for the Liberation of the Yugoslav Peoples* (*Narodno-oslobodilačka borba,* or, as it is known by its acronym in Serbo-Croatian which we will use here, NOB). Throughout the country, in cities and in villages, in factories, universities and schools, the Yugoslav communists mobilised people into rebellion and armed struggle, whilst building a broad partisan armed force.[13] From diversions and sabotages to mass uprisings, from guerrilla struggles to frontal combat, the armed resistance was gradually expanding both in its intensity and its scope, with the Partisan units growing into a large army, and with the victories in the struggle expanding the liberated territories.[14]

Together with the formation of the resistance movement and its organised armed force, the Communist Party also helped establish new bodies of popular-democratic rule which effectively took political power during the course of the liberation war. Forms of popular government, named the *people's-liberation committees* (*narodnooslobodilački odbori*) and the *land's anti-fascist councils* (*zemaljska antifašistička vijeća*), modelled on historical forms of revolutionary-democratic organisation,

were set up throughout the liberated territories and even outside of them, at all different levels – from the village to the county, from the city to the region, the nation or the republic.

But the liberation struggle was not only fought against the fascist armies and the collaborator regimes. The struggle of the Yugoslav partisans was also a struggle against the previous monarchical order and its consequences, against all forms of oppression and domination which were deeply inscribed into the socio-political fabric of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.[15] In the concrete practice of war, the Partisans also fought against those military and political forces which the Yugoslav government in exile tried to control and direct in order to maintain its power against the communist-led insurgency. The most infamous of these were the *Chetniks* of Draža Mihajlović – rebaptised by the émigré Yugoslav (or Serbian) government as the 'Army of the Yugoslav Fatherland' – initially organised as a force of resistance, only to become fatally compromised by an open collaboration with the Nazis, when they found it opportune in order to crush the growing Partisan resistance, and by the atrocities that they committed against the non-Serb populations.[16] Catherine Samary was right to note in this sense that "The 1941-1945 war in Yugoslavia, [was] simultaneously a world war, a civil war with interethnic massacres, and a war of national and social liberation".[17]

Within a year of the unfolding of the liberation war, its difficult but victorious development had already opened the political space for the emergence of two crucial events,

the events in which we could see the Yugoslav project being established.

In the winter of 1942, the Partisans, who had by then liberated and controlled a large part of what is now Bosnia and Herzegovina, inaugurated, on the 26th and 27th November 1942, the Antifascist Council of the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia, or the AVNOJ, as a supreme Yugoslav civil political authority of the liberation struggle. The AVNOJ, which was conceived as the unifying body of all different popular organisations which emerged during the struggle, effectively imposed itself as a universal political representative force of the liberation war, whilst laying an imprint of permanence on the many popular-liberation councils and committees. The Partisan movement set up two other mass political organisations at the general Yugoslav level, organisations emerging out of the struggle and expanding its liberatory and emancipatory development: the *Antifascist Front of Women of Yugoslavia,* and the *United Alliance of Antifascist Youth of Yugoslavia*.

With the defeat of Mihajlović's *Chetniks* in the battle of Neretva in the summer of 1943 and the capitulation of Italy in September 1943, the Partisan movement had gained the grounds in order to be able to define and declare a new political reality. At the Second Convention of the Antifascist Council of the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia, which took place on 29th November 1943 in the Bosnian town of Jajce, the AVNOJ, represented by almost all of the national and regional partisan liberation committees, was confirmed as the sole universal representative of political power in Yugoslavia. The AVNOJ declared the

establishment of the new, republican political order, whilst suspending and outlawing the previous government and the Yugoslav monarch. It also brought a fundamental constitutional decision, the "Decision to build Yugoslavia on a federal principle", which was to set the foundations for the new State: a federal republic, proclaiming the unconditional political equality for all the nations and peoples of Yugoslavia, and initiating the struggle for social emancipation.

These acts which we can see emerging in the midst of a world war, acts which were both acts of the break and acts of foundation, have inscribed the revolutionary subjective capacity of the NOB into the beginnings of a political form. This was the birth proper of Yugoslavia.

6.3. Đinđić and AVNOJ: Nothing took place but the place

How does Đinđić read this constituting scene of Yugoslavia, the event of AVNOJ and the birth of the Yugoslav project?

Đinđić proceeds in a classical way. The concept that he employs to grasp the founding of the Yugoslav project is the eminent modern figure of political constitution, the figure of the 'sovereignty of the people'. This figure, for Đinđić, is not only a historical norm, but it represents one of the most universal forms of political foundation. Sovereignty of the people, as we read, "immediately founds the concept of the constitution as the order of the highest values of a political community. In the figure of

popular sovereignty this general obligation is deduced from the general active participation of everyone in the constitution of the communal order".[18] In other words, Đinđić wants to draw our attention to the moment of circularity and immanence which the bourgeois revolutions had introduced, the moment in which the legal-political order finds its principle of constitution in the relation that the body politics as a whole maintains with itself, in the capacity of the *people* to be able to simultaneously produce the laws and to subject themselves to them. This is where, in what concerns the establishment of the political order in its legitimacy and normativity, the binding self-reproductive and self-sustaining force of the notion of popular sovereignty resides.

But Đinđić evokes this notion, together with its systemic and normative power, only to register its absence in the Yugoslav project, only to argue that from the point of view of popular sovereignty, that is, from the point of view of the universality of its concept, Yugoslavia represents an irremediable anomaly. According to him, Yugoslavia completely lacks the formative expression of the popular will and of constituent power. It lacks an unambiguous decision of the political community on its form, its organisation and its identity, and what is more, it lacks a set of fundamental universal norms which would regulate its political being. The very founding gestures of Yugoslavia vividly display this absence: "the first constitution of the 'new Yugoslavia' [...] was anything but an expression of the sovereign *pouvoir constituant*. It does not at all contain a *clear decision* about the form and the type of political unity

which is supposed to represent what we call the Yugoslav community. The term 'republican form' from the first article of this constitution is only an empty phrase which is to be filled by the real sovereign, a *pouvoir* from the background, the Party".[19]

What is interesting about these conclusions is the fact that Đinđić is not interested at all in the substantial and evental dimensions of the notion of popular sovereignty. He is not interested in the boundless constitutive power as such, in the principle of subjective political foundation. The criticism that he directs against the founding moment of Yugoslavia is a purely formal one. Đinđić calls upon the optics of popular sovereignty to Yugoslavia in order to note the absence of its juridico-political conditions of possibility, the absence of norms and procedures which would permit what he considers as the former's legitimate expression. Which norms and procedures? The classical liberal-democratic *topoi* of political representation and parliamentarianism, coupled with the figure which the continental legal-philosophical tradition calls *subjective rights. This last figure presumes a central place for* Đinđić: "The condition of possibility of a political community are the subjective rights of individuals, which resist any homogenisation and which thus transform each process of integration into a risky and painstaking labour of creating a consent of the originary pluralism".[20] Or again: "Subjective rights are recognised as preconstitutional rights, which cannot by any means of representation be completely transferred to the community or the State. What is preserved in these rights is the irreducible, metaphysical

moment of popular sovereignty, without which we would not have a systematic foundation of the validity of the constitution".[21] The recognition of the political rights of individuals, thus represents, for Đinđić, the very condition of possibility of the political community. There can be no question of the foundation of the political community as such, there can be no valid moment of constitution, of an expression of 'constitutive power', without a prior sanction of the 'originary pluralism', a constellation of differing perspectives and opinions: "The modern, or the political community, is founded upon reflexivity, in the sense that the validity (or legitimacy) of its order is a result and not a precondition of an agreement of particular interests [...] The political community, and with this, the constitution, is thus possible, only if there is an original pluralism of perspectives".[22]

We should stop here to note the remarkable reversal of the perspective at work. From the intensity and explosiveness of the scene of the historical constitution of politics – the birth of the new, the moment of a new beginning – we are displaced towards the motionless sight of rules and their repetitions, towards the scene of the Law. It is now the *pouvoir constitué,* conceived as a set of legal rules, norms and procedures, which is to explain and make possible *pouvoir constituant.* Whereas it was supposed to produce the latter, the constitutive political force of popular sovereignty is readily subordinated to the primacy of the legal procedure.

It should thus not surprise us that Đinđić does not devote much discussion to the actual context of the AVNOJ

and its historical and political significance. Instead, he concentrates most analytic attention on the writing of the first constitution of the People's Republic of Yugoslavia in the post-war years, whilst stressing a number of *procedural* and *formal* lacunae and gaps, absences and ambiguities which, in his view, fundamentally discredit the Yugoslav project.

But at the same time Đinđić makes his position explicit. The AVNOJ cannot be taken at all as a legitimate point of origin for a discussion of politics: "Here one can talk about the origin of the constitution *only* in historical terms, in terms of the theme of 'the decisions of AVNOJ'. This peculiar one-sidedness is not coincidental. The shadow which, by the nature of things, looms over the AVNOJ context (given that this context belongs to the drama of a world war) is thick enough to hide our constitutive power. One can talk about it only in epic and not in analytical terms. In a simple manner this has pushed the question of the bearer of sovereignty, and thus of the mode of legitimacy which the new order upholds, in the region of the narrative".[23]

The AVNOJ context, being a context which belongs to the 'drama of the great war' is not a political context at all. There is nothing to think in political terms in the moment of AVNOJ, in the event 1943, because we are not speaking of politics at all here but of war. The AVNOJ is not a rational political context, a context of 'reflexivity', for this 'reflexivity' has very precise coordinates, being ultimate grounded in subjective rights, and other formally secured political institutions. The AVNOJ, as such, is an irrational

context, a context of an armed conflict, a context of the caesura of all Law and legality, where politics and political decisions do not have any binding rationality. This is why it can only be a matter of narration, and not of reflection.

We probably cannot get a stronger admission of the reticence and retreat of political philosophy in front of the singularity of a political event. Đinđić's proposition is a proposition of juridical formalism that refuses any discussion of the historicity of politics, and thus of political novelty proper, without its prior grounding in a set of formal procedures and juridical norms. Popular sovereignty and its constitutive role can only be discussed in terms of predetermined legal norms and values – it must be legitimated in advance by finding its own expression in a juridico-political procedure. This in turn makes the entire problem of *pouvoir constituant from which* Đinđić sets out a matter of a priori legal guarantees, a matter of the self-constitution and self-regulation of the Law itself. Between the generality and formality of legal rules, norms and procedures, and the political particularities that these rules and norms regulate, there is no space for political novelty, no space for a political singularity. Politics can only ever be a repetition of or a variation upon a preconstituted legalistic theme. It is severed from the register of the break from radical historicity as such, to be pacified under a constant repetition of the norm, under the atemporal fetish of the Rule of Law.

Đinđić would in fact take this reactionary impulse to its utter conclusions, as he would not only seek to submerge the political event of AVNOJ under juridical universals,

but to implicitly call for a defence of the coordinates of the previous legal-political order of (the Kingdom) Yugoslavia against the Partisan revolution: "If they had abandoned the metaphysical grounding of the sovereignty (by recourse to the world-historical mission of the 'working class') the communists would cease being a party of a single world-view, and would become a party of the victorious conduct of the war, that is, a patriotic party which could then call upon popular sovereignty as a whole. The question of the legitimacy of rule would here become open for a rational discussion". [24]

Antonio Negri recently argued that this legalistic obscurantism is not an exception, for we can find it at the very core of liberal political thinking, constantly haunting the modern political rationality in its encounter with the disruptive force of the notion of *pouvoir constituant,* that "force that bursts apart, breaks, interrupts, unhinges any preexisting equilibrium and any possible continuity".[25] For Negri, the entirety of legal-political thought of the moderns constantly fails in accounting for the 'savage anomaly' that the notions of constituent power and popular sovereignty introduced into the historical field of politics. Instead of acknowledging the constituent power of the people in the modality of the break, juridical theory and liberal political philosophy incessantly attempt to 'constitutionalise' the constituent principle, to render the violent emergence of the power which makes the laws itself submersible to the rules and norms of the Law: "The time of constituent power, a time characterized by a formidable capacity of acceleration [...] has to be closed, treated, reduced in

juridical categories, and restrained in the administrative routine [...] Constituent power must itself be reduced to the norm of the production of law; it must be incorporated into the established power. Its expansiveness is only shown as an interpretative norm, as a form of control of the State's constitutionality, as an activity of constitutional revision. Eventually, a pale reproduction of constituent power can be seen at work in referendums, regulatory activities, and so on, operating intermittently within well-defined limits and procedures".[26]

The consequence of this, as Negri claims, is an annulation and restraint of the constituent principle: "The boundlessness of constituent expression is limited in it genesis because it is subjected to the rules and relative extension of suffrage; in its functioning because it is subjected to the rules of assembly; and in the period during which it is in force (which is considered delimited in its functions, assuming more the form of classic 'dictatorship' than referring to the idea and practices of democracy). Finally, and on the whole, the idea of constituent power is juridically preformed, whereas it was claimed that it would generate the law; it is in fact absorbed in the notion of political representation, whereas it was supposed to legitimize this notion".[27]

One problem remains here, however. Looking at the founding gestures of Yugoslavia, at the very moment of AVNOJ, can we say that Negri's criticism of the attempts at taming and constricting the constituent power suffices? Does the affirmation of the boundlessness of the *pouvoir constituant* provide us with an adequate analytical tool to

seize the moment of the foundation of Yugoslavia? For it seems that the whole problem is in fact more far reaching. The real question which the moment of 1943 opens up is whether it is possible at all to approach the problem of the political foundation of Yugoslavia in terms of the logic of popular sovereignty. Is this logic able to register the profound historicity of the moment of 1943?

6.4. The absent people of Yugoslavia

Let us turn to the AVNOJ context once more. Let us try to find the marks of the notion of popular sovereignty in the moment of inauguration of Yugoslavia. This is not difficult. According to the 1943 Declaration of AVNOJ from Jajce, the AVNOJ itself is explicitly defined as the "supreme legislative and executive representative body of Yugoslavia, the supreme representative of the sovereignty of the people and of the state of Yugoslavia as a whole".[28]

Does this not immediately seem as a confirmation of the fact that, at least according to its self-definition, the founding moment of Yugoslavia is truly played out through the concept of *le peuple souverain,* through that eminent category of the democratic constitution of modernity?

But the AVNOJ pronouncement is far from a univocal pronouncement. It is anything but easy to decipher the precise meaning of this reference to the sovereign people. What is the actual content of the subject, the 'people' that the AVNOJ Declaration calls upon in the midst of the turbulent context of the war, the liberation struggle and

the revolution? And what exact kind of 'sovereignty' is this subject supposed to possess?

We can start noting the complexity of this problem of interpretation if we take a look at actual text of the Third Decision, the foundational decision which the 1943 AVNOJ Convention brought, the "Decision to Build Yugoslavia on a Federal Principle".

This document opens with the following statement: "On the basis of the right of each nation to self-determination, including the right to secession or the right to unification with other nations, and in accordance with the true will of all the nations of Yugoslavia, demonstrated during the course of the three-year long common peoples' liberation struggle that has forged the inseparable fraternity of the Yugoslav nations, the Antifascist Council of the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia brings the following decision".[29]

Putting aside the striking evocation of the right of national self-determination, whose effective meaning we will try to expose in a moment (and which, it needs to be said in advance, has to do much more with Lenin than with Woodrow Wilson), let us observe the peculiarity of the pronouncement of the constitutive political category in this sentence, of the subject of politics which is posited as the foundation of the Yugoslav project. This is where we can see the enigma of the 'sovereign people' of Yugoslavia starting to unfold.

Who is the subject, whose unity and whose will the AVNOJ seeks to express and confirm in the founding gesture of Yugoslavia?

The answer that we have here is minimal, but at the same time categorical: this subject is the liberation war itself, it is the very *Struggle for the Liberation of the Yugoslav Peoples*. As the AVNOJ document reads, Yugoslavia proceeds from the "true will of all the nations of Yugoslavia, *demonstrated during the course of the three-year long common peoples' liberation struggle that has forged the inseparable fraternity of the Yugoslav nations*".[30] The origin of Yugoslavia is not a pre-figured 'people' whose sovereignty is at stake. It is the singular political subjectivity constituted in and through the liberation war: the *fraternité* formed in the armed struggle for liberation and emancipation.

One cannot overemphasise the profound political anomaly that is generated at this point. The modern subject of politics, the subjective assertion of 'we the people', does not appear *in person* in this foundational sentence. There is an absence of an unambiguous, direct reference to the category of popular sovereignty in the constitutive decision of the AVNOJ.

This, of course, is the moment where we could see Đinđić raising the most clamorous objections, and if not completely rejecting the political substance of the AVNOJ document, then explicitly noting its contradictory nature, and its lack of normativity vis-à-vis the political order: the lack of a clear articulation and application of juridico-political forms.

But this 'anomalous' and ambiguous formulation immediately appears in a different light when we exempt it from Đinđić's juristic horizon, from the judgement of the established fact of law or norm, and when we consider

it, on its own terms, as a singular political act, an act of political invention. What this 'anomaly' effectively reveals is precisely the profound singularity of Yugoslavia, a singularity which can be first of all registered in the distance produced with regard to the category of popular sovereignty.

Any attentive historical observer might protest at this point: is it not rather that the true face and the form of the modern political subject, the people, remains hidden under the written text of the AVNOJ? Do not the political unity and the will that the AVNOJ calls upon express precisely the presence of the *people*? And indeed, is not the 'inseparable fraternity of the Yugoslav nations' forged in the liberation struggle coextensive with the subject implied in the category of popular sovereignty?

At first sight, things do indeed look so. After all, the entire unfolding of the armed resistance and the liberation movement, under the leadership of the Yugoslav Communist Party, did take the form of a *Popular Liberation Struggle,* as it was also principally organised on the basis *popular-liberation detachments* and *committees*. What is more, the Communist Party did set up the *popular front* as an effective category of political representation whose function was to unify all the social and political forces in the struggle against fascism, both during the war and in its immediate aftermath, all up until the writing of the first post-war constitution of 1945. And in the end, this very constitution explicitly sought to shape Yugoslavia as a *popular democracy* and a *popular republic*.

But at the same time, the 'people' of the *People's Liberation Struggle,* the very people that we can see being inscribed into Yugoslavia, is a very peculiar political subject. A subject the content of which seems to immediately place in doubt and annul its own form. A subject whose actual political meaning seems to instantly overflow and subvert the representational and transcendent surface of the democratic institution of modernity. What we are dealing with here is not at all a category of formal political representation and constitution. The minimal and reductive pronunciation of the subject that we find in the AVNOJ does nothing but attest to this fact: the *people* of the Partisan struggle is this struggle itself, it is the mass movement for liberation and emancipation of the people of Yugoslavia and the subjectivity which is dialectically caught within this movement. As Boris Buden pointed out: "the people and the nations of the ex-Yugoslavia are not united because of an ethnic closeness [...] but precisely because on the basis of the common struggle against fascism. This struggle, and not some common, or contiguous ethnic identity is what makes the unitary, Yugoslav people".[31]

The crucial thing is that this subject is not pre-given or pre-figured in any way. It is not a subject dependent on any a priori representative surface, standing in the function of the representation of the State. The 'people' of AVNOJ is not *the people of the State* – it is not the ideal identity of the political community existing as a transcendent symbolic form or a horizon. It is not the political One which, after being officially, that is, juridically proclaimed at the beginning of the political order, becomes a matter

of a continuous process of *re-production,* a matter of an immense labour of the ideological apparatuses which have to inculcate on a daily basis the bond linking each individual to the particular community of the State.[32] The people of the *People's Liberation Struggle* is precisely the reversal and the negation of this concept. It is a political singularity in Althusser's sense: a new political creation arising out of the *void*: out of the contingency and the negativity of the struggle for liberation against oppression.

All of this comes into full light if we place the AVNOJ decision in its proper historical perspective. Because the absence of the category of popular sovereignty in the founding moments of the AVNOJ text is not simply a conceptual absence. It is a political and historical absence. It is an absence which signifies a radical break with the previous political order, with the entire substance of the State construct bearing the name Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The absence of the 'people of Yugoslavia' as a unitary referent in the AVNOJ documents signifies the rejection of the concept of 'national-popular unity' (*narodno jedinstvo*), a specific manifestation of the category of *le peuple souverain* on which the 'first Yugoslavia' was founded.[33] This formative concept for the political order in the Balkans after the First World War, in which the bourgeoisies of several southern Slav nations – namely the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes – saw the common prospects for the fulfilment of their political and economic gains in the situation opened by the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman empires and the restructuring of the European system of states, carried a set of drastic historical contradictions. If the first Yugoslavia

was conceived as an attempt to attain proper political modernity on the margins of the European order of capital and politico-military might, the concept of its unity, the concept of a common Yugoslav national identity, ended up, in its historical actualisation, being a violent practice of forced homogenisation, under the dictate, and after the 6th of January 1929, under the effective personal dictatorship of the Serbian monarch Karađorđević.[34] The historical reality of the concept of the 'sovereign people of Yugoslavia' was the reality of an impossible and alienated whole, ridden with social and political contradictions, with ineradicable and ever expanding political antagonisms, not simply between the particular national bourgeoisies trying to find a common political ground for their differing interests, and the monarchical and centralist State which sought to enforce this commonness violently, but, most importantly, between the political apparatus as a whole and the wide popular masses, which were progressively being pushed on the margins of social existence.[35]

Against the failed attempt at producing the 'sovereign people of Yugoslavia' – either by the practice of forced cultural and political homogenisation, or through the paradoxical display of the mechanisms of parliamentary democracy in the context of the monarchical dictatorship and of acute nationalist dividing lines – the Partisan struggle brought forward a different collective principle, a different principle of the political bond. It posited the 'people' as an immanent expression of politics: a subject forged 'from below', in the common struggle of the popular liberation war. In such a way, the struggle of the

Partisans invented the possibility of a collective identity of Yugoslavia, in direct opposition to the opacity of the previous political construct. Moreover, it forged this collective identity against the grain of near impossible historical circumstances – the circumstances of occupation and of Nazi and fascist terror, and of the deep animosities between the Yugoslav national groups, fuelled on a day-to-day basis by the violence and the atrocities perpetrated by the collaborator regimes.

But, at the same time, the Partisan struggle also did something more: it inscribed an effective break in political forms, a break with regards to the ideological representation of politics residing at the heart of the modern State. The historical significance of the 'new Yugoslavia' is to be measured in this sense. Because what emerges in 1943, from within the liberation war, is a political project effectively defining itself in terms of the abolition of political transcendence, in terms of the abolition of the multifarious mechanisms of representation and sovereignty proper to the modern State. A political project which, in contrast to the metaphysical scene of the self-constitution of Law, derives its entire subjective substance from the real experience of the struggle: from the movement of the masses, from the eruption of mass organisations, from the fraternity *won* in the struggle. A political project seeking its fundamental sources in the creative power and the innovative political capacity of the masses themselves. In other words, there is a completely different sense of the democratic subject at play here than that which we find at the core of classical liberal theory.[36]

Democracy and democratic subjectivity are not a matter of rights and liberties to claim, as they are also not, in a primary sense, a matter of the representative structures of the State, of the circle of sovereignty and its evocation of the ideal body of the people. They are a matter of democratic *situations*, situations of effective collective political struggle, and of organisational forms which proceed from these situations.[37]

The AVNOJ document is a veritable historical source in this regard: precisely in the sense in which it locates the central political and organisational shapes of the 'new Yugoslavia' not in the State itself, but in the democratic and revolutionary organisations of the liberation war – such as the *popular liberation committees* and the *land's antifascist councils* – in the organisations of the popular masses created from within the struggle for liberation and emancipation.[38]

Buden is right to point out here: "[The] new Yugoslav people does not build its political institutions from the logic of sovereignty (inheriting the latter from the monarch, or from the Yugoslav nationalism of the so-called First Yugoslavia), but precisely through a radical negation of such a concept, namely, from the revolutionary-democratic idea of the councils".[39] But these forms of mass political organisation inscribed in the AVNOJ – forms which seek their direct origins in the workers' councils of the Paris Commune and the *soviets* of the October Revolution – are not only defined by their distance and externality vis-à-vis the State. They are also shaped in direct confrontation with the latter. The essential political purpose of the *popular*

liberation committees and other mass democratic forms which the Partisan struggle invented was not only to assure effective democratic rule in the liberated territories and to provide the political armature of the liberation war. Their purpose was also the struggle against the political apparatus of the State, the struggle for the destruction of the mechanisms of representation and sovereignty embodied in this apparatus. Edvard Kardelj, one of the leading theoretical and political figures of the liberation war, made this point clear in his 1945 speech on the 'Power of the Popular Masses': "we have found, in the large part of the territory, the remains of the State apparatus which once served anti-popular regimes, and, during the war, the occupiers. This apparatus did not correspond, neither according to its particular individual composition, nor by its forms or contents, to the character of the democratic rule of the fundamental, democratic segments of the popular masses which emerged and developed itself in the course of the *popular-liberation war.* It was necessary to destroy this apparatus and to replace it with new forms, with forms which emerged in the liberated territories during the course of the war, forms which proceeded from the struggle, forms which withstood the bitter test of a popular uprising".[40]

6.5. The politics of AVNOJ and the dialectic of an 'unfinishable State'

There is more to be said of the consequences of this evacuation of the logic of popular sovereignty. For the

break that presides over the event of 1943, the break that presides over the political consciousness of the NOB is not to be measured only in terms of the subjective shapes of democratic and revolutionary politics, in terms of the substance of the political bond. If the Partisan struggle had definitely effectuated a displacement of the question of political association from the transcendent space of the State and its mechanisms of representation and sovereignty, and had inscribed it in the immanent terrain of the political activity of the masses, in mass democratic struggle as such, it had also, in this process, displaced and evacuated something else. It had evacuated the entire conceptual and logical space which surrounds the notion of popular sovereignty, the field of thought and thinking proper to the idea of popular sovereignty.

What does this mean?

Let us return to Đinđić one more time; let us recall once more the general construction of his argument on Yugoslavia: *Yugoslavia as an unfinished State*. Things appear quite straightforward from this perspective. The entire logic of Đinđić's argument rests upon a set of clear-cut oppositions: A State is either finished or it is not. It functions or it does not function. It exists or it does not exist. It is either formed in and upon the Law, or it is malformed. A State either possesses an unambiguous dimension of sovereignty or it does not possess itself at all, it does not possess statehood as such, and is consequently stranded in a state of incapacity and disorder, in a 'floating state', as Đinđić would speak of Yugoslavia.

The severity of these oppositions, as we saw, falls dramatically short of accounting for the historicity proper of Yugoslavia, and the scope of the politics of the Yugoslav Partisans. The project of Yugoslavia which emerges out of 1943 immediately presents itself as something else.

But what is this something else?

We can play upon Đinđić's phrasing: the 'unfinished State' that we can see being born out the event of 1943 is quite literally an *unfinishable State*. This is because the politics that orients this event is a politics which does not seek its essence or its ends in the State, in the idea of the finality or the accomplishedness of Law or the legal and political order. The political question that the AVNOJ poses is not at all the question of the foundation of State in Law, the constitution of the order of the political community. It is not the question of the subject stranded in a dialectical relationship to the juridico-political regime and its 'conditions of possibility'.

This can be seen, again, from the very definition of the subject present in the AVNOJ document, the political subject of the 'new Yugoslavia'. Because indeed, what does it mean to posit the struggle as such as constitutive?

Positing struggle as constitutive means, as Althusser would suggest, subtracting politics from the official sphere of the 'political', from the sphere of the State and the Law. But it also means positing an essential link between politics and historical novelty: it means seizing politics in the register of the break, affirming creativity, transformation and innovation as fundamental principles of politics. Instead of the static scene of legal-political establishment,

what we have here is subjectivity predicated upon a dynamic of novelty, an openness towards the new. Instead of the *fait accompli* of the Law, instead of the indolence and the immobility of institution, we have an affirmation of movement and creation as principles subverting any finality of the Origin. In other words, the AVNOJ reveals a radical figure of political intellectuality: instead of being the benediction of the existing state of affairs, it is a political intellectuality which is, as Marx would put it, *critical* and *revolutionary,*[41] a political intellectuality which questions each foundation, incessantly announcing the new.

What this means is that the politics of the AVNOJ needs to subtracted from the *fait accompli* and the finality of the legal-political institution. There is no State to be finished, no juridical principle of sovereignty to be effectuated in its 'clarity'. The goal or the essence of the politics of AVNOJ is something different: it is the development of collective freedom proper, the development of emancipation, at a remote from the freedom of legal-political universality, from that form of freedom which Hegel would name objective.[42] The only practical dimension proper to this goal stands beyond the question of the establishment and the perfection of institutional forms, beyond the finality of the political institution as such. This practical dimension is the emancipatory transformation of social relations.

At its very origins, Yugoslavia is being constituted as a project of revolutionary emancipation: an unfinishable, uncompletable State.

One might object at this point: does this not run completely against the grain of the actual proceedings of the moment of AVNOJ and of the political history of Yugoslavia after 1943? Is it not completely counterintuitive and erroneous to assert that the essence of politics of AVNOJ resides outside of the State-form, outside of the form of legal-political constitution, when the principle political act which the declaration of AVNOJ expresses is precisely the establishment of the federal State?

There is, of course, no question that the political event of 1943 stands under the material determination of political and legal institutions and forms, as there is no question that the basic shape in which the politics of the Partisan struggle is realised is precisely the shape of different figures of legal-political constitution. And yet what is crucial here is not the simple fact of empirical and historical presence of these figures and forms of institution. What is crucial is the tendency which they carry, the tendency inscribed in them. Behind the institutional setting, behind the juridico-political forms which are set in motion, the event of AVNOJ displays something more radical: the explicit presence of a contradiction, the presence of an irresolvable tension between two opposing terms. If the entire construction of the AVNOJ does indeed proceed in terms of different legal-political forms, if the politics of 1943 does create different political and juridical institutions, it seems to do so precisely in order to announce their overcoming, their *Aufhebung*. It seems to do so in order to embed a contradictory and innovative tendency at the heart of these forms.

This is the exact shape of the invention set out by the event of 1943: the inscription of a contradictory figure of the Two, a dialectic of destruction and creation, into different forms of being-together, or, what amounts to the same, the production of forms of political life which introduce their own disappearance.

1. We have seen this already in the way in which the displacement and the break with the modern category of the political subject is effectuated in 1943. We have seen it in the way in which the AVNOJ seeks to overcome the notion of the 'sovereign people'. When the AVNOJ proclaims the construction of the new political order on behalf of 'popular sovereignty', it instantly subverts this proclamation by affirming the unmediated political presence of the masses, it instantly disfigures the shape of the modern political subject by equating the 'people' with the popular movement for liberation, and thus with mass democratic politics as such. The AVNOJ declaration effectively realises a contradictory figure of the subject, a contradictory figure of collectivity: a people which is already a non-people, a form of the One which includes and induces a break with the logics of representation and sovereignty on which the modern bourgeois construction of the political community resides. A contradictory figure, but a figure with a specific albeit complex positivity of its own. Because the 'people' of AVNOJ is a figure of unity in contradiction, a form of the political subject tendentially announcing the abolition of the form of 'popular sovereignty'.

2. We can also see this same movement of contradiction, this same inscription of the negative

tendency in the way in which the problem of the nation appears in the politics of the *popular liberation-struggle*. What is exactly the 'national question' within the political sequence of 1943?

In the first place, we should note that it is a question with appears in a specific form: instead of being posed in the singular, it is a question which is being posed in the plural. Or better, it is a question posed in the *singular plural*. Because the subject implied in the struggle for national or popular liberation of 1943 is immediately multiple and heterogeneous: the liberation struggle does not concern only one nation, one people, but implies the emancipation of all the peoples of Yugoslavia, it implies liberty and the equality for each particular national group.[43] This is an immense political break. If the monarchical order of Yugoslavia, that is, of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, symbolically privileged three nations (and effectively, only one) whilst at the same time practising a repressive politics over other particular groups, the federal political construction of Yugoslavia is built upon an explicit recognition of the political equality of all nations, of all the particular peoples of Yugoslavia.[44]

But, at the same time, the revolutionary subjectivity of Yugoslavia poses the question of national liberation in another sense, in a sense which takes us beyond the formalism of juridico-political constructions. It poses the question of national liberation as inseparable from the wider problem of social emancipation, as inseparable from the question of the revolution. And in this sense, it does not only bring out something other than the nation-

form itself, but also opens the tendency towards the self-abolition of the latter.

We can see this in the Leninist formulation of the *rights of nations to self-determination* which the Yugoslav Partisans put into practice. What does Lenin consider under the syntagm of national self-determination? For Lenin, although he equates self-determination with concrete material, and therefore, institutional conditions, it is out of the question to simply speak about a juridical norm.[45] The 'rights of nations to self-determination' is not the principle according to which each national entity is to be reflected in its own state apparatus; it is not a norm of the State. It is, rather, the practical maxim of communist internationalism. The right to national self-determination is simply the smallest common denominator in the anti-imperialist struggle, it is the ground for the constitution of a collective which effectively unites different peoples in their struggle for the radicalisation of the egalitarian maxim, in their struggle for emancipation. In short, it is a *right to resistance* or a *right to struggle*, a figure of 'right' subordinated to inventive force of mass political struggle, to the Two of political invention. It is in this sense that we should read the proclamation of the right to self-determination as one of the operative political concepts of the popular-liberation struggle of 1943, of Yugoslavia. It is in this sense that we can see Tito stating, at the height of this struggle, thirty years after Lenin, that the 'right to self-determination' is accorded to each people "with a rifle in its hand, in this struggle for popular liberation today".[46]

3. In the end, we can see this same movement of contradictions in the very form of the political order, in the form of the political State which sees its beginnings in the AVNOJ decisions of 1943. We can see it in the political process of construction of the People's Republic of Yugoslavia. What is being constructed here is, strictly speaking, an openly contradictory reality: a State, that is, a juridico-political order, plus something else than the State. This something else is the tendency of the break with the State-form, an explosion of politics which implodes the State-form itself. One of the participants in the discussions which surrounded the Third Convention of AVNOJ in 1945, and therefore the political intricacy of the post-war constitution of Yugoslavia, exposes this element in a graphic way: "We have already spoken about what the ambivalent terms of government and of the legacy of the *popular-liberation struggle* mean. I think that the principle error of the opposition, which has expressed itself during the course of the entire discussion, is that they consider the current state of affairs in Yugoslavia as a regime, and not as a deep social transformation which occurred".[47]

Against Đinđić's oppositions, what we have here is a real presence of a third position, the presence of an 'impossible' whole: "a State which is at the same time already a non-State", to quote Lenin's famous expression, a State announcing its own disappearance as a State. The negative aspect of this contradiction does not mean the plain and simple absence of the State, a fact of sheer degradation, a void. The non-State does not mark, as Đinđić would have it, the dysfunctionality, the impotence

and the eventual capitulation of the legal-political order in front of the forces of disorder and anarchy, in front of the chaos of dissolution. Quite the contrary, it marks a positive, solid reality: it marks the real political struggle against the State, it marks the presence of political invention, the presence of the dialectics of destruction and creation driving forms of political life towards incessant revolutionisation.

We can also put this differently: what essentially characterises Yugoslavia as a political project is not the simple fact of the establishment of certain institutions (institutions which are considered to possess universal validity) – even though establishing institutions is its necessary and inescapable component. It is not even the simple negation and destruction of the institutional complex, the complex of political forms *per se*. The main, essential aspect of this politics is something else: it is the inscription of the revolutionary process at the heart of political forms, it is the assurance of the conditions for permanent political invention, for permanent transformation.

This is what connects the politics of Yugoslavia to one of the foremost political concepts from the Marxian revolutionary tradition: the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Dictatorship of the proletariat is precisely 'a State which is a non-State', or as Badiou recently remarked, a "State which is subtracted from all classical laws of a 'normal' State".[48] As Badiou notes: "a classical State is a form of power; but the State named 'dictatorship of proletariat' is the power of un-power, the power of the disappearance of the question of power".[49]

But there is also more than a theoretical analogy at play here. One of the crucial questions, in my regard, of the entire history of Yugoslavia is the pertinence and presence of the politics of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. To which extent did the Yugoslav Communist Party, and the struggle of the Partisans, invest Marx's or Lenin's notion in the construction of the new social and political reality which emerges after 1943. And moreover, to which extent did the historical development of Yugoslavia proceed in terms of the idea of the 'withering away of the State' that is implied in this notion. In what concerns the historicity of Yugoslavia, this seems to be one of the most productive ways to construct the dialectic of the subjective and the objective – the relationship between forms of struggle and political subjectivities, on the one hand, and the development of institutional realities upon these forms of struggles, on the other – without falling onto simplified historical models.

By way of concluding – and connecting the past to the present – the historical case of the AVNOJ shows us the possibilities of another form of political subjectivity, of another practice of politics, as Balibar would call it,[50] irreducible to the 'consensual', depoliticising logic of liberal-democracy and its juridical paradigm. It enables us to start thinking politics differently: in terms singular events in time which explode the coordinates of the given, in terms of radical breaks which reconfigure the logic of the given situation in such a way that they put forward the possibilities which seemed impossible from within the logic of that situation.

Conclusion

Even though the formal presentation of this work proceeds from a split into two – carrying, on the one side, the argumentation towards an exploration of the ways in which the problem of politics was theorised on the fault lines between Marxism and post-Marxism, whilst, on the other side, going into a more direct confrontation with the historical context of post-socialism and with what I name the *post-socialist political reason* – its substance was organised around the idea of the deep articulation and, in fact, the inseparability of the two parts. This idea can be best expressed through a paraphrase of Kant: a critique of post-socialism remains blind without a critique of post-Marxism, whilst a critique of post-Marxism remains empty without critique of post-socialism. In other words, a critical confrontation with the present, a critique of the practical implications of our current situation, has to proceed at once at two levels: both at the level of the scrutinisation of theoretical concepts aiming to produce a position beyond the actual theoretical and political impasses, and at the level of a concrete confrontation with historical, conjunctural realities of post-socialism, which not only provide the pretext for the development of these concepts, but at the same time place them under the real test of critical effectivity.

If post-Marxism, as I argued, maintains an organic relationship with post-socialism, reproducing the political impasses and the illusions of the present at the level of theory, then a consequent theoretical critique of post-socialism has to in the first place be *post*-post-Marxist – which practically means revisiting the prodigious critical

potential that Marxist theory generated in the epoch of capitalism. Against the idea that Marxism would become outdated and theoretically defunct with post-socialism, I insisted upon the opposite: that a critique of the post-socialist present, of the vexing contradictions of this present, remains unthinkable and impossible without a revitalisation of Marxism. This is the manner in which I wanted to show how theory and history are inseparable, whilst bearing in mind Adorno's claim that: "Whatever wants nothing to do with the trajectory of history belongs all the more truly to it. History promises no salvation and offers the possibility of hope only to the concept whose movement follows history's path to the very extreme".[01]

Herein lies the *rationale* for the entire attempt, which makes the first part of the thesis, to rethink the relationship between Althusser and Gramsci in Marxist theory, and at the limits of Marxism. My main aim in this regard was to offer a new reading of the development of the key theoretical concepts of politics at work in these two thinkers, whilst arguing how the proper resolution of the contradictory trajectory which unites Gramsci and Althusser around the question of the 'superstructures', instead of leading straight to the post-Marxist celebration of the 'death of Marx', rather points towards the real possibilities of a revalorisation and reinvigoration the Marxian critical apparatus.

If the post-Marxist theoretical operation consisted in reading Gramsci back into Althusser, I argued precisely for the reverse, attempting to demonstrate how the entire attempt of the theoretical autonomisation and localisation

of the political moment proper, originating from Gramsci's sketches of the space of hegemony at the distance both from the economic determination and from the institutional and ideological matrix of the State, instead of resolving the problem of Marxian politics, rather exhibits profound ambivalences and paradoxes. These paradoxes are exploded precisely with the post-Marxist propositions of Laclau and Mouffe, where the Gramscian problematic becomes a fully-fledged notion of the 'autonomy of the political', and where politics, separated from its critical link with the structural inequalities of capitalism, gets effectively subsumed under the terrain of the liberal-democratic State. This is where Laclau and Mouffe's 'post-Marxism' presents itself as an eminently anti-Marxist theoretical and political move, and thus also, as a veritable symptom of the post-socialist political ideology, inasmuch as both tend to annul and deny the Marxian critical *short circuit* which connects the sphere of juridico-political universality to capitalist exploitation.

Against these positions, I claimed that in order to find a viable solution to the problem of Marxist politics it is necessary to return to Althusser. And, in particular, to three moments from the Althusserian theoretical apparatus: a) his reformulation of the problem of the State, which involves a powerful dialectic between two forms of materiality: the materiality of ideology and the materiality of the violence of class struggle, b) his conception of philosophy as a practice of intervention and demarcation –which is an answer to Marx's injunction to 'change the world' which does not collapse theory into ideology pure and simple; and c) his theorisation of politics outside of the space of

the State and the Law, but also outside of the Gramscian 'civil society' and other topographical considerations, in the register of singularity and eventuality. This last motif seems, in my view, to resolve the problem of the autonomy of politics without sacrificing the radicality of the horizon of the break, without which a revolutionary conception of emancipation remains unthinkable.

In the second part of the book, I brought some of these discussions more closely towards history and the historical contradictions of post-socialism. My main aim here was to unravel the specific ideological operations inherent to the political rationality which is established after 1989, and do so in a double sense: in the first place, to demonstrate, beyond the 'consensual' and universalistic façade of post-socialist politics, its inherent contradictions and its limits; secondly, to delineate the precise ways in which the post-socialist political reason, through violent 'revisionist' moves, seeks to cancel out and 'pacify' revolutionary thought and practice. This is the backdrop to the three concrete analyses of the post-socialist situation: a) the analyses of the contiguity, in the concrete case of the 'Slovenian Spring', between the theory of Laclau and Mouffe and the post-socialist political concept of 'civil society', b) the analysis of the relationship between liberal-democracy and nationalism, in terms of the paradoxical conjunction of the processes of 'democratisation' in Yugoslavia with nationalist violence, c) the analysis of the ideological effects of the post-socialist 'juridification' of politics, especially in terms of the history of the revolutionary project of Yugoslavia.

But besides these negative, critical moments, the purpose of this confrontation with history was also affirmative: it consisted of the exemplification of the relevance and actuality of the Marxist theoretical apparatus today, especially in what concerns the effective possibilities of a political orientation beyond the post-socialist political reason. If Althusser's ideas on the complex materiality of the State, on the practicality of philosophy, and on the radical heterogeneity of revolutionary political practice, seem as compelling *theoretical* solutions to problems in Marxist theory, then we should also see them as powerful *practical* formulas: inasmuch as they drive us to think beyond the consensual logic of post-socialism, inasmuch as they *practice* Adorno's 'categorical imperative' for philosophy – to be able to measure up to one's times, to produce a critical antithesis to historical actuality.

By way of closing, I should point out that the relationship between theory and history, between Marxism, post-Marxism and post-socialism, that I sought to establish here certainly did not want to put final words on things, but rather to exemplify vantage points for a critical confrontation with the present. This means that it is necessary to develop the analysis further, to deepen and expand a number of moments touched upon here, but also to take other directions, some of which were only hinted at here. Thus, for example, it seems very relevant to me to follow the steps of those approaches which seek to think the precise points of contact between the post-socialist political forms and the economic realities and structures underlying these forms, to think the actual, empirical

and historical shapes of the relation between the liberal-democratic State and the forms of capitalist exploitation which are being introduced into the post-socialist realm.[02] This is the way to further strengthen and to expand the power of the Marxian *short circuit* which was crucial for this work.[03]

Other analytical trajectories can be sought in the expansion of the discussion of the Marxist theoretical concepts of politics towards the broader philosophical conjuncture in which the limits of Marxist theory are played out today. If my focus here was mainly on the post-Marxism of Laclau and Mouffe, and on different trajectories of Gramscianism – precisely due to the ideological baggage that these theoretical approaches carry vis-à-vis the post-socialist assertion of the 'death of Marx' – these points of contact and confrontation are by no means the only ones which are important. For example, it is interesting to explore the relationship between Marxism and the approaches of Badiou and Rancière, especially in the light of their indebtedness to the philosophy of Althusser, but also, more generally, in the light of their own attempts at producing a critical position in theory, not after Marx, but after the 'end of the truth of the State', which has identified Marxist theory with a statist ideology.[04] At the same time, it seems productive to examine the relationship between Althusser and Foucault, another canonical figure in the theoretical anti-humanism which left a profound impact on the philosophical and political scene of the 1960s and 1970s, but who also bears direct relevance to a number of contemporary discussions of emancipatory politics.[05]

Notes

01 Being initially formulated in terms of accounts of the political and socio-economic transformations in Latin America in the 1970s, 'transitology' has established itself as a specific scientific domain after 1989. 'Transitology' places the social sciences in direct service to the aims of neoliberal capitalism – measuring, in an uncritical way, the adequacy of the transformations to market economy, and of the introduction of multi-party parliamentary forms of democracy. For a meticulous study of the conjunction of the scientific and the ideological in the expansion of 'democratisation theory' after 1989, see Guilhot, Nicolas (2005) *The Democracy Makers: Human Rights and the Politics of the Global Order,* New York: Columbia University Press.

02 Rastko Močnik draws upon an authoritative source, the extensive empirical research underlying the *Human Development Report for Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS 1999*, conducted under the auspices of the United Nations Development Programme. He observes: "In *all* post-socialist countries, gross domestic product per capita (GDP) has sharply declined after 1991; in Central and Eastern Europe, GDP was falling until 1994 to reach the index 65 (1991 being 100); afterwards, the trend stabilised and reached the index slightly over 75 in 1997; in the Baltic region, the fall was sharper (index 43 in 1994), and the stabilisation after 1994 was on a much lower level (slightly above 50 in 1997); in the former Soviet Union (the Commonwealth of Independent States), the decline was still continuing in 1997 when the index was around 50". From this, Močnik concludes: "The increase in inequality is a uniform feature in all post-socialist countries". See "Tranzicija in družbene spremembe na Balkanu" ("Transition and social change in the Balkans") in: Močnik, Rastko (2003), *Teorija za politiko (Theory for Politics),* Ljubljana: Založba *cf. pg. 70-73. See also "The World Economy at the Beginning of 1998", taken from: United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report for Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS 1999*, United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs.
[N.B.: All non-English translations in this work are my own, unless noted otherwise].

03 Močnik himself offers a particularly bleak picture of the political rationality predominant in the post-socialist realm: "The same thing which is in western Europe being considered as a 'civilisational' threat, is being exalted, in the countries enchanted by the 'transition', as the *rise* towards civilisation. What is significant for the Balkans is that here 'transition' represents itself in an *orientalist* manner, with the imperative that 'it is necessary to join Europe'. However, whilst in Europe, and elsewhere in the world, more and more people seem to reject the false alternative 'liberalism or barbarism', the people in the Balkans are being pushed by others into neo-liberal politics, as if this is going to relieve them of their 'Balkan barbarism'". See Močnik, *ibid*, pg. 88-89.

04 Jürgen Habermas was speaking of a 'crisis of legitimation' already in the early 1970s. See Habermas, Jürgen (1975) *Legitimation Crisis,* Boston: Beacon Books.

05 Boris Buden would here speak of 'the society which has replaced politics with culture'. See Boris Buden (2002). *Kaptolski Kolodvor,* Belgrade: CsuB.

06 See the introduction to Žižek, Slavoj (2001) *Repeating Lenin,* Zagreb: Bastard Books.

07 Andre Glucksmann famously retorted "Marxism generates not only scientific paradoxes, but also concentration camps". See his, (1975) *La cuisinière et le mangeur d'hommes: Essai sur l'Etat, le marxisme, les camps de concentration,* Paris: Seuil. For a more subtle version of such a thesis, see the arguments put forward by François Furet in his (1999) *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

08 Jameson, Fredric (1996) "Five theses on actually existing Marxism", in: *Monthly Review,* April 1996, 47 (11): pg. 1

09 See Močnik (2003) *op.cit*.

10 Badiou, Alain (1998) *D'un désastre obscur: Sur la fin de la vérité d'Etat,* Paris: Éditions de l'Aube, pg. 30.

11 'Post-Marxism' has in recent years become a very wide and imprecisely defined term, encapsulating a broad array of theoretical and political alternatives to Marxist theory, as well as a wide array of theoretical and ideological criticisms of Marxism. I will here try to offer a more precise reading of the notion, by tracing it to those tendencies which have openly identified themselves as post-Marxist, that is, which have, starting from some problems in Marxism, come to a conclusion of

Marxism's essential untenability, in the light of the idea that Marxism is fundamentally incompatible with political pluralism. The work of Laclau and Mouffe, early Žižek, but also certain developments in Gramscian inspired social sciences, as we will see later, is crucial in this regard.

12 Laclau, Ernesto and Mouffe, Chantal (1985) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics,* (*HSS*) London: Verso, pg. 4.

13 Laclau and Mouffe are again paradigmatic in this regard: "What is now in crisis is a whole conception of socialism which rests upon the ontological centrality of the working class, upon the role of Revolution, with a capital 'r', as the founding moment in the transition from one type of society to another, and upon the illusory prospect of a perfectly unitary and homogeneous collective will that will render pointless the moment of politics. The plural and multifarious character of contemporary social struggles has finally dissolved the last foundation for that political imaginary". (*HSS*, pg. 2).

14 As Laclau would write: "We are today coming to terms with our own finitude and with the political possibilities that it opens. This is the point from which the potentially liberatory discourses of our postmodern age have to start. We can perhaps say that today we are at the end of emancipation and the beginning of freedom". Quoted from: Laclau, Ernesto (1996) *Emancipation(s),* London: Verso, pg. 18.

15 See Žižek, Slavoj "Beyond discourse-analysis", in Laclau, Ernesto (1990) *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Times,* London: Verso.

16 See Badiou's discussion of the 'end of referents' in his 1985 book *Peut-on penser la politique?,* Paris: Seuil, pg. 25-66.

17 V.I.Lenin, *Collected Works,* Progress Publishers, Moscow 1963, vol. 18, p. 584.

18 Already in 1977, Louis Althusser celebrated the 'crisis of Marxism' as the primary source of possibilities for theoretical reinvigoration: "At last the crisis of Marxism has exploded! At last it is in full view! At last something vital and alive can be liberated by this crisis and in this crisis". See Althusser, Louis (1979) "The crisis of Marxism", in: *Power and Opposition in Post-revolutionary Societies,* London: Ink Links, pg. 229.

19 Tosel, André (1995) 'In Francia', in: *Gramsci in Europa e in America,* E.J. Hobsbawm (ed.), Roma-Bari: Laterza, pg. 9.

PART ONE
THE PROBLEM OF POLITICS IN MARXISM AND AT THE LIMITS OF MARXISM: FROM AUTONOMY TO SINGULARITY

1.
GRAMSCI AND THE LIMITS OF MARXIST POLITICS: AUTONOMY, HEGEMONY AND THE 'PHILOSOPHY OF PRAXIS'

01 Christine Buci-Glucksmann, "Gramscisme", in: Labica, Georges and Bensussan, Gerard (eds.) (1985) *Dictionnaire critique du marxisme,* Paris: PUF, pg. 509.

02 Perry Anderson famously referred in this sense to 'Gramsci's antinomies'. See Anderson, Perry (1977) "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci", *New Left Review,* No. 100 March, London: NLR Press.

03 Gramsci was not the first Marxist thinker to employ and develop the notion of 'hegemony'. The notion is first sketched out by the writers of Russian Social-Democracy, such as Axelrod and Plekhanov, and later Lenin and Trotsky, in an attempt to account for problems of political leadership and strategic alliances. For an outline of the genealogy of the term amongst Marxist political thinkers, see Anderson, ibid, pg. 15 et passim.

04 Nicola Badaloni "Gramsci and the problem of the revolution", in: Chantal Mouffe (ed.) (1979) *Gramsci and Marxist Theory,* London: Routledge, pg. 80.

05 See Gramsci, Antonio (1977) "Revolution against *Capital",* in: *Selections From Political Writings: 1910-1920,* London: Lawrence and Wishart.

06 See for instance Kautsky: "We believe that the collapse of the existing society is inevitable because we know that economic development naturally and necessarily produces contradictions which oblige the exploited to combat private property. We know that it increases the numbers and strength of the exploiters whose interests lie in the maintenance of the existing order, and that it finally brings about unbearable contradictions for the mass of the population which is left only with the choice between brutalisation and inertia or the overturning of the existing system of ownership". Kautsky, *Das Erfuter Programm,* Stuttgart, Velrag von J.H.W.Diek, 1892, p, 106. (Quoted from Chantal Mouffe "Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci", in: Mouffe (ed.) *Gramsci and Marxist Theory,* pg. 173).

07 Quoted from Buci-Glucksmann (1980) *Gramsci and the State,* London: Lawrence and Wishart, pg. 237.
08 Antonio Gramsci (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (from hereafter, *SPN*), London: Lawrence and Wishart, pg. 407.
09 *SPN*, pg. 185.
10 In the first place, we can think of the tradition of the natural law, and thinkers such as Locke and Rousseau, but also, later, Kant, Fichte and Hegel.
11 *SPN*, pg. 12.
12 Karl Marx (1975) *Early Writings,* London: Penguin, pg. 230.
13 ibid, pg. 221.
14 See G.W. Hegel (1943) *Philosophy of Right* (Translated by T.M.Knox), Oxford: Clarendon Press.
15 Marx, *Early Writings,* pg. 90.
16 ibid, pg. 220.
17 ibid, pg. 223.
18 ibid, pg. 166.
19 In *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Politics and Philosophy Before and After Marx,* Balibar attempts to assess the profundity of the break that Marx effectuated with regard to our apprehension of politics: "He was to build the most powerful and comprehensive 'heteronomic' theory of politics in the history of philosophy, which relies on a provocative 'materialist' identification of politics with its 'other': what I call a *short circuit* of 'politics' and 'economy', arising from the simultaneous economic critique of 'politicism' and political critique of 'economicism'. See Balibar, Étienne (1994), *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Politics and Philosophy Before and After Marx* London: Routledge, pg. xi.
20 The idea of the short circuit can indeed be taken as a powerful solution of the conundrums of the base and superstructure. What is at stake here is not a reductive, but a critical conception. It certainly does not amount to a negation of politics, unless we want to admit that politics can happen only within the limits of the sphere of the State. What is reductive, according to Marx, is the very separation of the 'political' from the 'economic' effectuated with the constitution of the modern State, and reproduced in countless political theories and philosophies. It is reductive because it effectively excludes the set of struggles in the sphere production from the official political sphere, because it dissociates politics, and political representation as such, from the decisive nucleus of economic contradictions.

21 *SPN*, pg. 12.
22 Gramsci, Antonio (1995) *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks (FSPN)*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, pg. 167.
23 See Buci-Glucksmann, "Hégémonie", in: *Dictionnaire critique du Marxisme*, pg. 535.
24 ibid.
25 See Anderson (1977), but also, Buci-Glucksmann (1980).
26 V.I. Lenin *Collected Works*, Vol. 17, Moscow: Progress Publishers, pg. 231-232.
27 See *SPN*, pg. 365 et passim.
28 See Gramsci's "Notes on the Southern Question": "The proletariat can become the leading and the dominant class to the extent that it succeeds in creating a system of alliances which allows it to mobilise the majority of the working population against capitalism and the bourgeois State. In Italy, in the real class relations which exist there, this means to the extent that it succeeds in gaining the consent of the broad peasant masses". Gramsci (1978) *Selections from Political Writings: 1921-1926*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, pg. 443.
29 See Chapter 3 of the *Selections from Prison Notebooks*.
30 *SPN*, pg. 349.
31 See the first chapter of *SPN*.
32 *SPN*, pg. 169-170.
33 *SPN*, pg. 244.
34 ibid, pg. 243.
35 ibid, pg. 264-265.
36 See, Jacques Texier "Gramsci, theoretician of the superstructures", in: Mouffe (1979).
37 Terry Eagleton (1991) *Ideology: An Introduction*, London: Verso, pg. 115.
38 *FSPN*, pg. 167.
39 Buci-Glucksman (1985) *op.cit*, pg. 535.
40 Marx uses the metaphors of the *machine* and the *apparatus* when he discusses the State in texts such as *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and *Class Struggles in France*. We will discuss the importance of this metaphor, especially in terms of the problem of the *materiality of the State*, in the subsequent chapters.
41 In the dense pages of Gramsci's prison manuscripts, 'historical bloc' seems to denote, at the same time, a system of sociopolitical alliances, the unity of 'structure and superstructures' (SPN, pg. 137), the unity

of 'rulers and the ruled' or the 'intellectuals and the people' (SPN, pg. 418), and even the unity of the 'subjective and the objective dimension in Man' (SPN, pg. 360).

42 Jacques Texier (1979) *op.cit*, pg. 58-59.

43 Massimo Salvadori "Gramsci and the PCI: two conceptions of hegemony", in Mouffe (1979), pg. 251.

44 According to Perry Anderson, Gramsci "never intended to deny or rescind the classical axioms of that tradition [of Marx and Lenin, *OP*] on the inevitable role of social coercion within any great historical transformation, so as long as classes subsisted". Anderson (1977) *op.cit*, pg. 47.

45 At the forefront of the Eurocommunist readings, we can find the canonisation of Gramsci by his own party, the PCI. As Martin Jay pointed out: "Led by Gramsci's university friend and later Party comrade, Palmiro Togliatti, the PCI [...] interpreted Gramsci as a forerunner of its own gradualist, coalition-building, national political line. [...] Gramsci's central concept of 'hegemony' was understood to imply the slow progressive education of the population to socialism though an essentially democratic process of enlightenment". Jay, Martin (1982) *Marxism and Totality,* Berkeley: University of California Press, pg. 150.

46 Buci-Glucksmann (1985) *op.cit*, pg. 535.

47 Anne Showstack Sassoon (1987) *Gramsci and Marxist Politics,* London: Hutchinson, pg. 119.

48 The de-politicised Gramsci of 'culture' and 'ideology' emerged primarily as a collateral effect of the theoretical and political project of 'cultural studies' in the Anglophone context. In the next chapter we will examine the precise contours of the translation of this perspective into the post-Marxism of Laclau and Mouffe.

49 It seems necessary to insist, against someone like Stuart Hall, who would claim that "those who seek a 'philosophy' in Gramsci will be disappointed", (Hall, pg. 45) that Gramsci does not only indeed provide us with a specific philosophical orientation, but, moreover, that it is in this philosophical orientation that the key to his entire sociological construction, to his construction of the theory and a science of politics and of society resides.

50 Louis Althusser (1969) *For Marx* (*FM*), Harmondsworth: Penguin Press, pg. 36.

51 Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach", in: Marx and Engels (1968) *Selected Works,* Moscow: Progress Publishers, pg. 29.

52 *SPN,* pg. 355.
53 ibid, pg. 450.
54 ibid, pg. 465.
55 Peter Thomas points this out in his article "Historicism, Absolute", published in *Historical Materialism,* 15, Brill Publishers, pg. 249-256.
56 For an exhaustive survey of the relationship between Gramsci and Croce, as well as an exposition of the reception of Marx in the early 20th century Italian philosophy, especially around thinkers such as Labriola and Gentile, see Tosel, Andre (1991) *Marx en italiques: Aux origins de la philosophie italienne contemporaine,* Mauvezin: Trans-Europ-Repress.
57 *SPN,* pg. 446.
58 ibid, pg. 445.
59 Leszek Kolakowski (1985) *Glavni tokovi marksizma (Main Currents of Marxism),* vol. III, Belgrade: BIGZ, pg. 264.
60 ibid. pg. 258-259.
61 See Karl Mannheim (1954) *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge,* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. See also Michel Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), London: Routledge.
62 *SPN,* pg. 346.
63 ibid, pg. 344.
64 ibid, pg. 417.
65 ibid, pg. 345.
66 As Gramsci writes: "If the problem of the identification of theory and practice is to be raised, it can be done in this sense, that one can construct, on a specific practice, a theory which, by coinciding and identifying itself with the decisive elements of the practice itself, can accelerate the historical process that is going on, rendering practice more homogeneous, more coherent, more efficient in all its elements, and thus, in other words, developing its potential to the maximum". (*SPN*, pg. 365.)
67 *SPN,* pg. 341.
68 *SPN,* pg. 328. Note that Gramsci, unlike Marx, or Althusser, has a thoroughly 'positive' conception of ideology. Ideology does not denote 'false consciousness', and, in fact, it is not related to falsity or illusion at all. There is no function of misrecognition, as there is also no conception of critique, whether scientific, philosophical or political, which is to be opposed to ideological phenomena. The term 'ideology'

plays a thoroughly positive and practical role for Gramsci – being the 'cement' which unifies socio-political actors, giving them a definite degree of cohesion and unity, necessary for political action.

69 *SPN,* pg. 352.

70 ibid, pg. 357.

71 Althusser, Louis and Balibar, Etienne (1970) *Reading Capital* (RC), London: New Left Books, pg. 130-131.

72 Eagleton (1991) *op.cit*, pg. 121.

73 The famous passage from *The Poverty of Philosophy* reads: "Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people into workers. The domination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have noted only a few phases, this mass becomes united and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests." Karl Marx (1936) *The Poverty of Philosophy,* London: Lawrence and Wishart, pg. 145.

74 As Lukacs would argue in his seminal work, *History and Class Consciousness:* "Only the consciousness of the proletariat can point to the way that leads out of the impasse of capitalism". See Gyorgy Lukacs (1972) *History and Class Consciousness,* MIT Press, pg. 76.

75 For Lukács's more 'modest' attempt of an 'operationalisation' see his 1919 essay 'Tactics and Ethics' in: Lukács, Georg (1972) *Etika i politika,* Zagreb: Naprijed.

76 *SPN,* pg. 334.

77 *SPN,* pg. 9.

78 *SPN,* pg. 366.

79 *SPN,* pg. 181-182.

80 See the chapter on "Reification and Proletarian Consciousness", and especially, "The point of view of the proletariat" in *History and Class Consciousness.*

81 In his *Critique of Dialectical Reason,* Sartre would also speak of 'totalisation' in order to denote an act, or the process by which a social movement, composed of an essential heterogeneity and multiplicity, constitutes itself as a subject of its own activity. See Sartre, Jean-Paul (2004) *Critique of Dialectical Reason,* London: Verso.

82 *SPN,* pg. 259.

83 ibid, pg. 161.

84 *SPN*, pg. 180.
85 *SPN*, pg. 366-367.
86 Norberto Bobbio "Gramsci and the conception of civil society", in: Mouffe (1979), pg. 34.

2.
THE POST-MARXIST IMPASSE: LACLAU AND MOUFFE, HEGEMONY, AND RADICAL DEMOCRACY

01 Jameson, Fredric (1996) "Five theses on actually existing Marxism", in: *Monthly Review,* April 1996, 47 (11): pg. 1
02 Jean-Paul Sartre (1963), *Search for a Method*, New York: Vintage Books, pg. 7.
03 For a historical overview of the dialectic between the 'crises of Marxism' and different 'post-Marxist' arguments, from Masaryk to Kautsky and German social democracy, to the debates of the 1980s, see Bensussan's entry "Crises du Marxisme" in the *Dictionnaire critique du marxisme,* (1985) pg. 259-270.
04 Laclau and Mouffe (1985) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics,* London: Verso. (Second Edition, 2001) (from hereafter HSS).
05 Ellen Wood (1998) *The Retreat From Class: A New True Socialism* (revised edition), London: Verso. Pg. 47.
06 Although the term 'post-Marxism' in its general usage today cannot be reduced to the positions of Laclau and Mouffe, it should be stressed that Laclau and Mouffe maintain a privileged position here. They were the first ones who came to stand self-professedly as 'post-Marxist', and, most importantly, they were the ones who added a particular ideological tenor to the term, whilst making of 'post-Marxism' an explicit ideological project: the point being not simply to 'succeed Marx', but rather to renounce Marxism as a theoretical and political project. This is what contrasts them to a range of other contemporary authors and projects which are commonly – and in my opinion wrongly – associated with the notion of 'post-Marxism', such as Antonio Negri, Alain Badiou, Étienne Balibar or Jacques Ranciere. Moreover, this is also what makes of Laclau and Mouffe's 'post-Marxism' a peculiar accom-

plice to the post-socialist political ideology, which in its own way at the beginning of the 1990s rushed to bury Marx as a 'dead dog'. For an intellectual history of post-Marxism from within the Laclau and Mouffe perspective, see Stuart Sim (2000), *Post-Marxism: An Intellectual History,* London: Routledge. For an alternative perspective, see Wood, *op. cit.*

07 *HSS,* pg. 1.

08 Here, Laclau and Mouffe strike a parallel with the theorists of the new social movements such as Alain Touraine, André Gorz, Claus Offe and Alberto Melucci, who, in their own terms, formulated a critique of Marxism around the problems of the post-68 political scene. As Alain Touraine, for example, would note: "New social movements are less sociopolitical and more sociocultural. The distance between civil society and the State is increasing while the separation between private and public life is fading away. The continuity from social movement to political party is disappearing, political life tends to be a depressed area between a stronger State in a changing international environment and, on the other side, sociocultural movements". See Touraine, Alain (1985) "An Introduction to the Study of the Social Movements", *Social Research*, Vol. 52, No. 4.

09 Ibid, pg. 2. Laclau and Mouffe, in fact, formulate an explicit theoretical critique of Marxism, claiming that the latter is, in its very essence, dominated by a necessitarian, deterministic and reductionist logic, a logic which renders unthinkable in advance the complexity and contingency of socio-historical and political phenomena: "In as much as Marxism claims to know the unavoidable course of history in its essential determinations, the understanding of an actual event can only mean to identify it as a moment in temporal succession that is fixed a priori". (*HSS*, pg. 21) The problem with this critique, as many interpreters pointed out, is that it too readily embraces caricatural depictions of Marx and of Marxism in order to support its arguments. For forceful criticisms of L&M's criticisms of Marxism see Wood, *op.cit*. See also, Geras, Norman (1987) *"Post-Marxism?"*, *New Left Review,* I, no. 163.

10 *HSS* (second edition), pg. ix.

11 Ernesto Laclau (1990) *New Reflections on The Revolution of Our Time,* London: Verso, pg. 236.

12 *HSS,* pg. 71.

13 Ibid, pg. 3.
14 Ferdinand de Saussure (1959) *Course in General Linguistics,* New York: Philosophical Library.
15 *HSS,* pg. 114.
16 Ibid, pg. 107.
17 Ibid, pg. 98.
18 Ibid, pg. 110.
19 The key here is the celebrated passage from *Writing and Difference*: "It became necessary to think both the law which somehow governed desire for a centre in the constitution of structure, and the process of signification which orders the displacements and substitutions for this law of central presence – but a central presence which has never been itself, has always already been exiled from itself into its own substitute. The substitute does not substitute itself for anything which has somehow existed before it, henceforth, it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no centre, that the centre could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the centre had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play". Quoted from: Jacques Derrida (1978) *Writing and Difference,* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, pg. 280. The second important theoretical reference here, of course, is the work of Jacques Lacan, and primarily his attempt to reshape Freudian psychoanalytic concepts through De Saussure's combinatorial logic. Slavoj Žižek, in his early works, offers a Lacanian interpretation and extension of Laclau and Mouffe's theory. See for example Slavoj Žižek (1989) *The Sublime Object of Ideology,* London: Verso.
20 Derrida (1978), pg. 280.
21 Simon Critchley and Oliver Marchart "Introduction", in: Critchley and Marchart (2004) *Laclau: A critical reader,* London: Routledge, pg. 4.
22 Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe "Post-Marxism without apologies", in: Ernesto Laclau (1990) *New Reflections on The Revolution of Our Time,* London: Verso, pg. 110.
23 *HSS,* pg. 98.
24 Ibid, pg. 140.
25 Ibid, pg. 21-22. It is worth noting the similarity here to that what Lord Karl Popper formulated as an attack on Marxist 'historicism', whilst attempting, in his own way, to raise serious concerns about the ana-

lytical and explanatory capacity of the social and historical sciences, and even to put in question the very possibility of the explanation (as opposed to interpretation) of social and historical phenomena. See Karl Popper (1957) *The Poverty of Historicism,* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, and also (1945) *The Open Society and Its Enemies,* London: Routledge.

26 *HSS*, pg. 21-22.

27 Ibid, pg. 105.

28 Ibid, pg. 135.

29 Fred Dallmayr "Laclau and Hegemony: some (post) Hegelian caveats", in: Critchley and Marchart (2004), pg. 42.

30 Critchley and Marchart (2004), "Introduction", pg. 3.

31 Dallmayr, *op.cit.*, pg. 42.

32 *HSS*, pg. 121.

33 Nicos Mouzelis (1988) "Marxism or Post-Marxism?", *New Left Review,* I, no. 167. Pg. 119.

34 David Howarth "Hegemony, political subjectivity, and radical democracy", in: Critchley and Marchart (2004), pg. 259.

35 *HSS*, pg. 87.

36 *HSS* (second edition), pg. xii.

37 Eagleton (1991) *op.cit.*, pg. 219.

38 See their "Post-Marxism without apologies" quoted earlier.

39 Ernesto Laclau "Identity and Hegemony: The Role of Universality in the Constitution of Political Logics", in: Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek (2000) *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality,* London: Verso, pg. 49.

40 Eagleton (1991), pg. 209.

41 Althusser once noted that "if there really are two distinct ways of identifying the superstructure with the infrastructure, or consciousness with the economy – one which sees in consciousness and politics only the economy, while the other imbues the economy with politics and consciousness, there is never more than one *structure* of identification at work – the structure of the problematic which, by reducing one to the other, *theoretically* identifies the levels present". (*RC*, pg. 138-139)

42 *HSS*, pg. 112.

43 Marxism seems to be akin to technological determinism for Laclau and Mouffe: "For Marxism, the development of the productive forces plays the key role in the historical evolution towards socialism [...]

They are at the root of the formation of an ever more numerous and exploited proletariat, whose historical mission is to take possession of, and collectively manage, highly socialized and developed productive forces". (*HSS*, pg. 77).

44 Eagleton (1991) pg. 201.

45 Theodor W. Adorno (1973) *Negative Dialectics*, New York: Continuum, pg. 197-198.

46 Ibid.

47 *HSS*, pg. 143.

48 Geras (1987) *op.cit.*, pg. 74.

49 (*HSS*, pg. 140)

50 *HSS*, pg. 159-160.

51 Ibid, pg. 177.

52 Ibid, pg. 191.

53 Ibid.

54 *New Reflections on The Revolution of Our Time*, pg. 229.

55 *HSS*, pg. 177.

56 Ibid, pg. 152. This is where the authors of *Hegemony* come close to the position of Michel Foucault, who also attempted to displace the Marxist conception of history by stressing a shift of focus from the notion of revolutionary ruptures to multiple, heterogeneous and unsynchronised developments, as exemplified in his studies on sexuality, on prisons and asylums, and on other forms of societal control. See, for example, Foucault's remarks on method in 'History, Discourse, and Discontinuity', *Salmagundi*, No. 20 (Summer-Fall, 1972).

57 Ibid, pg. 178.

58 *HSS*, pg. 155.

59 Eagleton *op.cit.*, pg. 218.

60 Wood *op.cit.*, pg. xii-xiii.

61 *HSS*, pg. 176. A similar attempt at a reappropriation of fundamental liberal principles was recently proposed by Balibar, with his concept of 'equal liberty'. See his "What is a Politics of the Rights of Man", in: Balibar (1994) *op.cit.*.

62 *HSS*, pg. 152.

63 Ibid, pg. 154.

64 ibid, pg. 159.

65 Ibid, pg. 155.

66 Ibid, pg. 178.

67 Howarth *op.cit.*, pg. 260.

68 *HSS*, pg. 125.

69 Ibid, pg. 158. Laclau would in fact go as far as asserting that "class struggle is just one species of identity politics, and one which is becoming less and less important in the world in which we live". (Laclau "Structure, History and the Political", in: Laclau, Butler, Žižek (2000), pg. 203).

70 In his most recent work on populism, (*On Populist Reason,* 2005) Laclau would fully explode the identitary perspective. The question of identity now becomes *the* fundamental principle, a fundamental 'motor' structuring and putting in motion all political relations. Behind the totalising drive of hegemony there is always the lack of political community's identity with itself, a structural gap which incites political projects which try to fill this gap. The political subject qua the 'people' is always already a variation of an eternal drive for a lost identity and community: "[A]t its root, there is the experience of a *lack,* a gap which has emerged in the harmonious continuity of the social. There is a fullness of the community which is missing. This is decisive: the construction of the 'people' will be the attempt to give a name to that absent fullness". (Laclau, 2005: pg. 85-86).

71 Balibar, Étienne and Wallerstein, Immanuel (1991) *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities,* London: Verso, pg. 3.

3.
POLITICS, PHILOSOPHY, IDEOLOGY: ALTHUSSER'S SINGULARITY

01 The manuscript of Althusser's uncompleted project on the superstructures was published in France in 1995, under the editorship of Jacques Bidet. Cf. Althusser, Louis (1995) *Sur la reproduction* (*On Reproduction*) (*SLR*) Paris: PUF.

02 Adopting a disapproving tone, Gregory Elliot, in his exhaustive and otherwise eulogistic intellectual biography of the French philosopher, christened Althusser's self-critique of his earlier positions, which followed from the events of '68, as a move from 'theoreticism' into 'politicism'. See: Elliot, Gregory (1987) *Althusser: The Detour of Theory*, London: Verso, especially chapter 4.

03 What should be singled out in this regard are the works produced by the Birmingham *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies.*

04 Hall, Stuart (1996) "Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-Structuralist Debates", in: Curran, James et al. *Cultural Studies and Communications,* London: Arnold. pg. 18-19.

05 Hirst, Paul (1979) *On Law and Ideology,* London: Macmillan, pg. 43.

06 Elliot (1987) *op.cit.*, pg. 232.

07 See Barrett, Michèle "Althusser's Marx, Althusser's Lacan" in: Kaplan, E.A. and Sprinker, Michael (1993) *The Althusserian Legacy,* London: Verso. pg. 178.

08 Eagleton (1991) *op.cit.*, pg. 144.

09 Hall "Cultural Studies and the Centre: some problematics and problems", in Hall et al. (1980), *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79,* London: Hutchinson, pg. 36.

10 Particularly significant in this regard is the debate between Ralph Milliband and Nicos Poulantzas. Millband reproached Poulantzas for adopting the Althusser's framework of politics, and thus completely obscuring the specificity of the State in developed capitalist countries: "To suggest that the relevant institutions are actually part of the State system does not seem to me to accord with reality, and tends to obscure the difference in this respect between these political systems and systems where ideological institutions are indeed part of a State monopolistic system of power. In the former systems, ideological institutions do retain a very high degree of autonomy; and are therefore the better able to conceal the degree to which they do belong to the system of capitalist power". Miliband, Ralph (1970) "The Capitalist State: A Reply to Nicos Poulantzas", *New Left Review,* No. 59, Jan-Feb, pg. 59.

11 Hall (1996) *op.cit.*, pg. 20.

12 "Note sur les AIE", in: *SLR,* pg. 253.

13 Hence the collection of essays, *Elements of Self Criticism,* published in France in 1974 (the first English translation appeared in 1976), where Althusser attempts to rectify the 'theoreticist deviations' of his earlier works, like *Reading Capital* and *For Marx.*

14 See *For Marx* (1969), especially the chapter "On the Materialist Dialectic".

15 Balibar attempted to seize the specificity of Althusser's notion of the *coupure* or *break* in "L'objet d'Althusser", in: Lazarus, Sylvain (1993) *Politique et philosophie dans l'oeuvre de Louis Althusser,* Paris: PUF.

16 "Reply to John Lewis", (*RJL*) in: Althusser, Louis (1976) *Elements of Self-Criticism,* London: Verso, pg. 37.
17 *RC*, pg. 134. The entire chapter 'Marxism is not a historicism' in Althusser's contribution to *Reading Capital* is a criticism of Gramsci's philosophical propositions.
18 *Is it Simple to be a Marxist in Philosophy,* (ISMP) in: *Elements of Self-Criticism,* London: Verso, pg. 169.
19 Cf. "Marx in his limits" (MIL) in: Althusser, Louis (2006) *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings,* London: Verso, pg. 48.
20 As young Marx wrote: "Clearly the weapon of criticism cannot replace the criticism of weapons, and material force must be overthrown by material force. But theory also becomes a material force once it has gripped the masses" ("A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction", in: Marx, Karl (1975) *Early Writings,* London: Penguin, pg. 251.
21 ibid.
22 *Lenin and Philosophy,* (*LP*) in: (1971) *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays,* pg. 64-65.
23 ibid.
24 *LP,* pg. 50.
25 *ISMP,* pg. 193.
26 *RJL,* pg. 58.
27 *LP,* pg. 45.
28 This is a point at which we can seize the influence that Althusser exerted on the philosophical project of Alain Badiou. Whereas Althusser recognises two conditions for philosophy, Badiou sees four: politics, the sciences, art and love. See for instance, Badiou, Alain (1999) *Manifesto for Philosophy,* Albany: State University of New York Press.
29 *LP,* pg. 31.
30 Althusser, Louis (1990) *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists & Other Essays,* London: Verso, pg. 75.
31 *LP,* pg. 61.
32 This warrant pertains to all sciences, including the Marxist science of history, which has to be strictly separated from ideology. Althusser is categorical here: "The scientific theory of Marxism [...] is not an ideology. An ideology is a *distorted* representation of reality: it is *necessarily* distorted, because it is not an objective but a *subjective* representation of reality – let us say, for the sake of brevity, a social (class) representa-

tion of reality. Science, in contrast, exists only on condition that it struggles against all forms of subjectivity, class subjectivity included (consider Lenin's struggles against the 'spontaneous' ideology of the proletariat); science is objective. Science provides knowledge of reality independent of 'subjective' class interests". ('The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy' in: Althusser, Louis (2003) *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings,* London: Verso, pg. 191.)

33 "Elements of Self Criticism" (ESC), in: (1976) *Elements of Self-Criticism,* London: Verso, pg. 154.

34 *LP,* pg. 66.

35 For Althusser, for example, the philosophical category of 'matter' is not substantialist but critical. It makes no sense vis-à-vis a real object, or a reality. It is a philosophical thesis: "[T]he philosophical *category* of matter [...] can never be confused with the contents of the scientific *concepts* of matter. The scientific concepts of matter define knowledges, relative to the historical state of the sciences, about the objects of those sciences. The content of the scientific concept of matter changes with the development, i.e. with the deepening of scientific knowledge. The meaning of the philosophical category of matter does not change, since it does not apply to any object of science, but affirms the *objectivity* of all scientific knowledge of an object. The category of *matter* cannot change. It is 'absolute'". (*LP*, pg. 48-49).

36 *LP,* pg. 62.

37 ibid.

38 It should not be surprising that Althusser would thus criticise as idealistic those positions in philosophy which sought to discover in 'matter' a fundamental principle of the world.

39 Cf. "Althusser: Lénine et la philosophie", in: Macherey, Pierre (1999) *Histoires de dinosaure,* Paris: PUF, pg. 275.

40 *ibid.*

41 As Althusser would ask: "What is a history which is no more than the repetition of the clash between two fundamental tendencies? The forms and arguments of the fight may vary, but if the whole history of philosophy is merely the history of these forms, they only have to be reduced to the immutable tendencies that they represent for the transformation of these forms to become a kind of *game for nothing.* Ultimately, philosophy has no history, philosophy is that strange theoretical site where nothing really happens, nothing but this *repetition* of nothing". (*LP*, pg. 56)

42 *ISMP,* pg. 170.
43 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Towards an Investigation' (ISA), in: Althusser (1971) *Lenin and Philosophy,* pg. 171.
44 Thompson, E.P. (1978) *Poverty of Theory,* London: Merlin Press, pg. 6.
45 *FM,* pg. 244-245.
46 "Preface to *Capital* Volume One', in: (1971) *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays,* pg. 75.
47 Marx, Karl (1970) *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy,* Moscow: Progress Publishers, pg. 206. Quoting Marx further: "It would seem to be the proper thing to start with the real and concrete elements, with the actual preconditions, e.g., to start in the sphere of economy with population, which forms the basis and the subject of the whole social process of production. Closer consideration shows, however, that this is wrong. Population is an abstraction if, for instance, one disregards the classes of which it is composed. These classes in turn remain empty terms if one does not know the factors on which they depend, e.g., wage-labour, capital, and so on. These presuppose exchange, division of labour, prices, etc. For example, capital is nothing without wage-labour, without value, money, price, etc. If one were to take population as the point of departure, it would be a very vague notion of a complex whole and through closer definition one would arrive analytically at increasingly simple concepts; from imaginary concrete terms one would move to more and more tenuous abstractions until one reached the most simple definitions. From there it would be necessary to make the journey again in the opposite direction until one arrived once more at the concept of population, which is this time not a vague notion of a whole, but a totality comprising many determinations and relations". (ibid, pg. 206)
48 Ibid.
49 *RPJL,* pg. 50, footnote.
50 Ibid.
51 Balibar, Étienne (1974) *Cinq études du matérialisme historique,* Paris: François Maspero, pg. 48.
52 ISMP, pg. 184-185.
53 *ISA,* pg. 131.
54 Marx, Karl 'The Civil War in France', in: *Selected Works, op.cit.* pg. 285.
55 See "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte", in: *Selected Works,* pg. 96-179.

56 MIL, pg. 104

57 Lenin, V.I. (1970) *The State and Revolution,* Peking: Foreign Languages Press.

58 Balibar, Étienne (1977) *On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat,* London: New Left Books, pg. 71. In one of his later essays Althusser would use the metaphor of the 'machine' in order to come up with an original understanding of the relationship between force and legality, between class domination and political and legal power. The State is here quite literally a machine, a machine of transformation. The essence of the State resides in that it translates the violence of class domination, the 'excess' of its force over the dominated classes, into legal and legitimate power, into laws and universal principles. Quoting Althusser: "*The state* [...] *is a machine for producing legal power* [...] For class domination does indeed find itself sanctioned in and by the state, in that *only the Force of the dominant class enters into it and is recognised there*. What is more, this Force is the only 'motor' of the State, the only energy to be transformed into power, into right, laws and norms". (MIL, pg. 107, 109-110)

59 "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte", pg. 169.

60 Balibar (1974), pg. 93.

61 "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte", pg. 127.

62 ISA, pg. 146.

63 'Le marxisme comme théorie « finie »', (TF) in : Althusser, Louis (1998) *Solitude de Machiavel et autre textes,* Paris: PUF, pg. 288. Althusser would draw from the following political conclusion from this: rather then 'winning over' or 'democratising' the civil society, the stake of the revolutionary struggle is to dismantle the ideological State apparatuses, in the same sense in which the State has to be dismantled and abolished. "[T]he proletariat must seize State power in order to destroy the existing bourgeois State apparatus and, in a first phase, replace it with a quite different, proletarian State apparatus, then in the latter phases set in motion a radical process, that of the destruction of the State (the end of State power, the end of every State apparatus". (ISA, pg. 135).

64 ISA, pg. 146.

65 Althusser would see two particular ideological State apparatuses playing a crucial role: the legal-political system, on the one hand, and the education system on the other. In fact, he puts a specific emphasis on the ideological role of the schooling system for the reproduction of

capitalist relations, where "[e]ach mass ejected *en route* is practically provided with the ideology which suits its role it has to fulfil in class society: the role of the exploited (with a 'highly-developed' 'professional', 'ethical', 'civic', 'national' and a-political consciousness); the role of the agent of exploitation (ability to give the workers orders and speak to them: 'human relations'), of the agent of repression (ability to give orders and enforce obedience 'without discussion', or ability to manipulate the demagogy of a political leader's rhetoric), or of the professional ideologist (ability to treat consciousnesses with the respect, i.e. with the contempt, blackmail, and demagogy they deserve, adapted to the accents of Morality, of Virtue, of 'Transcendence', of the Nation". (ISA, pg. 147)

66 In this sense we can draw a parallel between Althusser and Foucault, in terms of the latter's remarkable studies on the heterogeneous nexus of power relations invested in the cacophony of social practices and discourses. See Foucault, Michel (1977) *Discipline and Punish*, New York: Random House, and also Foucault, Michel (1980) *Power/Knowledge*, New York: Pantheon Books. Althusser's difference from Foucault, however, emerges on two fronts. Against Foucault, who, having demystified and deconstructed the 'monolithic' structure of power into a pluralistic and heterogeneous web of social relations, remains ultimately unable to link together all the heterogeneous practices, Althusser forcefully points out the unifying capacities of the dominant ideology and of the State apparatus (I owe this remark to Rastko Močnik - see his book, *3 teorije: Ideologija, Nacija, Institucija*, CSUB: Belgrade, 2003). At the same time, against Foucault, who seems to reintroduce a specific 'metaphysics of power' by turning power into a substance – power comes from everywhere and nowhere and is productive at the same time – Althusser seeks to further demystify the nature of power relations by decisively rooting them in the fact of class exploitation and domination: "Let us note straight away, to avoid all temptation to invoke metaphysical Powers here ... that Force and Violence are relative, not absolute concepts; that Force designates *the Force of the one who has the greater force,* and Violence, the *Violence of the one who is the more violent* ... Some people would like to see, in the trick theatre that they have themselves rigged up, Force, pure and alone, and Violence, pure and alone, produce the effects of fascination that suit their purposes. But what we mean is something else entirely:

class struggle, where one class is powerful and violent only because it is the dominant class, in other words, exercises its force and violence upon another class (which is also a force) that it must, in a never-ending struggle, hold in check if it is to maintain the upper hand over it". (MIL, 108-109).

67 "The ISAs are not the realization of ideology *in general,* nor even the conflict-free realization of the ideology of the ruling class. The ideology of the ruling class does not become the ruling ideology by the grace of God, nor even by virtue of the seizure of State power alone. It is by the installation of the ISAs in which this ideology is realized and realizes itself that it becomes the ruling ideology. But this installation is not achieved all by itself; on the contrary, it is the stake in a very bitter and continuous class struggle: first against the former ruling classes and their positions in the old and new ISAs, then against the exploited class". (ISA, pg. 172)

68 The point here is not to reduce the State to sheer power and manipulation, and thus to collapse the difference between different forms of rule, as for example, the difference between liberal democracy and fascism, between democratic and dictatorial regimes. The question is rather to understand how universalistic political institutions – liberal-democracy, first and foremost – regardless of, or precisely because of their universality, reside upon relations of force, relations of class exploitation. This is why, for Althusser, as for Marx, the question of modern democracy would ultimately represent the question of "the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie under the forms of the parliamentary or the presidential democratic apparatus". (*SLR*, pg. 135)

69 Bidet, Jacques "En guise d'introduction: une invitation a relire Althusser", in: *Sur la Reproduction,* pg. 5.

70 ISA, pg. 149.

71 ISA, pg. 151.

72 ISA, pg. 156.

73 *SPN,* pg. 377.

74 This is the way in which Althusser is most commonly read today, especially in the Anglophone context. The most elaborate theoretical examples of this reading can be found in the work of Stuart Hall, Ernesto Laclau, Judith Butler, and Slavoj Žižek. See especially Laclau, Ernesto (1977) *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory,* London: New Left Books; Butler, Judith (1997) *The Psychic Life of Power,* Stanford:

Stanford University Press. Žižek, Slavoj (1989) *The Sublime Object of Ideology,* London: Verso.

75 ISA, pg. 160.
76 ISA, pg. 162.
77 Močnik (2003) *op.cit*, pg. 3.
78 ISA, pg. 169.
79 Ibid.
80 Karl Marx (1956) *Capital, Vol.1,* London: Lawrence and Wishart, pg. 88.
81 Spinoza *Ethics,* Part I, Appendix, in: *Complete Works*, Indianapolis: Hackett, pg. 239.
82 *ESC,* pg. 117, footnote.
83 Balibar 'L'objet d'Althusser', *op.cit.*, pg. 98.
84 *ISMP,* pg. 205.
85 This was indeed the operation through which Althusser was read philosophically in the 1980s, especially in the context of the Ljubljana 'school' of psychoanalytic theory. See for example Žižek (1989). In the Anglophone context, see Laclau (1977) and Butler (1997).
86 Cf. Badiou, Alain (1998) *Abrégé de métapolitique* (*Metapolitics*), Paris: Éditios du seuil, pg. 73.
87 Althusser would, in fact, go as far as to speak of the 'philosophical party of the State' in this regard. See the text 'La transformation de la philosophie', in: Althusser, Louis (1994) *Sur la philosophie,* Paris: Gallimard. See also the essay 'Philosophie et Marxisme', that is, the correspondence with the Mexican philosopher Fernanda Navarro, published in the same volume.
88 Politics and class struggle are consubstantial for Althusser. However, this does not mean that class struggle is only 'political' in the narrow sense. Nor that politics is narrowly 'classist'. The structural concept of class struggle is central in this regard.
89 TF, pg. 286.
90 Ibid, pg. 285.
91 Althusser, Louis (1999) *Machiavelli and Us,* London: Verso, pg. 121.
92 Negri, Antonio "Notes on the Evolution of the Thought of Late Althusser", in: Callari, A. and Ruccio, D. (eds.) (1996) *Postmodern Materialism and the Future of Marxist Theory,* Hanover: Wesleyan UP, pg. 54.
93 *ISMP,* pg. 170-171.
94 TF, pg. 285-286.
95 TF, pg. 289.

96 *ISMP*, pg. 171.
97 Ibid, pg. 172.
98 It is here that we can see Althusser be anticipating the contemporary debates which oppose politics to 'the political'. Althusser in fact prefigures the positions and arguments of thinkers like Badiou, Lazarus and Rancière in their conviction that politics needs to be extracted from the jurisdiction of any type of the transcendental gaze – which is always, in the last instance, the gaze of the State. See Badiou, Alain (1998) *Abrégé de métapolitique* (*Metapolitics*), Paris: Éditios du seuil, and, also, Rancière, Jacques (1995a) *La mésentente* (*Disagreement*), Paris: Galilée. One might add that, by comparison to some of the contemporary authors, Althusser's significance lies in the fact that he does not abandon the categories of science and history, in the fact that he accords a necessary place for the objectivity of knowledge and scientific theory (and not only for philosophy) in its encounter with real politics and its innovative tendencies.
99 Jameson (1996) *op.cit.*, pg. 8.

01 Badiou, Alain "*Présence et Présent",* lecture in Bruxelles, Palais des Beux-Arts, 28th March 2007.

02 On the peculiar ideological 'supplements' to the historical idea of the nation, and particularly on the relationship between nationalism and racism in the writing of national histories, see Balibar and Wallerstein (1991) *op.cit.* Also, see Balibar, Étienne (1992) *Les frontières de la démocratie,* Paris: La Découverte, especially the chapter on "Racism, Nationalism and the State".

03 De Tocqueville, Alexis (1945) *Democracy in America,* New York: Knopf, vol. 2, bk. 4, pg. 331.

04 Rancière, Jacques (2004) 'Introducing Disagreement', in: *Angelaki,* Vol. 9, No. 3, pg. 7.

05 The critical operation that I propose here, if it takes inspiration from Badiou's and Rancière's approaches, does not seek to engage with the two thinkers – with the complexity and the innovations of their respective philosophical projects – in a direct way. Nevertheless, I do need to acknowledge two things vis-à-vis these thinkers: 1) the fact that both of their projects essentially stem from an attempt to critically confront the 'obscure present', which in sense is precisely the present of post-socialism. Indeed, it does not seem exaggerated to claim that what lies at the core of Badiou's philosophical endeavour is an attempt to forcefully re-establish, against the obscurity of the present, the link between philosophy and the novelty of political emancipation. For a systematic discussion of Badiou under this light, see Hallward, Peter (2003) *Badiou: A Subject to Truth,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. At the same time, Rancière openly sets his task as rethinking the very notion of democracy as a category of division and uncompromising egalitarianism against the logic of consensus. See *Ranciere* (1995a) *op.cit.*. 2) The second observation to make is that Rancière's and Badiou's relationship to Marxism, and especially to the Marxist approaches that I deal with here – namely, the work of Louis Althusser – is a complex issue, which invites a fruitful examination and problematisation that unfortunately goes beyond the confines of this text. If both of these thinkers were Althusser's students in the 1960s,

Rancière's work has been shaped to a large degree by an attempt at a strict distantiation from his teacher (See for instance, Rancière, Jacques (1974) *La leçon d'Althusser,* Paris: Gallimard), while Badiou has himself maintained a more productive relationship to Althusser, exemplified, for instance, in his recent book *Petit panthéon portatif,* (2008) Paris: La fabrique.

4.
SPRINGTIME FOR HEGEMONY:
LACLAU AND MOUFFE AND THE 'SLOVENIAN SPRING'

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

02 ibid, pg. 25.

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

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

05 As Chris Marker remarked in his remarkable 1977 film *Le Fond de l'air est rouge* (*A Grin Without a Cat*) with regard to the French Communist Party: "the party which was slowest to de-Stalinize, was the fastest to de-Leninize".

06 One of the most exhaustive anthologies of the Slovenian *Alternative* movements can be found in the collections of essays: Malečkar, Nela and Mastnak, Tomaž eds. (1985), *Punk pod Slovenci* (Punk under Slovenes), Ljubljana: Krt. See also Močnik, Rastko (2003) "Ljubljana: Cultural Policies and the Balkan Nexus" (mimeo.)

07 As famously elaborated by the Hungarian 'dissident' intellectual György Konrád. See his 1984 work *Antipolitics,* London: Quartet.

08 One of the most famous public interventions was the 'poster scandal' in 1987, where a group of artists associated with the *Alternative* sent a re-designed Nazi poster to a competition which was to commemorate the Yugoslav Day of the Youth (and Tito's birthday). The poster won the first prize.

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

10 What is topical here are the interventions of Slavoj Žižek, Tomaž Mastnak, Rado Riha and others from the mid and late 1980s in the journals such as *Problemi* and *Vestnik.*

11 One of the cornerstones of the *Alternative* movement, the experimental music group *Laibach* could be found stating: "Politics is the highest form of popular culture and we, who create the contemporary European pop culture, consider ourselves politicians". Quoted in Thompson, Mark (1992) *A Paper House: the ending of Yugoslavia*, London: Hutchinson, pg. 44.

12 Močnik, Rastko (1998) *Koliko fašizma? (How much Fascism?),* Zagreb: Bastard, pg. 40.

13 See Mastnak, Tomaž (1992) *Vzhodno od Raja: civilna družba pod komunizmom i po njem* (*East of Eden: Civil Society Under and After Com-*

munism), Ljubljana: Cankarjeva Založba. For an alternative view, see Močnik "Ljubljana: Cultural Policies and the Balkan Nexus" (mimeo).

14 ibid, pg. 57.

15 Mastnak, Tomaž (1988) "Implozija družbenega" (The Implosion of the Social), in: *Problemi: Eseji,* 26, 7, pg. 67.

16 In this sense, 'civil society' was also an eminently post-Marxist concept as it allowed for an immanent critique of the practices of socialist regimes themselves and for an imagining of alternatives internal to these regimes. As Mastnak would note: "Theorising civil society was an alternative to Marxism. It had, through 'post-Marxism', opened an intellectual exit from the then dominant social and political theory, and thus also from the socialist (and especially 'self-management') ideology". Mastnak (1992) *op.cit.*, pg. 55.

17 The most important 'dissident' writings on the subject are the works of Ferenc Fehér, György Márkus, Mihály Vajda, but also Vaclav Havel and Jacek Kuron in the 1970s and the 1980s. For an extensive analysis of these approaches see Mastnak (1992) *op.cit*. 'Civil society', at the same time, seemed a theoretical fetish in the academic and intellectual circles West in the 1980s and the early 1990s, especially for the revived discipline of political philosophy. The most crucial elaborations of the 'reinvented' civil society are to be found in theorists such as John Keane, Andrew Arato and Jean Cohen, Larry Diamond, Ernest Gellner. See Keane, John (ed.) (1988a) *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives*, London: Verso, and also: Keane, John (1988b) *Democracy and Civil Society: On the Predicaments of European Socialism, the Prospects for Democracy, and the Problem of Controlling Social and Political Power*, London: Verso. Cohen, J. and Arato, A. (1992) *Civil Society and Political Theory,* Cambridge: MIT Press. Gellner, Ernest (1996) *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and Its Rivals,* London: Penguin.

18 Mastnak (1992) *op.cit*, pg. 26.

19 See, for instance: Heller, Agnes 'On Formal Democracy", in Keane, John (ed.) *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives*.

20 Cohen and Arato (1992) *op.cit*, pg. ix.

21 It is interesting that Laclau and Mouffe want to explicitly dissociate themselves from the notion of 'civil society', rejecting the separation of civil society and the State as being too rigid, and as politically inappropriate today (See the interview in *Mladina,* pg. 24). But it is difficult

to imagine their notion of hegemony without this dichotomy. This dichotomy, as we saw in the first chapter, was central for Gramsci, who essentially bound his concept of hegemony to civil society in its separation from the State apparatus, in order to think the conditions for the political unification and development of an autonomous revolutionary politics. If Laclau and Mouffe derive their entire political substance form Gramsci's idea of a 'political and cultural hegemony', then their notion remains inseparable to the conceptual space of civil society.

22 *HSS*, pg. 167.

23 *HSS*, pg. 153.

24 See for example Eduard Bernstein's *Evolutionary Socialism,* (1961) New York, Schocken Books.

25 Wood, Ellen M. "The Uses and Abuses of 'Civil Society", in: Miliband, Ralph and Panitch, Leo eds. (1990) *The Retreat of the Intellectuals, Socialist Register,* New York: Monthly Review Press, pg. 67.

26 Ash, T.G. (1990) *We the people*, London: Granta, pg. 151.

27 See Keane (1998b) *op.cit.*, and Gellner (1996) *op.cit.*

28 Cf. Laclau, Ernesto (1988) "Political Significance of the Concept of Negativity", in: *Vestnik,* 1988, 1, pg. 78.

29 According to Marx, the modern political emancipation in the liberal State – which recognises equality of individuals before the law and equality of citizens in relation to the State, regardless of their social status, their privileges, or their religious affiliation – is *partial* because it leaves untouched (and therefore reproduces) the inequalities in the socio-economic sphere. A *complete*, or 'human emancipation' must start from the unconditional demand for equality not only of rights but primarily so of the means of material life and production. See the Jewish Question'. See Marx, Karl (1975) *Early Writings,* London: Penguin.

30 Wood (1990), pg. 72.

31 As Fredric Jameson noted: "when one is immersed in the immediate – the year-by-year experience of cultural and informational messages, of successive events, of urgent priorities – the abrupt distance afforded by an abstract concept, a more global characterization of the secret affinities between those apparently autonomous and unrelated domains, and of the rhythms and hidden sequences of things we normally remember only in isolation and one by one, is a unique resource,

particularly since the history of the preceding few years is always what is least accessible to us. Historical reconstruction, then, the positing of global characterizations and hypotheses, the abstraction from the 'blooming, buzzing confusion' of immediacy, was always a radical intervention in the here-and-now and the promise of resistance to its blind fatalities". Jameson, Fredric (1998) *The Cultural Turn*, London: Verso, pg. 35.

32 Vajda, Mihaly (1981) *The State and Socialism: Political essays,* London: Allison & Busby, pg. 6

33 This is the centrepiece of their attack on Marxism, as we saw in the second chapter. Laclau and Mouffe maintain that the conception according to which society is essentially divided into two opposed and antagonistic classes – the bourgeoisie and the proletariat – seems to imply a separation between the realm of essences and that of appearances, where concrete social objects are not recognised in themselves, but are always read against another, abstract or essential reality: the economic laws of capitalism. Marxism is thus seen as always reducing empirical politics to abstract and essentialist laws, as reducing social relations and identities to something other than their actual discursive configuration – to the objective laws of economic development. The only problem, as we saw with Althusser, is that what Laclau and Mouffe dispose of here, in their 'pseudo-empiricism of discourses', is one of the principles of scientific practice: conceptual abstraction.

34 Bennett, Tony (1990) *Outside Literature,* London: Routledge, pg. 263.

35 *HSS,* pg. 17.

36 Cf. Keane (1988b), pg. 237.

37 ibid.

38 Žižek, Slavoj (1989) *Druga smrt Josipa Broza Tita* (*The Second Death of Josip Broz Tito),* Ljubljana: DZS, pg. 61. Žižek's text was originally published in *Mladina,* just after the arrest of Janša.

39 ibid, pg. 60.

40 Cf. 'Why do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics', in: Laclau, Ernesto (1996) *Emancipation(s),* London: Verso.

41 ibid, pg. 75.

42 ibid, pg. 76.

43 For a critical overview of the political and socio-economic conflicts in Yugoslavia in the early 1980s, see Woodward, Susan (1995) *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War,* Washington: Brookings (especially chapters 3 and 4).

44 See *Prispevki za slovenski nacionalni program, Nova Revija,* No. 57, 1987.

45 See Hribar, Tine "Slovensko poletje" ("Slovenian Spring") (1988) *Nova Revija* (No. 77, July), pg. 1343-1344. Hribar would also add: "According to its constitution, the Socialist Republic of Slovenia is a State. But this 'State' does not have even the most fundamental attributes of statehood. The authority of the Slovenian 'State' is neither full, nor exhaustive, in both cases it is bound to a higher instance. We do not have our own foreign policy (we do not have a foreign minister), nor our own defence (we do not have a minister of defence), and our internal politics is subordinated, as the arrest of Janša has shown, to the organs of federal state security. In relation to the terrain, which is being occupied by the Yugoslav Army, the entire territorial sovereignty of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia seems to be under question." (ibid, pg. 1347-1348).

46 See Repe, Božo (2002) *Viri o demokratizaciji i osamosvojitvi Slovenije* (*Sources on the Democratisation and Independence of Slovenia*), Ljubljana: Arhivski Zavod.

47 Tomaž Mastnak, for example, would end up theorising and appraising the necessary link between civil society and Slovenian independence. In an essay "Nacionalna država in nacionalizacija civilne družbe" (National State and the Nationalisation of Civil Society), published in the special issue of *Nova Revija* dedicated to "Independent Slovenia" (No. 95, 9, 1990), Mastnak would first state that "there are no more positive reasons for the existence of Yugoslavia", and then go on arguing that "democracy in Slovenia cannot exist without a sovereign Slovenian state. The national state as such, nevertheless, assures neither complete sovereignty nor democracy. The Slovenian State can only be sovereign, that is, the demand for the sovereign national State can only be successful, on the condition that its citizens are sovereign. Not simply when the internally homogeneous Slovenian State would limit the sovereignty (that is, the aggressiveness and the terrorism) of the Yugoslav State, but only when the pluralistic civil society would limit its own State as a sovereign" (pg. 456).

48 Kuzmanić T. (1994) "Civil Society and Nationalism in Slovenia", Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences (mimeo.)

49 Analogously (or in fact homologously) to the Committee, DEMOS, or the 'Democratic Opposition of Slovenia', was also the embodiment of a plurality of political orientations – nationalist, liberal, social-demo-

cratic, ecological, etc. The parties which formed it were: SDZ (Slovenian Democratic Association), SDSS (Social-Democratic Party of Slovenia), SKD (Slovenian Christian-Democrats), SKZ (Slovenian Peasant Association), the Green Party, SOS (Slovenian Craftsmen Party).

50 Močnik, Rastko (1998) *op.cit.,* pg. 32-33.

51 Ibid, pg. 40.

52 Ibid, pg. 39.

53 Ibid.

54 Mastnak (1992), pg. 95.

55 Mastnak seemed to have internalised this paradox in one of his engaged writings from the moment of Slovenian independence: "Democracy does not exist without national rights. And yet, democracy cannot be founded upon the national moment alone. Democracy is without origins and in democracy there are no rights which are more important than others. The rights of lesbians are not less important than the right to use one's own language; national identity is one amongst many identities and in principle it is not more important than the sexual identity, or any other". See Mastnak (1990) *op.cit.*, pg. 456. The problem here is evident: you cannot coherently claim at the same time that nationalism is one of the preconditions and one of the consequences of the democratic and pluralistic order.

56 *SPN,* pg. 418. For a problematisation of Gramsci's position within Marxism on this regard see Pozo, Luis M. (2007) "The Roots of Hegemony: The mechanism of class accommodation and the emergence of the nation-people", *Capital and Class,* Spring, No. 91, pg. 55-89. What is important to add is that Laclau comes to paradoxically acknowledge this fact in his recent attempt to revise and substantialise the political conception presented in *Hegemony* (See Laclau (2005) *On Populist Reason*). When the vision of politics and 'radical democracy' constructed simply out of the conjunction of legalistic forms and identitary representations of social groups exhibits its radical lack of a political substance, of a determinate universal reference, one turns to the figure of populism, and by the same token, to the nationalist ideological spectrum. The multiplicity of particular social identities now fuse decisively into the identitary One of the community. But this is where the development of Laclau's theoretical and political endeavours comes full circle: from his initial fascination with Peronist nationalism, to the excursions towards the liberal dogmas, Laclau resurrects

himself as a theorist of the *populus*. Not a theorist of the *plebs*, i.e. of the people as the undifferentiated mass of exploited and oppressed classes, of the 'vulgar', the 'common' and the 'underdog', but a theorist of the people correspondent to its institutional representation in the State, in the sense of the mass structures of the State.

5.
LIBERAL DEMOCRACY AND ITS DISCONTENTS: THE CASE OF 'DEMOCRATISATION' IN YUGOSLAVIA

01 Francis Fukuyama (1989) "The End of History?", in: *The National Interest,* Washington: The Nixon Centre, (summer issue), later expanded into a book: (1992) *The End of History and the Last Man,* London: Penguin. Jacques Derrida has been a stringent and stinging critic of Fukuyama's 'neo-evangelism'. See Jacques Derrida (1994) *Spectres of Marx,* London: Routledge.

02 Quoting Fukuyama: "The state that emerges at the end of history is liberal insofar as it recognizes and protects through a system of law man's universal right to freedom, and democratic insofar as it exists only with the consent of the governed". Or, again: "But in the universal homogenous state, all prior contradictions are resolved and all human needs are satisfied. There is no struggle or conflict over 'large' issues, and consequently no need for generals or statesmen; what remains is primarily economic activity". (Quoted from http://www.wesjones.com/eoh.htm - page visited 10/03/07).

03 See Woodward (1995) *The Balkan Tragedy,* especially chapter 3. I will be quoting extensively Woodward's work throughout this chapter because it is, to this day, and despite some of its shortcomings, the most exhaustive and the most meticulous scholarly approach to the break-up of Yugoslavia, and to the situation from 1990 to 1995. I find other similar works in this field – for example, Silber, Laura and Little, Alan (1995) *The Death of Yugoslavia*, London: Penguin Books and BBC Books, or Glenny, Misha (1992) *The Fall of Yugoslavia,* London: Penguin – suffering from a too shallow, journalistic methodology, and also from a overt political bias. Furthermore, it is important to note that currently there are no major historiographic attempts to address

this context from within a 'nativist' perspective, from the position of ex-Yugoslav historiography. This problem was discussed recently at a conference named 'The Uneventment of History: the Case of Yugoslavia" held at the University of Ljubljana in October 2007.

04 See Kuzmanić, Tonči and Kovačič, Gorazd (2004) "Pojmovanje države in nacije pri novorevijaših v osemdesetih letih" ("The understanding of the nation and the state amongst the writers of Nova Revija in the 1980s"), Časopis za kritiko znanosti, no. 215/216, Ljubljana: ČKZ.

05 As Branka Magaš pointed out: "Yugoslavia's economic problems have, no doubt, been aggravated by the high cost of money characteristic of the international finance market since the oil crisis in 1976 [...] In 1983 alone $900 million were added to the country's $20 billion foreign debt. To service this debt, and in order to be able to borrow more, the government has been cutting down imports and stepping up exports 'at all costs'. Import reductions have in turn produced a great shortage of essential materials. The result has been great industrial stagnation". Magaš, Branka (1993) *The Destruction of Yugoslavia: Tracing the Break-up, 1980-92,* London: Verso, pg. 95.

06 According to Susan Woodward: "By 1985-86 the preconditions of a revolutionary situation were apparent. One million people were officially registered as unemployed. The increasing rate of unemployment was above 20 percent in all republics except Slovenia and Croatia. Inflation was at 50 percent a year and climbing [...] Allocations decisions increasingly became stark questions of survival. Attempts to alleviate the pressures made inflation worse and undermined economic management. This economic polarization led to social polarization" (Woodward (1995) *op.cit.*, pg. 73).

07 Ibid.

08 Ibid, pg. 99.

09 Ibid, pg. 112.

10 Magaš (1993) *op.cit.*, pg. 289.

11 As Woodward noted: "the prevention of federal elections was only one of the actions by the governments of these three republics [Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia] that was aimed at destroying federal authority. This authority was first challenged, and effectively eliminated, by the unilateral action of the (then Socialist) Republic of Slovenia in September 1989, which passed amendments to its own constitution that claimed to render the federal constitution irrelevant to Slovenia. Following this

act by Slovenia, the survival of the Yugoslav federation became impossible in constitutional terms". (Woodward, 1995, pg. 29)

12 The two notable exceptions were the Association for a Yugoslav Democratic Initiative (known by its Serbo-Croatian acronym UJDI), an anti-nationalist, democratic and liberal political platform launched by non-party intellectuals and academics, and the federal Prime Minister Marković's party, the Alliance of Reformist Forces of Yugoslavia. Both of these political platforms ended up playing a minor political role in the ensuing elections: UJDI failed to constitute itself as a significant subject in the parliamentary democratic 'contest', whilst Marković was crippled due to the decision to postpone the federal elections, and afterwards due to Slovenia's actual veto on holding these elections.

13 Which proved to be a very destructive political formula, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

14 ibid, pg. 144.

15 On the 'juridical' conflict between the republics as an overture to the nationalist eruption, see Woodward, *op.cit.*, chapters 3 and 4.

16 This is Article 1 in: *Ustav Republike Hrvatske (The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia)*, Zagreb: Informator, 1991.

17 See Samary, Catherine (1995) *Yugoslavia Dismembered,* New York: Monthly Review Press.

18 The 1974 constitution defined the Socialist Republic of Croatia as 'the national state of the Croatian nation, the state of the Serbian nation in Croatia and the state of the nationalities who live in it', whilst at the same time stating that: 'The Socialist Republic of Croatia is a state based upon the sovereignty of the people and the rule and the self-management of the working class and all working people, as well as the socialist self-governing democratic community of working people, citizens, equal nations and nationalities'. Quoted from: (1974) *Ustav SFR Jugoslavije: Ustavni zakon za provođenje Ustava SFRJ; Ustav SR Hrvatske: Ustavni zakon za provođenje Ustava SRH,* Zagreb: Narodno sveučilište grada Zagreba, Centar za aktualni politički studij, 1974.

19 Woodward, *op.cit.,* pg. 103.

20 At a campaign rally in Zagreb in April 1990, Tuđman notoriously stated: "Thank God, my wife is neither a Serb not a Jew".

21 Woodward, *op.cit.,* pg. 120.

22 For the role of media and ideological propaganda in the fuelling of nationalism between Croatia and Serbia, see Skopljanac Brunner et al. (2000) *Media and War,* Zagreb and Belgrade: Argument.

23 See Samary (1995) *op.cit.*, pg. 80. See also Robert M. Hayden, (1999) *Blueprints for a House Divided: The Constitutional Logic of Yugoslav Conflicts*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, pg. 70.

24 Robert Hayden would name this process *constitutional nationalism*: a system of institutional discrimination and of 'negative action' towards groups other than the majority nation. According to Hayden: "A system of constitutional nationalism [...] institutionalizes a division between those who are of the sovereign nation, ethnically defined, and those who are not. The latter may hold citizenship but cannot aspire to equality [...] In this way constitutional nationalism institutionalizes social conflict by defining part of the population to be political and social aliens even if formally citizens" (Hayden, pg. 15-16). Hayden would also note that "[here] the effect of citizenship laws has been the reverse of naturalization in the United States, turning into foreigners, with very few rights of any kind, people in the various republics who had been fellow citizens in federal Yugoslavia and thus guaranteed equal rights in all republics under the federal constitution (art. 249)". (ibid, pg. 76).

25 See the discussion of Fichte by Étienne Balibar in his essay 'Fichte and the Internal Border: On *Addresses to the German Nation*' in: Balibar (1994) *op.cit*.

26 In September 1989, the Serbian parliament adopted constitutional changes which committed the Serbian State to protect Serbs living elsewhere. It had also revoked the autonomy of its two provinces, Vojvodina and Kosovo, so in order to reconstitute Serbian the sovereignty of the Serbian nation. (See Woodward, *op.cit*, pg. 107 et passim).

27 After the elections, Tuđman decided to form a grand coalition of all, or in fact, all but one of the parliamentary political parties, in support of the process of 'democratisation'. This is why the first government of democratic Croatia was dubbed the 'government of democratic unity'. This was confirmed by a declaration issued by non-party intellectuals affiliated to one of the major oppositional parties at the beginning of the nineties, the Coalition of National Agreement (KNS): 'We believe that political and ideological differences, characteristic for each democratic and pluralist society, would not be an obstacle to the fact that all political parties, that all Croatian citizens would unite in the struggle for the defence of the democratic and sovereign Croatia, as well as the defence of the will of the Croatian nation, expressed on the last

multi-party elections'; cited from: Jože Vlahović, "*Danas" 1982 – 1992,* Rijeka: Novi List, 2002, pg. 132.

28 Rašković's own political demands were, however, the inverted reflections of Tuđman's government's policy of 'culturalisation' of the State: "The Serbs do not want a second state in Croatia, but they demand autonomy ... The Serbian people in Croatia should be allowed to speak their language, to write their script, to have their schools, to have their education programs, their publishing houses, their newspapers". Quoted from: Silber and Little (1995), pg. 102.

29 As Tuđman would explain: "The Serbs in Croatia cannot become a ruling people. We have arranged our affairs in democratic Croatia the way the Serbs in Serbia, the Slovenes in Slovenia, the Macedonians in Macedonia, and every people the world over have arranged their affairs. Here in Croatia, the Croatians are sovereign, and to the Serbs are accorded all the rights of a national minority and all individual rights [...] But it cannot be asked that about 8% [sic] of the population, the Serbs, who found themselves here as a result of historical developments, should be sovereign in the country of Croatia, because nowhere in the world could such a thing exist". (*Danas,* 2nd July 1993).

30 As Woodward noted: "The majoritatian appeal of the Slogan 'all Serbs in one state' replaced the impersonal, administrative slogan of "border rectification" in the campaign of Serbian leader Milosevic and his new socialist party, but this appeared as an open threat to leaders in neighboring republics." (Woodward, *op. cit,* pg. 133).

31 See Samary (1995) *op. cit,* pg. 76-79.

32 Woodward, *op. cit,* pg. 146.

33 Franjo Tuđman, *Vjesnik,* Zagreb, 30th October 1990.

34 This thesis is propagated by Sabrina Ramet in her 1997 book *Whose Democracy? Nationalism, Religion and the Doctrine of Collective Rights in Post-1989 Europe,* Boston: Rowman & Littlefield.

35 Within the ex-Yugoslav context, one of the loudest advocates of this thesis was the Croatian political philosopher, and former head of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Croatia, Žarko Puhovski. See his essay 'Nationalism and Democracy in Post-Communist Key' in: Skenderović Ćuk N. and Podunavac M. (1999) *Civil Society in the Countries in Transition,* Subotica: ALD.

36 See Meštrović, Stjepan G, Slaven Letica and Miroslav Goreta (1993) *Habits of the Balkan Heart*. College Station, Texas: Texas A & M University Press.

37 For a powerful critique of such 'culturalist' argumnets, see Buden (2002) *op.cit*.

38 The opposition between liberal, or civic nationalism and 'ethnic' nationalism is, in fact, a staple theoretical dualism, which was articulated already by the mid-20th century. See Hans Kohn (1944) *The Idea of Nationalism; a Study of its Origins and Background*, London: MacMillan. In the post-Yugoslav context, this opposition was particularly brought forward by Vesna Pusić. See her text "Upotreba nacionalizma i politika priznavanja" ("The use of nationalism and the politics of recognition"), *in: Erasmus,* Zagreb, 1994: no. 8, pg. 2-20.

39 At the centre of contemporary debates, this distinction is formulated as an opposition between the 'French model' and the 'German model'. See, for example, Rogers Brubaker (1992) *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany,* Cambridge: Harvard University Press. For an alternative view, and a historical relativisiation of the distinction, see Louis Dumont (1994) *German Ideology: From France to Germany and Back,* Chicago: Chicago University Press.

40 The argument of the cultural presence of the 'cultural nation' has been a staple pattern of explanation in the studies of nationalism in the post-socialist context. An interesting case here is the analysis of Robert Hayden, (1999) which we cited above. Hayden in fact touches upon the heart of the paradox of liberal democracy, as he centres his analysis precisely on the question of the new, liberal constitutional structures. In locating with precision the paradoxical phenomenon of 'constitutional nationalism' in the post-socialist context, however, Hayden, however, immediately steps away from it, as he explains it away in terms of the cultural presence of the cultural model of the 'ethnic nation'. See Hayden, 1999, pg. 67-87.

41 Jürgen Habermas "The European Nation-state – Its Achievements and Its Limits. On the Past and Future of Sovereignty and Citizenship", in: Balakrishnan, Gopal (ed.) (1996) *Mapping the Nation,* London: Verso.

42 Ibid, pg. 285-286.

43 Ibid, pg. 287-288. It should be pointed out that Habermas here in fact resolves the dilemma of 'liberal nationalism' vs. 'ethnic nationalism', or of the 'French' vs. the 'German' model, by showing a continuity between the two, and by reformulating the problem in terms of degrees, and not absolute oppositions. As he argues: "Built into the self-understanding of the national state, there is this tension between the uni-

versalism of an egalitarian legal community and the particularism of a cultural community bound together by origin and fate" (ibid, pg. 287).

44 Ibid, pg. 283.

45 See especially Balibar's essay "The Nation Form: History and Ideology" in: Balibar and Wallerstein (1991) *op.cit.*

46 See "Nation, cité, empire (La problème de la forme politique bourgeoise)" in: Balibar, Étienne (1992) *Les frontières de la démocratie,* Paris: Éditions la Découverte, pg. 157.

47 ibid.

48 ibid, pg. 158.

49 Balibar 'The Nation Form: History and Ideology', pg. 94.

50 See Balibar (1992) *op.cit.*, pg. 157-160.

51 Ibid, pg. 94.

52 Ibid, pg. 96. Balibar here forcefully draws our attention to the fact that within the history of the modern State, amongst the myriad of different practical mechanisms which provide the material infrastructure for the 'ethnicisation' of social relations, we should find that two particular institutions are, in the last instance, crucial: language and family. Language which is both an immediate fact of communication and the statist instrument of standardisation (and nationalisation), and family as both a primary experience of belonging and the model upon which the racial origin of the ethnic community of 'descent' can be structured. See the entire discussion in: Balibar (1992), pg. 97-105.

53 It was the merit of Friedrich Nietzsche to have confronted the idealist core of the modern, bourgeois constitution of the political community with a shattering dose of cynical realism: *Ich, der Staat, bin das Volk* (I, the State, am the People). See the chapter 'On the new Idol' in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* New York: Random House, 1954. This stark reversal of the order of elocution in the centre of the modern pronouncement of politics and of the political community, if it should not lead us to reduce completely the reality of the democratic, popular subject to a simple function or appearance of the State, does warn us off from the idealist implications present in this concept.

54 Quoted from 'Propositions sur la citoyenneté', in: Balibar, Étienne (1992) *op.cit.*, pg. 112.

55 Cf. 'Nation, cité, empire. Le problème de la forme politique bourgeois', in Balibar (1992) *op.cit.*, pg. 157.

56 As Jack Goody pointed out in this sense, 'ethnic' violence, and 'ethnic cleansing' is a historical fact which almost without exceptions characterises the establishment of modern democratic States: "[T]here is virtually no modern state whose emergence has not involved similar processes of – putting it euphemistically – 'national consolidation', offering scant chance of reparation, let alone reversal. Who imagines that the fate of Australian aborigines or native Americans is going to be cancelled by retrospective justice? What democracy is more toasted in Western capitalism than Israel, founded on mass expulsion of Palestinians from their land, and long engaged in yet further expropriations of territory in the West Bank?". Quoted from Goody, Jack 'Bitter Icons', in *New Left Review,* Vol. 7, Jan-Feb 2001, pg. 7. Another interesting mediation on the problem of *the degree* can be found in Rastko Močnik's remarkable set of theoretical interventions in the post-socialist conjuncture: *How much fascism?,* (1998) *op.cit*.

57 Louis Althusser 'Machiavelli's Solitude' in: (1999) *Machiavelli and Us,* London: Verso, pg. 124-125.

6.
BEYOND POST-SOCIALIST POLITICS: THE SINGULARITY OF YUGOSLAVIA

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

02 Ibid, pg. 94.

03 Đinđić's thesis 'Yugoslavia as an unfinished State' seems to have left a decisive mark in the historiographic apprehension of Yugoslavia. For example, one recent historical volume on socialist Yugoslavia (one of the few recent ones written from a 'nativist' perspective) was conducted entirely under the aegis of Đinđić's thesis: Dejan Jović claims that Yugoslavia collapsed because there was never a proper articulation of sovereignty to the State, and this was so because the Yugoslav communists took communism too seriously. Instead of building the State in all its dimensions of sovereignty, they actually wanted it to wither away. See Jović, Dejan (2003) *Jugoslavija: Država koja je odumrla, (Yugo-*

slavia: A State Which Has Withered Away), Zagreb: Prometej. Another interesting case is that of Slavoj Žižek, who seems to be completely consequent to the thesis of the 'unfinished State' when he claims that the 'Titoist regime' was essentially constituted upon a 'fragile equilibrium of a system of sovereign nation-states'. See Žižek, Slavoj (1999) *Nato as the Left Hand of God?,* Bastard: Zagreb.

04 Đinđić (1988) *op.cit*, pg. 38.

05 Ibid, pg. 12.

06 Ibid, pg. 13.

07 Ibid, pg. 12.

08 Ibid, pg. 41.

09 Ibid, pg. 10.

10 Ibid.

11 For an analysis of the peculiar continuity between Đinđić and Milošević, and the paradoxes of liberal-democracy in Serbia, see Karamanić, Slobodan "Kosovo within the boundaries of liberal democracy" in: (2006), *Agregat,* No. 9/10, Ljubljana.

12 Although the resistance movement was primarily set up under the political, organisational and infrastructural leadership of the CPY, which had a thirty-year experience of clandestine activity, the movement was much wider in political scope. It rallied and included other political parties, organisations and groups, and was primarily driven by a spontaneous spirit of liberation. It was in Slovenia that the resistance took the most decisive pluralistic shape. The Slovenian Liberation Front (*Osvobodilna fronta*), created on 27th April 1941, united the militants of the Communist Party together with Christian Socialists, the Sokol Sport Association together with many other groups and individuals who stood up against fascism.

13 The most advanced armed units were the 'proletarian people's-liberation brigades' (proleterske narodnooslobodilačke *brigade*), based upon the guerrilla, mobile conception of warfare.

14 For an authoritative account of the period of anti-fascist resistance and the emergence of the Yugoslav revolution, see Bilandžić, Dušan (1985) *Historija Socijalističke Federativne Republike Jugoslavije (History of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia),* 3rd. Edition, Zagreb: Školska Knjiga.

15 The context in which the Partisan struggle emerged was a context of political, cultural and socioeconomic oppression and domination

inherent to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, where the Serbian crown attempted to violently control and dominate the other national and political groups united in a common state. For an authoritative analysis of the political conflicts in the 'first Yugoslavia', see Banac, Ivo (1984) *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics,* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

16 Mihajlović's *Chetniks,* however, are most remembered in history for the 'ethnic' massacres and atrocities that they committed against the Croat, Muslim and Albanian populations during the war. See Samary (1995) *op.cit.*, and Bilandžić (1985) *op.cit*.

17 See Samary (1995) *op.cit*, pg. 49.

18 Đinđić, *op.cit,* pg. 116.

19 Ibid, pg. 102.

20 Ibid, pg. 140.

21 Ibid, pg. 118-119.

22 Ibid, pg. 117.

23 Ibid, pg. 115.

24 ibid, pg. 123.

25 Negri, Antonio (1999) *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pg. 11.

26 Negri, ibid, pg. 2-3. What is interesting to point out is that Negri would claim that we can find this tendency of obscurantism even in Carl Schmitt, who ultimately ends up subordinating his decisionism to the question of the self-reproduction of the State. For a discussion of Schmitt, see pg. 8.

27 Ibid, pg. 3.

28 Cf. *Prvo i drugo zasedanje Antifašističkog veća narodnog oslobođenja Jugoslavije (26. i 27. novembra 1942; 29. i 30. novembra 1943) – po stenografskim beleškama i drugim izvorima,* Belgrade: Prosveta 1983.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid, emphasis added.

31 Buden, Boris (2003) 'More about Communist Slaughters, or Why We Actually Parted', *Prelom,* no. 5, vol. III, Belgrade: CSUb, pg. 54.

32 See the discussion of Balibar's argument of the 'production of the people' in the previous chapter.

33 The concept of 'national-popular unity' – the unity of three 'tribes', the Croats, Serbs and Slovenes - grew out of the previous ideas of Yugoslavness which was entertained by the political and cultural elites

of Croats, Serbs and Slovenes, especially during the *Illyrian Movement*. See the discussion in Banac (1984) *op.cit*, especially the chapters of 'National ideologies' and 'Unification'.

34 On the 6th of January 1929, the monarch of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Aleksandar Karađorđević disbanded the parliament and banned all political parties, effectively seizing all political power. The pretext for the introduction of the dictatorship was the assassination of a Croat politician Stjepan Radić in the national parliament, which came on the backbone of a drastic escalation of national tensions between the three main national groups which founded the Yugoslav state. The king then initiated a forced process of political and cultural unification – under the aegis of an 'integral Yugoslav identity', during which the State changed its name into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

35 See Samary (1995) *op.cit*. See also Bilandžić (1985) *op.cit*.

36 For a critical discussion of the ideological circularity between the Law and democracy in liberal political theory, see Balibar (1977) *op.cit*, pg. 68-69 et passim.

37 In *Of an Obscure Disaster,* Badiou distinguishes several different senses of what he calls the 'litigious notion of democracy': a) the Greek idea of democracy as *assembly*, b) the liberal democratic identification of democracy with juridical liberties and rights, and c) the revolutionary emphasis on 'democratic situations': general assemblies, mass movements, soviets, etc. See Badiou (1998) *D'un désastre obscur,* pg. 35.

38 The Third Article of the AVNOJ document of 1943 explicitly recognises the source of the political power of Yugoslavia in the political forms founded in the liberation war, such as the *antifascist councils* and the *liberation committees.* See the AVNOJ document cited above.

39 Buden (2003) *op.cit*, pg. 54.

40 See Kardelj, Edvard (1949) *Put nove Jugoslavije, 1941-1945 (The Path of the New Yugoslavia, 1941-1945),* Belgrade: Kultura, pg. 119-120.

41 As Marx put it vis-à-vis the question of the dialectic in the preface to the Second German edition of the first volume of *Capital*: *"In its mystified form, the dialectic [...] seemed to transfigure [...] the existing state of things. In its rational form it is a scandal and abomination to bourgeoisdom and its doctrinaire professors, because it includes in its comprehension an affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time also, the recognition of the negation of that state, of its inevita-*

ble breaking up; because it regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence; because it lets nothing impose upon it, and is in its essence critical and revolutionary". (Capital, Vol.1, op.cit, pg. 20).

42 As famously elaborated in the *Philosophy of Right*.

43 In December 1942, at the high point of the liberation war, Tito wrote in the journal *Proleter*: "Our People's-liberation struggle would not be so persistent and so successful, if the peoples of Yugoslavia wouldn't see in it, apart from the victory over fascism, the victory over those who were oppressing and who tend towards further oppression of the peoples of Yugoslavia. The word *people's-liberation struggle* – would be a mere phrase, even a deceit, if it wouldn't carry, apart from the general Yugoslav sense, the national sense for each particular nation, or, if it wouldn't, apart from the liberation of Yugoslavia, simultaneously mean the liberation of Croats, Slovenes, Serbs, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Albanians, Muslims, and others, if the people's-liberation struggle wouldn't carry that content, that it truly brings freedom, equality, and brotherhood to all the peoples of Yugoslavia". See. Tito, Josip Broz (1942) "Nacionalno pitanje u svjetlosti Narodno-oslobodilacke borbe" ("The National Question in the Light of the Popular-Liberation Struggle"), *Proleter,* No: 16, December 1942.

44 The political inscription of the 'rights to self-determination' into the antifascist struggle granted a formal recognition to some of the national political and cultural particularities of Yugoslavia for the first time. Montenegrins, Bosnian Muslims and Macedonians, who did not enjoy any specific means of political expression in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, were proclaimed as constitutive nations by the AVNOJ.

45 The question of national self-determination was the object of one of the important polemics in the history of the workers' movement, the polemic between Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg. Lenin's critique of Luxemburg's principal dismissal of nationalism, together with his defence of the rights of nations to self-determination, was laid out in his 1914 pamphlet "On the Rights of Nations to Self-Determination". See Lenjin, V.I. (1958) *O nacionalnom i kolonijalnom pitanju, (On the National and Colonial Question),* Zagreb: Naprijed.

46 See Tito, *op.cit*.

47 Published in the *Proceedings of the Third Convention of AVNOJ, 1945,* quoted in Đinđić, *op.cit,* pg. 17.

48 Badiou, Alain (2007) 'Destruction, subtraction, negation: On Pier Paolo Pasolini', Lecture at Graduate Seminar, Art Centre College of Design, Pasadena, quoted from *Lacanian ink: http://www.lacan.com/badpas.htm*. The crucial thing here is precisely the contradictory relationship between dictatorship and democracy: 'dictatorship', in the formula of the DOP, is not the opposite of democracy (as it is also not a dictatorship of an individual or a party), rather, it is the subversive dialectic between the class politics of emancipation and legal-political forms of universality. Dictatorship of the proletariat is a 'dictatorship' in the sense in which the working classes and working masses, those who were the objects of capitalist domination and exploitation, and moreover those who were previously excluded from the mechanisms of power and political representation, gain control of the historical process and seize the state power so in order to reverse and annul the effects of domination and exploitation of capitalism. (Cf. Lenin (1970) *The State and Revolution,* Peking: Foreign Languages Press).

49 Badiou (2007), *op.cit.*

50 See the chapter on the 'Rectification of the *Communist Manifesto*' in Balibar, Étienne (1974), Paris: François Maspero.

CONCLUSION

01 Adorno, T. (1998) *Critical models,* New York: University of Columbia Press, pg. 17.

02 See, for example, Močnik's attempts to articulate the socio-economic analysis of the transformations in the global economic structures together with an analysis of forms of post-socialist politics, in: Močnik, Rastko (2006) *Svetovno gospodarstvo in revolucionarna politika (Global economy and revolutionary politics),* Ljubljana: Založba *cf.

03 One possible objection to the analyses presented here would seek to find a contradiction between the argumentation on the necessary bond between the State and class struggle, on the one hand, and the absence of a 'concrete' class analysis – in the sense of an analysis of economic dynamics, and the empirical examples of the struggle between social classes – on the other hand. I can best answer to this by quoting Al-

thusser: "the State and its Apparatuses only have meaning from the point of view of the class struggle, as an apparatus of class struggle ensuring class oppression and guaranteeing the conditions of exploitation and its reproduction". (ISA, pg. 171) This means that even if in my analyses I place the focus solely on the general, 'abstract' dimensions of political forms – on their inherent contradictions – I consider them 'abstract' without the awareness that their backdrop is precisely the relationship between a political logic – the post-socialist rationality – and a profound economic logic which corresponds to it: the expansion of the capitalist relations of production, and the introduction of new forms of economic exploitation within the post-socialist realm. Focusing solely on the political logic does not exclude the latter: it presupposes it. But at the same time, focusing on the political and ideological moment seems to me to be a necessary starting point: inasmuch as the socio-economic transformations inherent to the post-socialist reality feed precisely upon political and ideological forms which mask their destructive effects under the guise of universality.

04 'The end of the truth of the State' is the subtitle to Badiou's philosophico-political essay *Of an Obscure Disaster,* cited earlier. The subtitle seems to catch the gist of the political stakes from which both Badiou's and Rancière's philosophical projects proceed, especially vis-à-vis their relationship to Marxism. On the relationship between Badiou and Althusser, see, for example, Bruno Bosteels (2001) "Alain Badiou's Theory of the Subject: Part I. The Recommencement of Dialectical Materialism?", in: *What Is Materialism?* Special issue of *PLI: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy,* no. 12: pg. 200-229; and Bosteels (2002) "Alain Badiou's Theory of the Subject: The Recommencement of Dialectical Materialism? Part II", in: *Foucault: Madness/Sexuality/Biopolitics*. Special issue of *PLI: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, no. 13: pg. 173-208.

05 The key moment here is certainly the currency of Foucault's notion of *biopolitics*. For a study of the relationship between Foucault and Althusser, see, for example, Montag, Warren "The Soul is the Prison of the Body: Althusser and Foucault 1970-1975", *Yale French Studies*, 1995, No. 88, pg. 53-77. See also Negri (1996), *op.cit.*

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