MaMa (Zagreb, Croatia)
October 23-24 2026
www.mi2.hr

THE INTELLECTUALITIES OF POLITICS — symposium

In which sense can one affirm politics as thought and as thinking – and indeed as a figure of intellectuality? That is, not as mere doing, practicing, exercising or applying , and neither as mere ability, the knowing-how of doing – but also not as judging, as judiciously deliberating or negotiating – rather, as genuinely thinking, as the creation and invention of previously unforeseen possibles? If it is imperative in this sense to go beyond its identification with consensual and deflating ideologemes of communicability and normativity – it is also necessary to do away with the old divide – orienting as it did the emancipatory struggles of the past century – between theory and practice. Affirming politics as thought means immediately affirming the inventiveness of movement and form stemming from collective situations and struggles, from mass political experiences and experiments. At the same time, it means affirming thinking as immediately practical, as an act and an actuality, rather than a reflection and deferral, and moreover an act manifesting the consistency of a heterogeneous capacity, pivoting upon an immanent affirmative expansion of its strength, in continuous rupture with what is. Materialised in actions and declarations, in interventions and demonstrations, crystalising a body – the holding together of a collective capacity – thinking is instantly a real force – a manifestation of strength, an empowerment and a mobilisation, which can only take place if it is at the same time constituted around its direct universalizability – its address for all. But what is its exact texture then, what are the internal operators through which one is able to identify it with intellectuality? Especially, in which sense does its objective nature – the determining of the essence of concrete situations (through inquiries and knowledges) – stand in relation with its subjective one – with declarations of strength and capacity, with nominations of change or rift and prescriptions of movement? And how should one rearticulate the classical oppositions between knowledge and will, between concept and slogan, between explication and decision? And moreover, where then to gather together, and in which form, its singular and multiple guises – the intellectualities which have, sequence by sequence, never ceased characterising emancipatory struggles?

Participants: Ray Brassier · Rebecca Comay · Peter Hallward · Ozren Pupovac · Jelica Šumič Riha

Organised by Multimedijalni Institut, the Centre for Theoretical and Critical Research, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Rijeka

***

SCHEDULE

October 23, 2026 (Friday)

16:00 · Ray Brassier · Communist Politics versus Political Marxism
17:45 · Jelica Šumič Riha · Disorientation of the Placeless Subject in a Time of the Absence of Limits
19:30 · Ozren Pupovac · The Actual Concept: Spinoza's Lenin

October 24, 2026. (Saturday)

16:00 · Peter Hallward · The Challenge of Political Moralism: Rousseau, Gandhi, Che Guevara
17:45 · Rebecca Comay · Lines in the Sand

***

ABSTRACTS

— Ray Brassier (American University of Beirut)

Communist Politics versus Political Marxism
Marxism is not dead but it has been historically destroyed following the lapse of its historical referentiality—in the workers' movement, in actually existing socialist states, in anticolonial struggles—which anchored it from within in the movement of history. This provocative assessment lies at the heart of Badiou's *Can Politics Be Thought?* (published in 1985). Yet it does not signal the renunciation of Marxism. On the contrary, Badiou insists, Marxism's political expiration is a historical moment for the Marxist subject of politics, which must assume the historical destruction of Marxism's political foundation in the myths of History and the Worker's State. Thus Marxist politics resuscitates by enduring the death of political Marxism. Badiou's claim pivots upon the distinction between politics and the political. Politics indexes the real by puncturing the fiction that

grounds the political in a social bond or relation, measurable according to the philosophical norm of the state or revolution. Where the fiction of the political attributes an essence to the internal relations constitutive of the polis, whether as recognition, entitlement, or production, politics is ordained by 'unrepresentable occurrences of unbinding.' This talk will assess the cogency of this contrast and the validity of Badiou's assessment of Marxism.

— Rebecca Comay (University of Toronto)

Lines in the Sand

What does it mean to cross a political threshold? The ancient sorites paradox begins with a deceptively simple question: if removing one grain of sand does not destroy a heap, and removing another does not, when does the heap cease to be a heap? Hegel transforms this problem of vagueness into a problem of measure: incremental quantitative changes accumulate until, at a nodal point, they become qualitative transformation. Marx and the later dialectical tradition extend this logic to social transformation, making the passage from quantity to quality a model for revolutionary rupture. Oppression accumulates until, at some grain, the heap ignites. Taking Gaza as my starting point, and the settler colonial context of territorial partition, dispossession, and elimination, I examine the lines through which political conditions are made and enforced: borders, evacuation orders, "safe" zones, ceasefires, deadlines, redlines, and humanitarian thresholds of permissible violence. Against both liberal gradualism and the teleology of the boiling point, I propose an emancipatory politics that refuses to wait for that final threshold.

— Peter Hallward (Kingston University)

The Challenge of Political Moralism: Rousseau, Gandhi, Che Guevara

Although all of us who work in the broad Marxian tradition are used to orienting ourselves according to the alternative 'materialism or idealism,' it might be more helpful to think instead in terms of the relative primacy of 'historical actualism' or 'political moralism'. Both dimensions are constitutive of any collective practice, but – in practice -- what sort of questions should have priority: those derived from the analysis of apparently objective developments or historical tendencies (along with predictions of likely futures), or those posed by the strategic choices facing political actors in specific circumstances (along with an awareness of how these circumstances constrain those choices)? Despite their many and obvious differences, Rousseau, Gandhi and Che all affirm versions of the latter position, and by doing so they foreground the relative primacy and autonomy of political morals (what should we do?) over submission to apparent economic necessity or alignment with apparent historical realities. I will defend this challenging order of priorities, while remembering that what's at issue is not a relation of either-or but of both-and.

— Ozren Pupovac (University of Rijeka)

The Actual Concept: Spinoza's Lenin

The enigma of Althusser's recourse to Spinoza concerns not only all those echoes of substance and its cause, or the theory of the adequate idea in its synthetic and generative movement, but even more so the notion of the actual essence – the conatus – seized intuitively to express and envelop the immensity of the problem of the revolutionary tendency in its continuity and its autonomy: how to continue, how to incessantly reaffirm one's rupture with the logic of domination? Such a Spinoza "pour Lénine", in fact, situates politics decisively in the register of intellectuality, where problems of organisation, strategy and direction pivot upon not only an *immanence* of thought in its movement – capable of always renovating itself by producing its contents from within itself – but also upon thought's *immediacy* – as the concept itself is pushed towards attentiveness and decisiveness with regard to contingent openings – which is precisely what ensures its actuality vis-à-vis concrete situations. And yet there is something profoundly unstable in this: the Spinozist recasting of Lenin's dictum „Marxist theory is all-powerful because it is true", if it opens up and infinitises the „true" as activity, as the power of production – instead of a guarantee, or a sign – thus precluding any fall into dogmatic ossification or ineffectivity, falls short of being able to capture its own effects outside itself – the actuality of political action to which it is coupled. The "true" cannot, from within itself, envelop the effects of its inscription into decisions and acts, as the "correct" course taken – or: the actuality of the concept falls short of seizing the actuality of the act which is nevertheless both its aim and its condition. Does this ultimately render Althusser's proposal of Spinoza's Lenin uninhabitable? Or does it rather recast the very understanding of the actuality of the avant-garde?

— Jelica Šumič Riha (ZRC SAZU Ljubljana)

Disorientation of the Placeless Subject in a Time of the Absence of Limits

Seen from the perspective of the inconsistency of the Other, the post-truth era can be considered to be an era emerging from a crisis in belief in the existence of the Other, which is to be taken in a twofold sense: as a belief in the Other of the Other, that is, the Other of Law, and a belief in the Other considered as the subject supposed to know. Insofar as the contemporary subject does not want to know anything about this "condition of belief" without which no knowledge, and therefore no truth, are possible, the crisis of belief affect both, the Other and the subject. This can be seen in the fact that the failing belief in the Other and knowledge, considered as a distinctive feature of our profoundly unbelieving times, is accompanied by an unprecedented rise in anxiety at the social level, as contemporary subjects who do not believe in the (existence of the) Other are singularly defenceless before the irruption of the real. With truth losing its power to name the real, the subject itself as a singular response to the real is becoming ever more precarious. Which is why, when faced with the erratic irruption of the real, contemporary subjects are condemned to a desperate search for certainties.

***

BIOGRAPHIES

— Ray Brassier

Ray Brassier is Professor of Philosophy at the American University of Beirut, where he has taught since 2008, and one of the founders of the Beirut Institute for Critical Analysis and Research (BICAR). He received his PhD from the University of Warwick in 2001, and from 2002 to 2008 he was a Research Fellow at the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy (CRMEP) at Middlesex University in London. He is the author of *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (2007) and is credited with coining the term 'speculative realism'. He has translated works by Alain Badiou into English, as well as Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude*. His work connects post-war French philosophy with the Anglo-American tradition of philosophical naturalism, and he is currently writing a book on Sellars and Marx.

— Rebecca Comay

Rebecca Comay is Professor of Philosophy and Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto, where she is also affiliated with the Program in Literature and Critical Theory, the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures, and the Centre for Jewish Studies; she also teaches at the European Graduate School. Her work focuses on Hegel and the Left Hegelian tradition, Marx and Marxism, Benjamin and Adorno, psychoanalysis, trauma and memory, and contemporary art. She is the author of *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution* (2011) and, with Frank Ruda, of *The Dash – The Other Side of Absolute Knowing* (2018). Her current projects include a book on the strange temporality of the deadline, *Deadlines (literally)*, and a book on the myth of Niobe, *Bad Mothers*. Her essay collections *On Persistence* (2026) and *Material Remains: Essays on Art* (2027) are being published by Seagull Books.

— Peter Hallward

Peter Hallward is a member of the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy (CRMEP). He received his PhD from Yale University and has taught French philosophy and literature at King's College London and Kingston University London. He is the author of *Absolutely Postcolonial* (2001), *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (2003), *Out of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (2006) and *Damming the Flood: Haiti, Aristide, and the Politics of Containment* (2007), and, with Knox Peden, he edited the two-volume *Concept and Form*, devoted to the journal *Cahiers pour l'analyse* (2012). He has long been working on a book, *The Will of the People*, on the concept of political will and the struggle for mass sovereignty, alongside shorter studies on Rousseau, Blanqui and Marx.

— Ozren Pupovac

Ozren Pupovac teaches philosophy and critical theory at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Rijeka, where he heads the Centre for Theoretical and Critical Research. He has taught at the University of Jena and at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul, and was a researcher at the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht and a fellow at ICI Berlin. Since 2007 he has run the Versus Laboratory project together with Bruno Besana. His work focuses on contemporary French philosophy, Marxist theories of politics and emancipation, the speculative legacy of German idealism, and the question of the subject. He has published on Marxist philosophy and the (post-)Yugoslav political context, and has translated Badiou, Rancière, Lazarus and Althusser.

— Jelica Šumič Riha

Jelica Šumič Riha is a Research Fellow at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU) in Ljubljana and at the ZRC SAZU Postgraduate School. She studied philosophy and comparative literature in Ljubljana, where she also received her PhD in 1992, and continued her studies in Paris, among others with Alain Badiou at the University of Paris 8. Her work focuses on political philosophy and the philosophy of law, ethics and psychoanalysis. She has long been editor-in-chief of the journal *Filozofski vestnik* and has led a number of research projects, including on Europe as a philosophical idea and political subject, and on the reconfiguration of limits in philosophy, politics and psychoanalysis. Her books include *Mutacije etike: od utopije sreče do neozdravljive resnice* (2002) and *Večnost in spreminjanje: filozofija v brezsvetnem času* (2012), and with Rado Riha she co-authored *Pravo in razsodna moč* (1993).