

Zizek – GDI Scholars 2007

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*****Africa-Specific Links**

Capitalism in Africa Uniqueness

Capitalism is low in sub-Saharan Africa

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If we define sub-Saharan Africa as excluding not only north Africa but also bracket off, for the moment, the continent's southern cone, dominated by South Africa, the key fact about the rest—the greater part of the continent—is thrown sharply into relief: after 80 years of colonial rule and almost four decades of independence, in most of it there is some capital but not a lot of capitalism. The predominant social relations are still not capitalist, nor is the prevailing logic of production. Africa south of the Sahara exists in a capitalist world, which marks and constrains the lives of its inhabitants at every turn, but is not of it. This is the fundamental truth from which any honest analysis must begin. This is what explains why sub-Saharan Africa, with some 650 million people, over 10 percent of the world's population, has just 3 percent of its trade and only 1 percent of its Gross Domestic Product; and why income per head—averaging 460 dollars in 1994—has steadily fallen, relative to the industrialized world, and is now less than a fiftieth of what it is in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.¹ It also explains why sub-Saharan Africa's economies have responded worse than others to the market-oriented development policies urged on it by the World Bank and other outside agencies since the 1980s. Now the aid flow is declining, while population growth is still racing towards a barely imaginable 1 to 1.2 billion in the year 2020.2

Africa Key to Understanding/Criticizing Capitalism

Africa is a unique site for capitalist exploitation- while most places exploited by capitalism receive some sort of benefit from the creation of jobs via the capital invested, Africa is deprived and economically perverted

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The two perspectives just outlined raise a familiar question: is Africa a victim of exploitation or of marginalization? The short answer must be that it is both. In the popular meaning of exploitation, Africa suffers acutely from exploitation: every packet of cheap Kenyan tea sold in New York, every overpriced tractor exported to Nigeria, every dollar of interest on ill-conceived and negligently supervised loans to African governments that accrues to western banks—not to mention every diamond illegally purchased from warlords in Sierra Leone or Angola—benefits people in the West at the expense of Africa's impoverished populations. On the other hand, as Geoff Kay once provocatively suggested, in the Marxian sense of the term Africa has "suffered" not from being exploited, but from not being exploited enough;¹⁰ not enough capital has been invested; too few Africans have ever been employed productively enough to create relative surplus value; the reinvested surplus has been too small. Either way, the result is relegation to the margins of the global economy, with no visible prospect for continental development along capitalist lines. Population growth has outstripped production growth; the chances of significantly raising per capita output are falling, not rising; the infrastructure is increasingly inadequate; the market for high value-added goods is minuscule. Global capital, in its constant search for new investment opportunities, finds them less and less in Africa.¹¹ This does not mean that nothing is happening, let alone that no alternative is possible. It simply means that Africa's development, and the dynamics of global capitalism, are no longer convergent, if they ever were.

Humanitarianism in Africa Link

Approaching crises in Africa in innovative business oriented ways signifies a new ideology of liberal communism, that makes capitalist look acceptable. This hurts direct challenges to the framing principle of global capitalism.

Slavoj Zizek, senior researcher at the Institute of Sociology, University of Ljubljana, "Nobody has to be Vile", April 6 2006, <http://www.lacan.com/zizvile.htm>

Some of them, at least, moved to Davos. The tone of the **Davos meetings is now predominantly set by the group of entrepreneurs who ironically refer to themselves as 'liberal communists'** and who no longer accept the opposition between Davos and Porto Alegre: **their claim is that we can have the global capitalist cake** (thrive as entrepreneurs) **and eat it (endorse the anti-capitalist causes of social responsibility, ecological concern etc)**. There is no need for Porto Alegre: instead, Davos can become Porto Davos. So who are these liberal communists? The usual suspects: Bill Gates and George Soros, the CEOs of Google, IBM, Intel, eBay, as well as court-philosophers like Thomas Friedman. **The true conservatives today**, they argue, **are** not only the old right, with its ridiculous belief in authority, order and parochial patriotism, but also **the old left**, with its war against capitalism: both fight their shadow-theatre battles in disregard of the new realities. **The signifier of this new reality in the liberal communist Newspeak is** 'smart'. Being smart means being dynamic and nomadic, and **against centralised bureaucracy; believing in dialogue and co-operation as against central authority; in flexibility as against routine; culture and knowledge as against industrial production**; in spontaneous interaction and autopoiesis as against fixed hierarchy. Bill Gates is the icon of what he has called 'frictionless capitalism', the post-industrial society and the 'end of labour'. Software is winning over hardware and the young nerd over the old manager in his black suit. In the new company headquarters, there is little external discipline; former hackers dominate the scene, working long hours, enjoying free drinks in green surroundings. The underlying notion here is that Gates is a subversive marginal hooligan, an ex-hacker, who has taken over and dressed himself up as a respectable chairman. Liberal communists are top executives reviving the spirit of contest or, to put it the other way round, countercultural geeks who have taken over big corporations. **Their dogma is a new, postmodernised version of Adam Smith's invisible hand: the market and social responsibility are not opposites, but can be reunited for mutual benefit**. As **Friedman puts it, nobody has to be vile in order to do business these days**; collaboration with employees, dialogue with customers, respect for the environment, transparency of deals - these are the keys to success. Olivier Malnuit recently drew up the **liberal communist's ten commandments** in the French magazine Technikart: 1. **You shall give everything away free** (free access, no copyright); **just charge for the additional services**, which will make you rich. 2. **You shall change the world, not just sell things**. 3. **You shall be** sharing, **aware of social responsibility**. 4. **You shall be creative**: focus on design, **new technologies** and science. 5. **You shall tell all**: have no secrets, endorse and practise the cult of transparency and the free flow of information; **all humanity should collaborate and interact**. 6. You shall not work: have no fixed 9 to 5 job, but engage in smart, dynamic, flexible communication. 7. You shall return to school: engage in permanent education. 8. You shall act as an enzyme: work not only for the market, but trigger new forms of social collaboration. 9. **You shall die poor: return your wealth to those who need it**, since you have more than you can ever spend. 10. **You shall be the state: companies should be in partnership with the state. Liberal communists are pragmatic; they hate a doctrinaire approach. There is no exploited working class today, only concrete problems to be solved: starvation in Africa**, the plight of Muslim women, religious fundamentalist violence. **When there is a humanitarian crisis in Africa** (liberal communists love a humanitarian crisis; it brings out the best in them), **instead of engaging in anti-imperialist rhetoric, we should get together and work out the best way of solving the problem, engage people, governments and business in a common enterprise, start moving things instead of relying on centralised state help, approach the crisis in a creative and unconventional way**. **Liberal communists like to point out that the decision of some large international corporations to ignore apartheid rules within their companies was as important as the direct political struggle against apartheid in South Africa**. Abolishing segregation within the company, paying blacks and whites the same salary for the same job etc: **this was a perfect instance of the overlap between the struggle for political freedom and business interests, since the same companies can now thrive in post-apartheid South Africa.**

NGOs in Africa Link

Private corporation's actions are to develop countries solely to exploit them for a profit

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On the other hand, from a corporate viewpoint, in which the aim is not to develop countries but to exploit profitable opportunities, the prospects can still appear bright enough. Above all in the oil, natural gas, and minerals industries there is optimism, even excitement. Africa's resources are still substantially untapped, many existing discoveries are yet to be developed and many new ones still to be made. The "investment climate" has been made easier, thanks, as we will see, to a decade and a half of aid "conditionality," and the returns can be spectacular; the rates of return on U.S. direct investments in Africa are, for example, the highest of any region in the world (25.3 percent in 1997).⁹ Under World Bank-International Monetary Fund (IMF) prompting, stock markets have been established in fourteen African countries with another six in prospect, with brokers in London and New York beginning to take an interest in speculating on them; the Economist Intelligence Unit notes that in some of them annual returns "in excess of 100 percent" have been "generated."

Free Trade/Development in Africa Link

Neoliberal structural adjustments allow for invasive imperialism and construction of a market that only benefits us

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Enter then, crucially, "the age of structural adjustment"¹⁴ in which the neoliberal reorientation of economic policy became required medicine for virtually all sub-Saharan African economies. Given the fact that most of Africa's debt was to the World Bank and other multilateral agencies, the Bank and the IMF emerged as particularly central to the process of dictating global capitalism's new terms to Africa. As manifested in their aggressive administering of "Structural Adjustment Programmes" (SAPs), the invasive impact of the international financial institutions (IFIs) on the national sovereignty of target countries cannot be overstated: "What has emerged in Accra," Eboe Hutchful once wrote of the Ghanaian SAP experience, "is a parallel government controlled (if not created) by the international lender agencies ... [while] the other side of the external appropriation of policy-making powers is the deliberate de-politicalization that has occurred under the ERP [Economic Reconstruction Programme], and the displacement of popular participation and mobilization by a narrowly-based bureaucratic management."¹⁵ Of course, as this process has proceeded the IFIs have come, in theory at least, to modify somewhat the more hard-boiled dictates of the 1983 document, the Berg Report, that first codified this approach. Subsequent reports have emphasized both the need to better protect the poorest of the poor against the "transitional" costs of adjustment, and also to permit a more active role for a transformed ("market-friendly") state. Yet such fine-tuning changes little that is essential to the overall project: the sustained downgrading of the claims of the social vis à vis the counterclaims of the market—alongside the loss of any sense of what a genuinely democratic state (as distinct from an "enabling" state, "insulated" from popular pressures) might hope to accomplish. Others have been even more critical: "[Africa's] crisis and the IMF and World Bank Stabilization and Structural Adjustment Programmes," writes Nigerian economist Bade Onimode, "have generated and exacerbated a serious decline in the African economy, and created the catastrophe of suffering facing the rural and urban poor, women, children, workers, peasants and other vulnerable social groups."¹⁶ In an important article about Mozambique, David Plank echoes Onimode in defining the current phase of Africa's positioning within the global capitalist system as "recolonization," a situation that, in his view, is more, not less, confining than the phase of formal colonialism itself. "Recent developments in Mozambique and elsewhere," he writes, "suggest that the most likely successor to post-colonial sovereignty will be neo-colonial vassalage, in which the Western powers assume direct and open-ended control over the administration, security and economic policies of 'deteriorated' states under the banner of the U.N. and various donors."¹⁷

Socialism Good – Africa Specific

The best method of development would take place under a socialist framework

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This is not what was supposed to happen. At independence—between 1955 and 1965—the structural weaknesses of Africa's economic position were generally recognized and it was assumed on all sides that active state intervention would be necessary to overcome them. Although Africa would still be expected to earn its way by playing its traditional role of primary-product exporter, the "developmental state" was to accumulate surpluses from the agricultural sector and apply them to the infrastructural and other requirements of import-substitution-driven industrialization. And some left variants of the developmental state sought, in the name of various brands of socialism, to press this interventionist model even further.

AT: Alt Can't Happen in Africa

Socialism is a possibility in Africa- failure in Mozambique gives a unique opportunity to learn from mistakes

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There was, of course, another trajectory to African politics—some states which professed to bend the logic of global capitalism in favor of more progressive outcomes: Ghana, Tanzania, and Mozambique, among others. The earliest of these attempts, most often instigated from the top down and more populist than socialist perhaps ("African Socialism"), foundered in both developmental and democratic terms, although not in the long-run any more noticeably than did their African capitalist counterparts. Still, the absence of self-conscious class action from below, the administrative and ideological weaknesses of the leaderships, and the severe challenge of finding space for autonomous maneuver within the global economy proved intractable. Better sited, in Chris Allen's view, were socialist attempts of more Marxist provenance that grew out of some of the liberation struggles in southern Africa, most notably in Mozambique.²⁷ In such cases it remains difficult to extract the morals to be drawn from their ultimate failure, because they were given so little scope to learn from their initial mistakes as a result of the vicious destabilization they experienced at the hands of apartheid South Africa and various hostile western interests (Reagan-inspired "rollback," for example).

*****General Links**

The Big Capitalism Link (1/2)

The affirmative insulates the liberal-democratic ruling consensus by succumbing to the temptation to act, intervening directly in the given situation while neglecting a critique of its very coordinates. Their approach to politics ensures that capitalism remains intact while any attempt at resistance is lip service at best, and serves to directly perpetuate the capitalist order at worst.

Slavoj Zizek, Professor of Sociology at the Institute for Sociology, Ljubljana University, 2002, Revolution at the Gates, p. 167-172

In academic politics today, the idea of dealing with Lenin immediately gives rise to two qualifications: yes, why not, we live in a liberal democracy, there is freedom of thought . . . provided that we treat Lenin in an “objective, critical and scientific way”, not in an attitude of nostalgic idolatry, and, furthermore, from a perspective firmly rooted in the democratic political order, within the horizon of human rights — that is the lesson learned painfully through the experience of twentieth-century totalitarianism. What are we to say to this? **The problem lies in the further implicit qualifications which can easily be discerned by a “concrete analysis of the concrete situation”**, as Lenin himself would have put it. **“Fidelity to the democratic consensus” means acceptance of the present liberal-parliamentary consensus, which precludes any serious questioning of the way this liberal-democratic order is complicit in the phenomena it officially condemns, and, of course, any serious attempt to imagine a different sociopolitical order**. In short, it means: say and write whatever you like — on condition that you do not actually question or disturb the prevailing political consensus. **Everything is allowed**, solicited even, **as a critical topic**: the prospect of a **global ecological catastrophe; violations of human rights; sexism, homophobia, anti-feminism**; growing violence not only in faraway countries, but also in our own megalopolises; **the gap between the First and the Third World**, between rich and poor; the shattering impact of the digitalization of our daily lives . . . today, there is nothing easier than to get international, state or corporate funds for a multidisciplinary research project on how to fight new forms of ethnic, religious or sexist violence. The problem is that **all this occurs against the background of a fundamental Denkverbot: a prohibition on thinking**. Today’s liberal-democratic hegemony is sustained by a kind of unwritten Denkverbot similar to the infamous Berufsverbot (prohibition on employing individuals with radical Left leanings in the state organs) in Germany in the late 1960s — the moment we show a minimal sign of engaging in political projects which aim seriously to challenge the existing order, the answer is immediately: “Benevolent as it is, this will inevitably end in a new Gulag!” **The ideological function of constant references to the Holocaust, the Gulag, and more recent Third World catastrophes is thus to serve as the support of this Denkverbot by constantly reminding us how things could have been much worse**: “Just look around and see for yourself what will happen if we follow your radical notions!” What we encounter here is the ultimate example of what Anna Dinerstein and Mike Neary have called the project of disutopia: “not just the temporary absence of Utopia, but the political celebration of the end of social dreams”.² And **the demand for “scientific objectivity” amounts to just another version of the same Denkverbot: the moment we seriously question the existing liberal consensus, we are accused of abandoning scientific objectivity for outdated ideological positions**. This is the “Leninist” point on which one cannot and should not concede: **today, actual freedom of thought means freedom to question the prevailing liberal-democratic “post-ideological” consensus — or it means nothing**. The Right to Truth The perspective of the critique of ideology compels us to invert Wittgenstein’s “What one cannot speak about, thereof one should be silent” into “What one should not speak about, thereof one cannot remain silent”. **If you want to speak about a social system, you cannot remain silent about its repressed excess**. The point is not to tell the whole Truth but, precisely, to append to the (official) Whole the uneasy supplement which denounces its falsity. As Max Horkheimer put it back in the 1930s: “If you don’t want to talk about capitalism, then you should keep silent about Fascism.” Fascism is the inherent “symptom” (the return of the repressed) of capitalism, the key to its “truth”, not just an external contingent deviation of its “normal” logic. And the same goes for today’s situation: **those who do not want to subject liberal democracy and the flaws of its multiculturalist tolerance to critical analysis, should keep quiet about the new Rightist violence and intolerance**. If we are to leave the opposition between liberal-democratic universalism and ethnic/religious fundamentalism behind, **the first step is to acknowledge the existence of liberal fundamentalism**: the perverse game of making a big fuss when the rights of a serial killer or a suspected war criminal are violated, while ignoring massive violations of “ordinary” people’s rights. More precisely, **the politically correct stance betrays its perverse economy through its oscillation between** the two extremes: **either fascination with the victimized other** (helpless children, raped women . . .), **or a focus on the problematic other who**, although criminal, and so on, **also deserves protection of his human rights**, because “today it’s him, tomorrow it’ll be us” (an excellent example is Noam Chomsky’s defence of a French book advocating the revisionist stance on the Holocaust). On a different level, a similar instance of the perversity of Political Correctness occurs in Denmark, where people speak ironically of the “white woman’s burden”, her ethico-political duty to have sex with immigrant workers from Third World countries — this being the final necessary step in ending their exclusion. Today, in the era of what Habermas designated as die neue Unbersichtlichkeit (the new opacity), our everyday experience is more mystifying than ever: modernization generates new obscurantisms; the reduction of freedom is presented to us as the dawn of new freedoms. The perception that we live in a society of free choices, in which we have to choose even our most “natural” features (ethnic or sexual identity), is the form of appearance of its very opposite: of the absence of true choices. The recent trend for “alternate reality” films, which present existing reality as one of a multitude of possible outcomes, is symptomatic of a society in which choices no longer really matter, are trivialized. The lesson of the time-warp narratives is even bleaker, since it points towards a total closure: the very attempt to avoid the predestined course of things not only leads us back to it, but actually constitutes it — from Oedipus onwards, we want to avoid A, and it is through our very detour that A realizes itself. In these circumstances, **we should be especially careful not to confuse the ruling ideology with ideology which seems to dominate**. More than ever, we should bear in mind Walter Benjamin’s reminder that it is not enough to ask how a certain theory (or art) positions itself with regard to social struggles — **we should also**

CONTINUED – NO TEXT REMOVED...

The Big Capitalism Link (2/2)

ZIZEK CONTINUED – NO TEXT REMOVED...

ask how it actually functions in these very struggles. In sex, the true hegemonic attitude is not patriarchal repression, but free promiscuity; in art, provocations in the style of the notorious "Sensation" exhibitions are the norm, the example of art fully integrated into the establishment. Ayn Rand brought this logic to its conclusion, supplementing it with a kind of Hegelian twist, that is, reasserting the official ideology itself as its own greatest transgression, as in the title of one of her late non-fiction books: "Capitalism, This Unknown Ideal", or in "top managers, America's last endangered species". Indeed, **since the "normal" functioning of capitalism involves** some kind of **disavowal of the basic principle of its functioning** (today's model capitalist is someone who, after ruthlessly generating profit, then generously shares parts of it, giving large donations to churches, victims of ethnic or sexual abuse, etc., posing as a humanitarian), the ultimate act of transgression is to assert this principle directly, depriving it of its humanitarian mask. I am therefore tempted to reverse Marx's Thesis 11: **the first task today is precisely not to succumb to the temptation to act, to intervene directly and change things (which then inevitably ends in a cul-de-sac of debilitating impossibility: "What can we do against global capital?"), but to question the hegemonic ideological co-ordinates.** In short, our historical moment is still that of Adorno: To the question "What should we do?" I can most often truly answer only with "I don't know." I can only try to analyse rigorously what there is. Here people reproach me: When you practise criticism, you are also obliged to say how one should make it better. To my mind, this is incontrovertibly a bourgeois prejudice. Many times in history it so happened that the very works which pursued purely theoretical goals transformed consciousness, and thereby also social reality. **If, today, we follow a direct call to act, this act will not be performed** in an empty space — it will be an act **within the hegemonic ideological coordinates: those who really want to do something to help people** get involved in (undoubtedly honourable) **exploits** like Medecins sans frontières, Greenpeace, feminist and anti-racist campaigns, **which are** all not only tolerated but even supported by the media, even if they seemingly encroach on economic territory (for example, denouncing and boycotting companies which do not respect ecological conditions, or use child labour) — they are **tolerated and supported as long as they do not get too close to a certain limit.**⁶ This kind of activity provides the perfect example of interpassivity: 7 of doing things not in order to achieve something, but to prevent something from really happening, really changing. All this frenetic humanitarian, Politically Correct, etc., activity fits the formula of "Let's go on changing something all the time so that, globally, things will remain the same!". **If standard Cultural Studies criticize capitalism, they do so in the coded way that exemplifies Hollywood liberal paranoia: the enemy is "the system", the hidden "organization", the anti-democratic "conspiracy", not simply capitalism and state apparatuses.** The problem with **this critical stance** is not only that it **replaces concrete social analysis with a struggle against abstract paranoiac fantasies**, but that — in a typical paranoiac gesture — it unnecessarily redoubles social reality, as if there were a secret Organization behind the "visible" capitalist and state organs. What we should accept is that **there is no need for a secret "organization-within-an-organization**". The "conspiracy" is already in the "visible" organization as such, in the capitalist system, in the way the political space and state apparatuses work.⁸ Let us take one of the hottest topics in today's "radical" American academia: postcolonial studies. The problem of postcolonialism is undoubtedly crucial; however, postcolonial studies tend to translate it into the multiculturalist problematic of the colonized minorities' "right to narrate" their victimizing experience, of the power mechanisms which repress "otherness," so that, at the end of the day, we learn that the root of postcolonial exploitation is our intolerance towards the Other, and, furthermore, that this intolerance itself is rooted in our intolerance towards the "Stranger in Ourselves", in our inability to confront what we have repressed in and of ourselves — the politico-economic struggle is thus imperceptibly transformed into a pseudo-psychanalytic drama of the subject unable to confront its inner traumas. . . (Why pseudo-psychanalytic? Because the true lesson of psychoanalysis is not that the external events which fascinate and/or disturb us are just projections of our inner repressed impulses. The unbearable fact of life is that there really are disturbing events out there: there are other human beings who experience intense sexual enjoyment while we are half-impostant; there are people submitted to terrifying torture. . . Again, the ultimate truth of psychoanalysis is not that of discovering our true Self, but that of the traumatic encounter with an unbearable Real.) The true corruption of American academia is not primarily financial, it is not only that universities are able to buy many European critical intellectuals (myself included — up to a point), but conceptual: notions of "European" critical theory are imperceptibly translated into the benign universe of Cultural Studies chic. At a certain point, this chic becomes indistinguishable from the famous Citibank commercial in which scenes of East Asian, European, Black and American children playing is accompanied by the voice-over: "People who were once divided by a continent . . . are now united by an economy" — at this concluding highpoint, of course, the children are replaced by the Citibank logo. The great majority of **today's "radical" academics silently count on the long-term stability of the American capitalist model**, with a secure tenured position as their ultimate professional goal (a surprising number of them even play the stock market). **If there is one thing they are genuinely afraid of, it is a radical shattering of the (relatively) safe life-environment of the "symbolic classes" in developed Western societies.** Their excessive **Politically Correct zeal when** they are **dealing with sexism, racism, Third World sweatshops**, and so on, **is thus ultimately a defence against their own innermost identification**, a kind of compulsive ritual whose hidden logic is: "Let's talk as much as possible about the necessity of a radical change, to make sure that nothing will really change!" The journal October is typical of this: when you ask one of the editors what the title refers to, they half-confidentially indicate that it is, of course, that October — in this way, you can indulge in jargonistic analyses of modern art, with the secret assurance that you are somehow retaining a link with the radical revolutionary past. . . With regard to this radical chic, our first gesture towards **Third Way ideologists** and practitioners should be one of praise: at least they **play their game straight, and are honest in their acceptance of the global capitalist co-ordinates — unlike pseudo-radical academic Leftists who adopt an attitude of utter disdain towards the Third Way, while their own radicalism ultimately amounts to an empty gesture which obliges no one to do anything definite.** There is, of course, a strict distinction to be made here between authentic social engagement on behalf of exploited minorities (for example, organizing illegally employed Chicano field workers in California) and the multiculturalist/postcolonial "plantations of no-risk, no-fault, knock-off rebellion" which prosper in "radical" American academia. **If, however, in contrast to corporate multiculturalism", we define "critical multiculturalism" as a strategy of pointing out that "there are common forces of oppression, common strategies of exclusion,** stereotyping, and stigmatizing of oppressed groups, and thus common enemies and targets of attack," **I do not see the appropriateness of the continuing use of the term "multiculturalism", since the accent shifts here to the common struggle. In its normal accepted meaning, multiculturalism perfectly fits the logic of the global market.**

Protest/Speaking Out/Critical Affs Link

Today, what passes for radical politics is often anything but. The anti-capitalist protests in Seattle prove that the system engenders its own resistance, only to allow political leaders to re-interpret activists' demands. Single-issue movements, like the affirmative, distract from properly universal resistance to anti-capitalism by working within the system's given coordinates. Even if your demand gets listened to and met, the very form of its negotiation means it isn't subversive.

Slavoj Zizek, Professor of Sociology at the Institute for Sociology, Ljubljana University, 2002, Revolution at the Gates, p. 300-01

The promise of the “Seattle” movement lies in the fact that it is the very opposite of its usual media designation (the “anti-globalization protest”): it is the first kernel of a new global movement, global with regard to its content (it aims at a global confrontation with today’s capitalism) as well as its form (it is a global movement, a mobile international network ready to intervene anywhere from Seattle to Prague). It is more global than “global capitalism”, since it brings into the game its victims — that is, those who are excluded from capitalist globalization, as well as those who are included in a way which reduces them to proletarian misery.¹⁹³ Perhaps I should take the risk here of applying Hegel’s old distinction between “abstract” and “concrete” universality: capitalist globalization is “abstract”, focused on the speculative movement of Capital; whereas the “Seattle” movement stands for “concrete universality”, both for the totality of global capitalism and for its excluded dark side. The reality of capitalist globalization is best exemplified by the victory in June 2001 of the Russian nuclear lobby, which forced the parliament’s decision that Russia would import nuclear waste from developed Western countries. Here, Lenin’s reproach to liberals is crucial: they merely exploit the working classes’ discontent to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the conservatives, instead of identifying with it to the end.¹⁹⁴ Is this not also true of today’s Left liberals? They like to evoke racism, ecology, workers’ grievances, and so on, to score points over the conservatives — without endangering the system. Remember how, in Seattle, Bill Clinton himself deftly referred to the protesters on the streets outside, reminding the assembled leaders inside the guarded palaces that they should listen to the demonstrators’ message (the message which, of course, Clinton interpreted, depriving it of its subversive sting, which he attributed to the dangerous extremists introducing chaos and violence into the majority of peaceful protesters). This Clinton-esque stance later developed into an elaborate “carrot-and-stick” strategy of containment: on the one hand, paranoia (the notion that there is a dark Marxist plot lurking behind it); on the other hand, in Genoa, none other than Berlusconi provided food and shelter for the anti-globalization demonstrators — on condition that they “behaved properly”, and did not disturb the official event. It is the same with all New Social Movements, up to the Zapatistas in Chiapas: establishment is always ready to “listen to their demands”, depriving them of their proper political sting. The system is by definition ecumenical, open, tolerant, ready to “listen” to all — even if you insist on your demands, they are deprived of their universal political sting by the very form of negotiation. The true Third Way we have to look for is this third way between institutionalized parliamentary politics and the New Social Movements.

Particularized Demands Link

Particularized demands for change, no matter how radical, are performed against the backdrop of the neoliberal-democratic order and are tolerated as long as they fail to fundamentally change hegemonic ideology.

Slavoj Zizek, professor of philosophy at the university of Ljubljana, 2001, "Repeating Lenin,"
<http://lacan.com/replenis.htm>, accessed January 28, 2004

What are we to say to this? Again, the problem resides in the implicit qualifications which can be easily discerned by the "concrete analysis of the concrete situation," as Lenin himself would have put it. "Fidelity to **the democratic consensus**" means the acceptance of the present **liberal-parliamentary consensus**, which precludes any serious **questioning of how this liberal-democratic order is complicit in the phenomena it officially condemns, and**, of course, **any serious attempt to imagine a society whose socio-political order would be different**. In short, it means: **say and write whatever you want - on condition that what you do does not effectively question or disturb the predominant political consensus**. So **everything is allowed**, solicited even, **as a critical topic**: the prospects of a global **ecological catastrophe, violations of human rights, sexism, homophobia, antifeminism**, the growing **violence** not only in the far-away countries, but also in our megalopolises, the gap between the First and the Third World, between the rich and the poor, the shattering impact of the digitalization of our daily lives... there is nothing easier today than to get international, state or corporate funds for a multidisciplinary research into how to fight the new forms of ethnic, religious or sexist violence. The problem is that **all this occurs against the background of a fundamental Denkverbot, the prohibition to think**. Today's liberal-democratic hegemony is sustained by a kind of unwritten Denkverbot similar to the infamous Berufsverbot in Germany of the late 60s - the moment one shows a minimal sign of engaging in political projects that aim to seriously challenge the existing order, the answer is immediately: "Benevolent as it is, this will necessarily end in a new Gulag!" The ideological function of the constant reference to the holocaust, gulag and the more recent Third World catastrophes is thus to serve as the support of this Denkverbot by constantly reminding us how things may have been much worse: "Just look around and see for yourself what will happen if we follow your radical notions!" And it is exactly the same thing that the demand for "scientific objectivity" means: the moment one seriously questions the existing liberal consensus, one is accused of abandoning scientific objectivity for the outdated ideological positions. This is the point on which one cannot and should not concede: today, the actual **freedom of thought means the freedom to question the predominant liberal-democratic "post-ideological" consensus - or it means nothing**. Habermas designated the present era as that of the neue Undurchsichtlichkeit - the new opacity.¹ More than ever, our daily experience is mystifying: modernization generates new obscurantisms, the reduction of freedom is presented to us as the arrival of new freedoms. In these circumstances, one should be especially careful not to confuse the ruling ideology with ideology which SEEMS to dominate. More than ever, one should bear in mind Walter Benjamin's reminder that it is not enough to ask how a certain theory (or art) declares itself to stay with regard to social struggles - one should also ask how it effectively functions IN these very struggles. In sex, the effectively hegemonic attitude is not patriarchal repression, but free promiscuity; in art, provocations in the style of the notorious "Sensation" exhibitions ARE the norm, the example of the art fully integrated into the establishment. One is therefore tempted to turn around Marx's thesis 11: **the first task today is precisely NOT to succumb to the temptation to act, to directly intervene and change things** (which then inevitably ends in a cul de sac of debilitating impossibility: "what can one do against the global capital?"), **but to question the hegemonic ideological coordinates**. If, today, **one follows a direct call to act, this act will not be performed in an empty space - it will be an act WITHIN the hegemonic ideological coordinates: those who "really want to do something to help people" get involved in** (undoubtedly honorable) **exploits** like Medecins sans frontiere, Greenpeace, feminist and anti-racist campaigns, **which are** all not only tolerated, but even supported by the media, even if they seemingly enter the economic territory (say, denouncing and boycotting companies which do not respect ecological conditions or which use child labor) - they are **tolerated and supported as long as they do not get too close to a certain limit**. This kind of activity **provides the perfect example of interpassivity**²: of **doing things not to achieve something, but to PREVENT from something really happening, really changing**. All the frenetic humanitarian, politically correct, etc., activity fits the formula of "Let's go on changing something all the time so that, globally, things will remain the same!"

Social/Political/Economic Relations Link

Social, political, and economic relations impose a libido for certain fantasies to fill in the lack of the subject – this is ideology. Westerners know how capitalist society works but the enjoyment the system creates keeps us continually engaging through a capitalist framework despite any other social claims.

Steffen Böhm and Christian De Cock, Lecturer at University of Essex and Prof at University of Exeter, “Everything you wanted to know about organization theory . . . but were afraid to ask Slavoj Zizek”, The Editorial Board of the Sociological Review 2005

For Zizek, **the Real penetrates both society and the individual**, which means that both are always thrown out of kilter. Thus, **what we take for substantive entities** (eg, self and society), **are actually hollow. The only substance is the Real of jouissance, which is excluded from both, but which subtends the sense of everyday ‘reality’**. The core of **subjectivity is a void filled in by fantasy**, and **the fact that we can only ever plug our lack with fantasy after fantasy is** what keeps us up and running (Eagleton, 2003). Zizek’s (1997) point is that this fantasy is also **characteristic of what we call ‘society’ or ‘organization’**. That is, **the social – the political and economic relations that make up society or organization – are fantastic** in the sense of being both illusionary **and** real **fillings of the fundamental gap that describes them**. Precisely because **jouissance** restlessly **invests across the boundaries of self and society**, the libidinal cannot be confined to subjectivity or psychology. **It provides the tissue of fantasies that make up the social/organizational whilst the narrowly libidinal itself is a web of social and political representations.** In **this breaking down of the barriers between concepts of desire and libido (the ‘subjective’) and the social, political and economic (the ‘objective’)**, Zizek’s project **has clear resonances** with that of Deleuze (see Zizek, 2004, see also Sørensen, in this volume), although they seek to achieve their ends by different means and in different forms. Zizek is probably best known for his interventions in the theory of ideology, as it was the core topic of his reakthrough work, The Sublime Object of Ideology (1989). For Zizek, **the important hold ideology has over us lays in its capacity to yield jouissance; ideological power finally rests on the libidinal** rather than the conceptual, ‘on the way we hug our chains rather than the way we entertain beliefs’ (Eagleton, 2003: 198). **Because ideology is an illusion which structures our social practices**, for Zizek **the ‘falsity’ lies on the side of what we do**, not necessarily of what we say or know. His standard line of argument goes something like this: ‘we’ (eg, **the ‘ethical’ consumer, the ‘left-leaning’ Western academic, or the ‘democratic’ politician**) **know** exactly how things are – **that ‘the West’ exploits ‘the South’** and that the Western way of life is utterly unsustainable. However, **although we might know** all sorts of things **about** how **capitalist society** works – **and although we might create a certain cynical distance to these things** – Zizek argues that **we are still doing them; we are still engaging in the reproduction of capitalist relations precisely because these relations are objectively ‘false’ and act as systematic fantasy** (1989: 32). Zizek thus performs his trademark ‘180-degree turn’ on traditional forms of ideology critique, which assume that social practices are real but that the beliefs used to justify them are false or illusory. Such arguments are practised, for example, by some labour process theorists within the realms of organization theory (eg, Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Rowlinson and Hassard, 2001; Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995; and Thompson and Smith, 2001). Zizek’s key point is that **the central ideological ingredient is to be located in the mode of enjoyment it makes possible, which is indifferent to so-called ‘social realities’**. The aim of Zizek’s version of ideology critique is to create the conditions in which we can experience that there is nothing behind ideology. We can resist ideological power most effectively not by repudiating it but by fully accepting its dictates, and doing so in an overly literal way that brings them to the point of their inherent contradiction. Keeping a ‘critical distance’ points to ideological delusion at its worst: precisely by not identifying with the web of power one is truly caught in it.

Social Responsibility Link

Concerns about social responsibility and actions for humanitarian crises only justify corporate interventions which have always been driven by the core of profit and exploitation.

Slavoj Zizek, senior researcher at the Institute of Sociology, University of Ljubljana, "Nobody has to be Vile", April 6 2006, <http://www.lacan.com/zizvile.htm>

Above all, **liberal communists are true citizens of the world - good people who worry. They worry about** populist fundamentalism and **irresponsible greedy capitalist corporations. They see the 'deeper causes' of today's problems: mass poverty** and hopelessness breed fundamentalist terror. **Their goal is not to earn money, but to change the world (and, as a by-product, make even more money).** Bill Gates is **already the single greatest benefactor in the history of humanity, displaying his love for his neighbours by giving hundreds of millions of dollars for education, the fight against hunger and malaria etc. The catch is that before you can give all this away you have to take it (or, as the liberal communists would put it, create it). In order to help people, the justification goes, you must have the means to do so, and experience - that is, recognition of the dismal failure of all centralised statist and collectivist approaches** - teaches us that private enterprise is by far the most effective way. By regulating their business, taxing them excessively, the state is undermining the official goal of its own activity (to make life better for the majority, to help those in need). **Liberal communists do not want to be mere profit-machines: they want their lives to have deeper meaning.** They are against old-fashioned religion and for spirituality, for non-confessional meditation (everybody knows that Buddhism foreshadows brain science, that the power of meditation can be measured scientifically). **Their motto is social responsibility and gratitude:** they are the first to admit that society has been incredibly good to them, allowing them to deploy their talents and amass wealth, so they feel that it is their duty to give something back to society and help people. **This beneficence is what makes business success worthwhile.** This isn't an entirely new phenomenon. **Remember** Andrew Carnegie, **who employed a private army to suppress organised labour in his steelworks and then distributed large parts of his wealth for educational, cultural and humanitarian causes, proving that,** although a man of steel, **he had a heart of gold? In the same way, today's liberal communists give away with one hand what they grabbed with the other.**

Identity Politics Link

Identity politics attempt to locate difference within capitalism that precludes a direct challenge to capitalist fantasy.

Steffen **Böhm** and Christian De **Cock**, Lecturer at University of Essex and Prof at University of Exeter, “Everything you wanted to know about organization theory . . . but were afraid to ask Slavoj Zizek”, The Editorial Board of the Sociological Review 2005

For Zizek, Foucauldian ‘micro-political’ subject positions designate a form of subjectivity that corresponds to ‘late capitalism’, which brings us back to his conception of the workings of capitalist ideology. His line of argument is that today we are ‘allowed’, for example, to be gay, radical feminist and even cynical critics of capitalism. All these different subject positions and identities are possible within contemporary capitalist relations – as long as we still engage in the labour process and capitalist forms of accumulation and reproduction. ‘Late capitalism’ enables a whole host of differences without necessarily challenging the fundamental logic of capitalist relations – this argument can also be connected to Hardt and Negri’s (2000) conceptions of ‘Empire’ as a fundamentally open regime that enables a multitude of differences to exist (see also Mandarini, in this volume). Zizek’s point is that rather than forming all sorts of different subject positions that aim to escape the core of capitalist fantasy, one should engage the fundamental fantasy of capitalist relations in a direct, uncompromising fashion. The way forward is therefore to ‘traverse the fantasy’ – a phrase which he borrows from the outcome of Lacanian therapy (Kay, 2003).

Identity Politics Link

Identity-based struggles can never come to grips with the Real of Capital because today's global capitalism relentlessly fragments identities to ensure that capital's homogenizing force will prevail.

Slavoj Zizek, Professor of Sociology at the Institute for Sociology, Ljubljana University, 2000, The Fragile Absolute, p. 11-15

So where are we, today, with regard to ghosts? The first paradox that strikes us, of course, is that this very process of global reflexivization that mercilessly derides and chases the ghosts of the past generates not only its own immediacy but also its own ghosts, its own spectrality. The most famous ghost, which has been roaming around for the last 150 years, was not a ghost of the past, but the spectre of the (revolutionary) future — the spectre, of course, from the first sentence of The Communist Manifesto. The automatic reaction to The Manifesto of today's enlightened liberal reader is: isn't the text simply wrong on so many empirical accounts — with regard to its picture of the social situation, as well as the revolutionary perspective it sustains and propagates? Was there ever a political manifesto that was more clearly falsified by subsequent historical reality? Is not The Manifesto, at its best, the exaggerated extrapolation of certain tendencies discernible in the nineteenth century? So let us approach The Manifesto from the opposite end: where do we live today, in our global 'post . . . (postmodern, post-industrial) society? The slogan that is imposing itself more and more is 'globalization': the brutal imposition of the unified world market that threatens all local ethnic traditions, including the very form of the nation-state. And in view of this situation, is not the description of the social impact of the bourgeoisie in The Manifesto more relevant than ever? The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real condition in life, and his relations with his kind. The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere. The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of Reactionists, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilized nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the productions of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness becomes more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature.⁶ Is this not, more than ever, our reality today? Ericsson phones are no longer Swedish, Toyota cars are manufactured 60 per cent in the USA, Hollywood culture pervades the remotest parts of the globe. . . . Furthermore, does not the same go also for all forms of ethnic and sexual identities? Should we not supplement Marx's description in this sense, adding also that sexual 'onesidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible'; that concerning sexual practices also, 'all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned', so that capitalism tends to replace standard normative heterosexuality with a proliferation of unstable shifting identities and/or orientations? From time to time Marx himself underestimates this ability of the capitalist universe to incorporate the transgressive urge that seemed to threaten it; in his analysis of the ongoing American Civil War, for example, he claimed that since the English textile industry, the backbone of the industrial system, could not survive without the supply of cheap cotton from the American South rendered possible only by slave labour, England would be forced to intervene directly to prevent the abolition of slavery. So yes, this global dynamism described by Marx, which causes all things solid to melt into air, is our reality — on condition that we do not forget to supplement this image from The Manifesto with its inherent dialectical opposite, the 'spiritualization' of the very material process of production. While capitalism does suspend the power of the old ghosts of tradition, it generates its own monstrous ghosts. That is to say: on the one hand, capitalism entails the radical secularization of social life — it mercilessly tears apart any aura of authentic nobility, sacredness, honour, and so on: It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom — Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.⁷ However, the fundamental lesson of the 'critique of political economy' elaborated by the mature Marx in the years after The Manifesto is that this reduction of all heavenly chimeras to brutal economic reality generates a spectrality of its own. When Marx describes the mad self-enhancing circulation of Capital, whose solipsistic path of self-fecundation reaches its apogee in today's meta-reflexive speculations on futures, it is far too simplistic to claim that the spectre of this self-engendering monster that pursues its path regardless of any human or environmental concern is an ideological abstraction, and that one should never forget that behind this abstraction there are real people and natural objects on whose productive capacities and resources Capital's circulation is based, and on which it feeds like a gigantic parasite. The problem is that this 'abstraction' does not exist only in our (financial speculator's) misperception of social reality; it is 'real' in the precise sense of determining the very structure of material social processes: the fate of whole strata of populations, and sometimes of whole countries, can be decided by the 'solipsistic' speculative dance of Capital, which pursues its goal of profitability with a blessed indifference to the way its movement will affect social reality. That is the fundamental systemic violence of capitalism, which is much more uncanny than direct pre-capitalist socio-ideological violence: this violence is no longer attributable to concrete individuals and their 'evil' intentions; it is purely 'objective', systemic, anonymous.

Democracy/Multiculturalism Link

The frame of democracy and multiculturalism depoliticizes universal struggles and preclude negotiations against pote politics.

Steffen **Böhm** and Christian De **Cock**, Lecturer at University of Essex and Prof at University of Exeter, “Everything you wanted to know about organization theory . . . but were afraid to ask Slavoj Zizek”, The Editorial Board of the Sociological Review 2005

Zizek's radical politics is founded, not in the notion of a difference that must be contained or embraced, but in the notion of the universal. He sees the political problem as one of struggle against the current of dominant, differentiating, particularist interests. He particularly takes issue with the ontologization of 'Democracy' into a depoliticized universal frame which cannot be (re)negotiated. The radicalization of politics into open warfare of us-against-them discernible in different fundamentalisms is the form in which the foreclosed political returns in the post- political universe of pluralist negotiation and consensual regulation. For that reason, the way to counteract this reemerging ultrapolitics is not more tolerance, more compassion and multicultural understanding, but the return of the political proper . . . True universalists are not those who preach global tolerance of differences and all encompassing unity but those who engage in a passionate fight for the assertion of the truth that engages them. (Zizek, 1998: 1002)

Democracy Link

Playing the democratic game literally guarantees that the given situation and its hegemonic ideologies remain unchallenged – the only way to break out of the democratic deadlock is the ethical Act proper, which shatters the co-ordinates of a given situation

Slavoj Zizek, Senior Researcher at the Institute for Social Studies in Ljubljana, 2002, Welcome to the Desert of the Real!, p. 151-54

No wonder, then, that, in a kind of echo to European Unity, in June 2002, Israel also started to raise the protective Wall against the West Bank Arab settlements. When terrorists are more and more described in the terms of a viral infection, as an attack of invisible bacteria, one should recall that the comparison of Jews to ‘bacteria’ attacking the sane social body is one of the classic topoi of anti-Semitism. Is then the invisible fundamentalist terrorist the last embodiment of the Wandering Jew? Are today’s reports on the secret Muslim fundamentalist plans to destroy the West the new version of the infamous Protocols of the Zion?

Does today’s ‘war on terror’ signal the paradoxical point at which the Zionist Jews themselves joined the ranks of anti-Semitism?

Is this the ultimate price of the establishment of the Jewish State? What underlies these ominous strategies is the fact that

democracy (the established liberal-democratic parliamentary system) is no longer ‘alive’ in the Paulinian sense of the term: the tragic thing is that **the only serious political force which is today ‘alive’ is the new populist Right.** **Insofar as we play the democratic game of leaving the place of power empty, of accepting the gap between this place and our occupying it** (which is the very gap of castration), **are we — democrats — all not ‘fidel castros’, faithful to castration?** Apart from anaemic economic administration, **the liberal-democratic centre’s main function is to guarantee that nothing will really happen in politics: liberal democracy is the party of non-**

Event. The line of division is more and more ‘Long live . . . Le Pen, Haider, Berlusconi!’ versus ‘Death to.. the same!’ — with the opposition life/death adequately distributed between the two poles. Or, to put it in Nietzschean terms (as they were interpreted by Deleuze): **today, the populist Right acts, sets the pace, determines the problematic of the political struggle, and the liberal centre is reduced to a ‘reactive force’:** it ultimately limits

itself to reacting to the populist Right’s initiatives, either opposing them radically from an impotent Leftist posturing, or translating them into the acceptable liberal language (‘while rejecting the populist hatred of the immigrants, we have to admit they are addressing issues which really worry people, so we should take care of the problem, introduce tougher immigration and anti-crime measures . . .’) **The notion of the radical political Act as the way out of this democratic deadlock,** of course, **cannot but provoke the expected reaction from the liberals. The standard critique concerns the Act’s allegedly ‘absolute’ character of a radical break,** which renders impossible any clear distinction between a properly ‘ethical’ act and, say, a Nazi monstrosity: is it not that an Act is always embedded in a specific socio-symbolic context? The answer to this reproach is clear: of course — **an Act is always a specific intervention within a socio-symbolic context; the same gesture can be an Act or a ridiculous empty posture, depending on this context**

(say, making a public ethical statement when it is too late changes a courageous intervention into an irrelevant gesture). In what, then, resides the misunderstanding? Why this critique? There is something else which disturbs the critics of the Lacanian notion of Act: true, an Act is always situated in a concrete context **this, however, does not mean that it is fully determined by its context. An Act always involves a radical risk,** what Derrida, following Kierkegaard, called the madness of a decision: **it is a step into the open, with no guarantee about the final outcome** — why? **Because an Act retroactively changes the very co-ordinates into which it intervenes.** This lack of guarantee is what the **critics**

cannot tolerate: they **want an Act without risk** — not without empirical risks, but without the much more radical ‘transcendental risk’ that the Act will not only simply fail, but radically misfire. In short, to paraphrase Robespierre, those who oppose the ‘absolute Act’ effectively oppose the Act as such, they want an Act without the Act. What they want is **homologous to the ‘democratic’ opportunists who**, as Lenin put it in the autumn of 1917, **want a ‘democratically legitimized’ revolution, as if one should first organize a referendum,** and only then, after obtaining a clear majority, seize power . . . It is here that one can see how **an Act proper cannot be contained within the limits of democracy** (conceived as a positive system of legitimizing power through free elections). **The Act occurs in an emergency when one has to take the risk and act without any legitimization, engaging oneself into a kind of Pascalean wager that the Act itself will create the conditions of its retroactive ‘democratic’ legitimization.** Say, when, in 1940, after the French defeat, de Gaulle called for the continuation of warfare against the Germans, his gesture was without ‘democratic legitimization’ (at that moment, a large majority of the French were unambiguously supporting Marshall Pétain — Jacques Duclos, the leading French Communist, wrote that, if free elections’ were to be held in France in the autumn of 1940, Pétain would have got at least 90 per cent of the votes). However, in spite of this lack of ‘democratic legitimization’, the truth was on de Gaulle’s side, and he effectively was speaking on behalf of France, of the French people ‘as such’. This also enables us to answer the ultimate democratic reproach: the absolute (self-referential) act is deprived of any external control which would prevent terrifying excesses — anything can be legitimized in a self-referential way? The answer is clear: as (among others) the case of France in 1940 demonstrates, **democracy itself cannot provide such a guarantee; there is no guarantee against the possibility of the excess — the risk has to be assumed, it is part of the very field of the political.**

Liberalism/Utopianism Link

Liberalism relies on the hope of a perfect universal state – this is just desire for perfect politics.

Alberto Moreiras, Professor at Duke University, “A god without sovereignty. Political Jouissance. The passive decision.”, pg. 75-76, 2004

The postrevolutionary political perspective, whether communist or liberal, incorporates a fundamental betrayal of desire based on the ontological hope of what Lacan calls the universal State. The universal State—an impossible paradise of free work and working freedom—stands for the indefinitely deferred but always present promise of the coincidence of desire with itself, no doubt a promise of desire itself, and not just of power, indeed a promise of sovereign desire, which is a promise of (self-)betraying desire.

The universal State, Lacan says, “means no more than supposing things will change on a molecular level, at the level of the relationship that constitutes the position of man in the face of various goods, to the extent that up till now his desire was not there” (318). The promise or hope for the universal State—there is no promise without hope—even though “nothing indicates that even at that limit the problem will disappear” (Lacan 1992, 318), is the political horizon of the end of politics. Far from anticipating an actual situation where the realm of goods and the realm of desire will have become identical, it is a substitute for the inability to live up to the (Lacanian) ethical imperative not to yield on one's desire. As an abandonment of radical perseverance in one's being, it could also be perceived as an abandonment of sovereignty, a sort of abdication. Indeed, Schmitt’s words on the essence of political existence absolutely resonate in Lacan’s notion of self-betrayal. For Schmitt, “for as long as a people exists in the political sphere, this people must . . . determine by itself the distinction of friend and enemy. Therein resides the essence of its political existence. When it no longer possesses the capacity or the will to make this distinction, it ceases to exist politically. If it permits this decision to be made by another, then it is no longer a politically free people and is absorbed into another political system” (Schmitt 1996, 49).

Survival Focus Link

Focusing on survival ensures that life is robbed of that which makes it worth living – only when we have something worth dying for does life become worth living.

Slavoj **Zizek**, Senior Researcher at the Institute for Social Studies in Ljubljana, **2002**, Welcome to the Desert of the Real!, p.88-90

What if we are ‘really alive’ only if we commit ourselves with an excessive intensity which puts us beyond ‘mere life’? What if, when we focus on mere survival, even if it is qualified as ‘having a good time’, what we ultimately lose is life itself? What if the Palestinian suicide bomber on the point of blowing him- or herself (and others) up is, in an emphatic sense, ‘more alive’ than the American soldier engaged in a war in front of a computer screen against an enemy hundreds of miles away, or a New York yuppie jogging along the Hudson river in order to keep his body in shape? Or, in psychoanalytic terms, **what if a hysterical is truly alive in his or her permanent excessive questioning of his or her existence, while an obsessional is the very model of choosing a ‘life in death’?** That is to say, is not the ultimate aim of his or her compulsive rituals to prevent the ‘thing’ from happening this ‘thing’ being the excess of life itself? Is not the catastrophe he or she fears the fact that, finally, something will really happen to him or her? Or, **in terms of the revolutionary process, what if the difference that separates Lenin’s era from Stalinism is, again, the difference between life and death?** There is an apparently marginal feature which makes this point clearly: the basic attitude of a Stalinist Communist is that of following the correct Party line against the ‘Rightist’ or ‘Leftist’ deviation—in short, steering a safe middle course; for authentic Leninism, in clear contrast, there is ultimately only one deviation, the Centrist one that of ‘playing it safe’, of opportunistically avoiding the risk of clearly and excessively ‘taking sides’. There was no deeper historical necessity in the sudden shift of Soviet policy from ‘War Communism’ to the ‘New Economic Policy’ in 1921, for example—it was just a desperate strategic zigzag between the Leftist and the Rightist line, or as Lenin himself put it in 1922—the Bolsheviks made ‘all the possible mistakes’. This excessive ‘taking sides’, this permanent zigzagging imbalance, is ultimately (revolutionary political) life itself—for a Leninist, the ultimate name of the counterrevolutionary Right is the ‘Centre’ itself, the fear of introducing a radical imbalance into the social edifice. **It is thus a properly Nietzschean paradox that the greatest loser in this apparent assertion of Life against all transcendent Causes is actual life itself. What makes life ‘worth living’ is the very excess of life: the awareness that there is something for which one is ready to risk one’s life** (we may call this excess ‘freedom’, ‘honour’, ‘dignity’, ‘autonomy’, etc.). **Only when we are ready to take this risk are we really alive.** Chesterton makes this point apropos of the paradox of courage: carelessness about dying. He must not merely cling to life, for then he will be a coward, and will not escape. He must not merely wait for death, for then he will be a suicide, and will not escape. He must seek his life in a spirit of furious indifference to it; he must desire life like water and yet drink death like wine. ~ **The ‘post-metaphysical’ survivalist stance of the Last Men ends up in an anaemic spectacle of life dragging on as its own shadow.** It is within this horizon that we should understand today’s growing rejection of the death penalty: we should be able to discern the hidden ‘biopolitics’ which sustains this rejection. **Those who assert the ‘sacredness of life’, defending it against the threat of transcendent powers which are parasitical upon it, end up in a ‘supervised world in which we’ll live painlessly, safely — and tediously’**, a world in which, for the sake of its very official goal—a long and pleasurable life—all real pleasures are prohibited or strictly controlled (smoking, drugs, food...) Spielberg’s Saving Private Ryan is the latest example of this survivalist attitude towards dying, with its ‘demystifying’ presentation of war as a meaningless slaughter which nothing can really justify—as such, it provides the best possible justification for Cohn Powell’s ‘no-casualties-on-our-side’ military doctrine. Here, we are not confusing the overtly racist Christian fundamentalist ‘defence of the West’ and the tolerant liberal version of the ‘war on terrorism’ which ultimately wants to save Muslims themselves from the fundamentalist threat; important as the difference between them is, they get caught up in the same self-destructive dialectics.

Survival Focus Link

True revolutionary politics must reject a focus on mere survival – doing so ensures that we don’t really live life.

Slavoj Zizek, Professor of Sociology at the Institute for Sociology, Ljubljana University, 2003, The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity, p. 94-95

Insofar as “death” and “life” designate for Saint Paul two existential (subjective) positions, not “objective” facts, we are fully justified in raising the old Pauline question: who is really alive today?
What if we are “really alive” only if and when we engage ourselves with an excessive intensity which puts us beyond “mere life”? What if, when we focus on mere survival, even if it is qualified as “having a good time,” what we ultimately lose is life itself? What if the Palestinian suicide bomber on the point of blowing himself (and others) up is, in an emphatic sense, “more alive” than the American soldier engaged in a war in front of a computer screen hundreds of miles away from the enemy, or a New York yuppie jogging along the Hudson river in order to keep his body in shape? Or, in terms of the psychoanalytic clinic, what if a hysterical is truly alive in her permanent, excessive, provoking questioning of her existence, while an obsessional is the very model of choosing a “life in death”? That is to say, is not the ultimate aim of his compulsive rituals to prevent the “thing” from happening—this “thing” being the excess of life itself? Is not the catastrophe he fears the fact that, finally, something will really happen to him? Or, in terms of the revolutionary process, what if the difference that separates Lenin’s era from Stalinism is, again, the difference between life and death? There is an apparently marginal feature which clearly illustrates this point: the basic attitude of a Stalinist Communist is that of following the correct Party line against “Rightist” or “Leftist” deviation—in short, to steer a safe middle course; for authentic Leninism, in clear contrast, there is ultimately only one deviation, the Centrist one—that of “playing it safe,” of opportunistically avoiding the risk of clearly and excessively “taking sides.” There was no “deeper historical necessity,” for example, in the sudden shift of Soviet policy from “War Communism” to the “New Economic Policy” in 1921—it was just a desperate strategic zigzag between the Leftist and the Rightist line, or, as Lenin himself put it in 1922, the Bolsheviks made “all the possible mistakes.” This excessive “taking sides,” this permanent imbalance of zigzag, is ultimately (the revolutionary political) life itself—for a Leninist, the ultimate name of the counterrevolutionary Right is “Center” itself, the fear of introducing a radical imbalance into the social edifice. It is a properly Nietzschean paradox that the greatest loser in this apparent assertion of Life against all transcendent Causes is actual life itself. What makes life “worth living” is the very excess of life: the awareness that there is something for which we are ready to risk our life (we may call this excess “freedom,” “honor,” “dignity” “autonomy,” etc.). Only when we are ready to take this risk are we really alive. So when Holderlin wrote: “To live is to defend a form,” this form is not simply a Lebensform, but the form of the excess-of-life, the way this excess violently inscribes itself into the life-texture. Chesterton makes this point apropos of the paradox of courage: A soldier surrounded by enemies, if he is to cut his way out, needs to combine a strong desire for living with a strange carelessness about dying. He must not merely cling to life, for then he will be a coward, and will not escape. He must not merely wait for death, for then he will be a suicide, and will not escape. He must seek his life in a spirit of furious indifference to it; he must desire life like water and yet drink death like wine.²

Catastrophe Management Link

They remain trapped in the ideological components of the Real of catastrophe – fascination with securing an insulated, artificial world against an abstract threatening presence ensures that their fixation on crisis is driven solely by jouissance.

Slavoj Zizek, Professor of Sociology at the Institute for Sociology, Ljubljana University, 2002, Revolution at the Gates, p. 232-33

It is precisely now, when we are dealing with the raw Real of a catastrophe, that we should bear in mind the ideological and fantasmatic co-ordinates which determine its perception. If there is any symbolism in the collapse of the WTC towers, it is not so much the old-fashioned notion of the “centre of financial capitalism” but, rather, the notion that the two WTC towers stood for the centre of virtual capitalism, of financial speculation disconnected from the sphere of material production. The shattering impact of the attacks can be accounted for only against the background of the borderline which, today, separates the digitalized First World from the Third World “desert of the Real”. It is the awareness that we live in an insulated artificial universe which generates the notion that some ominous agent is threatening us all the time with total destruction. In this paranoiac perspective, the terrorists are turned into an irrational abstract agency —abstract in the Hegelian sense of subtracted from the concrete socioideological network which gave birth to it. Every explanation which evokes social circumstances is dismissed as a covert justification of terror, and every particular entity is evoked only in a negative way: the terrorists are betraying the true spirit of Islam; they do not express the interests and hopes of the poor Arab masses. Whenever we encounter such a purely evil Outside, we should summon up the courage to endorse the Hegelian lesson: in this pure Outside, we should recognize the distilled version of our own essence. For the last five centuries, the (relative) prosperity and peace of the “civilized” West has been bought at the price of ruthless violence and destruction of the “barbarian” Outside: a long story, from the conquest of America to the slaughter in the Congo. Cruel and indifferent as it may sound, we should also, now more than ever, bear in mind that the actual effect of these attacks is much more symbolic than real: in Africa, more people die of AIDS every single day than all the victims of the WTC collapse, and their deaths could easily have been avoided at relatively small financial cost. The USA simply got a taste of what goes on around the world on a daily basis — from Sarajevo to Grozny, from Rwanda and the Congo to Sierra Leone. If we add to the situation in New York rapist gangs and a dozen or so snipers blindly targeting people as they walk along the streets, we get an idea of what Sarajevo was like a decade ago. When, in the days after 11 September 2001, our gaze was transfixed by the images of the plane hitting one of the WTC towers, we were all forced to experience the “compulsion to repeat” and jouissance beyond the pleasure principle: we wanted to see it again and again; the same shots were repeated ad nauseam; and the uncanny satisfaction we got from it was jouissance at its purest. It was when we watched the two WTC towers collapsing on the TV screen that it became possible for us to experience the falsity of “reality TV shows”: even if these shows are “for real”, people still act in them — they simply play themselves. The standard disclaimer in a novel (“Characters in this text are a fiction; any resemblance to real characters is purely accidental”) holds also for the participants in reality soaps: what we see there are fictional characters, even if they play themselves for real.

Anti-Terrorism Link—Pure War/Cap

Even benign anti-terrorist measures are designed to repress the true implications of events like 9-11 – they feed into a perpetual yet virtual war and divert attention from the role global capitalism plays in the generation of “terrorism”

Slavoj Zizek, Professor of Sociology at the Institute for Sociology, Ljubljana University, 2002, Revolution at the Gates, p. 234-36

Along the same lines, **Rightist commentators** like George Will also immediately **proclaimed** the end of the American “holiday from history”—the impact of reality shattering the isolated tower of the liberal tolerant attitude and the Cultural Studies focus on textuality. Now, **we are forced to strike back, to deal with real enemies in the real world. . . Whom, however, do we strike at?**

Whatever the response, it will never hit the right target, bringing us full satisfaction. The ridicule of America attacking Afghanistan cannot fail to strike us: if the greatest power in the world destroys one of the world’s poorest countries, in which peasants barely survive on barren hills, will this not be the ultimate case of impotent acting out? In many ways Afghanistan is an ideal target: a country that is already reduced to rubble, with no infrastructure, repeatedly destroyed by war for the last two decades ... we cannot avoid the surmise that the choice of Afghanistan will also be determined by economic considerations: is it not best procedure to act out one’s anger at a country for which no one cares, and where there is nothing to destroy? Unfortunately, the choice of Afghanistan recalls the anecdote about the madman who searches for a lost key beneath a streetlamp; asked why there, when he lost the key in a dark corner somewhere, he answers: “But it’s easier to search under strong light!” Is it not the ultimate irony that the whole of Kabul already looks like downtown Manhattan? **To succumb to the urge to act and retaliate means precisely to avoid confronting the true dimensions of what occurred on 11 September — it means an act whose true aim is to lull us into the secure conviction that nothing has really changed.** The true long-term threats are further acts of mass terror in comparison with which the memory of the WTC collapse will pale — acts that are less spectacular, but much more horrifying. What about bacteriological warfare, what about the use of lethal gas, what about the prospect of DNA terrorism (developing poisons which will affect only people who share a determinate genome)? In this new warfare, the agents claim their acts less and less publicly: **not only are “terrorists” themselves no longer eager to claim responsibility for their acts** (even the notorious Al Qaida did not explicitly appropriate the 11 September attacks, not to mention the mystery about the origins of the anthrax letters); **“antiterrorist” state measures themselves are draped in a shroud of secrecy; all this constitutes an ideal breeding ground for conspiracy theories and generalized social paranoia. And is not the obverse of this paranoid omnipresence of the invisible war its desubstantialization?** So, again, just as we drink beer without alcohol or coffee without caffeine, **we are now getting war deprived of its substance — a virtual war fought behind computer screens**, a war experienced by its participants as a video game, a war with no casualties (on our side, at least). With the spread of the anthrax panic in October 2001, the West got the first taste of this new “invisible” warfare in which — an aspect we should always bear in mind — we, ordinary citizens, are, with regard to information about what is going on, totally at the mercy of the authorities: we see and hear nothing; all we know comes from the official media. A superpower bombing a desolate desert country and, at the same time, hostage to invisible bacteria — this, not the WTC explosions, is the first image of twenty-first-century warfare. Instead of a quick acting-out, we should confront these difficult questions: **what will “war” mean in the twenty-first century? Who will “they” be, if they are, clearly, neither states nor criminal gangs?** Here I cannot resist the temptation to recall the Freudian opposition of the public Law and its obscene superego double: along the same lines, **are not “international terrorist organizations” the obscene double of the big multinational corporations — the ultimate rhizomatic machine, omnipresent, yet with no clear territorial base? Are they not the form in which nationalist and/or religious “fundamentalism” accommodated itself to global capitalism? Do they not embody the ultimate contradiction, with their particular! exclusive content and their global dynamic functioning? For this reason, the fashionable notion of the “clash of civilizations” must be thoroughly rejected: what we are witnessing today, rather, are clashes within each civilization.** A brief look at the comparative history of Islam and Christianity tells us that the “human rights record” of Islam (to use an anachronistic term) is much better than that of Christianity: in past centuries, Islam was significantly more tolerant towards other religions than Christianity. It is also time to remember that it was through the Arabs that, in the Middle Ages, we in Western Europe regained access to our Ancient Greek legacy. While I do not in any way excuse today’s horrific acts, these facts none the less clearly demonstrate that **we are dealing not with a feature inscribed into Islam “as such”, but with the outcome of modern sociopolitical conditions.** If we look more closely, what is this “clash of civilizations” really about? **Are not all real-life “clashes” clearly related to global capitalism? The Muslim “fundamentalist” target is not only global capitalism’s corrosive impact on social life, but also the corrupt “traditionalist” regimes in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and so on. The most horrifying slaughters** (those in Rwanda, Congo, and Sierra Leone) **not only took place — and are taking place — within the same “civilization”, but are also clearly related to the interplay of global economic interests.** Even in the few cases which would vaguely fit the definition of the “clash of civilisations” (Bosnia and Kosovo, southern Sudan, etc.), the shadow of other interests is easily discernible. **A suitable dose of “economic reductionism” would therefore be appropriate here: instead of the endless analyses of how Islamic “fundamentalism” is intolerant towards our liberal societies, and other “clash-of-civilization” topics, we should refocus our attention on the economic background of the conflict** — the clash of economic interests, and of the geopolitical interests of the United States itself (how to retain privileged links both with Israel and with conservative Arab regimes like those of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait).

Anti-Terrorism Link

Their position on terrorism forecloses the possibility of a truly ethical stance – we should combine the stances that terrorism should be condemned and that there are particular causes of extremism and terrorism, while maintaining a critique of global capitalism

Slavoj Zizek, Professor of Sociology at the Institute for Sociology, Ljubljana University, 2002, Revolution at the Gates, p. 243-44

The supreme example here is, yet again, that of Antigone. From the standpoint of the Hegelian position mentioned above, Antigone is to be unambiguously condemned: the actual consequences of her act were catastrophic; she was an ethical rigourist if ever there was one, in contrast to her sister Ismene's tolerance and compromising attitude — is this what we want? The opposite of the rationality of the Real, or its closed circuit of Fate which gives us back our true message, is the act itself which intervenes in the very rational order of the Real, changing-restructuring its co-ordinates — an act is not irrational; rather, it creates its own (new) rationality. This is what Antigone accomplishes; this is the true consequence of her act. And this cannot be planned in advance — we have to take a risk, a step into the open, with no big Other to return our true message to us. We do not yet know all the consequences this event will have for the economy, ideology, politics, warfare, but one thing is certain: the USA —which, hitherto, perceived itself as an island exempt from this kind of violence, witnessing this kind of thing only from the safe distance of the TV screen — is now directly involved. So the alternative is: will the Americans decide to fortify their “sphere” further, or will they risk stepping out of it? Either America will persist in — even strengthen — the deeply immoral attitude of “Why should this happen to us? Things like this just don't happen here!”, leading to more aggressivity towards the threatening Outside — in short: to a paranoid acting-out. Or America will finally risk stepping through the fantasmatic screen separating it from the Outside World, accepting its arrival in the Real world, making the long-overdue move from “A thing like this shouldn't happen here!” to “A thing like this shouldn't happen anywhere!”. That is the true lesson of the attacks: the only way to ensure that it will not happen here again is to prevent it happening anywhere else. In short, America should learn humbly to accept its own vulnerability as part of this world, enacting the punishment of those responsible as a sad duty, not as an exhilarating retaliation. The WTC attacks again confronted us with the necessity of resisting the temptation of a double blackmail. If one simply, only and unconditionally condemns it, one cannot but appear to endorse the blatantly ideological position of American innocence under attack by Third World Evil; if one draws attention to the deeper sociopolitical causes of Arab extremism, one cannot but appear to blame the victim, which ultimately got what it deserved... . The only appropriate solution here is to reject this very opposition, and to adopt both positions simultaneously; this can be done only if one resorts to the dialectical category of totality: there is no choice between these two positions; both are biased and false. Far from offering a case apropos of which one can adopt a clear ethical stance, we encounter here the limit of moral reasoning: from the moral standpoint, the victims are innocent, the act was an abominable crime; however, this very innocence is not innocent — to adopt such an “innocent” position in today's global capitalist universe is in itself a false abstraction.

*****Impacts**

Ethical Obligation To Reject Capitalism

We have an ethical obligation to reject global capitalism because of the suffering it imposes upon millions across the globe and because of the way it circumscribes the very field of political possibilities.

Glyn Daly, Senior Lecturer in Politics in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at University College, Northampton, 2004, Conversations With Zizek, p. 14-16

For Zizek it is imperative that we cut through this Gordian knot of postmodern protocol and recognize that our ethico-political responsibility is to confront the constitutive violence of today's global capitalism and its obscene naturalization/anonymization of the millions who are subjugated by it throughout the world. Against the standardized positions of postmodern culture — with all its pieties concerning 'multiculturalist' etiquette — Zizek is arguing for a politics that might be called 'radically incorrect' in the sense that it breaks with these types of positions and focuses instead on the very organizing principles of today's social reality: the principles of global liberal capitalism. This requires some care and subtlety. For far too long, Marxism has been bedevilled by an almost fetishistic economism that has tended towards political morbidity. With the likes of Hilferding and Gramsci, and more recently Laclau and Mouffe, crucial theoretical advances have been made that enable the transcendence of all forms of economism. In this new context, however, Zizek argues that the problem that now presents itself is almost that of the opposite fetish. That is to say, the prohibitive anxieties surrounding the taboo of economism can function as a way of not engaging with economic reality and as a way of implicitly accepting the latter as a basic horizon of existence. In an ironic Freudian-Lacanian twist, the fear of economism can end up reinforcing a de facto economic necessity in respect of contemporary capitalism (i.e. the initial prohibition conjures up the very thing it fears). This is not to endorse any kind of retrograde return to economism. Zizek's point is rather that in rejecting economism we should not lose sight of the systemic power of capital in shaping the lives and destinies of humanity and our very sense of the possible. In particular we should not overlook Marx's central insight that in order to create a universal global system the forces of capitalism seek to conceal the politico-discursive violence of its construction through a kind of gentrification of that system. What is persistently denied by neo-liberals such as Rorty (1989) and Fukuyama (1992) is that the gentrification of global liberal capitalism is one whose 'universalism' fundamentally reproduces and depends upon a disavowed violence that excludes vast sectors of the world's population. In this way, neo-liberal ideology attempts to naturalize capitalism by presenting its outcomes of winning and losing as if they were simply a matter of chance and sound judgement in a neutral marketplace. Capitalism does indeed create a space for a certain diversity, at least for the central capitalist regions, but it is neither neutral nor ideal and its price in terms of social exclusion is exorbitant. That is to say, the human cost in terms of inherent global poverty and degraded 'life-chances' cannot be calculated within the existing economic rationale and, in consequence, social exclusion remains mystified and nameless (viz, the patronizing reference to the 'developing world'). And Zizek's point is that this mystification is magnified through capitalism's profound capacity to ingest its own excesses and negativity: to redirect (or misdirect) social antagonisms and to absorb them within a culture of differential affirmation. Instead of Bolshevism, the tendency today is towards a kind of political boutiquism that is readily sustained by postmodern forms of consumerism and lifestyle. Against this Zizek argues for a new universalism whose primary ethical directive is to confront the fact that our forms of social existence are founded on exclusion on a global scale. While it is perfectly true that universalism can never become Universal (it will always require a hegemonic-particular embodiment in order to have any meaning), what is novel about Zizek's universalism is that it would not attempt to conceal this fact or to reduce the status of the abject Other to that of a 'glitch' in an otherwise sound matrix.

AT: Cap Good – Utopianism Good (1/3)

Pragmatism always warns against radical transitions from the status quo because the growth rate might fall or elites might backlash – this is precisely the line of thinking that must be rejected. Instead of a quantitatively higher growth rate we should strive for a qualitatively better standard of living for everyone by rejecting the structural violence endemic to global capitalism.

Slavoj Zizek, Professor of Sociology at the Institute for Sociology, Ljubljana University, Winter **2004**, Critical Inquiry 30, p. 316-17

If the Left were to choose the “principled” attitude of fidelity to its old program, it would simply marginalize itself. **The task is** a much harder one: **to rethink** thoroughly **the leftist project**, beyond the alternative of accommodating new circumstances and sticking to the old attitude. Apropos of the disintegration of state socialism two decades ago, one should not forget that, at approximately the same time, the Western social democratic welfare state ideology was also dealt a crucial blow, that it also ceased to function as the imaginary able to arouse a collective passionate following. The notion that the time of the welfare state has passed is today a piece of commonly accepted wisdom. What these two defeated ideologies shared is the notion that humanity as a collective subject has the capacity to somehow limit impersonal and anonymous sociohistoric development, to steer it in a desired direction. **Today**, such a notion is quickly dismissed as ideological or totalitarian; **the social process is again perceived as dominated by an anonymous Fate** beyond social control. **The rise of global capitalism is presented** to us **as such a Fate, against which one cannot fight**; one either adapts oneself to it or one falls out of step with history and is crushed. **The only thing one can do is to make global capitalism as human as possible**, to fight for global capitalism with a human face (this is what, ultimately, the Third Way is— or, rather, was – about). **Whenever a political project takes a radical turn, the inevitable blackmail pops up:** “of course these goals are in themselves desirable; however, **if we do all of this**, international **capital will boycott us, the growth rate will fall**, and so on.” The sound barrier, the qualitative leap that occurs when one expands the quantity from local communities to wider social circles (up to the state itself), will have to be broken, and **the risk will have to be taken to organize larger** and larger **social circles along the lines of the self-organization** of excluded marginal communities. **Many fetishes will have to be broken here; who cares if growth stalls and even becomes negative? Did we not get enough of the high growth rate whose effects in the social body were mostly felt in the guise of the new forms of poverty and dispossession? What about a negative growth that would translate into a qualitatively better, not higher, standard of living** for the wider popular strata? That would have been an act in today’s politics – to break the spell of automatically endorsing the frame, to break out of the debilitating alternative of either we just directly endorse free market globalization or we make impossible promises about how to have one’s cake and eat it, too, of how to combine globalization with social solidarity.

AT: Cap Good – Utopianism Good (2/3)

People often confuse utopian dreams for visions of some ideal, totally unrealizable society. That's not our kind of utopianism – a reinvigoration of the utopian political imaginary demands that we construct social spaces that alter the coordinates of the possible presented by the present situation. Such an act allows utopianism to be realized.

Slavoj Zizek, Senior Researcher at the Institute for Social Studies in Ljubljana, 2004, Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle, p. 122-24

The year 1990 – the year of the collapse of Communism – is commonly perceived as the year of the collapse of political utopias: today, we live in a post-utopian time of pragmatic administration, since we learned the hard lesson of how noble political utopias end in totalitarian terror. . . . As I noted above, however, the first thing to remember here is that this alleged collapse of utopias was followed by the ten-year rule of the last grand utopia, the utopia of global capitalist liberal democracy as the ‘end of history’ – 9/11 designates the end of this utopia, a return to the real history of new walls of conflict which follow the collapse of the Berlin Wall. It is crucial to perceive how the ‘end of utopia’ repeated itself in a self-reflexive gesture: the ultimate utopia was the very notion that, after the end of utopias, we were at the ‘end of history’. The first thing to do here is to specify what we mean by utopia: in its essence, utopia has nothing to do with imagining an impossible ideal society; what characterizes utopia is literally the construction of a u-topic space, a social space outside the existing parameters, the parameters of what appears to be ‘possible’ in the existing social universe. The ‘utopian’ gesture is the gesture which changes the co-ordinates of the possible. That was the kernel of the Leninist ‘utopia’ which rose from the ashes of the catastrophe of 1914, in his settling of accounts with Second International orthodoxy: the radical imperative to smash the bourgeois state, which meant the state as such, and to invent a new communal social form without a standing army, police or bureaucracy, in which all could take part in the administration of social affairs. For Lenin, this was no theoretical project for some distant future —in October 1917, he claimed: ‘we can at once set in motion a state apparatus constituted of ten if not twenty million people’. This urge of the moment is the true utopia. What one should stick with is the madness (in the strict Kierkegaardian sense) of this Leninist utopia — and, if anything, Stalinism stands for a return to realistic ‘common sense’. It is impossible to overestimate the explosive potential of The State and Revolution — in this book, ‘the vocabulary and grammar of the Western tradition of politics was abruptly dispensed with’. What this means is, again, that utopia has nothing to do with idle dreaming about ideal society in total abstraction from real life: utopia’ is a matter of innermost urgency, something we are pushed into as a matter of survival, when it is no longer possible to go on within the parameters of the ‘possible’. This utopia has to be opposed both to the standard notion of political utopias, books containing projects which were basically not even intended to be realized (from its first supreme case, Plato’s Republic, up to Thomas More’s Utopia and — not to be forgotten De Sade’s Philosophy in the Boudoir) and to what is usually referred to as the utopian practice of capitalism itself: commodities evoking utopian pleasures, the libidinal economy that relies on the dynamic of continuously generating new transgressive desires and practices, right up to necrophilia (think of the recent proposals to make corpses available to those who need them for their satisfaction).

AT: Cap Good – Utopianism Good (3/3)

Radical political acts require the suspension of belief in pragmatic, strategic considerations to be thrown aside in a momentary embrace of a better future – none of their impact turns make sense in the specific world of our affirmative because a radical act blurs the very coordinates of what is possible, changing the very way the political realm is organized.

Slavoj Zizek, Senior Researcher at the Institute for Social Studies in Ljubljana, 2004, Organs Without Bodies, p. 203-05

A revolutionary process is not a well-planned strategic activity with no place in it for a full immersion into the Now without regard to long-term consequences. Quite the contrary: **the suspension of all strategic considerations based on hope for a better future**, the stance of on attaque, et puis, on le verra (Lenin often referred to this slogan of Napoleon), **is a key part of any revolutionary process**. Recall the staged performance of “Storming the Winter Palace” in Petrograd on the third anniversary of the October Revolution (November 7, 1920). Thousands of workers, soldiers, students, and artists worked round the clock, living on kasha (tasteless wheat porridge), tea, and frozen apples, preparing the performance at the very place where the event “really took place” three years earlier. Their work was coordinated by army officers as well as by avant-garde artists, musicians, and directors, from Malevich to Meyerhold. Although this was acting and not “reality” the soldiers and sailors were playing themselves—many of them not only actually participated in the event of 1917 but were also simultaneously involved in the real battles of the Civil War that were raging in the nearby vicinity of Petrograd, a city under siege and suffering from severe shortages of food. A contemporary commented on the performance: “The future historian will record how, throughout one of the bloodiest and most brutal revolutions, all of Russia was acting.”²⁶ And the formalist theoretician Viktor Shklovski noted that “some kind of elemental process is taking place where the living fabric of life is being transformed into the theatrical.”²⁷ We all remember the infamous, self-celebratory First of May parades that were one of the supreme signs of recognition of the Stalinist regimes. If one needs proof of how Leninism functioned in an entirely different way, are such performances not the supreme proof that the October Revolution was definitely not a simple coup d’etat by the small group of Bolsheviks but an event that unleashed a tremendous emancipatory potential? Does the “Storming of the Winter Palace” staging not display the force of a sacred (pagan?) pageant, of the magic act of founding a new community? It is here that Heidegger should look when he wrote about founding a state as the event of truth (and not to the Nazi rituals); it is, perhaps, here that there occurred the only meaningful “return of the sacred.” In short, it is here that, perhaps, one should look for the realization of Wagner’s Gesamtkunstwerk, of what he aimed at with the designation of his Parsifal as Bflhlenweihfestspiel (sacred festival drama): if ever, then, it was in Petrograd of 1919, much more than in ancient Greece, that, “in intimate connection with its history, the people itself that stood facing itself in the work of art, becoming conscious of itself, and, in the space of a few hours, rapturously devouring, as it were, its own essence.” This aestheticization, in which the people quite literally “plays itself” certainly does not fall under Benjamin’s indictment of the Fascist “aestheticization of the political.” Instead of abandoning this aestheticization to the political Right, instead of a blanket dismissal of every mass political spectacle as “proto Fascist” one should perceive, in this minimal, purely formal, difference of the people from itself, the unique case of “real life” differentiated from art by nothing more than an invisible, formal gap. The very fact that, in historical documentaries, movie shots from this reconstruction (as well as from Eisenstein’s 1927 October) of the storming of the Winter Palace are often presented as documentary shots is to be taken as an indication of this deeper identity of people playing themselves. The archetypal Eisensteinian cinematic scene rendering the exuberant orgy of revolutionary destructive violence (what Eisenstein himself called “a veritable bacchanalia of destruction”) belongs to the same series. When, in October, the victorious revolutionaries penetrate the wine cellars of the Winter Palace, they indulge in the ecstatic orgy of smashing thousands of the expensive wine bottles. In Bezhin Meadow, the village Pioneers force their way into the local church and desecrate it, robbing it of its relics, squabbling over an icon, sacrilegiously trying on vestments, heretically laughing at the statuary. In this suspension of goal-oriented instrumental activity, we effectively get a kind of Bataillean “unrestrained expenditure”—the pious desire to deprive the revolution of this excess is simply the desire to have a revolution without revolution. However, this “unrestrained expenditure” is not enough. In a revolution proper, such a display of what Hegel would have called “abstract negativity” merely, as it were, wipes the slate clean for the second act, the imposition of a New Order. What this means is that, **in a truly radical political act, the opposition between a “crazy” destructive gesture and a strategic political decision momentarily breaks down. This is why it is theoretically and politically wrong to oppose strategic political acts, as risky as they might be, to radical “suicidal” gestures a la Antigone, gestures of pure self-destructive ethical insistence with, apparently, no political goal. The point is not simply that, once we are thoroughly engaged in a political project, we are ready to risk everything for it, inclusive of our lives, but, more precisely, that only such an “impossible” gesture of pure expenditure can change the very coordinates of what is strategically possible** within a historical constellation. Another expression of this excess is an unexpected feature of all outbursts of revolt. Several years ago, there was a rebellion of Cuban refugees detained at the Guant~inamo base. Its direct cause was that one group of refugees received lower quality orange juice than another group. The very trifling character of what triggered the violent uprising is indicative: not a big injustice or large-scale suffering but a minimal, ridiculous difference, especially for people who just came from Cuba, a country with severe food shortages. Does this not make it clear that the cause immediately triggering a rebellion is, by definition, trifling, a pseudo cause signalling that what is at stake is the relationship to the Other?

Liberalism = Root of Violence

Liberalism is the root of all other forms of violence – by tampering with the capitalist system instead of challenging its structure, it replicates conditions for the rise of explosive violence.

Slavoj Zizek, senior researcher at the Institute of Sociology, University of Ljubljana, “Nobody has to be Vile”, April 6 2006, <http://www.lacan.com/zizvile.htm>

We should have no illusions: liberal communists are the enemy of every true progressive struggle today. All other enemies - religious fundamentalists, terrorists, corrupt and inefficient state bureaucracies - depend on contingent local circumstances. Precisely because they want to resolve all these secondary malfunctions of the global system, liberal communists are the direct embodiment of what is wrong with the system. It may be necessary to enter into tactical alliances with liberal communists in order to fight racism, sexism and religious obscurantism, but it's important to remember exactly what they are up to.

Etienne Balibar, in La Crainte des masses (1997), distinguishes the two opposite but complementary modes of excessive violence in today's capitalism: the objective (structural) violence that is inherent in the social conditions of global capitalism (the automatic creation of excluded and dispensable individuals, from the homeless to the unemployed), and the subjective violence of newly emerging ethnic and/or religious (in short: racist) fundamentalisms. They may fight subjective violence, but liberal communists are the agents of the structural violence that creates the conditions for explosions of subjective violence. The same Soros who gives millions to fund education has ruined the lives of thousands thanks to his financial speculations and in doing so created the conditions for the rise of the intolerance he denounces.

*****Alternatives**

The ‘Do Nothing’ Alternative

Particularized demands in today’s capitalism, no matter how radical, ensure that things change so that the totality remains the same – no demand is performed against a neutral ideological background. The only way to open up space for a new kind of activity beyond merely “global capitalism with a human face” is to renounce facile calls to direct action.

Slavoj Zizek, Senior Researcher at the Institute for Social Studies in Ljubljana, 2004, Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle, p. 71-74

The stance of simply condemning the postmodern Left for its accommodation, however, is also false, since one should ask the obvious difficult question: what, in fact, was the alternative? **If today’s ‘post-politics’ is opportunistic pragmatism with no principles, then the predominant leftist reaction to it can be aptly characterized as ‘principled opportunism’: one simply sticks to old formulae** (defence of the welfare state, and so on) **and calls them ‘principles’, dispensing with the detailed analysis of how the situation has changed** – and thus retaining one’s position of Beautiful Soul. **The inherent stupidity of the ‘principled’ Left is clearly discernible in its standard criticism of any analysis which proposes a more complex picture of the situation, renouncing any simple prescriptions on how to act:** ‘there is no clear political stance involved in your theory’ — and this from people with no stance but their ‘principled opportunism’. Against such a stance, **one should have the courage to affirm that**, in a situation like today’s, **the only way really to remain open to a revolutionary opportunity is to renounce facile calls to direct action, which necessarily involve us in an activity where things change so that the totality remains the same.** Today’s predicament is that, **if we succumb to the urge of directly ‘doing something’ (engaging in the anti-globalist struggle, helping the poor . . .), we will certainly and undoubtedly contribute to the reproduction of the existing order. The only way to lay the foundations for a true, radical change is to withdraw from the compulsion to act, to ‘do nothing’ — thus opening up the space for a different kind of activity. Today’s anti-globalization movement seems to be caught in the antinomy of de- and reterritorialization: on the one hand, there are those who want to reterritorialize capitalism** (conservatives, **ecologists, partisans of the nation-state and champions of local roots** or traditions); **on the other, there are those who want an even more radical deterritorialization**, liberated from the constraints of capital. **But** is this opposition not too simple? Is it not ultimately a false alternative? **Is not the capitalist ‘territory’** (everything must pass through the grid of market exchange) **the very form and vector of radical deterritorialization** — its operator, as it were? (And does the same not go for the nation-state, this operator of the erasure of local traditions?) Positivity and negativity are inextricably intertwined here, which is why the true aim should be a new balance, a new form of de- and reterritorialization. This brings us back to the central sociopolitical antinomy of late capitalism: the way its pluralist dynamic of permanent deterritorialization coexists with its opposite, the paranoid logic of the One, thereby confirming that, perhaps, in the Deleuzian opposition between schizophrenia and paranoia, between the multitude and the One, we are dealing with two sides of the same coin. Were the Left to choose the ‘principled’ attitude of fidelity to its old programme, it would simply marginalize itself. **The task is** a much harder one: **thoroughly to rethink the leftist project, beyond the alternative of ‘accommodation to new circumstances and sticking with the old slogans.** Apropos of the disintegration of ‘state socialism’ two decades ago, we should not forget that, at approximately the same time, Western social-democratic welfarist ideology was also dealt a crucial blow, that it also ceased to function as the Imaginary able to arouse a collective passionate following. The notion that ‘the time of the welfare state has past’ is a piece of commonly accepted wisdom today. What these two defeated ideologies shared was the notion that humanity as a collective subject has the capacity somehow to limit impersonal and anonymous sociohistoric development, to steer it in a desired direction. Today, such a notion is quickly dismissed as ‘ideological’ and/or ‘totalitarian’: the social process is perceived as dominated by an anonymous Fate which eludes social control. The rise of global capitalism is presented to us as such a Fate against which we cannot fight — either we adapt to it or we fall out of step with history, and are crushed. The only thing we can do is to make global capitalism as human as possible, to fight for ‘global capitalism with a human face’ (this, ultimately, is what the Third Way is – or, rather, was – about).

A2: “Our Policy Helps Solve Your Alt”

Traditional politics act within the frame of capitalism at a superficial level to preclude an actual structural change.

Steffen **Böhm** and Christian De **Cock**, Lecturer at University of Essex and Prof at University of Exeter, “Everything you wanted to know about organization theory . . . but were afraid to ask Slavoj Zizek”, The Editorial Board of the Sociological Review 2005

Zizek thus does not feel that society would be improved by a greater commitment to order and democratic institutions or a more urgent call to civic duty – a position which stands in clear contrast to some liberalist voices expressed within the realms of organization theory (eg, Armbrüster and Gebert, 2002; du Gay, 2000).

Furthermore, he is also pessimistic about the possibility of a gradual production of alternative organizational regimes and sees a kind of conversion between the dynamic of capitalist power and the dynamic of resistance (Zizek, 2004). It is not that Zizek is against political activity (his own concrete political actions prove otherwise, and indeed demonstrate the necessity of such actions), but he believes that traditional political activity simply does not have the capacity for radical change: ‘alternative social formations . . . are, in their innermost core, mediated by Capital as their concrete universality, as the particular formation that colours the entire scope of alternatives’ (ibid: 186). His point is that alternative approaches typically intervene at a superficial, symptomal level. They amount to ‘doing things not in order to achieve something, but to prevent something from really happening, really changing’ (Zizek, 2002c: 225).

AT: Robinson and Tormey (Essentialism)

Zizek's Act does not embrace passivity or an acontextual essentialism – instead it relies on a culturally specific act that can manifest the exception to the social order.

Steffen Böhm and Christian De Cock, Lecturer at University of Essex and Prof at University of Exeter, "Everything you wanted to know about organization theory . . . but were afraid to ask Slavoj Zizek", The Editorial Board of the Sociological Review 2005

But does Zizek thereby condone a pessimist vision of social life caught in a repetitious deadlock, without any prospect for resolution, and thus opening the way to the 'celebration of failure', or even 'utter passivity' as critics (eg, Kay, 2003; Robinson and Tormey, 2004) have suggested? His answer is a dismissive 'No!', as he grasps back to a 'proper' universalism in his most recent works (eg, 2000a, 2002c). For Zizek, politics proper always involves a kind of short circuit between the universal and the particular; it involves the paradox of a singular that appears as a stand-in for the universal, destabilizing the 'natural' functional order of relations in the social body. Thus, we should not see the universal (eg, 'the non-exploitative', 'the egalitarian') in terms of an acontextual absolute, but rather as a culturally specific absolute (manifested as exception, the bone-in-the-throat, to the dominant form of the day). One way to effect change therefore is to seize on this exception, or on the random, contingent factor in the current scheme of things, and force its universal implications so as to produce a new order (Zizek, 2001a). Here his point of reference is what Badiou (2002) designates as Event: the art of seizing the right moment, of aggravating a conflict before the System can accommodate itself to the demand. The undecidability of the Event thus means that an Event does not possess any ontological guarantee: it cannot be reduced to (or deduced, generated from) a (previous) Situation: it emerges 'out of nothing'. (Zizek, 1999: 136) The cause immediately triggering it 'is, by definition, trifling, a pseudo cause signalling that what is at stake is the relationship to the Other' (Zizek, 2004: 205). For Zizek, all social and organizational attempts which try to establish a plural, egalitarian and 'just' order through a regime of social dialogue and bureaucratic rules, only hide the taken-for-granted (and misconceived) universalism of Western 'Democracy'.

AT: Robinson and Tormey/Criticisms of the Act

All their criticisms of the act use historical examples of false acts – the true act shatters all coordinates of the prior system; their examples are of acts designed to leave particular parts of the system in place

Slavoj Zizek, Senior Researcher at the Institute for Social Studies in Ljubljana, 2000, Contingency, Hegemony, Universality, p. 124-25

Now I can also answer the obvious counter-argument to this Lacanian notion of the act: if we define an act solely by the fact that its sudden emergence surprises/transforms its agent itself and, simultaneously that it retroactively changes its conditions of (im)possibility, is not Nazism, then, an act par excellence? Did Hitler not ‘do the impossible’, changing the entire field of what was considered ‘acceptable’ in the liberal democratic universe? Did not a respectable middle-class petit bourgeois who, as a guard in a concentration camp, tortured Jews, also accomplish what was considered impossible, in his previous ‘decent existence and acknowledge his ‘passionate attachment’ to sadistic torture? It is here that the notion of ‘traversing the fantasy’, and — on a different level — of transforming the constellation that generates social symptoms becomes crucial. An authentic act disturbs the underlying fantasy attacking it from the point of ‘social symptom’ (let us recall that Lacan attributed the invention of the notion of symptom to Marx!). The so-called ‘Nazi revolution’, with its disavowal/displacement of the fundamental social antagonism (‘class struggle’ that divides the social edifice from within) —with its projection/externalization of the cause of social antagonisms into the figure of the Jew, and the consequent reassertion of the corporatist notion of society as an organic Whole - clearly avoids confrontation with social antagonism: the ‘Nazi revolution’ is the exemplary case of a pseudo-change. of a frenetic activity in the course of which many things did change — ‘something was going on all the time —so that, precisely, something — that which really matters - would not change; so that things would fundamentally ‘remain the same’. In short, an authentic act is not simply external with regard to the hegemonic symbolic field disturbed by it: an act is an act only with regard to some symbolic field, as an intervention into it. That is to say: a symbolic field is always and by definition in itself ‘decentred’, structured around a central void/impossibility (a personal life-narrative, say, is a bricolage of ultimately failed attempts to come to terms with some trauma; a social edifice is an ultimately failed attempt to displace/obfuscate its constitutive antagonism); and an act disturbs the symbolic field into which it intervenes not out of nowhere, but precisely from the standpoint of this inherent impossibility, stumbling block, which is its hidden, disavowed structuring principle. In contrast to this authentic act which intervenes in the constitutive void, point of failure -- or what Alain Badiou has called the ‘symptomal torsion’ of a given constellation, the inauthentic act legitimizes itself through reference to the point of substantial fullness of a given constellation (on the political terrain: Race, True Religion, Nation . . .): it aims precisely at obliterating the last traces of the ‘symptomal torsion’ which disturbs the balance of that constellation.

AT: Robinson and Tormey – Resistance Reinscribes Symbolic Order

Our resistance doesn't simply re-inscribe the symbolic order: the recognition that we are constituted by the symbolic order at the same time that the symbolic order is constituted by us deflates its status from an all-powerful transcendent agency to something that we can establish distance and resistance towards.

Slavoj Zizek, Senior Researcher at the Institute for Social Studies in Ljubljana, 2000, Contingency, Hegemony, Universality, p. 254-55

Perhaps the ultimate literary example of the shift from alienation to separation occurs in Kafka's writings. On the one hand, Kafka's universe is that of extreme alienation: the subject is confronted with an impervious Other whose machinery functions in an entirely 'irrational' way, as if the chain that links causes and effects has broken down — the only stance the subject can assume towards this Other (of the Court, of the Castle bureaucracy) is that of impotent fascination. No wonder Kafka's universe is that of universal—formal guilt independent of any concrete content and act of the subject who perceives himself as guilty. However, the final twist of the paradigmatic Kafkaesque story, the parable on the Door of the Law from The Thai, pinpoints precisely what is false in such a self-perception: the subject failed to include himself in the scene, that is, to take into account how he was not merely an innocent bystander of the spectacle of the Law, since 'the Door was there only for him'. The dialectical paradox is that since the subject's exclusion from the fascinating spectacle of the big Other elevated the big Other into an all-powerful transcendent agency that generates an a priori guilt, it is the very inclusion into the observed scene that allows the subject to achieve separation from the big Other — to experience his subjective position as correlative to the big Other's inconsistency/impotence/lack: in separation, the subject experiences how his own lack with regard to the big Other is already the lack that affects the big Other itself (or, to quote Hegel's immortal formulation again, in separation I experience how the impenetrable secret of the Ancient Egyptians were already secrets for the Egyptians themselves). This reference to separation allows me to counter the criticism according to which there is in Lacan a secret longing for the 'strong' symbolic order/prohibition threatened by today's narcissistic disintegration: does Lacan really envisage as the only solution to the recent deadlock the reassertion of some fundamental symbolic prohibition/Law? Is this really the only alternative to the postmodern global psychotization of social life? It is true that the Lacan of the 1940s and 1950s does contain elements of such conservative cultural criticism: his constant effort from the 1960s onwards, however, is to break out of this framework, to expose the fraud of paternal authority (rejecting also the Pascalian cynical solution that one should obey the Power even if one knows of its false/illegal origins). Furthermore, this reference to separation also allows us to answer Butler's point that the Lacanian big Other, the symbolic order, forms a kind of Kantian a priori which cannot be undermined by the subject's intervention, since every resistance to it is doomed to perpetual defeat: the big Other is unassailable only in so far as the subject entertains towards it a relationship of alienation, while separation precisely opens up the way for such an intervention.

AT: Robinson and Tormey – Revolution → Stalinist Terror

Our alternative to capitalism doesn't result in Stalinism – that was a result of an emancipatory project going wrong, not anything intrinsic to our anti-capitalism

Slavoj Zizek, Professor of Sociology at the Institute for Sociology, Ljubljana University, 2001, On Belief, p. 39

Even if we concede that the Stalinist terror was the necessary outcome of the Socialist project, we are still dealing with the tragic dimension of an emancipatory project going awry, of an undertaking which fatally misperceived the consequences of its own intervention, in contrast to Nazism which was an anti-emancipatory undertaking going all too well. In other words, the Communist project was one of common brotherhood and welfare, while the Nazi project was one of domination. So when Heidegger alluded to the “inner greatness” of Nazism betrayed by the Nazi ideological peddlers, he again attributed to Nazism something that effectively holds only for Communism: Communism has an “inner greatness, an explosive liberatory potential, while Nazism was perverted through and through, in its very notion: it is simply ridiculous to conceive of the Holocaust as a kind of tragic perversion of the noble Nazi project — its project WAS the Holocaust.³⁴

AT: Robinson and Tormey/Impact Turns to Revolution

Their impact turns are overly generic and don't account for the specificity of our conception of a revolutionary ethic – prior revolutions failed because they didn't question their own presuppositions, which our radical revolution does. By rethinking our very ability to conceive of alternate social orders, we ensure that the revolution is here to stay.

Slavoj Zizek, Professor of Sociology at the Institute for Sociology, Ljubljana University, 2004, Organs Without Bodies, p. 210-213

Many a commentator has made ironic remarks about the apparent stylistic clumsiness of the titles of Soviet Communist books and articles, such as their tautological character, in the sense of the repeated use of the same word (such as “revolutionary dynamics in the early stages of the Russian revolution” or “economic contradictions in the development of the Soviet economy”). However, what if this tautology points toward the awareness of the logic of betrayal best rendered by the classic reproach of Robespierre to the Dantonist opportunists: “What you want is a revolution without revolution?” The tautological repetition thus signals the urge to repeat the negation, to relate it to itself—the true revolution is “revolution with revolution,” a revolution that, in its course, revolutionizes its own starting presuppositions. Hegel had a presentiment of this necessity when he wrote, “It is a modern folly to alter a corrupt ethical system, its constitution and legislation, without changing the religion, to have a revolution without a reformation.”³⁹ He thereby announced the necessity of what Mao Ze Dong called the “Cultural Revolution” as the condition of the successful social revolution.

What, exactly, does this mean? The problem with hitherto revolutionary attempts was not that they were “too extreme” but that they were not radical enough, that they did not question their own presuppositions. In a wonderful essay on Chevengur, Platonov’s great peasant Utopia written in 1927 and 1928 (just prior to forced collectivization), Fredric Jameson describes the two moments of the revolutionary process. It begins with the gesture of radical negativity: [T]his first moment of world-reduction, of the destruction of the idols and the sweeping away of an old world in violence and pain, is itself the precondition for the reconstruction of something else. A first moment of absolute immanence is necessary, the blank slate of absolute peasant immanence or ignorance, before new and undreamed-of sensations and feelings can come into being.⁴⁰ Then follows the second stage, the invention of a new life—not only the construction of the new social reality in which our utopian dreams would be realized but also the (re)construction of these dreams themselves: [A] process that it would be too simple and misleading to call reconstruction or Utopian construction, since in effect it involves the very effort to find a way to begin imagining Utopia to begin with. Perhaps in a more Western kind of psychoanalytic language, we might think of the new onset of the Utopian process as a kind of desiring to desire, a learning to desire, the invention of the desire called Utopia in the first place, along with new rules for the fantasizing or daydreaming of such a thing—a set of narrative protocols with no precedent in our previous literary institutions. The reference to psychoanalysis is crucial and very precise: in a radical revolution, people not only realize their old (emancipatory, etc.) dreams; rather, they have to reinvent their very modes of dreaming. Is this not the exact formula of the link between death drive and sublimation? It is only this reference to what happens after the revolution, to the “morning after” that allows us to distinguish between libertarian pathetic outbursts and true revolutionary upheavals. These upheavals lose their energy when one has to approach the prosaic work of social reconstruction—at this point, lethargy sets in. In contrast to it, recall the immense creativity of the Jacobins just prior to their fall, the numerous proposals about new civic religion, about how to sustain the dignity of old people, and so on. Therein also resides the interest in reading the reports about daily life in the Soviet Union in the early 1920s, with the enthusiastic urge to invent new rules for quotidian existence: how does one get married? What are the new rules of courting? How does one celebrate a birthday? How does one get buried? ... 42 It is precisely with regard to this dimension that revolution proper is to be opposed to the carnivalesque reversal as a temporary respite, the exception stabilizing the hold of power: In the European Middle Ages it was customary for great households to choose a “Lord of Misrule.” The person chosen was expected to preside over the revels that briefly reversed or parodied the conventional social and economic hierarchies.... When the brief reign of misrule was over, the customary order of things would be restored: the Lords of Misrule would go back to their menial occupations, while their social superiors resumed their wonted status.... Sometimes the idea of Lord of Misrule would spill over from the realm of revel to the realm of politics.... The apprentices took over from their guild masters for a reckless day or two,... gender roles were reversed for a day as the women took over the tasks and airs normally associated only with men. Chinese philosophers also loved the paradoxes of status reversed, the ways that wit or shame could deflate pretension and lead to sudden shifts of insight.... It was Mao’s terrible accomplishment to seize on such insights from earlier Chinese philosophers, combine them with elements drawn from Western socialist thought, and to use both in tandem to prolong the limited concept of misrule into a long-drawn-out adventure in upheaval. To Mao, the former lords and masters should never be allowed to return; he felt they were not his betters, and that society was liberated by their removal. He also thought the customary order of things should never be restored.⁴³ Is, however, such a “terrible accomplishment” not the elementary gesture of every true revolutionary? Why revolution at all, if we do not think that, “the customary order of things should never be restored.” What Mao does is to deprive the transgression of its ritualized, ludic character by way of taking it seriously: revolution is not just a temporary safety valve, a carnivalesque explosion destined to be followed by a sobering morning after—it is here to stay. Furthermore, this logic of carnivalesque suspension is limited to traditional hierarchical societies. With the full deployment of capitalism, especially today’s “late capitalism” it is the predominant “normal” life itself that, in a way, gets “carnivalized,” with its constant self-revolutionizing, its reversals, crises, reinventions, so that it is the critique of capitalism, from a “stable” ethical position, that more and more appears today as an exception.

AT: Robinson and Tormey/Impact Turns to Revolution

Their impact turns confuse past revolutions and the revolutionary potential of pure becoming – virtuality changes the ways in which the past's virtuality has been betrayed

Slavoj Zizek, Senior Researcher at the Institute for Social Studies in Ljubljana, 2004, Organs Without Bodies, p. 12

Deleuze's basic reproach to conservative critics who denounce the miserable and even terrifying actual results of a revolutionary upheaval is that they remain blind to the dimension of becoming: It is fashionable these days to condemn the horrors of revolution. It's nothing new; English Romanticism is permeated by reflections on Cromwell very similar to present-day reflections on Stalin. They say revolutions turn out badly. But they're constantly confusing two different things, the way revolutions turn out historically and people's revolutionary becoming. These relate to two different sets of people. Men's only hope lies in a revolutionary becoming: the only way of casting off their shame or responding to what is intolerable. 14 Becoming is thus strictly correlative to the concept of REPETITION: far from being opposed to the emergence of the New, the proper Deleuzian paradox is that something truly New can only emerge through repetition. 'What repetition repeats is not the way the past "effectively was" but the virtuality inherent to the past and betrayed by its past actualization. In this precise sense, the emergence of the New changes the past itself, that is, it retroactively changes not the actual past—we are not in science fiction—but the balance between actuality and virtuality in the past.⁵ Recall the old example provided by Walter Benjamin: the October Revolution repeated the French Revolution, redeeming its failure, unearthing and repeating the same impulse. Already for Kierkegaard, repetition is "inverted memory," a movement forward, the production of the New and not the reproduction of the Old. "There is nothing new under the sun" is the strongest contrast to the movement of repetition. So, it is not only that repetition is (one of the modes of) the emergence of the New—the New can ONLY emerge through repetition. The key to this paradox is, of course, what Deleuze designates as the difference between the Virtual and the Actual (and which—why not?—one can also determine as the difference between Spirit and Letter).

AT: Zizek Essentializes Class Struggle

Our argument doesn't essentialize class – class is simultaneously one particular identity and the element that determines the field of all other identities. The acceptance of postmodern politics requires that questions about the nature of capitalism go unanswered.

Slavoj Zizek, Senior Researcher at the Institute for Social Studies in Ljubljana, 2000, Contingency, Hegemony, Universality, p. 97-99

Of course, the postmodernists' answer would be that I am 'essentializing' class struggle: there is, in today's society, a series of particular political struggles (economic, human rights, ecology racism, sexism, religious . . .), and no struggle can claim to be the 'true' one, the key to all the others — Usually Laclau's development itself (from his first breakthrough work, Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory, to his standard classic, co-authored with Chantal Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy) is presented as the gradual process of getting rid of the 'last remnants of essentialism':~ in the first hook — following the classic Marxist tradition — the economy (the relations of production and economic laws) still serves as a kind of ontological anchorage point' for the otherwise contingent struggles for hegemony (i.e. in a Gramscian way the struggle for hegemony is ultimately the struggle between the two great classes for which of them will occupy-hegemonize a series of other 'historical tasks' — national liberation, cultural struggle, etc.); it is only in the second book that Laclau definitely renounces the old Marxist problematic of infra- and superstructure, that is, the objective grounding of the 'superstructural' hegemonic struggle in the economic 'infrastructure' economy itself is always-already 'political', a discursive site (one of the sites) of political struggles, of power and resistance, 'a field penetrated by pre-ontological undecidability of irrevocable dilemmas and aporias'.²⁰ In their Hegemony hook, Laclau and Mouffe clearly privilege the political struggle for democracy, — that is to say, they accept Claude Lefort's thesis that the key moment in modern political history was the 'democratic invention' and all other struggles are ultimately the 'application' of the principle of democratic invention to other domains: race (why should other races not also be equal?), sex, religion, the economy . . . In short, when we are dealing with a series of particular struggles, is there not always one struggle which, although it appears to function as one in the series, effectively provides the horizon of the series as such? Is this not also one of the consequences of the notion of hegemony? So, in so far as we conceive radical plural democracy as 'the promise that plural democracy, and the struggles for freedom and equality it engenders, should be deepened and extended to all spheres of society',²¹ is it possible simply to extend it to the economy as another new terrain? When Brown emphasizes that 'if Marxism had any analytical value for political theory, was it not in the insistence that the problem of freedom was contained in the social relations implicitly declared "unpolitical" — that is, naturalized in liberal discourse',²² ~ would be too easy to accept the counter-argument that postmodern politics, of course, endorses the need to denaturalize/repoliticize the economy, and that its point is precisely that one should also denaturalize/repoliticize a series of other domains (relations between the sexes, language, etc.) left 'undeconstructed' by Marx. Postmodern politics definitely has the great merit that it 'repoliticizes' a series of domains previously considered 'apolitical' or 'private'; the fact remains, however, that it does not in fact repoliticize capitalism, because the very notion and form of the 'political' within which it operates is grounded in the 'depolitization' of the economy. If we are to play the postmodern game of plurality of political subjectivizations, it is formally necessary that we do not ask certain questions (about how to subvert capitalism as such), about the constitutive limits of political democracy and/or the democratic state as such. . .). So, again, apropos of Laclau's obvious counter-argument that the Political, for him, is not a specific social domain but the very set of contingent decisions that ground the Social, I would answer that the postmodern emergence of new multiple political subjectivities certainly does not reach this radical level of the political act proper.

AT: Rorty/Prag/Impact Turns to the Alt/etc

Their insistence that the alternative be excluded from the realm of political possibilities is an unquestioning justification for the status quo. Rorty's insistence on excluding philosophy from the realm of politics forecloses salient alternatives.

Slavoj Zizek, Senior Researcher at the Institute for Social Studies in Ljubljana, 2000, Contingency, Hegemony, Universality, p. 127-28

The problem of today's philosophico-political scene is ultimately best expressed by Lenin's old question 'What is to be done?' — how do we reassert, on the political terrain, the proper dimension of the act? The main form of the resistance against the act today is a kind of unwritten Denkverbot (prohibition to think) similar to the infamous Berufsverbot (prohibition to be employed by any state institution) from the late 1960s in Germany — the moment one shows a minimal sign of engaging in political projects that aim seriously to change the existing order, the answer is immediately: 'Benevolent as it is, this will necessarily end in a new Gulag!' The 'return to ethics' in today's political philosophy shamefully exploits the horrors of Gulag or Holocaust as the ultimate bogey for blackmailing us into renouncing all serious radical engagement. In this way, conformist liberal scoundrels can find hypocritical satisfaction in their defence of the existing order: they know there is corruption, exploitation, and so on, but every attempt to change things is denounced as ethically dangerous and unacceptable, recalling the ghosts of Gulag or Holocaust. . And this resistance against the act seems to be shared across a wide spectrum of (officially) opposed philosophical positions. Four philosophers as different as Derrida, Habermas, Rorty and Dennett would probably adopt the same left-of-centre liberal democratic stance in practical political decisions; as for the political conclusions to be drawn from their thought, the difference between their positions is negligible. On the other hand, already our immediate intuition tells us that a philosopher like Heidegger on the one hand, or Badiou on the other, would definitely adopt a different stance. Rorty, who made this perspicacious observation concludes from it that philosophical differences do not involve, generate or rely on political differences politically, they do not really matter. What, however, if philosophical differences do matter politically, and if; as a consequence, this political congruence between philosophers tells us something crucial about their pertinent philosophical stance? What if, in spite of the great passionate public debates between deconstructionists, pragmatists, Habermasians and cognitivists, they none the less share a series of philosophical premisses — what if there is an unacknowledged proximity between them? And what if the task today is precisely to break with this terrain of shared premisses?

AT: Impact Turns to Revolution

Their impact-turns to our revolutionary ethic shouldn't factor into your decisionmaking calculus – they're merely symptoms of prior revolutions, which are redeemed and revised by the revolution of the future

Slavoj Zizek, Professor of Sociology at the Institute for Sociology, Ljubljana University, 2002, Revolution at the Gates, p. 255-56

In an outstanding reading of Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History",² Eric Santner elaborates Benjamin's notion that a present revolutionary intervention repeats/redeems past failed attempts: the "symptoms" — past traces which are retroactively redeemed through the "miracle" of the revolutionary intervention — are "not so much forgotten deeds, but rather forgotten failures to act, failures to suspend the force of social bond inhibiting acts of solidarity with society's 'others'".

Symptoms register not only past failed revolutionary attempts but, more modestly, past failures to respond to calls for action or even for empathy on behalf of those whose suffering in some sense belongs to the form of life of which one is a part. They hold the place of something that is there, that insists in our life, though it has never achieved full ontological consistency. Symptoms are thus in some sense the virtual archives of voids — or, perhaps, better, defenses against voids — that persist in historical experience. Santner specifies how these symptoms can also take the form of perturbations of "normal" social life, like participation in the obscene rituals of the reigning ideology. Was not the infamous Kristallnacht in 1938 — that halforganized half-spontaneous outburst of violent attacks on Jewish homes, synagogues, businesses, and people themselves — a Bakhtinian "carnival" if ever there was one? We should read Kristallnacht precisely as a "symptom": the furious rage of such an outburst of violence makes it a symptom — the defence-formation covering the void of the failure to intervene effectively in the social crisis. In other words, the very rage of the anti-Semitic pogroms is proof, a contrario, of the possibility of the authentic proletarian revolution: its excessive energy can be read only as a reaction to the ("unconscious") awareness of the missed revolutionary opportunity.¹²² And is not the ultimate cause of Ostalgia (nostalgia for the Communist past) among many intellectuals (and even "ordinary people") in the defunct German Democratic Republic also a longing not so much for the Communist past, for what really went on under Communism, but, rather, for what might have happened there, for the missed opportunity of another Germany? Are not the post-Communist outbursts of neo-Nazi violence also a negative proof of the presence of these emancipatory chances, a symptomatic outburst of rage displaying an awareness of missed opportunities? We should not be afraid to draw a parallel with individual psychic life: just as an awareness of a missed "private" opportunity (say, the opportunity of engaging in a fulfilling love-relationship) often leaves its traces in the form of "irrational" anxieties, headaches, and fits of rage, the void of the missed revolutionary chance can explode in "irrational" fits of destructive rage.

AT: The K → The New Right

Their argument that criticism of the system only paves the way for the new right should be rejected on-face – it's a strategy designed to buy off resistance so that the liberal-democratic capitalist consensus can proceed intact.

Slavoj Zizek, Professor of Sociology at the Institute for Sociology, Ljubljana University, 2002, Revolution at the Gates, p. 302

It is true that, today, it is the radical populist Right which usually breaks the (still) prevailing liberal-democratic consensus, gradually making acceptable hitherto excluded ideas (the partial justification of Fascism, the need to constrain abstract citizenship on grounds of ethnic identity, etc.). However, the hegemonic liberal democracy is using this fact to blackmail the Left radicals: “We shouldn’t play with fire: against the new Rightist onslaught, we should insist more than ever on the democratic consensus — any criticism of it, wittingly or unwittingly, helps the New Right!” This is the key line of separation: we should reject this blackmail, taking the risk of disturbing the liberal consensus, even up to questioning the very notion of democracy. The ultimate answer to the criticism that radical Left proposals are utopian should thus be that, today, the true utopia is the belief that the present liberal-democratic capitalist consensus can go on indefinitely, without radical change. We are therefore back with the old ‘68 slogan “So yons realistes, demandons l’impossible!”: in order to be a true “realist”, we must consider breaking out of the constraints of what appears “possible” (or, as we usually put it, “feasible”).

*****Aff Answers**

Zizek's Alt is Oppressive/Violent 1/4

Zizek's alternative necessarily reproduces violence and oppression. It takes these things as a given, and merely changes they ways in which violence is expressed.

Robinson and Tormey 05 (Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey, professors of the school of Politics at University of Nottingham, "A Ticklish Subject? Zizek and the Future of Left Radicalism," *Thesis Eleven*, 8 November 2005, pg. 2)

The Act resolves all problems in a single, all-encompassing Terror which bypasses particularities and violently stops the 'mad dance' of shifting identities, operating instead to ground a new political universality by opting for the impossible, with no taboos, no a priori norms . . . respect for which would prevent us from 'resignifying' terror. (Butler et al., 2000: 326) An Act is symbolic death, creatio ex nihilo, and self-grounded.¹⁷ It is the outcome of 'an ethics grounded in reference to the traumatic Real which resists symbolisation', i.e. to 'an injunction which cannot be grounded in ontology' (Zizek, 1997a: 213–14), a 'self-referential abyss' (Zizek, 1997a: 223), an excessive gesture irreducible to human considerations and necessarily arbitrary (as in Zizek, 2000: 155; 1999: 96). The suspension of ethical, epistemological and political standards is thus not merely a necessary consequence of a Zizekian Act – it is a defining feature. Such a suspension is necessary so a new system can be built from nothing, and anything short of a full Act remains on enemy terrain (see also, respectively, Zizek, 2000: 155; Butler et al., 2000: 126). The choice of the term 'suspension' is revealing, for although in Zizek's account the surface structure of the social system is changed during such a 'suspension', the deep structure of the social system as set out in Lacanian theory is not (and cannot be) changed, altered or reformed. So an Act shatters capitalism, but it leaves intact many of its most objectionable features, including social exclusion, violence, naturalization, reification and myths, all of which are for Zizek primordial, ever-present and necessary in any society.¹⁸ Further, since the Act involves submission to a Cause and a Leader, it cannot destroy the authoritarian structure of capitalism: 'often, one does need a leader in order to be able to "do the impossible" . . . subordination to [the leader] is the highest act of freedom' (Zizek, 2001b: 246–7). So, while an Act may destroy the specific articulations of oppression within the present system (e.g. the identification of the Real with illegal immigrants), it necessarily produces a system which is equally oppressive.

To succeed, their alternative requires an authoritarian leader capable of engaging in horrible violence in order to bring about change.

Robinson and Tormey 05 (Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey, professors of the school of Politics at University of Nottingham, "A Ticklish Subject? Zizek and the Future of Left Radicalism," *Thesis Eleven*, 8 November 2005, pg. 2)

Furthermore, despite Zizek's emphasis on politics, his discussion of the Act remains resolutely individualist – as befits its clinical origins. Zizek's examples of Acts are nearly all isolated actions by individuals, such as Mary Kay Letourneau's defiance of juridical pressure to end a relationship with a youth, a soldier in Full Metal Jacket killing his drill sergeant and himself, and the acts of Stalinist bureaucrats who rewrote history knowing they would later be purged (Zizek, 1997a: 21; 1999: 385–7; 2001b: 98–9). Even the Russian Revolution becomes for Zizek a set of individual choices by Lenin, Stalin and the aforementioned bureaucrats, as opposed to the culmination of mass actions involving thousands of ordinary men and women. This is problematic as a basis for understanding previous social transformations, and even more so as a recommendation for the future. The new subject Zizek envisages is an authoritarian leader, someone capable of the 'inherently terroristic' action of 'redefining the rules of the game' (Zizek, 1999: 377). We would argue that this is a conservative, if not reactionary, position. Donald Room's cartoon character Wildcat surely grasps the essence of left radical ambition rather better when he states, 'I don't just want freedom from the capitalists. I also want freedom from people fit to take over' (Room, 1991: 24).

Zizek's Alt is Oppressive/Violent 2/4

Zizek's politics subordinate everything to rejecting the status quo, and result in authoritarianism and human rights abuses

Robinson and Tormey 05 (Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey, professors of the school of Politics at University of Nottingham, "A Ticklish Subject? Zizek and the Future of Left Radicalism," Thesis Eleven, 8 November 2005, pg. 2)

Yet it is still the case that **Zizek** mercilessly rejects the present state of the world. On the one hand, he is very aware of problems of great significance for the left: the privatization of everything from telecommunications to genes, the invisible exploitation of workers in sweatshops, the growing ecological crisis, and the weight of the forces lined up to make these attacks, and the crisis they generate, seem 'normal'.¹² And yet, on the other hand, he launches conservative-sounding attacks on liberalism and reflexivity (Zizek, 1999: 358; Zizek, 2000: 9); the lack of a Master (Zizek, 1997a: 151–3, 164; 1999: 358; 2001b: 246–7); and campaigns against sexual violence (Zizek, 1999: 285; 2000: 72, 111). He also rails against 'permissiveness' and 'decadence' and calls for a conformist 'normal mature subject' prepared to submit to authority on trust and to identify authentically with social roles (Zizek, 1997a: 148, 193; 1999: 369, 399; 2000: 110–11, 133–5). Though it is far from clear that the changes he demands are unproblematically progressive, he clearly wants a comprehensive transformation. Indeed, he dismisses others' concerns for human rights, moderation and toleration as mere 'humanist hysterical shirking of the act' and announces that he doesn't care if 'bleeding-heart liberals' accuse him of 'linksfaschismus' (Butler et al., 2000: 326; Zizek, 1999: 380). **Zizek's position** thus sacrifices everything to a core orientation. Yet the question remains, how can he reconcile such a stance with the impossibility of imagining a radical alternative?

Zizek's theory encourages violence as part of antagonism constitutive of humanity – it should be rejected on the notion that it would allow for unspeakable atrocities.

Robinson and Tormey 03, (Andrew and Simon, Professor of Politics at Nottingham University and Professor of Politics at Nottingham University, 2003 "Zizek is not a Radical," <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/simon.tormey/articles/Zizeknottradical.pdf>)

As becomes evident 'class struggle' is not for Zizek an empirical referent and even less a category of Marxisant sociological analysis, but a synonym for the Lacanian Real. A progressive endorsement of 'class struggle' means positing the lack of a common horizon and assuming or asserting the insolubility of political conflict.¹⁶ It therefore involves a glorification of conflict, antagonism, terror and a militaristic logic of carving the field into good and bad sides, as a good in itself.¹⁷ Zizek celebrates war because it undermines the complacency of our daily routine by introducing 'meaningless sacrifice and destruction'.¹⁸ He fears being trapped by a suffocating social peace or Good and so calls on people to take a 'militant, divisive position of 'assertion of the Truth that enthuses them'.¹⁹ The content of this Truth is a secondary issue. For Zizek, Truth has nothing to do with truth-claims and the field of 'knowledge'. Truth is an event which 'just happens', in which 'the thing itself' is 'disclosed to us as what it is'.²⁰ Truth is therefore the exaggeration which distorts any balanced system.²¹ A 'truth-effect' occurs whenever a work produces a strong emotional reaction, and it need not be identified with empirical accuracy: lies and distortions can have a truth-effect, and factual truth can cover the disavowal of desire and the Real.²² In this sense, therefore, Lenin and de Gaulle, St Paul and Lacan are all carriers of the truth and therefore are progressive, 'radical' figures, despite the incompatibility of their doctrines. Such individuals (and it is always individuals) violently carve the field and produce a truth-effect. That de Gaulle and the Church are political rightists is of no importance to Zizek, since he redefines 'right' and 'left' to avoid such problems. He also writes off the human suffering caused by carving the field as justified or even beneficial: it has a 'transcendental genesis' in the subject, and its victims endure it because they obtain jouissance from it.²³ The structural occurrence of a truth-event is what matters to him - not what kind of world results from it. This is a secondary issue - and anyway one that he thinks is impossible to discuss, since the logic of liberal capitalism is so total that it makes alternatives unthinkable.²⁴ One should keep the utopian possibility of alternatives open, but it should remain empty, awaiting a content.²⁵

Zizek's Alt is Oppressive/Violent 3/4

Zizek's politics require authoritarian control and violence. He endorses actions such as Stalinist purges, and concedes that political change is impossible.

Robinson and Tormey 05 (Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey, professors of the school of Politics at University of Nottingham, "A Ticklish Subject? Zizek and the Future of Left Radicalism," Thesis Eleven, 8 November 2005, pg. 2)

So the Act is a rebirth – but a rebirth as what? The parallel with Lacan's concept of 'traversing the fantasy' is crucial because, for Lacan, there is no escape from the symbolic order or the Law of the Master. We are trapped in the existing world, complete with its dislocation, lack, alienation and antagonism, and no transcendence can overcome the deep structure of this world, which is fixed at the level of subject-formation. The most we can hope for is to go from incapable neurosis to mere alienated subjectivity. In Zizek's politics, therefore, a fundamental social transformation is impossible. After the break initiated by an Act, a system similar to the present one is restored; the subject undergoes identification with a Cause, leading to a new 'proper symbolic Prohibition' revitalized by the process of rebirth (Zizek, 1999: 154, 368), enabling one 'effectively to realize the necessary pragmatic measures' (Zizek, 1997b: 72–3), which may be the same ones as today. It is on this ground that Zizek is relaxed about supporting measures that, far from challenging or undermining the status quo, give added support to it – as, for example, in his refusal to denounce structural adjustment policies (Zizek, 1996: 32). This is all because, in his view, it is possible to start a 'new life', but only by replacing one symbolic fiction with another (Zizek, 1999: 331). As a Lacanian, Zizek is opposed to any idea of realizing utopian 'fullness' and thus in escaping the vicissitudes of the political qua antagonism. Any change in the basic structure of existence, whereby one may overcome dislocation and disorientation, is out of the question. However, he also rejects practical solutions to problems as a mere displacement (Zizek, 1999: 383–4). So an Act neither solves concrete problems nor achieves drastic improvements; it merely removes blockages to existing modes of thought and action. It transforms the 'constellation which generates social symptoms' (Butler et al., 2000: 124), shifting exclusion from one group to another, but it does not achieve either drastic or moderate concrete changes. It 'means that we accept the vicious circle of revolving around the object [the Real] and find jouissance in it, renouncing the myth that jouissance is amassed somewhere else' (Zizek, 1988: 109–10). It also offers those who take part in it a 'dimension of Otherness, that moment when the absolute appears in all its fragility', a 'brief apparition of a future utopian Otherness to which every authentic revolutionary stance should cling' (Zizek, 2000: 159–60). This absolute, however, can only be glimpsed. The leader, Act and Cause must be betrayed so the social order can be refounded. The leader, or 'mediator', 'must erase himself [sic] from the picture' (Zizek, 2001b: 50), retreating to the horizon of the social to haunt history as spectre or phantasy (Zizek, 2000: 64). Every Great Man must be betrayed so he can assume his fame and thereby become compatible with the status quo (Zizek, 1999: 90–1, 316); once one glimpses the sublime Universal, therefore, one must commit suicide – as Zizek claims the Bolshevik Party did, via the Stalinist purges (1997c).

The result of the plan is to completely subordinate the individual, replicating the abuses of concentration camps

Robinson and Tormey 05 (Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey, professors of the school of Politics at University of Nottingham, "A Ticklish Subject? Zizek and the Future of Left Radicalism," Thesis Eleven, 8 November 2005, pg. 2)

The Act thus reproduces in the socio-political field the Lacanian concept of traversing the fantasy. Traversing the fantasy involves 'accepting' that there is no way one can be satisfied, and therefore a 'full acceptance of the pain' . . . as inherent to the excess of pleasure which is jouissance, as well as a rejection of every conception of radical difference (Zizek, 1997a: 30–1). It means 'an acceptance of the fact that there is no secret treasure in me' (Zizek, 1997a: 10), and a transition from being the 'nothing' we are today to being 'a Nothing humbly aware of itself, a Nothing paradoxically made rich through the very awareness of its lack' (Zizek, 2000: 146–7). It involves being reduced to a zero-point or 'ultimate level' similar to that seen in the most broken concentration-camp inmates (Zizek, 2001b: 76–7, 86), so the role of analysis is 'to throw out the baby' in order to confront the patient with his [their] 'dirty bathwater' (Zizek, 1997a: 62–3), inducing not an improvement but a transition 'from Bad to Worse', which is 'inherently "terroristic" (Zizek, 1999: 377). It is also not freedom in the usual sense, but prostration before the call of the truth-event, 'something violently imposed on me from the Outside through a traumatic encounter that shatters the very foundation of my being' (Zizek, 1999: 377). With shades of Orwell, Zizek claims that the Act involves 'the highest freedom and also the utmost passivity with a reduction to a lifeless automaton who blindly performs its gestures'. In other words, in the Act freedom equals slavery (Zizek, 1999: 377).

Zizek's Alt is Oppressive/Violent 4/4

Zizek's Theory promotes violence and exclusion of the Other

Robinson 05 (Andrew, Professor of Politics at Nottingham University, 2005, "The Political Theory of Constitutive Lack: A Critique")

Zizek's anti-capitalism has won him friends in leftist circles, but the capitalism to which he objects is not the capitalism of classical Marxist critique. One could, indeed, question whether Zizek is attacking capitalism (as opposed to liberalism) at all. His "capitalism" is a stultifying world of suffocating Good which is unbearable precisely because it lacks the dimension of violence and antagonism. It is, he says, 'boring', 'repetitive' and 'perverse' because it lacks the 'properly political' attitude of 'Us against Them'²⁰. It therefore eliminates the element of unconditional attachment to an unattainable Thing or Real, an element which is the core of humanity²¹. It delivers what Zizek fears most: a 'pallid and anaemic, self-satisfied, tolerant peaceful daily life'. To rectify this situation, there is a need for suffocating Good to be destroyed by diabolical Evil²². 'Why not violence?' he rhetorically asks. 'Horrible as it may sound, I think it's a useful antidote to all the aseptic, frustrating, politically correct pacifism²³. There must always be social exclusion, and 'enemies of the people'²⁴. The resulting politics involves an 'ethical duty' to accomplish an Act which shatters the social edifice by undermining the fantasies which sustain it²⁵. As with Mouffe, this is both a duty and an acceptance of necessity. 'By traversing the fantasy the subject accepts the void of his nonexistence'²⁶. On a political level, this kind of stance leads to an acceptance of social exclusion which negates compassion for its victims. The resultant inhumanity finds its most extreme expression in Zizek's work, where 'today's "mad dance", the dynamic proliferation of multiple shifting identities... awaits its resolution in a new form of Terror²⁷. It is also present, however, in the toned-down exclusionism of authors such as Mouffe. Hence, democracy depends on 'the possibility of drawing a frontier between "us" and "them"', and 'always entails relations of inclusion-exclusion'²⁸. 'No state or political order... can exist without some form of exclusion' experienced by its victims as coercion and violence²⁹, and, since Mouffe assumes a state to be necessary, this means that one must endorse exclusion and violence. (The supposed necessity of the state is derived from the supposed need for a master-signifier or nodal point to stabilize identity and avoid psychosis, either for individuals or for societies). What is at stake in the division between these two trends in Lacanian political theory is akin to the distinction Vaneigem draws between "active" and "passive" nihilism³⁰. The Laclauian trend involves an implied ironic distance from any specific project, which maintains awareness of its contingency; overall, however, it reinforces conformity by insisting on an institutional mediation which overcodes all the "articulations". The Zizekian version is committed to a more violent and passionate affirmation of negativity, but one which ultimately changes very little. The function of the Zizekian "Act" is to dissolve the self, producing a historical event. "After the revolution", however, everything stays much the same. For all its radical pretensions, Zizek's politics can be summed up in his attitude to neo-liberalism: 'If it works, why not try a dose of it?'³¹. The phenomena which are denounced in Lacanian theory are invariably readmitted in its "small print", and this leads to a theory which renounces both effectiveness and political radicalism.

Zizek's Alt Ruins Political Action 1/3

Zizek's politics reject more effective strategies for overcoming suffering, and result in a complete lack of political change

Robinson and Tormey 05 (Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey, professors of the school of Politics at University of Nottingham, "A Ticklish Subject? Zizek and the Future of Left Radicalism," Thesis Eleven, 8 November 2005, pg. 9)

Zizek's politics are not merely impossible but, as we have shown, potentially despotic, and also – between support for a Master, acceptance of pain and alienation, militarism and the restoration of order – tendentially conservative. Such a politics, if adopted in practice, could only discredit progressive movements and further alienate those they seek to mobilize. We would argue that a transformative politics should be theorized instead as a process of transformation, an a-linear, rhizomatic, multi-form plurality of resistances, initiatives and, indeed, acts which are sometimes spectacular and carnivalesque, sometimes prefigurative, sometimes subterranean, sometimes rooted in institutional change and reform and, under certain circumstances, directly transformative. Moreover, we would take issue with Zizek's model of the pledged group bound together by the One who Acts as a step backwards from the decentred character of current left-radical politics. Nor need this decentring be seen as a weakness, as Zizek insists it should. It can be seen as a strength, protecting radical politics from self-appointed elites, transformism, infiltration, defeat through the ‘neutralization’ of leaders, and betrayal. In contrast with Zizek's stress on subordination, exclusivity, hierarchy and violence, the current emphasis on the adoption of anti-authoritarian, heterogeneous, inclusive and multi-form types of activity offer a better chance of effectively overcoming the homogenizing logic of capitalism and of winning support among wider circles of those dissatisfied with it. Similarly, the stress on the centrality of direct action – which includes ludic, carnivalesque and a variety of non-violent actions – generates the possibility of empowerment through involvement in and support for the myriad causes which make up the anticapitalist resistance. This resistance stands in stark contrast to the desert of 'heroic' isolation advocated by Zizek which, as Laclau puts it, is 'a prescription for political quietism and sterility' (Butler et al., 2000: 293). Zizek is right that we should aim to overcome the 'impossibilities' of capitalism, but this overcoming should involve the active prefiguration and construction in actuality of alternative social forms, not a simple (and actually impossible) break – with everything which exists – of the kind imagined by Zizek. It is important that radicals invoke 'utopias', but in an active way, in the forms of organization, 'disorganization', and activity adopted – in the spaces created for resistance and in the prefiguration of alternative economic, political and social forms. Utopian imaginaries express what is at stake in left radicalism: that what exists does not exist of necessity, and that the contingency of social institutions and practices makes possible the transcendence of existing institutions and the construction or creation of different practices, social relations and conceptions of the world. The most Zizek allows radicals is the ability to 'glimpse' utopia while enacting the reconstruction of oppression. Radicals should go further and bring this imagined 'other place' into actual existence. Through enacting utopia, we have the ability to bring the 'no-where' into the 'now-here'.

Zizek's Alt Ruins Political Action 2/3

Their alternative rejects political action as “intrinsic to the system,” and results in a destructive individualism that does not bring about meaningful change.

Robinson and Tormey 05 (Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey, professors of the school of Politics at University of Nottingham, “A Ticklish Subject? Zizek and the Future of Left Radicalism,” Thesis Eleven, 8 November 2005, pg. 9)

As useful as such a reading is, this is not, we would argue, the Zizek who emerges on closer examination. Regarding where radicals should proceed from ‘here and now’, his work offers little to celebrate. The relevance of a politics based on formal structural categories instead of lived historical processes, which measures ‘radicalism’ not by concrete achievements but by how abruptly one rejects the existing symbolic order, is questionable. The concept of the Act is, we think, metaphysical, not political, leading to a rejection of most forms of resistance. For Zizek, objections to official ideologies which stop short of an Act are ‘the very form of ideology’ (Zizek, 1997a: 21), and the gap between ‘complaint’ and Acts is ‘insurmountable’ (Zizek, 1999: 361). So protest politics ‘fits the existing power relations’ and carnivals are ‘a false transgression which stabilizes the power edifice’ (Zizek, 1999: 230; 1997a: 73). This position misreads past revolutionary movements – including the decades-long revolutionary process in Russia – and offers little for the development of left strategies aiming to challenge the existing system. What Zizek establishes, we would argue, is a radical break between his own theory and any effective left politics, much of which – as we have shown – he peremptorily dismisses. The concept of the Act is a recipe for creating a desert around oneself while sitting in judgement on actual political movements which always fall short of one’s ideal criteria.

Zizek's Alt Ruins Political Action 3/3

Zizek's theories undermine progressive politics- they reject meaningful political action and do not provide a clear alternative

Robinson and Tormey 05 (Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey, professors of the school of Politics at University of Nottingham, "A Ticklish Subject? Zizek and the Future of Left Radicalism," Thesis Eleven, 8 November 2005, pg. 9)

In this article we want to suggest that whilst Zizek's recent work is intellectually 'radical', this is not, despite appearances to the contrary, a radicalism that left politics can draw sustenance or hope from. Zizek does not offer an alternative that is genuinely progressive or transformative, but only the negativity of what Raoul Vaneigem terms 'active nihilism' (1967: 178). This negativity 'breaks' with the present but undermines rather than generates a meaningful politics of resistance to the system. What Zizek delivers falls short of its promise. In our view, therefore, his position should be opposed by those genuinely concerned with advancing left radical goals and a meaningful resistance to the neoliberal status quo. A RADICAL TERROR? Zizek's popularity results largely from the apparent way out that he provides from the cul-de-sac in which radical theory, and in particular radical postmodern theory, has found itself. Zizek is of course not the first author to attack 'postmodernists', post-structuralists and post-Marxists on grounds of their lack of radical ambition on the terrain of politics. However, left activists interested in confronting the liberal capitalist status quo find themselves trapped between politically radical but theoretically flawed leftist orthodoxies, and theoretically innovative but politically moderate 'post'-theories.³ Enter Zizek. Zizek offers an alternative to traditional left radicalisms and 'postmodern' anti-essentialist approaches, especially identity politics. For Zizek, 'radical democracy' accepts the liberal-capitalist horizon, and so is never 'radical' enough. Against this alleged pseudo-radicalism, Zizek revives traditional leftist concepts such as 'class struggle'. He ignores, however, the 'orthodox' left meaning of such terms, rearticulating them in a sophisticated Hegelian and Lacanian vocabulary.⁴ Yet problems remain: Zizek's version of 'class struggle' does not map on to traditional conceptions of an empirical working class, and Zizek's 'proletariat' is avowedly 'mythical'.⁵ He also rejects newer forms of struggle such as the anti-capitalist movement and the 1968 uprisings, thereby reproducing a problem common in radical theory: his theory has no link to radical politics in an immediate sense.⁶ Nevertheless, he has a theory of how such a politics should look, which he uses to judge existing political radicalisms. So how does Zizek see radical politics emerging? Zizek does not offer much by way of a positive social agenda. He does not have anything approximating to a 'programme', nor a model of the kind of society he seeks, nor a theory of the construction of alternatives in the present. Indeed, the more one looks at the matter, the more difficult it becomes to pin Zizek down to any 'line' or 'position'. He seems at first sight to regard social transformation not as something 'possible' to be theorized and advanced, but as a fundamental 'impossibility' because the influence of the dominant symbolic system is so great that it makes alternatives unthinkable.⁷ A fundamental transformation, however, is clearly the only answer to the otherwise compelling vision of contemporary crisis Zizek offers. Can he escape this contradiction? His attempt to do so revolves around a reclassification of 'impossibility' as an active element in generating action. Asserting or pursuing the impossible becomes in Zizek's account not only possible but desirable. So how then can the left advance its 'impossible' politics? How is a now 'impossible' model of class struggle to be transformed into a politics relevant to the present period?

Alternative Fails - Traversing the Fantasy

The alt fails – traversing the fantasy is a transition from bad to worse

Robinson and Tormey 05 (Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey, professors of the school of Politics at University of Nottingham, “A Ticklish Subject? Zizek and the Future of Left Radicalism,” *Thesis Eleven*, 8 November 2005, pg. 8)

Through an Act, one negates one’s position in the social system and destroys the person one was before. The concept of the Act is therefore palingenic: one destroys one’s former self to go through a moment of rebirth, but a rebirth grounded on a desire for Nothingness rather than on any particular programme of change (Zizek, 2000: 166–7). For Zizek ‘the only legitimation of revolution is negative, the will to break with the Past’, and revolutionaries should not have positive conceptions of an alternative to be realized (Butler et al., 2000: 131). Ruthlessness is characteristic of the Act: Zizek hates soft-heartedness because it ‘blurs the subject’s pure ethical stance’ and calls for an Act ‘impervious to any call of the Other’ (Zizek, 2001b: 111, 175). The Act thus reproduces in the socio-political field the Lacanian concept of traversing the fantasy. Traversing the fantasy involves ‘accepting’ that there is no way one can be satisfied, and therefore a ‘full acceptance of the pain . . . as inherent to the excess of pleasure which is jouissance’, as well as a rejection of every conception of radical difference (Zizek, 1997a: 30–1). It means ‘an acceptance of the fact that *there is no secret treasure in me*’ (Zizek, 1997a: 10), and a transition from being the ‘nothing’ we are today to being ‘a Nothing humbly aware of itself, a Nothing paradoxically made rich through the very awareness of its lack’ (Zizek, 2000: 146–7). It involves being reduced to a zero-point or ‘ultimate level’ similar to that seen in the most broken concentration-camp inmates (Zizek, 2001b: 76–7, 86), so the role of analysis is ‘to throw out the baby’ in order to confront the patient with his ‘dirty bathwater’ (Zizek, 1997a: 62–3), inducing not an improvement but a transition ‘from Bad to Worse’, which is ‘inherently “terroristic”’ (Zizek, 1999: 377). It is also not freedom in the usual sense, but prostration before the call of the truth-event, ‘something violently imposed on me from the Outside through a traumatic encounter that shatters the very foundation of my being’ (Zizek, 1999: 377). With shades of Orwell, Zizek claims that the Act involves ‘the highest freedom and also the utmost passivity with a reduction to a lifeless automaton who blindly performs its gestures’. In other words, in the Act freedom equals slavery (Zizek, 1999: 377). So the Act is a rebirth – but a rebirth as what? The parallel with Lacan’s concept of ‘traversing the fantasy’ is crucial because, for Lacan, there is no escape from the symbolic order or the Law of the Master. We are trapped in the existing world, complete with its dislocation, lack, alienation and antagonism, and no transcendence can overcome the deep structure of this world, which is fixed at the level of subject-formation. The most we can hope for is to go from incapable neurosis to mere alienated subjectivity. In Zizek’s politics, therefore, a fundamental social transformation is impossible. After the break initiated by an Act, a system similar to the present one is restored; the subject undergoes identification with a Cause, leading to a new ‘proper symbolic Prohibition’ revitalized by the process of rebirth (Zizek, 1999: 154, 368), enabling one ‘effectively to realize the necessary pragmatic measures’ (Zizek, 1997b: 72–3), which may be the same ones as today. It is on this ground that Zizek is relaxed about supporting measures that, far from challenging or undermining the status quo, give added support to it – as, for example, in his refusal to denounce structural adjustment policies (Zizek, 1996: 32). This is all because, in his view, it is possible to start a ‘new life’, but only by replacing one symbolic fiction with another (Zizek, 1999: 331). As a Lacanian, Zizek is opposed to any idea of realizing utopian ‘fullness’ and thus in escaping the vicissitudes of the political *qua* antagonism.

Alternative Fails - Capitalism

Alternative Fails-Any type of resistance to capitalism is rejected by Zizek, the alternative can never materialize

Robinson and Tormey 05 (Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey, professors of the school of Politics at University of Nottingham, “A Ticklish Subject? Zizek and the Future of Left Radicalism,” Thesis Eleven, 8 November 2005, pg. 8)

So an Act neither solves concrete problems nor achieves drastic improvements; it merely removes blockages to existing modes of thought and action. It transforms the ‘constellation which generates social symptoms’ (Butler et al., 2000: 124), shifting exclusion from one group to another, but it does not achieve either drastic or moderate concrete changes. It ‘means that we accept the vicious circle of revolving around the object [the Real] and find *jouissance* in it, renouncing the myth that *jouissance* is amassed somewhere else’ (Zizek, 1988: 109–10). It also offers those who take part in it a ‘dimension of Otherness, that moment when *the absolute appears* in all its fragility’, a ‘brief apparition of a future utopian Otherness to which every authentic revolutionary stance should cling’ (Zizek, 2000: 159–60). This absolute, however, can only be glimpsed. The leader, Act and Cause must be betrayed so the social order can be refounded. The leader, or ‘mediator’, ‘must erase himself [*sic*] from the picture’ (Zizek, 2001b: 50), retreating to the horizon of the social to haunt history as spectre or phantasy (Zizek, 2000: 64). Every Great Man must be betrayed so he can assume his fame and thereby become compatible with the status quo (Zizek, 1999: 90–1, 316); once one glimpses the sublime Universal, therefore, one must commit suicide – as Zizek claims the Bolshevik Party did, via the Stalinist purges (1997c). Furthermore, despite Zizek’s emphasis on politics, his discussion of the Act remains resolutely individualist – as befits its clinical origins. Zizek’s examples of Acts are nearly all isolated actions by individuals, such as Mary Kay Letourneau’s defiance of juridical pressure to end a relationship with a youth, a soldier in *Full Metal Jacket* killing his drill sergeant and himself, and the acts of Stalinist bureaucrats who rewrote history knowing they would later be purged (Zizek, 1997a: 21; 1999: 385–7; 2001b: 98–9). **Even the Russian Revolution becomes for Zizek a set of individual choices by Lenin, Stalin and the aforementioned bureaucrats, as opposed to the culmination of mass actions involving thousands of ordinary men and women. This is problematic as a basis for understanding previous social transformations, and even more so as a recommendation for the future. The new subject Zizek envisages is an authoritarian leader, someone capable of the ‘inherently terroristic’ action of ‘redefining the rules of the game’** (Zizek, 1999: 377). **We would argue that this is a conservative, if not reactionary, position. Donald Roodum’s cartoon character Wildcat surely grasps the essence of left radical ambition rather better when he states, ‘I don’t just want freedom from the capitalists. I also want freedom from people fit to take over.’**

Alternative Fails - Nihilism

The Revolution is nihilism and anti-ethical-the alternative is circular and will never solve Robinson and Tormey 05 (Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey, professors of the school of Politics at University of Nottingham, “A Ticklish Subject? Zizek and the Future of Left Radicalism,” Thesis Eleven, 8 November 2005, pg. 9)

True to form, Zizek does not see mere ‘impossibility’ as a barrier to action at all. Rather, he sees a confrontation with the impossible as a sign of the purity and authenticity of a particular action, i.e. of what he identifies as an authentic Act. For Zizek, an authentic, radical Act necessarily comes from the repressed Real, and involves the return of this repressed impossibility. It necessarily, therefore, surprises not only conformist observers, but the actor; it ‘surprises/transforms the agent itself’ (Butler et al., 2000: 124). The Act therefore opens a redemptive dimension via a ‘gesture of *sublimation*, of erasing the traces of one’s past . . . and beginning again from a zero-point’ (Zizek, 2000: 127). Such an Act is for Zizek a transcendental necessity for subjective action, ‘a quasi-transcendental unhistorical condition of possibility and . . . impossibility of historicisation’ (Zizek, 1997a: 225–6). The Act, which for Zizek is the sole criterion of whether one's politics are radical, is a structural or formal category, defined (in principle) internally and radically separated from anything which does not meet its criteria. All alternatives that fall short of the criteria of full Acts are for Zizek necessarily complicit in capitalism, even those which share Zizek's hostility to liberal capitalism, and including some which fit particular formal requirements of an Act. At best, they are hysterical 'false acts', providing a 'pseudo-radical', pseudo-resistance which actually sustains capitalism by contributing to its 'phantasmic supplement'. Acts have several formal criteria which Zizek formulates differently on different occasions. First, someone who Acts must identify with the symptom, thereby revealing a repressed Truth and bringing the Real to the surface. Second, they must 'suspend' the existing symbolic system, including its ethics, politics, and systems of meaning and knowledge; an Act is nihilistic and extra-, even anti-, ethical (at least as regards any conception of the good). Since Zizek denies the existence of radical social, cultural or psycho-logical difference, he believes that everyone is equally trapped by the dominant symbolic system, so any break with it must come from beyond meaning and positive ethics. The commitment an Act generates must be 'dogmatic'; it 'cannot be refuted by any argumentation' and is indifferent to the truth-status of the Event it refers to. An Act has its own inherent normativity, refusing all external standards; an Act (or Decision) is circular and tautological, based on a 'shibboleth', and incomprehensible except from the inside.

Alternative Fails - Radical Resistance

Alternative Fails-radical resistance fails and only continues the cycle of oppressive alienation, hierarchies and domination

Robinson and Tormey 05 (Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey, professors of the school of Politics at University of Nottingham, “A Ticklish Subject? Zizek and the Future of Left Radicalism,” Thesis Eleven, 8 November 2005, pg. 1)

The work of Slavoj Zizek has become an essential reference point for debates concerning the future of left radical thought and practice. His attacks on identity politics, multiculturalism and ‘radical democracy’ have established him as a leading figure amongst those looking to renew the link between socialist discourse and a transformative politics. However, we contend that despite the undeniable radicality of Zizek’s theoretical approach, his politics offers little in the way of inspiration for the progressive left. On the contrary, his commitment to Lacanian categories reasserts the primordial character of alienation, hierarchy and domination, and his proposed schema for confronting the status quo, the model of the Act, serves to reaffirm rather than contest the given. We suggest that a genuinely transformative politics should (contra Zizek) stress the necessity for the prefiguration of alternatives, of linking and radicalizing ‘petty’ resistances, of encouraging critical and utopian forms of thought and activity.

Alternative Fails-Zizek’s alternative is not progressive and reinforces current political structures through active nihilism

Robinson and Tormey 05 (Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey, professors of the school of Politics at University of Nottingham, “A Ticklish Subject? Zizek and the Future of Left Radicalism,” Thesis Eleven, 8 November 2005, pg. 2)

In this article we want to suggest that whilst Zizek’s recent work is intellectually ‘radical’, this is not, despite appearances to the contrary, a radicalism that left politics can draw sustenance or hope from. Zizek does not offer an alternative that is genuinely progressive or transformative, but only the negativity of what Raoul Vaneigem terms ‘active nihilism’ (1967: 178). This negativity ‘breaks’ with the present but undermines rather than generates a meaningful politics of resistance to the system. What Zizek delivers falls short of its promise. In our view, therefore, his position should be opposed by those genuinely concerned with advancing left radical goals and a meaningful resistance to the neoliberal status quo.

Alternative Fails - Shifts Oppression

Zizek's alternative cannot escape the current social system – he merely shifts oppression from one group to another.

Robinson and Tormey 03, (Andrew and Simon, Professor of Politics at Nottingham University and Professor of Politics at Nottingham University, 2003 "Zizek is not a Radical," <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/simon.tormey/articles/Zizeknotradical.pdf>)

So the Act is a rebirth - but a rebirth as what? The parallel with Lacan's concept of 'traversing the fantasy' is crucial, because, for Lacan, there is no escape from the symbolic order or the Law of the Master. We are trapped in the existing world, complete with its dislocation, lack, alienation and antagonism, and no transcendence can overcome the deep structure of this world, which is fixed at the level of subject-formation; the most we can hope for is to go from incapable neurosis to mere alienated subjectivity. In Zizek's politics, therefore, a fundamental social transformation is impossible. After the break initiated by an Act, a system similar to the present one is restored; the subject undergoes identification with a Cause,⁷⁷ leading to a new 'proper symbolic Prohibition' revitalised by the process of rebirth,⁷⁸ enabling one 'effectively to realize the necessary pragmatic measures',⁷⁹ which may be the same ones as today, e.g. structural adjustment policies.⁸⁰ It is possible to start a new life by replacing one symbolic fiction with another.⁸¹ As a Lacanian, Zizek is opposed to any idea of realising utopian fullness. Any change in the basic structure of existence, whereby one may overcome dislocation and disorientation, is out of the question. However, he also rejects practical solutions to problems as a mere displacement.⁸² So an Act neither solves concrete problems nor achieves drastic improvements; it merely removes blockages to existing modes of thought and action. It transforms the 'constellation which generates social symptoms',⁸³ shifting exclusion from one group to another, but it does not achieve either drastic or moderate concrete changes. It 'means that we accept the vicious circle of revolving around the object [the Real] and find jouissance in it, renouncing the myth that jouissance is amassed somewhere else'.⁸⁴ It also offers those who take part in it a 'dimension of Otherness, that moment when the absolute appears in all its fragility', a 'brief apparition of a future utopian Otherness to which every authentic revolutionary stance should cling'.⁸⁵ This absolute, however, can only be glimpsed. The leader, Act and Cause must be betrayed so the social order can be refounded. The leader, or 'mediator', 'must erase himself [sic] from the picture',⁸⁶ retreating to the horizon of the social to haunt history as spectre or phantasy.⁸⁷ Every Great Man must be betrayed so he can assume his fame and thereby become compatible with the status quo;⁸⁸ once one glimpses the sublime Universal, therefore, one must commit suicide - as Zizek claims the Bolshevik Party did, via the Stalinist purges ('When the Party Commits Suicide').

Alternative Fails - Political Paralysis

Zizek's alternative is political paralysis – progressivism built around the desire for transformation is the only way to avoid the replication of oppression.

Robinson and Tormey 03, (Andrew and Simon, Professor of Politics at Nottingham University and Professor of Politics at Nottingham University, 2003 "Zizek is not a Radical,"
<http://homepage.ntlworld.com/simon.tormey/articles/Zizeknotradical.pdf>)

Zizek's politics are not merely impossible, but potentially despotic, and also (between support for a Master, acceptance of pain and alienation, militarism and the restoration of order) tendentially conservative. They serve only to discredit the left and further alienate those it seeks to mobilise.
Instead, a transformative politics should be a process of transformation, an alinear, rhizomatic, multiform plurality of resistances, initiatives, and, indeed, acts, which are sometimes spectacular and carnivalesque, sometimes prefigurative, sometimes subterranean, sometimes rooted in institutional change and reform, sometimes directly revolutionary. Zizek's model of the pledged group, bound together by the One who Acts, is entirely irrelevant to the contemporary world and would be a step backwards from the decentred character of current leftradical politics. Nor need this decentring be seen as a weakness as Zizek insists. It can be a strength, protecting radical politics from self-appointed elites, transformism, infiltration, defeat through the 'neutralisation' of leaders, and the threat of a repeat of the Stalinist betrayal. In contrast with Zizek's stress on subordination, exclusivity, hierarchy and violence, the tendency of anti-capitalists and others to adopt anti-authoritarian, heterogeneous, inclusive and multiform types of activity offer a better chance of effectively overcoming the homogenising logic of capitalism and of winning support among wider circles of those dissatisfied with it. Similarly, the emphasis on direct action - which can include ludic, carnivalesque and non-violent actions as well as more overtly confrontational ones - generates the possibility of empowerment through involvement in and support for the myriad causes which make up the anti-capitalist resistance. This resistance stands in stark contrast to the desert of 'heroic' isolation advocated by Zizek, which, as Laclau puts it, is 'a prescription for political quietism and sterility'.¹⁵⁴ Zizek is right that we should aim to overcome the 'impossibilities' of capitalism, but this overcoming should involve the active prefiguration and construction in actuality of alternative social forms, not a simple (and actually impossible) break with everything which exists of the kind imagined by Zizek. It is important that radicals invoke 'utopias', but in an active way, in the forms of organisation, 'disorganisation', and activity we adopt, in the spaces we create for resistance, and in the prefiguration of alternative economic, political and social forms. Utopian imaginaries express what is at stake in left radicalism: that what exists does not exist of necessity, and that the contingency of social institutions and practices makes possible the overthrow of existing institutions and the construction or creation of different practices, social relations, and conceptions of the world. The most Zizek allows to radicals is the ability to 'glimpse' utopia while enacting the reconstruction of oppression. Radicals should go further, and bring this imagined 'other place' into actual existence. Through enacting utopia, we have the ability to bring the 'no-where' into the 'now-here'

Alternative Fails - No Change

Zizek offers no guide to change – his theory is a recipe for fragmentation of progressives
Robinson and Tormey 03, (Andrew and Simon, Professor of Politics at Nottingham University and Professor of Politics at Nottingham University, 2003 “Zizek is not a Radical,”
<http://homepage.ntlworld.com/simon.tormey/articles/Zizeknotradical.pdf>)

As useful as such a reading is, this is not the Zizek who emerges on closer examination. Regarding where radicals - especially active radicals - should proceed from ‘here and now’, Zizek’s work offers little to celebrate. The relevance of a politics based on formal structural categories instead of lived historical processes, which measures ‘radicalism’, not by concrete achievements, but by how abruptly one rejects the existing symbolic order, is questionable. The concept of the Act is metaphysical, not political, and it leads to a rejection of most forms of resistance. For Zizek, objections to official ideologies which stop short of an Act are ‘the very form of ideology’,¹⁴¹ and the gap between ‘complaint’ and Acts is ‘insurmountable’.¹⁴² So protest politics ‘fits the existing power relations’ and carnivals are ‘a false transgression which stabilizes the power edifice’.¹⁴³ This position misreads past revolutionary movements - including the decades-long revolutionary process in Russia - and offers nothing to the development of a left strategy to challenge the existing system. All Zizek establishes, therefore, is a radical break between his own theory and any effective left politics. The concept of the Act is a recipe for irrelevance - for creating a desert around oneself while sitting in judgement on actual political movements which always fall short of one’s ideal criteria.

Alternative Fails - Contradiction

The Alternative recreates the harms that it critiques-Zizek's theory cannot escape this contradiction

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Enter Zizek. Zizek offers an alternative to traditional left radicalisms and ‘postmodern’ anti-essentialist approaches, especially identity politics. For Zizek, ‘radical democracy’ accepts the liberal-capitalist horizon, and so is never ‘radical’ enough.⁶ Against this alleged pseudo-radicalism, Zizek revives traditional leftist concepts such as ‘class struggle’.⁷ However, he ignores the ‘orthodox’ left meaning of such terms, rearticulating them in a sophisticated Hegelian and Lacanian vocabulary. His dramatic impact on radical theory is therefore unsurprising. To take one example, Sean Homer’s praise for Zizek is based on this supposed reinvigoration of radicalism and Marxism.⁸ Though Homer is sceptical about Zizek’s ‘Lacanianism’, he declares that ‘Marxism … has always been much more to the fore of Zizek’s work than many of his commentators have cared to acknowledge’.⁹ Zizek, he claims, is reopening the repressed issue of the Marxian and Althusserian legacy, and calling for ‘[u]topian imaginaries which allow us to think beyond the limits of capitalism’.¹⁰ For Homer’s Zizek ‘the point is to be anti-capitalist, whatever form that might take’.¹¹ And though he attacks ‘the problem’ of Zizek’s Lacanian categories, especially the Real, Homer clearly sees Zizek’s work as a step towards the revitalised Marxist radicalism he advocates.¹² Problems remain, however. Zizek’s version of ‘class struggle’ does not map on to traditional conceptions of an empirical working-class, and Zizek’s ‘proletariat’ is avowedly ‘mythical’.¹³ He also rejects newer forms of struggle such as the anti-capitalist movement and the 1968 uprisings thereby reproducing a problem common in radical theory: **his theory has no link to radical politics in an immediate sense**.¹⁴ Nevertheless, he has a theory of how such a politics should look which he uses to judge existing political radicalisms. So how does Zizek see radical politics emerging? **Zizek does not offer much by way of a positive social agenda. He does not have anything approximating to a ‘programme’, nor a model of the kind of society he seeks, nor a theory of the construction of alternatives in the present.** Indeed, the more one looks at the matter, the more difficult it becomes to pin Zizek down to any ‘line’ or ‘position’. **He seems at first sight to regard social transformation, not as something ‘possible’ to be theorised and advanced, but as a fundamental ‘impossibility’ because the influence of the dominant symbolic system is so great that it makes alternatives unthinkable.**¹⁵ **A fundamental transformation, however, is clearly the only answer to the vision of contemporary crisis Zizek offers. Can he escape this contradiction?** His attempt to do so revolves around a reclassification of ‘impossibility’ as an active element in generating action. Asserting or pursuing the impossible becomes in Zizek’s account not only possible but desirable. **So how then can the left advance its ‘impossible’ politics? How is a now ‘impossible’ model of class struggle be transformed into a politics relevant to the present period?**

Capitalism Alt Fails - Empirically Denied

Alternative Fails-Zizek's philosophies are abstract, empirical examples of resistance to capitalism are rejecting by Zizek

Robinson and Tormey 05 (Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey, professors of the school of Politics at University of Nottingham, "A Ticklish Subject? Zizek and the Future of Left Radicalism," *Thesis Eleven*, 8 November 2005, pg. 9)

Read in a certain way, Zizek seems to offer a 'leftist' way out of the postmodern cul-de-sac. In questioning the movement of left radical theory towards identity politics, multiculturalism and radical democracy, he reminds readers of the continued importance of the global economy and the extreme disparities of wealth and power that characterize capitalist globalization. He has sought, as he would put it, to think the impossible and reopen the debate in radical theory about social transformation. His recent recovery of Lenin is a potentially interesting development given Lenin's importance in debates on organization, strategy and the wars of position and of movement that radical theory has recently eschewed in favour of abstract socio-cultural critique. He also offers a glimpse of the dilemmas of power, violence, transformism and betrayal that await those who take radical political action, as opposed to those who write about it. Read in a certain way, Zizek points radical theory back toward radical political practice – towards an engagement with political issues, radical political movements and the transformation of social relations, an engagement we think it should never have lost in the first place. As useful as such a reading is, this is not, we would argue, the Zizek who emerges on closer examination. Regarding where radicals should proceed from 'here and now', his work offers little to celebrate. The relevance of a politics based on formal structural categories instead of lived historical processes, which measures 'radicalism' not by concrete achievements but by how abruptly one rejects the existing symbolic order, is questionable. The concept of the Act is, we think, metaphysical, not political, leading to a rejection of most forms of resistance. For Zizek, objections to official ideologies which stop short of an Act are '*the very form of ideology*' (Zizek, 1997a: 21), and the gap between 'complaint' and Acts is 'insurmountable' (Zizek, 1999: 361). So protest politics 'fits the existing power relations' and carnivals are 'a false transgression which stabilizes the power edifice' (Zizek, 1999: 230; 1997a: 73). This position misreads past revolutionary movements – including the decades-long revolutionary process in Russia – and offers little for the development of left strategies aiming to challenge the existing system. What Zizek establishes, we would argue, is a radical break between his own theory and any effective left politics, much of which – as we have shown – he peremptorily dismisses.

Rejection Alternative Fails

Rejecting the Affirmative Fails-Concrete vision for change is necessary for social transformation – relying on isolated “acts” guarantees failure.

Robinson and Tormey 03, (Andrew and Simon, Professor of Politics at Nottingham University and Professor of Politics at Nottingham University, 2003 “Zizek is not a Radical,”
<http://homepage.ntlworld.com/simon.tormey/articles/Zizeknotradical.pdf>)

Zizek is right to advocate a transformative stance, but wrong to posit this as a radical break constituted ex nihilo. **Far from being the disavowed supplement of capitalism, the space for thinking the not-real which is opened by imaginaries and petty resistances is a prerequisite to building a more active resistance and ultimately, a substantial social transformation. In practice, political revolutions emerge through the radicalisation of existing demands and resistances - not as pure Acts occurring out of nothing.** Even when they are incomprehensible from the standpoint of ‘normal’, conformist bystanders, they are a product of the development of subterranean resistances and counterhegemonies among subaltern groups. As Jim Scott argues, **when discontent among the subaltern strata generates ‘moments of madness’, insurrections and revolutions, it does so as an extension of, and in continuity with, existing ‘hidden transcripts’, dissenting imaginaries and petty resistances.** As Scott’s evidence shows, **resistance requires an experimental spirit and a capacity to test and exploit all the loopholes, ambiguities, silences and lapses available... [and] setting a course for the very perimeter of what the authorities are obliged to permit or unable to prevent**.¹⁴⁴ **Such petty resistance can pass over into more general insurrections.** When prisoners at a Stalinist camp, expected to deliberately lose a race against their guards, ‘spoiled the performance’ with a ‘pantomime of excess effort’, **a ‘small political victory had real political consequences’, producing a ‘flurry of activity’.**¹⁴⁵ Filipino peasant uprisings often acted out an ideology developed through a subverted version of passion plays,¹⁴⁶ and European carnivals often passed over into insurrection.¹⁴⁷ **Social change does not come from nothing; it requires the pre-existence of a counter-culture involving nonconformist ideas and practices. ‘You have to know how the world isn’t in order to change it’.**¹⁴⁸ As Gramsci puts it, **before coming into existence a new society must be ‘ideally active’ in the minds of those struggling for change.**¹⁴⁹ **The history of resistance gives little reason to support Zizek’s politics of the Act.** The ability to Act in the manner described by Zizek is largely absent from the subaltern strata. **Mary Kay Letourneau (let us recall) did not transform society; rather, her ‘Act’ was repressed and she was jailed. In another case discussed by Zizek, a group of Siberian miners is said to accomplish an Act - by getting massacred.**¹⁵⁰ **Since Acts are not socially effective, they cannot help the worst-off, let alone transform society.** Zizek’s assumption of the effectiveness of Acts rests on a confusion between individual and social levels of analysis. Vaneigem eerily foresees Zizek’s ‘Act’ when he argues against ‘active nihilism’. **In a gloomy bar where everyone is bored to death, a drunken young man breaks his glass, then picks up a bottle and smashes it against the wall. Nobody gets excited; the disappointed young man lets himself be thrown out... Nobody responded to the sign which he thought was explicit. He remained alone, like the hooligan who burns down a church or kills a policeman, at one with himself, but condemned to exile for as long as other people remain exiled from their existence.** He has not escaped from the magnetic field of isolation; he is suspended in a zone of zero gravity.¹⁵¹ **The transition from this ‘wasteland of the suicide and the solitary killer’ to revolutionary politics requires the repetition of negation in a different register,**¹⁵² connected to a positive project to change the world and relying on the imaginaries Zizek denounces, the carnival spirit and the ability to dream.¹⁵³

In-Round Alternative Fails

Their alternative as presented in this debate round is not the radical act – it fails to meet Zizek’s own standards of what constitutes the Act. Zizek calls this a “false act,” one which merely serves to continue capitalism.

Robinson and Tormey 03, (Andrew and Simon, Professor of Politics at Nottingham University and Professor of Politics at Nottingham University, 2003 “Zizek is not a Radical,”
<http://homepage.ntlworld.com/simon.tormey/articles/Zizeknotradical.pdf>)

Caught in the Act The answer is that Zizek does not see impossibility as a barrier to action. Rather, he sees it as a sign of the purity and authenticity of a particular action, i.e. of what he identifies as an authentic Act.

For Zizek, an authentic, radical Act necessarily comes from the repressed Real, and involves the return of this repressed impossibility. It necessarily, therefore, surprises not only conformist observers, but the actor; it ‘surprises/transforms the agent itself’.³⁷ The Act therefore opens a redemptive dimension via a ‘gesture of sublimation, of erasing the traces of one’s past ... and beginning again from a zero-point’.³⁸ Such an Act is for Zizek a transcendental necessity for subjective action, ‘a quasi-transcendental unhistorical condition of possibility and ... impossibility of historicisation’. The Act, which for Zizek is the sole criterion of whether one’s politics are radical, is a structural or formal category, defined (in principle) internally and radically separated from anything which does not meet its criteria. All alternatives - even those which share Zizek’s hostility to liberal capitalism, and including some which fit particular formal requirements of an Act - which fall short of the criteria of full Acts are for Zizek necessarily complicit in capitalism. At best, they are hysterical ‘false acts’, providing a pseudo-radical pseudo-resistance which actually sustains capitalism by contributing to its phantasmic supplement.⁴⁰ Acts have several formal criteria which Zizek formulates differently on different occasions. Firstly, someone who Acts must identify with the symptom, thereby revealing a repressed Truth and bringing the Real to the surface.

Secondly, they must ‘suspend’ the existing symbolic system, including its ethics, politics, and systems of meaning and knowledge;⁴¹ an Act is nihilistic and extra-, even anti-, ethical (at least as regards any conception of the good). Since Zizek denies the existence of radical social, cultural or psychological difference, he believes that everyone is equally trapped by the dominant symbolic system, so any break with it must come from beyond meaning and positive ethics. The commitment an Act generates must be ‘dogmatic’; it ‘cannot be refuted by any argumentation’ and is indifferent to the truth-status of the Event it refers to.⁴² An Act has its own inherent normativity, refusing all external standards;⁴³ an Act

(or Decision) is circular and tautological,⁴⁴ based on a shibboleth,⁴⁵ and incomprehensible except from the inside.⁴⁶ It is a response to an ethical injunction beyond ordinary ethical norms, so that ‘although what I am about to do will have catastrophic consequences for my well-being and for the well-being of my nearest and dearest, none the less I simply have to do it, because of the inexorable ethical injunction’.⁴⁷ The Act resolves all problems in a single, all-encompassing Terror which bypasses particularities and violently stops the ‘mad dance’ of shifting identities, operating instead ‘to ground a new political universality by opting for the impossible, with no taboos, no a priori norms... respect for which would prevent us from ‘resignifying’ terror, the ruthless exercise of power, the spirit of sacrifice’.⁴⁸ An Act is symbolic death,⁴⁹ creatio ex nihilo and self-grounded.⁵⁰ It is the outcome of ‘an ethics grounded in reference to the traumatic Real which resists symbolisation’, i.e. to ‘an injunction which cannot be grounded in ontology’,⁵¹ a ‘self-referential abyss’,⁵² an excessive gesture irreducible to human considerations and necessarily arbitrary.⁵³

The suspension of ethical, epistemological and political standards is not a necessary consequence of a Zizekian Act - it is a defining feature. It is necessary so a new system can be built from nothing,⁵⁴ and anything short of a full Act remains on enemy terrain.⁵⁵

Alt → Authoritarianism

Zizek's "radical act" leaves intact the most violent features of capitalism while reproducing a system that requires authoritarianism.

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The choice of the term 'suspension' is revealing, for although in Zizek's account the surface structure of the social system is changed during such a 'suspension', the deep structure of the social system as set out in Lacanian theory is not (and cannot be) changed in the slightest. So an Act shatters capitalism, but it leaves intact many of its most objectionable features, including social exclusion,⁵⁶ violence,⁵⁷ naturalisation,⁵⁸ reification and myths,⁵⁹ all of which are for Zizek primordial, ever-present and necessary in any society. Further, since the Act involves submission to a Cause and a Leader, it cannot destroy the authoritarian structure of capitalism: 'often, one does need a leader in order to be able to "do the impossible"... subordination to [the leader] is the highest act of freedom'.⁶⁰ So, while an Act may destroy the specific articulations of oppression within the present system (e.g. the identification of the Real with illegal immigrants), it necessarily produces a system which is equally oppressive.

Zizek is Authoritarianism – his system requires war and oppression in order to maintain the revolution.

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Thirdly, Zizek's view of Lenin also shows that his 'revolution' cannot be extensively transformative; it can suspend the symbolic order, but must later restore it. Thus, Zizek identifies, not with the transformative agenda of The State and Revolution or the early reforms such as workers' control of factories, democratisation of the army and decentralisation of decision-making - which hardly figure in his account - but rather, with Lenin's determination to restore order even at the cost of abandoning such transformations, to take on 'the burden of taking over', to take 'responsibility for the smooth running of the social edifice' and become the 'One who assumes the ultimate responsibility, including a ruthless readiness to break the letter of the law ... to guarantee the system's survival'.¹²⁷ The 'heroic' dimension of revolution occurs when the 'Stalinist ritual, the empty flattery which "holds together" the community', which is 'a dimension... probably essential to language as such', 'necessarily' replaces the revolutionary moment.¹²⁸ What Zizek is telling left radicals, therefore, is to abandon the notion of the state as a source of violence and to see it as part of the solution to, rather than the problem of, reordering social life. Zizek sees the state as a useful ally, and an instrument through which to impose the good terror. He denounces anti-statism as idealist and hypocritical,¹²⁹ and attacks the anticapitalist movement for lacking political centralisation.¹³⁰ Zizek does not offer an alternative to statist violence; in Zizek's world (to misquote an anarchist slogan), 'whoever you fight for, the state always wins'. Opponents of the war in Afghanistan and the arms trade, of police racism and repression against demonstrators, will find no alternative in Zizek - only a new militarism, a 'good terror' and yet another Cheka. Zizek's concept of 'socialisation', virtually his only concrete proposal for social change, further confirms his authoritarianism. Since he applies it in areas such as gene patenting cyberspace, CCTV and scientific knowledge,¹³¹ it cannot mean workers' control, let alone workers' management. Presumably, therefore, it must mean control by the state, i.e. 'socialisation' by the big Other under the control of the master-signifier, a conclusion confirmed by Zizek's use of the terms 'socialisation' and 'state control' as interchangeable.¹³² If so, its extension to these areas is threatening, not liberating: Zizek is giving a green light to eugenicists, Internet censors and Lysenkoites. Zizek admits that his approach reduces privacy and openly advocates academic censorship and secret police.¹³³ Gene patenting and CCTV should be eliminated, not socialised, while science and the Internet are potential areas of freedom in which only the production process should be collective. Zizek's approach is closer to what Marx attacks as 'barracks communism' than to the Marxist idea of socialisation of the means of production. Zizek also defends the Stalinist view that social issues should be dealt with in reference to their effect on production, not their human dimension.¹³⁴

Alt → Genocide

Zizek's alternative is genocide – it requires acceptance of human nature as violent and extermination of those who get in the way of the revolution.

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Secondly, Zizek implies that Lenin must in some sense have 'understood' that the revolution would necessarily betray itself, and that all revolutions are structurally doomed to fall short of whatever ideals and principles motivate them. He also implies that the success or failure of a revolution has nothing to do with whether the modes of thought and action, social relations and institutions which follow are at all related to the original revolutionary ideals and principles. What matters is that power is held by those who 'identify with the symptom', who call themselves 'Proletarian'. Zizek therefore endorses the conservative claim that Lenin's utopian moments were Machiavellian manoeuvres or at best confused delusions, veiling his true intentions to seize power for himself or a small elite: Lenin was the 'ultimate political strategist'.¹²¹ That Zizek endorses the 'Lenin' figure despite endorsing nearly every accusation against Lenin serves to underline the degree to which Zizek's politics are wedded to conservative assumptions that repression, brutality and terror are 'always with us'. Rejecting the claim that politics could be otherwise, Zizek wishes to grasp, embrace and even revel in the grubiness and violence of modern politics. The moment of utopia in Russia was for Zizek realised when the Red Guards succumbed to a destructive hedonism in moments of Bataillean excess.¹²² The only difference for Zizek between leftist ethics and the standpoint of Oliver North, the Taleban, the anti-Dreyfusards and even the Nazis is that such 'rightists' legitimate their acts in reference to some higher good, whereas leftists also suspend the higher good in a truly authentic gesture of suspension.¹²³ The Soviet Terror is a good terror whereas the Nazi one is not, only because the Soviet terror was allegedly more total, with everyone being potentially at risk, not only out-groups.¹²⁴ Zizek goes well beyond advocating violence as a means to an end; for Zizek, violence is part of the end itself, the utopian excess of the Act. The closest parallel is the nihilism of Nechaev's Catechism of a Revolution which proclaims that 'everything is moral that contributes to the triumph of the revolution; everything that hinders it is immoral and criminal'.¹²⁵ As Peter Marshall comments in his digest of anarchist writings and movements, the Catechism is 'one of the most repulsive documents in the history of terrorism'. One can only speculate what he would have made of 'Repeating Lenin'.¹²⁶

Alt → Authoritarianism

Zizek's theory gives rise to an authoritarian politics that necessarily reproduces violence against its opponents and maintains social divisions.

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The paradox of this 'defence' of Lenin is that it reproduces almost exactly the conservative account of why Lenin should be renounced as a messianic 'totalitarian' despot. This is the Lenin of Bertram D. Wolf, Leonard Shapiro and Adam B. Ulam, the Lenin of the Gulag and the Evil Empire, the Lenin whose 'Bolshevism proved to be less a doctrine than a technique of action for the seizing and holding of power',¹¹⁰ the big bad wolf so important for Cold War and anti-left propaganda - that is, the very image of Lenin that generations of leftleaning scholars have been trying to qualify, undermine, challenge or rebut.¹¹¹ Zizek's endorsement of this 'Lenin' illustrates in stark terms why his project should be rejected by those seeking to advance a left agenda. Zizek's 'Leninism' shows the primacy of the category of the Act within his own approach. What he admires in the figure 'Lenin' has little to do with Lenin's motives and objectives, about which he says little; nor does he endorse progressive aspects of the Bolshevik ideology or programme, such as radical decentralisation, land reform and workers' control. What he admires is how Lenin's ruthlessness supposedly enabled him to traverse the fantasy and accomplish an Act. Thus, the fact that the revolution was 'betrayed', that it (or its successors) ate its own children and created a new Master and a new Order through horrific purges in contradiction to its own proposed goals, are not to be regretted, but should for Zizek be celebrated as evidence of the authenticity of the Leninist Act.¹¹² That the regime which eventually emerged was violent and terroristic is not problematic for Zizek: Acts are necessarily terroristic and sweep their initiators up in a truth-event regardless of their will, and the most one can do is claim responsibility for what occurs.¹¹³ Further, they are on Zizek's account supposed to produce a new Order and a new Master. It remains unclear why one should support the 'Leninist' Act, if this is the 'Leninism' on offer. As a historical account, this reading of Lenin is problematic. Zizek seems to feel he has little need for evidence to back his claims; he cares about the empty usefulness of the 'Lenin' signifier, not the historical Lenin - although his account rests on the assumption that he is saying something relevant to this Lenin and to the historical Russian Revolution. To take a few examples of the selectivity of Zizek's reading, Lenin specifically rejected 'orgiastic' releases of energy,¹¹⁴ and tried to restrain the worst excesses of the Cheka.¹¹⁵ Between Lenin's 'mad' position in April and the Revolution in October, there were the July Days and the text Marxism and Insurrection, where Lenin specifically renounced the idea of taking a revolutionary position without mass support. Lenin's late texts show that he did not take unconditional responsibility for the betrayal/failure of the revolution, but rather regretted and tried to amend many of the developments to which he had contributed.¹¹⁶ These are just a few examples of a problem of empirical inaccuracy which plagues much of Zizek's work. What is more pertinent for our purposes is that Zizek's position on Lenin confirms the basic conservatism of his political stance. Firstly, it involves an intentionalist 'Great Men' approach to history which ignores the subaltern strata. Echoing conservative readings, such as Bertram Wolf's Three Who Made a Revolution, Zizek assumes a Master is necessary for social change. As a political strategy this is in turn a formula for a messianic, leader-fixated, authoritarian politics, with change delivered to the hapless masses by a Leader. Lenin is a 'Messiah' and commitment to him is a 'leap of faith'.¹¹⁷ The theorist's role is to identify or generate such a leader, rather than to identify means whereby ordinary people can actively achieve their own liberation or emancipation. The leader becomes a social engineer who should be given every opportunity to manipulate others to produce an authentic Event.¹¹⁸ Zizek's formula of returning the masses' message in its true-inverted form is indistinguishable from Mao Zedong's slogan 'from the masses, to the masses'.¹¹⁹ The 'anamorphic' (distorting/reflective) process Zizek advocates is a manifesto for those who would substitute for others while claiming to represent them. Even the Lenin of What is to be Done? would have blanched at such an approach, and with good reason. Zizek's model of the revolutionary party is that of what Sartre terms a 'pledged group' with individuals tied to each other through identification with the Cause and the Leader, where 'in the name of our fidelity to the Cause we are ready to sacrifice our elementary sincerity, honesty and human decency' - whereas, according to Sartre, revolutions are made by 'fused groups', directly mobilised around immediate concerns.¹²⁰ Lenin was well aware that the party alone could not make a revolution (Marxism and Insurrection), and, though sometimes surrounded by sycophants, he was notoriously wary of any attempt to identify the revolutionary process directly with the party leadership.

Alt → Utopian

The Alternative is utopian-identity politics do not emancipate the oppressed and create a sense of impossibility to solve

Robinson and Tormey 05 (Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey, professors of the school of Politics at University of Nottingham, “A Ticklish Subject? Zizek and the Future of Left Radicalism,” *Thesis Eleven*, 8 November 2005, pg. 3-4)

The structural occurrence of a truth-event is what matters to him – not what kind of world results from it. This is a secondary issue – and, anyway, one that he thinks is impossible to discuss, since the logic of liberal capitalism is so total that it makes alternatives unthinkable. One should keep the utopian possibility of alternatives open, but it should remain empty, awaiting a content (see Butler et al., 2000: 324–5). How can one overcome capitalism without the ability or capacity to imagine an alternative? Zizek’s answer relies on his extension of Lacanian clinical principles into social analysis. For Zizek, every social system contains a Symbolic (social institutions, law, etc.), an Imaginary (the ideologies, fantasies and ‘pseudo-concrete images’ which sustain this system), and a Real, a group which is ‘extimate’ to (intimately present in, but necessarily external to) the system, a ‘part of no part’ which must be repressed or disavowed for the system to function. Zizek identifies this group with the symptom in psychoanalysis, terming it the ‘social symptom’. Just as a patient in psychoanalysis should identify with his or her symptom to cure neuroses, so political radicals should identify with the social symptom to achieve radical change. This involves a ‘statement of solidarity’ which takes the form ‘We are all them’, the excluded non-part – for instance, ‘We are all Sarajeans’ or ‘We are all illegal immigrants’ (Zizek, 1999: 231). By identifying with the symptom one becomes, for Zizek, a ‘proletarian’, and therefore ‘touched by Grace’ Thus even academics can perform an authentic Act while retaining their own accustomed lifestyle simply by identifying with the anathemas thrown at them by others. Since the social symptom is the embodiment of the ‘inherent impossibility’ of society, identification with it allows one, paradoxically, to recover a radical politics which is rendered unthinkable and impossible by the present socio-symbolic system. Identification with the symptom is not an external act of solidarity Zizek does not accept a division between individual and social psychology, so he believes identifying with the social symptom also disrupts one’s own psychological structure. This identification involves neither the self-emancipation of this group nor a struggle in support of its specific demands, but rather a personal act from the standpoint of this group, which substitutes for it and even goes against its particular demands in pursuit of its ascribed Truth the world. On the one hand, he is very aware of problems of great significance for the left: the privatization of everything from telecommunications to genes, the invisible exploitation of workers in sweatshops, the growing ecological crisis, and the weight of the forces lined up to make these attacks, and the crisis they generate, seem ‘normal’.

Perm Solvency

Perm Solves-Challenging leftist theories is the only way to create true political progressivism

Robinson 05 (Andrew, Professor of Politics at Nottingham University, 2005, "The Political Theory of Constitutive Lack: A Critique")

Amongst a plethora of radical theoretical perspectives, a new paradigm is slowly becoming hegemonic.

Inspired by the work of Jacques Lacan, theorists are increasingly turning to the concept of "constitutive lack" to find a way out of the impasses of classical Marxist, speculative and analytical approaches to political theory. Beneath the debates between rivals such as Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Zizek, there is a unity of purpose about the parameters of political theory. Across the work of authors such as Zizek, Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Yannis Stavrakakis, David Howarth, Renata Salecl, Jason Glynnos, Aletta Norval and Saul Newman, there is a central set of motifs and claims which mark out a distinct tradition within contemporary political thought. The idea of "constitutive lack", constructed as an ontological claim, operates also in these theories as a normative concept, and it is used to found normative claims. The title of Alenka Zupančič's most famous book Ethics of the Real summarises the outlook of all these authors¹. The challenge posed by this influential perspective is too important to ignore. Its paradigmatic structure - the shared, often unconscious and unreflexive, assumptions which unite its various proponents in a single way of thinking and arguing - is becoming the dominant trend in (ostensibly) radical theory. It is accounting for a growing number of submitted and published articles and is gaining a growing support among researchers and graduates. It has almost invisibly gained a foothold in theoretical literature significant enough to raise its influence to a level second only, perhaps, to the analytical/Rawlsian tradition. This is at least partly due to its radical pretensions. It is, however, crucial to challenge it, because its political effects are to paralyse "radical" theory. It provides a very weak basis for any kind of politics, and certainly no basis for a radical or transformative agenda. It is, in short, a surrogate radicalism, a theoretical placebo which does not live up to the promises it makes. This article examines this paradigm through a critique of its founding concept. In contrast to the claims of authors such as Laclau to have escaped the "essentialism" of classical political theory, I shall demonstrate that the idea of "constitutive lack" involves the reintroduction of myth and essentialism into political theory. I shall demonstrate that Lacanian political theory cannot meet its claims to be "radical" and "anti-essentialist", and its central arguments are analytically flawed. First of all, however, I shall outline the parameters of this new theoretical paradigm².

Lacanian Theory Bad – Conflict/Antagonism

Lacanian political theory recreates conflict and antagonism

Robinson 05 (Andrew, Professor of Politics at Nottingham University, 2005, “The Political Theory of Constitutive Lack: A Critique”)

Instead of the imperative to overcome antagonism which one finds in forms as diverse as Marxian revolution and deliberative democracy, Lacanian political theory posits as the central political imperative a demand that one "accept" the underlying lack and the constitutive character of antagonism. While the various authors disagree about the means of achieving this, they agree on its desirability. Lacanian theory thus entails an ethical commitment to create conflict and antagonism. This ethics mostly expresses itself via a detour into ontology: the ethical imperative is to 'accept' or 'grasp' the truth of the primacy of lack, and the accusation against opponents is that they fall into some kind of fallacy (illusion, delusion, blindness, failure to accept, and so on). At other times, however, one finds a direct ethical advocacy of exclusion and conflict as almost goods in themselves.

Alt Fails and Impact Turn

Alt Fails and Impact Turn-Zizek does not provide any social transformation theory and endorses an endless cycle of war and violence

Robinson and Tormey 05 (Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey, professors of the school of Politics at University of Nottingham, “A Ticklish Subject? Zizek and the Future of Left Radicalism,” Thesis Eleven, 8 November 2005, pg. 2-3)

Against this alleged pseudo-radicalism, Zizek revives traditional leftist concepts such as ‘class struggle’. He ignores, however, the ‘orthodox’ left meaning of such terms, rearticulating them in a sophisticated Hegelian and Lacanian vocabulary. Yet problems remain: Zizek’s version of ‘class struggle’ does not map on to traditional conceptions of an empirical working class, and Zizek’s ‘proletariat’ is avowedly ‘mythical’. He also rejects newer forms of struggle such as the anti-capitalist movement and the 1968 uprisings, thereby reproducing a problem common in radical theory: his theory has no link to radical politics in an immediate sense. Nevertheless, he has a theory of how such a politics *should* look, which he uses to judge existing political radicalisms. So how does Zizek see radical politics emerging? Zizek does not offer much by way of a positive social agenda. He does not have anything approximating to a ‘programme’, nor a model of the kind of society he seeks, nor a theory of the construction of alternatives in the present. Indeed, the more one looks at the matter, the more difficult it becomes to pin Zizek down to any ‘line’ or ‘position’. He seems at first sight to regard social transformation not as something ‘possible’ to be theorized and advanced, but as a fundamental ‘impossibility’ because the influence of the dominant symbolic system is so great that it makes alternatives unthinkable. A fundamental transformation, however, is clearly the only answer to the otherwise compelling vision of contemporary crisis Zizek offers. Can he escape this contradiction? His attempt to do so revolves around a reclassification of ‘impossibility’ as an active element in generating action. Asserting or pursuing the impossible becomes in Zizek’s account not only possible but desirable. So how then can the left advance its ‘impossible’ politics? How is a now ‘impossible’ model of class struggle to be transformed into a politics relevant to the present period? As becomes evident, ‘class struggle’ is not for Zizek an empirical referent and even less a category of Marxian sociological analysis, but a synonym for the Lacanian Real. A progressive endorsement of ‘class struggle’ means positing the lack of a common horizon and assuming or asserting the insolubility of political conflict. It therefore involves a glorification of conflict, antagonism, terror and a militaristic logic of carving the field into good and bad sides, as a good in itself (see, for example, the discussion in Zizek, 2000: 57, 126). Zizek celebrates war because it ‘undermines the complacency of our daily routine’ by introducing ‘meaningless sacrifice and destruction’ (Zizek, 1999: 105). He fears being trapped by a suffocating social peace or Good and so calls on people to take a ‘militant, divisive position’ of ‘assertion of the Truth that enthuses them’ (Zizek, 2001b: 237–8).