

## TOLERANCE AS AN IDEOLOGICAL CATEGORY

Slavoj Žižek

### *The Culturalization of Politics*

Why are so many problems today perceived as problems of intolerance, rather than as problems of inequality, exploitation, or injustice? Why is the proposed remedy tolerance, rather than emancipation, political struggle, even armed struggle? The immediate answer lies in the liberal multiculturalist's basic ideological operation: the 'culturalization of politics'. Political differences - differences conditioned by political inequality or economic exploitation - are naturalized and neutralized into 'cultural' differences, that is into different 'ways of life' which are something given, something that cannot be overcome. They can only be 'tolerated'. This demands a response in the terms Walter Benjamin offers: *from culturalization of politics to politicization of culture*. The cause of this culturalization is the retreat, the failure of direct political solutions such as the Welfare State or various socialist projects. Tolerance is their post-political *ersatz*.<sup>1</sup>

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It was Samuel Huntington who proposed the most successful formula of this 'culturalization of politics' by locating the main source of today's conflicts into the 'clash of civilizations,' which one is tempted to call the Huntington's disease of our time. As Huntington put it, after the end of the Cold War, the 'iron curtain of ideology' has been replaced by the 'velvet curtain of culture.'<sup>2</sup> Huntington's dark vision of the "clash of civilizations" may appear to be the very opposite of Francis Fukuyama's bright prospect of the End of History in the guise of a world-wide liberal democracy. What can be more different than Fukuyama's pseudo-Hegelian idea of the 'end of history' - the ultimate formula of the best possible social order has been found in capitalist liberal democracy, so there is now no space for further conceptual progress; there are only empirical obstacles to be overcome<sup>3</sup> - than Huntington's »clash of civilizations« as the main political struggle in the XXIst century? *The 'clash of civilizations' is politics at the end of history*.

The basic opposition on which the entire liberal vision relies is the opposition between those who are ruled by culture, totally determined by the life-world into which they are born, and those who merely 'enjoy' their culture,

who are elevated above it, free to choose it. This brings us to the next paradox: the ultimate source of barbarism is culture itself, one's direct identification with a particular culture which renders one intolerant towards other cultures. The basic opposition here is that between the collective and the individual: culture is by definition collective and particular, parochial, exclusive of other cultures, while - next paradox - it is the individual who is universal, the site of universality, insofar as she extricates herself from and elevates herself above her particular culture. Since, however, every individual has to be somehow particularized, has to dwell in a particular life-world, the only way to resolve this deadlock is to split the individual into universal and particular, public and private (where 'private' covers both the safe haven of family and the non-state public sphere of civil society (economy)). In liberalism, culture survives, but as privatized: as way of life, a set of beliefs and practices, not the public network of norms and rules. Culture is thus literally transubstantiated: the same sets of beliefs and practices change from the binding power of a collective into an expression of personal and private idiosyncrasies. Insofar as culture itself is the source of barbarism and intolerance, the inevitable conclusion is that the only way to overcome intolerance and violence is to extricate the core of the subject's being, its universal essence, from culture: in her core, the subject has to be *kulturlos*.<sup>4</sup> The philosophical underpinning of this ideology of the universal liberal subject is the Cartesian subject, especially in its Kantian version. This subject is conceived of as capable of stepping outside his particular cultural/social roots and asserting his full autonomy and universality - the grounding experience of Descartes' position of universal doubt is precisely a 'multicultural' experience of how one's own tradition is no better than what appears to us the 'eccentric' traditions of others:

"/.../ I had been taught, even in my College days, that there is nothing imaginable so strange or so little credible that it has not been maintained by one philosopher or other, and I further recognized in the course of my travels that all those whose sentiments are very contrary to ours are yet not necessarily barbarians or savages, but may be possessed of reason in as great or even a greater degree than ourselves."<sup>5</sup>

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This is why, for a Cartesian philosopher, ethnic roots, national identity, etc., are simply *not a category of truth*, or, to put it in precise Kantian terms, when we reflect upon our ethnic roots, we engage in a *private use of reason*, constrained by contingent dogmatic presuppositions, i.e., we act as »immature« individuals, not as free human beings who dwell in the dimension of the universality of reason. The opposition between Kant and Rorty with regard to this distinction of public and private is rarely noted, but nonetheless crucial: they both sharply distinguish between the two domains, but in opposed ways. For Rorty, the great contemporary liberal if there ever was one, the private is the space of our idiosyncrasies where creativity and wild imagination rule, and moral considerations are (almost) suspended, while the public is the space of social interaction where we should obey the rules so that we do not hurt others; in other words, the private is the space of irony, while the public is the space of solidarity. For Kant, however, the public space of the "world-civil-society" designates the paradox of the universal singularity, of a singular subject who, in a kind of short-circuit, by-passing the mediation of the particular, directly participates in the Universal. This is what Kant, in the famous passage of his "What is Enlightenment?", means by "public" as opposed to "private": "private" is not one's individual as opposed to communal ties, but the very communal-institutional order of one's particular identification; while "public" is the trans-national universality of the exercise of one's Reason. The paradox of the underlying formula "Think freely, but obey!" (which, of course, poses a series of problems of its own, since it also relies on the distinction between the "performative" level of social authority, and the level of free thinking where performativity is suspended) is thus that one participates in the universal dimension of the "public" sphere precisely as a singular individual extracted from or even opposed to one's substantial communal identification - one is truly universal only when radically singular, in the interstices of communal identities. It is Kant who should be read here as the critic of Rorty. In his vision of the public space of the unconstrained free exercise of Reason, he asserts the dimension of emancipatory universality *outside* the confines of one's social identity, of one's position within the order of (social) being - the dimension missing in Rorty.

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## ***The Effective Universality***

It is easy to render problematic this liberal notion of tolerance, and to render palpable the violence that sustains it. First, it is not truly universal, *kulturlos*, without culture. Since, in our societies, a sexualized division of labor still predominates which confers a male twist on basic liberal categories (autonomy, public activity, competition), and relegates women to the private sphere of family solidarity, liberalism itself, in its opposition of private and public, harbours male dominance. Furthermore, it is only modern Western capitalist culture for which autonomy and individual freedom, stand higher than collective solidarity, connection, responsibility for dependent others, the duty to respect the customs of one's community. Liberalism itself thus privileges a certain culture: the modern Western one. As to the freedom of choice, liberalism is also marked by a strong bias. It is intolerant when individuals of other cultures are not given freedom of choice - as is evident in issues such as cliterodectomy, child brides, infanticide, polygamy, and family rape. However, it ignores the tremendous pressure which, for example, compels women in our liberal society to undergo such procedures as plastic surgery, cosmetic implants, and Botox injections in order to remain competitive on the sex market.

The liberal idea of a 'free choice' always gets caught in a deadlock. If the subject wants it, he or she can opt for the parochial tradition into which they were born, but they have first to be presented with alternatives and then make a free choice of it. Amish adolescents, on the other hand, are formally given a free choice, but the conditions they find themselves in while they are making the choice make the choice unfree. In order for them to have a genuine free choice, they would have to be properly informed on all the options, and educated in them. But the only way to do this would be to extract them from their embeddedness in the Amish community and Americanize them. The limitations of the standard liberal attitude towards Muslim women wearing a veil are visible here, too. Women are permitted to wear the veil if this is their free choice and not an option imposed on them by their husbands or family. However, the moment women wear a veil to exercise a free individual choice, say, in order to realize their own spirituality, the meaning of wearing a veil changes completely. It is no longer a sign of their belonging to

the Muslim community, but an expression of their idiosyncratic individuality. The difference is the same as the one between a Chinese farmer eating Chinese food because his village has been doing so from time immemorial, and a citizen of a Western megalopolis deciding to go and have dinner at a local Chinese restaurant. This is why, in our secular, choice-based societies, people who maintain a substantial religious belonging are in a subordinate position. Even if they are allowed to maintain their belief, this belief is 'tolerated' as their idiosyncratic personal choice or opinion. The moment they present it publicly as what it is for them, say, a matter of substantial belonging, they are accused of 'fundamentalism'. What this means is that the 'subject of free choice' in the Western 'tolerant' multicultural sense can only emerge as the result of an extremely *violent* process of being torn out of a particular life-world, of being cut off from one's roots.

One should always bear in mind the hugely liberating aspect of this violence which makes us experience our own cultural background as contingent. Let us not forget that liberalism emerged in Europe after the catastrophe of the 30-years war between Catholics and Protestants; it was an answer to the pressing question: how could people who differ in their fundamental religious allegiances co-exist? It demanded from citizens more than a condescending tolerance of diverging religions, more than tolerance as a temporary compromise. It demanded that we respect other religions not *in spite of* our innermost religious convictions but *on account of* them - respect for others is a proof of true belief. This attitude is best expressed by Abu Hanifa, the great 8th century Muslim intellectual: "Difference of opinion in the community is a token of Divine mercy."<sup>6</sup> It is only within this ideological space that one can experience one's identity as something contingent and discursively 'constructed'. To cut a long story short, philosophically, there is no Judith Butler, or her theory of gender identity as performatively enacted, without the Cartesian subject. Whatever else one can accuse liberal multiculturalism of, one should at least admit that it is profoundly anti-'essentialist': it is its barbarian Other which is perceived as essentialist *and thereby false*: fundamentalism 'naturalizes' or 'essentializes' historically conditioned contingent traits. To modern Europeans, other civilizations are caught in their specific culture, while modern Europeans are flexible, constantly changing their presuppositions.

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"Postcolonial" critics like to emphasize the insensitivity of liberalism to its own limitation: in defending human rights, it tends to impose its own version of them onto others. However, the self-reflexive sensitivity to one's own limitation can only emerge against the background of the notions of autonomy and rationality promoted by liberalism. One can, of course, argue that, in a way, the Western situation is even worse, because, in it, oppression itself is obliterated, masked as a free choice ("What do you complain of? YOU chose to do it..."). Our freedom of choice effectively often functions as a mere formal gesture of consenting to one's oppression and exploitation. However, Hegel's lesson that form matters is important here: form has an autonomy and efficiency of its own. So when we compare a Third World woman forced to undergo cliterodectomy or promised in marriage as a small child, with the First World woman "free to choose" painful cosmetic surgery, the form of freedom matters - it opens up a space for critical reflection.

Furthermore, the obverse of the dismissal of other cultures as intolerant, barbarian, etc, is the all too easy admission of their superiority. Isn't one of the *topoi* of Western liberalism the elevation of the Other as leading a life more harmonious, organic, less competitive, and aiming at cooperation, not domination? Linked to this is another operation: blindness to oppression on behalf of 'respect' for the other's culture. To take the most obvious case: British colonial rule in India is not only the story of arrogant civilizing, but also the story of a pact made with the old Indian ruling class who were allowed to continue their exploitation and oppression since this was their ancient "way of life." Even freedom of choice is often evoked here in a perverted way: those people have chosen their way of life, inclusive of burning widows, and, deplorable and repulsive as it appears to us, we should respect their choice.

The "radical" postcolonial critique of liberalism thus remains at the standard Marxist level of denouncing false universality, of showing how a position that presents itself as neutral-universal effectively privileges a certain (heterosexual, male, Christian) culture. More precisely, she remains within the standard postmodern, anti-essentialist position, a kind of political version of Foucault's notion of sex as generated by the multitude of the practices of sexuality: here 'man,' the bearer of Human Rights, is generated by a set of political practices which materialize citizenship. Human rights emerge as a false

ideological universality which masks and legitimizes the concrete politics of Western imperialism and domination, military interventions and neocolonialism. Does this suffice to constitute a critique?

The Marxist symptomal reading can convincingly demonstrate the particular content that gives the specific bourgeois ideological spin to the notion of human rights: universal human rights are effectively the rights of white male property owners to exchange freely on the market, exploit workers and women, as well as exert political domination. The identification of the particular content that hegemonizes the universal form is, however, only half of the story. Its other, crucial half consists in asking a much more difficult supplementary question, that of the emergence of the very form of universality. How and in what specific historical conditions, does abstract Universality itself become a 'fact of (social) life'? In what conditions do individuals experience themselves as subjects of universal human rights? This is the point of Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism: in a society in which commodity exchange predominates, individuals themselves, in their daily lives, relate to themselves, as well as to the objects they encounter, as to contingent embodiments of abstract-universal notions. What I am, my concrete social or cultural background, is experienced as contingent, since what ultimately defines me is the abstract universal capacity to think and/or to work. Any object that can satisfy my desire is experienced as contingent, since my desire is conceived as an abstract formal capacity, indifferent towards the multitude of particular objects that may - but never fully do - satisfy it. The modern notion of a profession implies that I experience myself as an individual who is not directly 'born into' his social role - what I will become depends on the interplay between the contingent social circumstances and my free choice. In that sense, the contemporary individual has a profession. He is an electrician or professor or waiter. But it is meaningless to claim that a medieval serf was a peasant by profession. The crucial point here is, again, that, in certain specific social conditions of commodity-exchange and global market economy, 'abstraction' becomes a direct feature of actual social life, impacts on the way concrete individuals behave and relate to their fate and to their social surroundings. Marx shares Hegel's insight into how Universality becomes 'for itself' only insofar as individuals no longer fully identify the kernel of their being with their particular social situation. An attendant

circumstance is that these very individuals experience themselves as forever 'out of joint' with regard to this situation: the concrete, effective existence of Universality produces an individual without a proper place in the global edifice. In a given social structure, Universality becomes 'for itself' only in those individuals who lack a proper place in it. The mode of appearance of an abstract Universality, its entering into actual existence, thus produces violence: it violently disrupts a preceding organic poise.

It is no longer enough to make the old Marxist point about the gap between the ideological appearance of the universal legal form and the particular interests that effectively sustain it - as is so common amongst politically- correct critics on the Left. The counter-argument that the form is never a 'mere' form, but involves a dynamic of its own which leaves traces in the materiality of social life, made by theorists such as Claude Lefort<sup>7</sup> and Jacques Ranciere<sup>8</sup>, is fully valid. After all the 'formal freedom' of the bourgeois sets in motion the process of altogether 'material' political demands and practices, from trade unions to feminism. Ranciere rightly emphasizes the radical *ambiguity* of the Marxist notion of the gap between formal democracy with its discourse of the rights of man and political freedom and the economic reality of exploitation and domination. This gap between the 'appearance' of equality-freedom and the social reality of economic and cultural differences can either be interpreted in the standard symptomatic way, that is the form of universal rights, equality, freedom and democracy is just a necessary, but illusory expression of its concrete social content, the universe of exploitation and class domination. Or it can be interpreted in the much more subversive sense of a tension in which the 'appearance' of *egaliberté*, is precisely *not* a 'mere appearance,' but has a power of its own. This power allows it to set in motion the process of the re-articulation of actual socio-economic relations by way of their progressive 'politicization': why shouldn't women also vote? Why shouldn't conditions at the work place also be of public political concern? and so on. One is tempted here to use that old Levi-Straussian term of 'symbolic efficiency': the appearance of *egaliberte* is a symbolic fiction which, as such, possesses an actual efficiency of its own. One should resist the cynical temptation of reducing it to a mere illusion that conceals a different actuality. That would be to fall into the trap of the old Stalinist hypocrisy which mocked 'merely formal'

bourgeois freedom: if it was so merely formal and didn't disturb the true relations of power, why, then, didn't the Stalinist regime allow it? Why was it so afraid of it?

The key moment of any theoretical - and indeed ethical, political, and, as Badiou demonstrated, even aesthetic - struggle is *the rise of universality out of the particular life-world*. The commonplace according to which we are all irreducibly grounded in a particular, contingent life-world, so that all universality is irreducibly coloured by and embedded in that life-world, needs to be turned around. The authentic moment of discovery, the breakthrough, occurs when a properly universal dimension *explodes from within a particular context and becomes 'for-itself,' and directly experienced as universal*. This universality-for-itself is not simply external to or above its particular context: it is inscribed within it. It perturbs and affects it from within, so that the identity of the particular is split into its particular and its universal aspect. Surely Marx already pointed out how the true problem with Homer was not to explain the roots of his epics in early Greek society, but to account for the fact that, although clearly rooted in their historical context, they were able to transcend their historical origin and speak to all epochs. Perhaps, the most elementary hermeneutic test of the greatness of a work of art is its ability to survive being torn out of its original context. In the case of truly great art, each epoch reinvents and rediscovers it. There is a romantic Shakespeare and a realist Shakespeare.

Richard Wagner's operas provide another example. Recent historicist work tries to bring out the contextual 'true meaning' of various Wagnerian characters and topics: the pale Hagen is really a masturbating Jew; Amfortas' wound is really syphilis and so on. Wagner, the argument goes, was mobilizing historical codes known to everyone in his own time: when a person stumbles, sings in cracking high tones or makes nervous gestures, 'everyone' then knew this was a Jew. Thus Mime from *Siegfried* is a caricature of a Jew. The illness in the groin caught from having intercourse with an 'impure' woman was, because of syphilis, an obsession in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so it was clear to everyone that Amfortas really contracted syphilis from Kundry. The first problem with such readings is that, even if accurate, the insights garnered do not contribute much to a pertinent understanding of the work. Indeed, historicist commonplaces can blur our contact with art. In order properly to grasp

*Parsifal*, one needs to *abstract* from such historical trivia, *decontextualize* the work, tear it out of the context in which it was originally embedded. There is more truth in *Parsifal*'s formal structure which allows for different historical contextualizations than in its original context. Nietzsche, Wagner's great critic, was the first to perform such a de-contextualization, proposing a new figure of Wagner: no longer Wagner as the poet of Teutonic mythology, of bombastic heroic grandeur, but the 'miniaturist' Wagner, the Wagner of hystericized femininity, of delicate passages, of bourgeois family decadence.

Along the same lines, Nietzsche, himself, was repeatedly reinvented throughout the XXth century: from the conservative-heroic proto-Fascist Nietzsche he became the French Nietzsche and then the Cultural Studies Nietzsche. Convincing historical analysis can easily show how Nietzsche's theory was embedded in his particular political experience. His 'revolt of the slaves' was triggered by the Paris Commune. But this in no way contradicts the fact that there is more truth in the 'decontextualized' French Nietzsche of Deleuze and Foucault than in this historically accurate Nietzsche. The argument here is not simply pragmatic. The point to be made is not that Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche, although historically inaccurate, is more productive. It is rather that the tension between the basic universal frame of Nietzsche's thought and its particular historical contextualization is inscribed into the very edifice of Nietzsche's thought, is part of its very identity, in the same way that the tension between the universal form of human rights and their 'true meaning' at the historical moment of their inception is part of their identity.

The standard Marxist hermeneutics of unearthing the particular bias of abstract universality should thus be supplemented by its opposite: by the properly Hegelian procedure which uncovers the *universality* of what presents itself as a particular position. It's worth looking again at Marx's analysis of how, in the French revolution of 1848, the conservative-republican Party of Order functioned as the coalition of the two branches of royalism, Orleanists and legitimists. in the "anonymous kingdom of the Republic."<sup>9</sup> The parliamentary deputies of the Party of Order perceived their republicanism as a mockery: in parliamentary debates, they constantly generated royalist slips of tongue and ridiculed the Republic to let it be known that their true aim was to restore the kingdom. What

they were not aware of is that they themselves were duped as to the true social impact of their rule. What they were effectively doing was to establish the very conditions of bourgeois republican order that they so despised - by, for instance, guaranteeing the safety of private property. So it is not that they were royalists who were simply wearing a republican mask, although they experienced themselves as such. It was their very inner royalist conviction which was the deceptive front masking their true social role. In short, far from being the hidden truth of their public republicanism, their sincere royalism was the fantasmatic support of their actual republicanism. It was what provided the passion behind their activity.

Isn't this the very lesson of Hegel's 'Cunning of Reason'? Particularity can indeed mask universality. G. K. Chesterton wrote apropos of Nietzsche that he 'denied egoism simply by preaching it': "To preach anything is to give it away. First, the egoist calls life a war without mercy, and then he takes the greatest possible trouble to drill his enemies in war. To preach egoism is to practice altruism."<sup>10</sup> The medium here is not the message. Quite the opposite. The very medium that we use - the universal intersubjectivity of language - undermines the message. It is not only that we should, therefore, denounce the particular position of enunciation that sustains the universal enunciated content - the white, wealthy male subject who proclaims the universality of human rights. It is far more important to unearth the universality that sustains, and potentially undermines, his particular claim. The supreme case here, as noted by Bertrand Russell, is that of the solipsist trying to convince others that he alone really exists. Could one extend this argument for tolerance or intolerance? Perhaps not altogether, although there is a similar catch in preaching tolerance: it (presup)poses its presupposition, that is, the subject deeply 'bothered' by the Neighbour, and thus reasserts it.)

In the same way, the French royalists were victims of the Cunning of Reason, blind to the universal (capitalist-republican) interest served by their pursuing of their particular royalist goals. They were like Hegel's *valet de chambre* who can't see the universal dimension, so that there are no heroes for him. More generally, an individual capitalist thinks he is active for his own profit, ignoring how he is serving the expanded reproduction of universal capital. It is not only that every universality is haunted by a particular content that taints it; it is that every particular position is haunted by its implicit

universality, which undermines it. Capitalism is not just universal in-itself, it is universal for-itself, as the tremendous actual corrosive power which undermines all particular life-worlds, cultures, traditions, cutting across them, catching them in its vortex. It is meaningless to ask the question: 'is this universality true or a mask of particular interests?' This universality is directly actual as universality, as the negative force of mediating and destroying all particular content.

This is the moment of truth in liberalism's claim to *kulturlos* universality: capitalism, whose ideology liberalism is, effectively *is* universal, no longer rooted in a particular culture or 'world'. This is why Badiou recently claimed that our time is *devoid of world*: the universality of capitalism resides in the fact that capitalism is not a name for a 'civilization', for a specific cultural-symbolic world, but the name for a truly neutral economico-symbolic machine which operates with Asian values as well as with others. In that sense, Europe's worldwide triumph is its defeat, its self-obliteration. Capitalism's umbilical link to Europe has been cut. The critics of Eurocentrism who endeavour to unearth the secret European bias of capitalism fall short here: the problem with capitalism is not its secret Eurocentric bias, but the fact that it *really is universal*, a neutral matrix of social relations.

The same logic holds for the emancipatory struggle: the particular culture which tries desperately to defend its identity has to repress the universal dimension which is active at its very heart, that is, the gap between the particular (its identity) and the universal which destabilizes it from within. This is why the 'leave us our culture' argument fails. Within every particular culture, individuals *do* suffer, women do protest when forced to undergo cliterodectomy, and *these protests against the parochial constraints of one's culture are formulated from the standpoint of universality*, so one should display *no understanding* here. The formula of revolutionary solidarity is not 'let us tolerate our differences'. A better formula would be: in spite of our differences, we can identify the basic antagonism o antagonistic struggle, in which we are both caught; so let us share our *intolerance*, and join forces in the same struggle. In other words, in the emancipatory struggle, it is not the cultures in their identity which join hands, it is the repressed, the exploited and suffering, the 'parts of no-part' of every culture which come together in a shared struggle.

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Primo Levi was often asked whether he considered himself primarily a Jew or a human? Levi often oscillated between these two choices. The obvious solution - that precisely as a Jew, he was human, that is, one is human, one participates in universal humanity, through one's very particular ethnic identification - falls flat here. The only consistent solution is not to say that Levi was a human who happened to be a Jew, but that he was human (he participated 'for himself' in the universal function of humanity) precisely and only insofar as he was uneasy with or unable fully to identify with his *Jewishness*, "*being a Jew*" was a *problem for him, not a fact, not a safe haven to which he could withdraw.*

### ***Acheronta movebo***

The particular ethnic substance, our "life-world," which resists universality, is made of habits - what are habits? Every legal order (or every order of explicit normativity) has to rely on a complex network of informal rules which tells us how are we to relate to the explicit norms, how are we to apply them: to what extent are we to take them literally, how and when are we allowed, solicited even, to disregard them, etc. - and this is the domain of habit. To know the habits of a society is to *know the meta-rules of how to apply its explicit norms*: when to use them or not use them; when to violate them; when not to use a choice which is offered; when we are effectively obliged to do something, but have to pretend that we are doing it as a free choice (like in the case of potlatch). Recall the polite offer-meant-to-be-refused: it is a "habit" to refuse such an offer, and anyone who accepts such an offer commits a vulgar blunder. The same goes for many political situations in which a choice is given *on condition that we make the right choice*: we are solemnly reminded that we can say no - but we are expected to we reject this offer and enthusiastically say yes. With many sexual prohibitions, the situation is the opposite one: the explicit "no" effectively functions as the implicit injunction "do it, but in a discreet way!".

One of the strategies of "totalitarian" regimes is to have legal regulations (criminal laws) so severe that, if taken literally, EVERYONE is guilty of something, and then to withdraw from their full enforcement. In this way, the regime can appear merciful ("You see, if we wanted, we could have all of you arrested and condemned, but do not be afraid, we are lenient..."), and at the same time wield a

permanent threat to discipline its subjects ("Do not play too much with us, remember that at any moment we can..."). In ex-Yugoslavia, there was the infamous Article 133 of the penal code which could always be invoked to prosecute writers and journalists - it made into a crime any text that presents falsely the achievements of the socialist revolution or that *may arouse the tension and discontent among the public* for the way it deals with political, social, or other topics... this last category is obviously not only infinitely plastic, but also conveniently self-relating: does the very fact that you are accused by those in power not in itself equal the fact that you "*aroused the tension and discontent among the public*"? In those years, I remember asking a Slovene politician how does he justify this article; he just smiled and, with a wink, told me: "Well, we have to have some tool to discipline at our will those who annoy us..." This overlapping of potential total culpabilization (whatever you are doing MAY be a crime) and mercy (the fact that you are allowed to lead your life in peace is not a proof or consequence of your innocence, but a proof of the mercy and benevolence, of the "understanding of the realities of life," of those in power) - yet another proof that "totalitarian" regimes are by definition regimes of mercy, of tolerating violations of the law, since, the way they frame social life, violating the law (bribing, cheating...) is a condition of survival.

The problem during the chaotic post-Soviet years of the Yeltsin rule in Russia could be located at this level: although the legal rules were known (and largely the same as under the Soviet Union), what disintegrated was the complex network of implicit unwritten rules which sustained the entire social edifice. Say, if, in the Soviet Union, you wanted to get a better hospital treatment, a new apartment, if you had a complain against authorities, if you were summoned to a court, if you wanted your child to be accepted in a top school, if a factory manager needed raw materials not delivered on time by the state-contractors, etc.etc., everyone knew what you really had to do, whom to address, whom to bribe, what you can do and what you cannot do. After the collapse of the Soviet power, one of the most frustrating aspects of the daily existence of ordinary people was that these unwritten rules largely got blurred: people simply did not know what to do, how to react, how are you to relate to explicit legal regulations, what can you ignore, where does bribery work, etc. (One of the functions of the organized crime was to provide a kind of *ersatz*-legality: if you owned a small business and a

customer owed you money, you turned to your mafia-protector who dealt with the problem, since the state legal system was inefficient.) The stabilization under the Putin reign mostly amounts to the newly-established transparency of these unwritten rules: now, again, people mostly know how to act in react in the complex cobweb of social interactions.

This, also, is why the most elementary level of symbolic exchange is so-called "empty gestures," offers made or meant to be rejected. It was Brecht who gave a poignant expression to this feature in his learning plays, exemplarily in *Jasager* in which the young boy is asked to accord freely with what will in any case be his fate (to be thrown into the valley); as his teacher explains it to him, it is customary to ask the victim if he agrees with his fate, but it is also customary for the victim to say yes. Belonging to a society involves a paradoxical point at which each of us is ordered to embrace freely, as the result of our choice, what is anyway imposed on us (we all *must* love our country or our parents). This paradox of willing (choosing freely) what is in any case necessary, of pretending (maintaining the appearance) that there is a free choice although effectively there isn't one, is strictly codependent with the notion of an empty symbolic gesture, a gesture - an offer - which is meant to be rejected.

And is not something similar part of our everyday mores? In today's Japan, workers have the right to a 40 days holiday every year - however, they are expected not to use this right in its full extent (the implicit rule is not to use more than half of it). In John Irving's *A Prayer for Owen Meany*, after the little boy Owen accidentally kills John's (his best friend's, the narrator's) mother, he is, of course, terribly upset, so, to show how sorry he is, he discretely delivers to John a gift of the complete collection of color photos of baseball stars, his most precious possession; however, Dan, John's delicate stepfather, tells him that the proper thing to do is to return the gift. Let us imagine a more down-to-earth situation: when, after being engaged in a fierce competition for a job promotion with my closest friend, I win, the proper thing to do is to offer to retract, so that he will get the promotion, and the proper thing for him to do is to reject my offer - this way, perhaps, our friendship can be saved. What we have here is symbolic exchange at its purest: a gesture made to be rejected. The magic of symbolic exchange is that, although at the end we

are where we were at the beginning, there is a distinct gain for both parties in their pact of solidarity. There is a similar logic at work in the process of apologizing: if I hurt someone with a rude remark, the proper thing for me to do is to offer him a sincere apology, and the proper thing for him to do is to say something like "Thanks, I appreciate it, but I wasn't offended, I knew you didn't mean it, so you really owe me no apology!" The point is, of course, that, although the final result is that no apology is needed, one has to go through the entire process of offering it: "you owe me no apology" can only be said after I DO offer an apology, so that, although, formally, "nothing happens," the offer of apology is proclaimed unnecessary, there is a gain at the end of the process (perhaps, even, the friendship is saved).

Of course, the problem is: what if the person to whom the offer to be rejected is made actually accepts it? What if, upon being beaten in the competition, I accept my friend's offer to get the promotion instead of him? What if Russia really started to act as a great power? A situation like this is properly catastrophic: it causes the disintegration of the semblance (of freedom) that pertains to social order, which equals the disintegration of the social substance itself, the dissolution of the social link. In this precise sense, revolutionary-egalitarian figures from Robespierre to John Brown are (potentially, at least) *figures without habits*: they refuse to take into account the habits that qualify the functioning of a universal rule. If all men are equal, than all men are equal and are to be effectively treated as such; if blacks are also human, they should be immediately treated as such.

On a less radical level, in early 1980s, a half-dissident student weekly newspaper in ex-Yugoslavia wanted to protest the fake "free" elections; aware of the limitations of the the slogan "speak truth to power" ("The trouble with this slogan is that it ignores the fact that power will not listen and that the people already know the truth as they make clear in their jokes."<sup>11</sup>), instead of directly denouncing the elections as un-free, they decided to treat them as if they are really free, as if their result really was undecided, so, on the elections eve, they printed an extra-edition of the journal with large headline: "Latest election results: it looks that Communists will remain in power!" This simple intervention broke the unwritten "habit" (we "all know" that elections are not free, we just do not talk publicly about it...): by

way of treating elections as free, it reminded the people publicly of their non-freedom.

In the second season of the TV-series *Nip-Tuck*, Sean learns that the true father of his adolescent son Matt is Christian, his partner. His first reaction is an angry outburst; then, in the aftermath of a failed operation to separate Siamese twins, he again accepts Chris as a partner, with a big speech at the operating table: "I will never forgive you for what you did. But Matt is too precious, the best result of our partnership, so we should not lose this..." This message obvious, all too obvious - a much more elegant solution would have been for Sean just to say: "I will never forgive you for what you did.", the subjective position of this statement being already that of acceptance - this is how one talks to someone whom one already decided to re-accept. So the problem is that Sean SAYS TOO MUCH - why does he go on? This is the interesting question. Is the US public too stupid? No. So why then? What if just a sign of true re-acceptance would have been too much, too intense, so the explicit platitudes are here to water it down? Perhaps, *Nip-Tuck* being an American series, this excess can be accounted for in the terms of the difference between Europe and the US. In Europe, the ground floor in a building is counted as 0, so that the floor about it is the "first floor," while in the US, the "first floor" is on the street level. In short, Americans start to count with 1, while Europeans know that 1 is already a stand-in for 0. Or, to put it in more historical turns: Europeans are aware that, prior to start counting, there has to be a "ground" of tradition, a ground which is always-already given and, as such, cannot be counted, while the US, a land with no pre-modern historical tradition proper, lacks such a "ground" - things begin there directly with the self-legislated freedom, the past is erased (transposed on to Europe).<sup>12</sup> This lack of ground thus has to be supplemented by excessive saying - Sean cannot rely on the symbolic ground that would guarantee that Christian will get the message without explicitly stating it.

Habits are thus the very stuff our identities are made of: in them, we enact and thus define what we effectively are as social beings, often in contrast with our perception of what we are - in their very transparency, they are the medium of social violence. Back in 1937, George Orwell<sup>13</sup> deployed the ambiguity of the predominant Leftist attitude towards the class difference:

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"We all rail against class-distinctions, but very few people seriously want to abolish them. Here you come upon the important fact that every revolutionary opinion draws part of its strength from a secret conviction that nothing can be changed. /.../ So long as it is merely a question of ameliorating the worker's lot, every decent person is agreed. /.../ But unfortunately you get no further by merely wishing class-distinctions away. More exactly, it is necessary to wish them away, but your wish has no efficacy unless you grasp what it involves. The fact that has got to be faced is that to abolish class-distinctions means abolishing a part of yourself. Here am I, a typical member of the middle class. It is easy for me to say that I want to get rid of class-distinctions, but nearly everything I think and do is a result of class-distinctions. /.../ I have got to alter myself so completely that at the end I should hardly be recognizable as the same person."

Orwell's point is that radicals invoke the need for revolutionary change as a kind of superstitious token that should achieve the opposite, i.e., PREVENT the change from really occurring - a today's academic Leftist who criticizes the capitalist cultural imperialism is in reality horrified at the idea that his field of study would really break down. There is, however, a limit to this strategy: Orwell's insight holds only for a certain kind of "bourgeois" Leftists; there are Leftists who DO HAVE the courage of their convictions, who do not only want "revolution without revolution," as Robespierre put it - Jacobins and Bolsheviks, among others... The starting point of these true revolutionaries can be the very position of the "bourgeois" Leftists; what happens is that, in the middle of their pseudo-radical posturing, they get caught into their own game and are ready to put in question their subjective position. It is difficult to imagine a more trenchant political example of the weight of Lacan's distinction between the "subject of the enunciated" and the "subject of the enunciation": first, in a direct negation, you start by wanting to "change the world" without endangering the subjective position from which you are ready to enforce the change; then, in the "negation of negation," the subject enacting the change is ready to pay the subjective price for it, to change himself, or, to quote Gandhi's nice formula, to BE himself the change he wants to see in the world. - It is thus clear to Orwell that, in our ideological everyday, our predominant attitude is that of an ironic distance towards our true beliefs:

"the left-wing opinions of the average 'intellectual' are mainly spurious. From pure imitativeness he jeers at things which in fact he believes in. As one example out of many, take the public-school code of honor, with its 'team spirit' and 'Don't hit a man when he's down', and all the rest of that familiar bunkum. Who has not laughed at it? Who, calling himself an 'intellectual', would dare *not* to laugh at it? But it is a bit different when you meet somebody who laughs at it *from the outside*; just as we spend our lives in abusing England but grow very angry when we hear a foreigner saying exactly the same things. /.../ It is only when you meet someone of a different culture from yourself that you begin to realize what your own beliefs really are."

There is nothing "inner" in this true ideological identity of mine - my innermost beliefs are all "out there," embodied in practices which reach up to the immediate materiality of my body - "my notions-notions of good and evil, of pleasant and unpleasant, of funny and serious, of ugly and beautiful - are essentially *middle-class* notions; my taste in books and food and clothes, my sense of honor, my table manners, my turns of speech, my accent, even the characteristic movements of my body"... One should definitely add to this series *smell*: perhaps the key difference between lower popular class and middle class concerns the way they relate to smell. For the middle class, lower classes smell, their members do not wash regularly - or, to quote the proverbial answer of a middle-class Parisian to why he prefers to ride the first class cars in the metro: "I wouldn't mind riding with workers in the second class - it is only that they smell!" This brings us to one of the possible definitions of what a Neighbor means today: a Neighbor is the one who by definition *smells*. This is why today deodorants and soaps are crucial - they make neighbors at least minimally tolerable: I am ready to love my neighbors... provided they don't smell too bad. According to a recent report, scientists in a laboratory in Venezuela added a further element to these series: through genetic manipulations, they succeeded in growing beans which, upon consumption, do not generate the bad-smelling and socially embarrassing winds! So, after decaf coffee, fat-free cakes, diet cola and alcohol-free beer, we now get wind-free beans...<sup>14</sup> Lacan supplemented Freud's list of partial objects (breast, faeces, penis) with two further objects: voice and gaze. Perhaps, we should add another object to this series: smell.

We reach thereby the "heart of darkness" of habits. Recall numerous cases of pedophilia that shatter the Catholic Church: when its representatives insists that these cases, deplorable as they are, are Church's internal problem, and display great reluctance to collaborate with police in their investigation, they are, in a way, right - the pedophilia of Catholic priests is not something that concerns merely the persons who, because of accidental reasons of private history with no relation to the Church as an institution, happened to chose the profession of a priest; it is a phenomenon that concerns the Catholic Church as such, that is inscribed into its very functioning as a socio-symbolic institution. It does not concern the "private" unconscious of individuals, but the "unconscious" of the institution itself: it is not something that happens because the Institution has to accommodate itself to the pathological realities of libidinal life in order to survive, but something that the institution itself needs in order to reproduce itself. One can well imagine a "straight" (not pedophilic) priest who, after years of service, gets involved in pedophilia because the very logic of the institution seduces him into it. Such an *institutional Unconscious* designates the obscene disavowed underside that, precisely as disavowed, sustains the public institution. (In the army, this underside consists of the obscene sexualized rituals of fragging etc. which sustain the group solidarity.) In other words, it is not simply that, for conformist reasons, the Church tries to hush up the embarrassing pedophilic scandals; in defending itself, the Church defends its innermost obscene secret. What this means is that identifying oneself with this secret side is a key constituent of the very identity of a Christian priest: if a priest seriously (not just rhetorically) denounces these scandals, he thereby excludes himself from the ecclesiastic community, he is no longer "one of us" (in exactly the same way a citizen of a town in the South of the US in the 1920s, if he denounced Ku Klux Klan to the police, excluded himself from his community, i.e., betrayed its fundamental solidarity). Consequently, the answer to the Church's reluctance should be not only that we are dealing with criminal cases and that, if Church does not fully participate in their investigation, it is an accomplice after the fact; moreover, Church AS SUCH, as an institution, should be investigated with regard to the way it systematically creates conditions for such crimes.

This obscene underground of habits is what is really difficult to change, which is why the motto of every radical revolution is the same as the quote from Virgil that Freud chose as the exergue for his *Interpretations of Dreams: Acheronta movebo* - dare to move the underground!

"Humoresque," arguably Robert Schumann's piano masterpiece, is to be read against the background of the gradual loss of the voice in his songs: it is not a simple piano piece, but a song without the vocal line, with the vocal line reduced to silence, so that all we effectively hear is the piano accompaniment. This is how one should read the famous "inner voice /innere Stimme/" added by Schumann (in the written score) as a third line between the two piano lines, higher and lower: as the vocal melodic line which remains a non-vocalized "inner voice," a series of variations without the theme, accompaniment without the main melodic line (which exists only as *Augenmusik*, music for the eyes only, in the guise of written notes). This absent melody is to be reconstructed on the basis of the fact that the first and third levels (the right and the left hand piano lines) do not relate to each other directly, i.e. their relationship is not that of an immediate mirroring: in order to account for their interconnection, one is thus compelled to (re)construct a third, "virtual" intermediate level (melodic line) which, for structural reasons, cannot be played. Its status is that of an impossible-real which can exist only in the guise of a writing, i.e. physical presence would annihilate the two melodic lines we effectively hear in reality (as in Freud's "A child is being beaten," in which the middle fantasy scene was never conscious and has to be reconstructed as the missing link between the first and the last scene). Schumann brings this procedure of absent melody to an apparently absurd self-reference when, later in the same fragment of "Humoresque," he repeats the same two effectively played melodic lines, yet this time the score contains no third absent melodic line, no inner voice - what is absent here is the absent melody, i.e. absence itself. How are we to play these notes when, at the level of what is effectively to be played, they exactly repeat the previous notes? The effectively played notes are deprived only of what is not there, of their constitutive lack, or, to refer to the Bible, they lose even that what they never had. The true pianist should thus have the *savoir-faire* to play the existing, positive, notes in such a way that one would be cable to discern the echo of the accompanying non-played "silent" virtual notes or their absence.

And is this not how ideology works? The explicit ideological text (or practice) is sustained by the "unplayed" series of obscene superego supplement. In Really Existing Socialism, the explicit ideology of socialist democracy was sustained by a set of implicit (unspoken) obscene injunctions and prohibitions, teaching the subject how not to take some explicit norms seriously and how to implement a set of publicly unacknowledged prohibitions. One of the strategies of dissidence in the last years of Socialism was therefore precisely to take the ruling ideology more seriously/literally than it took itself by way of ignoring its virtual unwritten shadow: "You want us to practice socialist democracy? OK, here you have it!" And when one got back from the Party apparatchiks desperate hints of how this is not the way things function, one simply had to ignore these hints... This is what *acheronta movebo* as a practice of the critique of ideology means: not directly changing the explicit text of the Law, but, rather, intervening into its obscene virtual supplement. Recall the relationship towards homosexuality in a soldiers' community operates, which operates at two clearly distinct levels: the explicit homosexuality is brutally attacked, those identified as gays are ostracized, beaten up every night, etc.; however, this explicit homophobia is accompanied by an excessive set of implicit web of homosexual innuendos, inner jokes, obscene practices, etc. The truly radical intervention into military homophobia should therefore not focus primarily on the explicit repression of homosexuality; it should rather "move the underground," disturb the implicit homosexual practices which SUSTAIN the explicit homophobia.

It is this obscene underground which enables us to approach in a new way the Abu Ghraib phenomenon. Does anyone still remember the unfortunate Muhammed Saeed al-Sahaf, Saddam's information minister who, in his daily press conferences, heroically denied even the most evident facts and stuck to the Iraqi line - when the US tanks were only hundreds of yards from his office, he continued to claim that the US TV shots of the tanks on the Baghdad streets are just Hollywood special effects? Once, however, he did struck a strange truth - when, confronted with the claims that the US army is already in control of parts of Baghdad, he snapped back: "They are not in control of anything - they don't even control themselves!" When the scandalous news broke out about the weird things going on in the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad, we got a glimpse of

this very dimension that Americans do not control in themselves.

In his reaction to the photos showing Iraqi prisoners tortured and humiliated by the US soldiers, rendered public at the end of April 2004, George Bush, as expected, emphasized how the deeds of the soldiers were isolated crimes which do not reflect what America stands and fights for, the values of democracy, freedom and personal dignity. And, effectively, the very fact that the case turned into a public scandal which put the US administration in a defensive position was in itself a positive sign - in a really "totalitarian" regime, the case would simply be hushed up. (In the same way, let us not forget that the very fact that the US forces did not find weapons of mass destruction is a positive sign: a truly "totalitarian" power would have done what cops usually do - plant drugs and then "discover" the evidence of crime...)

However, a number of disturbing features complicate the simple picture. The main feature that strikes the eye is the contrast between the "standard" way prisoners were tortured in the previous Saddam's regime and the US Army tortures: in the previous regime, the accent was on direct brutal infliction of pain, while the US soldiers focused on psychological humiliation. Furthermore, *recording* the humiliation with a camera, with the perpetrators *included* into the picture, their faces stupidly smiling side by side with the twisted naked bodies of the prisoners, is an integral part of the process, in stark contrast with the secrecy of the Saddam tortures. When I saw the well-known photo of a naked prisoner with a black hood covering his head, electric cables attached to his limbs, standing on a chair in a ridiculous theatrical pose, my first reaction was that this was a shot of some latest performance art show in Lower Manhattan. The very positions and costumes of the prisoners suggest a theatrical staging, a kind of *tableau vivant*, which cannot but bring to our mind the whole scope of American performance art and "theatre of cruelty," the photos of Mapplethorpe, the weird scenes in David Lynch's films...

And it is this feature that brings us to the crux of the matter: to anyone acquainted with the reality of the US way of life, the photos immediately brought to mind the obscene underside of the US popular culture - say, the initiatic rituals of torture and humiliation one has to undergo in order to be accepted into a closed community. Do we not see similar photos in regular intervals in the US press, when some scandal explodes in an army unit or in a

high school campus, where the initiatic ritual went overboard and soldiers or students got hurt beyond a level considered tolerable, forced to assume a humiliating pose, to perform debasing gestures (like penetrating their anal opening with a beer bottle in front of their peers), to suffer being pierced by needles, etc. (And, incidentally, since Bush himself is a member of "Skull and Bones," the most exclusive secret society of the Yale campus, it would be interesting to learn which rituals he had to undergo to be accepted...)

Of course, the obvious difference is that, in the case of such *initiatic* rituals - as their very name bears witness to -, one undergoes them out of a free choice, fully knowing what one has to expect, and with the clear aim of the reward that awaits me (being accepted into the inner circle, and - last but not least - allowed to perform the same rituals on new members...), while in Abu Ghraib, the rituals were not the price to be paid by the prisoners in order to be accepted as "one of us," but, on the contrary, the very mark of their *exclusion*. However, is not the "free choice" of those undergoing the humiliating rituals of initiation an exemplary case of a *false* free choice, along the lines of the worker's freedom to sell his working force? Even worse, one should recall here one of the most disgusting rituals of the anti-Black violence in the old US south: a black guy is cornered by white thugs and then compelled to perform an aggressive gesture ("Spit into my face, boy!"; "Say I am a shit!"...), which is supposed to justify the ensuing beating or lynching. Furthermore, there is the ultimate cynical message in applying to the Arab prisoners the properly American initiatic ritual: you want to be one of us? OK, her you have the taste of the very core of our way of life...

Recall Rob Reiner's *A Few Good Men*, a court-martial drama about two US marines accused of murdering one of their fellow-soldiers; the military prosecutor claims that the act was a deliberate murder, whereas the defense (composed of Tom Cruise and Demi Moore - how could they fail?) succeeds in proving that the defendants followed the so-called "Code Red," the unwritten rule of a military community which authorizes the clandestine night-time beating of a fellow-soldier who has broken the ethical standards of the Marines. Such a code condones an act of transgression, it is "illegal," yet at the same time it reaffirms the cohesion of the group. It has to remain under cover of the night, unacknowledged, unutterable - in public, everyone pretends to know nothing about it, or even

actively denies its existence (and the climax of the film is, predictably, the outburst of rage of Jack Nicholson, the officer who ordered the night-time beating: his public explosion is, of course, the moment of his fall). While violating the explicit rules of community, such a code represents the "spirit of community" at its purest, exerting the strongest pressure on individuals to enact group identification. In contrast to the *written* explicit Law, such a superego obscene code is essentially *spoken*. While the explicit Law is sustained by the dead father qua symbolic authority (the "Name of the Father"), the unwritten code is sustained by the spectral supplement of the Name of the Father, the obscene specter of the Freudian "primordial father."<sup>15</sup> Therein resides the lesson of Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*: in the figure of Kurtz, the Freudian "primordial father" - the obscene father-enjoyment subordinated to no symbolic Law, the total Master who dares to confront face to face the Real of terrifying enjoyment - is presented not as a remainder of some barbaric past, but as the necessary outcome of the modern Western power itself. Kurtz was a perfect soldier - as such, through his over-identification with the military power system, he turned into the excess which the system has to eliminate. The ultimate horizon of *Apocalypse Now* is this insight into how Power generates its own excess which it has to annihilate in an operation which has to imitate what it fights (Willard's mission to kill Kurtz is nonexistent for the official record, "it never happened," as the general who briefs Willard points out). We thereby enter the domain of secret operations, of what the Power does without ever admitting it. This is where Christopher Hitchens missed the point when he wrote:

"One of two things must necessarily be true. Either these goons were acting on someone's authority, in which case there is a layer of mid- to high-level people who think that they are not bound by the laws and codes and standing orders. Or they were acting on their own authority, in which case they are the equivalent of mutineers, deserters, or traitors in the field. This is why one asks wistfully if there is no provision in the procedures of military justice for them to be taken out and shot."<sup>16</sup>

The problem is that the Abu Ghraib tortures were NEITHER of these two options: while they cannot be reduced to simple evil acts of individual soldiers, they were of course also not directly ordered - they were legitimized by a specific

version of the obscene "Code Red" rules. To claim that they were the acts of "mutineers, deserters, or traitors in the field" is the same nonsense like the claim that the Ku Klux Klan lynchings were the acts of the traitors of Western Christian civilization and not the outburst of its own obscene underside, or that the child abuses of children by Catholic priests are acts of "traitors" to Catholicism... Abu Ghraib was not simply a case of American arrogance towards a Third World people: in being submitted to the humiliating tortures, the Iraqi prisoners were effectively *initiated into American culture*, they got the taste of its obscene underside which forms the necessary supplement to the public values of personal dignity, democracy, and freedom. Bush was thus wrong: what we are getting when we see the photos of the humiliated Iraqi prisoners on our screens and front pages, is precisely a direct insight into the "American values," into the very core of the obscene enjoyment that sustains the US way of life. These photos therefore put into an adequate perspective Samuel Huntington's well-known thesis on the ongoing "clash of civilizations": the clash between the Arab and the American civilization is not a clash between barbarism and respect for human dignity, but a clash between anonymous brutal torture and torture as a mediatic spectacle in which the victims' bodies serve as the anonymous background for the stupidly smiling "innocent American" faces of the torturers themselves. At the same time, one has here a proof of how, to paraphrase Walter Benjamin, every clash of civilizations is the clash of the underlying barbarisms.

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<sup>1</sup> I rely here extensively on Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*.

<sup>2</sup> See Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, New York: Simon and Schuster 1998.

<sup>3</sup> See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York: Free Press 2006 (reprint edition).

<sup>4</sup> This, incidentally, gives a new twist to Joseph Goebbels's infamous formula "when I hear the word culture, I reach for my gun" - but not, of course, when I hear the word 'civilization'.

<sup>5</sup> Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press 1994, p. 33.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted from Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wyn Davies, *The No-Nonsense Guide to Islam*, London: New Internationalist and Verso Books 2004, p. 77.

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<sup>7</sup> See Claude Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism*, Cambridge: MIT Press 1986.

<sup>8</sup> See Jacques Ranciere, *Hatred of Democracy*, London: Verso Books 2007.

<sup>9</sup> See Karl Marx, "Class Struggles in France," op.cit., p. 95.

<sup>10</sup> G.K.Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press 1995, p. 38.

<sup>11</sup> Moustapha Safouan, *Why Are the Arabs Not Free: the Politics of Writing* (unpublished manuscript).

<sup>12</sup> Perhaps, this feature accounts for another weird phenomenon: in (almost) all American hotels housed in buildings of more than 12 floors, there is no 13<sup>th</sup> floor (to avoid bad luck, of course), i.e., one jumps directly from 12<sup>th</sup> floor to 14<sup>th</sup> floor. For a European, such a procedure is meaningless: whom are we trying to fool? As if God doesn't know that what we designated as 14<sup>th</sup> floor is really the 13<sup>th</sup> floor? Americans can play this game precisely because their God is just a prolongation of our individual egos, not perceived as a true ground of being.

<sup>13</sup> See George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937).

<sup>14</sup> Although, even here, the benevolent Welfare-State endeavors to balance the annoyance of the bad-smelling neighbor with health concerns: a couple of years ago, the Dutch health ministry advices the citizens to break wind at least 15 times per day, in order to avoid unhealthy tensions and pressures in the body...

<sup>15</sup> For a more detailed elaboration of this topic, see Chapter 3 of Slavoj Zizek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment*, London: Verso Books 1995.

<sup>16</sup> Christopher Hitchens, „Prison Mutiny,“ available online (posted on ay 4 2004).