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RESILIENCE AND/OR VULNERABILITY OF THE CIVIL SPHERE

OTPORNOST I/ILI RANJIVOST GRAĐANSKE SFERE

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Bernadette Nadya Jaworsky, Elisabeth Becker and Milica Resanović

Civil Sphere Theory (CST), as elaborated by Jeffrey Alexander (2006), is fitting to address the challenges of our times, interrogating the twin resilience and fragility of democracy. Today, we are facing acute struggles on a global scale over rising numbers of far-right political actors and exclusionary agendas: immigration and minority belonging; and rapid technological change, entailing connectivity and at the same time the dissolution of social bonds. As we confront these issues of polarization and democratic erosion across the world, notions of solidarity, justice and inclusion–all of which lie at the core of Civil Sphere Theory–are vital to understanding societal possibilities and transformations.

The civil sphere is a normative and aspirational democratic space of justice and inclusion. It is distinct from other spheres of social life, e.g., the market, the state, family, ethnicity and race, etc. (cf. Walzer 1984). At the same time, it is a "real" social location, a project in which individual and collective strivings interact with communicative institutions in order to foster democratic inclusion. Based on feelings of solidarity that forge at once inclusionary and exclusionary social structures, unifying and divisive societal forces are enacted in the civil sphere. Research on the civil sphere to date thus primarily addresses questions of inequality and violence in ethno-racial, religious, and gender hierarchies, and the justice-seeking potentialities of democratic and multicultural projects.

This special issue arose out of a conference hosted at Heidelberg University "The Civil Sphere: Global Perspectives on Culture and Politics," from October 18-19, 2023. The conference united scholars working in the field of cultural sociology from across the globe, with the shared goal of engaging with and further developing Civil Sphere Theory, considering its global dimensions, in particular. While the conference provided an intellectual opportunity for scholars across neighboring disciplines to employ cultural sociological theory and methods in order to speak to key sociopolitical shifts, including contemporary refugee and migration waves, global environmental degradation, enduring racism, and political waves of populism, we have since entered into a time of notably increased democratic crisis. We believe that the contributions

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in this special issue, both as individual papers and as a whole, are therefore more relevant than ever–both in and beyond the academy.

The portent of democracy as being in "crisis" today comes from several directions. Perhaps, no one individual is as noted a factor in the erosion of democracy as U.S. president, Donald Trump. Douglas Kellner discusses rise of authoritarian populism and assaults on democracy in the United States today, arguing that "Trump's presidency, along with other authoritarian regimes in the twenty-first century, is characterized by autocracy, theocracy, and kleptocracy" (2025, p. 383). We must at the same time consider other factors, such as the decline in freedom or the growing lack of trust in political institutions worldwide. As Freedom House researchers (Gorokhovskaia and Grothe 2025) point out: "Global freedom declined for the 19th consecutive year in 2024. Sixty countries experienced deterioration in their political rights and civil liberties, and only 34 secured improvements" (Freedom House 2025). They stress that democratic solidarity will be "crucial" in the coming year. In a study of trust in institutions, the OECD (2024) asserts that democratic governments today stand at "a critical juncture." Its *Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions* shows the levels and drivers of trust in public institutions across 30 OECD countries in 2023 and their evolution since 2021. Of those surveyed, levels of trust are extremely low: "39% of those surveyed trust their national government, 37% are confident that their government balances the interests of current and future generations, and 41% believe their government uses the best available evidence when taking a decision" (OECD 2024). Clearly, questions of resilience and/or vulnerability of the civil sphere, the focus of this special issue, are more salient than ever.

One of the major contributions of this special issue is thus the understanding of *the civil sphere as dynamic,* with democratic fragility in notable tension with democratic resilience. We see this in our authors' explorations of the noncivil foundations of democratic solidarities, processes of bridge-building and depolarization, social movements and mass surveillance. At the same time, this special issue provides *deep empirical contributions from across the globe,* with cases in the United States, Sweden, and Bolivia, showcasing civil performance and strength in times of uncertainty. Through these contributions, as well as publication in a leading academic journal in Serbia, this special issue further *adds notable geographical breadth* to the study of the civil sphere. This reach has been one of the primary goals of Civil Sphere Theory, since it was introduced by Jeffrey Alexander (2006) nearly two decades ago.

We thus seen this contribution as continuing in the line of myriad publications on Civil Sphere Theory since 2006, most notably edited book volumes that contribute to efforts to globalize Civil Sphere Theory, including: Solidarity, Justice, and Incorporation: *Thinking Through the Civil Sphere* (Kivisto and Sciortino 2015); *The Civil Sphere in Latin America* (Alexander and Tognato 2018); *The Civil Sphere in East Asia* (Alexander et al. 2019); *Breaching Civilization: Radicalization and the Civil Sphere* (Alexander, Stack and Khosrokhavar 2019); *Populism in the Civil Sphere* (Alexander, Kivisto and Sciortino 2020);

The Nordic Civil Sphere (Alexander, Lund and Voyer 2020), *The Courage for Civil Repair: Narrating the Righteousness in International Migration* (Tognato, Jaworsky, and Alexander 2021), *The Civil Sphere in Canada* (Alexander and Horgan 2025), and *The Indian Civil Sphere* (Alexander and Waghmore 2025).

The Articles in this Special Issue

This special issue opens with "Civil Society IV: Democratic Solidarity and the Non-Civil Scaffolding of the Civil Sphere," in which authors Gallen Watts and Mervyn Horgan argues that to fully grasp the vitality and resilience of the civil sphere, we must also consider its relationship with non-civil spheres, particularly family, school, and voluntary associations/public life. The article explores the interdependence between civil and non-civil spheres, emphasizing the positive contributions the latter can offer to strengthen and sustain the civil sphere. Watts and Horgan's article makes a theoretical contribution to CST by expanding our understanding of democratic socialization, democratic dispositions, and the forms of interactions and actions that foster civic engagement. Additionally, it seeks to establish a close connection between the decline in democratic quality and the corrosion of these non-civil spheres, which has occurred due to the increased economic inequalities and political polarization in American society. While the article primarily examines challenges facing American democracy, its insights extend beyond the U.S. context, offering a valuable framework for analyzing how non-civil spheres can invigorate the civil sphere across different societies.

While Watts and Horgan's article primarily explores the role of non-civil spheres in strengthening civil capacities and fostering solidarity among those who are here and now as members of a nation-state society, the following article, "Membership, Migration, and Inclusion in the Civil Sphere," by Peter Kivisto and Giuseppe Sciortino, broadens the perspective by addressing the issue of international migration. The article analyzes the intersection of migration, membership, and inclusion through Civil Sphere Theory (CST), offering a more nuanced understanding of immigration as the crossing of geographical, political, and symbolic boundaries. This study extends the original conceptualization of the civil sphere by placing greater emphasis on the horizontal processes of inclusion, the challenges that accompany the transformation of outsiders into insiders, rather than focusing solely on the inclusion of marginalized groups, second-class citizens to full membership. Directing attention to the role of symbolic codes in shaping inclusion and exclusion, this article offers a significant contribution to understanding the complex and tense dynamics between membership in the civil sphere and national belonging.

Rather than approaching migration from a theoretical perspective, "The Civil Sphere and its Resilient Tribalist Discontents: A Muslim Ban Cloaked in Sacralized Binaries," explores migration on an empirical level through a case study of media representation of the Muslim Ban policies (2015–2021) in the United States. Starting from an analysis of policies enacted under the Trump

Administration to restrict migration from Muslim-majority countries, Daniel Joseph Belback examines how civil sphere discourse functions as a tool for exclusion. Through an examination of newspaper articles dedicated to this issue, he argues that civil discourse is used to justify repression by portraying imagined Others as not only incapable of upholding the liberty-based values, relationships, and institutions seen as fundamental to a self-sustaining democracy, but also as representing threats to them. In short, the article argues that the civil sphere is more deeply rooted in maintaining primordial rather than universal ties, which suggests that exploring tribalistic tendencies within the civil sphere is crucial for understanding contemporary phenomena related to the process of de-democratization.

The following article, "The Ordinal Civil Sphere: Algorithmically Automated Surveillance and the Fight for Creativity and Control," explores the impact of technology on the civil sphere, specifically its vulnerability in the face of increasing surveillance and control. Jessica Dawson argues that while technology was once seen as a tool for democracy and social movements, it has now become a mechanism of control, placing particular emphasis on the study of commercial surveillance and data collection, which restricts participation in public life. The article highlights how commercial entities engage in mass surveillance, gathering personal data through phones, social media, facial recognition, and biometric systems, raising critical concerns about privacy, the illusion of consent, and the erosion of traditional democratic structures, solidarity and trust.

Following these portrayals of the social challenges that lead to the strengthening of exclusionary tendencies in the civil sphere and the erosion of solidaristic capacity, the next set of articles in the special issue place a greater emphasis on civil repair and the reinforcement of solidarity. In her article "Rehearsing Civility: Bridgebuilding in Polarized America," Emily Campbell explores the scope and limitations of bridgebuilding organizations that unite individuals from opposing political sides to engage in dialogue, with the goal of reducing polarization. Polarization, identified by Galen Watts in the first article of the special issue as a key pathology of contemporary societies, is further examined in Campbell's paper, which employs a qualitative case study approach to explore one potential method for addressing this polarization. The article concludes that bridgebuilding, as a practice, fosters themes and civil discourse that unite participants, enabling them to "rehearse civility" and experience the goodwill they long for in their own lives and wish to see in society, all within a relatively safe and controlled setting.

Continuing the discussion about social solidarity, the next article "The Potential for Civil Resilience: Staging Inequalities in a Stigmatized Neighborhood" explores art's transformative role in fostering civil repair. Through a case study of a Swedish theatre, Anna Lund, Rebecca Brinch, and Ylva Lorentzon illustrate how the dramatic arts can serve as a powerful platform for civil repair and the social inclusion of marginalized communities by activating symbolic structures of meaning and emotion. Drawing on a meaning-centered analysis of the

Husby Theatre, its place within the urban landscape, and a selected play from its repertoire, the article concludes that meaningful theatre is not only achievable but also has the potential to drive positive social change by fostering inclusion and increasing recognition of immigrants and stigmatized communities.

The final article in this special issue also explores solidarity but primarily focuses on the indigenous context. In "'TIPNIS somos todos': Discourse of Indigenousness Within and Beyond a National Civil Sphere," Daniel Mollericona Alfaro analyzes the environmental movement that emerged in Bolivia when indigenous groups marched in protest against a contested state highway project set to be built on indigenous land. The study demonstrates how the indigenous sphere embodies universalistic aspirations for solidarity, in contrast to the civil sphere, where solidarity is largely fostered within the framework of the nation-state. It defines the indigenous sphere as a distinct and relatively autonomous sphere of solidarity; characterized by active, peaceful, and collectivist relations; guided by non-rational motives deeply connected to nature and Mother Earth, rooted in a pre-millennial cosmology; and inclusive, grounded in communal ties, shaped by millennia-old traditions and institutions. This article offers a valuable contribution to discussions on the potential for global solidarities and alternative solidaristic discourses that emerge from non-Western traditions, unburdened by the legacies of colonialism.

Concluding Remarks

This special issue of the journal *Philosophy and Society*, published by the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory at the University of Belgrade, is the first issue in Serbia dedicated to Civil Sphere Theory. While the journal has previously introduced some aspects of cultural sociology to the Serbian academic community, such as the study of everyday life in cultural sociology (Prodanović 2013) and an analysis of the strong program through Burawoy's distinction between critical and public (engaged) sociology (Petrović Trifunović 2016), it has not yet engaged with CST. Epistemological and methodological questions concerning the interpretivist turn in sociology and thick description have been presented and debated within the Serbian sociological community (Spasić 2012; Spasić 2013; Resanović 2018). However, CST has largely remained on the margins of sociological literature in Serbia and the broader region, despite its introduction into Serbian-language academic discourse through critical reviews of major works such as *The Performance of Politics* (Alexander 2010) and *Populism in the Civil Sphere* (Alexander, Kivisto, and Sciortino 2021) (Spasić 2011; 2022). As exceptions, a few empirical studies employ a cultural sociological approach (Spasić 2013; Zvijer 2022), and more specifically, some apply Civil Sphere Theory (Resanović 2021).

The special issue *Resilience and/or Vulnerability of the Civil Sphere* seeks to fill this gap by featuring a collection of articles dedicated, on the one hand, to advancing theoretical questions regarding CST, and on the other, to applying CST in the analysis of contemporary challenges while exploring ways to

strengthen democratic capacities through civil repair across diverse social contexts. As we write, massive student protests are taking place in Serbia, sparking the emergence of a new form of solidarity and forging new alliances in the fight against an authoritarian and corrupt government between previously ideologically divided groups. Even though it may be too soon to dedicate an article to this social movement, we did not want to fail to mention how relevant the issues of solidarity and civic repair in Serbian society are today. In the coming period, CST offers us the capacity to explore how this extraordinary energy was created and sustained over several months by students and the non-student citizens who supported them. It could also contribute to interpreting the outcomes of the protests, which remain unknown at this moment, as we witness both the students' unwavering dedication and the extreme backlash from the ruling political elite.

Over the past two decades, CST has been used to explore questions of democracy and social solidarities in a rapidly changing world. Here we extend this intellectual terrain to focus on democratic resilience and vulnerability on a global scale. Through a combination of new theoretical insights and empirical cases, we contribute to broader conversations on democracy at a critical juncture. Civil Sphere Theory allows us to actively confront, analyze and seek answers to the challenges of our time. Crucially, it gives us hope. As Edith Eger (2023: ix) writes "Hope is about being free to choose how we engage with our circumstances. Choosing what we hold in our minds, choosing to be curious."

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Galen Watts and Mervyn Horgan

CIVIL SOCIETY IV: DEMOCRATIC SOLIDARITY AND THE NON-CIVIL SCAFFOLDING OF THE CIVIL SPHERE[1]

ABSTRACT
A defining feature of what Alexander calls Civil Society (CS) III is its separation—analytic and empirical—from the putatively non-civil spheres of the family, schools, and associational forms which lack public communicative intent and comprise CS I. While critical to the progress of CST as a research program, with this separation and delimited conception, civil sphere theorists may miss a key insight of CS I regarding the *mutual interdependence* of spheres. Although civil codes, institutions, and interactional practices may have their "natural" home in the civil sphere, their emotional and normative force, and their survival over time, depend upon their ancillary institutionalization in non-civil spheres. Families are key to *democratic socialization.* Schools cultivate *democratic dispositions* through citizen-formation, inducting students into their nation's democratic traditions. And through *civic action* and *civic interaction orders* prejudices are challenged, and citizens become open to new forms of incorporation. Using the case of contemporary American democratic culture, we survey scholarship on political polarization and social capital's decline in the US, and argue that the discord characteristic of contemporary America's civil sphere arises, in part, from these non-civil spheres. That is, the erosion of democratic solidarity and basic norms of civility originate in democratic deficits in those non-civil spheres that scaffold the civil sphere.

KEYWORDS
Civil sphere theory, civil society, democratic solidarity, cultural sociology, civic action

Introduction

Imagine, if you will, a society where the civil sphere's communicative and regulative institutions are expansive and robust, where the discourse of civil society and the democratic ideals it encodes are regularly invoked by journalists, politicians, and ordinary citizens, and where levels of political incorporation, legal

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protection, and cultural recognition for once marginalized and polluted groups and persons is historically high. Imagine also that *every* other (non)civil sphere in society save the market is weak, debilitated, or polarized—where the economy is invidiously winner-take-all, where middle- and lower-class families are resultantly stretched thin and bare, where schools are reduced to class-sorting mechanisms in a meritocratic rat-race, where partisan interests and hostilities organize religious life, where politics infuses art and athletics, where public space and services are eroded by privatization, where algorithms incentivizing outrage and umbrage dictate media and news consumption, where critical reflection and democratic deliberation have become luxury goods, where cross-cutting social ties and face-to-face sociability have become scarce. Now ask: is this putatively democratic society a healthy one? We suspect the answer is apparent: no, it is not. In fact, we suspect many will have trouble even imagining such a society; could a civil sphere be said to be "expansive and robust" under such conditions? Perhaps, but surely it cannot endure.

Implicit in this hypothetical lies our thesis: that the civil sphere's life and health is intimately intertwined with the life and health of noncivil spheres. Or put another way: that democratic culture in general and democratic solidarity specifically, relies upon noncivil scaffolding (Talisse 2019). Civil sphere theory (CST) is not inattentive to this fact: Alexander acknowledges that, although the civil sphere is culturally and institutionally autonomous from "noncivil" spheres such as the state, economy, religion, family, and community, "these spheres are fundamental to the quality of life and to the vitality of a plural order, and their independence must be nurtured and protected" (2006: 7). Moreover, later he notes that, while noncivil spheres are regularly responsible for anti-civil intrusions, they equally provide important "facilitating inputs" that strengthen the civil sphere: "The goods and social forms produced by other spheres can be conceived as promoting a more ample civil life" (206). Yet, despite these admissions, relatively little attention has been paid by Alexander, or CST scholars more generally, to noncivil spheres' civil contributions. Instead, CST scholars tend to treat noncivil spheres as either intrusions into, or as under the sway of the civil sphere.

This should perhaps not surprise us, as this oversight follows logically from CST's normative and empirical prioritization of the civil sphere—what Alexander (2006) calls CS III. To be sure, the analytic differentiation of "civil" institutions, associations, and discourse has arguably been CST's most important intellectual contribution, marking a clear advance over the classic formulations of Ferguson, Smith, Hegel, and Tocqueville (CS I) as well as the later neo-Marxist revision (CS II). However, by focusing narrowly upon the civil sphere proper—understandable in the theory's first iterations—CST scholarship can give the impression, wittingly or not, that democratic life relies exclusively on the expansiveness and robustness of the civil sphere. Worse, CST scholars may inadvertently end up disregarding some of the most important insights of these earlier accounts—be they, about the role of noncivil spheres in reproducing what Tocqueville (1998) termed the "habits of the heart" that

sustain democratic life, or the Marxist concern that the market tends to corrode everything, including civil solidarity. In turn, we believe CST scholars must expand our analytic purview to include the "civilizing" inputs (Alexander 2015: 174) of noncivil spheres and, similarly, the various ways that noncivil spheres provide "attenuating" inputs that temper or reduce the force of the civil sphere, and "impeding" inputs that outright obstruct civil sphere goals. This requires, we (provocatively) contend, a move from CS III to CS IV—an account of the civil sphere analytically includes both the *civil* dimensions of noncivil spheres—that is, the various ways these noncivil domains (re)produce and sustain civil dispositions, actions, interactional practices, and relations—as well as the *noncivil* features of these spheres which contribute to maintaining a healthy democracy.[2]

In this article, we present the initial outlines of this more expansive account of civil society by considering the civil contributions offered by three noncivil spheres: families, public schools, and voluntary associations/public life. CST is grounded in a framework of societal differentiation, conceiving of modern societies as characterized by institutional and moral pluralism (Durkheim 1984; Walzer 1983; Alexander and Colomy 1990). In contrast to modernization theory, however, CST rejects the view that differentiation entails institutional complementarity and cohesiveness; instead, it stresses the "fundamental incompatibility" of spheres (Alexander 2019: 7). In our view, the reality is best conceived as lying somewhere in-between neat complementarity and pure incommensurability. As Walzer (1984) puts it, "What goes on in one institutional setting influences all the others; the same people, after all, inhabit the different settings, and they share a history and a culture…" (327). While appreciating that noncivil logics, discourses, relations, and practices structure noncivil spheres, we believe that CST insufficiently stresses the *interdependence* of social spheres. In healthy democracies, noncivil spheres contribute fundamentally to civil life, socializing citizens to internalize the sacred codes of civil society, develop democratic attitudes, habits, and skills, cultivate and sustain civil relations, engage in everyday practices of civility, and expand the boundaries of democratic solidarity. Moreover, they also provide noncivil goods contributing to the vibrancy, cohesiveness, and richness of social life (Rosenblum 1998; Talisse 2019; Rosa 2024). Alexander (2006) contends that CST strives to theorize "democracy as a way of life" (4), yet, as Walzer reminds us, modern lives are scattered across far more spheres than the civil. If democracy is indeed a way of life, then it makes little sense to think it stops at the boundaries of the civil sphere. We do not stop being democrats when we go home and spend time with families and friends, when we attend school, or when we socialize in public. And if we do, maybe we were never really democrats to begin with.

2 In a penetrating response to this paper, Alexander forcefully challenged our contention that what is required is a new conception of civil society (i.e., CS IV). While we respectfully disagree, we do so undogmatically; we consider this an attempt to begin, rather than end, a much-needed conversation.

Thus, a more thorough sociological accounting of democratic life cannot limit itself to the communicative and regulative institutions of the civil sphere. To be sure, these institutions may be the heart of civil society, but a heart cannot live long unless its sister organs vigorously pump blood to it. Noncivil spheres are those organs, and their democratic roles, though perhaps civically subordinate, are no less vital for being so.

Our concern, then, is less the genesis of the civil sphere *per se* than how non- or extra-civil spheres provide scaffolding for the civil sphere, to the extent that without it the civil sphere would be much impoverished. Where CST scholarship has considered such spheres, they are generally treated as providing facilitating inputs or as spheres that encounter crises and are often transformed when pierced by civil sphere values (Alexander 2019). Where such an argument begins from a position inside the civil sphere, tracking its independent force over non- and extra-civil spheres, our argument takes an alternative tack—by starting *outside* the civil sphere. Rather than examining how the civil sphere infuses other spheres, we look at how those other spheres infuse the civil sphere. While our argument does not call into question the *analytic* autonomy of the civil sphere, we drive analysis in what we believe are novel and fertile ways by closely attending to the civil sphere's concrete entanglements with other spheres.

To set the scene, we begin with a review of the development of CST, focusing on the omissions and errors Alexander sought to address in earlier accounts of civil society. Next, building on the key insights of CS I, CS II, and CS III, we synthesize classical work on civil society, contemporary democratic theory, and recent cultural sociological scholarship on civic action and civic interaction orders, sketching the outlines of a more analytically expansive account of civil society (CS IV).[3] The next section considers the "civilizing" inputs of three noncivil spheres—families, public schools, and voluntary associations/public life—highlighting both their "civil" and "noncivil" contributions to democratic society. Then, in the final section, we demonstrate our account's value by using it to shed light on the ailing health of American democracy (Ziblatt and Levitsky 2018). Although our opening imaginative hypothetical was not meant as a description of contemporary American democratic life, we cannot deny its similitudes. Thus, we contend an important source of the democratic degeneration characteristic of the American civil sphere lies in the state of its noncivil spheres. Put succinctly: a combination of extreme inequality, political polarization, and flailing public institutions has profoundly undermined both the civil dimensions of these noncivil spheres, and the noncivil goods they contribute to democratic social life. We conclude with brief reflections on the implications of our account for CST scholarship.

3 In this endeavour we are inspired by Xu (2022).

Civil Society I, II, & III - A Review

In *The Civil Sphere* Alexander makes clear that he devised CS III in response to the problems that plagued prior accounts of civil society. The original account, CS I, which he traces back to the Scottish moralists (Ferguson and Smith), Rousseau, Hegel, and Tocqueville, conceives of civil society as comprising basically all non-state institutions (the family, the market, voluntary associations, etc.) that involve social cooperation. The central problem with this account, argues Alexander, is its diffuseness; although highly suggestive, talk of "civil society" on this account simply includes far too much, and so fails to empirically and normatively differentiate a whole panoply of discourses, relations, and institutions. It is useful to place Alexander's critique of CS I in context. During the years he was writing *The Civil Sphere*, neo-Tocquevillian accounts of civil society were experiencing a veritable revival (Bellah et al. 1985; Etzioni 1996; Putnam 2000; Paxton 2002).[4] Thus, Alexander's critique of CS I took shape in an intellectual context where social scientists were increasingly of the view that the lifeblood of democracy—what neo-Tocquevillians thought of as the seedbed of civic virtue—was "civil society," vaguely conceived as including any and all voluntary associations, be they babysitting co-ops, knitting clubs, or bowling leagues.

At the same time, CS III was also devised with a second account in mind—an account that Alexander sensed had become increasingly taken-for-granted in sociology. What Alexander calls CS II follows Gramsci in conceiving of "civil society" as a sort of superstructure of capitalist societies. On this view, not only is civil society not democratic, but it is "inherently capitalist" (Alexander 2006: 29)—the ideological terrain upon which ruling class domination is meted out: the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas. Although CS II is ostensibly Marxist in its theoretical debts, Alexander traces its intellectual origins back to Thrasymachus, for whom might makes right, and talk of "justice" is said to be a smokescreen for naked self-interest. For Alexander, then, while the problem with CS I was its diffuseness, the problem with CS II was its reductionism. Like "weak" programs in the sociology of culture (Alexander and Smith 2001), Alexander maintained, CS II mistakenly denied the autonomy of (democratic) ideals and culture.

Considering this context, it should be evident why Alexander insisted on the analytic autonomy and empirical priority of the civil sphere. In response to scholars advocating CS I, Alexander stressed the fact of institutional differentiation, and the complex societal dynamics it produces. Subsuming all non-state institutions under a single conceptual umbrella ignores the incredible cultural and institutional diversity contained therein. Bowling leagues and BLM chapters might both be non-state voluntary associations, but this does not make them equally "civil." Thus, a central aim of CS III was to isolate the

4 Following Lichterman and Eliasoph (2014) we use the term "neo-Tocquevillian" because many scholars saw themselves as inspired by Tocqueville's thought. We therefore sidestep the question of whether or not such scholars interpreted Tocqueville correctly.

codes, discourses, and institutions that comprise the civil sphere so that scholars might distinguish "civil" associations from "noncivil" ones. What makes a BLM chapter "civil" in a way that bowling leagues are not, Alexander contends, is that the former publicly invokes the discourse of civil society for the purposes of broadening democratic solidarity.

In formulating CS III, Alexander was sensitive to the arguments about "bad civil society" (Chambers and Kopstein 2001), which charged neo-Tocquevillians with overlooking the fact that many non-state voluntary associations either fail to contribute to civic life or directly threaten it (see also Foley and Edwards 1999). Is it actually the case that bowling leagues make a difference for civic life? Or might we be searching for the "civic" in all the wrong places (Schudson 2006)? Additionally, neo-Nazi social clubs may provide great bonding social capital for aspiring Nazis, but is this really something democrats should celebrate? Faced with an account of civil society so nebulous that it struggled to distinguish the civil impacts of condominium boards from those of social movements, it is not difficult to understand why Alexander (2006) insisted on "a much more precise and delimited understanding of the term" (31).

Equally, CS III was devised to counter the cynicism and reductionism of CS II. By insisting on the fact of differentiation, Alexander sought to correct the Marxist tendency to reduce everything to capitalism: "The civil sphere and the market must be conceptualized in fundamentally different terms. We are no more a capitalist society than we are a bureaucratic, secular, rational one, or indeed a civil one" (33). In separating analytically, the "civil sphere" from the "economic sphere," Alexander was able to demonstrate the autonomy of liberal democracy—to show empirically that far from being a mere handmaiden to capital, democracy enshrines its own institutions, relations, and codes, which have played a key role in constraining not only the predations of the capitalist market, but also the anti-civil effects of patriarchal families, racial hierarchies, and religious intolerance. What is more, by insisting upon the institutional and cultural autonomy of the civil sphere, Alexander was able to bring to light the centrality of shared feelings, sacred values, and social performance in democratic life, that is, democracy's reliance upon narrative, imagination, rhetoric, and charisma. This offered a useful corrective not only to the reductionism of CS II, but also the overly rationalized accounts of democratic life associated with Rawls and Habermas, centered on formal procedure for achieving justice. Thus, here too it is easy to see the basis for Alexander's insistence on defining civil society in the circumscribed form characteristic of CS III.

And yet, this insistence has not been without drawbacks, the most important of which is that CST scholars have arguably underrated, or at least overlooked, the civil contributions of noncivil spheres. In a response to his critics Alexander (2015) writes:

> Challenging the claim of critical theory that complex organizational systems colonize and destroy democratic lifeworlds, CST points to such 'civilizing' inputs as formally free market relations and contract law, bureaucratic rationality,

> science, and this-worldly ascetic religion. Yet, if such inputs can be critical to the creation of a civil sphere, they are not the same as the product they help to build—civil discourse and institutions.... Neither the morale nor the institutions of the civil sphere can be reduced to the social and cultural inputs that contribute to their construction. (175)

This statement, we think, is representative of CS III, in that it simultaneously acknowledges the "civilizing" inputs of noncivil spheres, while insisting upon the civil sphere's analytic and empirical priority. Now, as we have explained, given the academic context from which civil sphere theory emerged, this insistence makes perfect sense.

But it is not clear to us that this insistence helps, rather than hinders advances in CST scholarship today. Few deny the analytic autonomy of the civil sphere. This battle has been won. The question, then, is whether ignoring or downplaying the "social and cultural inputs that contribute" to the civil sphere's construction, maintenance, and expansion is theoretically appropriate. We think not. As CST matures and is brought in ever newer directions and applied to novel cases, it is a good time to revisit some of its core assumptions. We contend that while CS III is undoubtedly an improvement upon CS I and CS II, it nevertheless overlooks some of the most important insights contained in those earlier accounts. Accordingly, perhaps we need a more expansive account of civil society that systematically theorizes these "civilizing" inputs. In the following section, we offer the initial outlines of such an account.

Civil Society IV – An Initial Sketch

By bringing to light the institutions, associations, and discourses that centrally animate and structure the civil sphere, Alexander has done scholars of democracy an immense service. Without question, CS III markedly improves our empirical and normative understanding of democratic life. Yet, for all that it offers, it nevertheless leaves unaddressed or undertheorized a number of significant issues and questions.

The first of these is the question of *democratic socialization*. To be sure, Alexander (2015) acknowledges that "[c]ommitment to democratic values is a matter of socialization to established culture" (Alexander 2015: 175). Yet, there is little in CST that explores this process.[5] In fact, one can get the impression from much CST scholarship that democratic citizens—and democratic solidarity, with them—simply come into the world prefab. The truth, of course, is that no one is born a democrat; they must be made. And the making of democratic solidarity does not magically appear when citizen's reach voting age, but rather is contingent on socialization into civil sphere values, and so begins long before a person officially "enters" the civil sphere. This becomes apparent when we ask how civil values become sacred for individuals. The civil values

5 Of course, the tendency to ignore socialization is not unique to CST (see Guhin et al 2021).

of autonomy, agency, rationality, self-control, and sanity are made meaningful early in life, through local traditions, folk tales of civil heroism, and face-to-face interactions (Fine and Hallett 2014; Fine 2019). Similarly, individuals learn the meaning of civil relations—those that are open, trusting, and truthful—in various noncivil spheres long before they partake in the civil sphere proper (Xu 2022). Accordingly, CST scholars must improve our understanding of the process of democratic socialization—that is, how democrats are made (and continuously remade).

The second of these is the importance of what we call *democratic dispositions*. While CS I may suffer from diffuseness, what it arguably gets right is emphasizing the importance of democratic attitudes, sensibilities, and skills—what Tocqueville (1998) felicitously called "habits of the heart." Now, it is true that neo-Tocquevillians have tended to be too sanguine about the capacity of any and all voluntary associations to foster these, while also failing to identify precisely how such dispositions take shape. However, failing to identify the social origins of democratic dispositions does not change the fact that the cultivation of such dispositions is essential to a flourishing democracy (Maletz 2005). Indeed, summing up the consensus among democratic theorists, Kymlicka and Norman (2000) write,

> the health and stability of a modern democracy depends, not only on the justice of its institutions, but also on the qualities and attitudes of its citizens: e.g. their sense of identity, and how they view potentially competing forms of national, regional, ethnic, or religious identities; their ability to tolerate and work together with others who are different from themselves; their desire to participate in the political process in order to promote the public good and hold political authorities accountable; their willingness to show self-restraint and exercise personal responsibility in their economic demands, and in personal choices that affect their health and the environment; and their sense of justice and commitment to a fair distribution of resources. (6)

Political theorists tend to discuss these civic virtues as if they can be abstracted from the meaningful lifeworlds of individual citizens. A cultural sociological approach says otherwise (Xu 2022; Morgan 2024). Thus, when we speak of *democratic dispositions,* we consider the declarative and nondeclarative cultural habits that animate democratic life in specific places and times (Lizardo 2017). To be sure, the discourse of civil society and the sacred codes it enshrines are an essential resource in civic life, but such codes do not merely live at the symbolic or discursive level. They are equally embodied and enlivened, materialized in practical and social competencies, in split-second intuitions and instincts, and in routine practices (Giddens 1984). It is in this multidimensional way—entailing both discursive and practical consciousness—that we think "civility" as a cultural ideal must be conceived. For Shils (1991) "civility" is "a mode of political action which postulates that antagonists are also members of the same society" (13-14). In a similar vein, Boyd (2006) sees civility as "a moral disposition that derives from the postulate of moral equality" (866). For

these theorists, to be committed to civil values is not merely to invoke specific discourses, nor to be primed to respond to civic performances, but also to comport oneself in distinctly "civil" ways, and to exercise certain "civil" habits of mind (e.g., Gutmann 1987; Macedo 1990; Galston 1991; Rosenblum 1998).

One of these is "the disposition, and the developed capacity, to engage in public discourse" (Galston 1991: 227). And tied to this is "the willingness to listen seriously to a range of views" (Kymlicka and Norman 2000, 11). Gutmann (1987) summarizes these as "the skills and virtues of deliberation" (xiii). CST scholars have tended to be suspicious of philosophers' emphasis upon public reasonableness and rational deliberation. For Alexander (2015), theorizing "democracy after the cultural turn" requires, if not outright rejecting, at least attenuating the "abstract and ratiocinative understanding of modernity" implicit in classic accounts of deliberative democracy (182). To be sure, CST has compellingly shown how democratic life rests upon symbolic and performative foundations, which Habermasian accounts of the public sphere miss. Yet, there is no reason, in principle, that CST and deliberative democracy cannot be reconciled. Advancing precisely this kind of reconciliation Sass and Dryzek (2024) argue that "democratization entails the co-evolution of culture and reason (and institutions)," such that it is a mistake to sharply contrast social performance and rational deliberation.[6] Thus, Sass and Dryzek contend that a healthy civil sphere in fact *presupposes* certain democratic dispositions, including a willingness and capacity to deliberate. Of course, there are others. Rosenblum (1998) highlights the disposition to treat people with easy spontaneity and without reference to rank, law-abidingness, and refraining from inflicting cruelty, humiliation and violence. Callan (1997) stresses a psychological resistance to tribalism, and a striving for impartiality. And Lefebvre (2023) pinpoints a visceral revulsion to slurs and other forms of explicit discrimination. No doubt there are others, and of course these dispositions and virtues will manifest in distinct ways across democratic societies and cultures. But the point stands: the "culture of democracy" (Xu 2022) cannot do without democratic dispositions.

The third underexplored area in CST is the nature and diversity of *civic action* and *civic interaction orders*. Like CST, civic action theory was devised in response to the neo-Tocquevillian account of civil society, which naively presumed that all voluntary associations equally contribute to civic life (Lichterman and Eliasoph 2014). However, in contrast to CST, which foregrounds the communicative intent of "civil" groups, civic action theory instead centers how discourse, codes, narratives, and symbols are mobilized *in action*. On this account, action is "civic" insofar as it involves individuals cooperating for the purposes of improving society, however they imagine it (Lichterman and Eliasoph 2014, 809). This framework importantly differs not only from CST,

6 It is worth noting that Alexander made this very same argument prior to his more sustained engagement with performance theory, albeit in the context of discussing the aspirations of social science (see Alexander 1995).

but also deliberative democracy, which foregrounds democratic dispositions and capacities, as the focus is on *scene styles*—that is, the favoured modes of interaction that shape how groups "act" civically. With this concept, Lichterman and Eliasoph help us to see that some groups with "civic" communicative intentions and aims can coordinate their actions in profoundly uncivil ways, while other groups that lack any explicit "civic" intent or purpose may nevertheless accomplish profoundly "civic" goals. Crucial for us is the fact that "civic action" is not restricted to the civil sphere but rather takes place across a wide variety of institutional domains—both "civil" and "noncivil."

We use the term *civic interaction order* in order to highlight the meso-level groups where civic life becomes socially meaningful. As Fine and Hallett (2014) explain, citizens come to understand and experience the "civil" primarily through local communities and groups—be they families, classrooms, or volunteer groups. In other words, it is through the social relations, emotional linkages, shared memories and prospective futures formed and nurtured in groups that citizens make sense of, and experience, the discourse of civil society. Further, it is in these that we learn to perform and enact our "civil selves" (Fine 2019: 21). So, while the civil sphere may be institutionalized at the macro-level, it relies profoundly upon the "tiny publics" that make up meso-level interaction orders. Summing things up, Fine (2019) writes, "Affiliations among persons create affiliation with society. Allegiance is constituted in the local worlds in which citizens participate, and it then extends to allegiance to a world that is more expansive, but perceived as similar in kind. A commitment to local action becomes a commitment to an extended world" (22; see also, Kaplan 2018).

A focus on civic action and civic interaction orders forces us to expand our analytic purview and seek out wherever and whenever "civil" life is being done (Horgan 2019; 2025). Such focus challenges the view, implicit in CS III, that institutional spheres monistically enshrine a single discursive and moral logic, as opposed to being the site of multiple, overlapping and hybridized orders of worth (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006).[7] Reflecting on the merits of CS I, Rosenblum (1998) remarks upon the "hybrid character of associations" (6) in a liberal democracy, that is, the way a single institution or group may serve multiple social and moral purposes, some "civil" and others not. The insight here is significant, and can be traced back to Tocqueville: if a society is truly democratic, then nearly all institutional spheres will contain some "civil" dimensions and aspects, as they will reflect the "passion for equality" characteristic of democratic peoples (Tocqueville 1998: 204). So, while we agree with Alexander that the *raison d'etre* of the family, the public school, and voluntary associations are not to shore up the civil sphere, it is nevertheless the case that each of these noncivil spheres plays a vital role in doing so.

The fourth and final issue revolves around the *noncivil* goods upon which a robust civil sphere depends. In contrast to totalitarian societies, liberal

7 For contrasts between CST and Boltanski's approach to public culture, see Eulriet (2014).

democracies protect the right to privacy, and with this, the pursuit of apolitical engagements—from love and friendship, to art and academic excellence, to scientific exploration and humanistic fantasy (Watts 2022).[8] In this way, it is implicit in theories of liberal democracy, including CST, that a healthy democratic society requires robust noncivil spheres which provide citizens with plural social goods to value and pursue (Walzer 1983; Watts 2024). According to Talisse (2019), an underappreciated consequence of this is that it is *good for democracy* when individuals engage in activities and pursuits that are "nonpolitical." Talisse's argument is that healthy democracies require citizens who are engaged and invested in noncivil spheres—where they have strong familial and friendship ties, where they are gainfully employed, and where they have hobbies and communal responsibilities that root them in networks of support and esteem. Likewise, Rosenblum (1998) stresses the necessity of "the experience of pluralism" (17); in her view, it is best for democracy if democratic citizens are involved in myriad social spheres, which force them to interact with those who differ from them along axes of race, gender, sexuality, class, talent, ideology, and partisan affiliation. It is the experience of pluralism that serves to foster the cross-cutting ties essential to democratic stability (Calhoun et al 2022: 237).

It is the noncivil spheres in modern society that provide such inputs, while enabling such cross-cutting interactions and ties. Consequently, if those "greedy institutions" demanding "fervent and total commitment" (Coser 1974: 4) are permitted to flourish, civic life will suffer. If citizens lack health (and healthcare), they will not be able to meaningfully participate in civic life (Schudson 2006). If citizens lack social integration, they will be more susceptible to demagogues (Gidron and Hall 2020). Likewise, if they are withheld recognition or esteem (Honneth 2014; Lamont 2019). And, of course, few barriers to democratic participation are as profound as poverty. These examples recall an insight contained in CS II—what we would formulate as a concern about the *domination* of one sphere by another (Walzer 1983). Although Alexander was right that the civil sphere is analytically independent of the market, it is nevertheless the case that the economic sphere can dominate, and thereby distort, other social spheres. And to the extent that these spheres provide essential inputs into the civil sphere, their incapacity may indirectly undermine democratic life.

In sum, we contend that, for all its virtues, CS III fails to adequately theorize and account for (1) the process of *democratic socialization*, (2) the nature and importance of *democratic dispositions*, (3) the diverse sites and character of *civic action* and *civic interaction orders*, and (4) the essential role of *noncivil goods (and spheres)* in maintaining the civil sphere. In the following we begin addressing these issues, by considering them as they relate to each of the following three noncivil spheres—the family, public schools, and voluntary associations/public life.

8 This is not to say that these engagements are apolitical, but rather that they can be pursued without reference to politics.

A CST Analysis of the Family, Public Schools, and Voluntary Associations/Public Life

The Family

Parsons (1955) writes, "the *human* personality is not 'born' but must be 'made'", and that it is families which serve as the "factories" that produce them (16). So, if something like a "democratic personality" (Greenstein 1965) exists, then these will be pre-eminently formed in democratic families. In saying this, we are not reducing the family to its role in reproducing democratic life. As Erikson (1964) reminds us, the role of the family is much broader than this; it serves to imbue children with all the necessary means—psychological, emotional, and social—to cope with, and navigate, the adult world. Thus, we agree that childhood socialization involves much more than teaching children to speak in the language of civil society (Alexander 2015 175), yet, clearly, in democratic societies, families play an inordinate role in *democratic socialization* (Davies 1965).

While it was certainly the case that the family functioned in aristocratic societies as an anti-civil force, legitimating patriarchal relations and sexist attitudes, processes of modernization and democratization have fundamentally changed this (Giddens 1991; Inglehart and Welzel 2005). Indeed, it is perfectly coherent to speak today of the "democratic family," the "democratic marriage," and "democratic parenting" (Sait 1940; Beasley 1953). To be sure, these institutional changes have been the result of processes of societalization (Alexander 2019)—of the civil sphere intruding into the family and restructuring it in line with democratic norms and ideals. But the result has been a genuine cultural-structural change, such that the family in democratic societies now plays a critical role in sustaining the civil order.

Consider, first, when and how children are introduced to the discourse of liberty, which sacralizes the ideals of self-control, rationality, autonomy, and sanity, while polluting their opposites. We would argue that these values become "real" for the child first and foremost through their embodiment by their parents and caregivers (Easton and Hess 1962). Thus, just as Mead (1934) theorized that children develop a self through role-taking, we can say that the child first develops her "civic self" by taking on the perspective and roles of her parental authorities. In this way, the child's first "civil heroes" will likely be the significant others in her life—be they her parents, her teacher, or a local authority figure (Fine 2019). Furthermore, it is also within the family where children first learn the meaning of "civil" relationships; open, trusting, and truthful relations will be those modeled by their guardians and upheld (or not) by adult authorities. As, too, will civil interaction norms. Civil inclusion at the macro-level is complemented by inclusion at the interactional level, what Colomy and Brown term "interactional citizenship … a set of vague and diffuse but vitally felt expectations and obligations that pertain to interactional displays of respect, regard and dignity for the person" (Colomy and Brown 1996: 376; cf. Brownlee 2020). We would argue that it is within the family that children

first become acquainted with such democratic norms of interaction. These are more than simply interactional norms, they provide entrance into broader codes and rituals of democratic engagement (Cahill 1987). By observing parents and caregivers interacting with strangers, children learn that civility demands "equal, open, tolerant, nonviolent, and inclusive manners of communication and styles of self-governing" (Xu 2022, 10) and are thus initiated into the civil interaction order. Finally, it is in the family where democratic dispositions and competencies are first cultivated (if not fully realized). Children develop the habit of deliberating publicly and learn the "art of listening" (Xu 2022) at the dinner table, they may be taught by their democrat parents to speak up and advocate for their interests, and they learn to cooperate with siblings and playmates. In countless moments over the course of childhood, children develop the attitudes, skills, and character that enable them, when older, to participate in the civil sphere (Gutman 1987: 50).

Democracy presupposes an obedience to law coupled with a critical stance toward authority, and a valuing of independence and rational deliberation (Alexander 2006). These are core features of democratic socialization, and they contrast markedly with the socialization patterns typical of authoritarian societies. Elucidating the latter, Greenstein (1965) lists the following: rigid discipline, conditional affection dependent upon approved behavior, strict parental authority, deference toward superiors, domination of subordinates, the prizing of strength and the punishing of weakness. Of course, CST would stress that the codes of civil society can be attached to any number of behaviors (e.g., many contemporary authoritarians traffic in the language of democracy (Mounk 2018)). While true, the democratic family strives to embody the "best" in democratic society—i.e., honesty, openness, trusting, cooperation, participation, independence, and equality. Similarly, we can contrast the democratic marriage or partnership, premised upon the autonomy and equality of each partner, with that typical of authoritarian societies, where traditional gender hierarchies more forcefully structure relations and interactions (Sait 1940). And here again, empirical evidence suggests that genuine changes have taken place within the family in the wake of democratization (Giddens 1991).

All of this lends credence to Durkheim's (2003) insight that the family is "the political society in miniature" (26). A democratic society, therefore, will not last long without democratic families. If parents do not socialize their children to sacralize civil motives, relations, and institutions, then civil performances have difficulty fusing. If children do not develop the democratic dispositions undergirding civil relations and interactions, then civic life will hollow-out. And if young people are not encouraged by their parents to reflect, deliberate, and show respect for those with whom they disagree, then the prospects of the civil sphere will be impoverished.

All of this said, Alexander is correct that the family is not chiefly, or even primarily, a "civil" institution. The first language of the domestic sphere is expressive, affective, intimate, and self-oriented (Watts 2022). The interactional practices and norms of family life generally serve to secure close bonds of

affection, loving relations, romantic ties, and self-realization. Parental authority can conflict with rational-legal authority. The partiality and expressive ethic inherent to family life can sit in tension with the impartiality and self-discipline demanded by the civil sphere. The private goods of family life are not those of public life. The family, then, is a *hybrid* institution (Rosenblum 1998). On one hand, it provides essential noncivil goods—from nurture and loving relations to emotional and material support. On the other, it plays critical "civil" functions, making the discourse of civil society meaningful and real, inculcating in citizens democratic dispositions, and acclimating them to democratic mores. In turn, we do not deny the tension that can, and does, characterize the boundaries separating the family from the civil sphere. However, we insist that both the noncivil and civil inputs the family provides are crucial to a robust ad vibrant civil sphere, and so also to democratic life.

Public Schools

In a response to Honneth's contention that CST errs in overlooking the civil functions of schools, Alexander (2015) remarks, "education is of the greatest importance to maintaining a democratic society, but education is not, in itself, a civil institution" (175). Technically speaking, we have no qualms with this statement; if we define "civil" as Alexander does, it is plainly true. But it is worth asking: if education really is "of the greatest importance to maintaining a democratic society" then should we really exclude it from a sociological account of democratic life?

Public education, like the family, is a hybrid institution, oriented to multiple, and indeed, competing social goods. This is made clear in Parsons's (1964) analysis of the school class, which he describes as "an agency of socialization and allocation" (129). For Parsons, an important function of the schooling system is to prepare children and adolescents for their future roles in the modern economy, by socializing them into the value patterns of society, providing them intellectual and vocational training, and then channeling them into the occupational structure (130). In this way, education serves the economic sphere by providing it with human capital in the form of able workers and employers. Incidentally, in this capacity the school also functions as a system of stratification, thereby producing and reproducing various forms of inequality (Bourdieu 1984).

However, at the same time as the education system functions as a "sorting machine" (Domina et al. 2017), it also functions, Parsons (1964) contends, as a source of socialization into "responsible citizenship." That is, it's in the school class where young people hone the democratic dispositions they first learned in their families, while also broadening their scope: "Such things as respect for the teacher, consideration and co-cooperativeness in relation to fellow-pupils, and good 'work-habits' are the fundamentals, leading on to capacity for 'leadership' and 'initiative' (Parsons 1964: 137). Core to social reproduction, education, then, has both economic and civic functions. As Smelser (1985) writes,

"education as a process can never be a purely cognitive process, but it also inevitably involves the exposure to cultural values, ideals, heroes, and villains, as well as normative expectations relating to matters such as personal ambition, attitudes and behavior toward authorities, cooperative behavior, and so on" (116). It's worth noting that the view that the education system plays a vital role in democratic socialization is far from novel. For instance, one finds it championed by both Dewey and Durkheim (see Dill 2007). For the former, a critical aim of public education is to prepare young people for public life, by habituating them to cooperating, deliberating, and critical thought. For the latter, education is a profoundly moral task, oriented to socializing children into the civic traditions of the nation, fostering the emotional bases of democratic solidarity, and inculcating within students a universalist moral orientation (Cladis 2005). Nor have these ideas been exclusive to intellectuals. As Kymlicka (2001) reminds us, "the need to create a knowledgeable and responsible citizenry was one of the major reasons for establishing a public school system, and for making education mandatory" (293). So, while it might be the case that the primary function of public schools is not "civil," it is nevertheless the case that "a basic task of schooling is to prepare each new generation for their responsibilities as citizens" (293).

It might be argued that the school cannot, and ought not, be expected to accomplish "civil" ends, or that "civic education" is, at most, a minor component of the educational process. Yet, as Macedo (2004) insightfully retorts:

> Civic education is inseparable from education: no teacher could run a classroom, no principal could run a school, without taking a stand on a wide range of civic values and moral and political virtues. How could you conduct a classroom without taking a stand on gender equality? Are you going to treat boys and girls the same or not? Are you going to treat all religions in a tolerant manner? Do you care equally about the education of rich kids and poor kids? It would be nothing short of bizarre for schools to confine themselves to promoting only 'academic' or 'intellectual' virtues while leaving aside democratic virtues such as basic equality of concern and respect for all people. Important moral and political values constrain and shape the way we conceive of and advance the intellectual enterprise. (14)

Macedo reminds us that, just as democracy has reshaped the family, so, too has it reshaped the education system. And just as the democratic family facilitates democratic life, so, too, does democratic education (Gutmann 1987). For instance, by inculcating in students democratic dispositions, democratic education functions to expand the partial loyalties and primordial ties fostered in the family (Parsons 1955: 122). By enforcing and rewarding civility, tolerance, and mutual respect in interactions, schools habituate students to civic interaction orders. Democratic schools implicitly and explicitly sacralize the civil values of autonomy, independence, and rationality while polluting their opposites (Kymlicka 2001, 309). Classrooms provide opportunities to practice and hone the skills and habits of deliberation (Callan 1997). Students are

taught the histories of local and global "civil heroes" and "anticivil villains," developing admiration for the former and antipathy for the latter (Hess and Easton 1962; Watts 2025). Students internalize the "institutional habitus" of their school culture, coming to feel and enact specific modes of incorporation (Tajic and Lund 2022; Lund 2015). And in the process, they gradually develop a "common civic identity" (Macedo 2000: 231), which serves as the emotional and symbolic basis for civil solidarity.

Of course, all of this will take place in a particular cultural context, shaped by national, regional, and local traditions, and thus will take different forms across time and space. Moreover, just as CST offers an ideal-typical account of the democratic functions of the regulative and communicative institutions of the civil sphere, so, too, are we providing an ideal-typical account of the "civil" contributions of education. Furthermore, none of what we have said changes the fact that schools can, and do, function simultaneously as sources of human capital, as sorting machines, as incubators of academic excellence, and as generators of civic virtue. As we have argued, education is a hybrid institution, a site of diverse values and ends. Within any given school one is as likely to find the narrow pursuit of economic self-interest or the disinterested quest for truth, as the universalist ambition for civil solidarity. To this extent, it is true that schools are not "civil" institutions. Yet, it remains the case that in a healthy democracy, schools will serve "as mediators of civil sphere values" (Tajic and Lund 2022), thereby shoring up the civil sphere.

Associational Life

Alexander's critique of the imprecision and diffuseness of CS I remains invaluable. CST and civic action theorists have made evident the deficiencies in an account of civil society that treats all voluntary associations as equally "civil." Nevertheless, there are insights contained in CS I that ought not be neglected. We can think of these as twofold: first, CS I was justifiably concerned not merely about the *quality* of civic discourse, action, sociability, and public life, but also their *quantity*. Second, CS I rightly underscored the noncivil goods, fostered neither by the family nor state institutions, that contributed to a robust democratic culture. Let us take these in turn.

CST and civic action theorists are chiefly interested in probing the *quality* of "civil" discourse and performance and "civic" action (Alexander 2006; Lichterman and Eliasoph 2014). By contrast, in *Bowling Alone*, Putnam (2000) was mostly concerned with tracking the *quantitative* decline in social capital and civic engagement. When understood in this way, not only does it seem possible to reconcile these programs, but it becomes desirable to. The reason is that it seems to us important (leaving aside the methodological challenges it poses) to ask whether "civil" associations, as conceived by CST, or "civic action" as conceived by civic action theorists, are more or less common than they once were, and to then investigate what the sources of these quantitative changes might be. Or, framed differently: it may be that civic associational life

is high in quality, but if it is minimal in quantity, restricted to a tiny number of citizens, we may need to worry.

So, while communitarian and civic republican concerns about the corrosive effects of individualism on civic and public life may be overstated, they cannot be dismissed out of hand (Durkheim 2003; Calhoun et al 2022). Tocqueville (1998) was surely right that individualism can undermine democratic life, insofar as it leads citizens to turn inward, and disregard their civic responsibilities. Still, whether "civic life" has precipitously declined or not remains an open question, the answer to which will depend on how one defines "civic." Moreover, it remains the case that scholars such as Putnam ignored the rich varieties of civic action (Schudson 2006). In turn, a revised account of civil society must be much more sensitive to the diversity of both civic life and civic space.

One emerging line of inquiry follows Goffman (1963) in conceiving of public space and interactions between strangers as entailing profoundly civil dimensions (Horgan et al. 2020; Horgan 2020). As we noted above, civil inclusion at the macro-level has been complemented by inclusion at the interactional level (Colomy and Brown 1996)—a fact that becomes apparent when civil interactions break down. Indeed, "[i]t is the absence of democracy in everyday life that makes daily interactions unbearable" (Rosenblum 1998, 351). Democratic citizens expect to be treated with equal dignity in public space, such that a violation of the sacred norm of civility stirs up immense emotional distress and anger (Horgan 2020; 2025). Similarly, civil sociability among strangers may also provide for a diffuse sense of belonging (Horgan et al 2020; Liinamaa et al 2021). There is an important sense, then, in which face-to-face interactions with strangers can serve to fortify the civil bond or tragically weaken it. A key problem with CS I, then, was that in conflating civil society with voluntary associations, many civil dimensions of public life were overlooked.

The most important feature of CS I, however, was its appreciation for the noncivil goods that noncivil spheres such as the family, hobby groups, sports clubs, social networks, artistic communities, religious organizations, charities, professional societies, and associational life in general contribute to democracy. For instance, while Putnam's (2000) famous distinction between "bonding" and "bridging" social capitals has been criticized on the grounds that neither type has been proven to *directly* contribute to civic life, and both have been found in some cases to threaten civility (Chambers and Kopstein 2001), it is nevertheless the case that both types of social capital can, and often do, contribute *indirectly* to democratic social life.

First, associations that generate *bonding* social capital provide citizens with a host of noncivil goods, including camaraderie, community, responsibilities, purpose, social support, and emotional connection (Kaplan 2018). In this way, we could say that a core function of noncivil spheres is to stave off anomie (Durkheim 2002). A society where many suffer from social isolation or lack close friendships and social ties is not a healthy democracy. Citizens in this condition are more likely to lose faith in democratic institutions, and thus become more open to authoritarian appeals (Norris and Inglehart 2019; Gidron and Hall

2017). Accordingly, although they may not be expressly "civil," noncivil associations that generate bonding social capital can be said to function as "generative institutions" (Watts 2022) which provide democratic citizens with the resources—psychological, social, and emotional—to productively participate in the civil sphere. Rosenblum (1998) observes, "One experience of associational life can offset others. Associations can compensate for deficits and deprivations suffered outside. When they are not indirect schools of virtue, they may provide a sort of reparation" (350). Of course, it is true that not all voluntary associations of this kind will contribute to the culture of democracy (and some may threaten it), but Putnam and other neo-Tocquevillians' are right that a society wholly lacking in bonding social capital, where citizens lack close ties to others, is unlikely to foster a healthy democratic culture (Hall and Lamont 2013).

Second, Putnam's notion of *bridging* social capital spoke to the importance of broad social networks that facilitate interaction, cooperation, and communication between citizens. Here, too, the problem is that bridging social capital is not in itself "civil." Yet a crucial insight nevertheless remains—that is, the existence of social networks that cut across axes of difference is tremendously important for stabilizing the civil sphere (Talisse 2019; Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor 2022). As Alexander (2021) notes, the civil sphere relies upon the maintenance of "a vital center" that ensures that opposing civil groups remain committed to the basic rules and institutions of democratic life. One of the ways that this vital center is secured is through the existence of those cross-cutting allegiances and overlapping concerns across various noncivil spheres that enable "enemies" to become "frenemies" (Alexander 2013: 2). It is through sharing nonpolitical activities, identities, and investments that adversaries in the civil sphere become willing to accept the legitimacy of the democratic process (Xu 2022: 104). Furthermore, although true that the size and complexity of modern society ensures that core-groups may "rarely encounter out-groups directly" (Alexander 2006: 421), supposing that the few interactions citizens have with those different from them are inconsequential is a mistake. On the contrary, we contend contact between diverse citizens plays a crucial role in expanding or contracting civil solidarity (Allport 1954). These ties need not be sustained or thickened over time, merely sharing space in conflict-free ways is a good in itself (Anderson 2011). When core-group members have positive and civil interactions with members of out-groups, this can significantly reshape their civic imaginaries (Mounk 2022). Indeed, it is for this reason that the concept of bridging social capital is useful, as it points to the necessity of social ties that "bridge" individuals and groups with different identities and commitments (Rosenblum 1998).

Ultimately, what our expansive account of civil society strives to foreground are the myriad noncivil goods that sustain democratic social life (Talisse 2019). As our opening thought experiment implied, a society where none but the civil sphere is thriving is, paradoxically, not a healthy democracy. For a strong democratic society is one where families, schools, associational life are providing the "civil" and "noncivil" inputs that, in subtle yet essential ways, undergird civil solidarity.

American Democracy: A Case Study in Democratic Degeneration

We have argued that CS III needs updating, more specifically, that it must be expanded to include the civil and noncivil inputs upon which the civil sphere relies (what we call CS IV). Thus far we have made our case in analytic terms; in our view, democracy is at its best when its noncivil spheres like the family, the education system, and associational life are doing their civil and noncivil jobs, as it were. In this final section we strengthen our case by examining the empirical state of these spheres in contemporary America. We argue that an important source of the democratic degeneration taking place in America is the result of the domination and corrosion of these noncivil spheres. That is, American democracy is suffering because these noncivil spheres have been unable to do their jobs. This is not the place to offer a comprehensive account of the ills of American democracy, of course. So, we merely focus on what we take to be two key pathologies, which have had sizeable effects on American social and civic life—economic inequality and political polarization.

A large body of empirical evidence makes clear that over the last few decades inequality has risen dramatically, especially in the US (Piketty 2014). While growing inequality has multiple causes, analysts agree that a central source was an ideological-cum-policy embrace of neoliberalism, beginning with the election of Reagan (Harvey 2005; Savage 2021). From a cultural sociological perspective, neoliberalism can be understood as the view that the cultural and moral logic of the market should govern all other spheres (Lerch et al. 2021); it entails domination by the economic sphere (Watts 2024). Decades of neoliberal reforms have not only fuelled a massive gap separating the rich and poor, but also wage stagnation and increased economic precarity for the middle classes, a hollowing out of social services, including public education and infrastructure, a decrease in social mobility, steep declines in union membership, and the de-skilling of both blue- and white-collar jobs (Lind 2020; Leonhardt 2023). In these ways and more (and just as advocates of CS II would predict), the tyranny of the market has had profound effects on other social spheres, destabilizing and weakening personal, social, political, and even economic life for all but the wealthy.

In parallel with the mounting economic inequality wrought by neoliberalism, America has witnessed a remarkable surge in political polarization over the last half-century or so (Klein 2020). Not only do Democrats and Republicans tend to hold radically opposing ideological positions on most social issues (Abramovitz 2022), but they hold increasingly hostile views of each other (Abramovitz and Webster 2018). Summarizing the literature on affective polarization, Iyengar et al. (2019) write, "Democrats and Republicans both say that the other party's members are hypocritical, selfish, and closed-minded, and they are unwilling to socialize across party lines, or even to partner with opponents in a variety of other activities" (130). Political polarization has increased in most developed democracies, but America's levels of negative partisanship remain exceptional (Garzia et al. 2023: 3). One of the reasons for this,

Baldassari and Gelman (2008) explain, is because of an upsurge in partisan alignment. Not long ago, average Democrats and Republicans shared much in common, both ideologically and demographically. Today, partisans are divided not only by ideology, but also geography, race, education, religious affiliation, news consumption, workplace, cultural taste, and marital habits (Abramovitz and McCoy 2019; Iyengar et al. 2019). In other words, Democrats and Republicans have increasingly self-sorted, such that they inhabit discrete partisan lifeworlds. What is more, empirical studies suggest that one's political identity commonly dictates one's activities and investments across nearly all social spheres (Finkel et al. 2020; Lee and Bearman 2020; Revers forthcoming).

How have economic inequality and political polarization affected the non-civil spheres of the family, the school, and associational life? As Americans have grown more economically unequal, they have led much more economically segregated lives (Owens 2016). Indeed, income inequality is an important cause of the urban and rural divide (Florida 2018; Luca et al. 2023), as well as rising neighborhood segregation on the basis of class. Mijs and Roe (2021) observe, "As income inequality in the United States increased by 15% over the 1970–2010 period, inequalities among neighborhoods in these cities grew by about 40%" (6). One of the consequences of neighbourhood segregation has been a decline in cross-class interactions and ties; rich Americans rarely have sustained encounters or relations with those who belong to a different social class. A tragic irony of this fact is that the wealthy tend to "underestimate the extent of inequality in their society and overstate its meritocratic nature" (Mijs and Roe 2021: 11). And we would add that economic segregation drastically diminishes opportunities for the rich and poor to forge civil ties. It is also the case that the declining economic fortunes of the white working-classes have played more than a small part in fuelling the sense of grievance and resentment that has been essential to the electoral success of Donald Trump (Hochschild 2016; Norris and Inglehart 2019).

Meanwhile, partisan sorting has accompanied economic sorting; not only are neighborhoods more economically homogeneous, but they are also more politically homogeneous (Bishop 2008). As a result, families now exist in disparate partisan bubbles—with "red" parents socializing their children amongst like-minded others, and "blue" parents doing the same (Elder and Greene 2016). Finkel et al. (2020) contend that levels of polarization have normalized what they call "political sectarianism," which entails a tendency to view partisan rivals as essentially alien to oneself, a dislike and distrust of opposing partisans, and the propensity to view partisan rivals as immoral or evil (533). It seems reasonable to suggest that, if political sectarianism is increasingly the norm, then children are likely to be socialized to share the extreme negative partisanship of their parents. So, while young Americans are still socialized to view the values of civil society as sacred, they are simultaneously taught to restrict civil solidarity to partisan allies.

Just as the family has been profoundly reshaped by inequality and polarization, so, too, has the education system. Because the US public school system

is funded by local property taxes, economic and residential segregation fuels educational segregation (Mijs and Rose 2021: 8). Thus, not only do children of the wealthy receive more educational resources, but educational segregation makes it so that they will be less likely to form friendships or social ties with those of a lower-class background. What is more, with the decline of civic education (Mirel 2002), and the growing emphasis on meritocratic measures of success (Lamont 2019), many schools have abnegated their civil functions in favour of their latent function as sorting machines and engines of inequality. Summarizing these trends, Mjis and Roe (2021) write, "Increasing educational homophily in modern America is driving a wedge between the educated and the uneducated, with similar implications for income and wealth, which are closely correlated to educational attainment" (4). This is not to deny that public schools continue to provide vital "civil" inputs, rather it is to stress that the highly stratified character of the American education system is an important source of the civil degeneration that has taken place in recent years (Markovits 2019; Brooks 2024).

Finally, it should come as no surprise that associational life has been restructured along partisan lines. Political sectarianism has meant that fewer Americans engage in leisure, hobbies, work, worship, or volunteer alongside either those of a different income bracket or partisan affiliation (Campbell et al 2018; Lee and Bearman 2020). Talisse (2019) describes this as the "political saturation of social space" (4)—i.e., a state where partisan interests and investments colour one's activities in all social spheres. As a result, citizens have few if any cross-cutting ties or positive exposure to partisan rivals. The primary salve against the death spiral of affective polarization is to have a wide range of everyday interactions, not just with intimates and colleagues, but also with those with whom we may share little else (Törnberg 2022). And because perceptions of partisan rivals are increasingly filtered through news and social media, the consumption of which is guided by partisanship, many Americans inhabit "polarizing echo chambers" (Finkel et al. 2020: 534), thus becoming more entrenched in their partisan beliefs (Sunstein 2002). What this means is that, far from inculcating within citizens a broad commitment to civil values, solidarity, and the maintenance of a vital center, the segregated character of associational life now works to hinder cross-class ties while emboldening partisan hostility (Talisse 2019; Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor 2022).

It might be objected that the civil sphere has always been, and will always be, a site of immense contestation, agonism, and even polarization. This is of course true. As Alexander (2015) reminds us, because the discourse of civil society is binary—where a range of distinctions (open/secretive, trusting/suspicious, altruistic/greedy, etc) tethered to an overarching binary of sacred and profane shape democratic discourse (Alexander 2006: 53-67; Alexander and Smith 2001)—it is perfectly normal for partisan rivals to paint one another in anti-civil terms. Indeed, this is par for the course in democratic life (Alexander 2006: 129). Nevertheless, there are good reasons to think that the current levels of inequality and polarization make today's situation unique—or better

yet, much more akin to the sorry state of American democracy that existed in the lead up to the Civil War. As Alexander notes, the difficulty that America faced in this period was that the north and south inhabited largely distinct civil spheres. What is more, they "came to see each other as irredeemably anti-civil, as enemies who must be physically destroyed if the northern and southern civil spheres were to be preserved" (Alexander 2019: 23). Indeed, America in this period was so divided that there existed next to nil civil solidarity across the north and south. Although perhaps not quite as extreme, American democracy today holds perilous resembles. Abramovitz (2022) remarks,

> a growing share of Americans have come to see politics as a form of warfare, with elections viewed as contests between the forces of good and evil. Partisans increasingly view supporters of the opposing party not as opponents but as enemies: bad actors who want to inflict harm on the nation and who will stop at nothing to achieve their goals. (646)

The extreme levels of inequality and polarization in contemporary America are grave threats to the civil sphere because they create conditions where partisans become willing to subvert democratic norms and institutions to prevent their rivals from gaining power. It is significant that in recent years democracies have experienced backsliding, not through military coups, but instead through the ballot box (Gandhi 2018). What this suggests is that, in highly unequal and polarized societies, where economic resentment and negative partisanship are immense, citizens become increasingly willing to support politicians who disregard or even violate democratic norms and institutions, provided they share their partisan identity (Finkel et al. 2020). In such conditions the vital center cannot hold, as defeating one's anti-civil enemies is perceived as a matter of life and death, and thus far more important than respecting the democratic rules of the game (Graham and Svolik 2020). As Svolik (2019) summarizes, "Polarization ... presents aspiring authoritarians with a structural opportunity: They can undermine democracy and get away with it" (Svolik 2019: 24).

Conclusion

When Alexander devised CS III, it made sense to prioritize the analytic and empirical autonomy of the civil sphere, at the expense of the noncivil spheres which merely provide facilitating inputs. However, it is time for CST scholars to expand our analytic purview to include the noncivil components of democratic social life. Those noncivil spheres that provide facilitating inputs also provide *attenuating inputs* and *impeding inputs* that may modify the civil sphere, perhaps even weakening possibilities for its expansion. As the case of American democracy makes clear, without the vital civil *and* noncivil contributions of families, public schools, and associational life, democracy can neither thrive nor survive. What happens in these noncivil spheres profoundly shapes possibilities for enhancing the civil sphere. Extreme inequality and polarization have corroded and corrupted these noncivil spheres in ways that

have undermined their capacity to provide the goods which scaffold the civil sphere. CST scholars must revise our conception of civil society so as to provide a more thorough account and properly theorize these processes.

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Galen Vats i Mervin Horgan

Građansko društvo IV: Demokratska solidarnost i ne-građanska potpora građanskoj sferi

Apstrakt

Jedna od ključnih karakteristika onoga što Aleksander naziva Građanskim društvom III je njegova analitička i empirijska odvojenost od navodno ne-građanskih sfera, kao što su porodica, škola i udruženja koja nemaju javnu komunikativnu nameru, a koja čine GD I. Iako je ovo bilo ključno za razvoj teorije građanske sfere kao istraživačkog programa, sa odvajanjem i razgraničavanjem građanske sfere, teoretičari građanske sfere mogu propustiti ključne uvide koje je donelo Građansko društvo I u pogledu uzajamne međuzavisnosti različitih sfera. Iako građanski kodovi, institucije i interakcijske prakse možda imaju svoje „prirodno" mesto u građanskoj sferi, njihova emocionalna i normativna snaga, kao i njihov opstanak tokom vremena,

zavise od njihove pomoćne institucionalizacije u ne-civilnim sferama. Porodice su ključne za *demokratsku socijalizaciju*. Škole neguju *demokratske dispozicije* kroz formiranje građana, uvodeći učenike u demokratske tradicije svoje nacije. I kroz *građanske akcije* i *građanske interakcijske poretke* dovode se u pitanje predrasude i građani postaju otvoreni za nove oblike uključivanja. Koristeći slučaj savremene američke demokratske kulture, analiziramo radove o političkoj polarizaciji i opadanju socijalnog kapitala u SAD-u, i tvrdimo da rastuće neslaganje karakteristično za građansku sferu savremene Amerike delimično proizilazi iz ne-civilnih sfera. To znači da erozija demokratske solidarnosti i osnovnih normi uljudnosti potiče iz demokratskih deficita u tim ne-civilnim sferama koje treba da podržavaju građansku sferu.

Ključne reči: teorija građanske sfere, građansko društvo, demokratska solidarnost, kulturna sociologija, građansko delanje

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MEMBERSHIP, MIGRATION, AND INCLUSION IN THE CIVIL SPHERE[1]

ABSTRACT
In this article, we explore the intersection of migration, membership, and inclusion through Civil Sphere Theory (CST), the most powerful theory currently available for explaining social solidarity in modern, differentiated societies. While CST has amply proven its worth by deepening our understanding of social solidarity and civil repair within established polities, it has insufficiently addressed the boundaries that define inclusion and exclusion in the context of migration. We open the article by reconceptualizing immigration as the crossing of geographical, political, and symbolic boundaries. This perspective shifts the focus from linear processes of inclusion to the dynamic interplay between national membership, citizenship, and the civil sphere. Drawing on CST's nuanced approach to cultural and social boundaries, the paper makes explicit how in the contemporary world, national and civil memberships are tightly coupled. Concerning migration, the civil sphere must consequently mediate between the formal inclusivity of liberal-democratic ideals and the bounded character of national belonging. We further advance a critique of CST's limited attention to citizenship, emphasizing how citizenship remains a key conduit for universalizing national membership. To conclude, we identify the engine of potential membership change in the tension between social and symbolic boundaries embedded in differentiated societies. This approach bridges migration studies and cultural sociology, providing some preliminary insights into the mechanisms involved in civil incorporation.

KEYWORDS
sphere, democracy, inclusion, membership, migration, nation-state, solidarity

1 The ideas expressed in this paper have been tested at the CST conference in Heidelberg in October 2023 and at the conference *Working towards Meaning Together: Jeffrey Alexander's Legacy for Sociology* held at Yale in October 2024. We are grateful for the comments received on both occasions. We also wish to thank Martina Cvajner, Bernadette Nadya Jaworsky and two anonymous reviewers for their comments. Giuseppe Sciortino acknowledges the contribution of the PRIN project *The Children of Immigrants Have Grown Up, financed from the European Union - Next Generation EU, Missione 4 Componente 2 CUP E53D23010360006.*

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Introduction

We believe Civil Sphere Theory (CST) provides the most powerful theory currently available for explaining social solidarity in modern, differentiated societies. It represents an important resource for scholars interested in issues of inclusion, incorporation, and civil repair. It offers a conceptual framework able to cover both expansions and contractions of civil solidarity in democratic states. In its current form, however, CST suffers from a theoretical limitation: it does not adequately define the conditions for being considered, no matter how minimally, a member of the civil sphere. Why are certain actors considered legitimate members of the civil sphere, while others are excluded? How is membership in the civil sphere related to membership in other forms of universalizing solidarities? How and why do the established boundaries of the civil sphere change, becoming strengthened or blurred? To what degree does the civil sphere depend on the political institution of the nation-state? Although the last decade has seen strong developments in the literature on CST (Kivisto and Sciortino 2023), researchers have examined civil repair *vertically*, with the processes moving (or failing to move) individuals or groups from marginalized, probationary, or second-class status to full, bona fide membership. Less attention has been paid to the *horizontal* processes of inclusion (and exclusion), the processes turning outsiders into insiders (and unfortunately sometimes vice versa). The latter processes, however, are of fundamental importance for the study of international migration, and particularly of the alchemical process through which former "aliens" may become (or fail to become) part of the body politic and, in due course, civil actors. Existing civil spheres are constantly challenged and strained by the social consequences of human mobility across political boundaries. How do the symbolic codes of the civil sphere shape the distinctions between national and alien, native and foreigner? Do non-members, as opposed to second-class members, still invoke the positive polarities of these codes and upon which grounds?

In the following pages, we provide preliminary explanations of and responses to these queries. We begin by reviewing the current migratory situation, defined as a contrast between a growing potential for mobility and a political system differentiated segmentally in nation states. As a full-fledged civil sphere exists only in (at least somewhat) democratic nation states, we suggest that civil membership is tightly coupled with national belonging. Although the existence of more (geographically) extensive imaginations must be acknowledged, they can have noticeable consequences only when refracted within some national civil sphere, as we discuss in Part 2.[2] We subsequently criticize CST's

2 Similar considerations apply to the much-studied phenomenon of migration-based transnationalism and diasporas. While transnational networks are sometimes culturally and structurally important in the life of many groups of migrants, their function is based only on familial or local solidarities. When they acquire a civil potential, it is through an explicit linkage with a specific national civil sphere. Similar considerations apply to the more politically inclined phenomenon of contemporary 'diasporas.' It should

limited attention to citizenship, which we see as a major conduit for translating civil solidarity institutionally. National citizenship also plays a central role in negotiating migrants' rights and duties, defining enduring criteria of inclusion and exclusion, as seen in Part 3. Having clarified the connection between nation, citizenship and civil membership, we offer a view of migration as a boundary-crossing phenomenon. We suggest migration processes cannot be conceptualized in terms of a single boundary crossing. Given the differentiated structures of contemporary society, migrant trajectories interact with a complex array of social structures. In Part 4, we argue that CST, thanks to its sophisticated understanding of the relationship between cultural and social boundaries and its non-naturalistic understanding of membership, is in a favorable position to build upon existing research on boundaries while offering a more nuanced account.

World Society, Nation States, Migration, and Boundaries: A Primer

To start our analysis, we must summarize some of the basic features of the modern social order that shape the relations between social, political, and civil memberships. Although globalization is an increasingly maligned word, there are few doubts that the only cogent understanding of contemporary "society" – the encompassing social system that includes all communications and constitutes meaningful horizons for any further communication – is in terms of a world society (Luhmann 1975, Luhmann 1982). Sustained by the powerful development of market structures, media systems, and logistic technologies, the connections between (and across) the different regions of the world have strengthened enormously in a few centuries, a relatively short span of time (Rosenberg 2012, Loth, Zeiler et al. 2014).

The global reach of communication, moving resources, ties, and information, as well as images of the good life, has direct consequences for the increased *potential* mobility of human populations over long distances (Hoerder 2002). To recognize the existence of a global set of connections, however, does not imply the existence of unifying political structures, even less of a shared cosmopolitan consciousness, not to mention solidarity. World society, for the time being, appears as an anarchical set of differentiated spheres, sectors, institutions (and structures of meaning, such as civil spheres) that operate increasingly according to their own logic and structure, each of them establishing their own territorial reference. "Global" issues, claims, and mobilizations always appear refracted through the functioning of these spheres, as soon as they are made differentially meaningful by their specialized codes.

In contrast to most other social systems which differentiate functionally, the international political system differentiates segmentally, generating an

never be forgotten that their structural bases – legislation on double citizenship, voting rights for emigrants, fundraising for opposition parties, etc. – are firmly rooted in the national legislation in the country of origin.

increasing set of formally equal sovereign nation states, each of them controlling a well-defined slice of the landmass. Although a relatively recent invention, the nation state is the leading political form on the planet (Poggi 1991).[3] The segmentary nature of the political system has direct consequences for migration, as nation states depend existentially for their operations on a geographical definition of their boundaries. Nation states, moreover, legitimate themselves claiming, with varying degrees of good faith, to exist for the purpose of ensuring the rights of their subjects or citizens. States thus need a precise definition of those that should be counted as part of their population. They also justify their existence with the need to protect and enhance the reproduction of a distinctive social and cultural group (a "people;" a "nation") that, albeit internally diverse and segmented, stretches from a common past far into the future. No matter how recent, or even shaky, the empirical evidence for such collective projection is, those who underestimate the power of the national imagination do so at their own peril. National membership is one of the major modern templates – if not *the* major one – for imagining the functioning of broader solidarities (Greenfeld 1992). From these three built-in features of nation states, the three main dividing lines defining migration in the contemporary world emerge. Migrants must have access to the territory crossing a political border,[4] they (very often) must face the consequences of belonging to a different polity, and they must negotiate their differences and chances of inclusion in a political community that is nearly always marked by a specific ethnic and cultural understanding of membership.

In an ideal world, none of these dividing lines represent an unsurmountable problem, although resolving them could require substantial investments and efforts. The reality, of course, is rather different. World society, as related to human mobility, is built on a two-pronged postulate: that, at the same time, (a) capital, goods, services, information, and ideas (including Taylor Swift's grudge against her past boyfriends) should – and indeed do – circulate as a matter of course across all political boundaries, but (b) nationality, geographical residence, and civil membership should nonetheless coincide. Unfortunately, the frantic economic development made possible in the last two centuries by (a) makes (b) increasingly unlikely. As the benefits of economic and political

3 Forty-two states were members of the League of Nations at its founding in 1920. Fifty-one states were members of the United Nations in 1945. Currently, 192 states are members of the same organization. Except for the Russian Federation, empires have largely disappeared. Other once popular political forms – such as border marches or galactic polities - have receded into remote memory.

4 The current definition of international migration implies the crossing of a state border. The distinction between international and internal migration is not always so sharp. There are many cases in which "internal" migration is heavily controlled and regulated. The regulation of domestic travel and resettlement through a system of internal passports and residence permits was a key feature of everyday life in the USSR, shaping the life chances of most subjects (Light 2012). The Hukou household registration system in contemporary China establishes an effective loss of civil and social rights for millions of internal migrants moving to industrializing cities (Chan 2018).

development are allocated unequally, being in the territory of one state rather than another has acquired a growing – and extraordinary in historical terms – significance for the life chances of individuals and households.[5] As if this fact were not enough, the Arendtian "right to have rights" is largely restricted to a relatively small number of (somewhat) liberal-democratic states (Arendt 1949). If membership in those polities is impossible, being physically present in their territory is usually the second-best option. The incentives to move towards more attractive destinations are consequently substantial, making the embedded violation of (b) more evident.[6] Unsurprisingly, migrants are often what Mary Douglas (1966) would call "matter out of place." Some migrants may be actively recruited, in what is today called the global race for talent. Many others are occasionally deemed necessary, but rarely welcomed (Zolberg 1987). All, however, are suspected, at least occasionally, of being potentially polluting.

If the number of migrants in the world population is quite low, the reason is that "destination countries" are usually quite effective in restricting access (Zolberg 1999). The public sphere of developed countries is consequently rooted in forms of systematic exclusion. At the same time, this exclusion is never complete. The borders of nation states are always (slightly) porous. Many are refused, but some are called. Here, a second phenomenon of particular importance for the civil sphere may be observed. Among destination countries, migration is a matter of concern primarily for (somewhat) liberal-democratic states than for authoritarian regimes. In fact, the latter – with members of the Gulf Cooperation Council the paradigmatic case – are able to manage, through a highly discriminatory regime, the presence of high numbers – sometimes *extremely* high numbers – of foreign workers without any noticeable discomfort among the native population. This is because those foreign workers are forced to live separate lives apart from locals. Liberal-democratic nation states (states CST considers endowed with the most established civil spheres), on the contrary, face migration with remarkable unease.[7] These are the nation states that have gone through a gradual transformation of original ethnic definitions of belonging through to the inclusion of varying dosages of valuation of individual autonomy and social pluralism (Alexander 1990). As these civil spheres have,

5 Economically, the current world society follows the basic principle that the place where something is done is more important than the content of what is done. Residence is consequently the main axis of global social stratification (Milanovic 2016)3. As better life opportunities are clustered in a small number of countries, international migration – the crossing of the geographical borders – is a main avenue for socio-economic mobility.

6 In 2023, 16 percent of adults worldwide told pollsters that they would like to leave their own country permanently, if they could. The potential migrants are more than a quarter of the adult population in North Africa, a little less than 30 percent in Latin America, and more than 35 percent in Sub Saharan Africa (Gallup 2024).

7 In 2024, 15 percent of eligible voters in the United States, and 17 percent of EU voters considered immigration *the* top issue for their country/region. For Europe, see https://www.bva-xsight.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Concerns-and-global-perception-of-the-EU-citizens-250424.pdf. For the United States, see https://www.as-coa.org/articles/poll-tracker-attitudes-immigration-2024-us-elections.

consequently, difficulties (at least, until now) in adopting a strategy of full ethnic closure, the physical presence of immigrants triggers, almost automatically, the anticipation of their (at least legal) inclusion. The fear of the potential pollution – the possible debasement of the value of membership through the arrival of "unfit" elements – is compounded by the fact that these are countries that, owing to their embedded liberalism, often end up admitting migrant individuals or groups that many natives (and their governments) judge as "unwanted" or "not welcome" (Zolberg 1987, Joppke 1998, Hollifield, Martin et al. 2022).

In differentiated civil spheres, the challenge of inclusion is endemic. Migrants are notonly physical bodies. They are the tea leaves through which participants in the civil sphere read what they think will be the nation's fate. Beyond the frequent polemics concerning demographic imbalances, estimates concerning labor market competition, and welfare burdens, the main focus of many civil spheres is always (explicitly or implicitly) on the civil attributes of potential and actual newcomers and their fit (or more often, lack of fit) with the imagined features of the respective nation (Kivisto 2005, Jaworsky 2021, Drewski and Gerhards 2024).

Unsurprisingly, reactions to migrant issues activate the same polarized codes that members apply to themselves and others within the civil sphere, oriented, however toward the outside and the future. In some cases, as often occurs with high-skilled migrants, potential migrants are seen positively, as members-in-waiting. As they are expected to foster economic development, provide much needed skills, revitalize inner cities, and raise dismal demographic rates, they appear as endowed with all the positive polarities of civil members: they are portrayed as young, dynamic, entrepreneurial, disciplined, and willing to assimilate. If something has to be blamed, it is the receiving nation itself; unwelcoming, backward, unable to be attractive enough for them. In the case of unwanted flows, the negative polarities of the same codes are activated: they are depicted as passive, backward, dependent, emotional, devious, wild, and fanatic. The polarities of the codes, of course, may also be switched. High-skilled migrants may suddenly appear snotty, pretentious, and unable to understand local customs; low-skilled migrants may, as happened (albeit briefly) during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, be suddenly portrayed as heroic workers providing key services. What is remarkable is that such polarized coding of immigrants is reproduced nearly identically over and over again, in different countries, throughout different historical epochs, and targeted at different immigrant groups (Lucassen 2005, Alexander 2013).

This combination of codes, moreover, produces discourses that are abstract enough to travel easily. Nativist literature and icons are often appropriated by different actors in different countries (and times) with relative ease.

One last important premise is that the following three elements should not be taken as a sequence: (a) the crossing of geographical borders, (b) the crossing of political borders, and (c) claims to inclusion in national membership. Such a linear process is a possibility, but far from a certainty. Migrants excluded from political membership (and sometimes even from legitimate residence)

may have access to certain civil and social rights. Some may even attain a kind of localized informal citizenship. Undocumented migrants may be shielded from deportation. On the other hand, there are those able to acquire citizenship of a country with minimal residence or even without having ever visited the country previously, provided they can claim an ancestor linking them to the mystical body of the nation (Joppke 2005, Dumbrava 2014). Citizens with a migration background may (rightfully) complain that such legal inclusion does not translate into actual inclusion in national life. Far from being linear, migration trajectories may appear much more like a bowl of spaghetti.

What is the role of the civil sphere within the bundle of boundaries constituted by the interaction of borders, legal statuses, and civil and national expectations? How does the civil sphere mediate between the ethnic legacies of nations (oriented toward closure) and the liberal-democratic complex (oriented toward openness)? To answer these questions adequately, it is necessary to make the relations between the civil sphere and two fundamental forms of symbolic memberships associated with the legitimation of inclusion or exclusion in liberal-democratic states more explicit. We discuss the first, the nation, in the following section, and the second, citizenship, in Part 3.

The Boundaries of Civil Spheres

The heart of CST is the willingness to provide, against a variety of power-obsessed social theories, an approach able to identify and ground the possibility (although by no means the certainty) of an effective civil solidarity in modern, differentiated societies. Civil sphere theory recognizes the empirical importance of power and oppression without, however, being utterly mesmerized by them; it wants to acknowledge the empirical existence of civil solidarity and the possibility of civil repair and inclusion without, however, adopting any whiggish philosophy of history (Kivisto and Sciortino 2021). Contrary to the frequent identification of civil society with some societal sector, with specific forms of organizations and structures, CST identifies the civil sphere as an imagined community, a symbolic-cum-emotional cultural structure. Such solidarity is an activating symbolic structure of meaning and emotions, relying on solidarity for others who are considered worthy of respect out of principle, not experience (Alexander, Lund et al. 2019). The implications of these cultural structures, informed by such feelings of common membership, are not universal nor uniform. Only in a few countries (and not necessarily forever) have they acquired the possibility, (albeit not the certainty), of shaping, through regulative and communicative institutions, the action of the state, making its power instrumental to the protection of such civil solidarity (Alexander 2006).

Civil solidarity is abstract. It is broader than the ties created by physical co-presence, emotional attachment, common interests, repeated interaction, resource exchange, and political or religious homophily. It is a solidarity among strangers: its *bona fide* members know they will never know personally the other members, nor necessarily do they wish to know them (Anderson 1983).

They just take *for granted* that they are legitimate travelers on the same journey. Civil membership comes, if sometimes recalcitrantly, with some consequences: a fellow member can advance claims and seek redresses invoking the rights and duties associated with this common membership (Alexander 2024).

Why do certain actors recognize someone else as a fellow member? How do they distinguish between those who have a voice that deserves to be heard and those who can be safely ignored? What exactly is contained in the stock of common symbols and group markers that any member can take for granted? Are those who are denied membership in the civil sphere (the case for a large proportion of migrants) able to mobilize other forms of universalistic solidarity to advance their claims? In itself, the codes of the civil sphere do not have a built-in limitation: "we, the people" may refer to some hundreds of thousands or more than a billion. Nor do they have a built-in criterion for adjudicating which claims should be heard first. Last, but not least, civil discourse is not alone in its claim to the solidarity of members. From leftist internationalism to Western civilization, from human rights cosmopolitanism to environmentalism, the field of abstract solidarities is rather crowded. It is consequently rather important to explore the relations between civil solidarity and other forms of universalistic, abstract, political solidarities. How much and how often can political and civil membership be thought of as synonymous? The answer to these questions is far from straightforward.

Let us start with the CST foundational text, *The Civil Sphere* (hereafter TCS). For analytical convenience, it is useful to start with the negative. Alexander sharply contrasts civil membership with both cosmopolitan solidarities and public membership in a state. He has no patience for a cosmopolitan vision of the civil sphere as a utopian ideal or promise of the future, or even a yardstick for external critique. Alexander stresses several times that no civil sphere can be, by his definition, unlimited or fully inclusive. On the contrary, Alexander's civil sphere is always bounded geographically and socially. It is not an abstract space; it refers constantly to an essentialized territory, a homeland structured as a meaningful center, irradiating promises of salvation. He also clarifies repeatedly that actual civil spheres are always symbolically closed: beyond their boundaries, and often even within them, there are always other groups and other political entities lurking in the shadows. Without exclusion, without the negative polarities of the codes, the meaning of inclusion would also disappear.[8] *The Civil Sphere* does not see civil solidarity in cosmopolitan terms, and human rights cannot serve as sufficient grounds for membership. Paraphrasing Durkheim, even a society of cosmopolitan saints would need to have its polluted outsiders.

Alexander also refuses to identify the boundaries of the civil sphere with the boundaries of the state, even in its democratic or social-democratic varieties. *The Civil Sphere* does not support the secular progressive state so often

8 For an attempt to weaken substantially the necessity of such an exclusionary dimension of the civil sphere, see Voyer (2024).

idolized by the European left.[9] Instead, TCS analyzes the state in an old-fashioned, liberal way, as an extremely efficient coercion machine, a looming danger that must be carefully constrained and continuously controlled if the loss of liberty and autonomy are to be avoided.[10]

In fact, throughout TCS, the civil sphere is nearly always presented as somewhat co-extensive with the nation. Alexander writes, occasionally, that the civil solidarity he is discussing could be, in principle, also local, regional, or international (Alexander 2006:43). In the conclusions of the book, moreover, in one single page Alexander concedes quite a lot to the liberal globalism that has marked the period in which TCS was written. He stresses how his theory has been developed without reference to scale, and that it is possible to imagine and organize civil society beyond the territory of the nation-state. He even dares to write that a "globalized civil sphere may be the only way to proceed. Without a global range, the promises even of civil society in its national form may die" (Alexander 2006: 552).

Noble as this statement may be, it is doubtful it can be consistent with the overall structure of the book. In fact, throughout TCS, the civil sphere is nearly always presented as somewhat co-extensive with the nation. As he admits, his empirical studies concern only movements inside nation-states or regions (Alexander 2006:552). Of his cases, only the analysis of Jewish inclusion spans Europe and the US, although the latter becomes exclusive in the end. In the rest of the book, Alexander treats civil solidarity and national solidarity (at least in its "civic" variant) interchangeably. Nor should it be forgotten that the emphasis on the civil sphere as providing the force behind the state's regulative institutions – constitutions, legal systems, office, party, voting – imply a tight coupling of civil and national boundaries. The world Alexander discusses is a world of nation-states, to which some legacies of previous imperial formations are to be added.[11] He tends to distinguish himself from nationalist scholars because he defines the civil sphere in terms not only of national, but also of democratic membership (Alexander 2006:612). Still, democratic membership – symbolized by the voting roll – is legitimized by membership in the

9 The study of the Nordic European civil sphere has contributed to re-opening a debate on the emancipatory potentialities of states. See Alexander, Lund, and Voyer (2019).

10 This characterization is particularly evident in the way in which Alexander has reacted to the critique of his work by Bryan Turner (2008). While Turner insists that a liberal state, guaranteeing and supporting the existence of a public sphere, is necessary for a lively and independent civil arena, Alexander (2008) repeatedly stresses that a vision of the state as the enforcer of justice is inadequate for both analytical and empirical reasons. His civil sphere is an independent dimension, that in the best of circumstances may, through the influence of its communicative and regulative institutions, control the state, rather than being controlled by it.

11 Perhaps surprisingly, in a 793-page book published in 2006, the European Union, with its multi-layered membership and future-oriented mission, is not mentioned once. And it is a pity, as the extreme difficulties of the European project in fostering a sense of collective membership among the citizens of the member states could be a strategic research material in this regard.

politically-constituted nation. Technically speaking, liberal-democratic polities are just a subset, not an alternative, to nation-states.

The tight, but always implicit, coupling of the civil sphere and the nation has remained a dominant premise of the subsequent CST literature. It is pervasive, for example, in the innovative volumes on Latin America and East Asia that – also owing to the strong emphasis on democratic dynamics – have explored nearly exclusively processes of civil repair concerning second-class citizens in already established polities (Alexander and Tognato 2018, Alexander, Palmer et al. 2019).[12] In the CST literature, when there is a focus on the challenges to the established boundaries of the civil sphere, they are always *internal,* sub-national challenges. This is the case of the important analysis of secessionist claims ("what *you* claim is a civil sphere is *actually* an imperial space"), of regionalism and of first nations (Alexander, Stack et al. 2019, Alexander and Horgan 2025).[13]

In other words, there is little evidence that membership in the civil sphere – at least in the current societal configuration – can be independent of national belonging. The codes of the civil sphere may (and are) applied also externally: events in other parts of the world – the Vietnam War, the Russian aggression toward Ukraine or the Middle East tragedies being only the latest examples – may trigger heated debates and robust polarization also in countries very far from the epicenter. As we have seen previously, the same codes can, and are, applied to include or (more often) tarnish prospective migrants and newcomers (Jaworsky 2021). Codes may also be used, with varying degrees of success, to support processes of boundary expansions or boundary blurring: the European Union, battered as it currently is, has consistently employed civil codes and imaginaries to boost a feeling of post-national belonging among the citizens. International, transnational, and global civil discourses are always refracted and activated in, and through, national civil spheres.

Civil spheres, as quasi-nations, are not intrinsically open to newcomers. On the contrary, they may be quite suspicious of the civil qualifications of outsiders. What makes the civil inclusion of migrants possible (although not

12 For an exception, see Tognato and Jaworsky (2020). Migration is also more present in the volumes dedicated to Nordic Europe and Canada, always within specific national cadres (Alexander, Lund et al. 2019, Alexander and Horgan 2025). In many ways, the current CST literature could be criticized for its methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003). Ricarda Hammer has also criticized CST for failing to acknowledge how the constitution of the civil spheres is irremediably intertwined with colonization (Hammer 2020). We plan to discuss both these critiques in a future paper.

13 An exception is the work of Andrea Voyer and Anna Lund, who have developed a version of CST much more focused on a careful analysis of social interaction (Alexander, Lund et al. 2019, Voyer 2024). It is an approach that could, in principle, cross-cut national affiliations. They analyze interactions shaped by public cultural institutions involving actors whose status is defined nationally as legitimate. Hizky Shoham has developed an interactional approach to civil sphere analysis, which focuses explicitly on the bottom-up development of the connection between civil and national solidarity with limited state involvement (Shoham 2017, Shoham 2021).

certain) is consequently not a special "quality" of civil rules. What makes the civil sphere important in this regard is the (historically varying) mix of national membership (based on a difference between insiders and outsiders) and liberal-democratic imagination, based on openness. Analytically, the two elements are basically independent: the world is full of undemocratic nations, while liberalism has always been thought of as (theoretically) universal. Historically, however, the unlikely combination of these two elements has generated a specific normative model, that has shown (until now) a certain robustness even if constantly exposed to severe strains (Alexander, Kivisto et al. 2020). This "civil" model accepts – with some hypocrisy – migration as a possible avenue leading toward various degrees of membership, although it places the duty to prove one's civil qualifications on the shoulder of the prospective new member. It is a model clearly open to abuse. It further helps to orient the codification of migrants toward the negative polarities. Nevertheless, without considering this constitutive tension, it would be difficult to understand why in the (somewhat) liberal-democratic states, it is possible to practice the legal inclusion of culturally-distant migrants. This, of course, is something that authoritarian states – such as those of the Gulf Cooperation Council (a major immigration destination) – have no qualms about, being incapable of (or unwilling to) even consider conceiving migrants as anything close to ingroups.

Making explicit and systematic the connection between civil and national memberships is particularly useful for developing a satisfactory CST theory of migrant incorporation. It allows for a fruitful dialogue with the large body of studies on the national incorporation of immigrants, focused on migration as the crossing of a bundle of multilayered – and often overlapping – symbolic boundaries. At the same time, it grounds the study of civil incorporation in a more definitive geopolitical framework.

Migration, Citizenship, and the Civil Sphere

Reading the CST literature, most migration scholars would be surprised by the lack of citizenship as a political institution linked to and informed by the civil sphere, given how seemingly obviously it is connected to migration. Social theorists may be equally surprised, as the omission of citizenship runs against a long line of sociological reasoning: from T.H. Marshall (1964) to Talcott Parsons (1965), citizenship has been considered the building block of civil solidarity in modern society (Kivisto 2004, Sciortino 2010). In broader political theory, citizenship has been usually seen not only as a mark of membership and a guarantee of rights (and duties) but also as *the* communitarian element that provides, treating diverse individuals as equal, the foundation for claims to inclusion and justice.

Scholars of migration have always been interested in citizenship, both as the institution regulating global socio-economic stratification (see Part 1), and as a necessary passage in the inclusion process (Kivisto and Faist 2009). In particular since many liberal-democratic states have introduced measures

guaranteeing rights to long-term residents (thus creating the so-called *denizens*), understanding why some immigrants decide to "naturalize," that is, take citizenship of the host country, has become more important (Bloemraad and Sheares 2017, Joppke 2019). How different countries regulate the acquisition of citizenship has been linked to different visions of national membership, with important consequences for the inclusion of outsiders (Brubaker 1992). Some scholars have also focused on the consequences of immigration for the very same institution of citizenship. Christian Joppke, particularly, has argued that immigration causes a progressive "lightening" of citizenship. Accommodating migrants, among other trends, implies a weakening of citizenship's subjective meaning, its growing dissociation from nationhood, and a growing instrumental attitude to it (Joppke 2021). In a different vein, post-colonial critiques have seen in citizenship acquisition a decoy functional to the reproduction of the hypocritical "political demography" of liberal democracy (Favell 2022). In summary, citizenship remains quite a lively concept.

In TCS, by contrast, Alexander substantially ignores citizenship, considering it a merely legal, state-accorded status, which plays a marginal role in the overall incorporation process. He seems to perceive citizenship only as a formal, objective, legal status, denoting only the relationship between individuals and the state. His citizenship is Christian Joppke's vision of the future already accomplished. For Joppke, to grant theoretical attention to citizenship risks obscuring the much more important role played by shifting "internal" cultural perceptions (Joppke, 2021). The deeply analyzed cases of civil repair discussed in TCS, such as national minorities and first nations peoples (Alexander and Horgan 2025) as well as caste (Alexander and Waghmore 2025), have something in common: they all involve citizens or members of recognized national minorities.[14] While their claims concerning the implications of their membership trigger heated conflict, membership as such was not, as a rule, disputed. In the case of "aliens," even if long-term migrants, is precisely their presence to be a matter of contention.

Alexander's stance is that incorporation processes are primarily structured by collectively shared cultural meanings and emotions (the existential conflict over the symbolic boundaries between "us" and "them"), while changes in legal and political definitions seem to merely follow from such conflicts (Lund and Voyer 2020). His position, however, is not only analytical but also political: the possibilities of justice and recognition, in his view, should not be entrusted to citizenship. He sees citizenship as an institution that, allowing only

14 Although there are a few pages dedicated to acknowledging the importance of immigration in the composition of national populations, the issue receives only moderate attention in the text (Alexander 2006: 409ss). Besides mentioning that a more flexible civil sphere may find fewer difficulties in accommodating migrants than "rigid 'state' societies" (Alexander 2006: 414), Alexander does not explore how the codes of the civil sphere contribute to defining the meaning of the admission of new immigrants. Throughout the book, Alexander is mostly interested in what happens once the actors invoking civil repair have been long-term residents.

membership in a state, may be established independently by democratic rules or respect for individual rights (Alexander 2008).

Alexander has some good arrows for arming his bow. Citizenship, as a legal institution, is indeed available even in the most totalitarian states. It may be acquired but also lost. Rohingyas in Myanmar and hundreds of thousands of Muslims in India know this fact all too well.[15] Most immigrants acquire citizenship for instrumental, rather than sentimental, reasons evaluating it coldly in terms of benefits and costs (Harpaz and Mateos 2019). A growing number of states allow for multiple citizenships, severing the strict identification of nationhood and citizenship, not to mention "golden passports" for plutocrats (Surak 2023). Being a citizen of one country, moreover, does not necessarily entitle one to civil recognition, as many rituals, symbols, and icons associated with civil membership are historically defined by the dominant group. Neither does it shield migrants from frequent ethnoracial Othering. Even considering all these elements, however, there is room to argue that Alexander's view of citizenship is unduly restrictive.

First, membership in any given state is the very basis of the immigrant condition. Second, the acquisition of long-term residence status and/or citizenship is inextricably intertwined not only with important legal protections but also with a thicker symbolic legitimation of one's social presence. Few things like citizenship acquisition make it difficult to deny an actor's legitimacy in participating, although often in a marginal or stigmatized role, in the national community. Citizenship is also the fundamental legal protection against the ultimate form of exclusion: physical removal. Third, it is important to consider that the universalizing promise of civil repair that is so central to the cases analyzed in TCS would not extend to the "alien" who could not even claim to be a second-class citizen. Consequently, acquiring citizenship makes participation in civil life possible to a degree not allowed by any other legal status. Last but not least, the modern history of citizenship documents its rich cultural dimension. As the looming controversy over birthright citizenship in the United States will soon show, it is never only about the law. Conflicts over citizenship are the most meaning-loaded controversies in liberal democracies, the ones in which the codes of civil society are explicitly used. Civil sphere theory should thus incorporate a more explicit (and thicker) understanding of national membership, able to pay the citizenship status its dues as (currently) the main conduit – legally and symbolically – of the idea of civil membership.

Migration as Boundary Crossing

In the previous section, we argued in favor of a vision that sees existing civil spheres more explicitly and tightly coupled with national membership. We also claimed that at least for (comparatively-speaking) democratic states, the

15 For India, see https://jpia.princeton.edu/news/indias-national-register-citizens-threatens-mass-statelessness.

institution of state citizenship should be considered one of the main conduits for civil membership. Our plea for the importance of the political dimension in the analysis of the civil sphere should not, however, be taken as an attempt to define inclusion in mere legal-political terms. While we criticized CST for neglecting the importance of legal statuses, they are a necessary, if insufficient, pre-conditions for inclusion in the civil sphere.

Residence permits and citizenship are far from being the only factors shaping migration trajectories. Migrants interact with many other categorical systems that frame individuals (and networks, and groups), organize and limit their everyday lives, and reify the distinctions between insiders and outsiders. Many of these boundary processes are not codified in legal terms, and some of them operate largely informally, if not subconsciously. What they all have in common is that they all deal with, and in turn reproduce, migrants' membership ambiguity, their being "matter out of place."

Migration research has documented how the perceived quality of belonging, and its related boundary work, has consequences for the willingness to engage in interpersonal contact (Manevska, Achterberg et al. 2018), attitudes towards immigrants (Bail 2008), and even the willingness to help (Jaworsky, Rétiová et al. 2022). The perceived quality of belonging, however, does not depend only on the features – real or imagined – of the migrants. It is also, and perhaps mostly, contingent upon the ways boundaries are drawn (nearly always deploying the codes of the civil sphere). Migration means experiencing boundaries, but not all boundaries divide the world in the same way; not all boundaries draw upon the same symbols and narratives.

Unfortunately, migration scholars have traditionally paid little attention to the cultural dimension of migration and incorporation (Levitt 2005). The cultural dimension of social boundaries has been consequently little explored. Many migration scholars had judged social and symbolic boundaries too "soft" to be studied systematically, in comparison at least with more well-known issues of socio-economic and political incorporation. When dealing with issues of cultural difference, the field of migration studies is still largely split between those who see cultural differences as mere decoys for power inequalities and those willing to take at face value the description of reality endorsed by the involved actors, particularly when they are the migrants themselves (Sciortino 2012). Even if an increased cultural sensibility may be detected, it is still largely employed to "uncover" hidden forms of prejudice and xenophobia. Therefore, most sociological work on the cultural dimension of international migration is still caught up in a debunking mode. The attention to the contingency of difference-based discourses does not generate a fascination with their meaning structures or an interest in explaining the specific semantic structures that sustain (and constrain) their classificatory power and their capacity to persuade. It is here that CST can provide a distinctive contribution to migration studies. Relying on its cultural sociological approach, CST may help to question the

dominant instrumentalist vision of boundary-making, opening the relationship between social and cultural boundaries in a less reductionist direction.[16]

The dominant tradition for boundary research in sociology defines it as an instrumental, strategic activity. Boundary-making – both symbolic and social – is equated with a strategy of social closure, targeted to hoard resources, thus producing inequality (Tilly 2004, Tilly 2005). This strategic emphasis explains why the symbolic, discursive structure of boundary-making is often ignored, even when its importance is duly recognized (Wimmer 2008). The instrumental understanding of boundary-making practice is moreover associated, particularly in the work of Pierre Bourdieu, with a reductionist vision of the relationship between symbolic and social boundaries.[17] In Bourdieu's work, there is a fundamental homology between social and symbolic boundaries. They are not only highly interrelated, following the same logic of instrumental conflict: the creation of symbolic boundaries is a performative action that, using the language of revelation and construction, produces what it claims to have found in reality (Bourdieu 1991). The conflict about the legitimate ways of dividing the social world is the same thing as the conflict over the distribution of social power. From his perspective, the significant symbolic boundaries are the ones that overlap with specific social configurations and are functional to their reproduction. Unsurprisingly, categorical change is always functional to reproduction; transformation is always exogenous.[18]

From a CST point of view, this combination of instrumental boundary-making and weak autonomy of the symbolic dimension imposes unnecessary analytical limits to social research (Sciortino 2012). Granting (analytic) autonomy to symbolic boundaries, far from being a postmodern bonfire of the vanities, finally makes it visible how, in complex societies, collective representations are hardly ever homologous with social structures. A major implication is that boundary-making processes are contingent upon a creative interpretation of the cultural codes, classification, and narratives that constitute a major resource for their creation and maintenance. "Foreignness" can be seen as one form of belonging to a rich family of semantic constructions dealing with social

16 For a critical review of the field from the point of view of cultural sociology, see Sciortino (2012). The work carried out by the group of cultural sociologists at the Masaryk University in Brno is a rich example of the potentialities of a non-reductionist understanding of the interaction of cultural and social boundaries. See Jaworsky, Klvanova et al. (2023), Jaworsky, Rétiová et al. (2022), Rétiová, Rapoš Božič et al. (2021) and Božič, Klvaňová et al. (2023).

17 Bourdieu has been involved only marginally in migration research, but he has been an inspiration for scholars dealing with mobility and migration, including Abdelmalek Sayad (2004). See also Erel (2010) and Kim (2018).

18 The same applies to many researchers employing conceptual frameworks inspired by Bourdieu, with some important exceptions. Todd (2005) offers an interesting attempt to revise Bourdieu's framework making it able to account for the autonomy of the categorical order in social transformation and not only reproduction. Bail (2008), in his analysis of symbolic boundaries against immigrants in Europe, argues that the materials employed to trace such boundaries have consequences on the integration processes.

membership and the qualities necessary to claim and embody it. They are forms that can be combined in different ways, sometimes matching the boundaries of actual social networks, many other times resulting in broader configuration.

It should also be remembered that actual national boundaries are crisscrossed by other forms of transnational (as well as local or regional) solidary discourses that overlap – if only partially – with the codes of the civil sphere. Various discourses, from the cosmopolitan appeal to human rights to shared religious traditions, from the leftist appeals to worker solidarity to former colonial shared pasts, can be used in isolation or in (more or less) plausible combinations, as a rudimentary solidary discourse justifying one's presence and residence and, if not membership, at least the future possibility of it. A similar argument can be made for more exclusionary actions: they too can rely on a motley set of transnational discourses that, without challenging completely the membership of settled migrants and ethnic minorities, may seed uncertainty, weakening the bona fide nature of such membership.

The theoretical choice of giving analytical autonomy to symbolic boundaries makes it possible to explore new possibilities for understanding immigrant incorporation (Kivisto 2012). In fact, many of the most interesting phenomena in migration research take place precisely when symbolic categories and social clusters do *not* coincide. It is one example out of many, precisely the mismatch of social and symbolic boundaries that energizes the processes of civil repair as well as the tensions over inclusion or exclusion (Alexander 2016, Sciortino 2021).

In short, exclusion and inclusion are determined by structural *and* cultural forces, network positions *and* meaningful coding, political coalitions *and* crosscutting understandings of the moral order (Alexander 1990, Alexander 2006). If processes of boundary-making may be so dynamic, it is precisely because actors may develop claims to social inclusion (or exclusion) grounded on their previous membership in larger symbolic communities, as well as try to disqualify members of existing social networks owing to their polluting location in the symbolic order (Becker 2021). Rather than reflecting *sic et simpliciter* the balance of powers among members of various categories, the dynamism of boundary-making is oriented to, and acting upon, the gaps and discrepancies between social and symbolic orders. Granting analytical autonomy to symbolic boundaries does not mean denying that boundary-making is a process in which uneven and motley networks and asymmetric power relations play a great role. It acknowledges, however, that it is *also* a cultural activity linked to a vision of the world, triggered and regulated by overarching semiotic structures that classify events and possibilities in structured patterns of codes and narratives.

Stressing the importance of symbolic boundaries, and their analytical autonomy, does not imply going back to a vision of boundaries as reflexes of actual differences in specific cultural contents. Nor is it a return to the vision of boundaries only as a matter of subjective attribution. To claim that symbolic boundary-making is rooted in deeper cultural structures strengthens the view

that social categories, social groups, identities, and subcultures do not exist in isolation. Their actual meaning is always given by their position in the structural and symbolic orders that regulate social life. Such categories are a consequence of the specific form of the social and moral order in its historical developments, not its elementary, pre-existing constituents.

Conclusion

Civil sphere theory offers a promising, yet incomplete, framework for analyzing the complexities of universalistic solidarities in modern society. In this paper, we have explored the possibility of using CST to better account for international migration processes. By exploring migration as a process of boundary-crossing, we have situated it at the confluence of national membership, citizenship, and civil inclusion. This nexus provides the opportunity to highlight an undertheorized aspect: what are the membership boundaries of the civil sphere, and how are they related to national belonging?

The inherent tension between liberal-democratic ideals and the bounded nature of nation states creates fertile ground for both inclusionary and exclusionary practices. Migrants, as "matter out of place" often illuminate the fragility of civil solidarities while simultaneously offering opportunities for their redefinition. CST's nuanced understanding of cultural codes and symbolic boundaries positions it as a critical tool for unpacking these dynamics.

However, we wish to underscore the current limitations of CST, particularly its underdeveloped engagement with citizenship. As we have argued, citizenship is not merely a legal status but a pivotal conduit for both symbolic and social inclusion. Its omission risks underestimating the structural forces that shape migrants' experiences and the pathways toward their incorporation. We claim that by integrating a richer understanding of citizenship, CST can more effectively address the processes by which migrants negotiate their place within civil spheres.

In advancing this dialogue between CST and migration studies, we invite scholars to reconsider the role of symbolic codes in shaping inclusion and exclusion. This reorientation not only enriches CST but also provides migration scholars with a more robust framework for analyzing the cultural dimensions of boundary-making. In doing so, it calls for a deeper engagement with the symbolic imaginaries that sustain – and often disrupt – the processes of civil incorporation.

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Peter Kivisto i Đuzepe Šćortino

Pripadnost, migracija i uključenost u građansku sferu

Apstrakt

U ovom članku istražujemo odnos između migracije, pripadnosti i uključenosti kroz prizmu teorije građanske sfere, trenutno najsnažnijeg teorijskog okvira za razumevanje društvene solidarnosti u savremenim, diferenciranim društvima. Iako se teorija građanske sfere pokazala značajnom za produbljivanje razumevanja društvene solidarnosti i građanske obnove unutar ustanovljenih političkih sistema, ona je nedovoljno razmatrala granice koje određuju procese uključivanja i isključivanja u kontekstu migracija. Članak započinjemo rekonceptualizacijom imigracije kao procesa prelaska geografskih, političkih i simboličkih granica. Ovakav pristup pomera fokus sa linearnog shvatanja inkluzije na dinamičan međuodnos između nacionalne pripadnosti, državljanstva i građanske sfere. Oslanjajući se na sofisticiran pristup društvenim i kulturnim granicama razvijen u okviru teorije građanske sfere, tvrdimo da su u savremenom svetu nacionalna i građanska pripadnost duboko povezane. U kontekstu migracija, građanska sfera, dakle, mora posredovati između formalne inkluzivnosti liberalno-demokratskih ideala i ograničavajućeg karaktera nacionalne pripadnosti. Nakon toga razvijamo kritiku teorije građanske sfere zbog njenog nedovoljnog fokusa na državljanstvo, naglašavajući da državljanstvo dalje ostaje ključni kanal za univerzalizaciju nacionalne pripadnosti. Na kraju, identifikujemo glavni pokretač promena u konceptu članstva – tenziju između društvenih i simboličkih granica unutar diferenciranih društava. Ovaj pristup spaja studije migracija i kulturnu sociologiju, pružajući preliminarne uvide u mehanizme građanske integracije.

Ključne reči: Građanska sfera, demokratija, inkluzija, članstvo, migracija, nacija-država, solidarnost

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Daniel Joseph Belback

THE CIVIL SPHERE AND ITS RESILIENT TRIBALIST DISCONTENTS: A MUSLIM BAN CLOAKED IN SACRALIZED BINARIES

ABSTRACT

This article explores how primordial, tribally rooted bonds become sacralized within the Civil Sphere (CS), challenging prevailing assumptions about the sphere's inertial universal horizon. Through a structuralist-hermeneutic analysis of communicative and regulatory institutions surrounding the Trump Administration's Muslim Ban (2017–2021), the study reveals how exclusionary, anti-civil policies become legitimized within ostensibly civil frameworks. Central to this dynamic is a paradox within the CS, wherein the discourse of liberty inherently justifies repression when targeted groups are represented as threats to democratic universality. This analysis demonstrates the persistence of a "tribal solidaristic horizon," rooted in primordial ties to blood, land, and religion, strategically mobilized through civil motives, relations, and institutions to narrow solidarity. The Muslim Ban initially faced fierce opposition, characterized by widespread protests and judicial scrutiny framed by civil binaries profaning the ban as un-American, anti-democratic, and unconstitutional. Subsequent iterations adapted strategically to these cultural binaries, gaining legitimacy through orderly, procedural implementation. This strategic civil rebranding exemplifies how primordial ties—grounded in race, place, and religious identity—continue to shape and constrain the civil sphere, facilitating democratic backsliding through the relativization and manipulation of civil motives, relations, and institutions. Ultimately, the study extends Civil Sphere Theory by underscoring vulnerabilities to relativization of core cultural binaries, highlighting that resilience in democratic societies requires critical recognition of how civil discourses themselves can be co-opted to legitimize exclusion. The Muslim Ban case thus reveals significant deficits in universalistic CS resilience, signaling vulnerability to sustained exclusion despite apparent civil repair.

KEYWORDS

Civil Sphere, tribalism, Muslim Ban, liberty, repression, relativization, backsliding, resilience, frontlash, backlash

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Introduction

This article examines the interplay between tribal solidarities and civil sphere (CS) dynamics through the lens of the Trump Administration's Muslim Ban, demonstrating how deeply rooted tribalist identities can reshape civil discourse. It argues that despite its universal aspirations, the CS remains vulnerable to strategic manipulation by actors employing civil language to justify exclusion. Initially met with intense opposition, protests, and judicial challenges framed within inclusive, pluralistic civil narratives, subsequent iterations of the Muslim Ban strategically adapted, conforming superficially to civil norms while maintaining exclusionary intent. This iterative process gradually normalized exclusion within the CS, highlighting significant deficits in its resilience against democratic backsliding. Ultimately, this study emphasizes the paradoxical nature of the civil sphere, where symbolic adherence to democratic ideals can mask—and even facilitate—the perpetuation of exclusionary practices, underscoring the need for vigilance against the relativization of civil discourse in the pursuit of genuine democratic solidarity.

The great success of Civil Sphere Theory (CST) is its ability to account for the contradictions and paradoxes built into civil society and by extension, society as such. The most important of these built in contradictions is that the CS is simultaneously striving to be a universalistic sphere of solidarity while also being rooted in socially constructed institutions beholden to primordial imperatives such as 'tradition' pushing for social stagnation—social inertia (Bourdieu 1984). These two poles are often thought to complement each other in a pendulum-like manner, with frontlash—the broadening of the universalistic horizon of solidarity—followed by backlash—the push to narrow the horizon of solidarity (Alexander 2019). This is to say that CST is adept at explaining social change and social stagnation because it attempts to account for both flux and stagnation. Recently, with the rise of populism and alt-right movements in the West and increasingly globally (Moffit 2016), there is a sense that CST is perhaps too optimistic in its outlook of an ever-broadening sphere of inclusivity or justice baked into the founding myths of the CS. Some even argue that the civil ingredients themselves—binary discursive norms—derived from western colonial societies, need to be switched out, meaning major novel CS construction over CS repair (Hammer 2020). Moreover, the optimism at the heart of CST, envisioning an ever-expanding horizon of solidarity, appears to be less certain given the widespread lurch to the right in global politics, often characterized by nativist sentiments.

One need not look very deeply to notice the rising tide of populism, nationalism, nativism, and alt-right movements permeating globally. These movements often evoke a collective sense of us versus them while flipping certain sacred binaries of the CS to justify exclusion (Alexander et al. 2021). Moreover, strong charismatic leaders, in classic populist style, claim to speak for, represent, and offer solutions to save a mistreated sacred and collective people (Laclau 2018). The argument is often grounded in notions like, "if this 'other'

group, that does not hold our inclusive values incorporates with 'us,' we will lose our collectively imagined good inclusive values".[1] This serves to justify exclusion by creating apparent contradictions within the CS logic along with inverted and hierarchized moral binary schemes. This is a story as old as time, yet it currently is playing out on a much more interconnected and global scale. The universal is tied to the particular and primordial, the tribal. The tribally minded collective associates and equates universal values with particular and essentialized identity constructs rooted in notions of blood (race), land (place) and religion (belief system) (Williams 2012). This is seen in representations of essentialized notions concerning belongingness in the polity.

There is no group more illustrative of these primordially based exclusive representations than Muslims. Throughout the last quarter century, Muslims have been constantly depicted as unaligned, in a values and morals sense, with the western world (Gerteis 2020; Bail 2015). Major events and their cultural representations have served to reify this understanding of Muslims as incapable of participation in and incompatible with the supposed and contradictory universal values of the West. Namely, events like 9/11, ongoing conflicts like the War on Terror, and the Israel Palestine conflict are all often utilized to portray and represent what Huntington once—wrongly and irresponsibly—called "The Clash of Civilizations" (1996)—two civilizations with incompatible values. This intense othering has culminated recently in the colloquially known Muslim Ban or Travel Ban Policy (2017-2021) and even more recently in the inaction of the U.S.—even with a Democrat in power—regarding the genocide occurring against the Palestinian people. Moreover, the same law utilized to restrict travel for the Muslim Ban was used by the Biden administration to deport migrants on the U.S. southern border.

How do such religiously and ethnically discriminatory policies come to be rationalized within the CS? What are these values that are held up as incompatible with the West? This work follows the sequence of events related to CS communicative and regulative institutions. This illuminates how the Muslim Ban Policy was culturally narrated and gives a sense of which incompatible values were established and rationalized within CS sacred binaries.

By following the sequence of events influencing and being influenced by the Muslim Ban iterations, one can observe different factions of the CS in action. Moreover, one can observe a variant of the societalization process (Alexander 2019) wherein, enough public outcry, news coverage, legal disputes and ultimately a code switch, occurred for there to be inter-institutional civil repair of the discursive elements of the Muslim Ban. However, materially, most of the Muslim Ban lived on until the start of the Biden Administration in 2021. This suggests that while the CS is adept at achieving representational and symbolic expansions of the horizon of solidarity, it might inadvertently, via civil repair processes, push for the casting of exclusionary policies within

1 See "Populism in the Civil Sphere" for more on this (Alexander, Sciortino, Kivisto, 2021).

CS sacred binaries. This appears to have occurred with the Muslim Ban policy, though time of course also mediates the relative level of public outcry around a given social problem.

This work illustrates a backslide—more to less inclusion—of the CS, particularly amongst Republicans who initially dismissed the Muslim Ban as anti-American and incompatible with religious freedom, yet later shifted, often representing the Muslim Ban as something necessary for national security. Of course, these types of whiplash pivots reminiscent of Orwellian doublethink are not at all uncommon amongst politicians. Yet, they are very illustrative of the moral retraction of the horizon of solidarity, especially given that the issue revolves around stopping a particular religious group from entering the country, thus constricting religious freedom, something often deemed central and sacred to American life.

The *de jure* Travel Ban or initially executive order 13769, was implemented in the U.S. during the first week of Donald Trump's presidency in 2017, effectively banning entry to people from seven Muslim majority countries (ACLU 2020), a *de facto* Muslim Ban. Initially, it sparked three days of protests at airports across the nation (ACLU 2017). Three more varying iterations of the ban would follow. Initially, it restricted travel from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen—all predominantly Muslim countries. Later iterations varied but remained largely focused on Muslim majority countries.

During this time frame, massive protests at airports erupted, legal disputes ran rampant, and media coverage of the Ban was highly polarized around political party lines. However, it has been demonstrated that a massive opinion shift also took place, wherein "an influx of new information portraying the "Muslim Ban" at odds with inclusive elements of American identity prompted some citizens to shift their attitudes" (Collingwood et al 2018)—a code switch. The result was a tumultuous battle over the meanings surrounding the ban. The Supreme Court eventually upheld the ban, but only after various iterations became increasingly represented in the sacralizing language of the CS. The Ban was eventually stopped during the first week of the Biden administration in January 2021. **Figure 1.** below gives a brief timeline of major events.

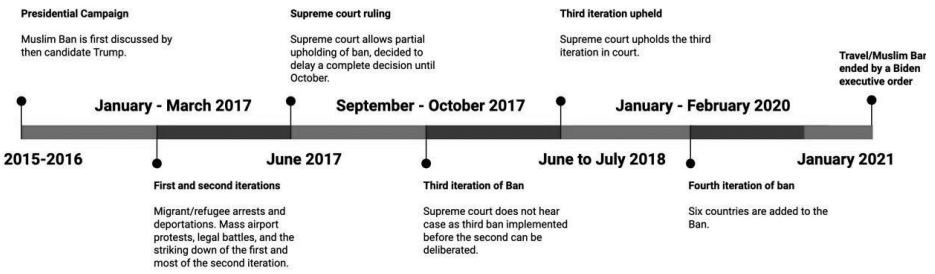

Figure 1.

Civil Sphere Theory

Civil Sphere Theory (CST) posits that certain cultural structures—such as rationality, honesty, altruism, cooperation, autonomy, and liberty—are integral to democratic discourse. The CS is conceptualized as an autonomous societal sphere composed of a distinct linguistic culture. These qualities are not only ideals but also require manifestation through symbolic performances and the support of communicative and regulative institutions (Alexander 2006; Alexander 2020). The CS's effectiveness depends on a compelling, emotionally resonant, and morally universalizing sphere of solidarity. This solidarity ensures the maintenance of essential democratic institutions by branding actions incongruent with sacred civil discourse, such as the Muslim Ban, a threat to democracy and thus anti-civil. The CS, characterized by a binary linguistic culture, sacralizes what it deems democratic and profanes what it views as anti-democratic.

This process occurs via a democratic culture of civil relations that influences actors' civil motives, and the institutions inhabited by the same actors and culture, "combining collective and individual motivations" (Alexander 2006: 38). Democratic discourse sacralizes actors and institutions who are deemed autonomous, rational, reasonable, calm, self-controlled, realistic, and sane, defining these as pertinent civil motives. Actors discursively defined as displaying passivity, dependence, irrationality, hysteria, excitability, passion, distortion, and madness are condemned as incapable of democratic participation and therefore anti-civil, worthy of exclusion (57). This dynamic helps to differentiate between behaviors and actions aligned with democratic values and those deemed a threat to them. The discourse permeates across the American political spectrum with different actors contentiously engaged in battles over what is civil and what is anti-civil, democratic and anti-democratic, and ultimately pure or impure—a never achieved yet always attempted struggle to define the solidaristic horizon through the civil symbolic code (55).

Similarly, relations are also defined along civil and anti-civil lines. "Democratically motivated persons" are defined as capable of openness over secrecy, trust over suspicion, criticality over deference, honorableness over self-interestedness, altruism over greed, truthfulness over deceit, straightforwardness over calculating, deliberative over conspiratorial, and friendly over antagonistic (58). Further, political and legal institutions are structured around civil and anti-civil binaries that stem from lower-level motives and relations. If comprised of civil relations and motives, civil institutions are rule regulated rather than arbitrary, subject to law rather than power, equal rather than hierarchical, inclusive rather than exclusive, impersonal rather than personal, contractual rather than based in bonds of loyalty, group based rather than factionally based and governed by office obligations over personalities (59). Across this cultural configuration and between the discursive levels of motives, relations and institutions, elements from the civil and anti-civil binary are incompatible (59), within each lies the symbolic elements for common democratic cultural myths on the discourses of liberty and repression, respectively.

The CS's ideals are thought to be utopian, focused on the achievement of democratic integrity, yet these ideals are never fully realized in practice. This creates a paradox where the abstract promotion of democracy contrasts with the imperfect enactment of these values (Alexander 2019a). The horizon of solidarity, which defines the scope of inclusivity within the civil sphere, is not fixed but rather fluctuates based on societal conditions and responses, such as frontlash and backlash. The tribal qualities within the civil sphere, characterized by exclusionary practices and a narrowed focus on in-group identities, often lead to a contraction of this horizon. Communicative institutions like the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and other major news networks play a crucial role in shaping public discourse and opinion by providing platforms for democratic engagement and critique (Alexander 2019b) constituting the means of symbolic production.

The CS identifies and condemns anti-democratic qualities, such as deceit, hysteria, and inequality (Alexander 2019b). The regulation and interpretation of public discourse through voting, electoral competition, and the rule of law are essential mechanisms for maintaining the CS's integrity. These mechanisms ensure that the CS can adapt and respond to changing societal dynamics, thus promoting a continuous redefinition and expansion or contraction of the horizon of solidarity. The CS functions as a kind of engine for promoting differing notions of democracy as it remains subject to constant flux and redefinition (Alexander 2006; Alexander and Smith 1993).

Tribal and Primordial Qualities

While the Civil Sphere is often touted for its universal solidaristic tendencies, there is in fact a deep seated primordial tribalistic glue bonding the CS together. This glue is rooted in meanings and representations centered around essentialized conceptions of blood, land, and religion (Williams 2012). Moreover, these bonds have deep historical roots that grew out of colonial undertakings that often sought to other and demarcate difference along the lines of race (blood), land (place), and religion (belief) (Hammer 2020; Williams 2012).

In modern societies, primordial ties can create both solidarity within groups and tension between groups, especially when such identities clash with broader societal norms or democratic values (Shils 1957). Throughout the theorization of the CS, there is a clear recognition of its primordial underpinnings (Alexander 2006). There is a continuous emphasis on the paradox built into the sphere's discourse, namely that the discourse of liberty also implies the discourse of repression (66). This paradox at the very center of the CS creates tensions that then permeate throughout. This is not a problem theoretically, per se. This tension is the engine of change that overcomes previous structural functionalist theories like the Societal Community (Parsons 2011). Society needs community solidarity, yet this community needs to be "articulated in a manner that allows its symbols and norms to include every group that is functionally involved in, or organizationally subject to, the values and institutions

of the social system" (Alexander 2005: 97). Community solidarity does not imply inclusive integration or justice. With CST, there is an attempt to more adeptly account for this tension between solidarity and justice.

To overcome this, Alexander notes, "CST conceptualizes a dynamic situation of punctuated equilibrium and de-civilizing breakdown, modeling a world filled with contingencies and strains that belies the normative idea of steady state" (2016: 75). This fractured view of the social allows for a less strict values-based interpretation, opening up a contentious group-based approach centered around symbolic meaning, allowing for concomitant understanding of both solidarity and integration.

A theory of the social world therefore must be rooted in flux, change and tension, any explanation without such a basis would function as a heuristic devoid of any practical foundation. Moreover, a theory of democratic process without an underlying change fulcrum would describe a static authoritarian-like system. Change and its explanation therefore must sit firmly at the center of democratic theory. The CS is thought to be this concrete mechanism mediating between progress and tradition, fostering a morally structured binary schematized relativism, focused on justice-based solidarity.

Yet, where Alexander critiques Parsons for over prioritizing solidarity (see Alexander 2005), it seems that Alexander overprioritizes his theorization of justice, neglecting the often primordially rooted solidary bonds of community, giving way to a theory that accounts for social exclusivity mainly via the mechanism of justice.

The concept of "tribal qualities" within the CS denotes the usage of rhetoric and representations of civil discourse to advance primordially based exclusionary notions of democracy. This practice, marked by its emphasis on protecting a narrowly defined in-group identity, leverages democratic language to legitimize exclusionary practices.[2] There is a growing recognition in fields like anthropology and evolutionary psychology that humans tend toward in-group tribal sentiments (Clark et al. 2019). Williams (2012) describes these tribal qualities as being centered on notions of "American blood and land," aligning with what he deems the "Tribal American Civil Religion." This subgroup often sacralizes a homogeneous national identity, primarily white, Christian, and American, while portraying outgroups—such as nonwhites, non-Christians, and nonnationals—as existential threats to democracy (Williams 2012; Alexander, Kivisto, and Sciortino 2021).

By utilizing nostalgic and folkloric narratives, as noted by Enroth (2021), the tribal qualities within the civil sphere aim to consolidate power within a

2 "The influence of racial prejudice in contemporary U.S. society is typically manifested in subtle, indirect forms of bias. Due to prevailing norms of equality, most Whites attempt to avoid appearing biased in their evaluations of Blacks, in part because of a genuine desire to live up to their egalitarian standards, but also because of concern regarding social censure. As a consequence, Whites' prejudice is more likely to be expressed in discriminatory responses when these actions can be justified by other factors" (Heman et al. 2011).

restricted community, often invoking and representing a collective memory that idealizes an essentialized monolithic national past. It has been suggested that localized customs and norms or what has been deemed the "folkloric civil sphere" can contribute to the universalism of the civil sphere (Shoham 2022). However, as numerous scholars have noted, collective memories surrounding what it means to inhabit a given identity are often portrayed in primordial terms to reinforce populist narratives concerned with defining what it means to be a people, in effect particularizing solidarity (Enroth 2021).

These tribal qualities are manifested in what has been termed the "pseudo-civil sphere" (Leungo and Malgorzata 2021), a domain where the facade of civility and democratic engagement masks an underlying agenda of exclusion. This faction manipulates CS's language and symbols to advance a vision of society that is fundamentally exclusionary, often cloaking its intentions in the guise of protecting civil values and achieving justice for a specific in-group. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the inversion of CS's symbolic binaries, where what is traditionally considered inclusive and democratic is profaned, while exclusionary and nationalist sentiments are sacralized (Alexander 2019). Such dynamics highlight the tribal qualities' opposition to what is often denoted as the CS's core principle of broadening the horizon of solidarity (Alexander 2006: 61). Instead, such sentiments seek to narrow this horizon, reinforcing a rigid and exclusive collective identity that stands in stark contrast to inclusive ideals. This tension between the inclusive and tribal qualities within the civil sphere poses a significant challenge to the maintenance of a truly democratic and inclusive society.

Hammer critiques CST for its inability to fully address colonial legacies and the constructed nature of civil categories (2020). He argues that the codes of civility and justice are historically rooted in colonial domination, limiting true solidarity to superficial "civil repair" rather than transformative "civil construction." This dynamic is thought to have been historically constructed by casting the CS's undesirable traits onto the "colonial other," reinforcing exclusionary binaries. Hammer contends that without radically rethinking these foundational processes, CST remains constrained by its exclusionary nature, rooted in colonial underpinnings.

One can also observe intense in-group dynamics at the network and interactionist level. Social networks tend toward homophily, fostering divides along lines of race, ethnicity, religion, and geography, which homogenize information and attitudes (McPherson et al. 2001). While weak ties are thought to provide novel information (Granovetter 1973), strong ties may increase information flow efficiency (Aral and Van Alstyne 2011). This tendency also seems to reinforce primordial bonds. Interactionists and phenomenologists note the sacrality of interaction rituals, requiring shared sociocultural scripts to maintain flow (Goffman 1967). Misunderstandings arise when these scripts clash, often driven by presuppositions (Collins 2004). Groups continuously categorize sameness and difference as they expand, reflecting relational and socially rooted categories (Schmaus 2004; Geertz 1973). This expansion, tied to

broader social processes, grows shared identities but remains spatially rooted in constructs like the nation-state (Anderson 1983) or "the West" (Said 1978). The West's values, constructed in opposition to the East or colonized spaces, raise questions about whether the CS expands solidarity or merely entrenches a Western hegemonic value system (Said 1978; Hammer 2020).

A Constructed Ultimate Other?

In American society, the othering of Muslims is a multifaceted phenomenon that involves cultural exclusion on religious, racial, and civic grounds. Research from 2020 suggests that nearly half of Americans harbor some form of anti-Muslim sentiment, as evidenced by nationally representative survey data that specifically measures attitudes toward Muslims and other groups (Gerteis et al. 2020). Moreover, numerous scholars have found that a large proportion of the U.S. holds Muslims in a negative light (Lajevardi et al. 2020; Mogahed et al. 2018). This widespread sentiment underscores the perception of Muslims as outsiders in multiple dimensions. Kaufman (2019) further elaborates on this dynamic, noting that in interviews conducted in 2015, respondents constructed Muslims as both foreign and familiar. While Muslims are rooted in the familiar racial stratification of American society, they are simultaneously viewed as alien due to a perception of a distinct cultural and ideological identity. This dual characterization exacerbates the criminalization of Muslims, positioning them as a perceived threat and reinforcing their marginalization within the social fabric of the United States. Muslims are systematically othered, facing exclusion and suspicion that pervades both public opinion and institutional practices (Bail 2015).

Scholars note how the Trump Administration strategically framed Muslims as incompatible with American identity. Braunstein (2019) articulates this process by describing how Muslims have been labeled as "non-American (outsiders), anti-American (enemies), and un-American (others)."[3] This characterization served to construct Muslims as anti-civil threats, justifying a boundary to protect the "blood and land" of a particular and exclusive typification of Americanness (Williams 2012). The narrative underscores the tribally rooted perception of a civil religious connection among religion, race, and national identity, historically conflated with and reproduced via backlash movements.

This rhetorical strategy aimed to reassert these exclusive identities at the core of American national consciousness, portraying Muslims as a threat to the civil whole due to their perceived particularism. The Trump Administration's framing sought to reinforce a vision of Islam that was explicitly non-universalist and exclusionary. This approach not only marginalized Muslims but also reinforced a narrow, exclusionary definition of Americanness, aligning national

3 "[A] subtler civic logic is also at work in efforts to frame religious minorities as uncivil threats to American values and norms, including religious freedom itself" (Braunstein 2019).

identity with specific racial, religious, and ethnic markers.[4] Recent scholarship has found that the more salient one's American identity, the more likely one will support curbing the civil liberties of Muslims (Nazita et al. 2024).

Moreover, scholars have demonstrated how the marginalization of Muslims in American society grew over time. Events such as 9/11 and cultural production related to the following War on Terror served to unjustly other Muslims further in American society. In "Terrified: How Anti-Muslim Fringe Organizations Became Mainstream," Bail maps the rise of anti-Muslim fringe groups into the mainstream of American society (2015). This process included the expansion of think tanks, civil society organizations, news outlets, and funding for anti-Muslim organizations. These organizations gained credibility and increased resonance with the wider American population via intense emotional and fear based representational attacks against Muslims, while moving from the fringe (low resonance) to the mainstream (high resonance) (2015). Moreover, negative representations of Mosque building in the West (Bowe 2018), Birther myths about President Obama (Braunstein 2019), 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror (Smith 2005), all served to significantly other Muslims in the West, with this process particularly noticeable in American society.

Media Effects, Cultural Resonance, and the Dynamics of Fusion and Defusion

Agenda-setting theory posits that media shape public perceptions by determining which issues receive attention and how they are framed (Guo, Vu, & McCombs, 2012). While media do not dictate public opinion outright, they establish issue salience, directing public concern toward particular topics and influencing collective interpretations (Guo, Vu, & McCombs, 2012). First-level agenda-setting highlights which issues become central in public discourse, while second-level agenda-setting examines how these issues are framed to evoke specific emotional and cognitive responses (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2019). However, the extent to which media narratives effectively shape public opinion depends not only on visibility but also on how well they align with preexisting cultural frameworks—a dynamic best understood through Bail's (2016) theory of cultural resonance and Alexander's (2004) conception of fusion and defusion.

Cultural resonance explains why certain narratives gain traction while others fail to mobilize public concern. According to Bail (2016), resonance depends on three key factors: credibility (the perceived legitimacy of the message and messenger), legibility (the extent to which a message aligns with existing schemas and cultural codes), and emotional significance (the strength of affective

4 Williams writes, "[o]ur national political culture, in general, became more hostile to Islam over the decade following 2001—with a clear result that for many Americans there is now a more distinct religious 'other'" (Williams 2012). Similarly, Bail (2015) outlines a similar phenomenon, showing the ascendance of fringe anti-Muslim organizations into the "mainstream of American culture.

engagement). Similarly, Alexander's (2004) theory of fusion and defusion describes the processes by which cultural objects—such as media narratives, social movements, or political claims—become powerfully embedded within collective identity (fusion) or lose their legitimacy and salience (defusion). When a message is fused, it is symbolically and emotionally integrated into a shared moral structure, making it resonate deeply with the public. Conversely, defusion occurs when a message becomes disconnected from and fractured within differing collective meanings, leading to disengagement, or loss of mobilization and polarization.

By integrating these two frameworks, we can understand how agenda-setting and framing succeed or fail in shaping public opinion. Media frames that align with widely held cultural narratives—particularly those that are already fused with national or moral identity—are more likely to resonate and influence public discourse. However, when competing narratives challenge or erode the symbolic power of an issue, defusion occurs, leading to declining public engagement or polarization. For example, a protest movement may initially achieve fusion by connecting its message to foundational democratic values, but over time, counter-framing by political elites or shifts in public fatigue may lead to defusion, reducing its effectiveness as a mobilizing force.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach, analyzing the societalization process of the Muslim Ban through structuralist hermeneutics and thick description, with Civil Sphere Theory (CST) as the guiding theoretical framework. The work proceeds in the spirit of Robert Park's scientific journalism by focusing on empirical observation and systematic analysis of social phenomena, while serving as a bridge between sociology and public discourse (1924). The research traces the evolution of public narratives, protests, and judicial decisions surrounding the policy, focusing on how the Ban was rebranded and integrated into the American civil sphere.

Sampling and Data Collection

The primary sources of data are articles from *The New York Times* (NYT) and *The Wall Street Journal* (WSJ), supplemented by other centrist media outlets such as The Guardian, Politico, USA Today, and The Hill. These sources were selected purposefully to capture key moments in the policy's lifespan. The NYT and WSJ were chosen due to their prominent roles as professionalized news institutions that influence public opinion and hold substantial sway within the American civil sphere. They are considered representative of civil sphere communicative institutions, each embodying distinct ideological perspectives but with significant overlap in coverage (Alexander 2011). The NYT archives were scanned in their entirety from 2015-2020. The WSJ archives were scanned systematically after the NYT search process. The search included looking for

key words in titles such as Muslim ban, travel ban, Muslims, travel, ban, refugees, immigration, immigrants, airport protests, executive order, birther, Islamophobic, and Islamophobia. After this, these key words were also searched for in the archives to ensure no articles were missed. From here, the articles were read and grouped by time period in excel, as most articles were clustered around ban iterations, protests, and judicial decisions. Purposeful sampling in these high-intensity periods from 2015 to 2020 was then used to gather more articles from sources such as The Guardian, Politico, USA Today, and The Hill. These sources are all centrist or slightly left leaning, typical communicative institutions of the CS. Adding these sources helped broaden the scope of sources analyzed, while retaining a degree of similarity across sources. It also allowed for the cross verification of source content. Importantly and as a limitation, no right-wing news sources are analyzed, though work from Bail (2015) is leaned upon to establish the rise of repression based and exclusionary cultural producers moving into the mainstream and more firmly into the CS itself.

A total of 92 articles were analyzed (N=92). Google Analytics data from research conducted by Collingwood, Oskooii and colleagues in 2018 and 2019 is used to highlight and confirm periods of intense online activity in relation to the Ban. The Google Analytics data confirms major upticks in searches for the ban in time periods surrounding events related to the ban. It also confirmed waning online activity in relation to the ban over time and in relation to each subsequent iteration. Google Analytics data mapping the frequency of searches for given key words like "Travel Ban" or "Muslim Ban," in conjunction with the mapping of judicial decisions, ban iteration implementations, and protests allowed for the triangulation of key moments surrounding the ban. Oskooii et al. similarly show ebbs and flows in the proportion of negative (anti-ban), balanced/informational, and positive (pro-ban) articles, along with the proportion of monthly articles, from the NYT, WSJ, and USA Today, pertaining to the ban, from January to December of 2017 (2019). They show clear upticks in negative anti-ban articles, balanced/informational articles, and the number of monthly articles, while finding a very small proportion of positive pro-ban articles. Upticks revolved around introductions of new ban iterations. Having such a broad media trend understanding from other authors allowed for closer inspection of specific contextual instances while still ensuring the instances were more broadly generalizable to the greater CS and social world. In conjunction with this, significant legal and policy milestones and major public reactions, such as protests and Supreme Court rulings were mapped via sources such as the ACLU, in conjunction with representations from communicative institutions, to outline unsettled/unsteady societal states (Swidler 1986; Alexander 2019).

This study did not engage with social media, except for a couple of Tweets quoted in news articles, and instead focused on more traditional online news sources. While this is a limitation, the use of google analytics data helps illustrate larger online trends and interest in the Ban in the form of searching. The use of public opinion polling data also elucidated broader perceptions of the ban over time.

Structuralist Hermeneutics, Binary Coding, and Thick Description

Structuralist hermeneutics guides the textual analysis of news coverage, treating articles as cultural texts embedded with patterned symbols and codes, seen most vividly in the highly structured binary civil discourse. This approach, based on Alexander and Smith's (2003) strong program, allows for the identification of deep cultural structures, civil religious myths and narratives, sacralized and utilized within civil discourse. The analysis moves beyond the literal content of the articles, aiming to uncover the symbolic meanings and binaries reminiscent of Durkheim's sacred/profane (2001) in the form of civil/anti-civil codes (Alexander 2006) that shape public perception of the ban. This method reveals how the Muslim Ban was initially framed as profane and un-American but later cloaked in civil language through a process of rebranding into a "Travel Ban."

Geertzian thick description complements the structuralist approach by offering a deep interpretation of cultural symbols and narratives within the coverage. Moreover, it allows for the contextualization of code usage by given actors, their relations, and their institutions. Thick description here involves interpreting the layered social meanings behind public reactions and policy representations, seeking to identify the structured "codes, narratives, and symbols that create the textured webs of social meaning" (Geertz 2000). This method is particularly useful for capturing the shift in public discourse from the initial profaning of the Muslim Ban to its eventual sacralization within civil sphere binaries.

Using CST, the study establishes a binary coding system based on civil/anti-civil distinctions and characterizations such as, democratic/anti-democratic, civic/ethnic, universal/particular, justice/injustice, unity/division, inclusive/exclusive, American/un-American, tolerant/intolerant, altruistic/selfish, freedom/oppression, opportunity/prejudice, protest/passivity, multiculturalism/ethnocentrism, bravery/cowardice, true/false, collective/individual, knowledge/ignorance, constitutional/unconstitutional, order/chaos, legal/illegal—for the specific structuring, see section on CST. These codes are derived from CST's emphasis on civil versus anti-civil dynamics and adapted through abductive coding (theoretically and inductively derived from media sources) to reflect the specific moralizing discursive structures surrounding the Muslim Ban.

Societalization

This coding system allowed the identification of shifts in the civil sphere's treatment of the policy, revealing the societalization process (Alexander 2019) whereby the Muslim Ban moved through phases of intense public outcry, legal battles, and rebranding efforts until it gained a semblance of legitimacy within a steady state. The process is outlined below in **Figure 2.**

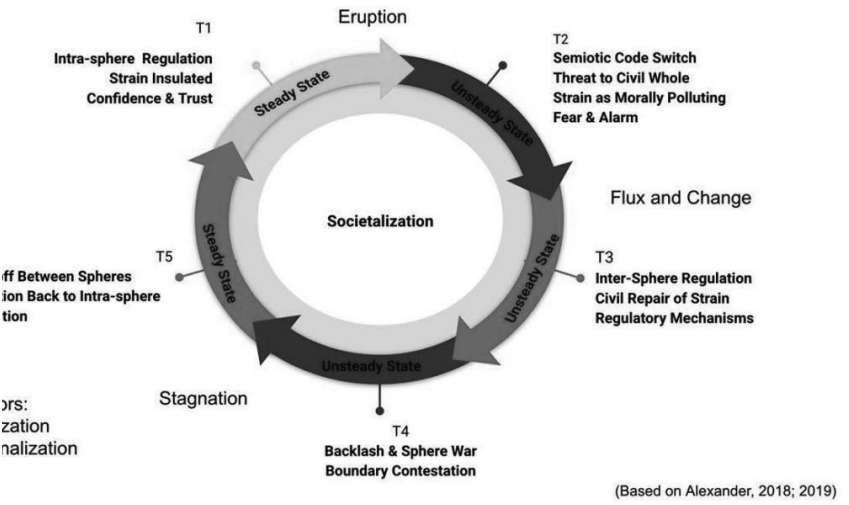

Figure 2.

This methodology provides a systematic way to trace the embedded tribal sentiments strategically employed and cloaked in civil language to legitimize the policy. By uncovering the framing as explicitly civil yet implicitly anti-civil, one can more clearly deduce how the policy discursively became sacralized within the CS while materially remaining exclusionary. The mapping of this process helps to elucidate a form of civil repair rooted in repression over liberty. By examining shifts in the use of binary coding to represent actors' motives, relations and broader institutions over different timeframes and iterations of the ban, the study reveals how exclusionary policies can navigate civil sphere dynamics, ultimately gaining legal validation while challenging the core ideals of inclusivity and solidarity within democratic society.

Narrating the Muslim Ban Iterations

The rise of Donald Trump to the presidency marked the culmination of a backlash process within the CS that sought to reclaim and redefine Americanness tribally, seen most vividly in exclusive and anti-pluralist rhetoric. This process clashed with inclusive parts of the CS, focused on justice, prioritizing exclusivity. During Trump's first campaign and presidency, his rhetoric further polarized the political sphere and undermined the civil sphere's cultural regulators. Trump initially proposed a "Muslim Ban" on the campaign trail, yet the policy was eventually reframed and launched officially as a "Travel Ban," ostensibly to align with civil sphere binaries and cultural structures embedded into the American collective conscience, like "religious freedom." Yet it had a disproportionate impact on Muslim-majority countries, exposing its de facto exclusivity (Braunstein 2019) while largely being recognized as a Muslim Ban across the political spectrum, for different reasons.

Trump's presidency further strained these cultural regulators as his administration sought to redefine norms of civility and inclusivity. His rejection of political correctness, paired with rhetoric like wiping "radical Islamic terrorism ... off the face of the earth" (Goldmacher 2017), framed inclusive values as out of touch with reality. Moreover, his insistence on tying terrorism to "radical Islam" furthered discourses rooted in protecting white Christian Americans from othered marginalized groups. At the start of Trump's first presidency, protests erupted nationwide, notably the Women's March—one of the largest protests in history—signaling a backlash against what many perceived as an "anti-civil" presidency. The belief that Trump's administration, or "the adults in the room," would moderate his behavior proved misplaced as the civil sphere's regulating structures faltered, and previously fringe ideologies came further into the mainstream, eroding shared norms of acceptability and civility in American political discourse.

Bipartisan Uncertainty Over the Proposed Muslim Ban as Anti-civil and Un-American

During Donald Trump's call for a Muslim Ban during the 2015-2016 campaign, even prominent Republican leaders expressed concerns about its alignment with what they saw as sacred American traditions of religious pluralism and inclusivity. Paul Ryan, then Speaker of the House, told *USA Today*, "[p]utting a religious test on anybody coming to this country is wrong ... We ought to have a security test, not a religious test. That's who we are" (Page 2016). Here, Ryan emphasized that America's identity is rooted in inclusivity and attacked the morality of any religious test, calling it "wrong." Here, he is implicitly invoking the cultural structure of the Constitution and the First Amendment in particular, noting that religious pluralism is a defining feature of Americanness, "that's who we are." Categorizing the proposed "religious test" as "wrong" and counter to a collective American identity served to represent the policy as anti-civil and rooted power over the law, arbitrary rather than rule regulated, faction based rather than group based, all the discourse of repression. Moreover, Ryan here represents his motives as civil by being active rather than passive, autonomous—against his party's president—rather than dependent. Relationally, Ryan performs openness, truthfulness, and criticality, aligning himself within a liberty based civil discourse.

Mitt Romney echoed Ryan's sentiments, tweeting, "On Muslims, @realDonaldTrump fired before aiming...@SpeakerRyan is on target" (McCarthy et al. 2015). Romney's comment in support of Ryan references a common American trope and relates Trump's actions to firing a gun irrationally, wildly, and excitedly, to represent Trump's anti-civil motives and move toward anti-civil institutions focused on bonds of loyalty, hierarchy, arbitrariness, and power. Similarly, *The Guardian* noted widespread Republican criticism, with figures like Republican National Committee chairman Reince Priebus and former

Vice President Dick Cheney denouncing the proposal as un-American. Cheney stated, "this whole notion that somehow we need to say no more Muslims and just ban a whole religion goes against everything we stand for and believe in… religious freedom's been a very important part of our history" (McCarthy et al. 2015). Cheney references the centrality and sacrality of religious freedom in an imagined American collective identity, further representing the policy in the realm of the anti-civil. Moreover, by repeating "our" and "we" he can further represent the ban as something distorted and deceitful, "against everything we stand for and believe in," and thus in the name of particular factions instead of a broader collectivity, anti-civil.

Priebus reinforced this view, stating, "We need to aggressively take on radical Islamic terrorism but not at the expense of our American values" (McCarthy et al., 2015). Marco Rubio also condemned Trump's plan, calling it "impulsive" and "not well thought out"—not self-controlled—adding, "It violates the Constitution. It places a religious test, and it isn't the best way to face this threat" (McCarthy et al. 2015). Rubio's critique framed the policy as unconstitutional, chaotic, and ignorant, reiterating the cultural and legal objections raised by other Republicans. Both officials heavily critiqued the ban as anti-civil while also making clear they believed there was a "threat." This performed "reasonableness" while also raising the alarm that sacred American values—cultural structures—were under threat if the policy proceeded, further raising the alarm that democracy itself was under threat.

Despite this bipartisan condemnation,[5] Trump's rhetoric resonated with much of the Republican base. Trump rejected these critiques by labelling them as 'politically correct,' but not 'correct,' declaring, "But. I. Don't. Care" (McCarthy et al. 2015) about political correctness. In this way, he could explicitly reject the structuring language and code of the civil sphere. This allowed him to present himself as distinct, unfiltered, and speaking for the people against elites—in a classic populist and charismatic style—a champion chosen by "the people" to disrupt established institutions and norms (Weber 1958). This resonated with a public influenced by growing polarization and a backdrop of anti-Muslim fringe civil society organizations (Bail 2015), who were declaring that the security of the collective was being sacrificed by unrealistic, irrational, passive, actors who themselves were deferential and deceitful—not critical or truthful about a "real threat" from outsiders, Muslims—thus creating institutions rooted in power, exclusivity, and hierarchy that were unable to identify threats to the polity. Trump thus represented his "personal" motives as active, autonomous, reasonable, and realistic, while characterizing political correctness as mad and dependent. In this way, he was able to represent his plan as civil. At the same time, he presented his personal plan as a necessary anti-civil

5 Democrats at this time were also furiously condemning the Ban. I included Republican establishment members' critiques to showcase how the CS discourse at this time was relatively united—not polarized—in condemning the ban.

diversion in the name of a collective good to protect the blood, land and religion of the U.S., the tribal solidaristic horizon.

While Republicans aimed to distance themselves from Trump's explicit rhetoric, their civilly coded language often mirrored similar exclusionary policies. Trump's approach underscored a growing backslide of inclusion-based norms within the CS, further polarizing political discourse and challenging CS cultural regulators that once unified political adversaries under a shared discursive commitment to perceived "American values" via "frenemy" status, seen in cross cutting group ties, the *sine qua non* of democratic politics (Sciortino 2021; Polletta 2016; Parsons, Sciortino & Alexander 2021; Alexander 2006). This indicates a major CS resilience problem.

The Travel Ban as a De Facto Muslim Ban

By the time Trump signed the Travel Ban (Executive Order 13769) in January 2017, he had effectively further polarized the political sphere, undermining the civil sphere's ability to exert inter-sphere regulatory power. Trump had campaigned on a promise to institute a Muslim Ban, yet his administration strategically named it the Travel Ban, framing it as a measure of commonsense "safety" and "security" against an evil threat "radical Islamic Terrorism." This reframing sought to align the policy with civil narratives while obscuring its repressive intent. Yet, State Department data reported by *The Washington Post* shows that visa issuances to majority-Muslim countries targeted by the ban plummeted from 1,419 the month before the ban to just 69 in its first month. Meanwhile, issuances to Venezuela and North Korea—non-Muslim-majority countries included in the ban—remained stable. These figures help confirm the Travel Ban's *de facto* targeting of Muslims, despite the administration's public insistence that it was not a "Muslim Ban" (Burke 2017).

The Travel Ban's rollout sparked immediate public outcry. Protests erupted at airports nationwide, with chants of "No Ban, No Wall" and the hashtag #nobannowall trending across social media. The protests represented a larger societal mobilization, invoking the CS's inclusive cultural structures to contest the manifestation of a policy deemed antithetical to American values. Public opinion shifted significantly: opposition to the ban increased from 44% pre-implementation to 51% immediately post-implementation (Collingwood et al. 2018). This seems to be indicative of a code switch around meanings assigned to the ban as it happened very quickly, intensely, and after intense protests. Media coverage further amplified this public opposition. Major outlets such as The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal and USA Today overwhelmingly framed the ban in negative terms (Oskooii et al. 2019). Moreover, major corporate institutions often silent on such issues, including Starbucks, Google, Microsoft, Amazon, Airbnb, Expedia and Lyft condemned the policy, framing it in anti-civil terms as exclusive and arbitrary. Such public outcry, protests, public opinion shifts, communicative institution condemnation, and major corporate backlash, is all indicative of a move into

the unsteady societal state, and thus a codeswitch from civil to anti-civil meanings. Polarization and marginalization are often credited with halting the societalization process, however, widespread condemnation occurred, meaning the possibility for civil repair opened.

Thick Description of Legality as Dictated by Universal Moral Cultural Structures

The legality of the *de jure* Travel Ban, but *de facto* Muslim Ban, was immediately contested in court. As Alexander notes, "the civil sphere sustains powerful regulative institutions as well: the complex apparatuses of law, office, and elections apply sanctions that are backed through state coercion and make cultural evaluations stick" (2019). Law, in this sense, is deeply intertwined with culture; as public pressure builds against what are deemed unjust laws, they are often overturned to address societal strains. The Travel Ban's lawfulness was questioned both in the courts and in the broader public sphere, where communicative institutions paired opposition with inclusive notions of Americanness rooted in sacred depictions of pluralism. By framing the ban as fundamentally anti-American, these institutions sought to represent moral universals to shift public perception.

An *NYT* editorial declared, "[t]he document does not explicitly mention any religion, yet it sets a blatantly unconstitutional standard by excluding Muslims while giving government officials the discretion to admit people of other faiths" (*NYT Editorial Board* 2017). This statement highlights how the ban, while not explicitly naming Muslims, was framed as functionally exclusionary. Moreover, the NYT frames the ban as anti-civil by showcasing its arbitrariness and particularism—only excluding Muslims—rooted in secrecy, deceit, and calculation, and derived from unrealistic and unreasonable motives contrary to the constitution, sacred to the CS—thus establishing a clear threat to democracy.

Simultaneously, Trump attempted to manage the narrative. In an *NYT* article titled "Judge Blocks Trump Order on Refugees Amid Chaos and Outcry Worldwide," Trump claimed, "It's not a Muslim ban, but we were prepared" (Shear et al. 2017). This performance sought to run counter to the notion of a particularized and exclusionary policy while also defending the preparedness of the policy implementation. Trump's strategy reflected an attempt to situate the policy as civil and democratic for those uneasy about its anti-pluralistic implications. The statement "we were prepared" attempts to portray a controlled rollout and thus sacralize it, contrasting the chaos stated elsewhere.

Despite these efforts, the broader information environment profaned the policy as un-American. Collingwood et al. (2018) observed, "In the hours and days after the executive order was signed, the information environment—which overwhelmingly focused on the ban above other news events and executive orders—painted the ban, to some degree, as inherently un-American." This narrative harkened on idealized notions of Americanness as inclusive and pluralistic, directly challenging the exclusivity of the ban.

The Constitution and the Rule of Law as Sacred Structures

Another significant line of critique centered on the ban's constitutionality. The *NYT* editorial above explicitly labeled the policy unconstitutional, while another *NYT* article implied this by highlighting a judge's decision to block the order. In the U.S., the rule of law and the Constitution are treated as sacred, ritualized cultural structures. Their invocation carries profound emotional and symbolic weight, capable of mobilizing public outrage. As Jaworsky (2019) notes, "the rule of law is one of the primary justifications for maintaining a strong legal boundary around the nation." Similarly, Nevins (2002) emphasizes that the law shapes perceptions of good and evil, further illustrating its role as a moral cultural structure.

The media amplified these sacred values by coupling the ban with imagery of chaos, in stark contrast to civil rules based legal decision making, creating threats to equality. The *NYT* editorial board described the policy as "Cowardly and Dangerous," while another *NYT* article referenced "Chaos and Outcry Worldwide." The *Wall Street Journal* published a similarly titled piece, "Trump's Travel Ban Jolts Globe, Leads to Legal Fight," evoking synonymous imagery. By pairing the ban with the profane binaries of chaos and unconstitutionality, these institutions represented highly resonant cultural structures symbolizing the rule of law and the Constitution as under threat, and by extension democracy.

Holocaust Cultural Structure as a Sacred Evil and the Bridging Metaphor

Protesters often drew explicit parallels from the Muslim Ban to historical injustices. Ibrahim Qatabi stated, "[w]e are impacted by the ban, but it should concern every American. Once they ban one group, they can ban another group, and that's how people's rights get sent back to the Dark Ages" (Stack 2017). This warning, invoking the dangers of exclusivity and oppression, resonates with Martin Niemöller's Holocaust-era admonition: "First they came for the Communists, and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist…Then they came for me. And there was no one left to speak out for me." These linguistic parallels tapped into deeply ingrained cultural structures of collective trauma and moral responsibility, widely recognized due to widespread historical narratives and cultural representations of evil.

Alexander (2003) identifies the Holocaust as a cultural structure representing "sacred evil," a universal symbol of injustice requiring vigilance. Activists and public figures used what Alexander terms a "bridging metaphor" to draw equivalence between the Muslim Ban and the Holocaust, highlighting their shared origins in the exclusion and persecution of minority groups. A protesting Rabbi made this link explicit, stating:

We remember our history, and we remember that the borders of this country closed to us in 1924 with very catastrophic consequences during the Holocaust. We know that some of the language that's being used now to stop

Muslims from coming in is the same language that was used to stop Jewish refugees from coming (Moynihan 2017).

This statement invoked not only the atrocity of the Holocaust but also the United States' complicity in denying refuge to Jewish people fleeing persecution, drawing a moral warning about repeating such actions, and tapping into the commonsense cultural construct, "history repeats itself." The imagery of rabbis being arrested during these protests deepened the symbolic resonance and spurred more media attention, evoking memories of Holocaust-era persecution. Media coverage amplified these associations, embedding the Muslim Ban within a narrative of sacred evil. Phrases like "never forget" and references to universal morality, forged through the Holocaust's traumatic narrative, shaped public perceptions of the ban as an affront to justice and the fabric of democracy.

By aligning the Muslim Ban with this sacred evil, activists and communicative institutions framed it as a profound moral failing. This cultural coding helped catalyze more opposition from a broader public, helping to transform the ban framing from a security policy into a symbol of exclusion and oppression that demanded collective resistance and civil repair.

Statue of Liberty as a Symbolic Cultural Structure of Inclusivity: The Soul of Americanness

The protests against the Muslim Ban invoked the Statue of Liberty as a potent cultural symbol of inclusivity, framing the debate around what it means to be American. The *NYT* reported, "references to the Statue of Liberty and its famous inscription became a rallying cry" (Rosenberg 2017). The ideals etched on the Statue of Liberty's base read: "Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!" (Lazarus 1883). Such imagery primes readers to reflect on their own immigrant heritage and the pluralistic inclusivity central to a universalistic CS. As one protester declared, "Muslims and refugees deserve just as much protection and love in America as anyone. I will stand by that forever and always" (Hu 2017). Here, the protester is explicitly expressing that Muslims deserve protection, not to be protected from. This extension of the horizon of solidarity sought to shift the framing of Muslims into civil discourse and away from the discourse of repression, harkening on trusting and friendly civil relations of equality.

Similarly, *The Wall Street Journal* invoked this resonating cultural referent with its article, "A Trump Protest Under Lady Liberty's Gaze" (Weiss 2017). The title connects the protests to the ideals of the Statue of Liberty and implies the ideals she represents are watching over the protesters. One protester, Mr. Aljomai, emphasized this by stating, "We are trying to tell Mr. Trump that America is the greatest and we want to keep it the greatest in the American way, not in his way. His decision is racist and he's not supposed to make a decision like

that" (Stack 2017). This taps into the binary of American versus un-American, implying that the ban undermines America's collective identity and broader sense of self. The protester notes that America is great, alluding to and contrasting with Trump's iconic "Make America Great Again" (MAGA). By contrasting "the American way" with "his way," the protester frames the policy as a betrayal of impersonal, collective, and universal institutional values in favor of the personal, factional and particular values. This also highlights a denial of charismatic authority. Muslim-American leaders echoed this framing. Afaf Nasher, executive director of CAIR New York, declared, "Muslim-Americans have been attacked over and over again... But we are resilient and strong, and we will come back with more protests until we have our civil rights. Because this is what America is supposed to be" (Robbins 2017). This statement again highlights civil ideals of unity, justice, and inclusivity while portraying protest itself as a sacred performance of American identity. Furthermore, they are pointing out the sacred ideal of increased inclusion over time.[6]

Hameed Khalid Darweesh, an Iraqi detained at JFK Airport, further captured this sentiment: "'This is the humanity, this is the soul of America,' he said, surrounded by reporters and a handful of protesters holding supportive signs. 'This is what pushed me to move, leave my country and come here'" (Rosenberg 2017). His words underscore the ideal of protesting injustice for justice and inclusion over exclusion. By distinguishing between the American people and the state's actions, Darweesh attempts to reinforce the idea that the protests embody the true "soul of America." The Statue of Liberty thus served as an iconic symbolic cultural structure of inclusivity mobilized to counter exclusivity. The communicative institutions thus were framing opposition to the Muslim Ban as a fight to preserve the nation's soul. By protesting, participants not only opposed the policy but also performed the sacred values of the civil sphere, standing against a policy deemed profane and un-American.

From Intra- to Inter-Institutional Regulation of the Policy

During the second and third days of the Travel Ban, January 28 and 29, airport protests persisted, and lawsuits were filed in New York and Massachusetts (ACLU 2017; 2020). A federal judge in New York granted the ACLU's request for an emergency stay, preventing the deportation of individuals stranded in U.S. airports. The ruling ensured that "[p]eople who arrive at a U.S. airport with a valid visa, green card, or as refugees approved for resettlement to the United States are protected from deportation" (ACLU 2017; 2020). This marked the first instance of inter-institutional regulation, with judicial intervention disrupting the policy's initial rollout. This ensured the continuation of a rule regulated and legal procedure, creating friendly, truthful, and open relations

6 "Insofar as the founding cultural myths and constitutional documents of democratic societies are universalistic, they implicitly stipulate that the discourse can always be further extended, and that it eventually must be" (Alexander 2006: 61).

rooted in autonomous, reasonable and calm motives, contrary to the binary anti-civil antonyms.

The chaotic rollout of the Ban, implemented without timely notification or clear procedural guidance, was cited as a violation of the rule of law. These critiques applied cultural-legal criteria like reasonableness to delegitimize the policy. Judicial rulings, shaped by embeddedness in a CS cultural configuration, thus applied civil motives, relations, and institutional discourses, reinforcing the bans portrayal as unlawful, unjust, and counter to deeply ingrained ideas of Americanness.

Meanwhile, media outlets amplified this narrative, coding the Ban as the "Muslim Ban" and framing airports as sites of resistance. Pro-bono lawyers aiding arrivals, protesters advocating for justice, and journalists exposing marginalization were portrayed as civil heroes. The chaotic implementation was further profaned as the courts' rulings questioned its constitutionality, giving communicative institutions additional material to criticize the Ban.

The interplay between judicial and communicative institutions intensified the societalization process. Legal rulings provided a basis for opposing the Ban, while media coverage reinforced its portrayal as anti-civil, sacralizing the actions of those resisting it via the discourse of the CS. Together, these institutions acted as cultural and regulatory forces, legally halting the Ban's first iteration while embedding it in the social text as un-American.

However, this inter-institutional regulation faced resistance. The iterative nature of the policy—rooted in anti-civil relations of deceit and antagonism driving arbitrary and power-based decisions—and ongoing sphere war underscored the tension between civil repair and backlash. This dynamic, explored further in T3 and T4, reveals the broader conflict over cultural definitions of Americanness.

Backlash, Sphere War, and Further Civil Repair

Backlash is an inevitable part of the societalization process, as institutions contest perceived overreach by other spheres to protect their autonomy (Alexander 2019a). During the civil repair of the Travel Ban, the White House reacted to what it saw as a breach of its institutional sovereignty. On January 30, 2017, President Trump's White House fired Acting Attorney General Sally Yates after she refused to enforce the Ban. Yates instructed Justice Department employees "not to defend the order in court" (Editorial Board 2017) and supported a dissent letter from 100 State Department officials, which stated: "This ban stands in opposition to the core American and constitutional values that we, as federal employees, took an oath to uphold" (Editorial Board 2017). This statement, coded in civil linguistics, questioned the morality and legality of the Ban while suggesting it could increase anti-Muslim and anti-American sentiment globally. Moreover, she notes the oath taken in support of the constitution and the country as a whole, harkening on the civil importance of office and contracts for regulating institutional behavior, contrary to anti-civil bonds of loyalty directed at a given personality.

Sally Yates publicly declared, "I am not convinced that the defense of the executive order is consistent with these responsibilities nor am I convinced that the executive order is lawful" (Binder and Apuzzo, 2017). Her dismissal during this tense period underscored the sphere war between the White House and other regulatory and communicative institutions. Yates, a holdover from the Obama administration, became a civil hero, praised for her refusal to uphold what she deemed unconstitutional, showcasing her autonomy, criticality, honor, and devotion to following the law and the oath of office, even when this meant certain removal from office. The *NYT* quoted a Republican senator from 2017 calling Yates "a hero of the American people, a hero of what's right" (Binder and Apuzzo 2017). This reframed her actions as bipartisan and rooted in truth over deceit, slightly transcending partisanship.

The courts continued to challenge the Ban. On February 3, 2017, a federal judge in Seattle issued a nationwide order temporarily blocking the Ban, and on February 9, a three-judge panel from the Ninth Circuit unanimously refused to reinstate it (ACLU 2020). Omar Jadwat of the ACLU stated, "[t]he appeals court's refusal to reinstate the Muslim ban is correct. The government's erratic and chaotic attempts to enforce this unconstitutional ban have taken a tremendous toll on innocent individuals, our country's values, and our standing in the world" (ACLU 2020). This statement, rich in civil sphere linguistics, framed the Ban as erratic, chaotic, unconstitutional, and un-American, reinforcing the notion of the ban as anti-civil and a threat to democracy.

President Trump's White House responded aggressively, asserting executive authority over national security matters. The *NYT* reported that Trump argued, "national security concerns are unreviewable, even if those actions potentially contravene constitutional rights and protections" (Liptak 2017). The courts rejected this argument, stating, "[i]t is beyond question ... that the federal judiciary retains the authority to adjudicate constitutional challenges to executive action" (Liptak, 2017). This response emphasized the judiciary's role in inter-sphere regulation, protecting constitutional boundaries and, by extension, American democracy itself. Moreover, the court clearly outlined that it was active and autonomous and thus critical of anything interfering with the rule of law and its sphere of influence.

Media coverage amplified this tension, framing the judiciary as protectors of the civil sphere against an overreaching executive branch. President Trump's reaction, including his February 10 tweet, "SEE YOU IN COURT, THE SECURITY OF OUR NATION IS AT STAKE!" (Siepel 2017). Here he states that the judiciary was compromising national security by blocking his ban. He later described the ruling as "a political decision" (Liptak 2017), questioning judicial impartiality by representing the court as conspiratorial rather than deliberative and self-interested rather than honorable, and thus focused on achieving power over preserving the rule of law.

Dissent within Trump's administration used similar civil linguistics to oppose the Ban. A memo from 100 State Department officials argued the policy was "counterproductive" to enhancing national security (Editorial Board 2017).

While agreeing on the importance of protecting American security, the memo framed the Ban as undermining these goals, indirectly endangering democracy. This dissent represented an internal attempt at inter-sphere regulation, as the State Department challenged the White House through communicative means in the civil sphere.

The conflict surrounding the Travel Ban illustrates the complexities of sphere war and civil repair. As the judiciary, communicative institutions, and civil society actors sought to challenge the Ban's legality and morality, the White House attempted to assert its authority, creating an iterative struggle over the boundaries of institutional power and the core values of American democracy.

Continuation of the Unsteady State: Sphere War, Iteration 2.0

The legal battles and the firing of officials marked only the beginning of the executive branch's backlash against civil repair efforts. After a brief period of calm following the judicial blocking of the first Travel/Muslim Ban, a second iteration was introduced via executive order on March 6, 2017. The *NYT* described this iteration as "[l]ighter, tighter and more carefully worded," noting its attempt "to pass legal muster in the United States while meeting its stated objective of combating Islamist terrorism" (Walsh 2017). This version sought legal and cultural acceptability by removing Iraq—an ally supported heavily by the U.S.—from the list of banned countries. Yet this new iteration remained in the unsteady state, prompting lawsuits, articles, and renewed CS resistance. Moreover, it remained heavily coded as anti-civil.

However, differing from the first rollout, the second iteration lacked the mass protests and emotional public displays that characterized the original. By this time, the ban had already been coded as a Muslim Ban in the collective consciousness, diminishing the shock value of its reintroduction. Still, civil sphere communicative institutions remained active. The *NYT* quoted an observer stating, "[t]o see this order as anything other than a Muslim ban is willful blindness. This is just another tragic example of this astonishing lack of empathy for anyone the administration believes is different" (New York Times Opinion 2017). This critique emphasizes the notion that the policy was aimed at othering those deemed different. Moreover, the quote emphasizes the dependent and distorted rather than autonomous and realistic view one must inhabit to believe the ban was justified, creating a deferential relation willing to accept exclusivity over inclusivity and ultimately hierarchy over equality in institutions. Again, showcasing the anti-civil and anti-democratic meaning of the ban.

Civil Sphere Regulation in Iteration 2

Unlike the chaotic rollout of the first iteration, the second version appeared more orderly, avoiding the immediate mass detainments and deportations that fueled airport protests. The *NYT* noted "[i]n a minor triumph, there were none

of the earlier chaotic scenes of travelers and refugees being turned back at airports" (Walsh 2017). This shift suggests an effort to represent the Ban's implementation as rational, reasonable, calm, self-controlled, realistic, and thus also straightforward, deliberative, and open, implying a rule regulated and impersonal contractual implementation. Moving away from blatant chaos toward procedural order greatly minimized the CS response to the ban. Removing the religious exception for Christians and eliminating Iraq from the list of banned countries further signaled an attempt to make the Ban appear less discriminatory, particularistic, and exclusive. Therefore, coding shifted away from the discourse of repression toward the discourse of liberty.

However, the intent to maintain the policy's exclusionary goals remained evident. Rudy Giuliani explicitly admitted to assisting in crafting a "Muslim ban that would pass legal muster" (Burns 2017). Stephen Miller similarly described the changes as "technical adjustments aimed at ushering the same policy past the review of a court" (Burns 2017). These admissions revealed the *de facto* goal of preserving the original ban's exclusionary intent while presenting a more acceptable facade. In this sense, the Muslim Ban still existed materially, while it became discursively cloaked in the symbolic discursive structure of motives, relations, and institutions, moving it from anti-civil to civil.

The orderly rollout of Iteration 2.0 accomplished two key outcomes: first, it allowed lawsuits to challenge the policy before full implementation; second, it minimized immediate visible impacts such as deportations, reducing media coverage and public outcry. Lawsuits from states such as Hawaii, New York, and Maryland became the key areas of contestation, rather than mass protests. Yet, communicative institutions did continue to critique the Ban, with the *NYT* reporting that 134 top foreign policy experts condemned it as "just as damaging to the United States' interests and reputation as his [Donald Trump's] original order" (Jakes 2017). Articles tied the Ban to declining tourism and economic setbacks. One article noted that the ban coincided with "a sharp decline in interest in coming to America," further linking the policy to reputational and economic harm (Jakes 2017). Yet, gone were the notions that the ban represented a clear existential threat to democracy itself.

Cultural Implications and Backslide of Democratic Norms

Communicative institutions began to highlight the broader global implications of the Ban, framing it as part of a democratic backslide, yet shied away from saying the entire house was burning down. One *NYT* article quoted an analyst describing the ban as contributing to a "moral and reputational toll" (Walsh 2017). This echoed concerns that the ban signaled a decline in U.S. democratic inclusivity and narrowed the horizon of solidarity. Another article noted that individuals in less democratic countries were drawing "parallels [to their own countries] to signify that the United States has entered an unwelcome phase" (Walsh 2017). These critiques tied the Ban to a perceived erosion of the U.S.'s moral and democratic standing globally.

Despite these communicative efforts to profane the ban, some evidence of minor civil repair emerged. Adjustments to the text and process of the second iteration were clear attempts to align with pluralistic civil sphere norms. However, these changes were often dismissed as and even celebrated by the authors of the ban as superficial efforts to pass legal scrutiny rather than genuine reforms.

2.0 The Legal Response Influenced by the Civil Sphere

The relatively subdued public response to Travel/Muslim Ban 2.0 contrasted sharply with the legal challenges it faced, as the unsteady state persisted within the judicial sphere. Judges in various cases cited the cultural context and social text surrounding the ban as critical factors in their decisions. For example, Judge Derrick K. Watson of Federal District Court in Honolulu wrote that a "reasonable, objective observer" would view the new order as "issued with a purpose to disfavor a particular religion, in spite of its stated, religiously neutral purpose" (Burns 2017). He noted the importance of context, referencing Trump's campaign press release calling for a "total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States" (Burns 2017). Judge Watson's decision reflected an interpretation of the Ban's *de facto* intent rather than its *de jure* language, identifying it as discriminatory and in violation of the First Amendment, as anti-civil.

Similarly, a Maryland judge struck down parts of the Ban, stating its purpose was "'the effectuation of the proposed Muslim ban' that Mr. Trump pledged to enact as a presidential candidate" (Burns 2017). Both rulings emphasized Trump's campaign rhetoric as evidence of the Ban's exclusive and anti-plural intent, aligning with the civil sphere's coding of the policy as unconstitutional and directly tying anti-civil motives, relations and institutional outcomes together. These judicial decisions not only applied legal standards and the First Amendment of the Constitution, but also reflected CS cultural norms prioritizing religious pluralism and freedom as foundational and sacred to Americanness. This alignment between judicial rulings and civil sphere norms illustrates a partial cultural regulation of legality. By striking down the Ban, judges reaffirmed an inclusive conception of Americanness, rejecting particularistic, exclusionary aims, while affirming the sacrality of their own autonomous honorable office and civil duty toward upholding legality and equality in the form of contracts that supersede personal bonds of loyalty.

Trump's response to these rulings attempted to profane the legal decisions and reassert his narrative. Speaking to a crowd, he declared, "This ruling makes us look weak, which by the way we no longer are, believe me" (Burns 2017), implying that judicial regulation undermined U.S. strength. His rhetoric conveyed that U.S. national security should supersede the sacred cultural structures of the CS. Moreover, he portrays the judiciary as a threat to national security and by extension the polity itself, thus rationalizing the need for exclusivity and the deployment of anti-civil cultural codes rooted in hierarchy, personality, bonds of loyalty, factions, and power.

While public protests were limited during the second iteration, smaller social media-driven campaigns and legal challenges filled the void. The lack of mass protests can be attributed to the more civilly coded rollout of the Ban, which reduced emotional triggers characteristic of the first iteration, like mass detentions and deportations. This allowed the civil sphere's regulatory institutions to address the ban's anti-civility more directly in the courts, diminishing the need for large-scale collective action. However, this meant that public awareness and outcry diminished, decreasing the pressure for civil repair characteristic of the unsteady societal state. Moreover, this meant a decrease in the potency of the code flip.

The shift to legal battles reflected a less public response to the Ban's perceived incivility. As the *NYT* noted, fewer chaotic scenes at airports translated to fewer emotional calls for action, while legal victories provided a sense of resolution (Walsh 2017). Furthermore, the orderly rollout allowed for challenges to be resolved preemptively in court, reducing visible public conflict.

Communicative institutions continued to critique the Ban's impact on America's reputation. Articles highlighted how the Ban contributed to a "moral and reputational toll" (Walsh 2017). Observers noted that anti-democratic policies like the Ban threatened America's image as a beacon of democracy. Such narratives reinforced the ban's coding as anti-civil by emphasizing its economic, diplomatic, and moral consequences. Yet, the attacks from the CS became less pronounced, indicating a stagnating societalization process.

T5: New Steady State

The later iterations of the Travel/Muslim Ban signify a return to the steady state, characterized by "standoff, not cooperation" and intra-sphere regulation (Alexander 2018). The large-scale protests and communicative efforts to profane the ban that defined its initial rollout diminished significantly during subsequent ban iterations. This marked a reassertion of non-civil spheres and a decline in inter-sphere regulation. In this steady state, "intra-institutional authorities typically 'handle' even severe institutional strains" (Alexander 2019), thus shifting control and autonomy back to the White House and away from inter-sphere regulatory measures in the form of civil repair, sphere war, and a broad conception of the ban as a morally polluting strain and threat to democracy, instigating fear and alarm.

Evidence of this shift is seen in the sharp decline in media coverage. A scan of NYT articles showed only 21 pieces on the Travel/Muslim Ban from June 2017 to June 2018, averaging 1.75 per month—dramatically less than the 16 articles per month during the initial rollout. Similarly, Google search trends for terms like "Muslim Ban" and "Travel Ban" peaked during the first iteration and tapered off in later rollouts (Collingwood et al. 2018; Oskooii et al. 2019). These indicators suggest that the unsteady state and societalization process waned, with public and communicative institutions less reactive to new iterations that adhered to and were represented as more closely aligned with CS sacred binaries.

New Iterations and Regulatory Norms

Later iterations, particularly the third, exemplified a shift back to the steady state. They were less chaotic in implementation, less discriminatory in language, and framed as more pluralistic. This iterative refinement demonstrated how the White House sought to conform to civil sphere standards without abandoning its underlying goals. They could therefore implement an exclusionary policy without evoking intense public outcry. In effect, cloaking a Muslim Ban in sacralized civil binaries.

Legal and communicative responses to the third iteration were much less intense. Federal courts initially blocked parts of the Ban, as they had with earlier iterations, but the Supreme Court allowed the third version to take effect. The Court's ultimate ruling in June 2018 upheld the ban in its entirety, effectively legitimizing it within the rule of law. This lengthy judicial process, marked by deliberation and procedural order, diminished perceptions of the ban's anti-civil polluting qualities, grounding it instead in civil legal decisions carried out by institutions perceived to uphold civil ideals. Moreover, once the ban was deemed constitutional, it was effectively cemented into legal precedent, making it extremely difficult to stop via the courts.

The NYT's coverage of the third iteration reflects this cultural shift. Articl's during this period highlighted the policy's "deliberative, rigorous examination" (Shear 2017) and framed it as the product of institutional cooperation, emphasizing autonomous and controlled deliberation, rooted in reason and ultimately the law—in other words derived via civil motives, relations and institutions. This helped further cement the policy as civil. While dissenting voices were still reported, they were relegated to secondary roles, and the rhetoric was less combative. This indicated a broader acceptance of the Ban within civil sphere boundaries, despite its ongoing material exclusionary impact.

Interestingly, the third iteration was broader and more indefinite than its predecessors, yet it failed to reignite an unsteady societal state. This suggests that rule-regulated and orderly implementation processes, even with exclusionary intent, can avoid provoking mass CS resistance. By working within the CS's sacred binaries—particularly via actively conveying reasonable, calm, and self-controlled motives, open, truthful, straightforward and deliberative relations, and rule regulated, impersonal and legal institutional actions—the White House managed to advance its agenda without facing prolonged civil repair efforts.

The Supreme Court's 2018 ruling signaled the institutionalization of the third iteration as part of the steady state. With the rule of law—a sacred cultural structure—affirming the ban's legality, communicative institutions like the NYT shifted focus to bolstering the legitimacy of the Court. The societalization process subsided, and the ban became part of the normalized regulatory framework, illustrating a clear backslide of the CS into a new steady societal state.

This steady state persisted until early 2021, when newly elected President Joe Biden fulfilled a campaign promise to rescind the Ban via executive order.

This marked the end of the policy, achieved through the civil sphere's most fundamental regulatory mechanism: voting. However, as one can see in more recent events related to the genocide in Palestine, particularly ongoing U.S. complicity, and the arrests and deportations of Palestinian supporters, the strain was not really resolved and instead continued on.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study demonstrates the paradox at the heart of the civil sphere, illustrating how inclusive democratic ideals can be co-opted by exclusionary tribal solidarities rooted in race, place, and religion. Through the case of the Muslim Ban, it reveals how sacred civil binaries—such as inclusion/exclusion, liberty/repression, and civil/anti-civil—can be strategically manipulated and relativized to justify repression by portraying targeted groups as threats to democratic universality. A key finding is that the civil sphere's symbolic and discursive mechanisms for civil repair, while capable of fostering democratic resilience, are equally vulnerable to strategic manipulation, allowing anti-democratic policies to gain legitimacy through procedural conformity. Ultimately, democratic resilience hinges upon critically recognizing and resisting the relativization of civil binaries, ensuring that civil discourse materially expands the horizon of solidarity rather than symbolically cloaking exclusionary tribal motives, relations, and institutions.

The interplay between communicative and regulative institutions played a crucial role in contesting and reshaping the discourse surrounding the Muslim Ban. Media outlets framed the policy as antithetical to American civil ideals, emphasizing its chaos, exclusion, and violation of constitutional protections. Courts, drawing on civil sphere norms, initially challenged the legality of the ban, invoking sacred cultural structures like religious freedom, the Constitution and the rule of law. However, as later iterations of the policy conformed to procedural and legal norms, public resistance diminished, signaling a troubling normalization of exclusionary practices within the civil sphere, reminiscent of Arendt's notion of "the banality of evil" (1964). Moreover, primordially rooted notions of solidarity were furthered while being sacralized by the CS, indicating a material disconnect from the discourse.

This normalization reveals the vulnerability of the civil sphere to tribal and populist forces, particularly in an era of heightened political polarization and marginalization. The Muslim Ban demonstrates how tribal bonds rooted in religion, land, and cultural identity can be mobilized to constrain the horizon of solidarity in the name of protection from an imagined other, undermining the pluralistic ideals at the core of democratic societies. This dynamic raises critical questions about the resilience of the civil sphere in the face of exclusionary policies cloaked in civil discourse.

This work is thus illustrative of a clear CS backslide, if one considers the ideal version of the CS as constantly seeking to broaden the horizon of solidarity, or further the discourse of inclusivity in line with sacred democratic

founding myths (Alexander 2006). However, if one thinks of the CS as a cultural sphere of society that is constantly adapting and shifting toward simultaneously absorbing and integrating its discursive civil ideals into the cultural configuration of competing aspirational hegemonic interests, one can also say that the CS simply changed, but did not necessarily backslide, as it does not have directionality, only a binary discourse that can be employed to sacralize or profane any given social phenomena.

Alexander notes that "even when they [agents of the CS] are aware that they are struggling over these classifications, moreover, most political actors do not recognize that it is they who are creating them. Such knowledge would relativize reality, creating an uncertainty that could undermine not only the cultural core but also the institutional boundaries and solidarity of civil society itself. Social events and actors seem to "be" these qualities, not to be labeled by them" (2006: 63). It seems that a degree of relativization occurred here, with the strategic understanding of members of Trump's team, and Trump himself, that they could code the policy within binary civil motives, relations, and institutions without making the policy materially align with the CS code. Manipulating the CS cultural code for one's political interest is of course relatively standard, however, the sacrality of the cultural code and one's embeddedness within it, typically dictates a threshold, namely the preservation of democracy. In this sense there did indeed seem to be a level of uncertainty undermining the "cultural core…institutional boundaries and solidarity of civil society itself" (62). This undermining is reason to give major pause over the resilience of the CS as it puts into question the *sine qua non* of democratic politics, namely the ability to overcome political polarization and establish cross cutting group connections via "frenemy" status, wherein the broader collectivity is more important than a given faction or an individual's personal gain. This is even more problematic when the cultural regulators of the CS are relativized and incapable of defining, instantiating and repairing various anti-democratic societal strains. It seems that there is a need to add new codes to the binary discourse of the CS to more adeptly capture the rise of a CS that is increasingly repressive, especially if previously anti-civil codes become sacralized.

The findings of this study extend CST by emphasizing its limitations in addressing the outcomes of deeply entrenched tribal and primordial bonds. While CST provides a robust framework for understanding the tension between solidarity and justice, this case study reveals how these tensions can tilt toward exclusion, eroding the inclusive foundations of democracy. The civil sphere's mechanisms for repair, while powerful, risk reinforcing exclusion when repressive policies are strategically recast within sacred binaries that prioritize security and protection for an exclusive definition of Americanness rooted in blood (race), land (place), and religion (value/belief system), rather than a focus on furthering an inclusive and ever broadening horizon of solidarity.

This study of course has several limitations. Most importantly, the work does not look at "right wing" news sources such as Fox News or Breitbart. Instead, the work engages with mostly centrist and just left of center news

sources as these have been defined as most indicative of the CS. However, as the CS continues to backslide further right, it is pertinent to understand the issues framed with CS discourse in right wing news sources, as these are increasingly defining and instantiating the issues at the cultural core of the CS. CST is a very useful framework for understanding the Muslim Ban policy, however, it does have limitations as well. Namely, it is mainly a cultural theory that sometimes struggles to account for economic forces and *realpolitik*. The theory is also reliant on the existence of a populace that assigns meaning to and believes it inhabits a democratic place. Without this belief, the theory struggles to explain political change. Many political scientists today note that the U.S. is in fact an oligarchy, and has been for a long time, by showing that the U.S. is run by powerful special interest groups and the economic elite and thus not beholden to social movements and popular opinion. This also sheds doubt on the ability of CST to adequately explain civil society. As a descriptive and explanatory tool, CST is extremely adept at explaining the culture of politics and the moralizing discourse used by interactants to both instantiate and describe their idea of a democratic culture.

Understanding the process of this discriminatory policy's rollout also has implications for the ongoing marginalization process of Muslims in the U.S. and globally. The recent and ongoing genocide in Palestine, along with decisions at the executive level in the U.S. to illegally deport international students involved in protesting the genocide, many of whom are Muslim, sheds light on the ongoing and accelerating othering of Muslims in the U.S. It is also illustrative of the continued backsliding of the CS, especially in relation to marginalized groups as it shifts toward an acceptance of a contracting horizon of solidarity.

Looking forward, the resilience of democratic societies depends on safeguarding the pluralistic, inclusive, and universal values at the heart of and idealized by the civil sphere not just discursively but also materially. Vigilance against policies that undermine these ideals, even when presented within the language of civility, is critical. Future research could explore how civil spheres in other national contexts navigate similar tensions. Comparative studies of policies targeting other marginalized groups could further illuminate how tribalist and universalist impulses interact in shaping the horizon of solidarity. Ultimately, the case of the Muslim Ban highlights the fragility of civil repair in an era of democratic backsliding. The civil sphere must not only resist policies that narrow solidarity but also actively work to expand its universal boundaries, ensuring that its ideals of inclusion and justice are more than rhetorical aspirations, and instead material realities.

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Danijel Džozef Belbek

Građanska sfera i u njenim okvirima postojana tribalna nezadovoljstva: Muslimanska zabrana obavijena sakralizovanim binarnostima

Apstrakt

Ovaj članak istražuje kako se primordijalne, plemenski ukorenjene veze sakralizuju unutar građanske sfere (GS), dovodeći u pitanje dominantne pretpostavke o njenom univerzalnom horizontu. Kroz strukturalističko-hermeneutičku analizu komunikativnih i regulatornih institucija koje su bile uključene u takozvanu Muslimansku zabranu prve administracije Donalda Trampa (2017–2021), studija otkriva kako isključujuće, anticivilne politike mogu postati legitimne unutar prividno građanskih okvira. U središtu ovog procesa leži paradoks građanske sfere: diskurs slobode istovremeno opravdava represiju kada su ciljne grupe predstavljene kao pretnja demokratskoj univerzalnosti. Analiza pokazuje postojanost „tribalnog solidarističkog horizonta", ukorenjenog u krvnom srodstvu, zemlji i religiji, koji se strateški mobilizuje kroz građanske motive, odnose i institucije kako bi suzio polje solidarnosti. Muslimanska zabrana se na početku suočila sa snažnim otporom, praćenim masovnim protestima i sudskim osporavanjem, pri čemu su građanske binarnosti oblikovale diskurs osude, predstavljajući

zabranu kao neameričku, antidemokratsku i protivustavnu. Kasnije verzije Muslimanske zabrane strateški su se prilagodile ovim kulturnim binarnim opozicijama, stičući legitimnost kroz proceduralnu i formalno uređenu implementaciju. Ovaj proces strateškog građanskog rebrendiranja otkriva da se primordijalne veze, ukorenjene u rasi, teritoriji i religijskom identitetu, koriste u oblikovanju građanske sfere i kreiranju njenih granica, te da doprinose procesu demokratskog nazadovanja kroz relativizaciju i manipulaciju građanskim motivima, odnosima i institucijama. Konačno, studija proširuje teoriju građanske sfere isticanjem njene ranjivosti na relativizaciju ključnih kulturnih binarnosti, naglašavajući da otpornost demokratskih društava zahteva kritičku svest o tome kako se građanski diskursi mogu kooptirati radi legitimizacije isključenja. Slučaj Muslimanske zabrane tako otkriva ozbiljne deficite u otpornosti građanske sfere, ukazujući na njenu temeljnu ranjivost kroz sklonost ka isključivanju, uprkos prividnim procesima građanske obnove.

Ključne reči: građanska sfera, tribalizam, Muslimanska zabrana, sloboda, represija, relativizacija, nazadovanje, otpornost, reakcija i kontrareakcija.

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Jessica Dawson

THE NEW GLOBAL PUBLIC: SURVEILLANCE AND THE RISKS TO THE CIVIL SPHERE

ABSTRACT
In Douglas Adams' The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy (1984), a galactic civilization built a super computer to answer the meaning of life. The answer, when given, is famously "forty-two", a once both nonsense answer and one that has taken on great cache as a marker of insider nerd knowledge. Ask a computer to define the civil sphere, it would likely be able to define the binaries of hermeneutic code but it would be unable to explain why these things are meaningful to different groups. The context would escape it. This paper argues that the meaning making that results from the binary codes of the civil sphere are not compatible with a society compressed into numbers and in fact, the binaries of computer code distort meaning making into its opposite. The global nature of the public sphere through connected communications and smart devices inverts the civil sphere into making it (i.e. repressive) by enabling surveillance by anyone anywhere in the globe and therefore removing it from local context bound together by shared beliefs. To accommodate the impact of commercial surveillance enabled data collection on the civil sphere, the theory of the civil sphere must expand to consider the consequences of data collection and ordinalization through commercial surveillance – how are the binaries of the civil sphere transformed by the binaries of life reduced to data?

KEYWORDS
surveillance capitalism, civil sphere, privacy, data & society, democracy & technology, social media, cyber stalking, algorithms & society

The Civil Sphere vs the Ordinal Society

In Douglas Adams' The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy (1984), a galactic civilization built a super computer to answer the meaning of life. The answer, when given, is famously "forty-two", a once both nonsense answer and one that has taken on great cache as a marker of nerd insider knowledge. The galactic civilization's attempt to build a supercomputer called Earth was an attempt to render the meaningless meaningful. The idea that a super computer with all the knowledge in the universe would give a number as an answer to the question of the meaning of life was meant to be silly and yet, how else would a computer attempt to calculate meaning if not in numbers? And the

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number itself is meaningless, unless embedded in a culture of meaning where it signals cultural knowledge of a favorite book. Ask a computer to define the civil sphere, it would likely be able to define the binaries of hermeneutic code but it would be unable to explain why these things are meaningful to different groups (Alexander 2008). The context would escape it.

Alexander argues that the civil sphere is a "network of understanding..." that is constituted by "distinctive symbolic codes" that demarcate the boundaries of who is "within and without." The binary codes focus on the boundaries between "pure and impure" which help illuminate whether status is deserved or undeserved, legitimate or illegitimate" (Alexander 2008:54). The rise of life by algorithm – a life where all meaning is compressed into data - is one of the central challenges facing the civil sphere. By the civil sphere, I use Alexander's conception of it as "a world of values and institutions that [generate] the capacity for social criticism and democratic integration at the same time" (Alexander 2008:4). The civil sphere fundamentally relies on solidarity, as sense of fellow feeling among members of a society but this solidarity is increasingly mediated by technology and data surveillance which inverts many of the binaries of that define the civil sphere.

These binaries should fit nicely into the society that is replicated in data – after all computer code is made up of 1s and 0s. And yet, I argue the meaning making that results from the binary codes of the civil sphere are not compatible with a society compressed into numbers and in fact, the binaries of computer code distort meaning making into its opposite. So, where a civil sphere requires rational decision making in order to produce perceptions of fairness and trust, decision making by algorithm produces unfairness through the removal of meaning and context and the complete removal of human interaction. The global nature of the public sphere through connected communications and smart devices inverts the civil sphere (i.e. making it repressive) by enabling surveillance by anyone anywhere in the globe and therefore removing it from local context bound together by shared beliefs. That is, that commercial data collection impedes meaningful social criticism by amplifying it globally and creating not accountability but fear of doxing, global stigmatization, and outrage that expands well beyond any useful social function. It impedes meaningful and purposeful democratic integration by transforming groups and algorithmic separation results indifferent conceptualizations of truth, which prevents people from functioning in meaningful groups. To accommodate the impact of commercial surveillance enabled data collection on the civil sphere, the theory of the civil sphere must expand to consider the consequences of data collection and ordinalization through commercial surveillance – how are the binaries of the civil sphere transformed by the binaries of life reduced to data?

The Binaries of the Civil Sphere versus Data Binaries

The theory of the civil sphere can be understood through the binaries of discourse, where the civil sphere is represented on one side and the anti-civil

sphere is on the other. On the face of it, the binaries of the civil sphere should transform neatly into the binaries of computer code. The binaries of the civil sphere function at "three levels: motives, relations, and institutions" (Alexander 2008:56). These binaries define who is perceived as worthy or unworthy, who is trustworthy or untrustworthy and whether institutions support democratic civil ideals or erode them. On the face of it, these should transform neatly into computer code and be able to be studied objectively. But the distinction between the binaries of the civil sphere and the binaries of computer code are as fraught with challenges as the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research. The binary discourses of the civil sphere are corrupted at every level by algorithms, surveillance, and ordinalization by categorizing autonomous, active people into irrational, meaningless scores and numbers; corrupting social relations by disrupting groups into atomized individuals and networks; and corrupting rule regulated institutions into irrational automatons. The result is that the global nature of modern connected technology and mass communications have radically altered the discourses of the civil sphere. The mechanisms through which this perversion of the civil sphere has been accomplished is mass data collection of commercial surveillance and the subsequent ordinalization of individuals and society at a scale never before seen by humanity.

In the modern world, and arguably at the dawn of a new era demarcated by computers that can allegedly "think", an increasing number of elements of human society and everyday interaction are connected and surveilled by tiny supercomputers. Meaningful interactions are compressed into data. The civil sphere requires both a radical individualism and collectivism where the "private meets the public" (Alexander 2008:44) but the surveillance of private lives by commercial entities results in the transformation of both individuals and the public. The global, instantaneous communications of the internet should be compatible with supporting the "sustaining universalizing ties" which sustain identification with the civil sphere but the reality is that the corruption of the civil sphere has been made easier by the global nature of "the publics" that are no longer anchored in space and time. Phones record every element of daily life. Pharmacies record faces of everyone who enters their store and sell prescription data to whoever can pay for it (Germain 2023; Robertson 2023). Stores can figure out a pregnancy before a family can be informed (Hill 2012). It is not possible to walk down the street in most neighborhoods without at least one doorbell camera recording everyone who walks down the street as well as a particular way of moving (Budington 2020). Houses of worship use data to find people who may be going through a significant life event that might make them more susceptible to messages encouraging them to attend while prayer apps are selling people's most intimate thoughts (Baker-White 2022; Woollacott 2022). Cars report driving habits to insurance companies and can lock owners out of features if they fail to pay the monthly subscription (Hill 2024a; Mast 2022). People's faces have become fodder for multi-million dollar companies and make individuals instantly identifiable in public to anyone with a couple hundred dollars in smart glasses (Hill 2022; Mac, Haskins, and

Pequeno IV 2021; McDonald 2020). The risks from commercial DNA services are still being conceptualized and revealed (Mullin 2023). In the aftermath of 9/11, U.S. government's use of big data and surveillance tech used data profiles to target an unknown number of Americans and others who were swept up in the dragnet, banned from flying in some cases because of a name similar to someone else's (Jacobsen 2021b, 2021a; Tau 2024).

This paper serves as an attempt to theorize the impact of the large-scale surveillance and ordinalization – compression of life into numbers – on the theory of the civil sphere. This appears to be perfectly suited for an algorithmically sorted world but the reality is that the reduction of life to data fundamentally distorts the civil sphere. Additionally, the removal of any sense of a public from a particular space and time presents significant challenges to any theory of the civil sphere. When a local event can be influenced, understood and shaped by a global audience, how then is the civil sphere to adjust? The ubiquitous commercial surveillance collects terabytes of data on people's everyday interactions, rendering their lives visible in data but just as meaningless as the number forty-two. But meaninglessness does not remove vulnerability presented by the data collection.

Atomized Individuals – Lives Reduced to Numbers

Commercial entities' data collection practices influence the capacity to participate in the civil sphere by making individuals visible to anyone anywhere around the globe instantly. Despite their global reach and impact, many of these companies are large enough to fight off institutional restrictions or even restrictions based in time and space. The theory of the civil sphere must expand to consider the impact of commercial surveillance and data collection – the ordinalization of society - on the civil sphere. How are the binaries of the civil sphere impacted by the binaries of life reduced to data? What aspects of people's lives should be quantified and stored and by whom and which authorities/agencies should govern both the data collection itself and the subsequent uses of it?

The ordinal society happens through surveillance and subsequent data collection. Critically, this surveillance is not largely done by people but rather machines. No empire ever in the world has had the ability to surveil people at this kind of scope and scale. The data collection that arises out of this surveillance is largely but not exclusively conducted by commercial entities that build their products to enable consistent data collection (Fourcade and Healy 2024). Put another way, there's nothing in the technology itself that requires the data collection and surveillance but because of the financial models, this is the primary motivation for developing this surveillance. While the civil sphere requires the surveillance of institutions and individuals to ensure accountability toward the ideals of the civil sphere, this ordinalization at scale fundamentally inverts these functions. The discourse of the civil sphere categorizes people and institutions as supportive of the civil sphere or against it – pure or polluted. To be identified with "polluted objects – the actors structures and processes

constituted by repressive discourse – is dangerous" (Alexander 2008:63). This danger locally is bad enough but when it scales globally, it is exponentially worse and, arguably more importantly, less able to be constrained by the rule of law or institutions of the civil sphere. An example of this is a man in Tennessee died from a heart attack after someone called in fake bomb threats to the local police because he owned a valuable social media handle (Burke 2021). While one of the men involved in the swatting – the calling of fake crises to police in order to provoke police response – was arrested and charged, the lack of the ability of the civil sphere to deal with cross jurisdictional threats via the internet remains a dangerous challenge to the public sphere.

Whereas the binary discourses of the civil sphere leverage rationality and impersonal institutions, the ordinalization from commercial surveillance results in something different. The ranking and scoring that follows from the ordinal society fundamentally chips away at a "community of equals" (Fourcade and Healy 2024:285). This ranking and hierarchy (really categorization or even passive sorting) then becomes a visible form of status and like all status, creates opportunities or barriers to access. For the civil sphere, this visible status should be a feature but instead, it acts in anti-civil sphere ways. The ordinalization of society results in people being ranked and sorted, their status no longer determined by in group membership or prestige but distant algorithms – once again flipping the binaries of the civil sphere on their head. Status is a fundamental aspect of every human society (Ridgeway and Markus 2022) and in the ordinal society, status is quantified and made visible and global. In the ordinal age, status, a state of prestige or honor (Weber 1958) has been reduced to follower counts and from being honored within a group to network ties. Trust in doctors, previously highly prestigious positions, has given way to trusting influencers on the internet for health advice in part because patients feel like they have been reduced to numbers, not people (Klein 2023; Maddox 2023; Perez 2019). This visible categorization, ranking and sorting, erases the visibility of social structure such as race, religion or gender, and pins the results on individual choice and action (Fourcade and Healy 2024). If people are only granted job interviews based on how well an application "fits" a job description, the serendipity of discovering a great future teammate may become a thing of the past (Dastin 2018; Rivera 2012). The ability to look a potential date up on the internet via search engines or social media can reveal more about someone than they might reveal on a first date and may put a stop to first dates entirely because some detail, a data point from a snapshot in time, means the first date never happens. The assortive mating that occurs through education is now even further stratified with more and more people only dating inside of specific income brackets because this information is now widely knowable (Brooks 2024; Packer 2021). The analog world with all of its messiness reduces beings to numbers, which are required in order to be made legible to a computer and subsequently enable the consequences of ranking and scoring by computer. The supposed rationality of ordinalization through data leads to irrational consequences for people's lives.

The Loss of Meaning Through Ordinalization

Hannah Arendt wrote that under totalitarian regimes, people become atomized and separated from one another through distrust, the ever-present fear that someone close to you might turn you in out of malice, jealousy, fear, or mere survival (Nisbet 1992). In other words, individuals become "dividual" (Ebeling 2022)– reduced from their membership in groups to a single atomized individual. This kind of individualization however is different than the individualization necessary for participation in the civil sphere. The civil sphere individualization traces the idea of the individual to the sacredness of the person (Joas 2013). The atomization Arendt describes fundamentally rejects the sacredness of the person and instead, reduces them from rights bearing individuals back to subjects.

Danielle Allen at Harvard wrote in a recent foreword to Arendt's *Human Condition* that Arendt worried that the language of science was being replaced by the language of math – she worried that people were being reduced to data points. Allen quotes Arendt saying:

> "a key feature of science that leads to depoliticization or a failure to engage in "thinking what we are doing" is science's reliance on math. Arendt writes that scientists move in a world where speech has lost its power. The sciences today have been forced to adopt a language of mathematical symbols which, though originally meant only as an abbreviation for spoken statements, now contains statements which can in no way be translated into speech" (Allen, quoting Arendt 2018:4).

In the age of big data and artificial intelligence (AI), information is scraped, stolen, and otherwise captured, encoded in data - 1 &0s but the meaning extracted from that is more than the sum of the parts. Big data is the aggregation of data from multiple sources. In the modern surveillance economy - an economy based on data extraction of everyday life – data labelers categorize elements of daily life in data and, in turn, transform that data into ranking and hierarchy that fundamentally rank and score the individuals that make up groups.

The binary discourses of the civil sphere reveal why the process of ordinalization conflicts with the project of the civil sphere. The institutions of the civil sphere are supposed to be rule regulated, bound by law and impersonal (Alexander 2008:99). The data scientists and engineers who created the algorithm that categorize, rank and score people based on information tied to them violate these discourses through several important ways. First, the data is collected using the fiction of consent. On the face of it, people appear to consent to the collection of this data through accepting the terms of service (Zuboff 2019). The use of internet sites and apps, modern vehicles and other connected tech are governed by terms of service that nearly everyone blindly clicks on without reading are in no way meaningful consent but because it can, at least in theory, be withheld. This fiction of consent then creates the justification that the users participate in the surveillance which then sorts and scores them. The fictional consent has real consequences in practice. Under

the American Health Information Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), consent is not required for individual data to be shared with others. Put another way, there is no way to opt out of this health data transfer in the United States (Ebeling 2022). Additionally, data can exist about individuals without individuals knowledge, for example, when a neighbor's doorbell camera recording someone walking down the street. It is not possible to withhold consent from *someone else's* cell phone listening for the magic words that activate the service (Federal Trade Commission 2023; Stempel 2025).

This means that the data collection that should in theory support the civil sphere ends up eroding it. There are many places around the world where surveillance and data collection occur without meaningful consent. The United States Secret Service has asserted that location data did not require a warrant because users consented to be tracked (Office of the Inspector General 2023). Several American pharmacies have come under public scrutiny for sharing medical records without a warrant (Rubin 2023). The US automotive company General Motors asserted that people consented to having their cars collect data about them and they now face a class action lawsuit for deceptive practices that buried consent in a maze of screens (Hill 2024b). Walmart has used prescription information to discover the impact of Ozempic and other weight loss drugs on shopping habits (Robertson 2023). It is unlikely that that people knowingly consented to these uses of their data. Such data collection has been used to deny access to health insurance or raise insurance rates, or deny claims altogether (Kiviat 2019; Ross 2023). This data collection then erodes the relations of the civil sphere by appearing deceitful, suspicious, greedy, self-interested and calculating (Alexander 2008:58).

Being misidentified by an algorithm is not a matter of seeing irrelevant ads. Around the world, schools, health care companies, police, governments and more are using algorithmically driven decisions to impact people's every lives. People, reduced to data points, are having their lives impacted by algorithmically irrational driven decisions by schools, health care companies, police, governments, and more to about people's everyday lives (Brayne 2018; Brensinger 2021, 2023; Levy, Chasalow, and Riley 2021; Ruckenstein and Schüll 2017). In the Netherlands, thousands of people were incorrectly identified as committing benefits fraud by an algorithm. The algorithms assigned people with dual nationality or being low income as being high risk for committing fraud and resulted in thousands of children being removed from homes, suicides and other significant life disruptions. The consequences of being misidentified by an algorithm can be devastating - ask anyone who has been arrested and detained because the police used their own data against them, only to realize the data didn't identify the right person (Fischer 2024; Hill 2020; McDonald 2020). The impact of the mistake is not just the people erroneously targeted. The government of the Netherlands now paying the price in fines for the massive privacy law failure (Heikkila 2022).

This surveillance and subsequent ordinalization of people by companies and governments fundamentally erodes the social relations that the civil sphere

depends upon. One way this happens is by assuming the data – frequently collected by unaccountable commercial entities depicts an accurate, some might say rational, picture of someone's life and therefore the outcomes are fair, just, and thus deserved. The results of the data being misinterpreted can have devastating consequences. In the U.S. a woman was dropped by her insurance company because her insurance company used an algorithm to "determine" she was doctor shopping for opioids. She *did* have two different prescriptions at two different pharmacies but it was not for doctor shopping. One of the two prescriptions was for her elderly dog (Szalavitz 2021). The data scientists and engineers who developed the algorithm did not or could not conceive of any valid reason that someone might have two different prescriptions – they assumed the worst possible intention. The algorithm they developed and that the insurance company deployed did rank and scored this woman based on technically correct but ultimately inaccurate information. The missing context around why she might have had two prescriptions created the tragedy. The binaries of the civil sphere should have been able to create a rational, impersonal outcome and instead created an irrational outcome that eroded trust and created harm.

Even in places where algorithms are expected to work well—such as sports—there are significant shortcomings because of the meaning of the data does not reveal what people think it reveals. The New England Patriots (an American football team) quarterback Tom Brady offers a classic example. He was quantitatively the last-round draft pick to the New England Patriots. He was not a superstar during his early years in the NFL. But despite his numbers, his coach and team owner kept him and allowed him to grow for more than a decade. Today, Brady is recognized both qualitatively and quantitatively as one of the greatest quarterbacks of all time -but the data only retrospectively captures this. There was nothing in the data over 20 years ago that suggested his future greatness (Ruiz 2017). How many other greats are out there because the data never gave them a chance to get on the field? More importantly, what data captures the ability of a player to be good as part of a team. It is widely known in sports that some of the best players "are terrible on teams" (Schoenfield 2016). The data collection and ranking of sports players may not seem like a problem of the civil sphere but it is because the ranking and scoring of people may limit their ability to access the public based on hidden, secretive reasons developed by distant impersonal data scientists.

While the civil sphere binaries of discourse require impersonal, objective social relations, the data collected by commercial surveillance invert these binaries. The meaning of a data point is filtered the moment it is collected and that filtering is subjective (Ebeling 2022). Put another way, the problem of classification by algorithm is a problem of mistaking the meaning of the data. The problem of meaning of data also exists when there is a lack of data or missing data. When someone looks at a bookshelf, they can see the books that have been taken out because of the empty spot. A border collie can understand something it doesn't know; send a border collie into a room of 12 things and there is one thing it doesn't know the name for, it will figure out the new

thing (Carroll 2021). Algorithms cannot do this. The problem of missing data for the civil sphere is that people are being classified and removed from participation in modern life by data that is not even necessarily data about them but instead about people who *look like them.* This leads to the inversion of the civil sphere by making the decisions seem capricious, secretive or conspiratorial rather than open or straightforward because when missing data is used, it is actually capricious and opaque.

Groups Versus Networks

Context is required for understanding the social relations that bind people together. Where the binaries of civil sphere discourse require impersonality, the impersonality of people portrayed in networks creates irrational consequences. All groups are networks but not all networks are groups. Data collection enabled by commercial surveillance has accomplished what Arendt feared, reducing people bound with moral force to communities and groups to data points in networks. The civil sphere is made up fundamentally of groups. They are not constituted merely by networks even if a group can be viewed as networks of organizations and individuals. The ability to come together to engage in the civil sphere fundamentally involves the ability to come together into a group, bound together by solidarity. Groups are not networks and in fact, function completely differently at scale. Groups function better when they are smaller and optimized toward a common goal. Networks gain greater utility through size and connections. These are not the same thing. Groups require a "collective self-conscious" (Alexander 2008: 43) whereas networks look only at concrete ties. Network connections are not relationships – network connections can reveal if someone is connected to someone else but not what those feelings are that traverse that network tie. Hence the problems when Facebook recommends ex-spouses or partners as friend requests (Ridley 2015). Algorithms built by impersonal distant data scientists cannot know that network tie consists of potential animosity or danger.

The collapse of understandings of human behavior from groups to networks likewise has consequences for the theory of the civil sphere. A group can be visualized with a network diagram but it cannot articulate why people have come together in particular groups. In many ways, however, this depiction of groups into networks makes groups more fragile and thus erodes a critical feature of the civil sphere. Networks have no obligation of fellow feeling toward others in the network whereas groups are fundamentally anchored in a sense of fellow feeling. A network can reveal a group but it cannot constitute a group on its own. Consider the case of unions. A network analysis of unions would look at the leadership (individuals) and the rank-and-file members (individuals). Cell phone records or social media interaction could reveal who frequently interacts with who. It could reveal demographic details about the makeup of their general membership and about who has frequent connections with the leadership. A network map could be used to understand who

influences the leadership from the available data. A network view of union membership would also reveal that the leadership has frequent contact with the company leadership. But a network view of a union obscures the nature of what binds the members and leadership together: solidarity and shared interests, a declared belief that sticking together will result in better outcomes for all members. This belief could be quantified through surveys. But a Likert scale obscures the invisible fellow feeling that unions must constantly reinforce in order to avoid atomizing forces that seek to encourage individuals to turn in their membership card. So, while a network view cannot generally explain *why* a network cluster moves together, it *can* provide insights at the individual level of how to break up the network. There must be something binding the actors together for it to become a group.

Retreat from Voluntary Action

The fellow feeling that binds people to each other in the civil sphere happens through the process of meaning making, and the global nature of the surveillance economy is already having negative, lasting effects on people's lives. In an active civil sphere, people volunteer their time and energy to work toward a common goal. Surveillance, while being critical to restrain those occupying public offices, is now cheaply and easily available to anyone with access to a computer, removed from institutional oversight of journalism or regulatory institutions of the civil sphere. This creates an inversion of the communicative institutions meant to restrain the civil sphere into a tool that can erode it.

The U.S. election system is run largely by volunteers who are responsible for the foundational act of democracy: tallying the vote, which represents the will of the people. Trust in this system has eroded steadily over the last few years since at least the contested election of 2000. But the seeds of the modern discontent in the U.S. can be traced back to the 60s when the boomer generation attended college en masse and was subsequently educated in new ways of being and knowing. This new way of knowing resulted in mass movements demanding actions of its government: grant Black Americans access to the status of full citizenship, end the war in Vietnam, free women from the prison of biological determinism. As more of "them" became part of "we the people", the institutions of civil society sorted along educational and economic lines. So, the volunteers who made up the backbone of democracy also changed, and while "we" still trust "our" election officials, "we" don't trust "theirs" and in the new global surveillance society, who is known to who is no longer limited by the physics of space and time. This has fundamental consequences for the civil sphere.

If election volunteers engage in anti-civil sphere behaviors, the people in their, county or state could—in theory if not always in practice—voice their protest and engage in institutional processes to correct the process. The public records that reveal phone numbers and addresses, friends and network connections, family members and people's histories are now global. These public records, once bound in space and time to a local phone book or the county clerk's record of

deeds, are now global and no longer facilitate democracy in the same way and in fact may in fact undermine the democratic processes that the civil sphere depends upon. The fact that individuals can be isolated and targeted before any institutional process can be engaged results in harassment and sometimes death. While there is value in being able to mobilize protests and other corrective actions in support of the civil sphere, these processes have become distorted in the new global public. In the past, allegations of misconduct or anti-civil sphere actions might make the national news but both the actions and consequences were generally locally generated and resolved. Now, however, rumors and allegations can go global in an instant and people identified - correctly or not - are now subjected to their actions being defined by a global audience that is bound by neither law nor limited by physics. The consequences for individuals identified and targeted this way, however are deeply connected to the real world as seen in death threats, attempted assassinations, and swatting deaths.

The fellow feeling and trust engendered from face-to-face communication and required for the civil has been transformed by the global communication networks of the internet. The universal ties that bind over dispersed geography do not function the same way through the global mass communications of the internet. Information about the workings of government being available to the public is a necessary feature of the civil sphere - concealing information to protect people from harassment may have the unintended consequence of protection people from accountability as well.

Public Versus Global

What is the boundary of "public" and how should this be reconceptualized in an era of instant global communication? The public, once bound by space and time, has been theorized to have become something more but the consequences of the loss of grounding in space and time are potentially enormous (Alexander 2008). What is known or able to be known has been, until the internet, largely bound by space and time. Regular people have found themselves at the center of a global mob because they were made scapegoats for the allegation of having been engaged in the ultimate violation of the civil sphere: corruption of an election (Corasaniti and Bensinger 2024; Luscombe 2024). People's home addresses and phone numbers, once bound in space and time to a local phone book or telephone operator, are now available instantly via publicly searchable data bases but also data brokers on the internet. This enables a corruption of the civil sphere from virtually anywhere in the world. Does invasion of privacy only happen when it's a person doing the looking? Does this mean the privacy invasion does not happen because it's not being done by a person (Königs 2024)? The automation of decision making by a computer still results in private data being used by some other entity to shape outcomes for people. The second point is that there is usually a person doing the looking at some point in the process and these distant, invisible people decisions have the ability to shape the civil sphere in profound ways.

The visibility of networks through friend lists on social media works to *erode* trust rather than engendering it. The genius of Facebook and subsequently nearly all social media apps - was to call their data extraction "friending" and "sharing" and making these visible. In doing so they tapped into a fundamental aspect of human reciprocity and generosity (Fourcade and Healy 2024). So while news outlets can report on people on someone's "friend" list, it does not mean they are actually friends or that they have interacted in any meaningful way beyond being a data point in a contacts file (Mehrotra 2024). The implication of the tie's existence is enough to erode trust at speed and scale in ways never before possible in human history.

It is in the space between a network and a group that the ability to destroy a group appears. The data that reveals information about individuals can reveal who might be willing to leave the union for a better paying nonunion job. It may enable some status polluting information to be discovered and shared that makes a fellow member persona non grata. It may identify old grievances suggesting that the leadership is self-dealing and can be activated to turn the members against the leadership. If infighting results in less effective leadership assuming the helm, the idea that binds the union together - that they are stronger together - becomes less compelling, particularly if they are unable to win concessions from the company. If the *belief* in the union is eroded, even it notionally still exists as a network, it may cease to function as a group. Commercial surveillance enables this in new invasive and invisible ways. One may be a member of a network through no meaningful individual action but this network may have negative consequences for the ability to join different groups.

Sociologist Erving Goffman's insights on spoiled identities is critical here (Goffman 1986). In the summer of 2020, Fort Hood (now Fort Cavazos) rose to national prominence when a young Hispanic female soldier went missing and was later found to have been murdered by a fellow Soldier. Social media initially focused on the search efforts, then erupted about the prevalence of sexual assault across the Army when the story was linked in social media to the #MeToo movement (Murray 2020). Despite the Army-wide crime narrative, Army leadership remained focused on examples at Fort Hood. It launched several investigations against 14 leaders and the nation moved on. In the aftermath of the investigations, several of the relieved leaders were cleared or found in violation of only small unrelated infractions, but these discoveries went without notice or public correction. At least two career officers have found themselves with very truncated employment options as civilians because a Google name search by a potential employer associates them with headlines related to a national scandal, not the actual situation. One of the commanders relieved at Fort Hood, was not for actions related to the murder or command climate, but for inadequate public affairs (Murray 2020). The headlines forever associated with his name paint a picture of a commander who tolerated sexual assault—in direct contravention to the findings of the Fort Hood Independent Review Common that cited him by name as the one person in their five year review that was effecting positive change (Department of the Army 2020).

This then represents a global consequence of spoiled identities. One of Goffman's critical insights related to the management of spoiled identities is the ability, arguably the necessity, of being able to conceal a stigmatized identity from others. The global nature of surveillance and reputational harm means that these things may no longer be possible. What then are people subjected to globally available stigmatizing events to do, particularly if the spoiled identity arises out of misunderstanding of the facts? Any theory of the civil sphere that fails to account for the processes of reconstruction of spoiled identities will be insufficient in the continually digitally connected world.

The Necessity of Unranked Lives for the Survival of the Civil Sphere

The binaries of the civil sphere are being inverted by the surveillance of everyday lives and the collapse of humanity into irrational data. And yet, we cannot over-theorize how well these algorithms work at suppressing human creativity. While surveillance can be a mechanism of control, these systems still require someone to enact their will in the world (Zhang 2023). In every regime, power has always been broken by the creativity and capacity of those who could imagine something different. Orwell highlighted this very insight in *1984* "Who controls the past,' ran the Party slogan, 'controls the future: who controls the present controls the past'" (Orwell 1949:44). But as algorithmic sorting and knowing becomes more ubiquitous, the consequences for the civil sphere become greater, particularly as access to the civil sphere becomes mediated by these algorithms. In this way, data provides ammunition that comes from mining private lives in ways that erode participation in public life (Dawson and Matthew 2024).

Influence and control over the narratives of the civil sphere has long been a fruitful area of research and concern but the theory which has supported this must evolve to encompass the impacts of the global surveillance and mass communications. Totalitarian regimes seek to limit what can be known—this is of course the desire of every authoritarian. In a world where people – particularly young people - increasingly get their information from algorithmically sorted ecosystems, to control the code, in theory, is to control the narratives that people consume (Dawson 2023). The Chinese Communist Party attempts to erase Tiananmen Square from collective knowledge by censoring terms related to it on the internet and social media they control. Every June, people around the world share the anniversary of the massacre to prevent its erasure from the common knowledge of the internet. But what if those people simply stop the effort at commemorating and memorializing because the risks to themselves become too great. Automated social control at a scale is rapidly approaching the point where it no longer requires the action of individuals to enforce. A perceived infraction can become real the instant it becomes quantified in data and there are precious few humans to appeal to in the age of automated customer service bots.

The generations that grew up before the internet began shaping what can be known are members of the hinge generation. Those who remember the people who survived the identification and murder deemed enemies of the Nazi state or the Soviet era and the gulags where millions were disappeared are critical to shaping the future of the civil sphere. They also remember a time before computers were ubiquitous surveillance devices. The generation that remembers watching Tiananmen Square on the evening news may be the last to have widespread access to non- algorithmically sorted news and information and thus the non-algorithmically influenced collective memory necessary for the civil sphere. Information has always been controlled by gatekeepers such as publishers deciding what to print, radio deciding what to broadcast or libraries deciding what books to keep on the shelves. But the ordinal society shaped by algorithms removes the ability to know what information is available and what information might be missing. The internet was once believed to be forever but now, the internet is rotting as links stop working and information, once stored on paper or archival tapes, is vanishing (Zittrain 2021). Newspaper archives are being bought and removed from online (Farhi 2022). The collective ways of knowing are becoming both increasingly fragile but also more dangerous as they become digitized.

There is reason for hope. The surveillance economy requires submission to the belief in its inevitability and its omniscience. Additionally, the tech companies that conduct this surveillance and ordinalization are leveraging the institutions of the civil sphere – in this case American governance - in order to push back on other institutions – such as European data laws - that seek to regulate them (Green 2025). As of this writing, 38 states in America have passed some form of privacy legislation. Illinois stands alone in limiting biometric data collection without explicit consent. A New Jersey law firm recently won a court case that argued privacy was a national security concern and thus superseded data broker arguments that privacy laws restricted their First Amendment. New Jersey stands as a national leader because of Daniel's Law, a law passed to remove judge's information from public data brokers because a federal judge's son was murdered by a man who got her information from a data broker (Toutant 2024). The European Union has been significantly more aggressive in restraining what data can be collected and how it can be used. This then appears to explain why US tech companies threw their support behind President Trump in the 2024 election – in order to secure support from the US state to push back on the EU's attempts to protect the civil sphere (Green 2025).

The civil sphere is a project that can never be completed (Alexander 2008) – but it can be stopped. The ways of knowing each other, via shared knowledge and values, is changing for the younger generations. While historians love it when people say things are unprecedented, very few things ever are. Case in point, the level of control a few have over the many has never been seen before in this way. In Huxley's *Brave New World*, people were sorted into their lots in life and largely satisfied. There was no need to censor information because

people simply refused to seek it out. While concerns about the younger generation go back since there was a younger generation, the new technology shaping our society and our civil spheres is profound and unless we are deliberate about engineering it to preserve the civil sphere, we may find it eroded and that few, if any, are left who actually care.

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Džesika Doson

Nova globalna javnost: Nadzor i rizici po građansku sferu

Apstrakt

U knjizi Daglasa Adamsa „Autostoperski vodič kroz galaksiju" (1984), galaktička civilizacija je stvorila superkompjuter da bi dobila odgovor na pitanje o smislu života. Odgovor, kada ga ponudi, glasio je čuveno „četrdeset dva", što je istovremeno besmislen odgovor i odgovor koji je stekao veliki značaj kao znak poznavanja insajderske štreberske kulture. Kada bi se kompjuteru postavilo pitanje da definiše građansku sferu, verovatno bi mogao da definiše binarne opozicije e hermeneutičkog koda, ali ne bi mogao da objasni zašto su te stvari značajne za različite grupe. Kontekst bi mu izmakao. Kada bi se kompjuter upitao da definiše građansku sferu, on bi verovatno bio sposoban da definiše binarne opozicije hermeneutičkog koda, ali ne bi bio sposoban da objasni zašto su ovi kodovi važni za različite grupe. Kontekst mu izmiče. Ovaj rad tvrd da je proces stvaranja značenja koji proizilazi iz binarnog koda građanske sfere, nije kompatibilan sa društvom koje je svedeno na brojeve, te da zapravo binarni kodovi kompjuterskog sistema zapravo izokreću značenja građanskog koda u njegove suprotnosti. Globalna priroda javne sfere kroz povezanu komunikaciju i pametne uređaje potpuno preokreće građansku sferu čineći je represivnom, omogućavajući nadzor bilo koga, bilo gde na svetu, i na taj način je odvaja od lokalnog konteksta u kojem se ljudi povezani zajedničkim verovanjima. Kako bi se prilagodila uticaju prikupljanja podataka omogućenog komercijalnim nadzorom na građanske sferu, teorija građanske sfere mora se proširiti kako bi uzela u obzir uticaj prikupljanja podataka i ordinalizacije kroz komercijalni nadzor – kako binarni kodovi civilne sfere bivaju pogođeni binarnim kodovima života svedenog na podatke?

Ključne reči: kapitalistički nadzor, građanska sfera, privatnost, podaci i društvo, demokratija i tehnologija, društvene mreže, sajber proganjanje, algoritmi i društvo

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REHEARSING CIVILITY: BRIDGEBUILDING IN POLARIZED AMERICA

ABSTRACT
Over the last decade, ever-increasing polarization has exacerbated political divisions threatening both the civil sphere and democracy itself. In the United States, concern over democracy's future has led to the growth of self-described bridgebuilding organizations. Bridgebuilding brings people from across the political aisle together for dialogue with the aim of lessening polarization. This paper examines bridgebuilding through a detailed case study of one such organization. Drawing on observation, interviews, and participant surveys, the study describes the motivations and experiences of bridgebuilders. The paper finds that bridgebuilding allows participants to "rehearse civility" experiencing the civility and goodwill they crave in their own lives and desire for the broader society in a relatively safe and controlled setting. Rehearsing civility invites participants to invoke the civil— reaffirming social bonds, speaking to a broader sense of goodwill, in turn rehumanizing their political opponents. Though not without its limitations, the growth of bridgebuilding highlights a deep desire for civility and the experiential and affective pleasure it allows. Civility as mutual regard and as bonds to democratic institutions is considered.

KEYWORDS
Bridgebuilding, civility, civil sphere theory, contact theory, cultural sociology, democracy, polarization, political sociology

Introduction

The caustic pitch of contemporary American political culture is exacerbating underlying tensions and provoking new ones. Most often referred to as political polarization, this phenomenon shapes more than just who people vote for, but also who they choose for friends, lovers, and neighbors (Huber and Malhotra 2017; Mason 2018; Xi et al 2019). This, coupled with increasing social isolation, has rendered Americans more than just a "lonely crowd" (Riesman 1950) but an increasingly hostile one as well. The basic glue that holds societies together—mutual regard, social solidarity, and a sense of belonging, seems to have grown more elusive. In response to this cloudier mood, civic organizations have stepped up, calling for new forms of understanding—challenging political

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adversaries to sit down, look one another in the eye, and talk. Bridgebuilders, as they are called, work to bridge political difference. The popularity of the practice in the US has surged (Hartman et al 2022). What are the motivations and experiences of bridgebuilders? And, how do their experiences illuminate contemporary American political culture?

This paper examines bridgebuilding through a detailed case study of Braver Angels, a leading American bridgebuilding organization. Drawing on observation of workshops and interviews with participants, the paper argues that bridgebuilding allows participants to "rehearse civility." Through highly-scripted workshops, participants gain language for how to speak to those with divergent political views, in turn experiencing the emotional payoff of civility. Rehearsing civility gives participants the opportunity to reaffirm social bonds, invoke a broader sense of goodwill, and rekindle hope in the face of a toxic political culture. The rehearsal offers participants the civil connection they crave in their own lives and in the broader society— fostering civil desire.

The paper begins with a brief review of the literature on polarization and its impact on political culture. The paper then engages civil sphere theory (CST) discussions on civility and the anti-civil. The contemporary anti-civil has successfully moved the needle on what speech is permissible in effect importing highly-exclusionary and anti-democratic rhetoric into the mainstream. Yet despite these challenges, the civil sphere continues to hold the possibility for expansion of social solidarity, bonds, and incorporation (Alexander 2006). Civility as social practice and its relationship to democratic culture is discussed (Shils 1991). Moving towards the case, bridgebuilding's roots in contact theory and its contemporary application to affective polarization are examined (Allport 1954). Finally, a detailed overview of the bridging organization Braver Angels is offered.

The methods section details the case study approach including the observation of two half-day workshops and interviews with 14 participants. The findings first offer a thick description of rehearsing civility detailing the two workshops in conversation with interviews and participant surveys. Through the practice of rehearsing civility, participants are given the opportunity to invoke the civil, reaffirming social bonds, and mutual regard. A discussion of the limits of civility as avoidance is then discussed. Lastly, the findings outline the major motivation for participation—personal troubles driven by political conflict with loved ones. The paper then concludes with a discussion of the significance of rehearsing civility and its relationship to democratic culture more broadly.

Literature Review

Polarization

Over the last decade, growing polarization has exacerbated political divisions threatening both the civil sphere and democracy itself (Alexander 2016, 2019; Finkel 2020; Iyengar et al 2019; Kivisto and Sciortino 2021; Mason 2015, 2018;

Shanto et al 2019). Political hatred has seeped into Americans most intimate relations dividing families and neighbors (Rousseau 2020). More, declines in community life and social isolation have accelerated in recent decades— exacerbating longstanding tensions presented by individualism and community (Campbell 2022, 2024; Case and Deaton 2020; Putnam 2000; Putnam et al 2004). The broader picture is one of increased social isolation, declining civic life, and deteriorating public health (Cacioppo; Lee 2022). At the interpersonal level of political culture, scholars have documented the growth of affective polarization.

Affective polarization is political discord that maps onto not just political opinion but is deeply rooted in identity itself (Mason 2018; Hartman et al 2022). This results in many to not simply disagree with political opponents, but rather to despise them. Earlier research on polarization traditionally highlights two key types: identity-based and issue-based (Doornbosch et al 2024). In the contemporary climate, these two have experienced considerable overlap, a phenomenon scholars call social sorting (Mason 2018). Increasing political partisanship has led adversaries to define their opponents as, "selfish, close-minded, unintelligent, dishonest, immoral, or hypocritical" (Doornbosch et al 2024: 98). Polarization threatens democracy when adversaries no longer view each other as legitimate but rather as permanent enemies (Bonikowski 2016; Kivisto and Sciortino 2021).

Civility and the Anti-civil

From the perspective of civil sphere theory (CST), polarization is an expected part of democratic life. A theory of democracy, most fully represented in Jeffrey Alexander's *The Civil Sphere* (2006), CST sees democracy as an ongoing accomplishment with ever-present tensions characteristic of modernity (Alexander 2013). The civil sphere is comprised of regulative institutions like elections, office, the rule of law on the one hand and communicative institutions including a free press, public opinion, and civic organizations on the other. At the level of discourse, political adversaries draw on the language of the civil sphere, which is comprised of binary codes, to define who they are and who they are not. This key feature, rooted in semiotics, makes both inclusion and exclusion possible. Verbal sparring is a healthy and necessary part of democratic societies as long as it does not devolve into radical exclusion.

Populism has broad impacts on communicative norms and what constitutes "civil interactions" (Tognato 2021: 278). Destructive attacks on the civil sphere that aim to exclude, scapegoat minorities, and reassert primordialisms narrow the vision of the moral community and gain influence by shifting, "what is sayable" (Binder 2021: 178). Such efforts work to, "erode the normal standards in public discourse such as truth, reasonableness, good faith, and accountability" resulting in "increased porosity" or civil/ anti-civil dynamics (Toganto 2021: 285). The impact of mainstreaming is described as a "self-poisoning of the vital

center" (Heins and Unrau 2019: 152). In a study of anti-civil discourse online, impoliteness is found to be central (Theocharis et al 2016).

Uncivility, racism, and populism are deeply intertwined (Kryzanowski et al 2021). Contemporary right-wing populism holds racism and xenophobia as fundamental elements for the cultivation of grievance (Jackson and Doerschler 2024; Jaworsky 2020). At the discursive level, scholars have noted the mainstreaming of radically anti-democratic, racist speech. This happens through "borderline discourse" that, "while remaining seemingly civil in nature (via, e.g. rational argumentation, various forms of democratic legitimation, etc.) effectively puts forward the profoundly anti-democratic views and ideologies which, inter alia, solidify calls for discrimination and exclusion as the apparent "new visions" of politics and society" (Kryzanowski et al 2021: 4). Politically, the success of anti-civil discursive strategies has led scholars to ask, "why violating rather than obeying them started to bring more attention and often guaranteed political success" (Kryzanowski et al 2021: 6).

In the face of such challenges, the possibility for inclusion and the expansion of the moral community remains possible through civil repair and the courage it requires (Alexander 2006; Tognato et al 2020). CST highlights the importance of the micro and macro link especially as it pertains to meaningful social interaction that facilitates inclusion (Alexander 1995; Becker 2023; Tajic and Lund 2022). This process is multifaceted but can include actions that produce "horizontal identification" across groups (Becker 2023: 44). Performing and invoking a vital center is also part of this process as reaffirming common bonds or a shared common good is necessary (Alexander 2019; Heins and Unrau 2019; Luengo and Ihlebæk 2019; Schlesinger 1949). Inclusion and repair, then, require people willing to engage in such culture work or relational exchange.

Civility is of longstanding preoccupation to social theorists and is noted as central to democratic life (Alexander 2006; Elias 1939; Shils 1991; Turner 2021). Edward Shils defines it as, "an attitude of attachment to the whole of society" (1991: 11). Civility, "considers others as fellow-citizens of equal dignity in their rights and obligations… as members of the same inclusive collectivity" (1991: 12-13). This is affirmed through civil manners, courtesy, and "includes concern for the good of adversaries as well as allies" (1991: 13). For Shils, it is a habit of mind and of being, an approach to others that shapes both affective and communicative practices. He declares, "civil manners are aesthetically pleasing and morally upright" (1991: 13). Of course, manners are not enough for the maintenance of democracy, people must also hold shared attachments to democratic institutions as well. Nonetheless, the importance of mutual regard persists, as he warns, "without such civility, a pluralistic society can degenerate into a war of each against all" (1991: 15). Despite the centrality of civility for democratic life, how one fosters civility—or regains it remains underexamined. This paper extends the literature on civil repair and civility through a case study of bridging practices.

Bridgebuilding

In the US, bridgebuilding has grown in popularity as a strategy to reduce polarization (Baldassarri 2021; Doornbosch et al 2024; Gehl and Porter 2020). Rooted in contact theory, it asserts positive contact between adversarial groups can defuse tensions and foster peace (Allport 1954; Levendusky 2023; Pettigrew et al 2011). In its original formulation, Gordon Allport's contact hypothesis (1954) posits that prejudice can be reduced should people from historically conflicting groups make contact under a set of positive conditions. Those conditions are equal status, shared goals, intergroup cooperation, and the support of authorities, law or custom (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006: 264). Though Allport emerged with his theory relying on studies of American black-white race relations, it has since been applied to study of a range of intergroup conflicts (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). The term bridging also harkens to Putnam's (2000) two types of social capital: bonding, which is inner-group and bridging, which is inter-group.

Studies on contemporary bridgebuilding efforts' impacts are ongoing. A randomized control trial of a bridgebuilding workshop found participation to reduce affective polarization in both implicit and explicit terms (Baron et al 2021). The same researchers also found participants to remain less polarized than those that did not take the workshop seven months later. Though such results are promising, they are not necessarily conclusive, as other research has found similar interventions' impacts to wear off in as little as a week (Duong 2023). Scholarship suggests depolarization efforts don't directly impact attitudes about democracy (Voelkel et al 2023).

Braver Angels

The bridging organization Braver Angels (BA) was founded in 2016 shortly after the presidential election (Bomey 2021.) The name Braver Angels is inspired by President Abraham Lincoln's inaugural address (1861), shortly before the American Civil War, where he called for national unity and appealed to "the better angels of our nature." BA brings people together from across the political aisle for civil dialogue with an eye to highlight shared interests and values (Levendusky 2018). The premise of the BA model is that if people sit down together, build tools for civil discourse, and work to see people before politics, affective polarization will diminish and a revitalized, civil culture can emerge (Baron et al 2021; Gino et al 2022; Hartman 2022). BA members grow their tools for civility through workshops and guided dialogue sessions then go out into the world, their communities, workplaces, schools, and places of worship as "bridgebuilders." Bridgebuilders help to restore civic trust one social interaction at a time (Bomey 2021; Fletcher 2023).

BA has grown rapidly since its founding, boasting over 14,700 members nationally (Braver Angels 2025a). The organization has been covered by national media outlets across the political spectrum from CNN to the New York

Times to Fox and USA Today (Braver Angels 2025b). BA is committed to attracting a broad range of voices, though the organization struggles to draw a pool of participants proportionally representative of American demographics (Braver Angels 2021). Demographically, BA as a whole is whiter: 88% of participants identify as White though they make up 64% of the US population (Jones et al 2021). BA is older: 73% are over 50 compared to America's median age of 38 (US Census 2023). Women also outnumber men accounting for 68% of participants. In terms of educational attainment, 65% had post-graduate degrees, compared to 14% of the US population, and just 1% had only a high school education compared to 25% of Americans (Schaeffer 2022). And, though BA does not collect income data on participants, one can confidently conclude based on education levels that more participants are from the middle, upper-middle, and upper classes than the general population. Most directly tied to its mission, ideologically BA is skewed as well. 21% of participants identify as conservative, while 69% identify as liberal. The organization has taken explicit steps to expand their reach through a Red Caucus for conservatives and an Angels of Color Caucus for people of color.

The organization hosts a range of events and celebrates an annual national convention at iconic sites for American conflict, gathering in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania in 2023 and in Kenosha, Wisconsin in 2024. BA also produces media including podcasts, music, and books that support revitalizing America through what they term patriotic empathy. The cornerstone of their work comes in the form of workshops that bring people together from across the aisle to engage, build skills for civil dialogue, and rediscover shared American values (Baron et al 2021; Duong 2023; Hagmann and Tinsley 2021; Oliver-Blackburn 2022). The BA workshop method was designed by marriage counselors who characterized America as a dysfunctional family. They draw, in part, on marital therapy techniques for session design.

On almost any given night, somewhere in the US, a local chapter, termed an "Alliance" is hosting a workshop. For example, from March 2020- February 2021, BA hosted 443 unique events (Braver Angels 2021). BA collects member dues with a minimum donation of $12 annually, though most workshops are open to anyone. All members take the BA Pledge (Braver Angels 2025c), stating,

> I pledge that from this day forward I will seek to be part of the solution to our society's widespread divisiveness, which is hurting individuals, families, communities, our nation, and our world.
>
> I will actively seek out opportunities to engage in dialogue with those who have different views from mine; by respectful listening, I will strive to understand their perspectives better, to identify our shared deeper values, and to build a bridge across the gap that has divided us.
>
> When sifting incoming information, I will seek to be a wise consumer. Taking into account my own biases, I will carefully assess the plausibility of the claim as well as the integrity, competence, and humility of the source, in order to decide whether the information is likely to be trustworthy.

I will resist the temptation to speak about, write about, or share on social media information that claims to be true but is of uncertain validity.

I will bring a generous spirit to all my interpersonal interactions, refusing to ascribe evil intentions to others simply because of different political or societal beliefs. I will be slow to take offense. Loving my neighbor will be my goal.

Methods

This paper examines the meaning of bridging interventions and describes how such groups imagine and instantiate an ideal civil citizen. The qualitative case study looks at one of the leading bridging organizations in the United States, Braver Angels (BA). Case studies have the empirical advantage of illuminating social processes (Small 2009; Yin 2009). Qualitative case studies typically draw on less than forty interviews given the in-depth nature of the approach (Crouch and McKenzie 2006). Though not generalizable in the statistical sense, qualitative research that relies on a smaller number of in-depth interviews can be theory-generative. Interviews allow for the examination of thoughts, feelings, and experience of participants (Cho 2017). The questions guiding this research are: What are the motivations and experiences of bridge-builders? And, how do their experiences illuminate contemporary American political culture?

The organization Braver Angels (BA) was selected as an influential case after a comprehensive national review. For example, in a state of the field paper on efforts to reduce partisan animosity, BA is noted as an exemplar bridging organization with an extensive national infrastructure (Hartman et al 2022). Once BA was selected, the national organization was contacted for permission to conduct the research and to request that the organization suggest a standout, highly successful branch for potential study. The Central Texas Alliance was selected because it is celebrated by the national organization as model (Timmis 2022). The case study draws on the observation of two in-person workshops and interviews with 14 participants totaling approximately 30 hours of contact defined as time spent with research subjects and in the field (Small and Calarco 2022). Additionally, BA-produced workshop materials and internal surveys provided by BA were reviewed. The researcher received internal organization approval from BA and the Central Texas Alliance for the study.

The two in-person BA workshops run by the Central Texas Alliance occurred in April 2023. Alliance is the term used by BA for regional branches of their organization and are run by volunteers. The first workshop, the "Red/ Blue Workshop" was held in Austin, Texas. A hallmark of the Red/ Blue workshop is that they control for political orientation. Republicans or those right of center are called "Reds" and Democrats of those left of center are called "Blues." Workshops are organized for parity of Reds/Blues. The second, titled, "Depolarizing Within Workshop" was held in the small city of New Braunfels, Texas and was geared toward introspection. The organizers did not control

for political identity. The two sessions were attended by a total of 35 participants. The researcher attended the two sessions with permission from facilitators and group participants.

For the workshops, the researcher arrived early and stayed late to get a sense of the people involved and the labor required for hosting a workshop. The researcher took detailed notes while at the events, and photographed collaborative materials produced, in addition to collecting copies of any materials distributed to participants. Detailed field notes were produced immediately following attendance. Each workshop formally lasted three hours, though time at each site ranged from four to five hours. The workshops had more men than women in attendance, though nationally the organization skews female (Braver Angels 2021).

The two workshops selected for study were suggested by the organizers and are among BA's hallmark experiences, running regularly throughout the US. For example, a review of events by BA from March 10 through the end of May 2025, shows the Red/Blue and Depolarizing Within Workshops scheduled in five states—California, Connecticut, Colorado, Idaho, and Michigan. The Depolarizing Within Workshop is also available online as an e-course (Braver Angels 2025d). Though one can logically assume no workshop is the same given regional differences and variations of personality among participants, the highly scripted nature of the workshops does allow for some level of predictability and thus generalizability to their nature.

For the interviews, the researcher was introduced to the participants of the workshops by session leaders at the outset of the sessions. All participants were given the option to participate in an interview following the workshop. The yield of interview subjects was strong with 12 out of 35 participants agreeing to be interviewed, in addition to the two workshop session leaders for a total of 14 interviews. In terms of the partisan affiliation of interviewees, though the Red/ Blue workshop controlled for parity of partisan affiliation, the overall yield of research subjects did skew liberal with 10 out of 14 interviewees identifying as "blue" or liberal. Nationally, BA's membership is 69% liberal (Braver Angels 2021). In this regard, the interviewee yield is highly in-keeping with organizational partisan demographics. Interviews were done over the phone within two weeks following the session and in one in instance, in-person immediately after the session. Interviews lasted from 25 minutes to 1.5 hours in duration. Interviews were recorded, professionally transcribed, and analyzed with an interpretivist approach for emergent themes. Names of interviewees have been changed.

The study received Internal Review Board (IRB) approval, an independent university ethics committee for research on human subjects, in February 2023.[1]

1 "Strengthening Democracy by Strengthening the Agora" was approved by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Institutional Review Board Office in February 2023 (IRB No. 00023010). This research was supported by the Lumina Foundation (Grant number: 139968).

Findings

Rehearsing the civil: Braver Angels of Central Texas

On a sunny Saturday morning in late April in Austin, Texas a group of people gathered at a Dispute Resolution Center above a bank in a large strip-mall. Greeted with coffee, donuts, and kolaches—the Texan version of an oversized pig in a blanket—each participant arrived, pausing at the welcome table to retrieve a handwritten nametag scribed in red or blue, a shorthand signifier for their respective political affiliation, to paste onto their shirts. Volunteers had set up a welcome booth featuring flyers, books, and a sign-in sheet. A life-sized cardboard cut-out of Abraham Lincoln stood proudly inside propped against the wall. Led by two trained facilitators, the morning began with introductions. Each participant was asked to present themselves, their reason for coming, and their hopes for the workshop. Though a diversity of political views were present, one thread tied the people in the room together: a deep concern for the internal divisions and strife threatening America. One young man quipped, "I don't want to catch ideological rabies." Another woman confessed, "I live in a bubble." The facilitators proceeded with ground rules: talk about politics without trying to convince anyone and only represent yourself. Participants were reminded to stay on topic and to focus on listening to others.

The "Red/ Blue Workshop" commenced and Reds and Blues—BA parlance for conservatives and progressives—gathered with members of their own group to generate a list of stereotypes. The stereotypes weren't about the other side, but rather prominent stereotypes about their own political group. Armed with a large notepad and markers, they got to work, building lists of stereotypes. Each stereotype was discussed as participants highlighted what was true and what was false, acknowledging any kernel of truth that the stereotype held. For example, Reds said a prominent stereotype was that they are "all MAGA" and "cult-like." Pushing back against this, they noted that not all Reds like Trump, that the two-party system has limitations, and emphasized, "MAGA is not an attempt to regress to a darker time in history." Acknowledging the kernels of truth in this stereotype, the group ceded that the party is divided on Trump and that some Reds simplify thinking in order to toe the party line.

Blues discussed the stereotype that they are "Anti-American/ woke/ against traditional values." They countered this by stating that they are patriotic, that they, "love our country" and do value inclusivity, and America as a melting pot of diversity. Turning to the kernel of truth, they admitted that, "some language does suggest they are against white, straight men" and that sometimes Blues used extreme language. Reds and Blues then sent a representative to the front of the room to summarize their discussion to the entire group. Then, breaking out into Red/ Blue pairs, participants discussed what they'd learned about the other side and were tasked with looking for points of common ground.

Table 1. Stereotypes generated by participants of the "Red/Blue Workshop"

Stereotypes of "Blues"	Stereotypes of "Reds"
Anti-American/ woke/ against traditional values	MAGA/ cult
Big spenders	Greedy/ money obsessed
Anti-police/ law and order	Bigot/ racist
Pro-abortion/ baby killers	Lacking compassion

The second exercise brought Reds and then Blues into the center of a circle to discuss the questions: Why do you think your side's values and policies are good for the country? What reservations do you have about your side's political positions? Those outside were tasked with listening. After, pairs of Reds/ Blues again teamed up to discuss their impressions, noting what they learned and highlighting any sites of commonality.

The three-hour session closed with a call for participants to share what they gained from the workshop. A general sense of good-will was palpable as participants expressed feeling, "more hopeful for the country" and that "common ground was shared." Others acknowledged a "sense of connection" and that they were hopeful for "a way forward." Another highlighted that, "fear was part of the partisan divide." In a follow-up interview with Charles, a Democrat and retired music technician, he explained the value of participation, "I think they [the polarized media] whip up our negative emotions, and when we get the chance to actually see each other face to face and talk about things, we realize that we have more in common than we realized."[2] When asked for their key takeaway, a Blue participant wrote, "We, both red and blue, have a lot in common, concerns about individual liberty, need for good government, and love of country for example."

The "Depolarizing Within" workshop met Sunday afternoon at an Episcopal church in New Braunfels, Texas. Still buzzing with activity from the morning service, the workshop took place away from the sanctuary in a large meeting room with windows looking onto a bright garden. Twenty participants made their way in, gathering materials, nametags, and a boxed lunch. Some were members of the church, while others were not. Led by two men, one Red and one Blue, the session convened with three stated goals (Braver Angels 2025e):

– Become aware of your own "inner polarizer"

– Learn how to criticize viewpoints without stereotyping, dismissing, ridiculing, and holding contempt for those who disagree with us

– Develop ways to speak up in polarizing conversations with peers about people on the other political side

The first activity prompted participants to fill out a survey, "Recognizing My Inner Polarizer." Written to prompt introspection, the six questions

2 Personal interview, May 5, 2023.

probed beliefs and behaviors about people from the other party. For example, one question asks, "How often do I find myself comparing the *worst* people on the other side with the *best* people on my side?" [sic] Another asks, "How often do I feel a "rush" of pleasure with friends when we ridicule those crazies on the other side?" The last questions had respondents assign an "overall emotional attitude" towards the other side, choosing from hate, disdain, pity, basic respect, and respect and appreciation.

After time for reflection, the facilitators led the group through a slide presentation, warning of the "four horsemen of polarization: stereotyping, dismissing, ridiculing, and contempt." Participants were prompted to consider how they stereotype the other side and how they could resist this inclination. One man offered, "remember all people are made in the image of God." Participants followed along with the slides, flipping through the nine-page BA packet that outlined each activity and the guiding principles in detail. The facilitators then introduced "depolarizing distinctions" between positions and people, policies and core values, and inconsistency and hypocrisy. Drawing on cognitive behavioral therapy techniques, participants were prompted to "edit the story" about people on the other side, challenging unidimensional thinking.

The session then shifted to how to depolarize a conversation using "LAPP" an acronym standing for listen, acknowledge, pivot, and perspective. For the approach, each participant listens to the other person, acknowledges or mirrors back what their concerns are, pivots to redirect the conversation focusing on "I" statements, and then offers a depolarizing perspective. Each step contained a short list of script-like examples. An example from the script[3] provided offers:

> **Listen** for the other person's values, and emotions that are influencing the stereotyping, ridicule or contempt.
>
> **Acknowledge** what you are hearing. For example, "I'm sorry you had to deal with those put downs in your family."
>
> **Pivot** to signal a shift in the conversation. For example, "I'm with you on being very concerned about what's going on. Can I throw in another perspective?"
>
> **Perspective** offers a depolarizing viewpoint. For example, "They are coming at this from different backgrounds and experiences."

When prompted to write their main takeaway, a participant wrote, "Polarization starts and ends with me." Another wrote, "Start with self first." And another, "Humble myself and listen." One confessed, "That I can be polarizing."

3 "Depolarizing Within: Becoming A Braver Angel In Your Own World." Distributed April 30, 2023. Adapted for clarity.

Invoking the civil

In interviews and throughout the workshops, participants invoked the civil and spoke to broader themes that united the group. A retired man in his late sixties, a Red, offered his thoughts on the group, [4]

> When you get behind it, they're all really still Americans. They have read the Declaration of Independence. They really have much, much more in common than different. But both have been led astray. That's what I expected to see, and that's what I saw, but the good thing was about it that when they did all get together, I think they started to see that they had a lot more common ground.

Another Republican man, a 60-year-old building inspector, expressed frustration with contemporary divisiveness and appealed to broader social solidarity, "It's not 'they.' There is no 'they.' There's only 'we.' They are us."[5] And, in the survey, pointing to shared goodwill, one Blue respondent wrote, "All participants have sincere desires for the best future of America." Speaking to his own role, Charles, a Democrat explained, "I try to turn down the temperature. That's one of my takeaways from all this. Try to turn down the temperature because you can't hear each other as long as you're shouting."[6]

Civility or avoidance?

In interviews, people shared being drawn to politics over issue-specific concerns including immigration, gun violence, homelessness, and climate change. The workshops did not take on issue-specific concerns, instead emphasizing general communicative norms for respectful dialogue and introspection. For some, this was frustrating, as they yearned to speak more directly, unbridled by the provided script.

One man, a Democrat, retiree, and Vietnam veteran explained, "I'm not sure they [the other participants] were really saying how they felt. Everybody was trying to be too nice to each other. You know what I mean?" He later continued, "I just want to start talking about the real gut issues. Why do you like Trump? What the hell is it with this guy?"[7] Charles, a Democrat, attributed the approach of participants to self-selection bias, "The people who are extremists or very fixed in their views, rigidly fixed, are unlikely to join a group like this because it's going to feel uncomfortable, I think. I found the people there quite willing to participate and be vulnerable and share their points of view in a respectful way."[8]

Another Democrat, a retired venture capitalist, noted the conspicuous absence of the topic of democracy, "If I reflect back on what was discussed [at the workshop], democracy never came up. And I view democracy and attacks on

4 Personal interview, May 8, 2023.
5 Personal interview, May 9, 2023.
6 Personal interview, May 5, 2023.
7 Personal interview, April 29, 2023.
8 Personal interview, May 5, 2023.

undemocratic behavior as an asymmetrical dynamic that's happening. I wish all Americans believed in democracy."[9]

Samantha, a 30 year old Red, acknowledged the limitations of the scripts in a phone interview.

> Samantha: The sessions are set up in a way where you don't get too deep, and that's probably something that bothers a lot of people, because they really do want to talk through actual issues. But the sessions are really not designed for that. And I think that's for the best overall, because it's really just to get people to sit in a room together. Things are so bad right now that just to get people to sit in a room together is...[trails off] I do notice that I still censor myself quite a bit. But I bet they do too.
>
> Interviewer: But in spite of that, you still want to be a part of it and are committed.
>
> Samantha: Yeah. Because I think just sitting in the room is important. It's really important. [10]

Depolarizing family and friends

Across all interviews, people participated in BA to grow their skill at speaking to those with divergent political views. Some had lost family and friends to the caustic political climate. For example, one woman, a Democrat, aged 54, described being caught in the middle of her ultra-conservative, 88-year-old parents and her daughter, aged 20, who is a lesbian. Politics had created a rift in the family, and she hoped to gain skills from BA to manage the conflict.[11] Another woman, a retired school teacher and Democrat explained her draw to the event, "I saw the word depolarizing and I thought, 'This might be a way for me to learn how to communicate with my own husband on a personal level in a better way."[12] Chris, a Red, aged 60, was also motivated by his family. He offered, "There's just so much divide and a lot of hate. It worries me about the future of our country. I have an 18-year-old son, soon to be 19, and I worry about his future." [13]

Samantha, the Red aged 30, had grown disenchanted with leftist ideals causing her to move right in recent years. The change in her political convictions led to a falling out with her friend group. She explained the experience,

> I felt like it was karma pretty much, because they immediately went from friends that I've known for years [to] immediately calling me names or insinuating that I'm on some sort of path to being a white supremacist or being a Trump supporter, or I'm a racist, I'm this, I'm that. And I felt like I had engaged in some of that [type of behavior] when I was younger.

9 Personal interview, May 8, 2023.
10 Personal interview, May 5, 2023.
11 Personal interview, May 9, 2023.
12 Personal interview, May 8, 2023.
13 Personal interview, May 9, 2023.

She sought BA for its cathartic, therapeutic attributes, noting it felt like a "safe space" to talk about her political views and experiences though she confessed she was pro-life in the interview, highlighting how hard it was to admit in any setting.[14]

Concluding Discussion

Affective polarization threatens democratic society because it erodes social bonds—threatening to turn political adversaries into permanent enemies. Bridging organizations have presented themselves as a solution to this challenge, inviting people from across the political aisle to gain tools for civil dialogue. Through a detailed case study of a leading bridging organization, this study has asked: What are the motivations and experiences of bridgebuilders? And, how do their experiences illuminate contemporary American political culture? The importance of civil repair through social interaction is noted by civil sphere theorists (Alexander 1995; Becker 2023; Tajic and Lund 2022). And, civility as central to democratic life is a longstanding preoccupation (Alexander 2006; Elias 1939; Shils 1991; Turner 2021). Inclusion and repair require people willing to engage in such culture work or relational exchange. This paper extends this tradition, showing how bridging facilitates a rehearsal of civility.

Rehearsing civility allows participants to practice civil dialogue with someone they would consider a political adversary. Set back from the stresses of more antagonistic everyday political communication, the rehearsal allows participants to experience the payoff of civility, reaffirming social bonds diminished by political polarization. In the study, the bridging workshops challenged participants to build their skills at civil dialogue through the use of highly-prescriptive scripts based, in part, on marital therapy. The scripts allowed participants to practice depolarizing conversations with people of divergent political orientation. Many were drawn to participate out of a desire to repair relationships with friends and family estranged by the political climate. Rehearsing civility gave participants language, but also provided an emotional reward—allowing them to experience the civility and connection they craved in their own lives and in the broader society. The rehearsal invited participants to invoke the civil—reaffirming social bonds by speaking to a broader sense of goodwill in turn rehumanizing their political opponents.

There are drawbacks to the scripts, however. In the study, some participants expressed frustration over the highly structured nature of the conversations that allowed for little improvisation or discussion of "the real gut issues" as one participant put it.[15] This feature, in some ways, left the most caustic, pressing elements of contemporary political culture relatively untouched. The literature on the recent success of right-wing populism to pull discourse to its favor highlights the use of "borderline discourse" that follows some civil norms but

14 Personal interview, May 5, 2023.
15 Personal interview, April 29, 2023.

also contains highly anti-democratic and exclusionary speech (Kryzanowski and Ledin 2017; Kryzanowski et al 2021). This works to widen the scope of "what is sayable" (Binder 2021: 178) and creates more porous boundaries between the civil/ uncivil (Tognato 2021).

Within BA and in the practice of bridgebuilding, commitment to parity, balance, and hearing both sides presents a challenge. Though there was no outright anti-civil speech during the sessions, participants were instructed to not try to persuade others. When does civility as a norm become repressive? And, when does a normative commitment to respecting others' views become dangerous? Should extreme speech, that is highly exclusionary, or anti-democratic, be entertained and thus legitimized? Within the scope of this case study, there were no explicit tools presented for dealing with anti-democratic or highly exclusionary language. The tradition of free speech absolutism in America further complicates this puzzle.

Rehearsing civility reveals a deep desire, at least on the part of participants, for the restoration of social bonds lost to political polarization. The growth in popularity of BA and organizations like it since the emergence of Trumpism is significant and in many ways in-keeping with the longstanding American tradition of civic participation. The importance of civic life and voluntary associations has been observed in the US dating back to at least Alexis de Tocqueville ([1835] 2003) though their prominence has been in decline for more than half a century (Putnam 2000; Putnam et al 2004). The bridging turn, if we are to call it that, reveals deep anxieties over the future of American community life and political culture more generally. It could be said that while a generation ago (or more) bridging happened organically through participation in a range of civic associations be them organized religion, union membership, and organizations of community uplift or clubs for hobby, today such shortage of organic bridging necessitates more prescriptive or deliberate approaches.

Even within BA's efforts for civic renewal, a more general turn inward is observed. The project of 'depolarizing within' is a project of self-improvement, where individuals reform themselves and in turn improve society. In the workshops, participants were prompted towards introspection, instructed to represent solely themselves, and to resist labelling the other side. Workshops required participants confess their own shortcomings, acknowledge their own 'inner-polarizer' and openly discuss their misgivings or doubts about their political identity in front of others—rewarding humility. Participants strongly resonated with this approach of personal responsibility and improvement, explaining in interviews their efforts to redirect or reform polarizing thought patterns.

The relationship between depolarization and democratic attitudes is murky at best (Voelkel et al 2023). Within the scope of this study, explicit references to democratic institutions were scant. Rather, emphasis was centered on growing what BA calls 'patriotic empathy.' The sessions did however foster mutual regard—a central and necessary part of the social fabric of democratic life (Shils 1991). In sessions and interviews, participants remarked how pleased they were to come together, invoking broader appeals to shared values, goals, and a

common identity as Americans. Future research should further interrogate the relationship between mutual regard and attachments to democratic institutions.

Empirically, this study is not without limitations. First, due to time constraints, it was not possible to follow up with participants for a second interview months later in order to understand the impact of BA participation over time. In some ways, this is a missed opportunity, given the literature on the durability of bridging interventions' impacts is inconclusive (Baron et al 2021; Duong 2023). Future research should design for follow-up interviews potentially three and six months out in order to illuminate impacts on the practice of civility in everyday life as well as democratic practices and views more broadly. More, interviewees in this study highlight the importance of transforming interpersonal relationships with friends and family members fraught with political tension. Longitudinal research would allow to further probe such dynamics by inviting interviewees to reflect on and explain any changes in their relationships over time and whether they attribute such shifts to skills acquired through bridging participation. Taking this line of inquiry a step further, future research could also incorporate interviews with family and friends identified by bridging participants as well.

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Emili Kembel

Uvežbavanje civiliteta: Izgradnja mostova u polarizovanoj Americi

Apstrakt

Tokom poslednje decenije, sve veća polarizacija produbila je političke podele ugrozivši time kako građansku sferu, tako i samu demokratiju. U Sjedinjenim Američkim Državama, zabrinutost za budućnost demokratije dovela je do porasta organizacija koje sebe opisuju kao „posvećene izgradnji mostova". Izgradnja mostova podrazumeva razvoj dijaloga između ljudi suprotstavljenih političkih stavova sa ciljem smanjenja polarizacije. Ovaj rad analizira izgradnju mostova kroz detaljnu studiju slučaja jedne takve organizacije. Oslanjajući se na posmatranje, intervjue i ankete učesnika, istraživanje opisuje motive i iskustva onih koji se bave izgradnjom mostova. Rad pokazuje da izgradnja mostova omogućava učesnicima da „uvežbavaju civilitet", da iskuse uljudnost i dobronamernost za kojom žude u sopstvenim životima i koju žele u širem društvu, i to u relativno sigurnom i kontrolisanom okruženju. Uvežbavanje civiliteta podstiče učesnike na osnaživanje građanskog, kroz učvršćivanje društvenih veza, prizivanje šireg osećaja dobronamernosti i humanizaciju političkog protivnika. Iako nije bez ograničenja, porast broja organizacija koje se bave „izgradnjom mostova" ukazuje na duboku potrebu za civilitetom, kao i iskustvenu i emocionalnu vrednost koju dosnosi sa sobom. Razmatra se civilitet kao međusobno uvažavanje i kao veza sa demokratskim institucijama.

Ključne reči: organizacije posvećene izgradnji mostova, civilitet, teorija građanske sfere, teorija ugovora, kulturna sociologija, demokratija, polarizacija, politička sociologija

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THE POTENTIAL FOR CIVIL RESILIENCE. STAGING INEQUALITIES IN A STIGMATIZED NEIGHBORHOOD

ABSTRACT
Currently, Sweden is a society marked by growing anti-immigrant sentiments and residential stigmatization. As a result, the symbolic and social gaps between in-groups and out-groups are widening. Consequently, interactions that could foster empathy and solidarity across differences have become increasingly fragile. However, artistic initiatives that counter anti-civil forces are emerging. This article focuses on theater and social inclusion by examining three interconnected elements: meaning, communication, and social change—and how they can serve as a form of civil resilience through critical reflection and recognition processes. Thus, we illuminate how theater can become a venue for social inclusion for a young, ethnically diverse audience by activating symbolic structures of meaning and emotions that recognize the inequalities present within marginalized groups and their experiences. This is achieved by investigating the professional and dramaturgical strategies employed by an artistic team establishing a new theater in a stigmatized neighborhood north of Stockholm and their efforts toward social cohesion. The analysis identifies dramaturgical strategies involving emotions, authenticity, and bodies, along with other professional strategies that work transformatively within the theater and the community, resulting in theatrical communication that allows for psycho-social identification for the audience and critical self-analysis for theater professionals, thereby holding potential for civil resilience.

KEYWORDS
Civil Sphere, Theater, Young Audience, Civil Resilience, Stigmatization, Ethnography, Recognition, Critical Self-analysis.

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Introduction

This article analyzes the strategies a newly established theater in a stigmatized neighborhood has developed to create relevant productions for a multiethnic and young audience. Today, Sweden is a super-diverse society that is strongly urbanized. Nearly thirty-five percent of the population has a foreign background, either born abroad or having one or both parents born overseas (SCB 2024). Many non-white Swedes and recent immigrants live in high-rise housing projects outside city centers, which the white majority has abandoned. This demographic shift is indicative of segregation, as well as economic (Haandrikman et al. 2019) and educational disparities (Malmberg and Andersson 2019; Osman et al. 2024). "The immigrant" is precariously positioned in contemporary Sweden. In the mid-2010s, Swedish policy underwent a significant shift in migration and asylum policy. For instance, legislation related to residence permits and family reunification was restricted, while a multicultural ethos shifted toward ideals of assimilation and ethnocentrism (Switzer 2024).

And, although Sweden is super-diverse, the world of theater and aesthetic traditions other than Western have largely been invisible in Swedish cultural life (Malmcrona and Larsson 2017; Svens 2015). Recent surveys show that the Swedish art scene lacks multiethnic representation (Myndigheten för Kulturanalys 2023). Art professionals are mainly white ethnic Swedes from middle-class backgrounds. This reality echoes the experience of Isra, one of the high school girls we interviewed in our research focusing on processes of social inclusion in Swedish theater. She has an Iraqi background, and when she remembers her previous theater experiences, she says: "Oh my god, the only kind of plays I've seen were when I was a child, with school. What can I say? It was white people putting on plays. So, it was boring."

Some Swedish art milieus are, however, currently working to de-center and diversify art spaces (Brinch et al. forthcoming). In research on incorporation processes within the field of art, valuable contributions have been made by Alexander (2006) and Schall (2019), Lund (2024), and Josten (2024), yet it is a field of research that requires further development (Martiniello 2015; DiMaggio and Fernández-Kelly 2015). Additionally, many studies focusing on youth and incorporation processes emphasize educational and/or mental health over social or cultural practices (SOU Ju 2013:17). To narrow this research gap, this article focuses on the theater's role in the civil sphere in a democratic society.[1] Such a civil sphere operates on the premise of universal inclusion, while retaining responsibility for collective goals and defending the autonomy of the individual (Alexander 2006, 34). We analyze the practice of a theater aiming to change the white and middle-class status quo of Swedish theater, and we

1 The article is partly based on a previous work: Lund, Anna 2022. "Att gestalta miljonprogrammet: Husbys nya scen och en berättelse inifrån" In Brinch, Rebecca, Dirk Gindt, and Tiina Rosenberg eds. *Berätta, överleva, inte drunkna: Antirasism, dekolonisering och migration i svensk teater*. Stockholm: Atlas: 235–256. The article has been significantly revised and received approval from the publisher to re-publish.

investigate the practice of leaving space, quite literally, for bodies and stories different to what has historically been the case. The aim is to produce knowledge about how a theater can work for social inclusion and empower a young multiethnic audience.

In the present article, we focus on one specific case: the meaning attached to a new stage, Husby Theater [Kulturhuset Stadsteatern Vällingby Husby]. This theater is located in a neighborhood called Husby. This neighborhood is multiethnic and, in Wacquant's terms, subjected to territorialized stigmatization (2008). Husby consists of high-rise housing projects from the 1970s, and is situated 20 minutes northwest of city center by subway. In Swedish, Husby and similar stigmatized areas are called "förorter," [suburbs in English], shortened by young residents to Orten" (from "förorten"), equivalent to the value-laden English "the hood."

We analyze the Husby Theater and its opening production *Mizeria*. The play premiered on March 7, 2020. The production was directed by Astrid Kakuli, with music by Marko Saez. Maria Nohra and Ahmed Berhan played the title roles. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, performance of the play was postponed to the fall 2022, when it was staged again with a new female lead, Yasmine Seifi. We are interested in what the premier play and the theater team want to communicate and what they, in practice, do when trying to change the world of theater into a more inclusive space. How are they trying to be relevant to a young local audience? Making the theater a more inclusive space involves de-centering the theater and its taken-for-granted truths and an awareness of how these are part of historically shaped power structures (cf. Go 2016). As we will show, portraying stories from within contributes to realizing inclusion processes. New stories and purposeful casting are central, as is a staging process that understands how "we" and "the other" have a relational dynamic where the conventions and norms speak the language of the actors of the "central stage" in society (Alexander 2006). What happens backstage in rooms where strategies and theater repertoires are planned and organized, media reviews, and acknowledgment in the world of theater are also a part of the story (see also Saha 2018). This article explores how *Mizeria* enhances the self-respect of a multiethnic audience by allowing them to identify with the narrative and cultivating hope for mutual recognition between minority and majority groups in Sweden, as evoked among the audience by the play. It also addresses a change process within the theater, focusing on realizing one's blind spots as white middle-class theater professionals.

As children and youth are prioritized groups in Swedish cultural policy, theater tickets are subsidized for them, particularly when purchased through schools. In practice, this allows young people in Sweden to experience professional theater in school at no cost. The democratization of the arts is key, and offering a cultural infrastructure that enables everyone in Sweden – irrespective of age, class, gender, and geographical location – to encounter and take part in art has been the goal since 1974. One could argue that encouraging citizen

participation in the arts and culture is an essential aspect of the welfare state (Lund 2008; Lorentzon et al. 2025).

After this introduction, we outline our theoretical perspective and explain the data collection and analysis before arriving at our findings. The analysis regards meaning, communication, and change in the practices of the Husby Theater. The article concludes with some reflections on the potential of staging inequalities for civil resilience.

From Civil Repair and Social Resilience to Civil Resilience

For this article, we have been inspired by civil sphere theory (Alexander 2006), which incorporates solidarity into sociological theorization and considers the potential to repair gaps in the social fabric. We have also been inspired by the concept of social resilience (Lamont et al. 2013) and the role recognition can have for marginalized groups.

In Sweden, having a non-white, non-Western, or Muslim background is currently associated with negative stereotypes (Voyer and Lund 2020). These stereotypes are on an individual level related to the constant identity threat of being perceived as a negative racialized category by the white majority rather than an individual with unique characteristics and resources. This is a heavy burden to bear, creating unsustainable emotional stress and a constant feeling that the white majority doubts one's abilities. Frustration may arise as one's capacity may be questioned, fostering a need to prove that one is good enough (Steele 2011).

The current divide in Swedish society and the increased presence of anti-immigrant and ethnonationalist policies enhance the important role of new narratives and aesthetic experiences. Theater, among other art forms, has a proven ability to create empathy and mutual understanding (Brinch et al. 2023), decrease shame among ethnically marginalized groups, and create productive guilt among a white majority (Lund 2024). Thus, art can illuminate gaps in the social fabric through representation, authenticity, and emotional cues such as humor (Lund 2024).

Our theorization highlights the potential of theater for social inclusion by suggesting a new conceptualization within this methodological framework: *civil resilience*. While studying stage-audience encounters, we have listened to voices from society's uneven distribution of recognition. Symbolized by the perspectives of theater professionals and a young, ethnically marginalized audience group, both sides of the recognition gap are represented in the article (Lamont 2018).

Civil resilience builds on the idea that social resilience depends on the experience of recognition among marginalized groups. This happens on a societal level and can occur through personal interactions, political initiatives (Lamont et al. 2013), and encounters with art (Lund 2024). But this is not on its own sustainable in the long run. Civil repair is also needed, which speaks to solidarity in a broader and deeper sense, i. e., when procucing a hierarchy

of people as less worthy of recognition becomes polluted. Civil repair can only happen, as Alexander et al. point out, if those in power stop "applying the discourse of repression to the dominated, polluting them and justifying their exclusion" (2020: 200). This demands that the white majority engage in critical self-analysis and, in our case, convert this to an internal learning process in strategically creating relevant theater for a marginalized, multiethnic, and young audience group. In our theorization, this resembles a work toward a mode of multicultural incorporation, i.e., solidarity through a unity-in-difference approach (Alexander 2006). Our conceptualization of civil resilience points to the double process occurring for the out-group and the in-group in a stage-audience encounter: the out-group can experience recognition, while the in-group can engage in critical self-analysis, resulting in strategical choices towards a broadened societal 'we'. The ongoing social drama between in-groups and out-groups in society highlights the historical malleability of relations of dominance and the potential for solidarity through mutual respect.

In order to illuminate civil resilience in practice, we utilize a cultural sociological perspective that pays attention to the meaning structures and objectives woven into artistic projects and their connections to further social and cultural processes (Eyerman and Ring 1998: 280). We consider the professional work being done at Husby Theater, supplemented by an approach that analyzes the meaning, communication, and hopes for change attached to both Husby Theater and the play *Mizeria*.

We are interested in the content and meaning of the play, but also in the meaning of Husby Theater as part of the urban landscape. *Meaning* is analyzed from the perspective of the respondents. And their motives and problem-solving strategies regarding the dominance of "white standard theater" and its exclusionary practices. In terms of *communication*, we are interested in what the theater – as a place and a professional practice on and off stage – wants to convey. Fictional media constitute a communicative institution in the civil sphere (Alexander 2006). How this communication takes shape through dramaturgical and other professional strategies is of interest for understanding the potential of civil resilience during times of ruptures in the fabric of civil society. The perspective on *change* means that the meaning of art is not only seen as a reflection of social conditions. Art is not simply about taste, power, and conventions (McCormick 2022); it can also uphold civil values (McCormick 2015) and reflect social conditions (Schall 2019). What is more, it can influence the social world and create change through emotional extension and understanding, as well as redefine what is civil in the world (Alexander 2006, Lund 2024).

Thus, performing art, as an organization and as staged narratives, has the potential not only to reproduce existing power structures but also to shape social conditions and social change and support civil resilience. Eyerman and Ring (1998) and Alexander (2006) have emphasized that encounters with art can lead to an increased understanding of our position in the world, the social relationships we are part of, and how they are valued and recognized in society. Our theoretical approach takes these dimensions of meaning, communication,

and change into our empirical work by investigating the professional practices used to establish the Husby Theater and the dramaturgical strategies used to stage *Mizeria.*

Studying meaning, communication, and change

We have worked on getting to know Husby Theater and the play *Mizeria* from different perspectives. Since 2019, we have been part of a collaboration between The City Theater in Stockholm, of which Husby Theater is a part, and Stockholm University regarding the performing arts and urban development. We had the opportunity to get to know actors in the city of Stockholm who are working to reach out to the youth and more diverse audience with relevant theater by expanding their collaborations. The organization of a new theater in Husby is something we have followed as ethnographers since its start – sometimes very close up, looking at the theater's creation of new collaborations and its plays, and sometimes at a distance, by reading the reviews of theater critics and listening to other actors in the neighborhood talk about what the Husby Theater means to them.

For this article, we have read the book *Mizeria* and saw the transformation of the book into a play. We have watched the recorded version of the play and seen the on-site performance with the young audience five times. On one occasion, we followed a group of 88 junior high school students, saw the play with them, and followed them back on the subway to their school and observed their interactions and small talk connected to their encounter with *Mizeria*. On another occasion, we observed teacher-student interactions during a lesson when Mizeria was processed in different assignments. We have done five focus group interviews and one individual interview with audience members (ages 14-19), with 16 members in total. These were done within a week of seeing *Mizeria.* We asked questions about the meaning of the play, emotional reactions, possible identification, and their thoughts on theater in society. We will also utilize interviews with theater professionals with extensive experience working with theater and permanently employed in leading positions at the Husby Theater, and a local artist on a temporary contract. Olof Hanson, theater manager and artistic director; Mia Winge, who is a dramaturge; Jiasi Maciel, executive producer at Husby Theater; and Melody Farshin, the local artist, a Husby-profile stand-up comedian, and author of *Mizeria.* We talked with theater professionals about their experiences of working in different locations in Sweden, representation on and off stage, their hopes for the theater, and considerations when lived experiences in stigmatized high-rise housing projects are to be portrayed. All the interviews have been semi-structured and offered good opportunities for follow-up questions.

As we could look at the theater from many different perspectives, the material is rich and colorful. However, our analysis is connected to the professional and audience views on *Mizeria*, and their hopes for Husby Theater. This means that our analysis does not include voices from the local community outside the

theater. Researching theater has its limitations; once a play concludes, there is a short window of time to study its communication with the audience. However, the presentism of the theatrical encounter also brings an analytical advantage to ethnographic analysis, as we as researchers become "immersed" in the theatrical event along with all the voices and interactions connected to the stage-audience encounter. Our cultural performance analysis (Brinch et al. forthcoming) serves as a triangulation between dramaturgical strategies, various professional approaches, audience reception, and social and cultural structures. Our coding procedures were characterized by deductive strategies (social recognition, modes of incorporation, civil repair), as well as inductive ones (emotions, authenticity, bodies/identification), resembling an abductive process of theorization (Timmermans and Tavory 2012). The present study is part of a larger project[2] and was considered exempt from ethical review by the Ethics Committee in Sweden (Etikprövningsmyndigheten), protocol code 2020-07039. Informed consent was adhered to, alongside confidential data management. The names of the audience members used in the paper have been pseudonymized. The theater professionals have consented to be represented with their actual names.

Considering that we are white and hold academic positions, we cannot fully understand the feelings and experiences of people who are at risk of being exposed to racial discrimination and everyday racism. Deep down, we also do not understand the behavioral patterns that an upbringing in an elite environment creates. Probably no sociology can achieve a complete understanding of the social life of individuals or groups (Duneier and Back 2006). At the same time, we believe that intercultural understanding across different life experiences is possible. As Frantz Fanon wrote, "I sincerely believe that a subjective experience can be understood by others" (1986: 86). But as researchers analyzing how experiences of migration, segregation, and non-whiteness affect living conditions, we are often reminded of our privileged positions in public spaces, the education system, the labor market, and the media. While working on the present text, we have been in dialogue with the people who shared their work in the theater with us and let their reading of our analysis be a way of verifying that our interpretations are valid representations of their experiences.

Meaning

Olof Hanson, the theater manager and artistic director, emphasizes that Husby's new theater must be "relevant" to its audience. Collaborations with artists who have "something to say to the audience [who live in the neighborhood]" are prioritized. Criteria for meaningfulness are that meaning is created through narratives that can affect the audience emotionally and that the work front and backstage "must be representative." In concrete terms, this is done by offering

2 The research is part of the project Staging Migration. Rhetoric, Representation, and Reception in Swedish Children's Theater (financed by the Swedish Research Council).

a repertoire of plays that stage narratives that come "from within." These narratives are portrayed by artists who are not exoticized and do not have an outsider's perspective but who can relate to staged experiences.

But it is not a self-evident matter for an art form largely associated with the white middle class in the inner city of Stockholm to establish itself in a class-stigmatized and multiethnic neighborhood. Zarah, a high school student from Husby tells us that her reaction to the founding of a theater was that it was, "out of place." Zarah tells us that she does not expect a theater of such quality to be around for the long-term (see also Lund et al. 2024).

> You start to think: it's just another thing that will fail. That is what happens to new projects in our neighborhoods. Why should we be engaged? It will soon disappear. Because almost everything that has been opened has been closed down. Opened up. And closed down. All the time.

Her expectations for her first visit to the theater were that the experience would be a "half- hearted attempt that would not lead anywhere." However, entering the venue and finding her way to her seat, she was surprised to find that "when I entered the venue, I saw that it's nice, it's clean, completely newly built inside and it was very nicely done. I was surprised. And I thought: 'Why am I surprised?'" Iman, who was interviewed together with Zarah, fills in by saying: "You expected it to look dilapidated." To which she responds: "Run down and bad. Because everything that opens up, the state only takes it half-heartedly, for the socioeconomically vulnerable areas nothing is serious." Quality and serious attempts at communication and engagement from cultural policy actors is seen with suspicion. The young women we interviewed are critical, and their summary of what it is like to live in Husby is that the neighborhood is: "genuinely deprived of quality."[3] These young women's expectations echo throughout our ethnography. Observing the audience, we could often hear positive utterances about how nice everything looks, and how surprising this was.

Trusting, long-term relationships need to be built between the new stage and the local audience. Or as Jiasi Maciel puts it: "We are not better than our collaborations." The young audience "trusts" certain artists, which makes the path to the theater shorter, according to the executive producer. Meaning is created for the new theater in Husby by furthering relations that are "already created" with cultural actors the audience can relate to. It is about developing relationships with cultural actors in whom the audience has confidence. In this way, and as Jiasi Maciel puts it, the Husby theater "cultivates where it is already growing." Often, this approach involves the theater collaborating

3 It is worth noting that even if there are experiences of low-quality formal institutions and municipality services, there are also positive driving forces within the area, such as active civil associations supporting culture and sports activities, and supportive social services within these associations. In a survey conducted in the community where the theater is located, 85% feel at home and enjoy living in this area, 80% feel that their neighbors are helpful, and 73% trust the people in their community (Schclarek Mulinari and Wolgast 2020).

with individuals new to theater production and the silent and tacit traditions of the craft, making it essential for theater professionals to bridge knowledge gaps and manage expectations. Dramaturgue Mia Winge emphasizes how she must balance translating and transforming work methods to facilitate collaboration. It can sometimes be the simplest details, such as the time of day she is available to take calls for a joint effort to progress. Engaging in new collaborations becomes a mutual learning process where the conventions of professional theater are opened up and transformed.

The stage is anchored in local collaborations and stories from within. The play *Mizeria* combines these dimensions. Melody Farshin, the novelist and playwright, is of a similar socio-economic profile as the residents of Husby. *Mizeria* is about being young in a multiethnic and stigmatized neighborhood that the residents call "Orten." In our text we will, from time to time, use the informants' way of talking about their neighborhood. *Mizeria*, as a novel, is popular among the local youth, and the story does not shy away from addressing questions of racism and the sorrow of losing a young person to gang violence,[4] but it is also about love for the neighborhood and its people. Isra, a high school student, agrees with the balanced view *Mizeria* offers: "She did it in a good way. Most people, if they were to talk about themselves and their place, would highlight the good stuff and leave the bad stuff out. She took both sides." Jiasi Maciel says:

> In the suburbs, people have long lived in the context of violence. Deadly violence is present. And the insider perspective of this story [*Mizeria*], alongside the fact that it's not stigmatizing, and at the same time that violence is not at the center of the story. There is something about the language and the tonality. And this is in contrast to how much is written about this problem by others, from outside [the suburbs], where you don't recognize yourself. But this story and the language and the people, we thought were, in any case, very appropriate based on our audience [a young target group]. Which it was. It was a hole-in-one. Bull's eye.

In *Mizeria* we get to know a pair of twins: Aicha and Ali. They have dreams, they worry and they ponder life, as young people, or rather as people in general do. However, another element comes into play: their social status. They feel at home at the same time as their sense of belonging is questioned. At home, in "Orten," it is both safe and unsafe. There are shootings in the neighborhood. Visits to the white and wealthier parts of the city evoke feelings of exclusion. When Ali visits an inner-city coffee shop with his friend Osman, they note that they are the only non-whites and exclaim: "People look at us like we're ISIS on a coffee break."

4 Sweden has witnessed an increasing number of deadly shootings and explosions over the last few years. Conflicts between criminal groups from stigmatized neighborhoods and their drug business have escalated into violent interactions, alongside the symbolic violence of racism in society. In 2022, 61 persons died in shootings (Polisen 2022). In 2013, the equivalent figure was 25 persons (Institutet för mänskliga rättigheter 2023).

Melody Farshin's authorship draws on the experiences of children of parents who immigrated. She writes the inside history of the high-rise housing projects, with the hope of an urgent improvement towards a safer neighborhood, yet with the same capacity for love and caring that it already has. She is also motivated to create cultural experiences that are perceived as authentic and that the audience can identify with – experiences where the suburb's emotional structure is staged with the ever-present gap between the lived experience of being labeled by others of what one is and wants to become. She describes it as "a feeling of inclusion in a state of exclusion." Inclusion in a state of exclusion is defined by her as "identification with 'Orten'." She speaks of music from 'Orten', 'Orten' style, 'Orten' slang. It is about family and everyday life, which includes "the strong role of parents, how every elderly person in the area is your aunt or uncle," as well as "extreme sibling love and sibling hatred." And, amid this cultural and social dynamic, lives are lost: "I don't know a single person in my area who doesn't know someone who is gone too soon. I don't know a single person among us who hasn't been to a funeral of a very young person."

While transcribing an interview with Melody Farshin one afternoon, Anna Lund was listening to her voice, describing the sorrow of losing close people, and contrasting this to only encountering it as a notice in a newspaper. The following morning, we read a notice about a young man who was "murdered late on Monday evening in Alby [a stigmatized neighborhood] in southern Stockholm. According to *Aftonbladet* [a daily newspaper], he was found with several gunshot wounds outside the gate of an apartment building" (Hagberg 2021). Later that day, there was another bit of news: "murdered 18-year-old in Alby is linked to a criminal gang." That was it. Pain, sadness, and underlying causes are not dealt with in the media. In *Mizeria,* Melody Farshin weaves in emotions, interactions, and complexity. One life is taken by a gunshot. We get to know him, and we like him. His name is Osman. Farshin says:

> Osman is a person who generates sympathy. A person we hold close to our hearts. And for whom we cry when his life is taken away. What is it like to have a close connection to a person who is taken from us in that way? What is life like afterwards?

Misery [which is what the word *Mizeria* means] "is almost constant. Because it doesn't take long before another person is lost," says Melody Farshin and continues: "You breathe a sigh of relief, 'oh thank god that it wasn't my relative this time'." After a shooting in the neighborhood, the character Aicha in *Mizeria* says: "I'm relieved. I haven't lost my brother. But Ali lost his."

The audience member Isra would like to bring her cousins who are involved in criminal activities to *Mizeria.* She explains that the parts of the drama that evolve after the shooting could serve as a wake-up call for her relatives:

> I think it's a different thing if you look at it from another perspective. Now, they live in it so they see it one way, but if they could see it from our perspective, we who are their relatives, and how it would affect us, maybe they would understand.

The audience is invited to process trauma that is darkening their everyday life. Talking about *Mizeria,* Lazar, a young man in the audience, started to think about how racism and violence are connected in stigmatized neighborhoods:

> It is also hard because it also makes you feel that even if you are not doing anything, you can get caught for anything. You can just be standing there and they'll be like: 'You're in trouble, come with me.' Like they did with Ali [in the play], they just took him and said you are suspected of the murder of the man. Because when you see him [Ali], they have different skin colors, and his skin color is darker, which automatically makes you think they are taking him because he looks this way. And it is what happens to you if you look this way.

A collective grief over lives taken and at the same being brutally under suspicion is shared among the audience members from the high-rise housing projects. A short newspaper notice is, in fact, a brother, a friend, a future husband, a son, and a father: a human. *Mizeria* humanizes the dehumanized by acknowledging the injustices and suffering experienced by residents of stigmatized neighborhoods. This has the potential to build civil resilience through understanding, empathy, and recognition for the members of stigmatized neighborhoods (Lamont et al. 2013). As Lazar illustrates, *Mizeria* manages to stage lived inequalities so they can be felt and verbalized.

Communication

With humor

Melody Farshin is a stand-up comedian with 17 years of stage experience. Her audience perceives her as breaking with norms: as a woman, as non-white, as Muslim, from the stigmatized neighborhoods. She awaits the silent and reserved reaction of the white, male-dominated stand-up scene in Sweden when she steps onto the stage. Often, the reaction she first encounters is "how is she supposed to be funny?" Despite the negative stereotypes, she believes in the potential of laughter to create: "meetings between people who might never have met." She gives an example:

> Someone who lives in a fairly homogenous area where you have never spoken to anyone from the suburbs. Who has never had a conversation with someone of a different religion? And all of a sudden, I get up on the stage, and in my 15 minutes, I welcome you into my whole world.

Laughter opens the potential to get to know the unknown and can create a basis for change through future memories (Lund 2024). As a form of communication, laughter is a voluntary expression: we cannot force anyone to laugh. The emotional foundation of this form of freedom contributes to the individual's openness to the narrative being staged. Melody Farshin brings her experience from stand-up to her writing of *Mizeria.*

Mia Winge, the dramaturge, agrees about the potential of humor for communication. She highlights how *Mizeria* uses humor in its opening scenes as "a good starting point" that gives a dramatic arc. The audience laughs when the siblings Aisha and Ali are fighting over how to share their common space (Play Station vs. loud music) and help with the household chores. These everyday dilemmas create familiar laughter. This affects the audience's reception – any anxiety is toned down and the risk of being uncomfortable in the stage-audience encounter is allayed (cf. Alexander 2006). The collective experience of laughing at a well-known aspect of everyday life also paves the way for the darker material of the play –unfortunately also familiar in high-rise housing projects. Mia Winge explains the dramaturgical strategy:

> If you had started with a very clear seriousness, a heaviness, then it becomes like: 'Oh, God, I have to understand this.' It can shut people down. But laughter opens them up. And then, as *Mizeria* does, the audience is slowly taken toward the painful parts.

Difficult topics can be communicated "wrapped up in a joke." Melody Farshin compares this with writing an opinion piece on structural discrimination. "Already in the title, some people will just look away and you will just be preaching to the choir." Instead, fictional media, such as the theater, have the potential to create emotional connections between the stage and the audience. Farshin elaborates:

> I believe you can get to know this world and learn to like the characters, even if you don't agree with the analysis. As long as you feel that your body reacts when you are reading or watching [*Mizeria*]. As long as you get to laugh. Sure, it's a form of entertainment, because that's how humor works. But we remember the things we have laughed at so much longer in comparison to wise words from a lecture. So, I think it's a great tool.

The humor in *Mizeria* is dark. It is a symbol of seriousness and urgency. Perhaps it works as a buffer zone for realities that may need time and processing if they are going to enter an individual's emotional and cognitive space.

An appealing authenticity

Humor is an entrance to the difficult and sad parts of *Mizeria*. But, as Melody Farshin tells us, "the characters and the language" also need to be "authentic." This is particularly true because fiction rarely succeeds in offering trustworthy portrayals of lives in the high-rise housing projects. She continues: "I don't think I've ever seen slang used correctly. But I have seen it used incorrectly so many times. I often see *exaggerated* "Orten" characters. It takes a lot to make it real."

Melody Farshin is a language expert in theory and practice. She is fluent in the language and the rhythms of "Orten" – in the slang, the quick-witted thinking. She relates to the interactions of the stigmatized suburbs. "So, if someone puts you down, you have to be quick with your response." She describes the

linguistic cohesion of the "Orten" as a shared way people there have of expressing themselves in a "relatively monotonous tone but at a very fast pace." It is also about being forthright with each other. "It is not fluffy at all," but is done with "everlasting love." Similar interactions characterize friendship, where teasing is the interaction norm. "The closer you are, the rougher the communication is. It would feel false if someone called you 'sweetie' or say 'how cute you are'." The use of language on stage was emphasized as very important when *Mizeria* was in the rehearsal phase. Authenticity and the self-evident presence of slang were vital. Melody Farshin reflects on the problems that occur if someone tries to relate to the language without having a lived experience of "Orten." She says: "I think it's difficult to act like yourself in relation to a position of acting like that [being free in the language and rhythm of "Orten"]." She clarifies: "There must be a personal connection to how you portray such personality and character. So, my big worry was that the depicted characters would be ridiculous," and Farshin uses an inauthentic tone saying, "so, this is what you're like if you live in Rinkeby [a stigmatized neighborhood in Stockholm]."

The residents of Husby do not belong to the Stockholm theater world's white, middle-age, and middle-class audience. Here, in Husby, it is imperative to work with theater that speaks, in the dramaturge Mia Winge's words, "directly *to*" the audience and not "*about*" the audience.

To speak directly to an audience in an uncommented and non-explanatory manner can communicate a feeling that 'this is for me'. An aesthetic and strategic choice was made within the theater team regarding communication in the stage-audience encounter, where slang was used without clarification for audience groups that do not live in stigmatized neighborhoods. One example is the word "benim" (a first-person pronoun in the vernacular of "Orten", borrowed from Turkish]. This is a choice of communication that works as a significant symbolic signal. One of the stage actors initially inserted an explanatory line when the word "benim" was used. The sentence was: "benim arrived first." Mia Winge says:

> So, then the actor added: "So, I arrived first." And, we just said: "no, you don't have to explain. You still understand and it means a lot to those who know the word that it's not explained to them. It means a lot to them." To just keep the language as it is. Without commenting on it [i.e., translating it to standard Swedish].

Winge compares their strategic choice with the white, middle-class theater in the city center of Stockholm. She calls it "the standard theater." She reminds us that there are words and concepts used that are not spoken in everyday life, and these are never explained to the audience.

> But we don't use glossaries for those words. You just expect the audience to understand. And we wanted to do the same thing. And if people come from the so-called inner city of Stockholm to our theater, they can look it up afterward, if they don't understand it, if there are things they're curious about. You can google it. In that direction as well.

Winge clarifies that *Mizeria* is not for all young people and especially not for those who "are used to cultural events. It's not primarily done for them." However, *Mizeria* is not difficult to follow. Still, audiences with different relations to the stigmatized neighborhoods and, thus, different vernaculars reacted differently to the play. Mia Winge spoke to students from a high school in a privileged white area who came to see *Mizeria.* After the performance she asked them: "could you follow it? Do you recognize the language?" The answer was that: "we didn't understand all the words, but we understood the play anyway." For students from the Husby area that we interviewed after seeing *Mizeria,* the "Orten" language could take on a different meaning. One student explained how the use of "Orten" language had created feelings of inclusion, as she understood jokes on stage while her white, middle-age neighbor in the audience did not. Suddenly, she was the one on the inside, while members of the majority group were excluded, something she found exhilarating. Jiasi Maciel, the executive producer, said: "You notice that the local schools or schools with students from areas similar to ours [...] have another level of understanding." He compares it with audiences coming from white and more privileged areas: "They didn't laugh in the same places, they didn't understand [what was funny]." This difference in audience reaction became "a sign that we had found the right tone and content [for the young audience in "Orten"]". A perspective close to the lived experiences of the young audience from the stigmatized neighborhoods was being staged.

With different, but recognizable, bodies

Humor, language but also bodies communicate a connection to the local community. The actors Maria Nohra/Yasmine Seifi and Ahmed Berhan represent different possibilities for identification, at the same time as their bodies are recognizable for young people irrespective of their migrant/or non-white background. Supporting the notion that representation matters, Chimamanda, a young black woman in the audience, said *Mizeria* was relatable through the bodies on stage: "It was important that they were colored people themselves that were playing." Representation is central to Farshin's work, and she thought this through analytically when reworking the novel *Mizeria* into a theater performance. We never learn what country the characters would call their motherland, other than Sweden. We understand from the names of the characters that they have a Muslim background, but we are never fully sure whether the women are veiled. Melody Farshin's artistic choice is to offer the reader, and later the audience, a wide horizon of interpretation, while there are also several known reference points to identify with. This enables psychosocial identification in the stage-audience encounter. The audience members may share a Muslim cultural background but differ on country of origin. It is thus possible to share a cultural background that is often questioned by the core group in society for Islamophobic reasons, at the same time as looks, clothing, and lifestyle may differ. The "we-ness" of social cohesion through "Orten" is present, while sharing the experience of being made into "the other" by the majority

group in society. The actors, Nohra/Seifi and Behran, stage one sibling each as well as performing other characters and genders. In this way, *Mizeria* communicates that what is socially and culturally recognizable is not fixed in one specific body. Melody Farshin explains:

> It was important to me, that they [the actors] are playing twins, but I wanted them to belong to ethnicities that many [in the audience] have seen. So, then it became necessary that one twin was black and the other had some kind of Middle Eastern brown look. Actually, Maria and Ahmed, who play Aisha and Ali, Maria is half a meter tall. Ahmed two meters. There is no biological possibility that they could be twins. But after two minutes into the play, we bought it.

Different genders and bodies embody, at the same time, the shared experiences of youth and young adults in stigmatized neighborhoods. Hence, the bodies on stage are not a statement about a particular experience or background. The very concept of race is thus called into question (cf. Saha 2018). This means that the staging of race reveals how race is a social construction and not an unchangeable essence of fixed identities and belongings.

Race is a social construction, but the very real consequences of social racialization are illuminated through the staging of what we call a counter-cultural aesthetic strategy. The choice of a staging strategy where race is deconstructed is, of course, not about making racialization processes invisible. Discrimination and how it can shape self-doubt are considered, but the pride, love, and community feeling of being at home in "Orten" is also portrayed. This could lead to strengthened solidarity and recognition in the neighborhood and civil action concerning demands for justice and equality supporting civil resilience (cf. Saha 2018: 142; Lamont et al. 2013; Alexander 2006).

Maria Nohra and Ahmed Berhan in the title roles Aisha and Ali in Mizeria. Photo by Anna Classon.

The twins Ali and Aisha's difference in background illuminates how the symbolic and social boundaries of "us" and "them" form the myth of "the immigrant," obscuring a symbolic order that creates a distinction between the in- and out-group. What is under-communicated through Swedish anti-racist color blindness (Hübinette 2019: 67) are negative stereotypes linked to non-whiteness and non-Western and Muslim backgrounds (Voyer and Lund 2020).

Minority Swedes are labeled by majority Swedes as more outsiders than insiders through the usage of words such as second-generation immigrant and of foreign background. A symbolic veil is created that hides the fact that Swedish children are discriminated against as a result of skin color, assumptions about what a non-Western background entails, and Islamophobia. In this way, and between the lines, housing segregation and the racism of low expectations are legitimized. The children and youth in "Orten" are made into an "exception," similar to the historical framing of exceptions in American society, where enslaved individuals lived without rights at the same time as the US claimed to be democratic. Such an exception designates people as less civilized and thus less worthy of respect and recognition – in a word it dehumanizes (cf. Voyer and Lund 2020). A young black man, Abdi, from the audience of *Mizeria*, describes the negative feelings of being constantly categorized in a stereotyped way:

> The stereotype is the thing that hurts the most, because people don't want to know much, and what they know is mainly stereotypes. So, this stereotype, without the person knowing, will make the person run away from me, without even knowing you. They put you in a box that is harmful and dangerous.

Mizeria moves between emotions of distress, frustration, anger and humor, friendship, and love. The emotions are used as an entrance to topics of cultural and social pain. And this is done from an insider perspective. The aesthetic choices of "Ortens" vernacular speak *to* and not about the young audience. The bodies on stage represent the similarities in differences. Regarding content, references are made to the lived experience of being young in "Orten," the feeling of a shared community of love and support, and the dark sides of lives lost and discrimination.

For Melody Farshin, the idea of creating meaningful theater for young audiences in stigmatized neighborhoods emerged through her encounter with theater in central Stockholm. To write the script for *Mizeria*, she regularly visited the city's established theater venues, but she often left the theater with a feeling of "having been made a fool," which motivated her to create theater that communicated differently.

> A lot of things were weird, just for the sake of being weird. It's so abstract that you cannot possibly understand what they are trying to get at. And I couldn't relate to that. It's just art for the sake of being art. [...] I left several plays thinking: "How is this [with *Mizeria*] going to go?" [...] I asked myself: "What was the point of the play I just saw?" I didn't understand what they had said. And this experience motivated me to make theater that the audience can understand.

On opening night, the young audience, ages 14 and up, came because of Melody Farshin, as she is a Husby profile with strong relational capital (Trondman 2003). The theater gains significance because Farshin is an asset, because Farshin is Farshin. In the foyer, before the curtain went up one young adult said: "listen, Melody, I'm here for you. I support you. But don't expect me to understand anything. The theater is not for us. I've gone several times with my class and I've never understood anything."

When the curtain went down, the reaction was: "this was not a play. This was more like a film." Farshin asked: "what do you mean?" She received the following answer: "this can't be a play. I understood it all." *Mizeria* succeeded in telling a meaningful story. The humor, the feeling of authenticity, and the bodies representing the young audience of "Orten" created a stage-audience encounter of re-fusion (Alexander 2004). Clear communication of meaning happened. Audience members experienced *Mizeria* as an authentic story, for example, remember Isra who would like to bring her cousins to the play so they could see the sadness of lost lives. The cultural meaning was projected from the performance to the audience, not only the meaning of the story per se, but a new understanding of what the art of theater could be was also created.

Change

The kind of change the audience living in stigmatized neighborhoods brings forward in our interviews is a hope of civil repair (Lund et al. 2024) When they think about what *Mizeria* can contribute, they hope that knowledge can instigate change among a greater number of people. They point to how insights into their lives can bring a more nuanced understanding of precarity and possibly change toward solidarity through recognition, i.e., civil resilience. According to Abdi, the understanding can be about:

> The people, how we live, our habits, what happens outside of the TV screen, seeing the people, like understanding what happened to them. Understanding the whole story, why it happened, who saw it but did not do anything about it.

Abdi thinks that action for problem solving can follow understanding:

> Because if you understand the project [social life and conditions in multiethnic neighborhoods] you can understand how to fix it. Understand how to help. But if you don't understand, you are just watching it like: "what am I supposed to do now?"

Magda, a young woman in the audience, reflects on the symbolic message of the play in terms of equality and a unity-in-difference approach to life. She concludes that *Mizeria* reflects how socially sharing the same experiences and belonging matters more than how we look or our family bonds: "It doesn't matter where you come from, skin color or anything like that, you can be close to someone, it doesn't matter."

The kind of change we have observed and listened in on deals also with how the theater team, which is new to Husby, changed their perspective on how to work with art. Besides the ongoing work to stage narratives that communicate to the young audience in "Orten," there is also ongoing work to make the Husby Theater useful for other institutions in the neighborhood, such as local schools being invited as reference groups (see further Lorentzon et al. 2025), as well as dance and amateur theater groups that are invited to utilize the theater's venues and get to consult with in-house artistic and project managerial expertise. These are initiatives to communicate a desire to make the occupations on and off stage known to residents in the community. The Husby Theater aims to promote the inclusion of marginalized groups by broadening residents' engagement with theater as an interest and career option. But what our analysis can most clearly observe is the change within the theater and the white professionals' thinking about their work.

Those in the theater team who have left the white stages of central Stockholm to work in an ethnically mixed and stigmatized neighborhood have developed a form of critical self-analysis. It is grounded in a growing awareness that the living conditions of residents in "Orten" are far from the lived experiences of a white professional in the Swedish cultural sector. The critical self-analysis is strengthened by a growing awareness that the Western theater tradition is not the only one and it does not hold all the answers. Instead, the experience is that the internal logic of the Western theater tradition influences professional choices and sometimes even thinks for people unconsciously (cf. Lund 2004).

This critical self-analysis has created a work ethic within the theater team. They remind each other that they need to watch and listen deeply as well as step back. They must get used to not being the ones who are always talked *to*; instead, they are becoming more prepared to be the ones who are spoken about. Olof Hanson, who is the artistic director at Husby Theater, has re-defined his view of art and is also ready to make room for other stories and experiences than his own. He says he has started to see himself as an "obstacle." His previous position – based on him being white and male – was self-evident and did not require explanation. The self-confidence that followed such a position allowed him to stage everyone's story, without any hesitation, including racism. Without ever having experienced discrimination, in 2016 he directed the play *Verkligheten* (*The Events*) by David Greig. But the events he directed were not at all his own. Olof Hanson regrets this artistic work:

> It was so wrong. Because there I was and talked about something I wasn't grounded in. The workings of racism. And I am talking about something that is incredibly painful but that I've never been exposed to. Not at all. And the audience didn't come: neither the large, white, middle-class audience nor the more mixed young audience.

He thinks of his experiences of how theater organizations he previously worked in do diversity. "It was superficial," he says and continues: "it was as if

you thought you were good if you had someone with a different ethnic background with you. And that person was exoticized." The person in question was "invited," but the work was not based on 'what is your story?', but rather 'you can sit a little on the sidelines and join in'. So, we *look* good. There was a lot of looking good instead of change that would be for real."

Melody Farshin describes, from her perspective, how fiction routinely portrays characters from "Orten" in a negative light, often through stories told by people with no experience of living in "Orten." She concludes: "we're included because we're mentioned, but never on our own terms."

Hanson's learning process concerning how to work with diversity in practice started in 2016, when he received a new assignment as artistic director for the Husby Theater. However, he experiences that the potential for real change is a challenge, as the taken for granted work process, aesthetic standards, and tacit knowledge are revisited and re-defined along the way. When conventional ways of doing theater are re-evaluated, professional uncertainty arises. The dramaturge Mia Winge shares challenges related to her professional role:

> I have the classic ways of storytelling under my belt. There are stories and ways of telling these stories that I don't have the codes for. I need to be open to that. And not be like: 'This is a story that needs to be staged like this.' 'We need to *understand* this because ...' [but], 'we already understand it, it's just you [Mia Winge] who doesn't.' I need to see that [the audience in "Orten" has different references].

She described it as a process in which she needs to: "Question my gut feeling a bit." This process involves how she evaluates the quality of and the right rhythm for a story. Being unsure about her gut feeling is a new experience. She can no longer take for granted that her answers are the right ones. Winge compares this to what it was like before she started working in stigmatized neighborhoods, then she says she could: "quickly know, feel, and see things," and she further explains:

> Like, this part needs to reach a depth. We need a breather after this scene. But maybe I'm wrong. After all, it doesn't need to be like that. Because, and as I have encountered here: that is not how we talk to each other – at that tempo and it is not that story.

A critical self-analysis arose in the work with new, diverse, constellations in "Orten." It is about "becoming more open and *relearning*." One's feeling of professional security is disturbed. During a period, Mia Winge experienced that "all of a sudden I felt I can't do this. I don't know anything." It is, she says, "difficult not be able to fully trust your instincts." And where: "everything is possible at the same time as nothing is completely certain." But Winge has a positive attitude toward learning anew and supporting "new ways of telling stories with new codes, references, and languages."

Questioning the conventional ways of creating theater shakes the thinking about and doings of theater. A learning process is initiated when tacit knowledge

is articulated and challenged (Lund 2013; Polanyi 1967). Or as Winge puts it: "there are so many norms about how to stage a story. Now, I get to see these norms. And then decide that I don't need to follow them. It's transformative." In *Mizeria,* it's about the rhythm. Although the play has slow passages, it goes against a conventional narrative structure. Winge describes this in the following terms:

> The tempo of the text is much higher than you would have in a classical theatrical text. It's about the appeal. It's about this [Winge rapidly and rhythmically snaps her fingers]. The talking as well. [...] There may be no breathers [between passages] like we are used to.

Critical self-analysis arises when previous professional knowledge is insufficient. References from "Orten" are not always understandable because other rhythms for dialogue and storytelling are in use. The fact that theater professionals from the white part of the city are running a local theater in Husby may require that these professionals reflect on and reevaluate their taken-for-granted knowledge (cf. Saha 2018).

There are hopes among members of the theater team in Husby that youth in stigmatized neighborhoods will start seeing the arts as a possible professional career or leisure activity. According to Melody Farshin, there are two pre-determined choices for the young: hip-hop and soccer. Farshin firmly believes that cultural activities in "Orten" need to expand and be broader.

> Right now, and if you are from "Orten," it's socially accepted and expected that you will become a rapper or a soccer player. But what if someone has artistic talent, and wants to paint or become a ballet dancer? Or an opera singer? All that stuff.

The theater in Husby shows the multidimensional character of the theater world. It shows that theater is more than the stage-audience experience. It is also a workplace. Jiasi Maciel, the executive producer, explains: "we may be the only time a student from this neighborhood visits a theater. We need to create theater experiences they can identify with, both regarding the story and who the professionals on and off the stage are." "Who I am too," continues Maciel, referring to his non-white body. The theater is not only about relevant stories that allow the young audience, in Maciel's words, "to reflect on their life and further explore what it means to be human," but also to "open this world" as a workplace that "is magical and full of possibilities." It is a change in the lives of young Husby residents that Jiasi Maciel hopes he can help bring about. For example, what his non-white body represents has historically been excluded from or exotified in the white world of Swedish theater. He says: "Just walking over to the marketplace in Husby to order a falafel and say that I work at the theater and look like I do is the meaning of theater in this context. For us. For me." Listening to the theater team in Husby, we are reminded of what Alexander concludes in *The Civil Sphere.* For social change to occur, it must feel

meaningful on a personal and emotional level (2006: 301). And, we would like to add, also on a professional level.

The stage in Husby, which is part of a cultural center, is seen as an arena for social change. It can provide new opportunities and take the creativity of Husby residents seriously. The goal for Mia Winge is a theater that the residents of Husby can be proud of:

> That a feeling can be created that we belong to them. Rather than the inner city. I guess that, at the moment, there is a feeling that we belong to the big culture house [in central Stockholm], *care of [c/o]* Husby. But I would like to remove the "care of," so that the belonging is to Husby.

The hope of opening up the arts for young people aligns with the aim of Swedish cultural policy to democratize the arts and increase citizen participation. But it is also a form of lived experience among the theater professionals as they have seen close-up the importance of different bodies on stage and how representation can create connections in meaningful ways between the stage and its audience. Here, it is, of course, necessary to also have a critical view of how theater is diversified and the risk of tokenism and the reproduction of power structures favoring the white elite.

The stage in Husby is not just a temporary project. The theater team is relying on the theater to be stable and permanent. And they are working on a local anchoring process, supported by their critical, self-analytical reflections. Ongoing projects based on ideas from the local community are in progress. At the end of August 2023, three cultural activities were initiated: a talk show with *Galdem A Talk*, a feminist podcast community from Husby, and an open workplace day where practitioners of all occupations in the theater welcome residents to come and talk to them and learn about theatrical professions. In the fall of 2024, a new actor training program for young aspiring performers from the region and similar areas was established in Husby through a collaboration between Husby Theater and two other well-established artistic institutions in Stockholm: Unga Klara and Balettakademin. They are examples, besides the work with plays, of processes that can strengthen the potential for a theater to become a site for civil resilience.

Civil resilience by staging inequalities

Civil sphere theory brings solidarity back into sociology. Alexander theorizes how "feelings for others matter" and states that: "Solidarity is possible because people are oriented not only to the here and now but to the ideal, to the transcendent, to what they hope will be everlasting" (2006: 3). We argue that Husby Theater has the potential for civil resilience as it strives for social inclusion, and our analysis shows that this is possible through recognition and critical self-analysis. Thus, the theater team is not working toward assimilation, but is rather changing the ways theater is done through encounters with

distinctive differences in "Orten." For instance, the dramaturge Mia Winge describes this process in positive terms, as a transformative learning process. Thus, even if social inclusion of marginalized groups is on the agenda, this cannot happen without an internal change within the theater. Members of the professional team show their self-critical capacity in relation to their presence in a hierarchical dominance relation and how such structural inequalities otherwise damage the lived civil sphere. When taken-for-granted positions are disturbed, critical self-analysis can grow. Awareness can be transformative (Lund 2024). Different bodies, experiences, vernaculars, and rhythms must be valued and recognized. Aesthetic sensibilities are reconstructed while the multiethnic young audience, many for the first time, find a play meaningful.

The theater team we observed talks about the problems in "Orten," not as problems of "Orten" but as problems of the civil sphere. This is an important aspect of a civil resilience process through which solidarity may be repaired. It is too early to determine the long-term effects on the relationship between the stage and the audience in Husby. A lived civil sphere is always a hope, an act of searching, and a possibility (Alexander et al. 2020). However, *Mizeria* and the theater team in Husby demonstrate that meaningful theater is achievable by working with dramaturgical strategies of emotions, authenticity, and recognizable bodies to establish "we-ness" within the local community. Husby Theater strives to de-center and challenge the conventions of white, Western, middle-class theater while providing alternatives in the form of a theater from within – a theater that tells a story and utilizes a language that acknowledges life in "Orten," with intentional casting and portrayals that aims to facilitate psychosocial identification. This offers a young audience artistic encounters that highlight experiences deserving of attention. Such change transcends the local context and can support civil resilience through critical reflection among professionals in the art world and acknowledgment of the experiences of the young minoritized audience.

The potential for civil resilience increases with the opportunity for a shared experience where bodies in a physical, material space, such as the theater, are focused on the same story simultaneously. Experiencing emotions individually and as part of a collective fosters the ability to see each other as fellow human beings, engaging in a civil project for sustainability and equality. The embodied feelings of recognition within the audience, combined with a critical capacity and initiatives from the local community, civic organizations, and local politicians can become transformative by instilling a sense of responsibility for fellow members of society, benefiting the young audience, Husby theater, and society as a whole.

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Ana Lund, Rebeka Brinč, Ilva Lorentzon

Mogućnost građanske otpornosti: Postavljanje nejednakosti na pozorišnu scenu u stigmatizovanom susedstvu

Apstrakt

Trenutno, švedsko društvo karakteriše porast anti-imigrantskih sentimenata i stigmatizacija naselja. Kao rezultat toga, širi se simbolički i društveni jaz između onih koji pripadaju grupi i koji su izvan nje. Posledično, interakcije koje pospešuju empatiju i solidarnost među različitostima postaju sve krhkije. Ipak, nastaju umetničke intervencije koje se protive anti-građanskim silama. Ovaj članak se fokusira na pozorište i socijalnu inkluziju, ispitujući tri uzajamno povezana elementa: značenja, komunikaciju i društvene promene - i kako oni mogu poslužiti kao oblik građanske otpornosti kroz kritičko razmišljanje i procese prepoznavanja. Na taj način, osvetljavamo kako pozorište može postati mesto društvene inkluzije za mladu, etnički različitu publiku, kroz aktivaciju simboličkih struktura značenja i emocija koje prepoznaju nejednakosti prisutne unutar marginalizovanih grupa i njihovih iskustava. To se postiže istraživanjem profesionalnih i dramaturških strategija koje koristi umetnički tim koji osniva novo pozorište u stigmatizovanom naselju severno od Stokholma i njihovih napora ka ostvarivanju socijalne kohezije. Analiza identifikuje dramaturške strategije koje uključuju emocije, autentičnost i tela, zajedno sa drugim profesionalnim strategijama koje deluju transformativno unutar pozorišta i zajednice, što rezultira pozorišnom komunikacijom koja omogućava psiho-socijalnu identifikaciju publike i kritičku samoanalizu za pozorišne profesionalce, čime se otvara prostor za jačanje građanske otpornosti.

Ključne reči: građanaska sfera, pozorište, mladi kao publika, građanska otpornost, stigmatizacija, etnografija, priznjacnjce, kritička refleksija

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Danny Daniel Mollericona Alfaro

'TIPNIS SOMOS TODOS': DISCOURSE OF INDIGENOUSNESS WITHIN AND BEYOND A NATIONAL CIVIL SPHERE

ABSTRACT
This paper explores the intersection of indigeneity, environmental conflicts, and global solidarities. Adopting a theoretical framework from the Strong Program of Cultural Sociology, this research examines how indigenous groups contesting environmental threats invoke a deep structure of discourse to cultivate solidarity beyond their communities at national and international levels. The TIPNIS (Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro-Sécure) conflict, where lowland Indigenous groups marched against a state-backed highway project, serves as a case study. Employing a hermeneutic approach, this study analyzes 160 op-eds and editorials from Bolivian newspapers, revealing how public discourse framed indigenous resistance within a collectivist, pro-environmental, and non-liberal moral structure. The findings contribute to understanding how the *Indigenous Sphere* interacts with and challenges frameworks of democracy and solidarity.

KEYWORDS
Indigenous peoples, Environmental Conflicts, Democracy, Cultural Sociology, Bolivia

Introduction

The rise of indigenous political movements in the world has challenged traditional state structures, redefining nationhood and sovereignty. In Bolivia, this transformation was epitomized by Evo Morales, elected in 2006 as the country's first 'Indigenous president' (Sivak 2010). Morales promoted the transformation of Bolivia from a republic into a Plurinational State, officially recognizing 36 Indigenous nations. This moment in Bolivia's history marked what some called the emergence of a new *Indigenous State* (Postero 2017). Morales embodied the discourse of indigeneity[1] and was widely regarded as "a symbol of fight and hope" (Exeni 2006) in a country with a long history of indigenous exclusion.

1 In this paper, I use Indigenousness and Indigeneity interchangeably, acknowledging that their usage varies across academic literature and that their translation into other languages can be complex. While 'Indigeneity' often highlights relational and socio-political

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However, this vision of an indigenous-led government was challenged in 2011 when lowland indigenous groups marched to La Paz to protest a road project that would cut through the Indigenous Territory and National Park (TIPNIS). This clash was not merely a confrontation between the state and Indigenous actors but a deeper tension within indigeneity itself—between its role in governance and its resistance to state-driven developmentalism. The project had been approved without the legally required Free, Prior, and Informed Consultation. The conflict exposed a fundamental contradiction: How was indigeneity interpreted when the very notion of an Indigenous State faced resistance from Indigenous-led activism?

This paradox reveals a deeper theoretical question about the role of nation-states in shaping democratic inclusion. Historically, nation-states have been the primary arbiters of incorporation, yet their frameworks of belonging can also impose limits on inclusion, particularly for indigenous peoples. Through the lens of Civil Sphere Theory (CST), the language of civil solidarity—central to democratizing efforts of repair—is often essentialized by specific historical and geographical contexts (Alexander 2006:195-202). Nation-states construct national identities that frequently rely on exclusionary logics, where citizenship, nationalism, and statehood become mechanisms of both inclusion and marginalization. In this sense, *nativism* has emerged as a major challenge to democracy, fueling struggles against immigrants and marginalized groups worldwide (Abidde, Hall, and Da Cruz 2024; Duyvendak, Kesic, and Stacey 2022). If nation-states remain the dominant arbiters of inclusion, can universalistic solidarity extend beyond the boundaries of state-driven civil spheres?

This paper extends Civil Sphere Theory (CST) by proposing the existence of an international framework centered on historically marginalized indigenous groups. Unlike national civil spheres, which can be constrained by state-driven discourses of belonging, this *Indigenous Sphere* advances universal democratic demands for solidarity while simultaneously asserting local particularistic claims. For instance, indigeneity often invokes the protection of "Mother Earth," promoting a global ethic of environmental stewardship while emphasizing indigenous communities' specific ties to their lands.

A key factor driving the growing prominence of this discourse is climate change, which has become central to international debates (Aykut, Foyer, and Morena 2017; Gray 1990; Hays 2000). Historically, indigenous populations have focused on defending their rights and resources within their territories. Today, however, they have gained visibility in the global media, mobilizing broader support for their causes. Unlike nativism, which often seeks to exclude, indigeneity fosters unity across groups, welcoming non-Indigenous allies regardless of race or origin in the collective struggle against environmental degradation.

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dimensions, and 'Indigenousness' tends to convey a more essentialist perspective, my focus here is on reconstructing an ideational cultural structure of discourse about Indigenous peoples. Ultimately, my aim is to examine how Indigenous discourse is framed and interpreted, and these words help me refer to this process.

To explore this framework, we examine the Bolivian case—specifically, the TIPNIS conflict—as a site where the Indigenous Sphere and national political structures intersect. Through a hermeneutic reconstruction of indigenous discourse, we analyze how the march was *interpreted* within competing discourses of indigeneity.

The paper is structured as follows: The first section outlines the theoretical foundations of the civil and non-civil spheres. The second section defines the Indigenous Sphere and its characteristics. The third section situates Indigenous discourse within Bolivia's historical context. The fourth section introduces environmental conflicts, the TIPNIS case, and the methodological approach. The fifth section presents our primary research findings. Finally, the conclusion synthesizes the broader implications of this framework.

The Civil Sphere and non-civil spheres

The civil sphere is a distinct, autonomous, and morally universal sphere in direct interaction with other non-civil spheres (Alexander 2006). The relationship between the civil sphere and non-civil spheres is characterized by tension and instability. Three typical-ideal forms of these boundaries determine their interaction: facilitating inputs, destructive intrusions, and civil repair (Alexander 2006: 205). While the functions of non-civil spheres such as the economy or religion contribute to societal plurality, it is the civil sphere that introduces the capacity for social criticism to uphold the normative ideals of democratic societies. This binary coding sustains solidarity and justice by protecting against contamination and threats to these ideals (Alexander 2019). Alexander asserts the existence of a symbolic realm constituting an independent sphere of justice and universal solidarity (Alexander 2006).

This study aligns with this perspective, focusing on discourses and deep meaning structures rather than organizational frameworks. In this sense, scholars have examined how the sphere of universal solidarity coexists with *non-civil structures shaping democratic life*. Civil Sphere Theory provides insights into how actors define the civil and anti-civil dynamically (Jijón 2018). Scholars have identified and analyzed the mobilization of non-civil conceptions of democracy, particularly in response to political conflicts, and their role in contesting legitimate definitions of social life.

The *patrimonial discourse*, for example, has been extensively explored in Mexico, addressing historical moments such as the critical year 1994 in Mexican politics and scandals involving former president Enrique Peña Nieto's residence (Arteaga and Arzuaga 2018; Arteaga 2022; Arteaga and Mejía 2024). In Brazil, during its democratic transition, Baiocchi (2006) contrasts a *corporate code* with the liberal code. In Colombia, the *hacienda discourse* (opposed to the liberal) and the code of violence serve as central frameworks for understanding social and cultural life in this country (Rudas 2019; Tognato 2011). Similarly, the *militant revolutionary code*, emphasizing collective mobilization, sacrifice, and loyalty to revolutionary ideals, has been identified in Cuba through analysis of

the blogosphere (Martínez 2018), in Venezuela through the examination of the middle class (Villegas 2018), and in Colombia during its transition from war to peace in university contexts (Tognato 2019). Proposals for alternative non-civil spheres in Asia have also been discussed elsewhere (Alexander et al. 2019).

The Indigenous Sphere

Building on the importance of non-civil cultural structures, I highlight scholars who have called for understanding alternative justice frameworks within Andean and Amazonian communities (Jijón 2018: 235) and distinctions between Western and non-Western traditions in societies with significant indigenous populations (Tognato 2019). More recently, Ray and Jimmie (2025) have argued that there are multiple Indigenous Civil Spheres with their own institutions, using the case of self-government in the Nicola Valley, Canada. It is important to emphasize that indigenous groups/nations have their own institutions, languages, and systems of knowledge. While some might share similarities with other indigenous groups, their historical trajectories, particularly their interactions with colonization, shape their contemporary demands and practices of self-determination. However, rather than focusing solely on localized space-time, this article examines how indigeneity has solidified as a global or transnational structure of discourse, promoting solidarities that articulate or contest liberal practices at an international scale.

This discourse of indigeneity at times advances universalistic aspirations for solidarity, particularly when the nation-state essentializes the boundaries of inclusion. In this way, it contrasts with the expected fragmenting consequences of nationalistic civil spheres (Alexander 2006: 197-199). Despite decades of efforts toward multicultural incorporation, pressures for homogeneity persist, revealing how democracy, as an ongoing process, continually grapples with particularistic tendencies. Alternative international frameworks, such as the *Indigenous Sphere*, emerge in response, extending solidarities beyond the limits of state-driven incorporation.

The contemporary discourse of indigeneity can be understood as an international indigeneity that bridges the local with the universal while distinguishing itself from ethnic particularism. Its origins lie in international legal frameworks related to the protection of Indigenous rights and self-determination (Niezen 2003). This shift represents an international imagined community in which "the Indigenous" has become a transnational identity uniting disparate groups around shared political struggles (Johnson 2002: 310). Mackay (2022) emphasizes that this process has contributed to the formation of a shared and generalizable indigenous thought structure or at least an extensive collaboration of knowledge-building (Mackay 2022: 3). Other scholars highlight how indigenous organizations strategically appropriate liberal principles and frame their claims within international human rights discourse (Samson and Gigoux 2017: 153). However, this contemporary indigeneity is neither a singular way of being Indigenous shared by all Indigenous peoples nor a purely contested

and fragmented identity. Instead, it serves as a referential cultural structure, a conjoint ideational framework through which Indigenous peoples of the world articulate their collective demands, what Dahl (2012) describes as indigenous "peoples" in the plural.

This indigeneity/indigenousness established in an international sphere have consolidated within institutions such as the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and other global indigenous advocacy networks. These institutionalized actors, which scholars have described as the Global Indigenous Movement Network, gained momentum starting in the second part of the previous century (Roca-Sánchez 2025). In this sense, we propose to read contemporary indigeneity as a cultural structure that matters for both indigenous and non-indigenous groups worldwide. This Indigenous Sphere occupies a distinct position from previously studied non-civil spheres. It lies at the intersection of universal aspirations—such as international law and environmentalism—and the "primordial ties" of local beliefs and land belonging. This interplay allows the Indigenous Sphere to promote a vision of solidarity that ranges from highly particularistic local struggles to broad universalizing demands. This ideational cultural system of indigeneity thus exists in a continuum between the universal democratic and the particularistic essentialized. Alexander (2006: 195) argued that "civil primordiality is a contradiction in terms" due to the conflicting universal and particularistic nature of the civil and the non-civil spheres. However, the Indigenous Sphere exemplifies the interplay of this contradiction, demonstrating how the universal and particular function in dynamic tension rather than mutual exclusion.

Indigeneity was long marginalized by nation-states, often perceived as an obstacle to modernity and democracy. Indigenous relationships with the land were seen as pre-modern, while alternative knowledge systems were dismissed as irrational, interpreted as a *destructive intrusion* to democratic ideals of civility. As a result, Indigenous demands were framed as a disruption to the civil sphere. At times, states selectively incorporated elements of indigeneity as a *facilitating input* to reinforce national identity, relegating it to folklore or cultural heritage while limiting its political significance (Bigenho and Stobart 2016: 151–54). However, the rise of transnational Indigenous movements has transformed indigeneity into a site of *repair* rather than exclusion. One of the central dynamics of this shift is the concept of "Mother Earth" or "Pachamama," which Lehmann (2022:133) describes as being mobilized in an "all-purpose manner", connecting Indigenous territorial struggles with global environmental concerns. This articulation extends beyond localized claims, characterizing indigeneity as inherently peaceful (Hristov 2005) or as an alternative to Western frameworks of knowledge (Mackay 2022). In the following, we will examine how these dynamics unfold in the Bolivian case, specifically through the TIPNIS conflict.

The Bolivian Civil Sphere and the Indigenous Sphere

The first significant effort of an independent civil sphere in Latin America started when indigenous rebellions challenged colonial domination in the late 18th century. Leaders such as Tupac Amaru in present-day Peru and Tomás Katari and Túpac Katari in present-day Bolivia envisioned a "new era" of communal sovereignty over territory and resources (Thomson 2016: 408). However, Bolivia's independence process in the early 19th century, rooted in Simón Bolívar's liberal discourse, ultimately excluded indigenous peoples from citizenship and relegated them to the margins of a "civilized space" (Platt 1993). When Bolivia was founded in 1825, citizenship was limited to literate men with property (Irurozqui 1999). Unlike nations where indigenous populations were decimated, Bolivia retained one of the largest indigenous populations globally (Irurozqui 2006; The World Bank 2015). Nevertheless, this demographic majority remained excluded from civil life (Villanueva 2019).

"Indigenismo" emerged in the early 20th century as part of debates on modernizing traditional societies. The central question was whether indigenous peoples could integrate into "modern civilization" (Stavenhagen 2002: 26). Indigenous populations were often viewed as a "problem" requiring assimilation into nationalist projects. Alcides Arguedas, a controversial Bolivian thinker, promoted social Darwinism, attributing the nation's "sickness" to its indigenous population (Arguedas 1909). This assimilative model required indigenous groups to erase their identities to participate in the nation (Alexander 2006: 429).

A more concrete approach to incorporating indigenous populations emerged after the Chaco War (1932–1935) against Paraguay. The National Revolution of 1952 initiated agrarian reform, universal suffrage, and mines nationalization. The Agrarian Reform Decree of 1953 declared that "the land belongs to those who work it." Indigenous groups were reframed as a "peasant class," reflecting Marxist perspectives. President Víctor Paz Estenssoro declared, "There are no longer any Indians, only campesinos" (Casen and Rundell 2012: 4). This mestizo-centric framework sought to eliminate discrimination and racism while fostering solidarity and citizenship (Rivera 2004). However, this effort represents a hyphenated incorporation model, blending identities into mestizaje (Alexander 2006: 432) without respecting their differences. At this point of history of Bolivia, indigenousness was considered as a *destructive intrusion* to the civil aspirations, so it needed to be eliminated or condensed with other identities.

In subsequent decades, responses to Revolutionary Nationalism gave rise to "Indianism" and "Katarism" movements. These emphasized not only economic or peasant concerns but also colonial structures of indigenous oppression. Indianism rejected nationalist and Marxist traditions, focusing instead on racialized relations and colonial perspectives on social issues (Escárzaga 2012: 192). This marked the delineation of an indigenous sphere. Beyond academic discourse, these movements manifested politically through parties such as the Indian Movement Tupaj Katari (MITKA) and the National Katarista Movement (MKN), led primarily by Aymara intellectuals (Mayorga 2005).

These movements sought not only recognition but also self-determination. In the 1990s, Felipe Quispe ("Mallku") reintroduced Indianism as Communitarian Indianism, envisioning communities as political bases and advocating for revolutionary Tupakatarism as an armed struggle against "colonized Bolivia." However, the ethnic and primordial tones of Indianism hindered its integration into national politics (Gamboa 2009; Mansilla 2014).

During the same period, Bolivia pursued multicultural incorporation within a neoliberal economic intersection. President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada and Vice President Víctor Hugo Cárdenas, of Aymara origin, implemented state policies promoting intercultural education and indigenous language preservation (Viaña 2009). We can consider this as an initial state-led effort to interpret indigeneity as a *facilitating input* within the Bolivian civil sphere. However, structural inequalities persisted, marginalizing indigenous groups compared to non-indigenous populations. This context catalyzed an "indigenous awakening" (Chihuailaf 2018). By the century's end, indigenous groups transitioned from minimal public participation to becoming central to comparative politics debates (Van Cott 2003, 2005, 2010).

This movement led to a new multicultural incorporation model in Bolivia. Evo Morales's social movement, rooted in coca growers' unions, garnered support from indigenous organizations aligned with his populist discourse on uniting cultural diversity (Avila 2019) and urban groups (Albro 2005). The MAS political party employed a civil metalanguage to highlight the social struggles of particular groups, positioning them at the symbolic center of society's utopian ideals (Alexander 2006: 231). Morales's presidency marked an effort to universalize solidarity, evident in his speeches advocating justice, equality, and the end of discrimination:

> From 500 years of resistance to seizing power for 500 years, Indigenous people, workers, all sectors coming together to put an end to injustice, to end inequality, and above all, to end discrimination and oppression, where we have been subjected as Aymaras, Quechuas, Guaranis. We deeply respect and admire all sectors, whether they are professionals or not, intellectuals or not, entrepreneurs or not. We all have the right to live in this life, on this land, and the outcome of the national elections is precisely the result of the combination of social awareness and professional capability. This demonstrates that the Indigenous movement is not exclusionary. Hopefully, hopefully, others will also learn from us. (Ersilias 2006)

Morales and the MAS spearheaded Bolivia's constitutional reform, establishing the Plurinational State of Bolivia and recognizing 36 indigenous nations. Rooted in the concept of Living Well (Vivir Bien), this framework combined indigenous beliefs with environmental harmony, opposing global capitalism (Avila 2019). Morales delivered impactful speeches at international forums, emphasizing respect for Mother Earth (Madre Tierra) (Dawson 2011). The new government utilized the Indigenous Sphere as a facilitating input to advance the universalizing aspirations of the Bolivian Civil Sphere, ultimately aiming to achieve civil repair.

However, this process was far from complete. Morales played a central role in embodying and institutionalizing the Indigenous Sphere in this capacity. These "indigenous performances" provided legitimacy to government actions and helped consolidate state power: "Morales continues to invoke Indigenous history and culture, but he does so in performances of a state-controlled version of indigeneity that legitimized state power" (Postero 2017: 4). The indigenized Bolivian Civil Sphere was framed within a nationalist and economic framework, which simultaneously challenged indigenous nations' self-determination while reinforcing state control (Burman 2014; Canessa 2012).

Our case study enters at this point. The TIPNIS conflict in 2011 posed a significant challenge to the government, exposing the contradiction between the nation-state's interests and the aspirations of indigenous solidarity.

Indigenous Environmental Conflicts and the TIPNIS Conflict

Indigenous communities have long been at the forefront of environmental conflicts, particularly concerning land use in rural areas, over the past decades (Environmental Justice Atlas 2024). In Latin America, these conflicts often target indigenous populations, not only violating basic human rights but also leading to violence, including the assassination of land defenders (Raftopoulus 2018; Scheidel et al. 2020). The historical processes of dispossession and exclusion that began with colonization have re-emerged in the democratic era through the imposition of pipelines, roads, and mining projects. In response, indigenous communities have employed peaceful self-defense, legal action, and efforts to gain international and local support.

According to Merino (2015), extractivism in Latin America is deeply tied to extensive infrastructure projects that perpetuate a "colonial model of accumulation." Even in countries like Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador, where left-wing parties have promoted the creation of plurinational states, indigenous communities protesting development projects by transnational corporations are often ignored, repressed, or left to fend for themselves (Merino 2012). In this context, the pursuit of self-sovereignty has emerged as a critical strategy to counteract extractivism.[2] Since the indigenous resurgence of the 1970s, there has been a reevaluation of legal understandings of sovereignty, encompassing self-government and self-determination (Wiessner 2008). However, this debate

2 This is the right to make decisions about one's territory and it is central to understanding environmental conflicts in rural areas where the relationship with the territory plays a key role in identity and politics of defense. Some authors consider that there can be a framework to solve sovereignty problems by focusing on three characteristics that are dynamic and require the specification of the context: "(1) shared sovereignty, (2) institution building, and (3) a determination of final status" (Williams, Avoryie, and Armstrong 2015:23). Scholars have argued that "indigenous sovereignty" can be interpreted through the traditional legal framework of state sovereignty, emphasizing: "a) a permanent population; b) a defined territory; c) government; and d) capacity to enter into relations with other States" (Lenzerini 2006:196).

remains ongoing, grappling with the contested history of land titles, rights claims, and the symbolic nature of policy implementation. For instance, in Australia, some scholars have suggested that acts of recognition may be merely symbolic and fail to fully address the responsibilities owed to indigenous nations (Moreton-Robinson 2020).

Despite these limitations, symbolic recognition holds importance due to its global resonance. In Argentina and Chile, for example, some scholars have highlighted how discourse around mining-related conflicts has evolved into international networks that systemically frame these disputes (Urkidi and Walter 2011). Indigenous discourse has effectively brought local debates into the broader global context of environmental justice. McGregor et al. (2020) argue that indigenous peoples, drawing on their ontologies, philosophies, and epistemologies, have presented a global perspective on the ecological crisis of climate change. Concepts like *Vivir Bien*, which ascribe legal personhood to the planet, have emerged within this framework (McGregor, Whitaker, and Sritharan 2020:27). This represents a shift from Western liberal paradigms toward an integrated approach that views the human and physical world as a continuum within a systemic vision of justice (Parsons, Fisher, and Crease 2021).

TIPNIS

The Isiboro Sécure National Park was established on November 22, 1965, through Supreme Decree 07401 under the presidency of René Barrientos Ortuño. Encompassing areas in the departments of La Paz, Beni, and Cochabamba, it was originally managed by the Ministry of Agriculture. Over time, the territory's status evolved due to demands from indigenous populations. On September 24, 1990, Supreme Decree 22610 recognized the park as an indigenous territory, renaming it Indigenous Territory and National Park Isiboro Sécure (TIPNIS). This decree introduced a "red line" to prevent encroachment by new settlers and mandated that any construction projects require the participation of indigenous peoples in the area (Gaceta Oficial del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia n.d.).[3]

The decree was a milestone in indigenous history, marked by the First March for Territory and Dignity in 1990. This historic mobilization saw lowland indigenous organizations march to Bolivia's political center in La Paz. The event highlighted the marginalization of lowland indigenous communities, who had long been overshadowed by the larger Aymara and Quechua populations of the highlands.

Bedoya (2019) notes that the march symbolically initiated a series of mobilizations in the region, emphasizing the identity-based nature of indigenous claims. These included language, ethnicity, territory (as a central unifying element),

3 During the First Conference of Indigenous Nations of Beni in 1989, the Central de Pueblos Indígenas del Beni (CPIB) was established, laying the groundwork for this mobilization (Patzi 2007). The march brought attention to conflicts with timber enterprises and agro-exportation cattle businesses, which had strong ties to the Bolivian government.

systems of political and social organization, and shared historical narratives. The march united diverse groups, including the Chiman, Trinitarios, Chacobo, Esse Ejja, Tacana, Yuracaré, Movima, Joaquiniana, Ignaciana, Itonoma, Baure, Javeriana, and Sirionó peoples. It also revealed tensions between indigenous organizational structures, such as the *Cabildo Indigenal*, and the democratic frameworks promoted by the nation-state. These tensions underscored the state's limited understanding of indigenous logic and highlighted potential violations of international regulations regarding indigenous rights (Torrico 1992).

Eighth Indigenous Peoples March in Bolivia

The TIPNIS conflict emerged during Evo Morales' presidency, revealing contradictions in the government's pro-environment discourse. The government's decision to construct a road through the Core Zone of TIPNIS was ostensibly aimed at uniting Bolivia's eastern and western regions. However, the underlying motives included expanding coca cultivation, advancing the Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America (IIRSA) for improved trade access between Brazil and China, and facilitating hydrocarbon extraction. The project contradicted the recommendations of the National Service of Protected Areas (SERNAP), which, in its 2011 Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment, prohibited infrastructure construction in the biodiversity-rich Core Zone. Moreover, the government failed to conduct the required Free, Prior, and Informed Consultation (FPIC) with indigenous communities before initiating the project (Laing 2015).

The TIPNIS conflict underscores the complex interplay between development strategies, neo-extractivism, and indigenous rights. Scholars have highlighted the colonial underpinnings of these practices, which often result in predatory actions against indigenous communities (Delgado 2017). The conflict also raised questions about indigenous veto power over policies and the need for deliberative spaces to address potential inequalities in FPIC processes (Christoffersen 2020; Shaw 2017). Furthermore, the conflict brought attention to the performative dimensions of indigenous march and their role in foregrounding issues of indigeneity and gender (Fabricant and Postero 2018; Hope 2016; Roncken 2019).

The repoliticization of nature as a political strategy became a central theme of the TIPNIS conflict, illustrating the divergence between nation-state development paradigms and indigenous approaches rooted in substantive economies and ecological knowledge (Springerová and Vališková 2016). Scholars have also noted the potential for indigenous groups to counter global development trends, simultaneously positioning themselves as global actors while confronting exclusionary consequences (Brysk and Bennett 2012). Post-conflict analyses have documented the broader political and developmental impacts of the TIPNIS conflict, including its framing as "land dispossession" (Hirsch 2019) and the ongoing challenges faced by indigenous groups in the region (Reyes-García et al. 2020).

Methodology

The methodological orientation of this research is interpretative. First, it follows a hermeneutic approach, analyzing the social world as a text. For our empirical work, we select *records*, understood as objectified structures of significance that reflect deep meanings (Oevermann et al. 2019). These records are not randomly chosen to provide an objective description or to construct a chronological analysis of events—as seen in the Comprehensive Event Coverage approach, for example (Davenport 2009). Instead, our objective is to uncover the interpretative biases of the record creators, capturing different moral standpoints (Earl et al. 2004: 67; Ortiz et al. 2005: 402).

Second, we employ an abductive analytical process. Following Peirce, we infer hypotheses about reality based on a rule and a result (Peirce 1992). In Peirce's terms, *hypothesis* refers to inferences about social life based on a theoretically guided approach (Reed 2011), using empirical evidence to draw conclusions. We treat our records as *clues* (Ginzburg 1989) or *images* (Abbott 2001) embedded in public debate that allow us to reconstruct cultural structures (Smith 2005) as a whole.

In this study, the interpretation focuses on cultural objects such as newspaper columns, op-eds, and editorials from five of Bolivia's most prominent newspapers. Specifically, we analyze 160 op-eds and editorials from *El Diario, La Razón, Página Siete, El Deber,* and *Cambio*. Each newspaper represents has a distinct ideological orientation—ranging from left to center to right—and offers a national rather than local perspective. The op-eds are authored by public intellectuals, journalists, writers, politicians, and representatives of civil organizations. Beyond quantitative analysis (Mathieu and Hart 2024), our approach seeks to understand how these texts construct interpretations of social reality, particularly in relation to the march.

The theoretical framework distinguishes a binary structure that organizes motives, relations, and institutions. In this study, we aim to construct the *Indigenous Sphere* by drawing from the model of the *Civil Sphere* (Alexander 2006: 57-59). In the following sections, I will infer the deep structures shaping the interpretation of the march—its motives, relations, and institutions. The purpose of this analysis is to examine how the march was *interpreted* in public discourse, rather than how Indigenous groups perceive themselves.

The Sacred Indigenous against the Polluted Indigenous State

Even though the indigenous state promoted the most significant incorporation process in the history of Bolivia, the new indigenized Civil Sphere controlled by the Plurinational State of Bolivia, led by Evo Morales, could not avoid being criticized as representing particularized solidarities rather than fostering genuine repair. In the following, we will illustrate how the march was *interpreted* in two distinct phases: First, the start of the march on August 15th before the Yucumo Repression. Second, after the Yucumo Repression encompassing the journey toward the city of La Paz and culminating in their arrival on October 19th, 2011.

Part I: The Start of the Journey to La Paz

The Loss of Hope with the Plurinational State

Anti-indigenous Motives

Criticism of the government during the TIPNIS march centered on perceived missteps, such as the controversial Supreme Decree 748, which resulted in the "gasolinazo" fuel price hikes years prior (Chumacero 2011). Government actions were labeled as irrational, with particular emphasis on an apparent lack of negotiation skills and general incompetence (Capriles 2011; D. Editorial 2011b; Natusch 2011).

Accusations went beyond policy disagreements to portray the government as guided by personal whims and self-interest (C. Editorial 2011a). The government was characterized as arrogant and dishonest, driven by unchecked ambition that undermined the principles upon which the nation's faith was built (Valdivia 2011). Critics questioned the authenticity of the government's motives, particularly its defense of indigenous rights and environmental concerns, branding it a hypocritical ploy to maintain control (Untoja 2011). Evo Morales' motivations were described as selfish, with concerns about corruption and degradation stemming from his exercise of power (Berrios 2011b). The overarching sentiment demanded more genuine and responsible decision-making, resonating throughout discussions of the TIPNIS march (Caballero 2011).

Conversely, we have to highlight that some commentators argued that indigenous support from certain politicians and public figures was disingenuous, labeling it "political resentment" or "hypocrisy" (Coco Manto 2011b). Others criticized what they saw as "false militant ecologism" (C. Editorial 2011b).

Anti-indigenous Relationships

Evo Morales' government faced criticism for its selective relationships with various groups, especially *cocaleros*, and its approach to "pachamama" (Mother Earth). According to Vacaflor (2011a), the government's ties to *cocaleros* and other groups accused of illegal activities, such as forest plunderers, smugglers, and mineral thieves, drew condemnation for harming "pachamama" and favoring certain factions (Vacaflor,2011b). Likewise, discrimination against indigenous people is mentioned, attributing racist and discriminatory practices to Evo Morales' associates, especially peasant leaders (Berrios 2011a). The government's relationship with Brazil is also highlighted, suggesting potential foreign interests (Iturralde 2011a). Evo Morales is characterized as an "unbridled developmentist," implying an inclination toward development without sufficient environmental consideration (Paulovich 2011b).

Criticism extends to the apparent contradiction in Evo Morales' discourse, questioning the defense of Mother Earth's rights in international conferences compared to environmental destruction in practice (Chumacero 2011). He is also accused of demagogic contradictions regarding indigenous autonomy

(Andrade 2011a). Morales is considered the main critic of the marchers, despite declaring himself a follower of Mother Earth (Cárdenas 2011). The endorsement and relationships with *cocaleros* are criticized (Ortiz 2011a; Rueda 2011), as well as the alleged failure to adhere to environmental control or consultation rules (Tejada 2011). Additionally, the importance of cocaleros or colonizers as generators of disorder in indigenous lands is emphasized, disrupting harmony and destroying the ecosystem (Ríos 2011).

Conversely, indigenous lowland groups' relationships with external organizations, such as NGOs or the U.S. Embassy in Bolivia, were criticized as conspiratorial (D. Editorial 2011a).

Anti-indigenous Institutions

The Plurinational State itself faced criticism for its structural deficiencies and the relationships associated with Evo Morales' leadership. The state was labeled a deceitful construct, and Morales' "indigenism" was dismissed as a "Chinese tale" (a fabricated narrative of indigeneity). Critics highlighted inconsistencies between the state's symbolic rhetoric and its actions: "Gone is the rhetoric; the real world confronted them. Gone is the symbolism they so fondly embraced. Gone are the enticing songs of the 'process of change.' The TIPNIS revealed them in full; they could not pass the consistency test" (Ortiz 2011a).

This statement encapsulates widespread dissatisfaction with the Plurinational State's failure to align symbolic promises with practical realities, particularly in the TIPNIS conflict. Critics interpreted Morales' "indigenism" as hollow and identified a lack of genuine environmental commitment. Internal conflicts among indigenous leaders were also noted, suggesting that their efforts should prioritize tangible benefits for their people (Zambrana 2011).

The Hope with the Indigenous March

Indigenous Motives

The indigenous marchers emphasized constructing a new, inclusive understanding of territory that contrasted with the government's approach: "Be that as it may, the indigenous people of Loma Santa are building territories in a broader sense, that is, 'counter-hegemonic' (inclusive)" (Chumacero 2011). The unique worldview of TIPNIS indigenous peoples, including their religiosity and reverence for nature, was underscored: "In addition to constitutional reasons and the rights of indigenous peoples over their territories, this is another reason why this road should not be allowed, as it will destroy the nature and the magic it holds" (Carvhalo 2011). The marchers condemned the damage to their "spiritual well-being" (Rivero 2011).

This perspective reframed development beyond economic motives, advocating for a broader understanding of human well-being: "Nobody opposes the comprehensive development of a region where there is extreme poverty;

however, we must understand that this is just a fundamental component to achieve full human development, in this case, for the indigenous people of the Bolivian Amazon" (Aguilar 2011).

Indigenous Relations

From the perspective of relations, people are characterized by demonstrating real connections with others: "And they receive the solidarity and sympathy of Bolivians from the legal sector" (Vacaflor 2011a). In this sense, there is a nationalist sentiment among the indigenous people of TIPNIS against the government. Negative land use is criticized, and it is highlighted that those from TIPNIS are taking a stand in favor of all Bolivians: "The project of that road that has aroused the interest and concern of the entire population must be reviewed at the request of indigenous nationalities who, representing the Nation, have expressed their opposition to this project" (Antezana 2011a).[4]

After the first weeks of the march, opinion leaders noted that the national community was attentive and supportive of the inhabitants of TIPNIS (C. Editorial 2011a). At one point, a national referendum was considered as a solution to resolve the conflict (D. Editorial 2011d). Furthermore, this conflict is characterized not only as a specific issue between the government and the indigenous people of the east but as a deeper conflict over land. This conflict soon sparked more conflicts in the country. Thus, it can be seen how it fits into a broader theme than the TIPNIS conflict: "If, on this occasion, the fundamental problem of the rural population, which is land, is not resolved, nothing will have been solved, and the solutions will have been no more than aspirins to cure a cancerous ailment" (D. Editorial 2011a). Moreover, it is considered that this is a problem that has transcended to an international level: "In time, the news of the march initiated two weeks ago left national borders and gained international projection, which obliged facing the bull by the horns with more ductility and patience" (D. Editorial 2011b).

It is deemed indispensable for the international stage and the defense of the land: "It has the backing of national and international institutions for being in line with the doctrine of environmental and biodiversity defense" (Capobianco 2011).

Furthermore, the cause of TIPNIS is positioned as the representative of the "common good" (Mariaca 2011). It is also considered that their motives, even the enchantment of nature, are important to understand their vulnerability: "The re-enchantment with nature is the 'Mother Earth', it is the cry of despair,

4 Others share the same perspective from a nationalistic standpoint: "We believe that this matter is of national interest and not only of the indigenous people living in that territory because the Homeland belongs to everyone" (Cárdenas 2011). It was also stated that "the urban population shows its moral and material support to the marchers" (Antezana 2011b). External group support is emphasized in the indigenous struggle: "This vision is shared by a large part of the Bolivian population, whose expressions of moral support translate into shipments of food, supplies, and medicines, as well as the reception offered by the towns along the route traced for the march" (Valdivia 2011).

of men and women condemned by the State to ethnocide in this century" (Untoja 2011). Also, a national consciousness about the territory and rich nature against capitalist beliefs (Coco Manto 2011a).

Indigenous Institutions

This construction undertaken by those from TIPNIS is also identified as a transformation of state power. It is not enough to have a president of indigenous origin; rather, there is a change in the dynamics of power and, consequently, in democratic senses: a different management of society. "The march for the defense of TIPNIS tends to transform the spiritual foundations of an official Power that wants to do everything, including elections for magistrates" (Numbela 2011).

Part II: The March Arrives to La Paz

The Yucumo Repression

Public opinion viewed the Yucumo repression as a moment that highlighted the "anti-indigenous" nature of the government and sacralized the march. Articles refer to this event as violent repression that undermines the government's legitimacy (Martinez-Salguero 2011). They are labeled as violent and savage: "We lean towards the latter, as we have already expressed, because the Government's action is unquestionably barbaric and savage in repressing innocent people" (Vaca 2011). Intolerance and a development-centric anthropocentric vision are consistently criticized in opinion columns (Sejas 2011).

Columnists commented that the event was undemocratic, and the country's solidarity increased for this reason:

> The country's solidarity in the face of such outrages is not delayed, and they are sufficient demonstrations that the current Government is mismanaging the State, where every voice of protest is not solitary but forms thousands, perhaps millions of citizens who, regardless of political color, place of birth, or other aspects, stand in solidarity with the TIPNIS marchers and condemn any act of violence against people who were legally and legitimately marching (Coca 2011).

The cause of TIPNIS was emphasized as "just" and presented as defenders of nature, forests, and more (D. Editorial 2011c). In this sense, their peaceful characteristic in the face of the megaproject in their territory is highlighted: "The indigenous march that left the city of Trinidad for La Paz is peaceful. It does not interfere with the free movement of people and vehicles; it causes no harm. The indigenous march, including women and children, is for a just cause" (Ojara 2011).

It is spoken of as having national support: "Faced with national resistance to the construction of section two of the road, the Government has no choice but to accede to the demand of the indigenous people of the area" (Luna 2011).

The growing international support for the construction of the road is mentioned: "As time goes by, the march in defense of the Isiboro-Sécure Park is being supported by various sectors of society, even international organizations" (Andrade 2011b). The journey described as "friendly" for the marchers is mentioned (Vacaflor 2011a). It is highlighted how in localities like Caranavi, for example, their entry is celebrated: "a triumphant entry of the indigenous people in merit of their determined purpose, even risking their lives to defend their constitutional rights" (Montecinos 2011). Before the entry of lowland indigenous people into La Paz, they were positioned as the "winners" of this battle: "In general, it can be considered that the issue is almost definitively lost for the official spheres and that the TIPNIS indigenous people have not only won a battle but are winning a war unjustly declared against them" (Antezana 2011c).

When the march reached La Paz, all the structures of motives, relationships, and institutions articulated in the opinion columns and editorials converged. One of the op-eds, from a narrator argued: "We put some clothes and food in a bag, and we went to reach the marchers, to give them principally our hearts" (Paulovich 2011a). This marked a moment of "effervescence" (Alexander 2006), where emotions and profound feelings of belonging to the cause of indigenous groups amplified the networks of solidarity with other groups. The systematized ideational structure of motives, relationships, and institutions is divided in the following charts:

Indigenous and Anti-indigenous Motives

Figure 1. Structure of Indigenous and Anti-indigenous Motives

Indigenous	Anti-indigenous
Active	Passive
Peaceful	Violent
Collectivist	Individualist
Not rational (Alternative futures)	Rational (Progress)

Own elaboration based on data analysis

During the arrival of the march, the indigenous groups were depicted with sacred motives, a perception consistent since the commencement of the mobilization. However, a clear distinction emerged between the objectives of the government, led by Evo Morales.

For instance, the peaceful and active nature of the march held significant importance. The participants were seen as having a distinct purpose: to conduct a peaceful march that emphasized a culture of peace essential for Bolivia. As stated by Bonadona (2011), "A demonstration of determination exercised peacefully, which is only possible when there is clarity of objectives and deep conviction" (Bonadona 2011).

In contrast, the government's motives accentuated violence from the outset: "On September 25, the march was attacked in a perverse manner by police troops, in an action that had never been seen in the country" (E. D. Editorial 2011). The focus wasn't solely on the event but also on the violent approach to politics against the peaceful movement led by the TIPNIS marchers: "Rejection of abuse, authoritarianism, arrogance" (P. S. Editorial 2011), emphasizing that "arrogance is useless, and political power is not enough" (Atahuichi 2011).

On the flip side, the collectivist nature of the march's motives aimed to unite the Bolivian population: "It will be a day of unity among Bolivians, the day when real change is born" (Arias 2011). Conversely, the government's individualistic approach was criticized as anti-indigenous for neglecting other groups and failing to listen to the people: "The Government, with the president of the State at the helm, with its incomprehensible ideological confusion in the conflict, the succession of errors of action or omission in its management [...] We need them to see, to listen to the people, and understand what is happening" (Prudencio 2011).

Lastly, the rationale behind "development" was questioned, and indigenous perspectives were highlighted for surpassing rational thinking: "The Road is nothing but a metaphor, the symbol of Western thought that collides head-on with indigenous thinking" (Lea 2011). Other arguments also arose, challenging the rationality of the well-known development model: "The TIPNIS march calls on the Bolivians to deliberate on a new Development model that links education with the economy to overcome, through knowledge, the extractive model" (Gómez 2011).

Indigenous and Anti-indigenous Relations

Figure 2. Structure of indigenous and Anti-indigenous Relations

Indigenous	Anti-indigenous
Loyal to everybody's well-being (including mother earth)	Betraying/suspicious of everybody's well-being (including mother earth)
Based on a millennial cosmology	Based on new interest
Oriented to global/earth repair	Oriented to a particular interest

Own elaboration based on data analysis

Additionally, public commentators interpreted indigenous relationships as sacred, portraying them as honest and loyal connections with society and nature or Mother Earth. Some commentators explicitly identified these relationships as a commitment to preserving nature rather than seeking personal benefits: "But they don't want tributes or recognition; they just want to save nature" (Vacaflor 2011). In general, it was observed that "indigenous peoples continue to demand that Mother Earth not be sacrificed for a Road" (Puente

2011), even if it means putting their lives at risk: "They defend it even at the cost of sacrificing their lives" (Mercado 2011).

The government's relationships were viewed with suspicion: "The power that MAS encapsulates confuses, divides, offers dialogue while discrediting, advocates unity while repressing, retreats, and improvises, denying" (Brockmann 2011). Furthermore, the constant emphasis on the government's connections with other groups was noted: "Without invasive actions from illegal loggers or coca growers" (Gramunt 2011).

These relationships were seen as oriented toward the interests of specific groups: "They knew that if the Government achieved its goal of allowing coca growers in Chapare to consolidate their control over this national park, other territories would fall one after another" (Ortiz 2011). Additionally, links with narcotics organizations were highlighted (Salinas 2011).

On the contrary, the sacrifice made by indigenous groups appeared to extend beyond their own interests or Bolivia, evolving into a global fight for humanity: "They have taught future generations that defending biodiversity is fundamental for human life against materialism" (Berrios 2011); "It is up to humans to defend their values, unite around faith, and sow hopes for the future without compromising the values that nature offers" (Valdivia 2011).

Indigenous and Anti-indigenous Institutions

Figure 3. Structure of indigenous and Anti-indigenous Institutions

Indigenous	**Anti-indigenous**
Communitarian	Hierarchical
Millenarian	New
Inclusive	Discriminatory

Own elaboration based on data analysis

Against the figure of the Bolivian nation-state, the indigenous institutions are linked to their organizations based on their territory and their rights (Vilar 2011). It is highlighted the groups and their "ancestral" position of the land: "since time immemorial" (Seleme 2011). At the same time, the millenarian characteristic: "a population perhaps quantitatively reduced, but qualitatively superior due to the presence of ancestral peoples, nations, and cultures that are lost in the distant past of our continent" (Capobianco 2011).

The anti-indigenous position of the government was established as hierarchical and discriminatory. The hierarchy is highlighted when stating the characteristics of the people in the government: "the president and his ministers must rid themselves of arrogant and authoritarian attitudes, making constructive, sincere dialogue prevail" (Aguilar 2011). The government, and the people working there, were also considered as discriminatory, or "racist" against the indigenous groups: "Difficult task to find more pettiness than this revenge

orchestrated by Morales, García Linera, Juan Ramón Quintana, and their followers, unyielding in their racism towards the indigenous peoples of the lowlands" (Seleme 2011).

In contrast, the fight of the indigenous groups marching is considered inclusive as they unite Bolivian thinking: "it has awakened deep admiration and solidarity throughout the national territory" (Valdivia 2011). Moreover, some values are highlighted: "unity (from east to west that definitively buried the nefarious intentions of small groups with separatist paranoia); integration of La Paz residents under the influence of indigenous determination" (Loayza 2011).

Conclusions

Previous scholarly work has interpreted that, in the TIPNIS case, the indigenous way of being challenged the Bolivian nation-state's understanding of democracy (Torrico 1992), constructing a unifying narrative around Indigenous identity (Bedoya 2019). In this paper, I have analyzed the interpretation of the TIPNIS conflict to illustrate how indigeneity, as embodied in Evo Morales and the Plurinational State, was contested by the march of lowland Indigenous groups in Bolivia. This analysis aimed to identify the ideational structure of the non-liberal *Indigenous Sphere* attributed to the march. Through this case, I have reconstructed a structure that sacralizes the active, peaceful, collectivist, and non-rational motives driving Indigenous populations in their defense of land. The analysis also highlights how this structure frames Indigenous relationships as deeply connected to nature and *Mother Earth*, rooted in a pre-millennial cosmology, and oriented toward collective well-being. Finally, Indigenous institutions emerge as inclusive, grounded in communal ties, and shaped by millennia-old traditions.

In this sense, I argued that public opinion in Bolivia largely identified the march as embodying the *Indigenous Sphere* in opposition to Evo Morales and his government. However, this opposition should not be understood as a simple betrayal of indigeneity by Morales, but rather as an internal drift of the discourse of indigenousness/indigeneity when embedded with the nation-state. The TIPNIS conflict illustrates how tensions within the Indigenous Sphere – between its collectivist, non-rational, peaceful and millenarian environmental commitments – arise in its embeddedness in state power, producing a shift in Morales' leadership interpretation. His trajectory reflects not an abandonment of indigeneity but an inherent contradiction within the Civil Sphere as it navigates the demands of governance and wants to maintain state authority circumscribed in a national imaginary. In this sense, the *Indigenous Sphere* and the *Civil Sphere* are not strictly separate; rather, their interweaving reveals how democracy is continuously shaped by both universalist and particularist solidarities. The challenge is not simply the incorporation of Indigenous discourse into the Civil Sphere, but how this discourse redefines the very terms of inclusion and solidarity.

Beyond its interaction with the Civil Sphere, deeper theoretical questions remain regarding the nature of the Indigenous Sphere. To what extent can

this sphere be considered "civil" in the sense of Civil Sphere Theory, or does it represent an alternative ontological category? Can non-Indigenous actors fully mobilize the Indigenous Sphere, or is it necessarily ascriptive, tied to ancestry, land, and lived experience? Can this sphere help us understand other topics such as cultural appropriation of indigenous material and immaterial cultural expressions or the popularity of Indigenous knowledge and methodologies in academia? These questions point to a broader issue: whether the Indigenous Sphere can be fully translated into the conceptual language of democracy, or whether its structure resists incorporation into a model that, historically, has been entangled with colonial frameworks of inclusion. This study does not attempt to resolve these tensions, but instead lays the groundwork for further exploration.

At the same time, this case highlights how indigeneity has gained authority through its deep connection with universalistic aspirations to environmentalism, positioning itself in opposition to developmentalism and extractivist models of economic growth. The TIPNIS conflict is one example of how land defense movements are framed not only as local struggles but as part of a broader global discourse that challenges dominant models of progress. Future research should examine whether this environmental discourse remains central across different Indigenous movements or whether it varies based on local political and economic contexts.

To deepen our understanding of these dynamics, further empirical research is essential. Comparative case studies across diverse geographical settings will be crucial in determining whether the discourse structure identified in this case remains consistent or varies across different historical and cultural contexts. A multifaceted approach—incorporating different methodologies and theoretical perspectives—is necessary to fully grasp the complexities of the Indigenous Sphere and its broader implications.

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Danny Danijel Molerikona Alfaro

'TIPNIS somos todos': Diskursi autohtonosti u okvirima i iznad okvira nacionalne građanske sfere

Apstrakt

U ovom radu se istražuje presek između autohtonosti, ekoloških sukoba i globalnih solidarnosti. Polazeći od teorijskog okvira jakog programa u kulturnoj sociologiji, u radu se ispituje kako se autohtone grupe koje se suprotstavljaju ekološkim pretnjama oslanjaju na duboku strukturu diskursa kako bi izgradile solidarnost koja nadilazi njihove zajednice, na nacionalnom i internacionalnom nivou. Sukobi oko Teritorije autohtonog stanovništva i nacionalnog parka Isiboro-Sécure (Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro-Sécure TIPNIS), prilikom kojih su autohtone grupe iz nizijskih područja marširale protiv državnog projekta izgradnje autoputa, predstavljaju studiju slučaja. Primenom hermeneutičkog pristupa, istraživanje analizira 160 autorskih tekstova i drugih priloga iz bolivijskih novina, otkrivajući kako je javni diskurs uokvirio autohtoni otpor unutar moralne strukture kolektivističkih, ekoloških i ne-liberalnih motiva. Nalazi istraživanja doprinose razumevanju načina na koji autohtona sfera interaguje sa okvirima demokratije i solidarnosti i dovodi ih u pitanje.

Ključne reči: autohtoni narodi, ekološki konflikti, demokratija, kulturna sociologija, Bolivija

II

STUDIES AND ARTICLES

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Gustavo Torrecilha

THE END OF ART, MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM

ABSTRACT
This article tries to offer a contribution with regard to the understanding of the periods of modernism and postmodernism in the arts through a Hegelian point of view. Based on Hegel's thesis about the end of art, the article tries to show how modernism can be seen, at the same time, as both the realization and the negation of this end, for modernist art embodies the reflective character demanded by the modern spirit and at the same time it tries to resist the loss of relevance of art in the modern world. This type of art, thus, tries to be more than just an aesthetic experience by seeking to influence life and society and to reclaim for itself the primary role of expressing the truth. Postmodernism, in turn, as the negation of modernism, fully carries out Hegel's reading on the art of his own time, accepting this loss of relevance and turning to representations that no longer have the goal of being spirit's highest mode of self-apprehension. Postmodernism has, however, two possible readings: it can either be seen negatively, as an art that has become sterile and that demands to be accepted by institutions and the market, or positively, as an extension of the freedom achieved by modernist experimentations to every artistic production without being limited by a programmatic view. Both these readings show the intrinsic contradictions of artistic postmodernism and the role of philosophy in apprehending it.

KEYWORDS
Hegel; end of art; modernism; postmodernism.

Introduction

Hegel's thesis of the end of art has been, since he held his lectures on the fine arts in the universities of Heidelberg and Berlin during the years between 1818 and 1829, one of the topics that found the most resonance in philosophical debates in the two centuries following his work. Even after the turn of the 21st century, much is still written regarding his thesis about the end of art, which shows the importance of his philosophy to the understanding of the historical development of art during the period in which art saw the rise and fall of modernism and its succession in postmodernism. This article will try to elucidate Hegel's thesis and how it relates to both modernism and postmodernism.

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This will be done not only by investigating Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, but also by discussing with authors who have engaged with this text in order to explain both contexts, since it was historically impossible for Hegel to have written anything about these moments, even if some of his formulations may seem foreshadowing for some of the thinkers discussed in this article.

Considering that Hegel thought his own time to be that of the end of art, this article tries to expand his interpretation to the movements that took place a few decades after he held his lectures, proposing a philosophical comprehension of modern art and its contradictions. But now being clear that modernism has also reached its end, the question regarding the application of Hegel's philosophy of art to the comprehension of postmodernism also arises. Considering how modernism is, in a way, an attempt to recover a condition of art that was lost with its end, as narrated by Hegel, it is possible to see how applicable his thesis would also be in trying to understand the end of modernist aspirations. Modernist art intended to be more than a simply aesthetic experience – it was as if art, self-conscious about its own historical development, were trying to regain the relevance it once had in the past[1]. In other words, modernism tries to resist the end of art, but it comes to an end too due to the inevitability of the loss of primary relevance of art in the contemporary world. With regard to the goal of this text, it is worth bringing Dieter Henrich's evaluation of Hegel's aesthetics and the possibility of a diagnosis of the art of modern times, in which he says that "art theory does not have to avoid being close with Hegel's aesthetics because it fears, in this proximity, being paralyzed by the conceptual superiority and historic distance", for it can only overcome this superiority through "inversely, seeking and expanding this proximity" (Henrich 2003: 125). This is what this text tries to do; but while Henrich highlights the necessity of building upon Hegel's fundaments for the development of an autonomous theory of art, it must be said that this text does not have the goal of being a polished theory of art, but rather an attempt of contributing to a reading of Hegel's philosophy of art considering the developments that took place in the last two hundred years.

In fact, there are many thinkers influenced by Hegel's philosophy who have tried to understand both these periods, emphasizing how important and useful his formulations are for the comprehension of them. That shows how Hegel's aesthetics offers many possibilities in its historical and dialectical apprehension of art, not being limited only to his own time. Important works as such are Pippin's (2014) attempt to explain the pictorial modernism of the impressionists, especially Manet's, or even Rutter's (2010) interpretation of the modern arts, even if his work is not entirely dedicated to modernism in the strict sense. On the other hand, both Jameson (1998) and Danto (1997) have also tried to understand postmodernism by employing Hegel's thesis about the

1 This treatment of art (a sphere of the absolute spirit) as if it were a subject is justified by Hegel's own treatment of the Absolute as a subject in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (cf. Hegel 1980: 18-19).

end of art – with conflicting conclusions. The arguments of these four authors will be employed in order to explain the development of art in the modernist and postmodernist eras; first, in modernist art's attempt to regain the primary position it once had with regard to the expression of spiritual content and second, in its discussion of the possibilities offered by postmodernist art after the loss of this aspiration. The discussions with these authors have the goal of highlighting the different readings Hegel's end of art thesis has to offer, which can even be conflicting among themselves.

Hegel's philosophy is considered, at least by a few of those who claim to be Hegelian themselves, as the main philosophy of modern times. His conception of the human spirit becoming fulfilled and able to comprehend itself historically and retrospectively is one of the main aspects that allows this interpretation, for the understanding of modernity is linked to this consciousness and awareness of the past. And since the comprehension of the modern world is already a way of seeing it in comparison with a past mentality that modernity claims to have overcome – even if not always in a positive sense –, seeing a postmodern condition is also a way of affirming that this same period and its ambitions are at least partially overcome. Given that many modern visions believe to be – as some interpret Hegel's works, especially the *Phenomenology of Spirit* – the fulfillment of a historical condition in which the conscience becomes aware of itself, its history and its development (finally understanding what it is now supposed to be and how it got to where it now is), classifying something as postmodern means seeing this realization as already left behind, which can be due to a number of reasons.

Here, it is worth pointing out how modernity is essentially thought of as a narrative that is necessarily opposed to a period that came before it, just as postmodernity itself is only thought as the negation of the modern period, as Jameson (2012) discusses. In fact, in many discussions – Lyotard (1979) being the main example here – postmodernity is understood precisely as the negation of narratives. For Jameson, one of these possible narratives about modernity is based on artistic modernism itself; this is not, however, a single possible narrative, for there are several moments in history in which one can see the birth of modernity (in philosophy, art and economics), always linked with the question of innovation. For example, a possible narrative of modernity in philosophy may see its beginning with Descartes and the "discovery" of the Self. In the arts, however, such conscience of itself and its history, even if already present before modernism, sees its radicalization through modernism's movements and avant-gardes.

Artistic postmodernism, as the negation of the modernist narrative, can either allow a pessimist vision, which sees this self-consciousness captured by forces outside its own realm (such as the market and artistic institutions), or an optimist view, which understands postmodernity as the generalization of this self-consciousness that becomes even greater, as this article will discuss based on the visions of Jameson and Danto, respectively. In the arts, such understanding of its own history is achieved by modernism and its proposal of being

a new way of expressing the spirit that differs from representations of the past – modernist art, being aware of its place in history, proposes a critical reading of art and even society; modernism is not only an art that proposes an understanding of what art ought to be beyond the mere aesthetic appreciation of its objects, but it can also lead to a political engagement with its own time. And at the same time, this critical reading also means a recovery of art's past characteristics, in which it offered the public a more immediate and relevant relation – especially to those in ancient times and in the Middle Ages – as a privileged means of spiritual expression that was lost in modernity before modernism tried to recover it. Postmodernist art, in turn, could mean either giving up this critical ideal and pretension of being more than just art and becoming completely dictated by the market, or embracing the possibilities that were opened by this awareness, achieving complete freedom in terms of artistic expression.

The engagement with Danto's text also offers a possibility of further specifying what can be understood as modern and postmodern in the arts, given that the terms employed by him – "modernism", "postmodernism", "contemporary" and "post-historical" – are seen as more than merely chronological delimitations; they correspond to ways of producing art. Danto (1997: 8) clarifies that modernism is "marked by an ascent to a new level of consciousness, which is reflected in painting as a kind of discontinuity" with regard to "mimetic representation", which "had become less important than some kind of reflection on the means and methods of representation". "Contemporary" is also seen as more than a "temporal term, meaning whatever is taking place at the present moment", and, in Danto's view, "moreover, it designates less a period than what happens after there are no more periods in some master narrative of art, and less a style of making art than a style of using styles" (Danto 1997: 9-10). But while there is a "relative weakness of the term 'contemporary' as conveying a style", because it seems "too much a mere temporal term", "post-modern" also seems "too strong a term, too closely identified with a certain sector of contemporary art", for it seems linked to a "certain style we can learn to recognize, the way we learn to recognize instances of the baroque or the rococo" (Danto 1997: 11). That is why Danto prefers to use the term "post-historical", a concept that, just as Lyotard's understanding of "postmodern", is linked to the idea of overcoming a certain modernist narrative. The point is to understand postmodernism as the negation of narratives and the possibility of employing every style and endless forms.

This article starts by presenting Hegel's end of art thesis in its two main dimensions, which are related to (i) the end of the age in which art served as the primary mode of expression of the truth of its time, and (ii) the new possibilities that are open to the artist in regard to what can be expressed, since art is no longer the main mode of conveying spiritual content. Next, it investigates how the end of art thesis allows the comprehension of the modernist period, as some Hegel scholars have dwelled on; it is mainly concerned with the new interpretative and reflective aspects of this art that is no longer immediate to the public and how this consciousness culminates in the modernist aspiration

of being more than mere art, at least more than what art had become since it lost its pre-modern status. Then, it is necessary to discuss the relations between modernism and postmodernism using texts from philosophers who have also dealt with Hegel's philosophy of art, starting with Jameson's formulations, which are dedicated not only to the universe of art, but to culture and even economy on a greater scale. Following that, this article investigates Danto's defense of the art produced in the period of art that was inaugurated with Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*. Both their comprehensions see postmodernist art as the negation and overcoming of modernist ideals, either with a positive and a negative outcome on the artistic production that followed.

The end of art in Hegel's aesthetics

First, it is necessary to understand how Hegel poses his theory about the end of art. And in order to understand that, it has to be clear that Hegel does not directly state the term "end of art". In fact, his discussions on the topic arise throughout the entirety of his *Lectures on Aesthetics* – each of the chapters on the romantic arts discusses directly or indirectly something that is related to this theme –, even though two passages are the most important: the introduction, where he discusses philosophy's relation to art (and even if it is appropriate that philosophy addresses such a topic) and the passage regarding the dissolution of the romantic artform[2]. The first dimension of the end of art can be seen in the following passage, which has been the most cited by scholars when visiting this topic, maybe because it is one of the first grand statements in Hegel's text:

> In all these respects, art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past [ein Vergangenes]. Thereby it has lost for us genuine truth and life, and has rather been transferred into our ideas instead of maintaining its earlier necessity in reality and occupying its higher place. What is now aroused

2 But even with such statements about art's condition in his time, there are still some scholars dedicated to Hegel's philosophy who see in the *Lectures on Aesthetics* a camouflage of this thesis (cf. Rutter 2010: 42-43); regarding that, it is worthy pointing out that Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* consist of a compilation made by his student Heinrich Gustav Hotho after his death, using both Hegel's own manuscript and transcriptions from students who attended his lectures. Therefore, because it was not written by Hegel himself, its legitimacy has been put into question in the past couple of years, while the publications of such transcriptions (including Hotho's, which is considered to be one of the most complete and useful sources on Hegel's aesthetics) has simultaneously been carried out. Despite all that, regarding the end of art thesis, even if it was camouflaged, it can still be found in the version that Hotho compiled and published in the 1840s and which became the reference for many other thinkers who engaged with Hegel's aesthetics before these transcriptions even began being published from the 1990s on – that includes Jameson and Danto, who are important references to this text and who deal with the Hotho edition; Pippin and Rutter, both scholars of Hegel, also frequently quote Hotho's edition in their works. On account of all that, the traditional edition of the *Lectures on Aesthetics* will serve as the main source for this article.

> in us by works of art is not just immediate enjoyment but our judgment also, since we subject to our intellectual consideration (i) the content of art, and (ii) the work of art's means of presentation, and the appropriateness or inappropriateness of both to one another. The philosophy of art is therefore a greater need in our day than it was in days when art by itself as art yielded full satisfaction. Art invites us to intellectual consideration, and that not for the purpose of creating art again, but for knowing scientifically what art is (Hegel 1989: 25-26)[3].

This perspective of Hegel's end of art thesis is based on the argument that "neither in content nor in form is art the highest and absolute mode of bringing to conscience the true interests of the spirit", for "precisely on account of its form, art is limited to a specific content" in such a way that "only one sphere and stage of truth is capable of being represented in the element of art" (Hegel 1989: 23). The intellectual scenario of modernity creates a more reflective worldview, which demands more than the direct representation to the senses. Hence, art is no longer "the highest mode in which truth fashions an existence for itself" and human beings do not bow their knees before works of art as they used to (Hegel 1989: 141-142). In this first dimension, Hegel deals with the pastness of art, which does not mean that art would no longer be produced, but rather, that it does not have the same relevance that it used to have in contexts such as Ancient Greece and Rome or even the Middle Ages. Artworks are no longer the main mode of expression of the Absolute and humans do not turn as much to art because they live in a world in which reflection and rational thought have become the best ways of responding to spiritual demands and of gaining knowledge and comprehension of themselves. Modern times are the era of philosophy and, precisely because of that, this comprehension of spirit's entire historical development – which encompasses the different roles art had throughout history – could have only emanated from a philosophical system.

The second dimension, in turn, can be seen in the section about the dissolution of the romantic artform, in which Hegel states that:

> in our day, in the case of almost all peoples, criticism, the culture of reflection [Bildung der Reflexion], and, in our German case, freedom of thought, have mastered the artists too, and have made them, so to say, a tabula rasa in respect of the material and the form of their productions, after the necessary particular stages of the romantic artform have been traversed. Bondage to a particular subject-matter and a mode of portrayal suitable for this material alone are for artists today some thing past [etwas Vergangenes], and art therefore has become a free instrument which the artist can wield in proportion to his subjective skill in relation to any material of whatever kind. The artist thus stands above specific consecrated forms and configurations and moves freely on his own account, independent of the subject-matter and mode of conception in which the holy and eternal was previously made visible to human apprehension (Hegel 1990a: 235).

3 The quotes from texts originally written in other languages were all compared with the respective translations (when available) to the English language and slightly altered when necessary. When not available, the translations were made by me.

Here, Hegel deals with the consequences of this loss of the status art used to have during the Greek and Roman periods and that of the Middle Ages. Because art is no longer the main mode of spiritual expression, topics that would otherwise be excluded from art can now be brought to light. This allows the artist to explore mundane and profane objects in order to express his subjectivity, as in Hegel's notorious interpretation of Dutch painting of the Golden Age, since the divine is no longer the only theme that is available to art. For these productions, the matter is not what is being represented, but how the artist represents it. From this point in history on, "everything has a place, every sphere of life, all phenomena, the greatest and the least, the supreme and the trivial, the moral, immoral, and evil", and "the more art becomes secular [sich verweltlicht], the more it makes itself at home in the finite things of the world, is satisfied with them, and grants them complete validity" (Hegel 1990a: 221). Since art can no longer be the primary mode of representation a people or a nation has of itself, it is the artist's own subjectivity that he objectively expresses in a work. There is no longer a universal Gehalt, and art makes "Humanus its new saint" (Hegel 1990a: 237). And the reflection itself, which inserts another dimension in the appreciation of works of art beyond the immediate enjoyment, is also absorbed by the artistic production. That allows the artists to experiment with art's modes of representation, pushing them to their limits, as is seen not only in modernism and postmodernism, but already before, for example in the vast number of possibilities offered by the genre of novel[4].

Even though this thesis would be incorporated by many authors in order to explain different contexts in the history of art, it is worth noting that Hegel has in mind the artistic production of his own time. Some elements of the end of art can already be seen throughout the entire romantic era, since it is "the self-transcendence of art but within its own sphere and in the form of art itself" (Hegel 1989: 113) and the beginning and preparation for this new historical stage of art. This entire era can even be seen as a long ending of art, as the overcoming of its previous classical stage, in which art best fulfilled its concept of beauty and perfection. For Hofstadter, several of Hegel's claims about the romantic art in the period of its dissolution also find resonance in the productions made during the last two centuries. For him, "this period is not over", since "there is no other spiritual possibility", meaning that "if Hegel's assertion of the end of art is correct, then the whole of our lasting artistic life, in his understanding of the word, must be romantic" – as a result, "it seems appropriate, therefore, to incorporate his concept of the romantic and compare it with the artistic developments of our time" (Hofstadter 1983: 272). However, it is not any romantic worldview, but the romantic worldview at the time of its dissolution – after, according to Hegel's division, the religious and chivalrous domains are surpassed and subjectivity becomes the main content of art. Hegel discusses several works by artists from this time, in which art has already begun to feel different than it used to feel for ancient peoples. And

4 Which Hegel (1990b: 392) notoriously classifies as the "modern bourgeois epic".

some of these artists and works of art are very much appreciated by Hegel, such as the already mentioned Golden Age of Dutch painting, but also Shakespeare's plays and the works of his contemporaries Goethe and Schiller, to name a few examples. Claiming that art is a thing of the past does not mean that Hegel discredits the artistic production that was contemporary to him; at the same time, it makes clear that his point of reference is his own time and that he was not intentionally making a prediction about the future (however applicable his considerations may be for the forthcoming art), but evaluating the condition of his era.

The artworks of the end of art can no longer be understood as the direct "presentation of a truth to the conscience, but as the consequence of truth [Wahrheitsfolge]" (Henrich 2003: 132-133)[5]. That means that art has a "partial character" as its content and that it is permeated by "reflectiveness [Reflektiertheit]", which stands in an intimate relation with the freedom of the modern artist and the lack of a worldview linked to his nationality and context (Henrich 2003: 130-131). For Hegel, modern art belongs to a time of a "reflective culture [Reflexionsbildung]" that is the "result of the ambivalent self-experience" that constitutes the "modern conscience", which leads to the fact that art is "only one element in the more universal movement of reflection, which is kept in motion by the problem of the mediation of being and self-power"; as a result of being only one element in this modern conscience, Hegel understands art as having only a partial character, which leads to the renunciation of any type of "utopia of arts" (Henrich 2003: 149).

But despite the new diminished role art has in the modern era, it is not as if Hegel merely dismisses its productions. Artworks are still a relevant mode of self-understanding; they are just no longer the primary mode. Gethmann-Siefert (2013: 33) highlights the role art still has, as a symbol of the ethical community [Symbol der Sittlichkeit] that offers "formal culture [formelle Bildung]", which, even if not primary, is still relevant to the contemporary intellectuality; "art retains its significance in the modern – i.e. in my opinion also in today's – world. The only difference is that identification with the content conveyed by art is replaced by a reflective examination of proposals for viewing the world", in a way that "art is no longer a binding orientation in terms of content, but provides formal culture". Art is still connected to the modern worldview, and it is precisely the reflective character of modernity that drives art's questioning of itself that would be the main feature of modernism. And even

5 It must be highlighted that, for Henrich, the aspiration of understanding the art produced after Hegel's time based on his philosophy can, at best, be built upon his arguments. Henrich (2003: 133) concedes that, in order to understand the partiality of the art of modern times, one must go "beyond the limits" of Hegel's own theory of art, because, in his formulations, the expression of truth to the senses is the definition *per se* of art, and if one understands it only as "consequence of truth", so "the conditions of its definitions are no longer fulfilled". Since Hegel himself acknowledges this contradiction, dealing with modern art from a Hegelian point of view means absorbing this whole conceptual and historical development.

though art is no longer the main mode of conveying content, it still is related to the content that constitutes the modern worldview. What modern art can produce are precisely works "that stand in double reflection: through their reflection on the character of being works of art (1), and through reflection on the consequences that are necessarily associated with the formal structures of a successful work (2)", and, by having itself as a theme and by reflecting about itself, a modern work of art becomes a "program" (Henrich 2003: 150). This programmatic character is one of the main features that would be reinforced by modernist production:

> Already from the reflectiveness of the work as such was revealed that its relation to the spectator had to become different from that of the traditional arts. Reflection was also integrated in the contemplation. In the effort of art against form per se, the same thing happens once again and in an even more important way. The first reflection still left the possibility of the freedom of the spectator, even if it gave it a different character from that which the conventional separation of interpretation and intuition [Ansachauung] assumed. The reflection on the meaning [Bedeutung] of form has as a consequence, however, that no longer only the genesis and technique of the work become its own object. It includes now the question of its meaning [Sinn] and of the possibility of adequately recognizing [gewahren] it. [...] Thus, the modern work gains an intensity which, albeit in a completely different sense [Sinn], seemed to be preserved for the mythical era of the arts and which the art of the modern age, emancipated from the religious sphere, could not have had before (Henrich 2003: 153).

And even though Henrich (2003: 154) grants that "there is no occasion to suppose that future art could liberate itself from partiality and reflection, and in all seriousness no motive to yearn for such liberation from the essential", it is as if this programmatic tendency tried to do exactly that and relive the mythical era of pre-modern art. Both dimensions of the end of art highlighted by Hegel can be applied, firstly, to the understanding of modernism. Because what were the avant-garde movements if not a way of pushing art to its limits, either with it reflecting about itself (as in modernist painting and the making of its means, specially its flatness, its own object) or even making complete mundane and profane objects that are surely not spiritually elevated by themselves as its themes (as in many works produced during this period)? In modernism, these new themes show a type of self-criticism art has about itself due to the recognition of the new possibilities it now has with its diminished role. But, by reflecting about itself, art also denies a position of mere observer of the world and tries to go beyond itself; an example of this is the modernist mantra of blurring the boundaries between art and life – which, in a way, is an attempt to retrocede to the time before the end of art, in which art and the public for whom it was produced were a community and in which art was much more immediate and relevant to everyday life. Even a work that shows mundane objects (Duchamp is the main example here) has as its goal reflecting on and criticizing the development of art and the position it had taken in this era.

In his Theorie der Avantgarde, Bürger (2017) describes this process as art gaining autonomy[6] and becoming an institution in bourgeois society after the Renaissance period and the rise of the individual creation of singular artworks; art thus separates itself from the vital praxis and becomes merely art pour l'art or aestheticism. This process is only perceived when the avant-garde movements – as a form of art's self-criticism about itself – point it out and try to restore the relations between art and life. So modernism itself can be seen both as a realization of Hegel's end of art thesis and as a way of fighting this loss of social and intellectual status. It tries to be a sort of "Aufhebung" (Bürger 2017: 68), combining art's pre-modern significance with its modern critical capacity. Postmodernism, in turn, could be seen as the true end of art, in which this loss is no longer fought, for this fight will not be won in a bourgeois, bureaucratic and reason-oriented world. Art then gives up this aspiration of becoming once again the main mode of spiritual representation and fully embraces the possibilities opened by the modern world, adopting a pluralist attitude and/or even attaching itself to the market[7].

6 The reading of art gaining autonomy in the modern era is a fairly common one in the field of aesthetics. It is argued that art has become autonomous for the moderns to the extent that it becomes an end in itself; it can even be argued that art as a concept is a modern invention. This perspective is certainly present in the Hegelian thesis of the end of art, but there is also more to it than that. Werle (2011: 55-56) shows how Hegel's thought offers perspectives beyond autonomy as the "guarantee of a space of its own for art after this space had been lost or stolen from social praxis", for "autonomy, as the most proper field of modern subjectivist art, also implies or 'promotes' the very end of art, long before it is a mere result of it". Art, in its relation with the spirit, as a particular form of its appearance that is based on materiality, already had an autonomy even in ancient times: the relation between art and ancient societies was more organic insofar as it more directly represented their respective spiritual aspirations and was more deeply embedded in everyday social and religious life, but as an intellectual activity – an aspect that is only more recognizable in modern life – it was already separated as an end in itself. No matter how direct the relations between an ancient people and the sculptures that represents their gods or the architectural temples that determine the places of meeting and celebration, they still did not arise spontaneously or unconsciously; they are the effective results of the spirit's work in its process of self-understanding that culminates in the end of art. There was always a degree of autonomy in art, which is only recognizable (and not inaugurated) by modernity, and which leads to the intellectual scenario that is able to make such a recognition.

7 Once again, Burger's *Theorie der Avantgarde* provides an interesting reading of the art after the avant-garde and how it longs for being accepted by the institutions rather than criticizing them: "if an artist sends a stove pipe to an exhibit today, he will never attain the intensity of protest of Duchamp's Ready-Mades. On the contrary, whereas Duchamp's *Urinoir* is meant to destroy art as an institution (including its specific organizational forms such as museums and exhibits), the finder of the stove pipe asks that his 'work' be accepted by the museum" (Bürger 2017: 167).

Hegel and modernism

Hegel's thesis about the end of art serves as the basis for, among many others, Pippin's attempt to understand the painting produced by the generation of European artists that emerged after Hegel had held his lectures on aesthetics during the 1820s. Pippin sees in Hegel's comprehension a very reasonable explanation for the meaning of the modernist experimentations, of an "art produced under the pressure of art having become a problem for itself, in a period when the point and significance of art could no longer be taken for granted", and structures his book as a defense of "Hegel's concept of art, as well as his claim about what is at stake in the historicity of art" (Pippin 2014: 1-2). This concept of art provides the understanding of "artworks as elements in such a collective attempt at self-knowledge across historical time", in which such self-knowledge also plays a major role "in the struggle for the realization of freedom" (Pippin 2014: 25). Right after quoting the aforementioned passage regarding the first dimension of the end of art, in which Hegel sees art as ein Vergangenes, Pippin (2014: 38) discusses Hegel's prophetic tone and how he "provided the resources for an approach to modernism and a way of understanding its relation to the self-knowledge problem", even considering him to be "the theorist of modernism, malgré lui and avant la lettre". For "Hegel's 'pastness of art' claim lands him very close to, if not directly in, the historical situation – the crisis – of modernist art, having to confront, rather than simply assume, its continuing possibility and importance", a situation in which "art itself simply began to look (and read and sound) radically different from art of the past" (Pippin 2014: 8). Pippin understands the modernist movements as a type of reflective art, which is to be expected in the modern context, due to new demands of spiritual self-comprehension.

As a result of this reflective scenario, Pippin points out that interpretation becomes a very important factor in the relations between the public and artworks. His basis for that is a reference to Hegel's claim that art makes "every one of its productions into a thousand-eyed Argus, whereby the inner soul and spirit is seen at every point", and in which "not only the bodily form, the look of the eyes, the countenance and posture, but also actions and events, speech and tones of voice, and the series of their course through all conditions of appearance" are made into an eye in which "the free soul is revealed in its inner infinity" (Hegel 1989: 203-204). Pippin (2014: 51) sees in modernist works precisely this "resistance [...] to conventional appreciation and interpretation, the unfamiliarity and opacity we often see in its thousand 'eyes' can be understood as something like the culmination of this difficulty".

So what is at stake in this reading of Hegel applied to modernism is precisely the aspect mentioned above, of a reflective comprehension of oneself with regard to its own past. Modernity is the first period in which art becomes aware of itself, and this development culminates in modernism. With modernism, this awareness grows to such a level that art aims to become something different than what it used to be, at least with regard to its modes of representation,

trying to conceive other means to expose its conscience. This is what constitutes such a resistance to conventional appreciation and the need of interpretation, because art starts to demand more from itself and, hence, from its spectators. Modernism saw the art from the past as easily graspable, whether due to the more immediate relation between the public and the works in ancient and medieval times or to the fact that the art in the dawn of modernity allegedly did not make much demands from its public, as if it had already accepted its new relegated status. In the period of the dissolution of the romantic artform, art represents mundane and even trivial objects because it is no longer the primary mode of spirit's self-apprehension.

The prevalence of such objects constituted the alleged crisis that prompted modernism. An example of this contradiction can be seen in genre painting by the Dutch: while Hegel understands the exhibition of such objects as representations "in which the productive artist himself lets us see himself alone" (Hegel 1990a: 229), or, in other words, as representations of spiritual subjectivity – which is understood as the reconciliation of the subject with objectivity and as the expression of the modern human being through the material effectivity of art –, even a philosopher of his own time, Schelling (1966: 65), sees some of the Dutch works as "the most coarse [derbsten]". Hegel, however, recognizes the new status of art and that the implications around it do not mean that art becomes irrelevant or useless, even though he still avoids the "utopia" and "programs of a universal artwork", as opposed to Schelling, who still longs for the primacy of art, which causes him to dismiss this partial productions in his "dream of an epic of the modern world in which the idealistic gods of the new era are implanted in the nature for the last and supreme synthesis" (Henrich 2003: 130). It is this widespread comprehension of such works, that saw them in a crisis, what drove modernism to try to overcome this era of art by resisting the conventional ways of appreciation and interpretation.

And almost paradoxically, this differentiation from the art of the past – here meant this art that modernism saw as mainly produced for mere exhibition in museums in the bourgeois era – also meant a recovery of the art from the past way before; the historical development narrated by Hegel in his aesthetics shows how art loses relevance during its history, due to the new spiritual necessity, in modern times, of intellectual reflection. Art, thus, becomes relegated to a secondary function rather than having primary significance for the public. For Hegel, the value of art in modern times is connected with its capacity of arousing intellectual consideration. Modernist art, by incorporating such reflection in itself, tries to fight this loss of relevance and to become once again the main mode of spirit's self-apprehension, what it was before it was overcome by rational thought in modernity, which meant the end of the era of art. Modernism is, dialectically, an embracement of the reflective possibilities brought by this new historical context of self-apprehension and the negation of the very relegated status that results from this new reflective era. It is this embracement of reflective possibilities that makes art become a problem for itself as something whose significance can no longer be taken for granted.

Another author who investigated Hegel's comprehension of art in modern times was Rutter. And even though his book is not focused solely on modernism and in fact is more directed to the modern arts in a much broader sense (with deep discussions on Goethe, Dutch painting of the Golden Age and Lawrence Sterne, to name a few examples), Rutter still tries to grasp one of the most important modernist expressions: abstract painting. He first interprets it through a Hegelian point of view by establishing a comparison between abstract painting and instrumental music. Autonomous instrumental music (which Hegel lived long enough to see become more important) could be meager in terms of representing the spirit, especially if compared to the power of music that accompanies a text[8]. Hegel was afraid instrumental music could fall into the condition of being something produced only for specialists, giving up its potential for spiritual expression and becoming more about skills than anything, which is something abstract painting could also be guilty of. But even though Hegel favors music that is accompanied by a text, Rutter still sees in his aesthetics a defense of the liberation of music from texts and concludes that he could have had the same opinion regarding the appreciation of abstract painting, had he been around during the time of its rise in the artistic scene inaugurated with modernism. The reason for this is that, "unless there is some principled difference in this case between sound and vision", Rutter believes "it seems reasonable to think that Hegel's commitment to the representation of objects and bodies is simply an artifact of his experience rather than a principled position" (Rutter 2010: 117). Rutter argues that Hegel could also have seen in the abstract painting of modernist artists such as Kandinsky and Rothko the same employment of the magic of colors that he mentions in his aesthetics: "in so handling all the colors that what is produced is an inherently objectless play of pure appear", "a fusion of colors, a shining of reflections upon one another which become so fine, so fleeting, so expressive of the soul that they begin to pass over into the sphere of music" (Hegel 1990b: 80-81).

The employment of the magic of colors is a privileged means of expressing subjectivity, the reason why Rutter understands abstract painting as akin to music – and autonomous instrumental music in particular –, the most interior and subjective of all arts in Hegel's system. But the Kolorit also relates to the exploration of painting's flatness and its possibilities, as Rutter emphasizes, also mentioning Dutch painting of the Golden Age. When discussing the relations between color and sound – "just as in music the single note is nothing by itself but produces its effect only in its relation to another, in its counterpoint, concord, modulation, and harmony, so here it is just the same with color" – Hegel brings up ter Borch's ability to depict satin: "each spot of color by itself is a subdued gray, more or less whitish, bluish, yellowish, but when it is looked at from a certain distance there comes out through its position beside

8 However, it still has its value when it has "development", for instrumental music "cannot simply linger in continuous consonance; there must be interjections or marked musical events, further housed within an overall cadential structure" (Eldridge 2007: 141).

another color the beautiful soft sheen proper to actual satin" (Hegel 1990a: 228)[9]. Rutter (2010: 118) sees here a discovery "of the tension between flatness and depth that is among the organizing ideas of modernist painting". It is such tension that modernist art critic Clement Greenberg considers to be the essence of modernism, and that is entirely related to these new reflective requirements modernist art makes from itself and its spectators. The limitations imposed by the flatness of painting caused not only the development of techniques that at first tried to overcome such limitations (and that were not only limited to color, but to drawing and perspective too), but also promoted discussions about painting's own means and what could even be expressed through its flatness.

Rutter, as Pippin, sees in his reading of modernism through Hegel an art that makes a discovery about itself and, in this discovery, reflects about its very own nature. Even though they both add an element to Hegel's conception of the state of modern culture, seeing an art that becomes reflective, it is worth highlighting that, for Hegel, as discussed in the first quotation on the end of art brought above, it is not art itself that becomes reflective, but it arouses reflection. But, as Henrich (2003: 149) notes, even though Hegel "did not acknowledge the reflectiveness of the work of art itself" and that he "could describe the reflection at best as the formation [Bildung] of the poeta doctus [...]", there is still the possibility of, "against his will", seeing "in his own theory" that the "work of art itself must have the character of being reflected and of implying itself as a work of art". After all, the work of art is inserted in this cultural context of modernity and reflects it in itself. This reflective capacity prompted the reaction modernism tried to incorporate in art, responding to the productions of the early modern days.

Modernism is a type of art that becomes reflective, an art that aims to be more than just the production of trivial images that had allegedly defiled artistic production in the few centuries before; modernist art sees itself as a way of reaffirming and reclaiming the status art had lost. Modernism aims to become more than what art was in modern times prior to the emergence of its movements. In this sense, it must be noted that the adjectives "modern" and "modernist" are not necessarily synonyms. While "modern" refers to a way of seeing art in comparison with the art from the past – which was a relevant topic of discussion since the emergence of aesthetics in the context of 18th century German philosophy –, "modernist" refers to this self-consciousness elevated to a whole new level. It is no longer a matter of simply recognizing art's position in the historical development of the spirit, but of seeing what this position allows. There is also the possibility of demanding more from art and even trying to recover the role it once had but in a much more conscious way about this role. Because, even if art in ancient times was not unconscious about itself and the expression of spirit – since it belongs to the first level of the absolute

9 One work to which Hegel may have been referring is the one called *Galante Konversation*, acquired in 1815 by the Gemäldegalerie of Berlin. There is also a slightly bigger version of the work that belongs to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, which Hegel could also have seen during his trips to the Dutch capital.

spirit, together with religion and philosophy[10] –, it was still not conscious of the whole process the spirit would go through, a process that would cause the very own decline of its role and relevance.

Modernism reacts to the modern art that allegedly accepted this loss of relevance and the expansion in the circle of objects that can be represented. While Hegel sees the value of the "triumph of art over the transitory, a triumph in which the substantial is as it were cheated of its power over the contingent and the fleeting" (Hegel 1990a: 227) in the expression of subjectivity, this vision is not unanimous. With the loss of art's capacity of being spirit's main mode of highest representations, the modernist ideology does not see a powerful message that is conveyed through the art that preceded it, and these artworks are dismissed because of it. It is as if modernism only understands the negative side of Hegel's claim about the end of art, in which, "if we keep before our eyes the essential nature of works of art proper (i.e. of the Ideal), where the important thing is both a subject-matter not inherently arbitrary and transient and also a mode of portrayal fully in correspondence with such a subject-matter, then, in the face of works of that kind, the art products of the stage we are now considering must undoubtedly fall far short" (Hegel 1990: 223). Modernism, in response to the modern art that comes before it and falls short, not only sees itself as capable of being once again much more significant to society, but in a way that it would actually be able to influence it through its productions. However, as it shall be seen in the following discussion of postmodernism, this falling short is the result of the development of art itself, and dealing with it is of fundamental importance to the art of today.

Hegel and postmodernism

As seen above, Hegel's aesthetics can be employed in order to understand modernist art insofar as it incorporates this capacity of critical reflection that starts to be demanded by the human spirit when art is deemed insufficient for its self-apprehension. By reflecting about itself and its history, art tries to regain its status of pre-modern times – which, in this context, means trying to be more than a mere aesthetic experience. During the period of modernism, art tries to resist its loss of relevance and partial character by incorporating reflection in such a way that it dialectically tries to become once again the privileged means of representation of the Absolute. However, this era also comes

10 In the oral additions of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, Hegel (1995: 33) says that "§385. [...] The spirit is already the spirit in the beginning, but it does not yet know that it is this. It has not itself already grasped its concept in the beginning, but only we who contemplate it are the ones who recognize its concept. That the spirit comes to know what it is, this constitutes its realization". It is only in the absolute spirit that "§381 [...] the idea grasps itself – neither only in the one-sided form of the concept or of subjectivity, nor only in the equally one-sided form of objectivity or of effectivity, but in the perfect unity of these moments that are different of it, i.e. in its absolute truth" (Hegel 1995: 22).

to an end, which evokes once again the application of Hegel's end of art thesis to the comprehension of postmodernism. From a Hegelian point of view, it can be argued that the modernist aspirations are overcome because this loss of art's primary position in the highest modes of self-apprehension is art's natural and inexorable development:

> On the other hand, in the position we have been forced to assign to art in the course of its development, the whole situation has altogether altered. This, however, we must not regard as a mere accidental misfortune suffered by art from the outside, owing to the distress of the times, the sense for the prosaic, lack of interest, etc.; on the contrary, it is the effect and the progress of art itself which, by bringing before our vision as an object its own indwelling material, at every step along this road makes its own contribution to freeing art from the content represented. What through art or thinking we have before our physical or spiritual eye as an object has lost all absolute interest for us if it has been put before us so completely that the content is exhausted, that everything is revealed, and nothing obscure or inward is left over any more. [...] But if the essential worldviews [Weltanschauungen] implicit in the concept of art, and the range of the content belonging to these, are in every respect revealed by art, then art has got rid of this content which on every occasion was determinate for a particular people, a particular age, and the true need to resume it again is awakened only with the need to turn against the content that was alone valid hitherto [...] (Hegel 1990a: 234).

The modernist aspiration of making art regain its former relevance as the main mode of conveying spiritual content cannot endure for much time during this new era of reflection in which the spirit demands more than what is feasible of being conveyed through sensible manifestations. Art has already expressed its limited content, and for Hegel (1990a: 236), "is therefore no help to [the artist] to adopt again, as that substance, so to say, past worldviews, i.e. to propose to root himself firmly in one of these ways of looking at things". As a result, "no Homer, Sophocles, etc., no Dante, Ariosto, or Shakespeare can appear in our day; what was so magnificently sung, what so freely expressed, has been expressed; these are materials, ways of looking at them and treating them which have been sung once and for all"; but still, "it is the appearance and activity of imperishable humanity in its many-sided significance and endless all-round development which in this reservoir of human situations and feelings can now constitute the absolute content of our art" (Hegel 1990a: 238-239). Art has played its role in the process of spirit's self-apprehension and is no longer the primary mode of conveying spiritual content. The first mode of representation that the spirit has is the one of material exteriority, but through the exploration of this means, the spirit is able to reach its full potential and the point of its final stage, which demands its self-apprehension through the intellectual means of philosophy. Even if this final stage involves a culture of reflection and this reflection is absorbed by art itself, it will always be limited to the exterior means and its apprehension by the senses. The primary mode

of conveying content will be that of philosophy and art will be relegated to the function of reflecting this content in its productions.

Art will not be as relevant as it once was, but this loss of relevance at least offers the possibilities of exploring new ways in the portrayal of human subjectivity, which becomes the new content of art as opposed to a universal Gehalt that had prevailed in the symbolic, classical and romantic artforms. These new possibilities, the freedom that Hegel identified in the art of his own time, resemble very much the condition of postmodernism. In fact, even though Pippin (2014: 43) spends the vast majority of his book applying Hegel's vision to the comprehension of the modernist period in which Manet produced his impressionist paintings, he also recognizes that the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, especially the aforementioned second dimension of the thesis about the end of art, can also "almost sound like a celebration of postmodernism", because "for the contemporary artist, anything from the past is available, any style, tradition, technique, any theme or topic".

There are two possible interpretations of this new possibilities postmodernist art has before itself. Jameson and Danto, while engaging with Hegel's text, propose a reading of this moment in which modernist art became too a thing of the past and the period of the end of art could finally establish itself with no more disturbances that attempted to regain the primary position regarding the conveyance of content. Their visions, however, are conflicting in terms of what it means to postmodern art. While Jameson, a prominent critic of postmodernism and whose reading of Hegel is inspired by a Marxist orientation, sees the postmodern condition in the arts as a loss of modernist aspirations and the realization of Hegel's thesis that gives way to another main form of grasping the world (that of Theory), Danto praises the postmodern art and sees it as a positive fulfillment of Hegel's thesis about the end of art, insofar as the works incorporate in themselves art's very own philosophy and art finally becomes completely free to reflect about itself with no more ties to a mimetic or an ideological perspective. Such mixed interpretations also serve to elucidate the role of Hegelian dialectics and the internal contradictions postmodern art poses to itself by negating the modernist period, which was itself a negation of the late romantic period, which itself was too a negation of art's concept as realized in the classical era.

In his text "'End of Art' or 'End of History'", Jameson (1998: 73) brings up this question through a Marxist point of view, which sees an overlap of economics and culture in a way that "everything, including commodity production and high and speculative finance, has become cultural; and culture has equally become profoundly economic or commodity oriented". He sees in modernist art precisely the claims Hegel had made about the art of his past, in which art was the main mode of bringing truth to existence: "what has defined modernism in the arts above all is that it laid peremptory claim to a unique mode 'of apprehending and representing the Absolute'", for "it was indeed for us or at least wished to be for us par excellence 'the highest mode in which truth claws its way into existence'" (Jameson 1998: 82). If, at least in Hegel's view, art ought

to be dialectically overcome by philosophy, "rather, a new and different kind of art suddenly appeared to take philosophy's place after the end of the old one, and to usurp all of philosophy's claims to the Absolute, to being the 'highest mode in which truth manages to come into being'" (Jameson 1998: 83). This art was precisely that of modernism and by incorporating in itself the necessity for critical reflection that the modern spirit demands, modernism aspires, in Jameson's point of view, to be more than just beautiful, but also sublime[11].

Art, according to Jameson's understanding of it, has two halves, the Sublime and the Beautiful. The end of modernist art means that the brief period in history in which art aspires to be more than just beautiful is "dried up", which means "a return of Beauty and the decorative, in the place of the older modern Sublime, the abandonment by art of the quest for the Absolute or of truth claims and its redefinition as a source of sheer pleasure and gratification (rather than, as in the modern, of jouissance)" (Jameson 1998: 86). But the role of the Sublime would ultimately be taken over by Theory, "as that seemed to supplant traditional literature from the 1960s onwards, and to extend across a broad range of disciplines, from philosophy to anthropology, from linguistics to sociology, effacing their boundaries [...]" (Jameson 1998: 84-85). For Jameson, this moment of Theory would actually be a confirmation of Hegel's "premonitions" that art would be superseded by philosophy. If modernism was a way of art trying to be more than just beautiful, or, as in Jameson's term "transaesthetic", postmodern art would be the resurgence of beauty due to the loss of this transaesthetic aspiration. In Jameson's Marxist understanding, it happens due to the further development of the cultural industry, which becomes even greater than it was during the time some of the modernism tried to criticize it. As a consequence, this "return of the Beautiful in the postmodern", Jameson (1998: 87) writes, "must be seen as just such a systemic dominant: a colonization of reality generally by spatial and visual forms which is at one and the same time a commodification of that same intensively colonized reality on a world-wide scale". For that matter, it is worthy noticing that Jameson sees in postmodernism not merely a style, but the historical periodization of culture that is deeply intertwined with a new stage in global capitalism.

11 For Jameson, sublime does not have the exact same meaning it had during the period of aesthetic formulations made by classical German philosophy from Kant to Hegel, but means, rather, the belief art has of being something beyond mere aesthetic. He says: "The sublime was for Burke an experience bordering on terror, the fitful glimpse, in astonishment, stupor, and awe, of what was so enormous as to crush human life altogether: a description then refined by Kant to include the question of representation itself, so that the object of the sublime becomes not only a matter of sheer power and of the physical incommensurability of the human organism with Nature but also of the limits of figuration and the incapacity of the human mind to give representation to such enormous forces" (Jameson 1991: 34). But due to the development of capital and of urban life (Jameson is particularly interested in modern and postmodern architecture), "the other of our society is in that sense no longer Nature at all, as it was in precapitalist societies, but something else which we must now identify" (Jameson 1991: 35).

Danto, on the other hand, still sees something positive in his application of Hegel's end of art thesis to the comprehension of the art produced from the 1960s on. He also understands modernism as an art that tried to be more than just art: in his interpretations, each of the avant-garde movements had a philosophical comprehension of the essence of art and tried to defend its point of view at the same time they tried to eliminate others. They also denied the aspiration of a mimetic representation of reality in order to pose the question of art's true philosophical nature. For Danto (1997: 30), modernism was the Age of Manifestos, in which "to accept the art as art meant accepting the philosophy that enfranchised it, where the philosophy itself consisted in a kind of stipulative definition of the truth of art", as well as, most of the time, "a slanted rereading of the history of art as the story of the discovery of that philosophical truth". It is followed by post-historical art and the age of pluralism for, if "a manifesto singles out the art it justifies as the true and only art, as if the movement it expresses had made the philosophical discovery of what art essentially is", he argues, "the true philosophical discovery, I think, is that there really is no art more true than any other, and that there is no one way art has to be: all art is equally and indifferently art" (Danto 1997: 34). This mentality, which had the goal of differentiating true art from alleged pseudo-arts from other movements, would be overcome in the 1960s with pop art. The main example for Danto is Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*, giant replicas of a mass consume cleaning product that show that from this moment on, anything can be a work of art and that the difference between a work of art and a mere object cannot be stated simply through visual inspection[12].

Danto sees it as a positive thing that art has gone through this process because it is this very process that allows it to be what it is supposed to be. Art becomes its own philosophy and, by reflecting about itself, realizes that there is no way it necessarily must be. Modernism movements and avant-gardes, no matter how open they were to experiment with and to even deny art's predetermined forms, which were related to a mimetic aspiration, were still not entirely open to other forms of experimenting with art that would be against its alleged true essence. For Danto (1997: 46), Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* make it historically possible that the true real essence of art emerges: "the Age of Manifestos, as I see it, came to an end when philosophy was separated from style because the true form of the question 'What is art?' emerged". Danto sees post-historical art as the recognition of pluralism because the question of what art is is not

12 Due to the scope of this article, it is not possible to deeply investigate Danto's reading of Hegel's aesthetics and the criticism he received from scholars specialized in Hegel's philosophy. It must be noted, however, that his thesis about the "philosophization of art" (Danto 1990: 334) – which Danto supports with his reading of Hegel's aesthetics – is contested by, for example, Iannelli (2015: 120), who states that, for Hegel, there is a "sensuous dimensions that determines the ideal limits that art must not exceed if it does not want to become philosophy and disappear". For Iannelli (2015: 127), Danto's reading would be based more on Kojève's reading of Hegel than on Hegel's philosophy itself.

necessarily tied to an affirmation of its essence in a stylistic manner. And the positive consequence is that art finally becomes free to achieve all that was prepared in the modernist era. That means the end of the search for a rigid definition of art and the embracement of complete and total freedom.

And even though they both see postmodernism as more than a mere style, and therefore as a historical condition, there is a discordance between Jameson and Danto regarding the value of this postmodernist production. While Jameson sees it as a loss, Danto sees it as an opening of possibilities that modernism, in its dogmatic definition of art's true philosophical essence, did not allow. Such conflictive readings influence how they both perceive an artist such as Andy Warhol. While examining Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes*, Jameson (1991: 8-9) argues that "it does not really speak to us at all" in the sense of Hegel's understanding of the process of loss of art's position as the main mode of spiritual expression, simultaneously culturally relevant and immediate to the public; and considering how "Warhol's work in fact turns centrally around commodification" (in his Coca-Cola bottles or Campbell's soup cans), Jameson still does not see it as "powerful and political statements", which makes one wonder "about the possibilities of political or critical art in the postmodern period of late capital"[13]. This loss of depth is not Warhol's fault, but the postmodernity itself is to blame, for it effectively carries out the end of the age of art that modernism tried to recover; the further development of capitalism and the cultural industry that absorbs even the works that are critical to it also plays an important role in the sterilization of art. Danto, on the other hand, sees post-historical art as the celebration of the true philosophical nature of art, of an art that is no longer invested in necessarily defending a position of what it must be. Postmodernist art could be anything, like Warhol's works show us: they are free from the "burden of history" and artists are "free to make art in whatever way they wished, for any purposes they wished, or for no purposes at all" (Danto 1997: 15). In fact, Danto's reading also acknowledges the institutionalization of art that some modernists tried so hard to counter, since, for him, the definition of what is a work of art becomes entirely dependent on how the "artworld" perceives an object (Danto 1964: 580)[14].

13 However, Jameson is not entirely distrustful of postmodernist production. He just sees a loss of potential in comparison with what the art from the decades prior tried to achieve. And even when he glimpses a new type of critical art, he does so by recognizing that it will be impossible to retrocede to the modernist era. For Jameson, a resurgence of critical art would mean not longing for the modernist past, but creating new possibilities for the future.

14 This is also a point of view that scholars on Hegel have criticized, since Danto's argument for the legitimation of works of art through an artworld contradicts Hegel's vision of art as something universal, created for the sake of humankind's own self-apprehension. Gethmann-Siefert (2013: 35) is one of these scholars, to whom, according to Hegel's "aesthetic concept" of art as the "result of a world formation [*Ergebnis einer Weltgestaltung*]", "works of art do not become – as in Danto's determination of the art after its end – citizens of a special world, but retain their significance 'for us'". It is also necessary to highlight that, even if this "institutionalist" thesis can be attributed to

Such readings, even if conflicting when it comes to the assessment of postmodern art, still employ Hegel's aesthetics as a way of explaining the development and the changes in artistic production, especially from the 1960s on. It must be noted that both Jameson and Danto have their own perspective, in which they do not intend to necessarily develop Hegel's thesis to its ultimate consequences; they both operate as philosophers and cultural critics themselves, employing Hegel's thought to base their own. By doing so, each of their readings highlights one aspect of the end of art that was mentioned above, with Jameson emphasizing the loss of relevance, and Danto accentuating the freedom and the infinite new possible paths art now can follow, even if such dimensions are intertwined and do not exist without the other. This is a contradictory condition of postmodernity that can be found in Hegel's reading of his own time. While he acknowledges the loss of art's place as the primary mode of conveyance of content, he still values many of the productions of this era, for, even if they are not the primary mode of transmitting content as artworks used to be, they at least convey the individual subjectivity that constitutes the culture of reflection. These works reflect (on) the world in which they exist and that is of great relevance, albeit diminished in comparison with that of philosophy and the reflective potential granted by its purely intellectual means. Postmodernist production cannot be simply disregarded, but it is still necessary and possible to demand and extract something from it; the point is understanding the position of art in the face of rational thought and the contemporary world. The different readings of postmodernism and even the evaluation of its consequences for the culture as a whole show how contradictory this period is and how necessary dealing with such contradictions is for the comprehension of it. And in maturely dealing with this loss of relevance and making use of its almost unlimited possibilities resides a possibility for art to still try to intervene in social life, even if to a limited degree.

Danto, he also persists in search for an essentialist definition of art and puts interpretation and the discovery of the work's embodied meaning as the basis for both the philosopher and critic, allowing "the *art world* to decide whether something is a work of art" and assigning "to philosophy the task of defining the essence of art in such a way that it fits everything judged to be an art work by the art world" (Houlgate 2013: 281). However, Houlgate argues, based on Hegel's logical framework, that Danto adheres to the standpoint of the understanding [*Verstand*] and not to that of the speculative reason [*Vernunft*] in his conception of the essence of art, presupposing it to differ from its appearance as the "simple *negation* or elimination of what is inessential" (Houlgate 2013: 283); as a result, "Danto's radically pluralistic attitude to contemporary art itself rests on what is, to Hegelian eyes, a profoundly conservative and inadequate conception of 'essence'; [...] This means that, for Danto, art's essence does not require art to look any particular way, that it makes no *visible* difference to the way art works look. This, in turn, means that art's essence does not make itself visible, does not *appear* for all to see, in works of art. Yet here lies the problem: for after Hegel's proof that essence *must* appear, the idea that essence does *not* appear is no longer sustainable; nor can Danto sustain the associated, radically pluralistic, idea that art can look any way at all and still be art" (Houlgate 2013: 286).

Hegel's end of art thesis serves as a way of understanding both modernism and postmodernism, because, rather than being seen as a foreshadowing about a specific event in history, it accounts for a profound understanding of art, its function and its historical development in a much broader cultural sense, related to other spheres of intellectual production. By placing art as the first mode of the spirit comprehending itself, Hegel states its cultural significance, especially in a given period of time, the one that started in Ancient Greece and that endured until the Middle Ages. But, simultaneously, he also underscores how it is not spirit's final mode of self-apprehension. Art must be overcome by other modes of self-knowledge, and modernity offers that with the rise of rational thought, of a pure intellectuality that no longer depends on the senses. By incorporating in itself this gain of a reflective capacity, modernist art is the brief period of time in which this development is most radically fought, but it cannot endure for long. The spiritual aspirations of humanity still need to go beyond what is feasible of being expressed to the senses. Even without intentionally making predictions for the future, the conceptual and historical development of art narrated by Hegel's aesthetics allows the understanding of the contradictions of modern and postmodern art.

Even now, with the expansion of postmodernism, it may still take some time for critical thinking to fully respond to postmodern phenomena and their different possible readings and assessments. The goal of this text was not to speculate on what Hegel would have thought or said of modernism and postmodernism, but to show how his philosophy of art and the historical understanding of this concept still offer a way of comprehending the contradictions art poses for itself in the modern and postmodern eras. However foreshadowing Hegel's remarks about the end of art may seem, his philosophy is not about predicting the future, but retrospectively analyzing the process of the development of the human spirit and the contradictions that emerged along the way. Applying Hegel's aesthetics to the understanding of modernism and postmodernism requires a similar procedure. And such theoretical procedure is necessary due to the nature of philosophy and art themselves and their relation in and to the overall state of culture since the dawn of modern times.

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FROM THE POSTMODERN TO THE METAMODERN: THE HEGELIAN DIALECTICAL PROCESS AND ITS CONTEMPORIZATION

ABSTRACT
This article posits that postmodernism and its focus on disenchantment, subjective experience(s), and the argument for the incoherency between modernist conceptions of truth, reason, universality, progress, logic, and knowledge are exhausted and have been transcended by a flexible successor. Named "metamodernism," this new modality addresses the polemics left in the wake of postmodernism like alienation, hyperindividualism, and the breakdown of collectivity and unity. As such, metamodernism represents a more awakened sense of the modernist search for meaning and progress, albeit supplemented with self-conscious awareness of the goal's seemingly unattainability. However, this renewed interest in reestablishing truth, certainty, assurances of identity, self-realization progress, and reinstatement of usable modes of I/We integrality is hardly new at all. Instead, this burgeoning "metamodern" development represents the rekindling of the "negative dialectic" as previously outlined by G. F. Hegel, but now with a heightened focus on its "positive" development, that is speculative philosophy and the pursuit of sublated individuality-in-unity. In this article, I will explore this argument in four sections. I will outline Hegel's process of alienation to reunification as elaborated in "The Phenomenology of Spirit," the "Science of Logic," and the "Encyclopedia of Logic." Next, I will explore how postmodernism buckled under its contradictions, introduce the philosophy of "metamodernism," and argue for a Hegelian reading by focusing on three elements: Ironic Sincerity, Becoming, and Self-Renewal. While only looking at three aspects of a much broader fabric, metamodernism as a cultural shift is not estranged from postmodernism but is instead given life *through* it.

KEYWORDS
metamodernism, postmodernism, Hegel, dialectic, negative dialectic, negation of the negation, metamodern

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Introduction

If one craves to be an individual, where does one start? Does one start defining themselves from a total break from the world, or does one create themselves *through* the world? Or, perhaps, one looks towards the world to reject that which is not seen as themselves, and in this rejection a self is created? The worldview and ideology performed by postmodernism, that being a strange paradoxical blend of hyperindividualism and self-flagellating attempts at exposure therapy to the modalities of servitude and entrapment, could not see that its goal was both insufficient and unoriginal. The goal of modernism, universal individuality, was the goal of postmodernism, albeit rendered self-consciously skeptical and wary of repeating the mistakes of the past. Yet, the goal of the postmodernist worldview forms the basis upon which its successor is built. Dubbed "metamodernism" by some, or variants like "pseudo-modernism" (Kirby 2006), "hypermodernism" (Retsova 2022), and even more clunkily, "postpostmodernity," it is no understatement to say that a new epoch has begun, built upon a sublated variation of modernist optimism and postmodernist skepticism. In this article, I argue that this burgeoning "metamodern" development represents the rekindling of the "negative dialectic" as outlined by G. F. Hegel, but now with a heightened focus on its "positive" third (fourth) development, that is the speculative emphasis on processual becoming and the pursuit of sublated individuality-in-unity, or unity-in-difference. To substantiate my thesis, I will first explore Hegel's "dialectic," a misnomer for a three (four)-step process from abstraction to sublation to abstraction once again in a cyclical process of self-exploration. Next, I will explain the internal polemics within postmodernism that necessitated its overcoming, followed by a description of metamodernism, concluding with a tripartite schematization of metamodernism in light of the Hegelian dialectical process. I will focus on three elements: Ironic Sincerity, Becoming, and Self-Renewal. Others have used Hegelianism in their analytical work on metamodernism, Storm (2021) argues, "metamodernism must negate postmodernism in turn without merely returning to the previous system" (18). In this way, I seek to further such an argument and argue that postmodernism is not dead but sublated, subsumed in the Hegelian dialectic, forming the basis of a new order.

Literature Review

The tentative slowdown of philosophical endorsement of postmodernism is generally attached to the mid to late-1970s to 1980s (Abramson 2015) with its "codification" occurring by the 1990s (Clare 2017), and coinciding with the dissolution of the USSR (Afanasov 2022). While postmodernism's pluralism had its benefits, notably Lyotard's "language games," a central tenet of its ineffective, or incompatible, nature was its moroseness which mistook skepticism for nihilism, the exposure of power politics without helpful remedies, argument of the dissonance between structured meaning with emancipation, and

inevitability of enslavement by some kind of hijacked mode of inexpressible discontentment. By the early 2010s, the zeitgeist had transformed and "pseudo-modernism" signaled the fruition of a syncretic alternative. As such, the imbricated next chapter had begun, built from the weaving of eclectic theories like "multiple modernities" (Eisenstadt 1999) and reformulated versions of Artaud's concept of "body without organs" like the work of Nick Land. Additionally, a nascent desire for new stability emerged, which could not be satiated with the continued usage of postmodernism's allowance for subjective world building and socially-dependent truth creation. However, rather than deflate entirely, postmodernism underwent a period of reinvention, with the "postmodernist sensibility" (Jay 1988) not only fully interrogated but utterly pathologized into a "syndrome" (Morawski 1996).

While epistemologically, some called for scientific "anarchy" as to liberate oneself from codified methodological thinking and attachment to Aristotelian empiricism which undermined innovation (Feyerabend 1975), others sought to destabilize the boundaries between fact and fiction itself (Zavarzadeh 1975). Closer to the turn of the 20th century, the future of the postmodernist project was not a reinstitution of battle lines by the "building of a complex, self-reflexive whole" which took postmodernism's deconstructionist and skeptical antagonism for universals and love of universal plurality and created an introspective alternative (Epstein 1996). As such, the philosophical zeitgeist created after postmodernism has turned into itself, in Hegelian terminology made itself an observed object and the experiencing object (i.e., Hegel's very articulation of actualized spirit), is an era which the *negative* dialectic of postmodernism's love of skepticism and radical cynicism is replaced with an illuminated rediscovery of what postmodernism rejected. Within the post-post-modernist epoch, criss-crossing theories like (post/de)-colonialism, "post-secular" philosophizing, and performatism, among others, and concepts like metaxy, oscillation, anomie, and aporia alienate the self from the self insofar as one is then able to see the framework by which the "I" operates within (Sim 2011). The Gordian moment of postmodernist disillusionment was a necessary return into itself but through different means, on different terms. In this way, post-post-modernism became the rearticulation of freedom and selfhood from the deconstructed self and the reconvening of the thinking I in the form of the conscious object which thinks of itself and thus creates itself but does not take itself for truth just yet. This type of self-aware autonomy encourages a marriage between the awareness of influence, influencer, and influenced. In effect, there is no author, influence, or text distinctions to be had, but rather temporary simulations of their forms (Kirby 2006).

Hegel's dialectic and its positive and negative aspects have been assessed from multiple perspectives in light of postmodernism (Achella et al. 2021, Vaughn 2015). For Salermijn (1971), the negative is exemplified in the contradictory nature of the independent subject from its surroundings, as the conditions for independence only arise out of dependence on said surroundings (19). Conversely, the positive can be understood as the third side of "the logical"

which leads one out of contradiction and into the light of knowing, where the contradiction leads to a higher state of knowing which accounts for the discontinuities and yet leads again to unification and reunification. However, framing Hegel's "dialectical" (i.e., negative) and "speculative" (i.e., positive) stages as quasi-premeditations of postmodernism and its successor, metamodernism, is hardly rare and practically ubiquitous, some of the first to merge Hegel's dialecticism with postmodernism put Hegel into dialogue with meta-thinkers like Heidegger (Malabou 2005). Geoff Boucher's argues that the "enigma of postmodernism" coalesces with Hegelian "discursive totality" or "totalisation," and results in a dialetheic striving for truth and structure through multiplicity, totality, and ambiguity (2000). Thus, postmodernism, framed as radical "deconstructionism," is likened to an equally radical embrace of Hegelian differentiation (Singh 1995).

Others have framed Hegel's dialectic within a frame of postmodernist dissonance between collective service and community development with individual freedom and personal liberty (Luther 2009) while Hegel's theses of "clash and conflict, of truth as relative, of reason as limited and constructed, and of collectivism" have been directly associated with postmodernism (Hicks 2004: 51). For Sartre, Hegel's dialecticism-cum-sublative re/unification of the subject and the object and the fundamental unity between individuals is undermined and frustrated by the subjugation of the I against the We and the power imbalance therein as a result of the lording I over the We who creates truth based on the other lording I's (Rose 2019: 162). Moreover, turn-of-the-century ponderings on postmodernism in light of Hegel from the East European and post-Soviet standpoint reveal the metamodernist "becoming" and oscillating metaxy which does not deny skepticism but instead utilizes it for self-conscious sublation revealing the very "exposition" of conscious living itself (Boym 1999). Postmodernist readings of Hegel tend to reject his community-oriented perspective on "totalization," arguing for the supremacy of "language games" and the "metasubject" (Lyotard 1984). But such critiques have been themselves critiqued for being myopic (Browning 2003) while others have framed Hegel's new seminality as one linked with the "turn to religion" (Žižek et al. 2011). Echoing late-20th century discourses on postmodernism's dogmatism (Ivanova 1998), overcoming the "negative" has been framed through a post-post-modern sense, resulting in a more sympathetic rearticulation of Hegelian sublative reunification which allows for post-structuralist subjectivity and discursive fluidity (Rutzou 2015). Specific infusion of Hegel's dialecticalism from "abstract" to "negative" to the sublative "positive" is expressed in a burgeoning vein of post-post-modernism called "metamodernism" (Dempsy 2023). Process philosophy's focus on becoming already unified post-post-modernism with Hegel, but it is now being furthered in light of the focus on the double negation, or "negation of the negation" (Storm 2021: 6).

From Negative To Positive

In the "Phenomenology of Spirit," one encounters the avatars of the reiterative, three(four)-step, process come to be colloquially known as the "dialectic." Insofar as postmodernism(s) and meta- developments are concerned, this process encapsulates other homologous terms and concepts like the notions of "becoming," "negation," "skepticism," and "sublation," and creates an intricate network of modalities conducive towards a proactive involvement of Hegel in the dying/dead light of postmodernity and its successor. As Forster (1993) articulated, the Hegelian "dialectic" which, it can be said, is hardly a dialectic in the strict sense and more a misnomer for a tripartite cyclicism, is a process of negatively identifying difference, positively reunifying them, and then sublating above such artificial distinctions in the first place. Thus, the "dialectic" as "a method of exposition in which each category in turn is shown to be implicitly self-contradictory and to develop necessarily into the next" (132) is not estranged from postmodernism and its sublated variant but rather a rearticulation of the same process. This will be explored soon enough, but first, I wish to more closely examine this process and its three-qua-four steps as to more specifically demonstrate the advantageousness of applying Hegelian ouroboric processes to explications on contemporary conditions. The use of four, the "fourth term," in Hegelian dialecticism-qua-speculative philosophy, as opposed to three, is an attempt to internalize the "negative unity" or "absolute negativity" which underlines the very process of the spirit's coming-to-consciousness of itself as thinking/thought being and thinking/thought object. Thus, the true face of the Hegelian dialectic is not three but four steps out of and back into the initiator of the process itself, at the point where the third becomes the first negation, "the paradoxical moment which is third since it is already the first moment which 'passes over' into its own other" (Zizek 1991: 3). Hegel himself identifies this shift from "triplicity" to "quadruplicity" and, unlike Theodore Adorno's "negative dialectics" which stops just short of sublation and any promise of reconciliation, Hegel's process encourages sublation *and* its frustrated continuation, thereby encouraging an immortal cyclicism. What can be surmised is that the sublative overcoming of difference is not a state to be permanently achieved. Rather, it is a state to be recognized and then continued *through* lest one fall back into determinant comfortability, with blind individuality breeding the conditions for complacency and ignorance to a natural desire for actualization. But this is what the postmodern sensibility encourages, a stagnation in the quest for sublative actualizing of identity via a desire to overcome skepticism. Instead, skepticism is arbitrarily and superficially embraced and maintained. As Hegel writes, "Skepticism which ends with the abstraction of nothingness or emptiness cannot progress any further from this point" and "must instead wait to see whether something new will present itself and what it will be, in order that it can also toss it into the same empty abyss" (PS: 79). But, Hegel also identifies the nature of his process towards actualization *is* skepticism, or "negative movement," and makes up a subpart of "pure consciousness" and its two modalities, "restless movement" and "unity at rest."

Yet, "pure consciousness" can be likened to a pre-modernist thought style, a natural simplicity in the ways of thinking itself and the construction of the world which concerns itself not with individuality but the ways of the generalized whole. The incipient desire for individuation has not yet occurred, although a negation which is useful towards sustaining itself is there. As noted by Hegel, this first part of the process is the abstraction of everything, "every term or product of thought preserves a stereotyped distinction from every other. Each of these limited abstractions the Understanding [*Verstehen]* believes to be and exist on its own account" (EL: 6.80a). Yet, the second part of this tripartite (not yet quadripartite) process is the push towards individualism and the examination of the self from the abstracted universality which was not yet individualized *as* individual. The first true face of the dialectic is brought about at this stage, with abstracted knowledge being denied and a more genuine desire for truth foregrounded. But, as he warns, unregulated dialecticism can quickly fall into skepticism which, while undergoing a negation, has not concerned itself with negation for sublative purposes. Instead, naive dialecticism "introduces confusion and a mere semblance of contradiction into definite notions" and results in "a subjective see-saw of arguments pro and con, where the absence of sterling thought is disguised by the subtlety which gives birth to such arguments" (EL: 6.81.2). In effect, a dialectical approach is only advantageous when seen as a step in a far larger meta-structure whereupon the skepticism is utilized only insofar as to achieve a sublation from abstract universality but not as to escape it but develop it. Speaking on the skepticism, many have observed the internal lackings *and* contradictions of skepticism, Chiereghin (2009) noting that "The disappearance of whatever has a determinate existence is the universal working of Skepticism. It is able to demonstrate to consciousness the effective nullity and inconsistency of every existing reality" (61). Thus, while holding the power of deconstruction, disproving, critique, and disjunction, if skepticism is not seen as the step towards the sublation of itself, then one is reduced to viewing skepticism as nothing more than deconstruction of universality, however abstract, and understanding, however superficial. Instead, skepticism is a two-form modality, something which exposes nothingness, but in its exposure, its nothingness is then revealed as its positive form. As Hegel writes, "Throughout the changing flux of everything which would secure itself for it, skeptical self-consciousness thus experiences its own freedom, both as given to itself by itself and as sustained by itself to itself" (PS: 4.205). He clarifies in numerous ways, one such being its correlation with "empty idealism" which "only grasps reason in the way reason is initially to itself" (PS: V.238). He later reworks this to argue for skepticism's determinant nature, "the shine of skepticism and the appearance of idealism do immediately have a manifold of determination...the shine exists for it immediately, whatever content it might have" (SL: 11.247). As Heidemann (2011) notes, the differences between skepticism's "destructive" and "constructive" forces are great, the latter vying for "a new [dialectical] positive content" (95).

Acting as the "third term" (or "middle term"), that is the realm of appearances which has designed the simple determinateness of objectified being but equally has denounced its actualization as self-sufficiency of its inner and outer manifestation, once skepticism has initiated its positive ascension, sublation seems within arms reach. Yet, it must be observed that sublation does not equal minimization of the negative differentiation, but rather a systematic incorporation of its processes. As Krahn (2014) observes, sublation (or *Aufhebung*) is not *just* a movement through dialectical opposition but rather a dynamic process which incorporates everything to the service of its actualization. But, as a dynamic process and an aspect of the "movement of knowing" (PS: IV.166), something conceptualized as fulfilling the inner logic of the Hegelian "concept" (*Begriff*), sublation is not something to be so easily achieved, if achieved at all. Further still is its enigmatic character unified by a central prerogative, "Aufhebung is not unrecognizably Aufhebung from one moment to the next, lest the term lose the coherence afforded by a certain continuity" (87). That central purpose, then, is the desire to overcome the limitations exposed by skepticism and renew oneself in light of the negated variant which, while never in full dissolving, remains as an internal discourse conducive towards further iterations of sublative overcoming. It is notable that Zizek (2011) reconfigures sublation as equal to the "negation of the negation" when referencing its inner *raison d'etre*. As he writes, "In it [sublation], radical change (negation) overlaps with the pure repetition of the same. This means that the inertia of the Old and the rise of the New also coincide in the dialectical notion of repetition" (483), and in this modality what is new is also what is old. But, what is old is what was once new and was sublated to a higher state. As I will address later, arguments against postmodernism's charade of the new is itself sublated when, in reflection, its internal discourses seem to struggle towards a sublated variant of what it attempts to negate, that is modernism. In a way, the process of sublation towards a self-annihilating yet self-discovering unification of being and not-being, a totalistic embrace of cyclical becoming, reflects the third step of the Hegelian dialectical shift from constructive forms of skepticism towards proactive forms of searching for self-in/as-unity. The emphasis on processual becoming, if one accepts that the "negation of the negation" and other forms of "absolute negation" are simply (re)articulations of sublation, helps clarify what occurs within the process of sublation itself. As Hegel writes, "In one determination [of Being], nothing is the immediate, that is, the determination begins with nothing and this refers to being" while "the [second] determination [of Becoming] begins with being and this passes over into nothing – coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be." However, he concludes the thought by saying, "but each rather sublates itself in itself and is within it the opposite of itself" (SL: 21.93). Here, the true nature of sublation seems reflected not in the annihilation of something but the very opposite. "Negation is what allows us to return anew" (Haas 2014: 7), thereby reintroducing the self to the self.

But the journey continues past sublation, "the third term through which it mediates itself with the other, namely, with itself" (PS: C.BB.568), and continues

onto what Zizek (1991) called the "fourth movement." That is, "the void of self-relating negativity which becomes invisible once we look at the process 'backwards', from its Result" (8). Reconfigured, the extended variation of the traditional tripartite modality of the Hegelian dialectic is reflective of the double sublation-cum-double negation of the very contingent existence which is the actant of the sublative process in the first place. If such a continuance seems arcane, that is because it is. To dwell upon the negation of the doubled negation as a sublative process itself is to retroactively seek the very process of simple universalism⁄skepticism⁄sublation as within itself from the very beginning and whose very process must itself be sublated. But to what is such a sublation occurring? What realm lies beyond? Returning to Hegel, this mythical "fourth term" is, "the unity of the first and the second moment, of the immediate and the mediated" (SL: 12.247). However, a difference should be noted between the "third" and the "fourth" given the latter could be construed, in light of Hegel's words, as the higher-order variant of sublation itself. Hegel himself suggests this when he breaks down the three base movements of his dialectic process towards actualization. As he writes, "the third is the immediate, but the immediate through sublation of mediation, the simple through the sublating of difference, the positive through the sublating of the negative." Moreover, "the two first moments of triplicity are abstract...but this third is the conclusion in which the concept mediates itself with itself through its negativity and is thereby posited for itself as the universal and the identity of its moments" (SL: 12.248). An authority on the process's continuation and the fourth extension, Kristeva (1984) argues that negativity *is* the fourth aspect of the Hegelian dialectic, that negativity-as-sublation is always present right from the beginning of the process. "A negativity inseparable from the Hegelian notion of Being is thus precisely what splits and prevents the closing up of Being within an abstract and superstitious understanding [*Verstehen*]" (113), and with this one finds themselves back where they started. Of course, it is not so simple. Negativity as the arcane "fourth term" is not simply the third in a sublated variant but rather the underpinnings of the whole structure itself, and that force which "disturbs the unity of Self and Being, and therefore of language itself" (Haas 2014: 116). As such an all-pervasive force, the quest to skeptically differentiate is already subsumed within the very process of sublation and higher-order becoming in the first place, and any arbitrary, or simple, universalism or determinateness cannot break down such a force. What Haas calls "a negation that keeps on giving itself with creative abundance" (119) Kristeva calls "heterogeneous contradiction" whose "signifying thesis" jumpstarts the very process of constructive (de/re) construction in the first place. In other words, "The text introduces into rejection a reversal of rejection, which constitutes signifying binding" (1984: 187). Through the process of radicalized (or meta-sublative) becoming. As Hegel notes, "The truth of Being and of Nothing is accordingly the unity of the two: and this unity is Becoming" (EL: VII.88). As one avoids recognizing this inherent unity, the truth of it all still remains, "Being is the passage into Nought, and Nought the passage into Being" (EL: VII.88.5).

Postmodernism's Crisis

When speaking about postmodernism, one must avoid the assimilation of idiosyncratic, albeit imbricated, lines of theorizing which collectively fall within the postmodern zeitgeist. The "postmodern turn" prioritized subjectivity, the dialectic which ruptured the modernist search for transcendence through self-expression with the polemic view of hijacked discourse overtaking and defining the parameters of self-discovery. As a result, poststructuralist theorization came to regard meaning making as socially constructed, where the modernist belief in the emancipatory potentiality of human feeling, affect, and the grosser project of Enlightenment rationalism was now seen as fallible due to the specter of assumed truths, foundationalism, and the irretrievability of organizational unity in truth and futurity. An essential component, however, of postmodernism is its inheriting and reschematizing of modernism, the post-being regarded as dual natured, containing both a destructive (or negating) and a rehabilitating (or affirming) nature. Best and Kellner (1991) note that postmodernist theorists such as Foucault, Lyotard, Toynbee, and Vattimo embody such a Hegelian (read: *Aufhebung*) like sentiment. The main element is its embodiment of "a dramatic rupture or break in Western history...a sense of an ending, the advent of something new" (29-30). But what postmodernism did not realize so readily, or at least prior to late-stage developments, was that within the multiplicity the unity remained and was not dismantled but rather ignored. In other words, what Morawski (1996) called "the sense of exhaustion" (12) became the resolute expression of disbelief in progress itself, replaced, ironically, with a negation. But, as the Hegelian process demonstrates, postmodernism failed to see how modernism defined its very becoming.

The eschewing of postmodernism's fundamental relationship to modernism can be observed in the attempt to schematize the ideology into empty qualifiers like irregularity/chaos, performance/imitation, and uncertainty/indecision. These became the frame of postmodernist negations of modernism. Yet, I posit that it becomes clear, viewing said division through a Hegelian view, that what is seemed as the unmasking of modernist illusion becomes the launching off point for a new set of postulates which do not undermine the dialectic which has unfolded but rather reasserts the discovery of self through the dialectic rather than a submission to it. As Best and Kellner note, "The discourses of the postmodern therefore presuppose a sense of an ending, the advent of something new" (3), but it is not within postmodernism per se that such newness is to be found. The birth of a new paradigm was noted in Lyotard's late-postmodernist writings, "the nascent state" defines the postmodern sensibility, where the aesthetic of modernism, characterized as a nostalgic subliminality for an earlier monistic harmony between man and nature which became severed at the hands of industrialization and its denaturing progeny, is scrapped for the attempted conveying of the inconveyable through the purposeful rejection of the "solace of good forms." But the point is here, "A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern." That is to say, "the increase of being

and the jubilation which result from the invention of new rules of the game" (1984: 80). The euphoria now revolves around the realization that one has not to salivate over potentially reliving the past pursuit of Enlightenment, but rather salivate over the emancipation from it entirely. But rather than disproving Kantian transcendentalism or the idea of the "sublime," postmodernism took them and attempted to disprove them by arguing through various means like anti-foundationalism that the mere idea of subliminality, unity, and liberation through the overcoming of the pain/pleasure binary tantamount to enslavement to fickle notions of the human desire for order.

To Lyotard, postmodernism reflected a prolonged stage of infantile knowledge development, a leaning into the obscurity through disinterest in clarity, and epistemological impressionism which allowed for beginnings on beginnings thereby denying the attainment of any kind of teleological finality. This rumination in endless possibilities without having the requirement to realize any of them led to a prolonged state of anomy which, as it can be argued more than forty years after Lyotard's magnum opus, "The Differend," has never been fully shaken off. However, seeing as history does not stop and with the breakdown of everything including the ontology of even the most fundamental of concepts like subjectivity and reality, from the chaos comes a desire for coherency. If one accepts the Lyotardian definition of postmodernism as "the decline of universalist discourses" and the apathetic rejection of the previously endorsed idealism of the modernist "narratives of progress" (1988: xiii) as the generalized benchmarks of its postmodern zeitgeist, then "the time has come to philosophize" uttered in Lyotard's next breath seems to invoke an era which grows from postmodernism and yet transcends it at the same time. Later Lyotardian writings invoked similar post-post-modernist ideations as those like Epstein (1996). In Lyotard's words, postmodernism and its cacophony of subjectivities leads to their own demise in "consensus" which, hidden behind its hegemonic nature, endorses the idea of a "universal, rational language" (1997: 125). Such fallibility in epistemic descriptions of our world is referred to by Hegel when speaking about sense-certainty, "a simple ensemble of many Heres" and the true universal which lies above the deictic limitations of mediating knowing, becoming practically impossible to convey through speech means (Pinkard 2018: 67). However, early-1990s arguments exposing the postmodern worldview's reliance upon its predecessor more simply expose the Hegelian core of postmodernism. As Pippin (1991) noted, describing the "modernity problem," extreme individualism and liberation from nature led to another extreme, "anomie, consumerism, alienation, disaffection" (7). But, most importantly, a false sense of self-reliance and liberation from pre-modern notions of self-in-world-as-self through. Effectively, postmodernism was actualized modernism and, in the words of Jameson (1991), a coalition of "facile repudiation" and "facile celebration" (61).

As a result of blind sublation, "only subdued diversity is permitted to be publicly expressed" (Sonderling 2013: 16), that which is collectively believed and endorsed. Therefore, postmodernism seems to be both the ticket towards

Hegelian "absolute knowledge" and simultaneously, the obstacle to said sublative stage of being and knowing. To Epstein, the "overcoming of contingent sign systems" marked the fruition of a desire for a state of cogitation which balanced being with becoming with its antithesis, leaving room for the possibility of being wrong, a state which postmodernism fails to allow for, the destruction of the sign/signifier relationship never being the object of self-critique but always taken as the logical continuation of the idealist's conception of emancipatory epistemology. As Epstein continues, postmodernism is played without any logical conclusion and whose beginning has been entirely wiped from view. All there is play and nothing but play, play without an end and play without a beginning despite the desire to understand where one is and how one got there. But there is a limit as "play becomes impossible in a space where there is nothing but play; for this reason play creates another sphere, which it differentiates and protects from itself" (329). Both Epstein and Lyotard recognized the fraught nature of postmodernism's late-stage character, leading its worshippers towards denatured asphyxiation which leads not to promised emancipation but to a seemingly permanent state of slavery to the Wittgensteinian game, desiring stability and receiving nothing but epistemic husks with its heuristic-flavored meat removed. But Epstein argued that the postmodern "principle of difference" also promised a "new wholeness beyond variety in styles, genres, and cultures," a "new, non-totalitarian whole" which embraces its totality but realizes the multiplicity therein (329). Akin to post-structuralist "anti-essentialism," A may be the A, but it unites with its alternates to become a simulacra, becoming wholly true and wholly false. Thus, postmodernism argued incommensurability yet reflected commensurability but found no balm in Gilead there.

In many respects, postmodernism is a false-friend to itself. One apt example is Lyotard's anti-reason, paralogical theory, a Trojan horse for a new move towards rebuking the constraints of postmodernism for a metaxic liberation from stability without becoming stuck in skepticism or rejectionism which, ironically, collapses into modernist principles upon further inspection. From "the [paralogical] failure of reaching consensus on a given question" (Lipovetsky 1999), a sublated form of knowing and truth is constructed which does not design the existence of multiplicity but focuses instead on the larger resonances between the subjectivities which connect them and ultimately form the architectonics of knowledge itself. This dissonance between the quixotic belief in futurity and the derelict state of the present which renders the present, the quixotic futurity previous generations believed in, renders postmodernism such derelict present which leads to the conception in a new present in the future. As Epstein writes, "the purity of the future amid its failed projections" becomes the leading beacon which casts postmodernism as banal and not the end of advancement but a new beginning. "Before us opens an image of the future as a great irony that will never allow itself to be objectified and subjected to analysis" (330), and thus postmodernism's post-ontology is revealed for the hungry believer in a future which comes regardless one desires it or not.

Such a point is succinctly noted by Lyotard himself, "in front of the canvas or the page, consensus is null and void" (216) and the authoritarian desire for consensus is rebuked for a fallible honesty which cannot know itself except as an idea which will become reality only by embracing hope.

It is this central paradoxicality of which Lyotard references when speaking about music's ontology which contains its constructed itself yet contains the conditions for the spontaneous despite its constructed nature, of the planned future and the seemingly unplannable future which collide as to render postmodernism practically antiquarian if not useless. To chase away the fear, the decrepit alienation of nothing by which postmodernism argues for, the breakdown of meaning and the embrace of the arbitrary, self-expression seeks to give understanding to that which cannot be fully understood through the use of language comprised of phonemes, allophones, and the boundaries of linguistic morphology. Chasing away the beast of the terrible nothing, art works allow true transcendence to arise, the sensuous precarity of the "lament" of corporality and ultimate annihilation. Postmodernism cannot provide the individual with anything other than fear and a stagnating sense of what Afansov (2022) calls the "sense of the end." As a result of this despondency over the perceived finality of all things, including social structures, economic models, cultural epochs, international diplomacy, geopolitical dynamics, the historical record, and global power relations, it seeks to reprobate any ideation on the possibility of resolution, instead abiding in unresolved animosity towards the realization of futurity. And yet, as Afansov alludes, philosophizing on new roads emerged, chief among them being reschematizing modernity itself and the ideas of one's relationship with the past and the future, embracing rather than falling into a "sense of the end" as more self-awareness of inevitable futurity. Dwelling upon late-stage postmodernism as conceptualized in Nicholas Zurbrugg's writings on multimedia art, Warren Burt noted how the estrangement from modernist subliminality and the skeptical deromanticization of the quest for emancipation at the teleological heart of postmodernism was turning over itself for a redirected goal. Namely, a never quite solved dialectic between theory and practice, the obeisance towards regulations and prescriptions of bordering and limitations which can be useful towards the pursuit of (post) modernist emancipation and the overcoming of desire for regulation. As Burt writes, "there is an essential dissonance between the activities and natures of those who make things in a boundary-challenging way, and those who seek to classify them" (2000: 189). Again, the taut dependence upon modernism to sustain postmodernism's very being cannot be overlooked even for a minute.

For those like Stravinsky, Berg, Prokofiev, Scriabin, Obukhov, Shostakovich, and the entire "Second Viennese School," even pre-Rosenkavlier Strauss and the philosophies of theosophy, there was strength in pursuing the sublime through limitation and the use of the human capacities for revelatory emancipation. The goal of transcendence through suffering and laborious denial, embracing the pleasure of pain which was to harness the power of the more than beautiful, was worth it as through the raw strife there would be glorious unity

awaiting the martyr for the cause. The beautiful was traded in for the sublime, and the pursuit of that which can only be inadequately captured in the expressive mediums available to the human being was the ticket for an awakening of epic proportions. The "unpresentable" was the goal, and while deromanticized it was never unromanticized, meaning that the goal was worth the strife, for the potential for permanent sublation, even if only in solitary fantasizing, was more real than life itself. Where did this go? The Nietzschean "God is dead" argumentation, secularization of ethics and morals, and the post-Enlightenment withdrawal from belief in unity, laid the foundations for a world which killed history and yet required history to do so. "His death was the life of the world" which birthed a "world of diversity" (Mainländer 1876: 38). As Trilling (1996) ferociously put it, "Universalism demands objectivity; destroys objectivity and universalism crumbles too" (370).

The Fabric of Metamodernism

Having argued for metamodernism's role as the "positive" side of Hegel's dialectical process, that is to say the speculative continuation of the spirit's quest to know itself, it is still insufficient to state that postmodernism's fixation on demystifying the self from the self, viewing self as an object without a desire to rectify its deconstructed state, is the true nature of the Hegelian dialectic. Therefore, I argue that postmodernism represents an incomplete form of raising spirit to the level of self-consciousness of self and the universal space by which self inhabits and is formed and deformed within and through. As a result, the metamodernist "sensibility" (or Weltanschauung, Weltgeist, Zeitgeist), that which lies after the disenchantment from knee-jerk deconstruction, destructuralism, and apathetic skepticism runs its course and the reconstruction of self and object seeks an alternative form which neither lies within self or object but an upwards spiraling which negates fixity and limited being for higher becoming, is the rational continuation. The notions of finality repeating itself rather than futurity being realized, sprawling conceptions of the true and the real, and euphoric embrace of atomized, subjective experientiality over concrete, realistic, and practical approaches towards building knowledge of self and self-in-the-world, as Lyotard, Zavarzadeh, and many others observed, were running stale by the 1990s. As Clare notes, postmodernism "as a means of upsetting the establishment" (92) no longer carries the same meaning as it once did, and if treated to summation in light of Hegel, "simple seeing" does not carry the same fervency. Thus, a renewed desire for a sublated variant of realism, what Jameson (1991) deemed the Hegelian "third term," or "a kind of ascesis of the diachronic" pursuit of chronological pleasure-through-progress (65), is the ticket. A promise of becoming, "the subsistence of being and of non-being" (SL: 21.80), metamodernism is the kiss of the future self looking backwards to look forwards. Without A, B cannot be, and C is the child of A.

A desire for newness in the form of fresh perspectives on the forcibly broken constructs of truth and fiction, of which fictive art and superfiction are

apt examples of, a reconceptualization in constructive ideas of the world and self-in-the-world, and the pursuit of higher-order cognition around themes of self-knowledge, consciousness, and life's purpose (a point which Paul Feyerabend argued benefited from the adoption of a cosmological perspective), now govern our world. As a result, postmodernism and the dialectic (or the "negatively rational") are no longer sufficient in answering the call of our contemporary *Weltgeist* which longs for "Aufhebung." In other words, an upperwards transcendence between negation and affirmation which does not associate with either but utilizes both for the *becoming* synthesis of both concepts which forms something greater. In Hegel's words, "What sublates itself, does not, on that account, become nothing." Rather, it has been "preserved" albeit in a more complex and transcendent manner which fulfills the necessity for actualization (Stirling 1898: 243). Concepts like sublation, the negation of the negation or the "sublation of the negative" (Palm 2009: 106), transcendence, self-reflexivity (Dempsey 2023), and "new Holism" (Khrushcheva 2019), are among the tenets in the discourse on realizing Hegel's three-part conception of everything "true" on the one part and the sublation of spirit into absolute knowing on the other as outlined in the Phenomenology.

I argue that following postmodernism's deidealization after the (attempted) reconstruction of the world order following WWII, the zeitgeist has now entered into a period where the fruition of the spirit's actualization has begun and the third (fourth) part of the phenomenological sublimation of "everything is subjective" is turning over into a new era. Consequently, a process of (be)coming intimately more comfortable with self-conscious, and potentially self-defeating, optimism now sits opposite to what Kant called "transcendental idealism" with an interior view of object as subject converging with the external view of the self as object, resulting in greater levels of self-awareness and appreciation for the unconquerable desirability of grandscale systems which, while not diminishing the chance for individuality, absorb and conceive of it as part of a larger whole. Contextualization of metamodernism's development from the ruins of postmodernism during the final decade of the 1990s into the 2000s reveals that the proliferation of global/glocal dynamics regarding digitalization, the rise of market capitalism as the seemingly autochthonous system of operations, the fall of the Soviet Union yet continuation of international warfare and unending conflicts when peace was naively thought possible, deserved, and desired led to a state of perpetual anxiety. Such post-Cold War anxiety is systematized into two acronyms, VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity) and BANI (brittleness or fragility, anxiety, nonlinearity, incomprehensibility). If one detects the fragrance of skepticism and first-order negation, that is because an intrinsic part of metamodernism is an *allowance of* postmodernity, not a capitulation to it.

One of the reasons for the development of post-post-modernism, of which metamodernism is but one, was the unrealized (read: sublative) promises of modernism and its ineffective antithesis. As a result, a new path was needed where enantiodromic inevitability leads to transcendent good which ushers

in a subliminal stage of holistic monism which does not negate individuality but nurtures a more profound unity between nature and man, mind and body, truth and fiction, and the opposites which sublate to form a larger unity previously eschewed in the name of dialectical subjectivity (Pipere and Martinsone 2022). The "end" of postmodernism is both contentiously fictional and reductively identifiable, the gradual decline in postmodernism's effectiveness as an anti-establishment device for hegemonic frustrations and decline into kitschiness leading it to turn over itself. The 1990s gave rise to "a kind of posthumous postmodernism" (Clare 2017: 93), such a position echoed by other proto-metamodernist thinkers like Mikhail Epstein who noted that the splintering of postmodernism led to a desirable overcoming. As he wrote, "new unities are constructed from the sphere of difference itself, postmodernism crosses over to the next phase of cultural movement" (1996, 328). Such movement initiated a return back into the self, away from the self-destructive entropy within the idealism postmodernity set for itself.

To compensate for playful pluralism, post-post-modernism created itself with the *raison d'etre* of "building of a complex, self-reflexive whole" which could withstand heavy critique of its existence without succumbing to skeptical subjectivities (1995, 328). The obstacle of postmodernism was that in the process of critiquing the pillars of assumed systems of thought, truth, and objective reality it began critiquing itself without knowing, a blind critique of its own existence led to chronic feelings of dissatisfaction which lacked the self-awareness to realize what it had become disillusioned by in the first place. As Epstein writes, the "parodic unmasking of centuries of logocentrism" led to a situation where "profound parody parodies itself" to such an extent that what is pursued is not an orgiastic rehashing of subjectivities but rather its antithesis, or more accurately a sublative unification of that which is the object of negation and negation itself. Postmodernism failed to see that it craved "a possibility of wholeness" (329). It could not sublate, there was no possibility of *Aufhebung*, and the third element of the "concept" could not be initiated. Thus, an endless cycle of dialectical differentiation overtook the transcendent futurism philosophical-artistic movements like Futurism, Suprematism, Constructivism, Symbolism, and early-20th century movements like Russian Cosmism were concerned with.

Put into dialogue with another inherited concept from Hegel and seminal in metamodernist philosophy, namely the "negation of the negation" (i.e., the "positive mode of cognition"), and metamodernism is less a philosophy than a mode of cognitive movement into a motile state of awareness of self, self-in-other, self-in-self, self-in-world, world-in-self, and other-in-self. If the goal of the "positive dialectic" is summarized as "what is objectively given results from the necessary synthesis of pure determinations" (Sarlemijn 1971: 22), determinations synonymize with dialectical assertions of understanding which pass into concept after being dialectically negated and sublated to "a unity of distinct determinations" resulting from previously lapsed moments of determination which ultimately fall into negation, then metamodernist "holism" is

synonymize with "positive reason." The "negation of definite determinations" becomes the factor upon which a new epistemic order is created which, while benefiting from the advantageous aspects of enantiodromia, is the pursuit of a dialectical monistic view of cosmic order, the individual playing a supportive role part, which frees the alienated from dialectical contradictions, the first two stages of Begriff. Through this, connections to Hegel's "negation of the negation" are present, namely the sublimation available through the process of leaning into the exposed contradiction and unanswerable of the dialectical process, the *reductio ad absurdum* resulting from the disparaging of the previously abstracted formations of objective reality which is reconvened with the pursuit of unity educated (not limited) by the awareness of nothing and yet everything, the I and not-I, the subject and the object, the sign and the signifier, and the collective we and the individual as mutually necessary elements to maintain each other. In other words, metamodernism is founded upon the very principle of the double negation.

When the requirements for ontological, epistemological, and phenomenological balance of internal and external being are illuminated, what is realized is that there is no individual I with the collective we, no deconstruction of concepts without first establishing a form. Likewise, there cannot be the we without the I nor the form before the concepts. As Jason Storm notes, the very foundations of metamodernism rely upon Hegelian *Aufheben* to aid in its own upward becoming which, within the halls of the postmodernist-gorged academic establishment, means an escape(e/ade) into standpoint epistemological finality which leads to "antidisciplinarity and new forms of theoretical abstraction" (19), the first stage of the Hegelian "concept." Metamodernist "holism" leans heavily into what Dempsey calls "decentration," or the rising above one's immanent positionality towards a more comprehensive perspective which, while pursuing transcendent absoluteness, is not yet there as to inhabit an pleromic state of uninterrupted transcendence, what Aristotle called the "unmoved mover" who holds the ability for "primary cause" and whose essence gestates all other secondary causes, and yet has risen above as to see itself as itself from a vantage point of the illuminated self. In Dempsey's words, "The new perspective sees things the old one could not and is thus newly aware of its deficiencies" (7). Yet, these 'deficiencies' are the "negative" in which the negation of the negation finds root. Just like Hegel notes, in differentiation, the false and the true are phenomenologically distinct, but when brought into harmony, they unify under new conditions. In this way, Dempsey, Haas, and Khrushcheva unite in the search for "determinate simplicity," the true phenomenology of spirit which knows itself, fulfilling the scientificity of the search for self through and back into oneself through itself. The failure of postmodernism to live up to its own goal was not, in a way, the fault of postmodernism per se but a blindness to the seductiveness of individualism. In this deception, postmodernism inevitably split skepticism, with many going back to the dialectical beginning.

In the Platonic theorizing on forms, it is argued that the "sensible world," equivalent to Hegel's concepts of "sense-certainty" and the "circle of reciprocity"

which argues for the domination of the sensuous-based experience of our world which drives itself from sensible intuition rather than knowledge, is independent of the "intelligible world" which does not derive its existence from beliefs, doxa, or opinion which oscillates between being and non-being. Instead, the latter is the result of the sublation of the dialectic which questions until it comes to "absolute knowledge," gained only through "unmediated insight" of the form in question as to liberate the mind from the tainting influence of bias and the epistemological material world which can only provide a shadow of the real knowledge attainable through transcending towards the right side of the Platonic divided line. Such a theory concatenates Heraclitusean *becoming* with Parmenidean *being*, exemplifying the unmoved mover who gestates movement but does not move, the original cause of the movement of the cosmos, our bodies, atoms, the celestial bodies, the winds, and everything which is, was, and will be. As Thomas McFarlane writes, "being and becoming are both implicit in the nature of the form" (2004). With this very axiom, metamodernism is revealed as having been present right from the beginning of classical epistemology and proto-phenomenological inquiry into the unity of the complexity of our world and its elements. Rather than succumb to the notion of irretrievable difference, it is through difference that all is once again connected, the rupture between the subject and its predicate connected once again and unity is created which produces a harmonious sublation leading us back and into the "universality of spirit." Later in the Phenomenology, Hegel tacitly writes metamodernism's thesis, namely the "movement" of consciousness from immediate "now" to "negative This" to "plurality of nows" to "universal Here" to the "Genuine Also" to the core of the "concept." The new worldview proposed by metamodernism is nothing short of a self-conscious Master/Slave Ouroboric unity.

Schematizing Metamodernism

Within the metamodernist "sensibility" (Dempsey 2023: 14), many elements exist, albeit in different forms depending on the philosopher and the interpretation. Much like (post)modernism, whose internal strains can be teased out in distinct veins like post-structuralism, post-colonialism, deconstructionism, and what has been called "post-secular philosophy" (Sim 2011: 73), so too can metamodernism be combed for fundamental elements which coincide with Hegel's "positive mode of cognition," or the third and final element within Hegel's schematization of a "concept." From the vanguard postulations of Zavarzadeh, late-20th theorizing by Epstein, new-school variations by Vermeulen and Akker, and later expansions by those like Khruscheva, Storm, Dempsey, and Hanzi, emphasis on accessibility, existential optimism, and more complex forms of self-interrogation and deidealized romanticism-qua-realism without reductions into affective sensitivity and excessive nihilism form the crux of metamodernism and its Hegelian potentiality for sublative transcendence. To draw the connection between Hegel's positive overcoming of the dialectical

separation of subject and object and the 'becoming' internality of metamodernism's oscillatory relationship between contradiction and unity, I will explore two elements of my syncretic formulation of metamodernism in light of Hegel's "positively rational" synthesis, or the "determinate negative," to demonstrate how the pillars on which metamodernism stands come from Hegel and should be seen as a larger fruition of the Hegelian dialectic to establish a more comprehensive and ouroboric "absolute knowledge." Reframed as "appropriation" or a "recycling" of previously constructed systems of meaning into newer forms as to serve as the basis for an imitative commonality" (Engstrom 2022), metamodernism's emphasis on "projective/proactive thinking" encourages a hands-on relationship with selfhood and world-building, neither negating or endorsing but rather providing and letting fate decide.

I seek to establish that belief that metamodernism, unlike Dempsey who leans into the "negation of the negation" without acknowledging its "positive" orientation but does embrace the synthetic transcendence at its core, is inherently Hegelian by exploring three concepts, Ironic Sincerity, Becoming, and Self-Renewal. I further contend that metamodernism cannot be understood without starting with Hegel as through his taxonomy of the "concept," or the eternally true which result from the synthesis of a general idea, one's subjective form, and the "real" form (i.e., abstract, dialectic, speculative), one sees the entirety of the path towards metamodernism beginning with modernism *and* postmodernism. Effectively, metamodernism's emphasis on the unification of distrust in structured forms of knowledge yet acquistent admittance of their usefulness and dependence on post-ironic forms of "new directness" (Khrushheva 2020: 21) which look for desired alleviations of chronic epistemic fatigue behind humor, satire, and parody yet simultaneously educated by humanities many failed attempts, define the very foundations of sublative "becoming." In Hegel's words, "to preserve, maintain, and again as much as to cause to cease, to make an end of" (Sterling 1898: 243) typifies the metamodernist zeitgeist and humankind's attempt at futurity. It is this sense that metamodernism is the realization of *Aufhebung* as the synthesis of ending(s), preserving(s), and maintaining(s), with layers of reinvention(s). All that has come before is synthesized as "abstract negativity," the antithetical potency between being and non-being. In this way, when Velmeulen and Akker articulate metamodernism as traversing both/and into a "'both-neither" (2010), what is tacitly invoked is Hegelian sublation, the reunification of self by/from/in/for self.

An essential element of metamodernism is post-ironic sincerity (or sincere irony), stated by theorists as "Ironic self-awareness" (Kirby 2006) or a "simulation of [a] simulation" which parodies irony to such an extent that it becomes itself a serious affair. Such a concept has been dubbed "New Sincerity," where the rose-colored glasses have been eschewed yet the fondness for naïve warmth remains (Lai 2019: 29). Speaking on the subject, Rich (2020) argues that the discovery of self through the usage of postmodernist skepticism cannot provide the individual anything more than contradictions which obfuscate from postmodernism's more intrinsic polemic, namely the embrace of dialecticism

and unmasking but without the continued interest in reconstitution and restoration. As she writes, collapsing "self and world, self and Earth, and self and our animal kin, meaningfully, ironically, and sincerely" (69) cannot be undertaken when using the I-focused, individualistic, and self-centered strategies of postmodernism which, paraphrasing Hegel, reflect a totalistic deconstruction which seeks construction on its own terms without acknowledgment of larger truths conveniently replaced with "convincingness" rather than desires for the "ecstasy" of truth which dissolve the I into the "absolute" We.

From the postmodernist's perspective, irony represent(ed/s) a rejection of realistic affirmations and the adept acknowledgment of modernist incongruencies which may or may not be axiomatic already. However, techniques like "double-coding" and the pessimistic sliding into a "derealization of social reality" (Sim 2011: 18) obfuscated from irony's post-post-modern potential as a mediator between the real and the fiction without having to decry reality for alternatives but rather abide simultaneously in the play of reality construction itself. Concepts like "hyperreality" and "superfiction" epitomize metamodernism's attempted rediscovery of the Hegelian *concept* and the quest for "determinate simplicity" through a reestablishment of grandscale formulas, without sacrificing the awakened realization of their fickle ontology. As Hegel notes, the *concept* must not be understood as being anything in an absolute sense but rather a culmination of everything, including what the concept is not and is at the same time. In his words, "for in the absolute, everything is one" (Pinkard 2018: 14). It can be argued that metamodernism's utilization of self-aware irony, what Nigel Watson calls "a knowing irony" although it is connected to late-stage postmodernism (Sim 2011: 71), is representative of the attempt to grapple with the forgotten subliminality of a belief in abstracted truisms, assumed constructions of the world, and the now awakened mind fed on the dialectic which destroys the abstraction but is still hesitant to reunify. Speaking on the teleological motivations of the Hegelian negation, Haas (2014) reminds that the (postmodern) negative is not a benign or banal act but rather a conscious choice which leads the cogitator through negation but is not content with staying in such a place. As he writes, "[negation] supplies the energy by which some form of kinesis takes place... it is originary, providing the origins for something to come to be, a becoming, even if a becoming by means of a nought" (7). Such an orientation of the negative (i.e., dialectical) was lost during postmodernism's zeitgeist domination, only found in the late formations, consonant with post-WW2 pessimism-qua-optimism-qua-"negative futurity" as the second post-war future seems mired by unescapable hedonism, McDonaldization, and anti-human consumptionism yet simultaneously creating blueprints for its own futurity (Elliot 2022). As a result, irony turned to post-irony as negation turned to itself and laughed.

Another element, which *becoming* is inherent in the "speculative" third element of the Hegelian concept finds resonance with, is continual self-reflective introspectiveness which does not allow itself to be content with "negative" dialecticism insofar as it means the postmodernist sense of stalwart rejection of

supposed universals and entrenched skepticism towards organized frames of knowledge. An integral part of other metamodernist concepts like "New Euphoria" and "New Intellectualism" (Khrushcheva 2020), engaging in metamodern thinking requires an attachment to what Hegel calls "phenomenal knowledge," and a denial of ossified binaries which dialectical thinking has convinced are advantageous tools of liberation. Metamodernist reiterative self-reflectivity, or Becoming, takes its form from the true nature of the Hegelian "negative," the "positive" state where all is collapsed into and onto and for itself as a framework which allows for individuality to be realized. As Haas notes, the journey of consciousness from unrealized "actual" to realized "actual" which combines the "sensuous consciousness" of itself, that "familiar," and the larger "structure of the whole" can be understood as the notion of "Erfahrung." To actualize such a journey, the negative cannot operate on its own terms nor on its own in a void comprised of itself but in tandem with the positive, affirmative, and regenerative companion. Thus, "the act requires something opposite against which to act...negation therefore becomes reliant upon that object for its effective enactment" (2014: 9). Even Hegel seems to herald metamodernism, "It [Being Determinate] is Becoming expressly put in the form of one of its elements, viz. Being" (EL: 7.89).

With the emergence of dialectical negativity and the break between subject and object, in that very act the seeds of a positive transformation have been set, yet such seeds were there as were negativity as were their eventual reunification. As a result, a return to oneself signals a return to grand scale metatheorizing where the universal "I" is not sequestered from the individualistic "not I" but linked and, to borrow the Blavatskian philosophizing of Alexander Scriabin, one must fully exchange "the individual Will for the Cosmic Will" (Morrison 2001: 188). Both Haas' and Scriabin's comments bear similarity with what Vermeulean and Akker regarded as metamodernism's intrinsic elements, namely the "'both-neither" dynamic" which finds resolution in itself and not itself as well as "metaxy" and "atopy," a chronic sense of in-betweenness and sense of "being simultaneously here, there, and nowhere" (2010). As Haas writes, negation is not a fixed condition but an "act of self-opposition" which, in its very condition, acts as its own antithesis and which counters itself with itself towards a higher form of self taking "mediation in immediacy" (2013: 11). Finding no solace in immanence, the "negative" craves for transcendence. Metamodernism solves this craving, albeit momentarily, and the upward spiraling ouroboros, while consuming its own tail, consumes a transformed version of itself having shed its pre-sublated skin. This foregrounding of the "positive" continuation within the "negative" prior to "determinate being" is readable into concepts like Nietzsche's "eternal recurrence" and "amor fati" negating suffering by rendering it "innocent" on the one hand and embracing its liberating potentiality (Kain 2007). Metamodernism's *raison d'etre* can be summarized as the reintroduction to self by itself for itself, thereby shaking off "negative" habits of alienation through meta-observations formed by "negative" separations of self, a process Dempsey refers to as "decentration" (2023:

6). In this way, metamodernism is the fulfillment of modernism *through* the skeptical disproving and speculative substantiation of itself in an act of transcendence through negative unity.

As proto-metamodernist Mas'ud Zavarazadeh wrote, "the metafictionist demonstrates the confusing multiplicity of reality...the naivete involved in attempting to reach a single synthesis of reality in a narrative" (1975: 78). Whether metamodernism is definable as a "zero degree of interpretation" (69) or rather the compliment to a "participatory worldview" which ontologically reduces the distance between "self, society, and nature" (Rich 2020: 8), the point becomes *that which is called metamodernism* emphasizes equal parts reduction with equal parts restoration insofar as both become sublated to higher forms of each other which reduces the distance between them to begin with and shows each to be part of the other. What is described here is the very phenomenology of the Hegelian spirit, or "mediated being...a substantial content which is equally immediately the possession of the I" which "unfold themselves into the form of simplicity which knows its object to be itself" (Pinkard 2018: 23). Metamodern can be synonymized with the Hegelian development of knowledge of the self as both object and subject which has given rise to the realization of truth which finds its plurality within the unity which forms the conditions for the multiplicity itself. At the core of our disenchantment with postmodern fragmentation, the freedom believed to be had in the rewriting of rules concerning the fabric of reality, the dialectical deconstruction of structure, language, and epistemic coherency, was an awareness that something has gone array. Yet, for many this condition is but one element of a more capitulatory "amor fati" and an intrinsic part of post-industrial, neoliberal, late-capitalist existence, the atomization of I from the We.

To this, metamodernism promises something which Hegel had argued for in the 1830s, namely freedom through continuously sublating pursuit of knowledge. The keys are in our hand now but such keys were never ours to begin with, "You are free: you are the text: the text is superseded" (Kirby 2006). While this push and pull of consciousness may be the dialectical stage by which the contending with the precariousness of our knowledge of what we thought we knew, this does not imply we ought to be removed from or apathetic towards the idea of reunification and the modernist ideal, but be aware of its symbiotic relationship with inevitable failure. Instead, Hegelian sublation can be initiated by allowing ourselves not to be pushed back into individualisms but rather find contentment in the discontent of dissatisfaction, disillusionment, yet fervid joy of one's search for 'simple immediacy' and the neoromantic search for truth. The "sense of the end" as Afansov wrote is just the beginning of a return to higher state(s) of knowing and in (re)unity of self with self, fear turns to joy, nihilism to ecstasy, and the river of blood turns back into water, but it was never really blood.

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that the project of postmodernism has effectively ended, having been superseded by its sublated successor, post-post-modernism, with one of its many veins being metamodernism. Moreover, the very nature of metamodernism, that is a metaxy, or oscillation, between thesis and antithesis without the disillusionment and unresolved defeatism of postmodernist skepticism although absorbing essential aspects, is more cognizable when filtered through the relationship between Hegel's "negative" dialecticism and "positive" speculative stages. In other words, the search for universal meaning, purpose, unity, truth, and clarity through a more self-conscious perspective, one which acknowledges the futility of the goal and instead leans into the search without sacrificing the goal per se, forms the conceptual basis for a reschematization of emancipation, liberation, freedom, individuality, knowledge, purpose, and even happiness. Through a negotiation between the pursuit, the critique, and the dream of such things, metamodernism is Hegelian in its core. As such, the "negative" dialectic which sees itself as itself for what it truly is and sublative, "positive" evolution which does not *become* anything new per se but rather folds back into self through itself but this time with the knowledge and awareness gained through the sublative process, can be seen as the movement through postmodernism from modernism to metamodernism. However, metamodernism does not negate what has come before and absorbs it, finding body through its sublation. A quintessential expression of Nietzschian "eternal recurrence," the cycle of unity, separation, and reunification gives new meaning to being human, being an individual, and being free. The estrangement from, attempt at, and disbelief in I/We unity define the metamodernist future.

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THE FORGETTING OF HEGEL IN ERNESTO LACLAU: AN UNFORTUNATE DISENGAGEMENT

ABSTRACT
Ernesto Laclau criticises Hegelian dialectics for allegedly introducing the logic of necessity into Marxism, which, he argues, hinders the consideration of contingency. This article examines Laclau's interpretation of Hegelian dialectics across various works and scrutinises his exploration of the concepts of determination, negativity, and contingency. Revisiting these concepts may offer a non-deterministic understanding of dialectics more aligned with post-foundational political thought, thereby facilitating reflection on social ontology and antagonisms.

KEYWORDS
Laclau, Hegel, Marx, Post-Marxism, dialectics, hegemony.

Introduction

"So forget Hegel".
(Laclau 2004: 148)

Ernesto Laclau has been a persistent presence in contemporary left-wing political theory for over four decades. Since his early works, his ideas have sparked a series of particularly intense debates that have articulated theoretical discussions, hermeneutic quarrels over different authors, and paradigmatic categorical refinement with passionate discussions about contemporary political processes and the historical action of left-wing, emancipatory, or liberation projects. The works compiled in *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* of 1977, for example, sparked controversies, especially due to attempts to reconcile a type of populism and socialism, in a theoretical context marked by Althusserianism and the presence of national liberation movements in countries of what was then called the Third World.

The 1980s and the crisis of the left, the changing political context in Europe and Latin America, had a space for reflection in – perhaps – Ernesto Laclau's most influential work (alongside Chantal Mouffe), *Hegemony and Socialist*

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Strategy: Towards a Radicalization of Democracy (1985). A new reading of Gramsci in a terrain marked by post-structuralism (psychoanalytic and linguistic), a space for new social movements, and the proposal of a radical democracy fueled controversies. The provocative label of "Post-Marxism" clouded many receptions that reacted more focused on denouncing a renunciation of Marxism by labeling them as ex-Marxism (Geras 1987, 1988) or pre-Marxism (Borón 1996), and a concession to postmodernism (Boucher 2000), if not to neoliberalism. However, there were other lucid readings that recovered and examined the fundamental critiques of Marxism, focused on pointing out the "metaphysics of presence" contained in an essentialist (and deterministic) idea of both society and social identities.

The *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (NRR), originally published in 1990, had fewer repercussions, perhaps due to its predominantly theoretical nature and the lesser evidence of the political consequences of intervention. However, the text is fundamental insofar as it operates the radicalization of the anti-essentialist ruptures outlined in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (HyES) and is one of the places where a theory of the political subject is glimpsed (in relation to concepts such as antagonism, decision, myth, and the imaginary). Likewise, in the effort to elaborate a theory of the construction of social objectivity (society), the concept of dislocation is developed as a key to thinking about constitutive failure and options for social change. Associated with this – but analytically differentiated – the stylization of the category of antagonism is a vehicle for thinking about a theory of the subject that, in our view, remains in its infancy and needs to be deepened.

On Populist Reason (2004) has unleashed a controversial deluge. There, on one hand, the exacerbation of two theoretical roots already present in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (HyES), Lacanian psychoanalysis and rhetoric, is evident. The former, present from the outset in works such as "The Impossibility of Society" (1983) and "Psychoanalysis and Marxism" (1987a), the latter hints at a shift from a theory of discourse to a theory of rhetoric inaugurated in works prior to HyES such as "Populist Rupture and Discourse" (1980), through "Why are Empty Signifiers Important for Politics?" (1996) and other articles*, and Politics* (2002) to his latest book *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society* (2014). On the other hand, the theorization of a battered concept such as populism - "the poor relative of political theory" (Laclau 1987b: 25) – and the historical background of left-wing populisms, especially in Latin America and Southern Europe (Greece and Spain), but also of right-wing populisms in Europe linked to xenophobic positions, placed this work among the most controversial. The proposition of populism as a political logic to construct the "people" subject, the relationship with democracy, sovereignty, as well as the question of leadership, has been widely addressed in academic circles, in mass media, and political fields.

In Laclau's work, one of the most intense debates revolves around the thorny terrain of his relationship with Marx or, in other words, the relationship between Marxism and post-Marxism, in which Hegel plays a subterranean role. What are the ruptures Laclau establishes with respect to Marx, and what are

the continuities? What does 'post' imply in relation to Marxism? And what is left of Marxism if we add the prefix 'post' to it? The authors' criticisms of Marxism operate on different levels. Firstly, there is a theoretical disagreement due to a paradigmatic limitation in the conceptualisation of the configuration of social subjects (the question of subjectivity and social classes as agents). Secondly, there is a disagreement with an empirical claim related to the course of history and the development of capitalism towards a polarised simplification of the social. Thirdly, there is a focus on the political project (communism as reconciliation). In this article, we are particularly interested in the theoretical critique situated at the level of social ontology (with consequences for the conception of history) and the shaping of political subjects (with implications for social struggles). The theoretical critique contains a dual argument: the questioning of the idea of 'contradiction' and the abandonment of dialectics within the framework of a critique of the determinism and essentialism attributed to Marxism. This implies the need to forget Hegel.

The hypothesis of this article is that Laclau abandons dialectics due to its deterministic and teleological nature, attributed to Hegel and sometimes to Marx by certain authors who mediate Laclau's reception, primarily Louis Althusser and Lucio Colletti. However, in order to resolve some of the theoretical problems posed by Laclau himself, it is possible to recover dialectics detached from the idea of necessary resolution (such as reconciliation) and linked to an open (and contingent) play between constitutive negativity and necessary precarious positivity. This implies separating negativity from necessary reconciliation and from logical-formal contradiction on the one hand, and rethinking the relationship between contingency and determination by subverting that dichotomy on the other. In the following section, we will review Hegel's presence in Laclau's work before advancing into the potential role that dialectics could play in contemporary political theory.

The Forgetting of Dialectics in the Forgetting of Hegel

In this context, we address a relatively unexplored aspect related to Laclau's relationship with dialectics (which he claims to renounce), whose ontological logic – according to Laclau – is shared by Hegel and Marx albeit with different content. In his own words:

> It is from this point that we must begin our consideration of the Marxist tradition, since at its root there is a discourse anchored in Hegelian teleology. We are familiar with the characteristics that define the latter: the essential determinations of any entity are found in its conceptual specificity, the inherent conceptual contradictions of this specificity compel us to move towards a new entity embodying a new conceptual stage, etc. Marx did not change things at all with his 'inversion' of Hegelian dialectics: if the foundation is 'matter' instead of 'idea', but matter has internal laws of motion that are conceptually specifiable, Marx's materialism is as idealistic as Hegel's. Ontologically speaking, they are not, in fact, different from each other. (Laclau, 2010: 30)

To speak of dialectics is to discuss one of the most debated concepts within Marxism and a philosophical tradition that traces back to the Eleatics, passing through Heraclitus, Plato, Aristotle, and, of course, Hegel. In the specific field of Marxism and political philosophy, controversies regarding its ontological or methodological status have generated thousands of interventions of varying kinds and rigor. However, as we argue, Laclau's abandonment of dialectics operates in the realm of reaction against determinism and the metaphysics of presence, that is, in the ontological terrain. For Laclau,

> Whereas classical Marxism fixed an objective meaning on history which subsequendy operated es an unquescioned transcendental horizon in the analysis of concrete social processes, what we try to do is to historicize the horizon iself, this to say, to show it in its radical contingenry, which is only possible insofar as the radicalization of the interrogation opens the possibility of different contingencies. (Laclau 1990: 161)

Laclau, therefore, proposes – albeit inadvertently – a recuperation of Hegel that consists of historicizing the horizon to demonstrate radical contingency, something that Gramsci had already mentioned as absolute historicism. Laclau (and Mouffe) evokes Hegel in almost all of their works. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, he introduces him to address the problem of articulating elements in the context of hegemony theory when it is preached as an ontological concept (Retamozo 2011). The issue at hand is the loss of foundation of social order with the death of God and the attempt to erect other myths as shapers of society. If the Enlightenment proposed recourse to reason, stemming from the crisis of the conception of the cosmos as an organic unity due to the disintegrating tensions of liberalism and capitalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Romantic generation was able to reinscribe the classical problems of freedom and necessity in a new historical context. The evidence of the absence of foundation (hence the idea of post-foundational thought) forced a consideration of new foundations and the legitimacy of the order of the cosmos (natural and political) but this time as human production. Let us quote Laclau extensively in a clear passage:

> From our present perspective, this is the ambiguity which Hegel's thought presents in its approach to the dialectic of unity and fragmentation. His work is at once the highest moment of German Romanticism and the first modern – that is to say, post-Enlightenment – reflection on society. It is not a critique of society from Utopia, nor a description and theorization of the mechanisms which make possible an order that is accepted as certain and given; rather, Hegel's reflection starts from the opaqueness of the social vis-a-vis elusive forms of a rationality and intelligibility detectable only by reference to a cunning of reason which leads separation back to unity. Hegel thus appears as located in a watershed between two epochs. In a first sense, he represents the highest point of rationalism: the moment when it attempts to embrace within the field of reason, without dualisms, the totality of the universe of differences. History and society, therefore, have a rational and intelligible structure. But, in a second sense, this

> synthesis contains all the seeds of its dissolution, as the rationality of history can be affirmed only at the price of introducing contradiction into the field of reason. It would, therefore, be sufficient to show that this is an impossible operation requiring constant violation of the method that it itself postulates – as was already demonstrated in the nineteenth century by Trendelenburg – for the Hegelian discourse to become something very different: a series of contingent and not logical transitions. It is precisely here that Hegel's modernity lies: for him, identity is never positive and closed in itself, but is constituted as transition, relation, Difference. If, however, Hegel's logical relations become contingent transitions, the connections betwreen them cannot be fixed as moments of an underlying or sutured totality. This means that they are articulations. In the Marxist tradition, this area of ambiguity is displayed in the contradictory uses of the concept of dialectics'. (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 94–95)

Laclau retrieves Hegel's contribution to ponder the problem of constituting order, introducing contingency and questioning the legacy of dialectics, which he believes Marx inherits from Hegel. However, in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (HyES), there are no direct citations of Hegel. Laclau employs two mediations via Marx to approach Hegel: Louis Althusser and Lucio Colletti. Each author serves as a vehicle to address two theoretical problems, whose analytical distinction is worth noting: the issue of social totality (social order) and the issue of subjects (and antagonism). The underlying logic of the treatment is the same and is guided by theoretical decisions seeking to break with essentialism (both of society and identities). Following Althusser, and certainly not an exclusive interpretation of the French philosopher, Laclau attributes to Hegel the idea of a complex totality that self-unfolds (and therefore contains the necessity of a teleology synthesized in the "cunning of reason"). The concept of overdetermination that Althusser (1965) borrows from Freud, on the other hand, offers a (in)determined (or overdetermined) totality open to the play of contingent articulation. What Laclau seeks to recover from Althusser – rightly in our view – is the possibility of overcoming a deterministic version of Marxism that will be radicalized in post-structuralism (by abandoning "determination in the last instance"). The impossibility of fixing an a priori and/or ultimate structure opens up the possibility of thinking about the contingent formation of society as a discursive construction (in the specific sense Laclau gives it as an articulation of elements). The conclusion Laclau draws is relevant in theoretical terms: introducing contingency implies addressing the problem of human freedom and a radical historicism in social formation (which does not mean, as we will see, historical indeterminacy).

The problem – perhaps – lies in the relatively scant attention given to the notion of contingency, its place in political theory, and its relationship with the ideas of necessity and determination. In this regard, Hegel operates as a deterministic, idealistic, and teleological "commonplace," whose conception seeps into Marxism as a shadow from which one must escape. Carlos Pérez Soto directly challenges this assertion, stating that "[b]y never making a distinction between Hegel and the Soviet versions of Hegelianism, Laclau produces

the unfortunate confusion of criticizing in Hegel what could legitimately be criticized in Soviet philosophy. And, in this line, he goes so far as to commit the abuse, already consecrated by Popper, of citing Soviet philosophy when he wants to criticize Hegel. When one examines, in his texts, how he criticizes Hegelian philosophy, what we find is an argumentation completely based on Della Volpe and Colletti, and even on the unfortunate Popperian texts." (Perez Soto 1997: 32) Laclau has acknowledged the influence of Galvanno Della Volpe, although also acknowledging the "exaggerated optimism" initially generated by his arguments against dialectics. In this sense, he affirms, "An idealist philosophy like Hegel's, which reduces the real to the concept, could conceive antagonisms as contradictions; but, as the Della Volpe school in Italy pointed out, it is incompatible with a materialist philosophy like Marxism, which asserts the extra-mental character of the real" (Laclau 2006: 104). In his theory of antagonism, Laclau follows the criticism of the Della Volpe school – especially Colletti's – of dialectical contradiction but deviates from their conclusions (Laclau and Mouffe 2004, Laclau 2012). Antagonism is neither a dialectical relationship nor a relationship of real opposition (as it does not imply a relationship between positive terms), but rather the way in which the impossibility of completeness presents itself. In a text bridging between PIM and HyES, Laclau (1980) had equated contradiction and antagonism, but in HyES he corrects this issue to propose antagonism as a relationship that is neither subsumed as contradiction nor as real opposition (the figures that Colletti takes from Kant).

For Laclau, Colletti starts from Kant's distinction between real opposition (*Realrepugnanz.*) and logical contradiction. While the former can be formulated as a relationship between A and B, where their terms do not lose identity, the latter is a true logical contradiction and can be formulated as "A and not A" (A □ □A). What Laclau extracts from this is that contradiction can only occur at a logical-conceptual level and not as a historical manifestation. In other words, it's a formulation of thought rather than a social process. However, the first type of opposition is configured when two positivities come into contact, negating each other in a contingent process. Therefore, according to Colletti in the Laclauian reading, while contradiction does not enter into history, it is not only possible but necessary for a scientific thought to expel dialectics. Antagonism, in this sense, does not imply contradiction.

The relationship between contradiction, antagonism, and dialectics is crucial to understand Laclau's conception. He diverges from Marx – and by extension, Hegel – by referring to the treatment of this issue in two canonical texts of Marxism: The Communist Manifesto and the Preface of 1859. In the former, the relationship occurs between classes, while in the latter, it is between social relations of production and productive forces. The class struggle can be understood as antagonism without contradiction (since there is nothing inherently contradictory within the relationship of buying and selling labor power), while in the latter, there is a contradiction but not necessarily an antagonism. Therefore, what interests us here is the idea of contradiction (both formal and dialectical).

The attack on dialectics is one of the central points of post-Marxism. For this, a first operation is necessary that prepares the ground for criticism: reducing dialectical contradiction to formal logic. Indeed, it is absurd to maintain that in historical reality one can think under a strict idea of contradiction of the type A and not A, but this does not follow the challenge to dialectical contradiction. According to Laclau:

> The dialectical explanation we have rejected presupposes that if there is an antagonistic (that is, contradictory) relation between A and B, I have within the concept of A everything we need to know that it will be negated by B and only by B. (Laclau 2005: 148)

The problem, of course, lies in what is understood by dialectical contradiction. If this falls under the scheme A and not A, the criticism would be appropriate. However, if the idea of dialectics cannot be articulated under the notion of a formal contradiction, not under the equivocal scheme of thesis-antithesis-synthesis, we find ourselves in another terrain. Moreover, if this is far from what Marx himself understood. Even more importantly, can we sustain dialectics beyond what Hegel and Marx have said? And in that case, what dialectics? Beyond doing justice to Laclau's (in)just critique of Hegel, we are more interested in the ideas that emerge than in an act of philology and exegesis. However, it is worth noting that asserting that concept and the Idea in Hegel can be reduced to a dichotomy of materiality/mentality is, at the very least, a questionable reduction (perhaps of Feuerbachian origin). Marxist theorists still owe us an answer to this question of what is meant by contradiction (dialectic) without resorting to more or less dogmatic formulas. The point of departure for the reconceptualization of dialectics is found in the realm of negativity. Laclau seeks to preserve something from dialectics (negativity) while dispensing with another element frequently associated with it, the supposed necessary resolution:

> The Hegelian notion of negativiry is that of a necessarynegativicy and as such was conceived as determinate negation. That is to sey that the negative is a moment in the internal unfolding of the concept which is destined to be reabsorbed in an Aufhebung or higher uniqy. It is not even necessery here, as has been occasionally claimed, for the final term of the dialeccical rnovement to be positive; even if the system is conceived as a successive movement bettween positivity and negativity, the later is always internal to it. Contingency itself is absorbed as e moment in the self-unfolding of the – necessery. (Laclau 1990: 26)

It is evident that if Hegel affirmed panlogism as a reduction of being to the concept (and if the concept refers to thought and the mental realm), his effort would not merit the place it holds in the history of philosophy. However, if it is possible to conceive with Hegel being as the historicity of humanity unfolding, as the unfolding of freedom and rationality, then we are facing another horizon. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, in one possible reading, is the attempt to address the challenge of thinking the experience of freedom and community.

The Absolute Knowledge implies, in some way, the attempt (and with Laclau we can say: "necessary and impossible") to constitute a community with freedom as a condition of possibility. Hence, Hegel has been reclaimed by communitarian strands in contemporary political philosophy, such as Charles Taylor (1975), and also as the first post-Marxist, as Zizek does (1992). However, Laclau acknowledges in Hegel this idea of the necessity of a limit, although in his view "external," momentary, and not constitutive:

> For Hegel, for example, the perception of a limit was the perception of what is beyond it; the limit, then, lies within the conceivable. Structuralism's radical relationalism would thus be subsumable under the category of the infinite regress. This point could be generalized: the most diverse forms of contemporary thought are permeated by the relational character of identities in conjunction with the impossibility of intellectual mastery over the contex (Laclau 1989: 69–70)

However, negativity in Hegelian thought also resides in the ontological realm, which is equally relevant for post-structuralism. Indeed, it is the inscription of nothingness into being (a constitutive negativity) that remains unmediated in the becoming of human history and needs to be filled in a transition from contingency to determination. A post-foundational reading of Hegel is consistent with his post-Enlightenment attempt to address historical processes under a conception of history that incorporates negativity and the incessant play of filling the constitutive void (of society and social identities).

Slavoj Žižek has been, in many of his interventions, a defender of Hegel against Laclau's critiques, to the extent that Laclau dedicates Section II.B. under the title "Hegel" in "Identity and Hegemony" (2000) to him. In these dialogues with Žižek and Judith Butler, Laclau acknowledges that both authors have joined forces against him to defend Hegel (just as he has joined forces with Butler to defend deconstruction against Žižek, and with Žižek to defend Lacan against Butler's arguments). Žižek accuses Laclau of an "all-too-quick" anti-Hegelian turn, and Laclau responds:

> I cannot simply dismiss Žižek's reading of Hegel, for two reasons. First, because I agree with almost everything he extracts from the texts of Hegel. Second, because I do not think he is projecting onto these texts a series of considerations foreign to the texts themselves, but rather they apply perfectly to these texts (Laclau 2003a: 67).

However, Laclau departs from Hegel on two aspects. The first – here a first citation from the Logic appears – attacks Hegel for his reflection on language. It is strange that from a reflection on the distinction between common language and philosophical language, Laclau draws conclusions about the place of rhetoric in his theory compared to the place of language in Hegelian theory. We can only think of this as a symptom of a necessary shift from discourse to language to include rhetoric, which can be considered a regression concerning the notion of discourse, which not only produces meaning but also institutes conditions of possibility for action, characteristic of a materialist theory of

discourse. This does not imply ignoring rhetoric but rather relocating it and, consequently, detaching it from its ontological function, that is, from the "rhetorical foundation of society" as titled in Laclau's posthumous book (although rhetorical tropes help us understand logics of social constitution). The second aspect highlighted by the author is the rejection of the distinction between form and content (as proposed by Butler, invoking Hegel) and the subsequent deepening of disagreement regarding the concept of concrete universality (or the concrete abstract) (Laclau 2000).

However, while it can be conceded that most uses of "dialectic" in purported Marxist contexts are imprecise (resembling more an idea of complexity, interrelation, or conflict without delving into the definition of contradiction and negativity), it does not follow that the concept should be abandoned, let alone that this is necessarily what must be derived from Hegel's texts. Laclau, in response to the objection raised by Carlos Perez Soto in the aforementioned interventions during his conferences in Chile, states:

> In regard to Hegel, this is evidently a problem of interpretation. In Hegel, there is a duality; on the one hand, we see the subjection of all concrete content to the principle of a rationality that grounds it, but on the other hand, due to the fact that rationality extends to so many concrete contents, rationality itself begins to be colored by these contents, by the concreteness of these contents, and starts to do something that goes beyond itself. All interpretations of Hegel are dominated by one or the other of these types of interpretations; either Hegel is seen as the precursor of Marxism and the precursor of an existentialist conception of history, or Hegel is seen as the first of the post-Marxists. I have taken a line in my reading of Hegel, which tends to emphasize the rationalistic character of the Hegelian system, called panlogicism. There are other authors, for example Slavoj Žižek, who see in Hegel a prefiguration of Lacan and of the thought of the indeterminate character of identities (Laclau 2002: 148).

Dialectics, Negativity, and the Quest for Lost Positivity

In Laclau's work, three main issues can be identified where his theoretical arsenal operates: the constitution of society (ontological), the shaping of social agents (identity-related), and the logic in the field of politics. This is particularly evident in his use of the categories of hegemony, populism, and antagonism, which he also employs to address different problems related to the constitution of society, the formation of political identities, and the dynamics of politics. As argued in some works, this has led to a series of confusions. However, it is crucial to integrate these dimensions into a political theory that is consistent in thinking about the ways in which order is constructed, how its institution is contested, and the agents who carry it out (Arditi 2010, Retamozo 2011). As shown in this article, the (dis)encounter with Hegel and dialectics operates fundamentally in the ontological terrain by objecting to an assumed immanent teleologism. However, this theoretical movement affects other terrains as well because, ultimately, if there is no room for the contingency of the

political, then it makes no sense to think of the shaping of political subjects as a historical and political task.

In this context, restoring dialectics is key to an integrative movement when linking the post-foundational ontological proposal with a theory that helps to understand the configuration of social subjects and their struggles. The recovery of dialectics in post-foundational political thought does not lie in nostalgia for a concept dear to the emancipatory political tradition but rather in its value for thinking about the processes of configuring social order and emerging struggles. This recovery goes hand in hand with the idea of negativity, accepted by Laclau but underexplored in his work. Therefore, separating negativity from the realm of its necessary resolution will be key to our purpose. Let's see how negativity operates in post-structuralism.

In the political theory we are discussing, there is a double inscription of nothingness. On the one hand, as absence (of foundation), which allows for the discussion of a post-foundational political theory (Marchart 2007). The absence of foundation implies conceiving that the foundations of order cannot be conceived a priori (theoretical thesis) and that any attempt to postulate transcendent foundations denies democracy (ethical-political thesis). The conception of a constitutive nothingness of being is clearly of Hegelian inspiration.Principio del formulario

Now, if post-foundationalism is not an anti-foundational theory, it's because it doesn't deny that organizing human life requires providing foundations (partial, contingent, finite) that can be subject to various disputes (class, gender, ethnicity, sexual preference, etc.). What we're interested in recovering here is the presence of that absence (of a void that inevitably needs to be filled), but whose ontic appearance allows for plurality, even if it remains latent.

The absence of foundation is, however, a form of positivity and possibility. There is nothingness (as absence), and that nothingness contains Being (the need for a foundation). But also Being – as foundation – contains that absence (the nothingness) whose filling is retrospective (as Hegel said!) since it sets its own foundations. That lack is already a positivity in not-yet, to use Bloch's turn of phrase, it is the absence of something that is something. As Groppo, following Espósito, argues: "That is, the lack is not purely negative but implies a positive dimension, its presence as a lack. This lack is constitutive, primordial, precisely because it does not come to cut, castrate, prohibit, erase a previous fullness, but is itself prior" (Groppo 2011:59).

The configuration of order implies a conception of negativity to generate positivity (here we have an example of the dialectic of opposites). Producing life implies negating it, as Marx detected with his analysis of living labor and surplus value. Enrique Dussel (1998 and 2007) has meticulously worked on the idea of a constitutive negativity of the order that produces victims whose praxis is the vehicle of emancipation (via the negation of negation). In his terms – and this he recovers from Levinas – totality (social order) produces exclusions by denying the life of part of the community. The recognition of that otherness to the order is the source of analexis and the critical principle of action of the

victims that legitimizes their struggle to negate that negativity and open spaces for the becoming-other of the system to institute orders that reduce negativity and increase the positivity of life. In the production of antagonism, the negation of negation thus appears. The exercise of productive negativity on bodies and subjectivity (indistinguishable, as biopower) is a condition of possibility of life (biopotency).

Articulation, in Laclau's terminology, is not just the ordering of preconstituted elements but the genuine production of social relations (and, in this sense, of life). The difference between Dussel and Laclau is that the former has the advantage of starting from an ethics of liberation that allows him to distinguish genuine struggles (of the victims) from struggles for domination. The latter contributes comprehensive capacity towards other struggles, even those that are conservative. Negativity in post-foundational political thought is necessary as a condition for the production of order, but both negation and what is negated are historical (because social being is historical, and identities are too). Consequently, if there is always negativity, it is possible to think about the construction of demands from dominant sectors in the social totality that feel negated in their historical being, perceiving that their rights are denied (to live in a hierarchical community, to bear firearms, to dispose of women, workers, to own slaves, etc.). It is also possible to conceive situations where the very demandization of subaltern negativity constructs conservative order projects (for example, higher levels of repression and implementation of control devices in response to the demand for security, theocratic regimes, etc.). The elaboration of the demand from an instance of negativity (the meanings to construct an experience of negativity as such) and the reverse, understood as a project (whether autonomous or heteronomous), are political constructions, contingent and historically determined. Constitutive actions (which fill the void of order and produce the negation of negativity) are historical.

Now, our proposal at this point is to take a step further, which consists of no longer considering that contingency subverts necessity but rather subverting that distinction in such a way that it is possible to investigate the constitutive relationship between contingency (which, as Laclau says, empirically is never absolute) and determination. The concept of contingency has little development in Laclau's work, and it is necessary to advance on this matter. From the present point of view, contingency is the reverse of the idea of unique-necessary determination. In logical terms, it means admitting that given a state of affairs A, a state of affairs B does not follow without the determinants that make the transition from situation A to situation B (mediation implies incorporating temporality). Consequently, contingency means a priori indetermination but not pure indetermination. An event B occurs because it is determined by interventions that make it B (that make it necessary). Now, what state of affairs B can follow from a state of affairs A? The shift lies in considering what is logically possible is historically possible or "actually" possible. Laclau says, "And it is also important to note that the repressed possibilities are not all those that are logically possible in a certain situation" – that is, all those

that do not violate the principle of contradiction – [but only] "those that we can call initiated possibilities, those that have had a principle of actualization and have been eliminated" (Laclau 2000: 48). By negation, Laclau introduces the concept of potentiality, and the problem then is determining that what is historically possible involves thinking that something that is currently unlikely given the events we have today may be more (or less) likely tomorrow. Hugo Zemelman (1992) developed the concept of "activation of potentialities" for political praxis based on this situation, intervening in the determinants of the course of history (eventful, microphysical, capillary, and always political). This implies analyzing the conditions of possibility of a historical moment, the condensed power, and the future contents (hence the political importance of the analysis of the conjuncture and political action).

The recovery of dialectical thought – or at least of a dialectical thought – implies understanding how one moves from one figure to another, that is, the constitutive relationship between contingency and necessity in this case. To do this, we must position contingency as ontological constitution but not as a paradoxical historical necessity (which would equate to mere chance) but as a condition of historical determination (history is the result of the incessant interplay of contingency and determinations). Determination should not be confused with determinism, and this has two related consequences. On the one hand, it shifts historical analysis towards the question of the determinants that intervened in making an event happen. On the other hand, political analysis implies the study of open processes (given and ongoing) whose knowledge relates to structures and the practice of determination towards a horizon contained as a project. Consequently, there is a subtle distinction in the relationship between contingency and determination, whether for historical thought or political thought. The former deals with investigating the determinations that gave a process a certain morphology (political, cultural, economic, climatological aspects, including chance and decision), the latter with identifying spaces of activation for praxis. The three fields in which Laclau's theory operates (the political, politics, and political identities) then find their relationship. The conjunctures articulate them: the formation of subjects (which includes the structures that determine them) and political strategy are in tune with "the political," that is, with the ways of partially producing society. Dialectics, as a corollary, becomes an important category in the post-Marxist framework.

In a celebrated Epilogue to the second edition of Capital, Marx had set out to extract from Hegelian dialectics the rational core wrapped in mysticism; perhaps it is time to unwrap the mystical wrapping with which many Marxists and post-Marxists enveloped Hegel's dialectics. Post-foundational political thought has a horizon towards which to walk, that is, rethink the relationship between contingency, negativity, determination, and social struggles.

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Martin Retamozo

Zaboravljanje Hegela u delima Ernesta Laklaua: nesrećno razdruživanje

Apstrakt

Ernesto Laklau kritikuje hegelijansku dijalektiku zbog navodnog uvođenja logike nužnosti u marksizam, što, kako on tvrdi, ometa razmatranje kontingencije. Ovaj rad ispituje Laklauovo tumačenje hegelijanske dijalektike u njegovim različitim delima i pomno ispituje njegovo istraživanje pojmova determinacije, negativnosti i kontingencije. Ponovno razmatranje ovih koncepata može ponuditi nedeterminističko razumevanje dijalektike koje je više usklađeno sa post-fundamentalnom političkom mišlju, čime se olakšava razmišljanje o društvenoj ontologiji i antagonizmima.

Ključne reči: Laklau, Hegel, Marks, postmarksizam, dijalektika, hegemonija.

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Rutwij Nakhwa

AN ABSOLUTE HEGELIANISM FOR POSTMODERN TIMES: HEGEL WITH LACAN AFTER BATAILLE AND DERRIDA[1]

ABSTRACT
This paper examines the Hegelian dialectical procedure of determinate negation in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* through the lens of "failure" in light of its critique by post-Hegelian thinkers, primarily Georges Bataille and Jacques Derrida. Further, this paper shows how the notion of failure remains important in the thinking of both Hegel and Bataille and discusses the Hegelian "labor of negative" as a Beckettian "failing better" in its resonance with Lacanian psychoanalytic praxis. In so doing, this paper highlights how the post-Hegelian praxis of psychoanalysis and even the "anti-Hegelian" thinking of Derrida and Bataille share certain conceptual operations with Hegel's philosophy. The paper goes on to trace the limitations of Bataille's and Derrida's critiques of Hegel, especially through Bataille's notion of "sovereignty" that he opposes to "lordship," which he views as the central concept of Hegelianism. The paper argues that most critics of Hegel (including Bataille and Derrida) misread his notion of "absolute knowing" due to a misunderstanding of the radical difference between the transitions within the *Phenomenology* and the culmination of this series of transitions in absolute knowing. Through dispelling this misunderstanding, the paper argues that absolute knowing remains a crucial conceptual operator to *cut* through the impasses of postmodern thinking.

KEYWORDS
Hegel, absolute knowing, failing better, Bataille, sovereignty, Derrida, Lacan, psychoanalysis, capitalism

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Introduction

In his inaugural address to the Collège de France, Michel Foucault remarked:

> truly escaping Hegel would require appreciating exactly what it would cost to detach ourselves from him. This would require knowing just how far Hegel, perhaps insidiously, has moved in our direction. This would require knowing what remains Hegelian about that which allows us to argue against Hegel, and to measure the extent to which our recourses against him are perhaps a lure that he has set for us, at the end of which we will find him waiting, immobile and elsewhere. (1981: 74-75)

I adduce this remark to highlight the commonplace that post-Hegelian objections to Hegel's philosophy are often (more or less explicitly) anticipated by Hegel himself or, more precisely, and this is Foucault's point, that ostensibly anti-Hegelian positions actually turn out to be remarkably Hegelian – this is the lure that Hegel's philosophical system always already sets up for us. However, the argument of this paper is not simply that anti-Hegelian positions, which are technically "post-modern" insofar as Hegel is considered the culmination of modern philosophy (Förster 2012) — are actually Hegelian. Such an argument implies that postmodern philosophy should merely *recognize* its proper debt to Hegel. Rather, I argue that the problem with anti-Hegelian postmodern philosophy is *not* that it is actually Hegelian but that this philosophy *is not Hegelian enough*.

To this end, I engage the French writer Georges Bataille as my primary interlocutor not only because he's widely considered a "precursor of poststructuralism" whose literary works are now included as "modern classics" (Noys 2000: 1) in the Western canon but also because, as Jacques Derrida (2005) took great pains to point out, he remains one of the most perspicuous readers of Hegel in the twentieth century. This paper takes "failure" in its relation to the Hegelian conceptions of negation and the negative as a privileged entry point into both Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Bataille's "parody" (Ko 2024) of the Hegelian dialectic. The first section considers how failure remains a central driving force for both Hegel's and Bataille's thought and articulates Bataille's and Derrida's criticism of the Hegelian dialectic alongside a certain long-standing Marxist critique of Hegel's dialectical logic as mirroring the logic of capital. The second section persists with the motif of failure, considering how the Hegelian dialectic takes the form of (Beckettian) "failing better," which logically resonates with the praxis of Lacanian psychoanalysis. I engage the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan in this context both because his reading of Hegel (like that of Bataille's) remains thoroughly mediated by the influence of Alexander Kojève but, more crucially, because Lacan remains a symptomatic internal-exception in the horizon of postmodern thinking. The third section focuses on Bataille's opposition to Hegelian determinate negation through the former's articulation of "sovereignty" and goes on to trace the limitations of the Bataillian sovereign operation. The fourth and final section argues that the

Hegelian notion of absolute knowing is typically misread because of a negligence of the difference between transitions within Hegel's *Phenomenology* as a process of sublation (*Aufhebung*: supersession and preservation) and absolute knowing as the sublation of this (process of) sublation. In so doing, I contend that absolute knowing remains a crucial conceptual operator to *cut* through the impasses of contemporary postmodern thinking.

Hegel the Capitalist?, or, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as the Work of Death

In the "Introduction" of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel writes of the book's method with surprising clarity. The object of the inquiry is "phenomenal knowledge" (Hegel 1977: 53). And to know any object, consciousness implicitly follows its own *internal* criterion for what an object of knowledge, in general, is for consciousness. As Hegel puts it: "Thus in what consciousness affirms from within itself as being-in-itself or the True [i.e., an object in the world, R.N.], we have the standard which consciousness itself sets up by which to measure what it knows" (ibid.: 53). Thus, Hegel's phenomenological method makes explicit the internal criterion or standard consciousness implicitly but necessarily follows to know its object. However, what drives the *Phenomenology's* movement is precisely the *failure* of consciousness's *own* internal criterion of (objective) knowledge vis-à-vis its object. The first shape of consciousness, "sense-certainty," has as its object the immediacy of the "this," of the immediate "here" and "now." The *Phenomenology* shows that what sense-certainty believes to be the most immediate and direct knowledge is, in fact, the most abstract and depends on universal (proto-)concepts of "here" and "now." Thus, the failure of sense-certainty, which is also its "truth," leads to the next shape of consciousness or form of knowing: perception (ibid.: 66).

Hegel makes the following crucial point about the *Phenomenology's* method or labor unequivocally:

> Since consciousness thus finds that its knowledge does not correspond to its object, the object itself does not stand the test; in other words, the criterion for testing is altered when that for which it was to have been the criterion fails to pass the test; and the testing is not only a testing of what we know, but also a testing of the criterion of what knowing is. (ibid.: 54-55)

Because what fails is not simply consciousness's knowledge but the very criterion of knowledge, consciousness is forced to alter its criterion, and thereby, the object of knowing itself changes. In Hegel's words, "Inasmuch as the new true object issues from it, this dialectical movement which consciousness exercises on itself and which affects both its knowledge and its object, is precisely what is called experience [*Erfahrung*]" (ibid.: 55). Thus, Hegel describes the *Phenomenology* as the "science of the experience of consciousness" (ibid.: 56). This apparently abstruse point has far-reaching consequences. For

instance, isn't this the basic lesson of Marxian ideology critique? That ideology is not simply false knowledge but the very frame that constitutes what counts as knowledge. And thus, the solution lies not in correcting knowledge but in a different frame.

Hegel himself recognizes that he is proposing something radical against the usual notion of experience wherein change transpires not because we labor to create a different standard or criterion for our experience but due to a chance encounter with something external (ibid.: 55). Thus, *pace* Bataille for whom the "absolute dismemberment" of the negative, the temporary "rupture" of discourse is only "an accident in the ascent" (Bataille 1990: 27) of meaning, for Hegel, because the failure is immanent to consciousness's criterion of knowledge, it has a necessity, albeit a retroactive one: "the entire series" of the shapes of consciousness has a "necessary sequence" (Hegel 1977: 56; cf. Pippin 1993: 54). Indeed, Catherine Malabou has characterized Hegel's dialectic as a dialectic of necessity and contingency, or, of essence and accident: the becoming essential of the accident *and* of essence becoming accidental (2005: 163). Thus, while the temporary rupture of the negative as a failure in and of discourse might appear as something accidental and contingent, this failure takes on a retroactive necessity as consciousness transitions to a new shape that appears as the necessary result of the contingency, which, therefore, also becomes necessary. In other words, the contingency that results in necessity retroactively itself becomes necessary. However, the necessity, in turn, becomes accidental through its failure, and this process continues until (at least) the "conclusive" point of absolute knowing.

To be sure, Bataille admires Hegel because the latter takes failure seriously, in particular, the absolute failure that is death and the notion of sacrifice, which Bataille infamously tried to literalize in his secret society *Acéphale* (Headless) (Noys 2000: 9). Bataille was introduced to Hegel's philosophy through Kojève's lectures (1934-1939) on the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in France, which were attended by many-a-French thinker, including Bataille's friend, Lacan, whom I engage below. Much like Lacan, Bataille's reading of Hegel does not escape Kojève's mediating influence. In his essay on "Hegel, Death and Sacrifice," Bataille (1990) repeatedly, almost obsessively, returns to the following passage from the *Phenomenology's* preface:

> But the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself. It is this power, not as something positive, which closes its eyes to the negative, as when we say of something that it is nothing or is false, and then, having done with it, turn away and pass on to something else; on the contrary, Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being. (Hegel 1977: 19)

On Bataille's account, Hegel takes death, the negative, seriously, but, perhaps, too seriously and, therefore, not seriously enough. As Derrida argues:

> The immense revolution [of Kant's and Hegel's philosophy, R.N.] consisted—it is almost tempting to say consisted *simply*—in taking the negative *seriously*. In giving meaning to its labor. Now, Bataille does not take the negative seriously. But he must mark his discourse to show that he is not, to that extent, returning to the positive and pre-Kantian metaphysics of full presence. In his discourse he must mark the point of no return of destruction, the instance of an expenditure without reserve which no longer leaves us the resources with which to think of this expenditure as negativity. For negativity is a *resource*. (2005: 327-328; original emphases)

Thus, for Bataille (and for Derrida), in Hegel's philosophy, death, negativity, and failure are ultimately subsumed or sublated (*Aufhebung*: superseded and preserved) into a higher sphere of meaning, into the infamous Hegelian totality. As Hegel himself puts it in the above-quoted passage, spirit's "tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being." In Derrida's terms, negativity is a resource from which one gains the "profit of meaning" (2005: 322). Bataille calls Hegel's philosophy the "work of death" (Bataille 1990: 14) insofar as this philosophy sublates the negativity of death, makes it subservient to the work of philosophy, and, in Kojève's "anthropological" reading, also the deadening labor of the worker in capitalism who is "pinned to his work" (Bataille 1990: 17). Thus, on this account, the Hegelian dialectic constantly and necessarily mourns away, sublates, all of its losses, accidents, ruptures and turns them into the ideality of meaning (Gómez 2022). As per Derrida's *Glas*, "The *Aufhebung* is the dying away, the amortization, of death. That is the concept of economy in general in speculative dialectics" (Derrida 1986: 133 A; cited in Gómez 2022: 480). Further in the text, Derrida suggests that the economy of the Hegelian dialectic, its "onto-logic," is coextensive with "political economy" (1986: 133 A).

This criticism of Hegel's philosophy does not remain restricted to the profit of meaning alone but extends to the literal profit of capital in a continuing line of argument in the Marxist tradition (notably, in Theodor Adorno and Moishe Postone) and going back to Marx himself, which contends that the logic of Hegel's idea, spirit, etc., mirrors capital's logic of profit for the sake of profit (Dolar 2022: 123-132). While I will not enter the details of this debate, suffice it to say that contemporary capitalism, or so-called neoliberalism, thrives off of failure, negativity, crises of all sorts, and even death. As many historians (Mirowski 2013) and political analysts (Klein 2007) have demonstrated, capitalism turns its *own* failures into its greatest resource and never lets a serious crisis or disaster go to waste.

To put it briefly, no crisis or catastrophe, whether COVID-19, climate change, or international warfare, is capable of limiting capital; the capitalist machine swallows everything and marches on in its work of death. Marx's image of capital in his *Grundrisse* is aptly described by Gérard Lebrun as "a monstrous mixture of the good infinity and the bad infinity, the good infinity which creates its presuppositions and the conditions of its growth, the bad infinity which never ceases to surmount its crises, and which finds its limit in its own nature" (Leburn 2004: 311; cited in Žižek 2022: 20).

In this view, at its worst, Hegel's philosophy not only succumbs, as Bataille and Derrida claim, to the profit of meaning but also, more devastatingly, to the profit of profit or the logic of capital. Through reading Derrida and Bataille together, one could make the case that both Hegel's philosophy and political economy constitute "restricted economies" that prohibit true freedom or "sovereignty," which Bataille sought (Derrida 2005: 342-350). Curious then that Lacanian psychoanalytic theory as an avowedly anti-capitalist praxis, at least in a certain interpretation, seems to follow this above-elaborated Hegelian logic of profiting from failure, which I turn to next.

Anti-Capitalist Psychoanalysis, or, Failing Better as the Work of Truth

I now consider the extent to which the work of Hegel's *Phenomenology* logically resonates with psychoanalysis, to which Freud (2001) gives the imperative of "working through" and which Jacques Lacan calls "the work of truth" (2007: 78).

At the outset, what brings together Hegel's *Phenomenology* and psychoanalysis is that they both refuse to rely on an external standard and not just of "good" mental health, which psychoanalysis does not seek but, ultimately, of truth. In his text, "The Freudian Thing," Lacan rails against ego psychologists for imposing on the patient their standard of what a healthy ego is (ultimately their own ego) with the promise to (re)integrate her in capitalist social reality (2006: 353). In contrast, the work of psychoanalysis is not about getting the analysand to match up to an external standard (even and especially that of the analyst) but to force them to make explicit (the failure of) their own standard and thereby create a different self-measure. Similarly, the dialectical process does not require the philosopher to actively intervene with her own ideas but only renders explicit what is always already there implicitly (i.e., "in itself" [*an sich*]) in the concept. Hegel's methodological principle would equally apply to the Lacanian analyst. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel asserts: "we do not need to import criteria, or to make use of our own bright ideas and thoughts during the course of the inquiry; it is precisely when we leave these aside that we succeed in contemplating the matter in hand as it is in and for itself" (1977: 54).

The immanently critical approach of the explication of the implicit or the "in itself" avoids the obvious problem of infinite regress: an external standard would always require another standard that justifies why the former is the proper standard. However, apart from this pragmatic consideration of avoiding infinite regress, there is a more crucial (philosophical) reason for the immanently critical procedure of both Lacanian psychoanalysis and Hegelian dialectical philosophy. Infinite regress becomes a problem because there is, strictly speaking, *nothing* to regress to. And not coming to terms with this nothingness or negativity *is* what results in a spurious or bad infinity of regress. On the one hand, there is no substantial human nature to which we have recourse. On the other hand, as Lacan insisted, there is no metalanguage that could provide an external (philosophical-linguistic) criterion to our procedures of (self-)knowledge.

Hegel makes the absence of a first nature abundantly clear in his *Philosophy of Spirit* (2007), in general, and particularly in his philosophy of objective spirit, including the *Philosophy of Right* (2008). In the absence of a "first nature," human beings give themselves their own second nature through a dialectic of habit and (self-)alienation (See Malabou 2005; Novakovic 2017). Put differently, the first nature of human beings is to be determined as naturally undetermined or a "weak nature" (Johnston 2015: 217-261). As it were, the lack in and of human nature, which thwarts any automatic human instinct, persists as the lack in and of language, prohibiting any complete and completely self-transparent (meta) language. This redoubling of lack, which, at the same time, produces an excess (*jouissance*, enjoyment), makes necessary the hypothesis of the Freudian-Lacanian unconscious (See Zupančič 2017). In other words, human nature is the failure to have a substantial human nature (ibid.: 84-93), and human speech is the result of not being able to "say it all" (Lacan 1990: xix).

Because there are no a priori, pre-given external standards or criteria of success, success can only emerge as a retroactive result of failure, which takes a determining role in the discursive-conceptual production of psychoanalysis as well as Hegelian dialectics. At the get-go of the *Phenomenology*, language itself reveals the failure of consciousness in revealing the truth beyond our intended speech. Hegel writes:

> we do not strictly say what in this sense-certainty we mean to say. But language, as we see, is the more truthful; in it, we ourselves directly refute what we mean to say, and since the universal is the true [content] of sense-certainty and language expresses this true [content] alone, it is just not possible for us ever to say, or express in words, a sensuous being that we mean. (1977: 60; translator's parentheses)

In other words, because we are speaking beings, consciousness's relationship to the world is constitutively and necessarily mediated through language, which always fails to capture completely the objects of our knowledge. Thus, for us, experience can only take the form of the failure of (totalized, complete, whole) experience. As Mladen Dolar puts it:

> Language comes too late to capture the experience, but *it is this very inadequacy that ultimately constitutes the experience*—the full presence of experience turns out retrospectively to have been a mirage. This inadequacy will haunt the (natural) consciousness all throughout the *Phenomenology*, to the very last page, for it will always be doomed to saying something else than intended. (2020: 40; original emphasis)

In the *Phenomenology's* final pages, it's precisely this mirage or fantasy of the full presence of experience that absolute knowing breaks or traverses rather than, as is typically believed, fulfills. Like the *Phenomenology*, psychoanalysis works towards traversing the fantasy of complete experience, which is, at once, the fantasy of the subject's full self-presence as a unified, sovereign, self-sufficient whole.

To repeat, in the *Phenomenology*, due to the constitutive lack in human nature and language, there is no external standard of success but only an implicit, internal one, which becomes explicit and fails — and this failure drives the whole process. And because failure is all we have, "an untrue mode of knowledge," i.e., failure, "must not be allowed to run away into an empty nothing, but must necessarily be grasped as the nothing *of that from which it results*—a result which contains what was true in the preceding knowledge" (Hegel 1977: 56, original emphasis). Thus, the *Phenomenology*'s imperative takes the form of a sort of Beckettian failing better; its motto: "Try again. Fail again. Fail better" (Beckett: 1983). And the better implies that we must not simply insist on and repeat the failure of sense-certainty but fail *better*, which makes possible movement and transition from sense-certainty to perception and all the way to absolute knowing. Failure for the sake of failure or negation for the sake of negation is identical to skepticism, or "abstract negation," to which Hegel contrasts his procedure of determinate negation, which grasps that in the result of failure, "a new form has thereby immediately arisen, and in the negation the transition is made through which the progress through the complete series of forms comes about of itself" (Hegel 1977: 79).

I am building upon Samo Tomšič's argument that psychoanalysis pursues the work of failing better. He also makes the connection to Hegel, but only in a single footnote. Tomšič argues that Beckett addresses to the subject the imperative of failing better and

> conceives the process of transformation through the combination of repetition, failure and displacement. The lines indicate a possible link between failure and production [...]. The predicate "better" sufficiently indicates that Beckett does not speak of failure for the sake of failure. In a structure or situation that makes the opposition between success and failure inoperative, invalid or insufficient, a subject can either fail or fail better, but he or she must engage in a repetition, which also means a process of work, in order to bring about a gradual change. (2019b: 85)

To be sure, since modernity at least, the situation wherein the opposition between failure and success is inoperative is not an exceptional situation that one encounters in Hegel's philosophy or the psychoanalytic clinic, but it is the situation of the modern subject as such. In the absence of an external standard coercively or consensually imposed by God or a divinely ordained king, the subject can only choose to fail or fail better — this is the true meaning of self-determination. Slavoj Žižek has proposed the following as a possible formal definition of the subject: "a subject tries to articulate (express) itself in a signifying chain, this articulation fails, and by means and through this failure, the subject emerges; the subject is the failure of its signifying representation—this is why Lacan writes the subject of the signifier as $, as 'barred'" (2011: 311).

In other words, for modern subjects, success cannot simply be a pregiven or predetermined telos to be achieved but necessarily has to be a practical result. As Hegel puts it in the *Phenomenology's* "Preface," truth is not a thing or

an object that can be pocketed like a freshly minted coin (1977: 27). Similarly, Hegel remarks that the true and false cannot treated like oil and water and the false cannot be separated from the true like "dross from pure metal" (ibid.: 23). The *Encyclopedia* echoes this thought: "Otherness or error, as something sublated, is itself a necessary moment of the truth, the truth which only is by making itself its own result" (Hegel 2010a: 282). Thus, any measure of success can only be a retroactive result of the process or labor of failing better, which, I suggest, is a possible way of interpreting Hegel's labor of the negative, at least in the *Phenomenology*.

Failure retroactively makes explicit the standard with respect to which the failure has failed. In other words, the object or criterion emerges through determinate negation, i.e., through an immanent failure and necessity rather than an external one. Derrida's and Bataille's main issue with Hegel is precisely his preference for determinate negation over abstract negativity, which, for Hegel, runs away "into an empty nothing." Below, I consider the reasons for the Derridian-Bataillian opposition and their proposed alternative.

Sovereignty, or, Failure, Pure Failure – Without Further Sublation

In his text on Bataille's reading of Hegel, Derrida quips that Bataille would respond to Hegel's dialectic of determinate negation with a "burst of laughter":

> Laughter alone exceeds dialectics and the dialectician: it bursts out only on the basis of an absolute renunciation of meaning, an absolute risking of death, what Hegel calls abstract negativity. A negativity that never takes place, that never *presents* itself, because in doing so it would start to work again. A laughter that literally never *appears*, because it exceeds phenomenality in general, the absolute possibility of meaning. And the word "laughter" itself must be read in a burst, as its nucleus of meaning bursts in the direction of the *system* of the sovereign operation [...]. (Derrida 2005: 323)

In Derrida's account, laughter is beyond meaning, meaningless, a risk of death that cannot be given any meaning, which he equates with Hegel's abstract negativity. Further, laughter never presents itself phenomenally, does not appear, yet it somehow — exists. Laughter is the meaningless, baseless base, groundless ground of meaning, which makes all meaning possible and is the constitutive exception of the Hegelian system, without which the dialectic cannot get going but at the same time, due to which the dialectical synthesis necessarily falls apart, fails. Laughter makes dialectics at once possible and impossible. Therefore, the Hegelian system necessarily has to repress it to exist (Gómez 2022: 477). For Derrida, laughter marks the imperceptible difference between the Hegelian concept of lordship (*Herrschaft*) and the Bataillian "operation" of sovereignty.

Following Kojève's idiosyncratic interpretation of Hegel's *Phenomenology* through the lordship-bondsman (or "master-slave") dialectic (Kojève 1980: 50; McGowan 2017: 139-141), Bataille takes the concept of lordship as the key to

Hegel's entire philosophical system. Again, lordship represents the sublation, the overcoming of death. As per Derrida, "The lord is the man who has had the strength to endure the anguish of death and to maintain the work of death. Such, according to Bataille, is the center of Hegelianism" (Derrida 2005: 321). And, through the moment of laughter, Bataille subjects the Hegelian concept of lordship to "the rigorous effect of trembling" (ibid.: 320) to get to the point of "sovereignty," which, as Bataille famously claimed, "is NOTHING" (Bataille 2017: 256). In Derrida's words, "Simultaneously more and less a lordship than lordship, sovereignty is totally other. Bataille pulls it out of dialectics" (2005: 323). As Derrida clarifies further, sovereignty is not simply an interruption, a caesura of dialectics that would still retain a relationship to the Hegelian dialectic as its reverse side – as the negative of Hegel's philosophy (ibid.: 327-328). Thus, sovereignty is not even the negation of the infamous Hegelian "negation of the negation," which would constitute some sort of "affirmationism" (Noys 2010: xi) but a much more radical *setting aside* of Hegel's philosophy, which "keeps itself beyond the opposition of the positive and the negative" (Derrida 2005: 344). In other words, the sovereign operation "is convulsively to tear apart the negative side, that which makes it the reassuring *other* surface of the positive; and it is to exhibit within the negative, in an instant, that which can no longer be called negative" (ibid.: 328). Through the operation of sovereignty, Bataille wants to push Hegel's "closed" system to its extreme, to its limit, to rupture out of it, and, thus, move beyond it.

In his text "Method of Mediation," Bataille describes sovereignty as an excess, an "excessive energy," as a "senseless loss":

> The *general economy*, in the first place, makes apparent that excesses of energy are produced, and that by definition, these excesses cannot be utilized. The excessive energy can only be lost without the slightest aim, consequently without any meaning. It is this useless, senseless loss that *is* sovereignty. (Bataille 1943: 233; cited in Derrida 2005: 342)

At this point, it is instructive to quote Lacan's incisive description of capitalism from his *Seminar XVII*:

> Something changed in the master's discourse at a certain point in history. We are not going to break our backs finding out if it was because of Luther, or Calvin, or some unknown traffic of ships around Genoa, or in the Mediterranean Sea, or anywhere else, for the important point is that on a certain day surplus *jouissance* became calculable, could be counted, totalized. This is where what is called the accumulation of capital begins. (2007: 177)

For Lacan, surplus *jouissance*, "enjoyment," has the status of an excess – of a surplus pleasure, or more precisely, a pleasure-in-pain. But, crucially, vis-à-vis Bataille's description of sovereignty as an excess energy and a senseless loss, for Lacan, too, surplus *jouissance* is a senseless loss, a waste, which, however, is not simply an absence or a lack, but an *insisting* absent presence (Zupančič 2006: 157). In the seminar, Lacan compares his notion of surplus *jouissance*

both to the Marxian notion of surplus value as well as to entropy. Ultimately, for Lacan, (surplus) *jouissance* is waste as opposed to simply a lack; the distinction between the two is that in waste, "something is there, yet it serves no purpose" (Zupančič 2006: 158). I will not belabor further the proximity between Bataille's and Lacan's notions of excess.[2] The crucial point is that while Bataille claims that this excess cannot be "utilized" by the economy and thereby constitutes the resistance that is sovereignty, for Lacan, the entire transition from feudalism (i.e., the master's discourse) to capitalism is premised on capital's utilizing, counting, and putting into circulation this excess. Capitalism puts to use senseless waste, the excessive energy that was hitherto lost.

So, finally, does Bataille's excess, the burst of laughter, sovereignty escape capital's utilization? Yes and no. As Tung-Wei Ko (2024) argues apropos of Bataille's entire oeuvre:

> If sovereignty in an elementary sense is equivalent to supreme power, it is a power that is naked of force, of action, and of the ability to transcend. A sovereign act suggests a forward movement, a defiant spirit that might have precipitated the whole movement to its destruction had the need for restraint not asserted itself in time. Bataille, unable to write sovereignly, nevertheless succeeds in making a display of his failure, which in this limited context can be taken as a partial achievement. For this very failure homes in on the reality of the sovereign proper: that it will always remain in a state of suspension.

Sovereignty impossibly aims at something like *pure failure* that is beyond the dialectics of the positive and the negative, master and slave, a death that is not, cannot be, sublated. Thus, sovereignty aims at death to "simulate" (Ko 2024) an impossible moment: "at all costs, man must live at the moment that he really dies, or he must live with the impression of really dying" (Bataille 1990: 20). In a sense, all of Bataille's life and writing could be thought of as so many impossible attempts to simulate the impossibility that is sovereignty – to try to return again and again to the "state of suspension" just before death. Eric Santner writes:

> Bataille's later reflections on sovereignty could be grasped as a set of reflections not on the "discourse of the master" but rather on what Lacan referred to as the "discourse of the analyst," a discourse distinguished by the paradoxical attempt to occupy the place of an excremental remainder that induces, in turn, the other's evacuation or emptying out, his separation precisely from the master or sovereign signifiers that heretofore dominated his libidinal life, subordinated his enjoyment to the servility and service of goods. (Santner 2011: 104)

Bataille, of course, would protest against such a putting to use of sovereignty. While Lacan saw the psychoanalytic cure as a point of "subjective destitution" (Verhaeghe 1998: 15-19) or "symbolic death" (Žižek 2012: 511-515) from

2 On Lacan's unacknowledged appropriation of Bataille's work in Lacan's development of his concept of *jouissance*, see Noys (2000: 3, 31-33).

which would follow a radical reconfiguration of the subject's being-in-the-world, Bataille seems fixated on biological death — the ultimate limit of life but also of Bataille's work.

Benjamin Noys tells us of Bataille's "traumatic initiation" to Hegel (through Kojève's lectures), which made Bataille feel "suffocated, crushed, shattered, killed ten times over" (Noys 2000: 7). In a letter to Kojève, Bataille wrote: "I imagine that my life – or, better yet, its aborting, the open wound that is my life – constitutes all by itself the refutation of Hegel's closed system" (Bataille 1937/1997: 296). As per Noys, after Bataille's encounter with Hegel, all of the former's writings "can be read as a sustained and violent dialogue with the overwhelming force of Hegel" (Noys 2000: 7). From my limited engagement with Bataille's oeuvre, a fateful limitation of Bataille's encounter with Hegel and of his alternative, i.e., sovereignty (Bataille's paradoxical concept without concept) is that Bataille repeatedly creates the conditions from which sovereignty might emerge as a temporary suspension, a suspension that cannot be sustained.[3] The impossibility of achieving pure failure, i.e., the nothingness of death or failure without any further sublation, nevertheless, seems to force Bataille to engage in a process of failing better, not unlike the one elaborated above. Or, more precisely, Bataille engages in a repeated failure to fail, which persists in a kind of Hegelian bad infinity.[4] In contrast, and this is the argument of this paper's next and final section, through absolute knowing, Hegel too, like Bataille, aims at the excess, but Hegel moves from the bad infinity of excess to the true or good infinity of creation from this excess, from the point of absolute knowing.

Before moving on, I must note that, from Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy (1991) to Noys, all serious readers of Bataille lament "a profound *failure* to read Bataille" (Noys 2000: 1) in his assimilation and appropriation by Bataille's so-called followers. For one, Derrida (2005) points out that one cannot begin to read Bataille without reading Hegel, a precondition that, as per him, almost no Bataillians meet. An obvious issue in engaging with Bataille seems to be his insistence on the momentary state of suspension he calls sovereignty, which his followers seem to be anxious to either dispatch or, which is the same, somehow sustain. Noys remarks: "The impossibility of deriving a theory from Bataille may be the reason that he is so little read, but when he draws out the impossibility of theory itself he becomes impossible to ignore" (2000: 17).[5]

3 This resonates with Lacan's pessimistic view of the unsustainability of the love encounter, which is elaborated by Zupančič (2017: 134–135).

4 Derrida recognizes this limitation of Bataille but, expectedly, attributes it to Bataille's yet unresovled Hegelianism; see Derrida (2005: 346–350).

5 This anxiety about the impossibility of theory certainly seems to be at play in Bataille's appropriation by contemporary art-critical discourse, which Santner subjects to devastating critique, in particular, the Bataille-inspired art criticism of Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois in which Santner detects a celebration of the "infantile," of regression to "not-yet-human animality" (Santner 2011: 112) as an attempt to deal with the excess.

Absolute Knowing, or, The Failure of Failing Better

The argument of this paper elaborated in this section is that there is a radical difference between the transitions that take place *within* the *Phenomenology*, i.e., the dialectical progression of *Aufhebung* (sublation) as determinate negation — and the culminating point of absolute knowing that brings this process to a close in a sublation of sublation, which Malabou terms as "*speculative abrogation or letting-go*" (2005: 156).[6] The ignorance of this difference marked by the moment of letting go, release (*Entlassen*) is, arguably, the shared blind spot of typical postmodern critiques of Hegel, including but not restricted to those of Derrida and Bataille.

The final paragraph of the *Phenomenology's* introduction declares:

> In pressing forward to its true existence, consciousness will arrive at a point at which it gets rid of its semblance of being burdened with something alien, with what is only for it, and some sort of "other," at a point where appearance becomes identical with essence, so that its exposition will coincide *at just this point* with the authentic Science of Spirit. And finally, when consciousness itself grasps this its own essence, it will signify the nature of absolute knowledge itself. (Hegel 1977: 56-57; my emphasis)

At the outset, Hegel apparently sets up a clear measure of success for the *Phenomenology's* inquiry: a stable, homeostatic correspondence between the subject and object of knowledge. Hereby, all the usual critiques of Hegel appear vindicated. Absolute knowing as the systemic closure ultimately sacrifices the process of failing better simply to success. However, since this anticipation of success is in the text's introduction and not in the philosophical work itself, perhaps it is not yet genuine philosophy but "mere talk" about philosophy, which nevertheless has its proper function "to serve the aims of preparation, initiation" (Yovel 1996: 27). Hegel seems to set up this "organizing fantasy" of success and completion only for absolute knowing to traverse or implode it. As Rebecca Comay argues, absolute knowing "reveals our stubborn attachment to the magical power of narrative closure and our unquenchable desire for a Master—a subject-supposed-to-know—who controls the story and possesses the key to its interpretation [...]. The ending of the *Phenomenology* explodes this fantasy" (2021: 75). Thus, rather than what Hegel says in the introduction, perhaps we should focus our attention on what absolute knowing *shows*. Frank Ruda explains:

> What all the stages of the *Phenomenology* strangely have in common is that they in one way or the other try to generate a stable knowledge of something, of the subject, even in the last instance of knowledge itself. Yet, and this is precisely what the *Phenomenology* depicts, it demonstrates how the very idea of any stability is irrefutably unsustainable. (2014: 124)

6 I set aside for now the controversial question of the transition from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to Hegel's *Science of Logic* and thereby the question of the relation between the only two "books" Hegel published, which has been the subject of longstanding debate in Hegel scholarship; see Collins (2012), Comay and Ruda (2018), Pippin (1993).

If the *Phenomenology's* work retroactively appears as a series of better failures, then absolute knowing shows that there is a radical difference between failing better as making implicit, *existing* standards (i.e., the unconscious habits of consciousness) explicit and creating a truly new standard, a new habit — through a radical abrogation, kenosis, sacrifice.

Implicitly or explicitly following Hegel, one of the basic achievements of psychoanalysis was to destabilize the rigid boundary between the internal and external, between subject and object. In the psychoanalytic clinic, Tomšič argues that "every demand for the cure always already contains a demand for a change in the social structure" (2019a: 187). Lacan's definition of the psychoanalytic cure was "to raise impotence to impossibility" (Tomšič 2019a), which Tomšič interprets as the displacement of the subject from being the "impotent sufferer" who compulsively repeats her symptoms to the "impossible laborer" who works on the structure that causes her symptoms. But given the mutual internal externality (or extimacy, as per Lacan's neologism) of subject and structure, isn't the danger that every resistance against the structure is the very mode in which the structure appears as such and, therefore, (re)produces itself? Thus, Foucault might be correct to claim that "resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (1978: 95). But perhaps true resistance has to be created not *against* the structural frame but in (in)difference (Ruda 2024) to the frame: creation not only from the limit or failure of the enframed content, i.e., failing better, but creation from the limit of the very procedure of framing, i.e., from the limit or failure of failing better. In other words, the point is not to resist interminably the against the structural frame of capitalism with the hope of a final success but a radical setting aside of this interminable labor grounded in the impossible fantasy of cure. Absolute knowing knows its own process of knowledge — failing better — as a failure and, therefore, makes possible, creates, the actuality of freedom.

In absolute knowing, Hegel tells us, spirit in its self-knowledge "knows not only itself but also the negative of itself, or its limit: to know one's limit is to know how to sacrifice oneself" (1977: 492). Till the point of absolute knowing, the transitions were happening "behind the back of consciousness" (ibid.: 56), which only Hegel's observing consciousness (or the psychoanalyst in the clinic) could formalize by merely looking on. However, in absolute knowing, consciousness does not become self-transparent but knows itself in its self-negativity, its limit. And this constitutes sacrifice because spirit does not merely recognize this negativity but becomes the negativity.[7] Thereby, spirit can set aside the existing frame of experience or *Phenomenology* through the creation of the frame of the *Science of Logic*. Spirit at once remembers and forgets everything that came before and knows itself as the immediacy of the pure concept that the *Logic* will both acknowledge and set aside, remember and forget, or remember to forget, which is the only way it can get to (its own) creation.

7 Zupančič (2017) has developed this point vis-à-vis psychoanalysis.

Ultimately, Derrida misses the point that absolute knowing always already points to its beyond when he claims:

> In sacrificing meaning, sovereignty submerges the possibility of discourse: not simply by means of an interruption, a caesura, or an interior wounding of discourse (an abstract negativity), but, through such an opening, by means of an irruption suddenly uncovering the limit of discourse and the beyond of absolute knowledge. (2005: 330)

As the previous section showed, sovereignty remains an impossible rupture, a pure failure that the sovereign operation keeps circulating around in a repeated interminable failure of pure failure. In his crucial *Seminar XI*, Lacan (1981) directly links the impossible (as the "real") to his conception of the drive (*Trieb*). Drive is what always finds its goal of satisfaction (*jouissance*) even through the failure to achieve its aim. For instance, the drive satisfies itself through the "normal" consumption of food (if there is such a normal) just as equally as through the extremes of gluttony and anorexia (cf. Miller 1995: 13). It is the drive that enjoys even at the expense of the subject who suffers. Thus, one can again link Bataille's operation of sovereignty with the capitalist drive (M-C-M') — capital's interminable drive for more capital (Johnston 2024) — that finds satisfaction even through the very dissatisfaction of laborers' and consumers' desires and the devastation of their actual lives (disaster capitalism).

To be sure, the Hegelian-Lacanian cure is not the championing of desire over drive. For Lacan, while drive is what always finds satisfaction, desire can only sustain itself as unsatisfied (Zupančič 2000: 242). Desire is that which remains unfulfilled in the consumption of every object and, therefore, that which no object can fulfill. Desire is the constitutive "this is not it." To put it in an abbreviated manner, if drive is the necessity of satisfaction, the necessary enjoyment bound to the failure of pure failure (i.e., sovereignty), the waste that capital puts to work and to (ac)count, desire is what marks the contingency of every necessity. In other words, desire marks the failure inherent to any structure, its immanent impossibility. Desire exposes the structure's repression of laughter and, therefore, opens up the possibility of the structure being otherwise, of displacing the structure through the labor of failing better. However, the process of failing better can itself become interminable. As I suggested earlier through a Foucauldian cautioning of failing better as resistance against structure, the very procedure of exposing the contingency of necessity itself can retroactively shore up the necessity of the structure. Behind every "this is not it," the "it" of capital reproduces itself and satisfies itself at the expense of the "impossible laborer."

Despite his repeated rejection of the Hegelian "monstrosity" (Dolar 2006: 152) of absolute knowing, Lacan conceived the terminus of the interminable failing better of psychoanalysis in a manner strikingly close to absolute knowing (ibid.: 149-152). The end of analysis is not simply a matter of success whereby the subject becomes one with herself but a radical separation from her subjective coordinates that hitherto guided the process of cure. Hegel's absolute

knowing marks a similar moment of "radical destitution" (Comay and Ruda 2018: 4) wherein the fantasy of a successful union of subject and object collapses, spirit sacrifices itself and this "sacrifice is the externalization in which Spirit displays the process of its becoming Spirit in the form of *free contingent happening*" (Hegel 1977: 492) Thus, while Bataille's desire for sovereignty turns into a drive that repeats around the impossibility of biological death in different symbolic iterations — better failures that hold the subject hostage to "its" enjoyment, in Hegel and Lacan the moment of impossibility results in the symbolic death of subject.

The psychoanalytic cure coincides with the transition from the position of the patient to the position of the analyst. Lacan concludes *Seminar XI* by declaring that the "analyst's desire is not a pure desire" (1981: 276) because the traversal of the (fundamental) fantasy (of cure and closure) opens up the analyst to the "experience of the drive" (ibid.: 273-274). In other words, freedom is the short circuit of desire and drive. While the operation of sovereignty recycles its energy in constantly approaching the point of impossibility, retreating, and making a different approach, absolute knowing sublates the process of sublation itself. It terminates the interminable failing better. As opposed to a pure failure, it reaches the impossibility through and as the failure of failing better. The cure is that there is no cure, and this allows spirit to move on. As Dolar tells us, psychoanalysis shows that "the disease that the subject suffers from is incurable—yet analysis also shows that this incurable disease is another name for the subject, that this disease founds the very possibility of human experience" (1993: 92). Having digested, reduced, abstracted, sublated all the experiences of spirit, Absolute knowing sublates this experience in a "liberation of energy" (Malabou 2005: 165-166; cf. Marder 2021). As a result, for Malabou, "Force, previously contained within the strict limits imposed by a transcendental perspective, which the gap between subject and object particularly sustains, now breaks away from these bonds and becomes free for other combinations and other syntheses" (ibid.: 165) With this release of energy, absolute knowing makes possible real creation or creation in the real: an impossible new beginning, which allows Hegel, in the *Science of Logic*, to unfold the thoughts God had before his creation (Hegel 2010b: 29). When Lacan conceives of psychoanalysis as the overcoming of the discourse of the master and as an exit from the capitalist discourse, he remarks that "perhaps it's from the analyst's discourse that there can emerge another style of master signifier" (2007: 176).[8] We can only move beyond the existing standard of the master and capital by creating a new measure, another style.

8 To be sure, Lacan ultimately abandoned as a failure his notion of the pass (*la passe*) from the position of the analysand to the analyst. On this, see Frosh (2009: 108-111). This is why we still need Hegel's notion of absolute knowing *after* Lacan. I thank Gene Flenady for pushing me to clarify this point, which needs to be developed further. For a contemporary re-actualization of the Lacanian notion of *la passe*, see Gabriel Tupinambá (2021).

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Rutvij Nakhva

Apsolutno hegelijanstvo za postmoderno vreme: Hegel sa Lakanom posle Bataja i Deride

Apstrakt

Ovaj rad ispituje hegelijansku dijalektičku proceduru određene negacije u *Fenomenologiji duha* kroz prizmu „neuspeha“ u svetlu njene kritike posthegelovskih mislilaca, pre svega Žorža Bataja i Žaka Deride. Dalje, ovaj rad pokazuje kako pojam neuspeha ostaje važan u razmišljanju Hegela i Bataja, te razmatra hegelijanski „rad negativnog“ kao beketovski „bolji neuspeh“ u njegovoj rezonanciji sa lakanovskom psihoanalitičkom praksom. Na taj način, ovaj rad naglašava kako posthegelijanska praksa psihoanalize, pa čak i „antihegelijansko“ razmišljanje Deride i Bataja dele određene konceptualne operacije sa Hegelovom filozofijom. U radu se dalje prate ograničenja Batajove i Deridine kritike Hegela, posebno kroz Batajov pojam „suvereniteta“ koji on suprotstavlja „gospodstvu“, a koji smatra glavnim konceptom hegelijanstva. Autor tvrdi da je većina kritičara Hegela (uključujući Bataja i Deridu) pogrešno protumačila njegov pojam „apsolutnog znanja“ zbog nerazumevanja radikalne razlike između prelaza unutar *Fenomenologije* i kulminacije ove serije prelaza u apsolutnom znanju. Uklanjanjem ovog nesporazuma, ovaj rad pokazuje da apsolutno znanje ostaje ključni konceptualni operater za prevazilaženje ćorsokaka u postmodernom mišljenju.

Ključne reči: Hegel, apsolutno saznanje, bolji promašaj, Bataj, suverenitet, Derida, Lakan, psihoanaliza, kapitalizam.

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Andreas Herberg-Rothe

LYOTARD VERSUS HEGEL: THE VIOLENT END OF POSTMODERNITY

ABSTRACT

In the final phase of the Cold War, Jean-François Lyotard popularized the end of modernity and the dawn of a new era, "postmodernity". But postmodernism is already over again. In the resurgence of the great empires and civilizations that perished in European colonization and European-American hegemony, the rise of the "others", a new epoch of history is emerging that will define the entire 21st century. Lyotard's position is characterized by three different approaches that seem to flow into each other but need to be separated: A critique of Hegel with the core assertion that Auschwitz, as a symbol of infinite suffering, abrogated his philosophy of history, and the extension of this critique to the great narratives of modernity. This is followed by a meta-discourse on the great narratives of history on the basis of linguistic-philosophical considerations (in fact a meta-meta-narrative) and, finally, the construction of an alternative great narrative, that of the individual, particular, other, of postmodernity. This latter is only ostensibly not an alternative construction because it is intimately connected to the critique of grand narratives. In all three subfields, Lyotard has made groundbreaking considerations – but their immediate connection has reversed these advances. Lyotard exchanged a totalizing discourse of the absolute through a similar totalizing discourse of the particular. We not only need a radical reversal of the concepts of Western modernity, but also of those of post-modernity and re-invent a kind of different dialectics. It must be granted to Lyotard that an abridged interpretation of Hegel could support his critique. However, it is completely disputed whether Hegel's approach is based on a closed or an open system. The thesis presented here is that Hegel's approach is both open and closed at the same time. A simple and illustrative example is a sine curve on a slightly rising x-axis. This wave model is closed on the y-axis, but completely open and even infinite on the x-axis. Critics and proponents of Hegel's philosophy of history misunderstood his approach as a closed system and derived from it an "end of history" (Marx as well as Fukuyama). With Hegel, however, it can be argued that we are at the violent end of postmodernity. I wanted my text not only to attempt a critique of Lyotard and a reconstruction of the Hegelian method, but also to lay out the consequent substantive perspectives, even if they are necessarily not yet fully elaborated. In addition, I see Lyotard as an outstanding representative of post-structuralism, with whom he shares comparable problems, so that I make cross-references to similarities in this position, even if I do not treat them separately here.

KEYWORDS

Hegel, Lyotard, postmodernity, Auschwitz, Clausewitz, *Science of Logic*

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The Fundamental Problem

At the end of the Cold War, Jean-François Lyotard proclaimed the end of modernity and the dawn of a new era, "postmodernity". But postmodernity is already over. In the resurgence of the great empires and civilizations that perished under European colonization and Euro-American hegemony, in the rise of the "others" (Zakaria 2008, Herberg-Rothe 2020), a new epoch of history is emerging that will define the entire 21st century. The current wars are an expression of this development, which, however, was already foreseeable since the world financial crisis of 2007/2008. In his critique, Lyotard was able to "deconstruct" what he called the "grand narratives" of modernity as a totalizing philosophy of history, but he only rudimentarily noticed that he himself formulated a new grand narrative, that of the individual, the particular, the other. The end of modernity that he postulated was embedded in an unconscious philosophy of history. It corresponded to individualization and the market economy. Lyotard, Foucault, and Derrida formulated a radical critique of Western modernity that nevertheless remains within Western discourse (Herberg-Rothe 2017). Paradoxically, the major theoretical approaches that still dominate the discourse today (Habermas, Luhmann, Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault) all emerged in the final phase of the Cold War and were decisively shaped by it, but are today often misunderstood as supra-historical concepts, a fact that is far too little reflected upon. The collapse of the Soviet Union gave them a seemingly timeless validity. What greater confirmation of discourse and system theories could there be than that even the Iron Curtain had been breached by communication and democratic movements? The deadliest walls, as in Berlin, could be torn down by peaceful protest. These expectations, as expressed for example in the song "Wind of Change" by the Scorpions, are already history after only 30 years. Despite this limitation, it should be noted with Lyotard that Western modernity is finally over – but it remains a moment in a more comprehensive conception (Herberg-Rothe/Son 2018).

The deconstruction of the "grand narratives" of socialism and communism, of Western modernity and the superiority of Western civilization did not lead to real individualization (Lyotard 1987), but in the medium term to the formation of large ideologies and small communities. Alexander Dugin's New Russia, Salafism, Zhang's view of China as the only civilized state, Trump's "Make America Great Again", the ideologies of the New Right in Europe and the United States, and Hindu nationalism are such large-scale ideologies. Moreover, in almost all only seemingly ended civil wars, small-scale communities have been formed by ideologies around the notion of honor and recognition. Civil wars have become gang wars. Examples of the rule of such gangs are the Maras in Central America, the gangs on the west coast of Colombia that emerged after the end of the civil war there, but Iraq is also being torn apart by gang wars. A timely example are the gang wars currently taken place in Haiti. The modern ideologies that Lyotard criticized have been replaced by "postmodern" ideologies. While modern ideologies were characterized by the construction of a

concrete image of the enemy and the exaltation of one's own identity, postmodern ideologies are characterized by the binary construction: us *versus* them, us *versus* the rest, whoever the others may be (Herberg-Rothe/Son 2018).

The rise of the other (Zakaria) and the decline of the other (Herberg-Rothe) mark the end of postmodernity as proclaimed by Lyotard, the emergence of a new identity struggle of communities at the world-political, national, and individual levels, as identities are dissolved by the advancing hybrid globalization (Herberg-Rothe 2022), as well as by global civil wars and the struggle of world powers for hegemony. Interests are at the center when fixed and presupposed identities prevail; when these dissolve, a new struggle for identity recognition is ignited (Izenberg 2016). The critique of the return of tribalism through the overemphasis on fixed and sectarian identity (Fukuyama 2018 and Chua 2018), which is correct in principle, must not include the abolition of identity as such, otherwise this approach becomes a gateway for postmodern ideologies. At its core, the end of postmodernism is characterized by the replacement of the process of individualization by the struggle for identity of communities, a process that requires a different determination of the relationship between the individual and the community than that of Lyotard. Just to mention, the theorists of poststructuralism from Derrida, Foucault to Lyotard criticized not only concrete identities perceived as ideological, but the possibility of identity as such (Izenberg 2016: 302–303). What we are witnessing at the end of postmodernism is not individualization, but atomization – and already Hannah Arendt argued that the atomized masses need the "Fuehrer" (Herberg-Rothe/Son 2018). Without wanting to establish cause-and-effect mechanisms between the discursive and the *Realpolitik* dissolution of identities, the elective affinity between the two is illuminating.

Lyotard's position is characterized by three different approaches that seem to flow into each other, but must be separated: A critique of Hegel, with the central claim that Auschwitz, as a symbol of infinite suffering, invalidated his philosophy of history, and the extension of this critique to the great narratives of modernity. This is followed by a meta-discourse on the great narratives of history on the basis of linguistic-philosophical considerations (actually a meta-meta-narrative), and finally the construction of an alternative great narrative, that of the individual, the particular, the other, of postmodernity. The latter is only ostensibly not an alternative construction (Browning 2000), because it is intimately connected to the critique of grand narratives. In the direct connection of these three approaches, and especially in the reference to the linguistic-philosophical approaches of Alfred Tarski and Bertrand Russell, Lyotard gains an apparent scientificity that is problematic upon closer analysis. In all three subfields, Lyotard has made groundbreaking considerations – but their immediate connection has reversed these advances. Marx's inversion of Hegel already led to new insights, but the apparent possibility of a complete abandonment of Hegel led to fragmented partial aspects that could only be provisionally cemented by force and power (Herberg-Rothe 2002 and Herberg-Rothe/Son 2018). Among the poststructuralists, a fragile unity was

attempted to be established through new myths: "chora" in Derrida, "plasma" in Lyotard, "power" as an absolute in the early Foucault (Herberg-Rothe 2019). In the end, a supposed totalizing discourse of the absolute was just replaced by a similar totalizing discourse of the particular, the singular.

Auschwitz as a Refutation of Hegel's Philosophy of History?

Hegel is the great antipode on which Lyotard is working, for he represents a totalizing philosophy of history in Lyotard's view. Hegel had formulated that the real is rational. His idea, borrowed from Goethe's *Faust*, that evil is part of that force which always wants evil but creates good through the "cunning of history" (Hegel, Rechtsphilosophie, Werke 7: §1), points in the same direction. Now, of course, it is obvious to criticize Hegel's philosophy of history against the background of Auschwitz, as Lyotard does – for in a simplified understanding of Hegel's approach, Auschwitz would also have been "reasonable", perhaps even necessary to achieve the good? These are "outrageous" questions, but they go to the heart of the philosophy of history. Here, Adorno's statement that "to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric" stands out as representative. Adorno was co-author of the influential *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, co-founder of Frankfurt Critical Theory, and idol of the 1968 student movement. Where is Adorno right? Is only silence possible in the face of the suffering, the industrially organized lethal "processing" of millions of people, because every word misses the monstrous by far? (Adorno 1967, Herberg-Rothe 2019).

In the Hall of Remembrance at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, I, like all the other visitors, could only mourn in silence: "and no one dared disturb the sound of silence" (Simon & Garfunkel). The extent of the suffering is so immeasurable that even any sympathy expressed falls far short of that suffering. And then there is the age-old question: Must linguistic representation and explanation always give meaning to the incomprehensible? What meaning can suffering have? What sense did Auschwitz have? Or do we have to face the meaninglessness of all suffering? Is there, then, an irrevocable boundary between suffering and the sufferer on the one hand, and its linguistic formulation, its articulation, on the other? And conversely, can anyone adequately express the extent of suffering linguistically? Lyotard argues that any positive philosophy of history must fail against the background of the suffering of Auschwitz (Lyotard 1987). Like many of Hegel's critics, Lyotard overlooks the fact that Hegel distinguishes between reality in terms of the forces at work in history and mere reality. The real (in German: "Wirklichkeit", which is different from mere "Realität") is what "works" in history, while mere reality has no meaning of its own. In this light, Auschwitz would also be meaningless to Hegel, because evil has no continuing meaning. What remains at work, however, is the consciousness of this monstrous crime against humanity and the discourse about it.

Despite taking up this fundamental problem, Lyotard, like all critiques of the philosophy of history, remains bound to his own historical context. Lyotard is of particular importance here because it can be shown that his critique of

the absolute must contain this as a tendency, because otherwise a new binary code is installed – that of the criticized absolute *versus* the individual with the primacy of the absolute would be merely replaced by a new one, that of the individual, the particular, the other. This problem is only overlooked in critique and superficially covered up in the form of methods (Habermas, Luhmann) or incomprehensible myths. We find such myths in Lyotard's conception of the "plasma", in Derrida's of the "chora", and in early Foucault's absolutization of power (Herberg-Rothe 2019). The delegitimation of grand narratives in favor of heterogeneity, discontinuity, otherness, difference, and their synonyms is itself a totalizing judgment that traps Lyotard in a circularity that stems from a logic he did not accept but could not escape.

The Frankfurt "critical theory" in the wake of Habermas as well as the approach of Luhmann, absolutize the method and do not notice that they remain within an almost classical understanding of Western modernity and that there continues to be a "blind spot" regarding colonialism and non-Western civilizations in this tradition of thought (Herberg-Rothe 2017). One could even argue that they construct a hyper-Western modernity. Finally, there is also a negative anthropology as seen in Sofsky (1996) and the "violence innovators" who replace the binary progress myths of Western modernity with a new binary code of violence (Herberg-Rothe 2017). It is also paradoxical when Hans Joas criticizes Hegel's philosophy of history and at the same time positively evaluates the global proselytizing of the Catholic Church. Like many others (Sofsky, Baberowski, Zimmermann, see Herberg-Rothe 2017 and 2019), his criticism of Hegel leads back to Nietzsche (Joas 2020). Instead of a more differentiated interpretation of Hegel, they attempt a renaissance of Nietzsche of all thinkers.

Overcoming Hegel or a Hidden Meta-Narrative?

"Our entire epoch is trying to escape Hegel", postulated Michel Foucault as early as 1970 (quoted Herberg-Rothe 2005, see also Foucault 1997). Only seemingly paradoxically, however, almost all "epochal" escapes from Hegel end up back with Hegel or Hegelian figures of thought, if they only develop their own position far enough or think it "to the end". Of course, one can distance oneself from other philosophical positions, criticize them, without implicitly and unrecognizably adopting their position or at least certain foundations. This is more problematic with Hegel, because he, like hardly any other philosopher, included "the other" in his conception – as a necessary developmental moment of the "Absolute Spirit". Thus, the criticism of Hegel's conception itself and the emphasis on "other" contents can in principle be integrated into his position, especially in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Now, it is true that other "others" can be brought into the field against Hegel, which he did not or at least did not sufficiently take into account – death and love, for example. Or "the other" itself, as Lyotard argues (Lyotard 1987). It is questionable, however, whether this challenges Hegel's conception at all? For many of the "other others" are either already contained in Hegel's phenomenology as developmental

moments of the absolute spirit, such as explicitly Engels' and Lenin's concept of matter, which only seems to go beyond Hegel, but also conceptions such as the rather romantically influenced "unhappy consciousness". On the other hand, such "other others" enrich Hegel's phenomenology of the spirit with further facts that differentiate the path of development structurally described by Hegel, but without changing anything in the "result of Hegel", the transition to "absolute spirit". In Hegel's conception, every position is "surpassed" by a more developed category, with the exception of the "final determination" (Wandschneider 1997: 116, Wolf 1997).

Obviously aware of this problem, Lyotard addresses the Hegelian position only under the generic term "result". For only the questioning of Hegel's result makes possible a position that can no longer be interpreted as a differentiation *within* Hegel's development of absolute spirit. But wasn't Hegel finally finished, at the latest after the end of the Iron Curtain, because he was worshipped there as a political forerunner of Marx, and then scientifically shelved? If one looks at the French reception of Hegel, however, one finds that it had already turned radically away from Hegel and toward Kant before the epochal turn of 89/91. Before the other caesura, the movement of 68, Hegel was like "God in France" (at least for the left); after this caesura, he was held directly responsible for totalitarianism (Schnädelbach 1987). Henri Lefebvre, for example, believed that Stalinism was the realization of Hegel's absolute idea. However, this is debatable, since both Marx and Marxism-Leninism understood their own position as a reversal of Hegel's (Herberg-Rothe 2002). The paradoxical result, however, is that the most important French thinkers nevertheless used Hegelian figures of thought (Pillen 2003) or "in the end" came back to Hegel, especially Jean-François Lyotard, the popularizer of postmodernism. Lyotard had taken the insights of language-analytical philosophy, especially in his main philosophical work, *The Differend*, out of the "Oxford ghetto" in a completely new and ingenious way and made them useful for a diagnosis of the present (Reese-Schäfer 1995).

The thesis to be elaborated here is that there can be no complete abandonment or reversal of Hegel without a return to a Hegelian figure of thought, albeit uncomprehended and "in the long run". As can be seen especially in the work of Foucault, Derrida, and Lyotard, important epistemological advances are made through these departures and connections to Kant – but these are mythodologized and almost reversed if they are not perceived as a further development of the antagonism between Kant and Hegel. By moving away from Hegel, they approach Kant, but "in the end" return to Hegel or Hegelian figures of thought. Not grasping in this way, they end up with a masquerade of Hegel, with Lyotard in the form of the "plasma" (Lyotard 1986).

If everything general is "deconstructible" (Derrida), the particular itself becomes general and is unconsciously re-formulated in Hegel's "magic formula" of the "identity of identity and non-identity". Hegel's concept of identity is simply replaced by non-identity in the concept of "the non-identity of identity and non-identity", the unity of theory and practice by the "practice of practice and theory", as given from Gramsci to Althusser (Herberg-Rothe 2002). If there is

no enactment or absolute reversal of Hegel without an uncomprehended return to a Hegelian figure of thought, this does not imply a hypostatization of Hegel's absolute idea or even a transfiguration of his person. Without exaggerating Hegel's philosophical achievement, his inescapable importance is above all systematically conditioned. Hegel marks one of two extremes in the dynamic field of an epistemological and inherently contradictory discourse within which the solutions sought are to be located. This discursive field is determined within the opposing positions of Kant and Hegel. Outside of this field marked by both, in principle, no solutions can be found without going back before their insights, though often without being understood. Pan-criticism, on the other hand, necessarily leads back to the hardest dogmatism (Hösle 1990: 171).

Lyotard wonders if we are not telling ourselves more than the "grand narrative of the end of grand narratives" (Lyotard 1987: 182). He is more aware of the problem than both his followers and his critics. This means nothing more than that Lyotard has been clear about formulating a grand narrative himself – albeit, in terms of his claim, a different one than that of modernity, socialism, and communism. The possibility of the self-application of the "meta-narrative" to Lyotard arises from one of his own "determinations". For he formulates that the only thing that is unquestionable is the proposition, because it is immediately presupposed (Lyotard 1987: 9). To doubt that one is "setting" propositions is itself a "setting", and so is silence. Wittgenstein's famous formulation, about which one cannot speak, one must be silent, presupposes a precise determination of what one must be silent about. Thus, silence about Auschwitz would itself be a "sentence" about it, at least in Lyotard's conception. This "silence" about Auschwitz is consequently Lyotard's decisive criticism of Heidegger: one "hears" Heidegger's "deep and conscious" compromise with National Socialism in his philosophical texts in what these texts conceal. Above all in the silence that they maintain until the end, with the exception of one sentence, on the annihilation in the Holocaust (Lyotard 1988: 65).

Ultimate Justification *versus* the Incompleteness Theorem

At the end of his Hegel excursus, Lyotard emphasizes that the "conduct of philosophical discourse" is the discovery of a rule, without, however, being able to adapt the discourse to this rule before its discovery. Sentence by sentence, the concatenation would not be controlled by a rule, but by the search for a rule. With this consideration, Lyotard reflects a fundamental problem of justification. How should and can logical and linguistic rules and systems be justified and introduced without already presupposing them? It is true that German grammar can be explained in English. The fundamental problem, however, is how to explain grammar and logic "themselves" without presupposing and applying them at the same time. Lyotard goes one step further with the "linguistic turn" of philosophy and sharpens the problem by arguing that the rule that is actually to be justified already "generates" the sentences that are to be justified (Lyotard 1987: 168).

There are a number of attempts to solve this fundamental problem of justification. The two most far-reaching are, on the one hand, those based on Gödel's incompleteness theorem (Gödel 1931) and, on the other, those that infer from the reflexivity described above that there are ineluctable preconditions in the form of an "ultimate justification". In the first case, it is argued that there can be no complete and contradiction-free justification of rules or systems without resorting to axioms and propositions that cannot be justified within these rules and systems. In the second case the circular reasoning that is actually to be avoided – that which is to be justified is already presupposed in order to be able to formulate it – is understood as an inescapable precondition of all speech and argumentation – whether in the form of an inescapable ultimate justification of objective idealism (Hösle) or a pragmatic transcendental philosophy (Apel, Habermas). If we try not to simply leave the two approaches side by side, but to relate them to each other, it immediately becomes clear that they express a similar self- and other-reference, analogous to antinomies. The self-justification of all conceivable systems is necessarily based on a self-reference, while Gödel's incompleteness theorem is based on an external reference. Reflexive self-justification as well as Gödel's incompleteness theorem are thus the ultimate realizations of self-reference and other-reference.

In his discussion of Apel's concept of final justification (Lyotard, *Grundlagenkrise* 1986), Lyotard explicitly rejects any form of self-foundation and is associated with Gödel's position as well as Tarski's and Russell's philosophy of language. In this view, a self-grounding transcendental as well as transcendent philosophy is either antinomian or tends to be "total". Lyotard criticizes Hegel's position, which he attributes to ultimate justification, as follows:

> But the beginning (in Hegel's *Science of Logic*) can only appear as this final result because the rule of the result was presupposed from the beginning. According to this rule, the first proposition was connected with the following and the others. If one does not apply it from the beginning, one does not necessarily find it at the end, and if it is not at the end, it has not been generated and was therefore not the rule sought. (Lyotard 1987: 168, translation Herberg-Rothe).

It can be assumed that with this distinction he only intends to criticize Hegel, but at the same time he marks an essential difference between Kant and Hegel. For Kant's intentions since the *Critique of Pure Reason* relate to the preconditions of the possibility of knowledge, while Hegel's relate to the further development of human thought, to the creation of new forms of thought. This explains the "infinite distance" between Kant and Hegel, since one emphasizes the clarification of the preconditions of human knowledge, while the other focuses on its development (this motif is most evident in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*), without being able to dispense with either approach.

Lyotard rightly notes that Hegel's concept is determined by the preservation of an identity despite all its developments. But this is only one aspect of Hegel's definition, since the concept of the beginning implies the opposite proposition, that something goes beyond itself, develops, changes. Change and the

maintenance of an identity together constitute Hegel's concept of the beginning. The "conflict" revolves around the question of whether Hegel ascribed primacy to one of the two sides, or whether the conundrum of thinking both sides together – the "staying with itself" *versus* the "going beyond itself" of an identity – could be resolved in a different way.

The fact that even his most determined critics return to Hegelian figures of thought, which can be interpreted or classified as forms of development of the absolute idea, is the problem to be explained. After all the attempts to leave Hegel behind or to "reverse" him (Herberg-Rothe 2002), and yet in the end unconsciously return to Hegelian figures of thought, only one possibility remains open: To rethink the "beginning" with Hegel against Hegel. In the opposition between taking sides and resignation, no tertium vis-à-vis Hegel seems possible (Röttges 1976: 2). However, this tertium, this third, is to be traced here through the self-application of Hegel and the identification of fundamental "contradictions" in Hegel's thinking, from which an alternative solution can be developed.

Thinking with Hegel beyond Hegel

Following the seminal work of Heinz Röttges, our thesis is that the Hegelian concept of method cannot be "fully" defined without directly contradicting itself (Röttges 1976: 337–340). This concept states that it is necessary to move from the self-evident to the posited, linguistically represented determinacy (Röttges 1976). This problem can also be described as a semantic-pragmatic difference. It consists in the fact that the explicit meaning of a category does not express everything that is always presupposed for its meaning. In order to explicate a meaning, the whole apparatus of logical categories and principles must be presupposed. This tension between explicit content and implicit presuppositions necessitates the introduction of ever new categories through which this "pragmatic surplus of meaning" (Wandschneider 1997; translation Herberg-Rothe) is successively further explicated. This fundamental "drive", this movens of Hegel's dialectic, applies to all categories, with the exception of the "final determinations" (Wandschneider 1997: 116).

This is where the aforementioned fundamental contradiction arises: on the one hand, the concept of method cannot have its full meaning in itself, because the transition from the inherently presupposed to the posited determinacy would then also have to apply to itself. Due to the impossible separation of method and content in Hegel, this means nothing other than that the self-movement of a content contradicts itself (Röttges 1976). For Hegel, the self-movement is bound to the transition from self-appearance to posited determinacy and thus to at least two different contents ("something" must have been added to the first content), so that there can be no question of the self-movement of only one content. On the other hand, the self-development of one identity describes Hegel's fundamental concern. Without the resolution of this contradiction, Hegel's entire approach would "cancel itself out".

It could be argued that all concepts and propositions in Hegel's *Science of Logic* imply a contradiction between semantic and pragmatic considerations. A classic example of this is the sentence repeatedly quoted by Vittorio Hösle: "There is no truth". If this sentence is to be true, it must not be true, but then it shows in itself that there must be at least one true proposition. In itself, the proposition states that there is no truth; as a posited proposition, it is at least one truth. But Hegel's absolute idea itself must be excluded from such a performative contradiction, because only with it has the concept emerged "which itself is what it intends" (Wieland, quoted in Hösle 1988: 200; transl. Herberg-Rothe). This also applies to the concept of method, which Hegel accordingly does not address until the discussion of the Absolute Idea at the end of the Logic. For this, as for the Absolute Idea, it is true that it must itself be what it asserts, that it is what it intends. Otherwise, Hegel's method, and with it the Absolute Idea, would also be self-contradictory, at least performatively, and, according to Hegel's own methodological approach, would have to be abolished in an even more comprehensive whole – in the "true logical contrast" and its identity (Clausewitz), according to the thesis developed here later.

Röttges attempts to resolve the contradiction he himself presents in the concept of method by interpreting self-evident determinacy as already posited. The transition from self-evident determinacy to the posited as a transition from one to another content would be relativized by the assumption that the self-evident determinacy is already a "posited" one. Röttges thus repeats with Hegel the figure, already found in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, of the genesis of self-consciousness from object consciousness, on the condition that the latter is already a still undeveloped stage of self-consciousness (Röttges 1976: 337–340).

With this attempted solution, however, Röttges merely reverses the contradiction. For the first states that the complete determination of the concept of method contradicts the assumption of the self-movement of only one content. However, if we resolve this contradiction in the way Röttges does, the result is a contradiction to the method. The Hegelian method would suddenly have to be described as a transition from the posited to the being-in-itself and back again to the posited determinacy. However, this would relativize the self-development, since the set-being is the higher logical-linguistic form for Hegel (Röttges 1976). If one were to understand "being-in-itself" as already posited – in order to avoid the first contradiction – there would no longer be any higher development, but only the endless repetition of the same.

If Hegel's concept of method is determined by the transition from being-in-itself to being-set, this contradicts the further development of only one content. Conversely, in order for the content to remain with itself, the "first" content must already be set, but this no longer allows for further development. In positive terms, Hegel attempts to solve the problem of how repetitive movement and real development can be conceived together as a unified movement. Just how topical this Hegelian problem is can be seen in the contrast between the reversibility and irreversibility of time (Herberg-Rothe 2024).

This problem arises already in the concept of the beginning, where else than at the beginning of Hegel's *Science of Logic*. The concept of the beginning implies that something is just beginning, that it is not yet fully present. Thus, on the one hand, a content is defined as the beginning, but at the same time it refers to something else, another content, whose beginning it is. Other content must be added to this beginning. With regard to Hegel's concept of the beginning, however, this problem is "somewhat" more difficult, because the entire architecture of the work is a self-development of the Absolute, so there is no "designer" who overlooks the whole thing. For Hegel, all further development is already laid out in the beginning, but only insofar as that particular beginning refers to an end. For this reason, Hegel can write that only that which is set in a concept belongs to the developing consideration of it. To illustrate this problem again with an example. If the rate of expansion of the universe or any other parameter had been slightly different by a millionth of a second during or after the Big Bang, there would have been no formation of galaxies, stars or planets, not to mention human existence. Only what was "set" at the Big Bang made this evolution possible.

In his Introduction to the *Science of Logic*, Hegel again emphasizes the problem of having to begin with an immediate beginning on the one hand, while on the other hand having to take into account the insight that there cannot be such an absolute beginning:

> In no science is the necessity of beginning with the thing itself without prior reflection stronger than in logical science. In every other science, the object it treats and the scientific method are distinct from one another. In this case, the content is not an absolute beginning, but depends on other concepts. His *Logic*, on the other hand, cannot presuppose any of these forms of thought. They only constitute its content and must first be justified within the representation of logic. Not only the statement of the scientific method, but also the concept and its object, the grasping thought, first belong to its own content and even constitute its final result (all Hegel WdL I, Werke 5, 35; translations Herberg-Rothe).

Hegel thus treats the problem of how to explain and justify fundamental rules of logic and grammar without at the same time presupposing them.

Assuming a complete absence of presuppositions, the beginning in logic is absolute, it is an absolute beginning. At the same time, however, Hegel must of course also presuppose "logic" in order to be able to speak and make statements at all. Consequently, Hegel begins his actual text with an introduction - one could almost say another introduction - to the question of where the beginning of science must be made. There he sums up that it is only in "recent times" that the awareness has arisen that it is difficult to find a beginning in philosophy. The beginning of philosophy must be either mediated or immediate, and it is easy to show that it can be neither the one nor the other. Thus, one or the other kind of beginning would find its refutation. The logical beginning could be taken either as a result in a mediated way or as an actual beginning in an immediate way (Hegel WdL I, Werke 5, 65–66).

The contrast between these two positions is obvious. In the (first) introduction, Hegel argues that logic must be absolutely presuppositionless. In contrast, in the second, we find the position that the logical beginning itself must be on the one hand a result, something mediated, and on the other hand something immediate. Hegel further emphasizes this problem by stating that the beginning of logic, as he presents it, is a result of his own discussions in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The beginning is logical in that it is to be made in the element of thinking that is free for itself, in pure knowledge. It is mediated by the fact that pure knowledge is the ultimate, absolute truth of the historical development of consciousness. Logic is thus based on the science of the appearing spirit (his book on the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*), which for Hegel is the proof of the truth of pure knowledge. In phenomenology, empirical, sensual consciousness is taken as the starting point, and this is the actual immediate knowledge, the immediate and first in science, and thus the prerequisite for all further discussion. In logic, on the other hand, the presupposition is what has proved to be the result of this observation – the idea as pure knowledge (all Hegel WdL I, Werke 5, 66–67). The contrast between the two positions can be summarized as follows: In the one case, Hegel emphasizes the necessity of the absolute presuppositionlessness of logic as a form of ultimate justification (Hösle is following this path in his interpretation of Hegel; Hösle 1988). In the other case, he emphasizes that the logical beginning must be taken from *two* sides: on the one hand as something immediate without presuppositions, and on the other hand as a mediated result (we might compare this second position with that of Gödel).

This "contradiction" between the two positions is already apparent in the structure of Hegel's complete works, but in the end Hegel's position is not a logical contradiction, but an antinomy (Kesselring 1984; Sainsbury 2001). In his *Science of Logic*, Hegel makes his earlier book on the "science of the appearing spirit" a prerequisite for his discussions. In the later *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, the problem of the beginning is presented quite differently. In the latter, there is no longer any talk of the science of the appearing spirit, of phenomenology as a prerequisite for the exposition of logic. Instead, Hegel begins directly with "logic". On the contrary, the science of the appearing spirit is here (only in the third volume of his *Encyclopedia*) a much more advanced stage in the development of the overall presentation and appears within the consideration of the subjective spirit and is now a conclusion and no longer a prerequisite.

How can we explain this contradiction? First of all, it can be ruled out that Hegel made a simple mistake that he overlooked in the revisions of 1830 and 1831. Rather, this contradictory position is systematic. In fact, it reveals the whole problem, because Hegel begins with the absolute presuppositionlessness, the immediacy of being, only to emphasize at the end of his *Science of Logic* that the absolutely indeterminate being cannot be as presuppositionless as he himself has presented it. At the beginning of the *Science of Logic*, it is said that being in its indeterminate immediacy is only equal to itself. It would

not be held in its purity by any determination or content that would be distinguished in it or by which it would be set apart from another (Hegel WdL I, Werke 5, 82–83). Finally, however, Hegel explicitly states that such beginnings as being, essence, generality, etc. only seem to be of such a kind that they have all the generality and lack of content necessary for a formal beginning (Hegel WdL II, Werke 6, 568). We can thus draw an arc from the absolute presuppositionlessness of being at the beginning of the *Logic* and the emphasis that this beginning is not as immediate, as presuppositionless, as it appears. At the end of his *Logic*, Hegel even declares that it has been shown that the beginning is not to be taken as something immediate (as Hegel had initially repeatedly emphasized), but as something mediated and derived (ibid. 567).

For reasons of proof or self-movement, Hegel could have presented the beginning as absolutely presuppositionless, as an absolutely indeterminate general, although "actually" it is not. The "truth", on the other hand, would be that the beginning is, on the one hand, an immediate without any presupposition and, on the other hand, a result, a mediated one. This unresolved problem is indicated above all by the fact that Hegel's postulation of the absolute presuppositionlessness of the beginning and the realization of its resultant character articulates a "contradiction" in itself. In Hegel's statements on the unity of immediacy and mediation of the beginning, both "contradictory" opposites are assigned to a single state of affairs.

This problem becomes particularly clear in Hegel's fundamental statement that there is nothing in the world, nothing in the heavens, in nature or in the spirit, that does not contain both mediation and immediacy (Hegel, WdL I p.66). But if everything, really everything, contains this contradiction, then every fact articulates immediacy and mediation in itself. However, the articulation of two contradictory opposites in one fact seems to be logically contradictory. The possible solution to the contradiction of the absence of presuppositions and the resulting character of the beginning, as initially presented, thus necessarily leads to a further developed contradiction and finally to the concept of "contradiction" (understood as antinomy) in Hegel himself. In the history of philosophy, this fundamental problem has always been solved on one side. Either through self-reflection and the resulting concept of ultimate justification (Hösle), or through the incompleteness theorem in the wake of Gödel, Tarski, the Vienna Circle, and poststructuralism in general, and Lyotard's concept of postmodernism in particular. The only possibility, then, is to understand this "contradiction" not as a simple logical or pragmatic contradiction, but as the form of an "other" contrast, of Clausewitz's concept of the true logical contrast (Herberg-Rothe 2007), which expresses a form of polarity, but is a much more nuanced concept.

Detour *via* Clausewitz

An alternative solution to the problem raised by Lyotard and Hegel is offered by another dialectic, as implicitly developed by Carl von Clausewitz on the basis of his analysis of attack and defense. Clausewitz's approach is of paramount

importance in that it does not presuppose a primacy of identity over difference, contrast, and conflict (Confucius and, to some extent, Hegel), nor the reverse, as in the conceptualizations of the poststructuralists (Herberg-Rothe 2007, Herberg-Rothe and Son 2018). In contrast to binary opposites, Clausewitz's model of the "true logical contrast and its identity", a structure-forming "field" (something like a magnetic field), allows us to think of multiple mediations as well as differences between opposites. If we formulate such an opposition in the framework of a two-valued logic (which formulates the opposition with the help of a negation), there is a double contradiction on both sides of the opposition. From the assumption of the truth of one pole necessarily follows the truth of the other, although the other formulates the adversarial opposition of the first, and *vice versa*. Hegel's crucial concepts such as being and nothingness, coming into being and passing away, quantity and quality, beginning and end, matter and idea, are such higher forms of opposition which, when determined within the framework of a two-valued logic, lead to logical contradictions. Without taking into account the irrevocable opposites and their unity, a "pure thinking of differences" (as in Lyotard) leads either to "hyper-binary" systems (such as the relationship between system and lifeworld, constructivism and realism) or to unconscious absolutizations of new mythical identities (such as Lyotard's notion of plasma).

Clausewitz's "true logical contrast and its identity" makes it possible to think of a model in which the opposites remain irrevocable, but at the same time, in contrast to binary opposites

A. both remain in principle equally determining the whole; this model is therefore neither dualistic nor monistic;

B. it structures a "field" of multiple unities and differences;

C. makes possible a conceptualization in which the opposites have a structure-forming effect, but do not exist as identities detached from one another,

D. and in which there are irrevocable boundaries between opposites and differences, which at the same time, however, can be historically and socially differentiated. The concrete drawing of boundaries is thus contingent, without the existence of a boundary as such being abolished (Herberg-Rothe 2005, 2007 and Herberg-Rothe and Son 2018).

E. Finally, Clausewitz's model even proves superior to Hegel's, because the transitions from one extreme to the other are conceived differently. Defense goes directly into attack ("the flashing sword of retaliation"), while attack goes into defense as mediation (in detail elaborated in Herberg-Rothe 2007, Herberg-Rothe and Son 2018).

The model developed here and its usefulness for thinking beyond Lyotard and Hegel can be illustrated by two mathematical-physical examples: that of a slightly rising sine curve and that of polarity or that of a magnet respectively. Such a sine curve is both a closed and an open system. Closed on the y-axis, open and even infinite on the x-axis. In such a coordinate system, the slightly rising x-axis symbolizes Hegel's idea of the progress of humanity despite all the setbacks, the ups and downs of world history in the peaks and low points of

the sine curve. We are familiar with such wave movements in economic models of business cycles and the wave-particle dualism, which can be resolved as different ways of movement (Herberg-Rothe 2024).

Obviously, in the model, albeit limited, of a magnet, neither the south nor the north pole exist as an identity; a (violent) separation of the two even leads to a duplication of the model. At the same time, both poles are structure-forming for a magnetic field, without any priority of either side. Finally, Clausewitz's model of the true logical contrast goes beyond that of polarity, because it allows us to think of multiple forms of transitions. It is primarily concerned with categories such as mostly asymmetrical transitions and reversals, as well as the "interspace" (Arendt) between opposites. With such an understanding of dialectics, it is possible to understand the apparent contradiction between the rejection of a supreme meta-meta-language and the fact that the language used in this critique, theory, is itself this actually excluded "supreme" level of language, not as a logical contradiction, but as a different one (concerning this problem in Tarski's approach see Herberg-Rothe 2005). It is precisely Hegel's criticized and rejected form of dialectic that makes it possible to conceive of these contradictions not as "logical" contradictions, but as contradictions that ground but also compel further development, as opposed to mythical ways out as in Lyotard, Derrida and Foucault. At the same time, however, this form of dialectic contains the demonstration of a principle of development without conclusion and thus replaces Hegel's "great logic" as "God's thoughts before the creation of the world" (Hegel's Preface to the *Science of Logic*, Wdl I, Works 5; translation Herberg-Rothe).

Elaborating Clausewitz's Implicit Dialectics

I do not want to stop at the critique of Lyotard or Hegel, even though I am aware that I am developing an as yet undeveloped research perspective. I start from the following fivefold distinction of thinking, based on the fundamental contrasts of life and civilization (this perspective is based on my understanding of Clausewitz, Hegel and Arendt, but with special emphasis on Katzenstein 2009, Baggini 2018 and Jaspers 1949, although the latter two largely reduce different ways of thinking to the development of functional differentiation; Herberg-Rothe 2005, 2007, Herberg-Rothe and Son 2018).

1. Either-Or systems – Western modern thought, concentration on method (since Descartes and Kant, Vienna Circle, Tarski), democracy, individualism, in Islam Ibn Sina and Ibn Khaldun, in Chinese thought the tradition of Han Fei and Li Se (Yan 2011, Zhang 2012).

2. As well as – Daoism, early Confucianism, but also New Age approaches, Heißenberg's uncertainty principle.

3. Neither-Nor enables the construction of "being-in-between"– Plato's *metaxis* plus Indian logic, the whole concept of diversity, difference thinking, de-constructivism, the post-structuralism, post-colonialism.

4. System thinking, structuralism – here I struggle with the distinction between holism (in the Islamic worldview) and pure hierarchies (in Islam Al Ghazali); inherent logic of systems (Luhmann) and functional differentiation; in Eastern philosophies we find this approach mainly in highlighting spiritual approaches.

5. Process thinking – in ethics this can be found e.g. in utilitarianism, stage theories (Piaget, Kohlberg; Hegel's world history as the progress of freedom consciousness), Hegel's becoming at the beginning of his "logic" as "surplus" of coming into being and passing away; cycle systems; Enlightenment; Dharma religions, in China, Mohism (for closer reading I recommend Baggini and Jaspers).

How can this fivefold distinction be derived from one model, which is not a totalizing approach (Mall 2014)? For this purpose I use here again the simplified model of polarity. This method is elaborated in my Clausewitz interpretation on his wondrous trinity and the dialectic of attack and defense (Herberg-Rothe 2007 and 2019, Herberg-Rothe and Son 2018).

Differences in polarity as a unifying model

1. Either-Or systems: Each of the two poles is either a north or a south pole (= *tertium non datur*). We find those approaches in mathematics, logic, rationality and methods in general; such conceptualizations are also to be found in zero-sum games - what one side gains, the other loses (rationality, if-then systems, in China Li Si and Han Fei);

2. As well as (earlier Confucius, Daoism): the magnet as unity consists of both poles and the magnet "is" both north pole and south pole. This is analyzed in detail in my Clausewitz interpretation on the basis of war as unity and irrevocable opposition of attack and defense. We find this thinking especially in Chinese ideas of win-win solutions. Here, competition and conflict in one area do not exclude cooperation in another (Herberg-Rothe 2007, Chinese version 2020).

3. Neither north nor south pole exist as identities (Plato's *metaxis*, Indian thought) – they are rather dynamic movements in between the opposites (see in detail again Clausewitz's concept of attack and defense; this understanding is the methodological basis of diversity; Herberg-Rothe 2007; see the French theorists of post-structuralism).

4. Structure (system theories, Islamic holism): North pole and south pole "construct" a magnetic field outside and inside the magnet, a non-material structure.

5. Process thinking: Here the simplified example of the magnet finds its end – but can be understood beyond the physical analogy easily as movement from the south pole to the north pole and "always further" (sine curve on an ascending x-axis). In this sense, already Hegel had considered the discovery of polarity as of infinite importance, but criticized it because in this model the idea of differentiated transition from one pole to the other was missing (Herberg-Rothe 2000 and 2007). Molla Sadra (1571-1636), the most important philosopher of

the School of Isfahan, elaborated this progressive circular movement particularly clearly. Although he is mainly regarded as an existential philosopher who denies any essence, he actually postulated a kind of progressive circle as the decisive essence (for an overview see Yousefi 2016, and for more details concerning Molla Sadra see Rizvi 2021 and Herberg-Rothe 2023).

Starting from the premise that Western thinking is shaped by the billiard model of international relations and that of all other civilizations by concentric circles and cycles (Herberg-Rothe and Son 2018), the aim is to work out how extensively both models determine our thinking in the respective cultural sphere in order to develop a perspective that includes both sides. In doing so, I do not assume one-dimensional causes for action, but neither do I assume pure diversity without any explanation of causes. Instead, I work in perspective with virtuous and vicious circles – in these circles there are several causes, although they are not unconnected to each other, but are integrated into a cycle. So far, this methodological approach has probably been applied mainly in the Sahel Syndrome. The methodological approach would involve trying to break vicious and transform them into virtuous circles.

At the infinite end of this process would be a kind of mutual recognition of the civilizations of the earth, accompanied by their self-commitment to their own civilizational norms. My colleague Peng Lu from Shanghai University has made the following suggestion: In the 19th century, the Europeans conquered the whole world; in the twentieth century, the defeated nations and civilizations had to live with the victorious West; in the twenty-first century, the civilizations of the earth must finally learn to live together. This is in my view the task of the century. I have to admit that this approach cannot solve all the problems of philosophy – for example, the question of whether the universe has a beginning or not remains unsolvable for the human mind. However, such unsolvable questions do not require a decision, are neither decidable nor undecidable (Heinz von Foerster), but create a tension between which a balance must be found, as in Clausewitz's concept of the wondrous trinity (Herberg-Rothe 2007, Herberg-Rothe 2023). Despite my own limitations, I think this is a perspective that goes beyond Lyotard and Hegel.

How is Lyotard's critique, like his own implicit philosophy of history, to be judged now? Louis Althusser used an apt image for this: In order to straighten a bow, one must "overbend" it in the other direction (Herberg-Rothe 2002; Labica 1989, Althusser 1968). This is exactly what Lyotard has done, but this reversal is as logically and temporally limited as his conception of postmodernism. Herein lies both Lyotard's achievement and his limitation. We must therefore think beyond Lyotard and the theorists of poststructuralism, as well as beyond postmodernism, and imagine a more harmonious (Confucius) and balanced (Clausewitz) world order (Herberg-Rothe and Son 2018, Herberg-Rothe 2020, 2021 and 2022). Postmodernism as a bygone era was a necessary step forward – but as the poststructuralists did not sufficiently distinguish between individualization and atomization, this short period is ending in the worldwide dissolution of identities and the violent struggles for tribal identities

(Fukuyama 2018). The global village has been accompanied by a village mentality in the form of us against the other, whoever the other may be. It is the result of a generalization of the individual as in globalization (Herberg-Rothe 2020), that leads to mythical concepts of community such as race, gender, nation, ethnicity, culturalism. To counter these developments, we need to find a dialectical balance (Clausewitz) and harmony (Confucius) of the individual and the community that goes beyond Lyotard and Hegel.

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Andreas Herberg Rote

Lijotar nasuprot Hegelu: nasilni kraj postmodernosti

Apstrakt

U završnoj fazi Hladnog rata, Žan-Fransoa Lijotar popularizovao je kraj modernosti i zoru novog doba, „postmodernosti". Međutim, postmodernizam je već završen. U ponovnom usponu velikih carstava i civilizacija koje su nestale usled evropske kolonizacije i evropsko-američke hegemonije, s usponom „drugih", rađa se nova epoha istorije koja će obeležiti čitav 21. vek. Lijotarova pozicija karakteriše se kroz tri različita pristupa koja naizgled proističu jedan iz drugog, ali ih je potrebno razlikovati: Kritiku Hegela sa osnovnom tvrdnjom da je Aušvic, kao simbol beskonačnog stradanja, ukinuo njegovu filozofiju istorije i proširio ovu kritiku na velike narative modernosti. Sledeće je meta-diskurs o velikim narativima istorije zasnovan na lingvističko-filozofskim razmatranjima (zapravo meta-meta-narativ) i, na kraju, konstrukcija alternativnog velikog narativa, narativa o pojedincu, partikularnom, drugom, postmodernosti. Ovo poslednje samo prividno nije alternativna konstrukcija jer je usko povezano sa kritikom velikih narativa. U sva tri ova područja, Lijotar je izneo revolucionarna razmatranja – ali njihovo neposredno povezivanje je poništilo ove napretke. Lijotar je zamenio totalizujući diskurs apsoluta sličnim totalizujućim diskursom partikularnog. Potrebna nam je ne samo radikalna revizija pojmova zapadne modernosti, već i pojmova postmodernosti i pronalazak drugačije vrste dijalektike. Lijotaru treba priznati da skraćeno tumačenje Hegela može podržati njegovu kritiku. Međutim, potpuno je sporno da li se Hegelov pristup zasniva na zatvorenom ili otvorenom sistemu. Teza izneta ovde jeste da je Hegelov pristup istovremeno i otvoren i zatvoren. Jednostavan i ilustrativan primer je sinusna kriva na blago uzdignutoj x-osi. Ovaj talasni model je zatvoren na y-osi, ali potpuno otvoren i čak beskonačan na x-osi. Kritičari i zagovornici Hegelove filozofije istorije pogrešno su razumeli njegov pristup kao zatvoren sistem i iz toga izvukli „kraj istorije" (Marks kao i Fukujama). Međutim, s Hegelom se može tvrditi da smo na nasilnom kraju postmodernosti. Želeo sam da moj tekst ne samo pokuša kritiku Lijotara i rekonstrukciju Hegelove metode, već i da iznese suštinske perspektive koje iz toga proizlaze, čak i ako one nužno još nisu u potpunosti razrađene. Pored toga, Lijotara vidim kao istaknutog predstavnika poststrukturalizma, s kojim deli uporedive probleme, tako da pravim ukrštene reference na sličnosti u ovoj poziciji, čak i ako ih ovde ne razmatram zasebno.

Ključne reči: Hegel, Lijotar, postmodernost, Aušvic, Klauzevic, *Nauka o logici*

III

REVIEWS

PRIKAZI

ALESSANDRO FERRARA, *SOVEREIGNTY ACROSS GENERATIONS: CONSTITUENT POWER AND POLITICAL LIBERALISM*, OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2023

Marjan Ivković
Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory

Alessandro Ferrara's *Sovereignty Across Generations: Constituent Power and Political Liberalism* presents a rigorous, nuanced and innovative theoretical response to the challenges that confront liberal democracy today. The book carries further Ferrara's project, begun a decade earlier in his *The Democratic Horizon*, of demonstrating that the normative and heuristic potential of John Rawls's mature, non-essentialist and anti-perfectionist 'political' liberalism overflows its own boundaries, or, as Ferrara puts it succinctly, that "political liberalism is broader than *Political Liberalism*" (4). Ferrara's work is guided by a conviction that the conceptual resources implicit in Rawls's perspective can help democracy stand up to 'inhospitable conditions' such as the cultural hyperpluralism brought by globalization and the devastating social consequences of neoliberalism. In *Sovereignty Across Generations* Ferrara takes on what is generally viewed as the greatest direct threat to democracy today fuelled by these conditions: populism.

Upon outlining the relative advantages of political liberalism compared to its most influential theoretical competitors, Ferrara sets out to explain the normative core of the late Ralws's perspective through an original anti-authoritarian reformulation of Plato's allegory of the cave. He invites us to imagine that, not one, but several philosophers have ventured out of the cave, experienced the outside world in somewhat differing ways, and are facing the task of returning to the cave with their competing accounts – what are they to do? Wouldn't it be *most reasonable* for them, Ferrara asks, to compare the accounts, identify what is common to all of them, and agree to present only that common part to the cave dwellers as a basic set of rules for their common life, while leaving the contentious parts to non-binding debates about what is true, right or beautiful? This, in a nutshell, is the logic of the Ralws's 'normativity of the most reasonable', a revolutionary perspective capable of reconciling universalism and non-foundationalism.

Ferrara thus sets up the basic parameters for his analysis of populism that addresses an important blind spot – while populism has been the subject of

myriad theorizations and analyses, the question of its normative logic has remained on the sidelines. Ferrara argues that common to all forms of populism – 'right' and 'left' – are three characteristics: the conflation of the concept of 'the people' as the sovereign of a given democratic polity with the current electorate of that polity (the currently living segment of the people); the attribution of 'full constituent power' – the power to transform the constitution of a polity or replace it with a new one – to the electorate; and 'presumptively justified intolerance' of the electorate's majority to any opposition. These premises comprise the basis of the 'serial' conception of democratic popular sovereignty, according to which every generation of individuals living in a political community has the right to proclaim itself 'the people' and dispose of the constitution as it sees fit.

In Ferrara's understanding, the appeal of populism stems from its rootedness in 'deep-seated tropes of our political tradition', such as our general proneness to equate 'the people' with the currently living citizenry, the view of politics as always essentially about drawing the line between 'us' and 'them', and the notion that the existence of a plurality of worldviews and opinions in any given polity is always the result of sinister forces at work – ideology, false consciousness or 'ill-conceived relativism' – without which the one 'true' worldview (the one reflecting the actual order of things-in-themselves) would shine through and become universally adopted. One wouldn't be wrong in saying that Ferrara's *oeuvre* is deeply motivated by a commitment to fight these views.

In the central parts of the book, Ferrara fleshes out his two key theoretical innovations which harbour significant potential for informing progressive mobilizations against populism: the 'political conception of the people' and 'sequential sovereignty'. With the political conception of the people, Ferrara transcends an ossified binary of Schmittian perspectives that define the political community as little more than an extension of a particular *Volksgeist*, and Kelsenian, constructivist conceptions, within which its establishment boils down to an act of creation ex nihilo. The people, Ferrara argues, comes into existence when members of a given historical *ethnos*, having an initial sense of connectedness for contingent reasons such as a common language or territorial contiguity, and spurred by some organized political actor such as a movement or a charismatic leader, take upon themselves a joint 'commitment to share commitments' (155). In so doing, they transform themselves into a *demos*, a reflexive community capable of exercising *constituent power*, the power of committing itself to a specific set of basic normative guidelines – a constitution.

When setting the terms of their future association, members of a new *demos* are not free to choose any arbitrary normative logic they stumble upon. Just as the philosophers debating what to do at the entrance of the cave, they will (and this 'will' is both explanatory and prescriptive in Ferrara) choose the normativity that is *most reasonable* for them in light of who they are, "historically, politically and culturally" (134). So, is this after all a form of veiled Schmittian substantivism? Not in the least, because, for Ferrara, 'who we are' is always also (and in fact primarily) projective, it inherently entails 'who we aspire to become' in the future.

Ferrara's arguments exhibit a sociological sensitivity for the dialectical, structurational nature of processes of institutionalization not often found in normative political theory (Ferrara obtained his PhD in sociology). The thrust of his argument is that neither *ethnos* nor *demos* is ontologically prior when it comes to the constitution of a people:

"There is no priority, in this process, of who we are over who we commit ourselves to being, as in essentialist models of popular sovereignty and constituent power. On the contrary, there is a priority of '*who we most reasonably may want to be*' as future *demos*, over who we *are* as an *ethnos*. The process that constitutes us as a *demos* also transforms *who we are as an ethnos*, while keeping a foothold in that life form: the new *demos* is a transformation *of us*." (156) Ferrara argues in a pragmatist vein that, when it comes to identity, our commitments are more important than beliefs about who we are, which means that individual and collective self-realization is not about bringing the reality of ourselves in line with our self-image, but in orienting ourselves, through commitments, to becoming something which we still aren't. To capture this openness without indeterminacy, Ferrara relies on a very Hegelian formulation of Charles Larmore: "The fulfillment of the self does not consist in coincidence with something represented as actual, but rather in 'coinciding with its own essential non-coincidence'" (153).

These reflections ground Ferrara's argument that the *authenticity* of a constitution – its capacity to provide members of a people with a sense of having a unique political identity – does not rest in its being an emanation of an ethnic tradition or *Volksgeist*, but in the *normative exemplarity* of its essentials. Ferrara here brings in another strand of his work, his theory of exemplary normativity. Displaying a clear grasp of what critical realists term the 'emergent' dimension of social reality, Ferrara explains that exemplary normative commitments found in constitutional essentials are those that prove capable of shaping the identity of a people in an *aspirational*, future-oriented way. Article 1 of the 1948 constitution of democratic Italy, which stipulates that 'Italy is a republic founded on labour' is one such commitment: a line that has come to be interpreted as a rejection of obstacles to civic participation such as property and privilege, the article does not reflect any 'fact of life' of the Italian *demos* that had existed prior to the new constitution, but expresses the newly constituted people's aspirations to egalitarianism and inclusiveness in a way that provides its members with a sense of a unique common purpose.

The *sequential* conception of sovereignty, Ferrara's second key innovation, basically means a people's practice of transgenerational fidelity to the foci of normative exemplarity in its constitution. Such fidelity requires that some constitutional essentials, which have over time proven identity-defining for a people, be considered implicitly unamendable across generations, while others may, and often should, be amended – through the exercise of *amending power* – insofar as amendments bring the constitution normatively 'more in line with its original promise'. This means, Ferrara points out, that a living segment of the people – the electorate – should generally be bound by the *normative will* of previous generations, but not by their *cognitive horizon* (228).

In contrast to the serial view of sovereignty with its pseudo-commonsensical premise that future and past generations don't exist and that currently living citizenry should be unbound in its political action, sequential sovereignty operates under the principle of 'vertical reciprocity': as Ferrara argues, "Amending power should be barred from altering the constitutional essentials (basic structure, basic rights and liberties) in any way that would make it *less reasonable* for the other generations, past or future, of the people to be imagined as willing to live their political lives within that newly generated constitutional order." (273). Another key assumption at play here is that, if institutional reality, as the emergent property of our

collective relations, is not reducible to its physical carriers, then past and future generations of a people are 'real' in an important sense. The best indirect evidence for this view is that rejecting it leads to a degeneration of constitutional democracy into an ethnocracy. If our own political will as the living electorate will one day be inconsequential and non-existent, the only bonds that will seem durable to us will be ethno-cultural ones. Over time, we will inevitably start prioritizing these bonds over political ones *in the present*: Ferrara warns that "Serial sovereignty breeds and indirectly sustains the ethnicization of collective identity." (215). This is a powerful, if indirect, argument in favour of a transgenerational perspective in politics, which Ferrara offers to readers instead of a tedious philosophical discussion of the issue.

The final sections present a fine-grained discussion of what it means for a people to exercise legitimate amending power and what amounts to a proper, non-epistocratic 'representation of the transgenerational people' by the highest judicial authority in constitutional democracy – a high, supreme or constitutional court – which will be of great interest to expert readers. Beyond Ferrara's pivotal contribution to ongoing debates in legal and political theory, however, it is his fundamental view of collective political identity, which subtends concepts such as the transgenerational people, sequential sovereignty, authenticity as normative exemplarity and the co-constitutive nature of *demos* and *ethnos*, that will capture the imagination of the broader audience. By this I mean Ferrara's persuasive argument that an open and non-essentialized collective identity can be a robust one, and that it is precisely its future-oriented, aspirational dimension that secures its robustness in the present. No small part of the appeal of reactionary populism seems to come from its having convinced many people that the only way out of the anxiety of the post-metaphysical (and neoliberal) age is to tie oneself firmly to 'who one is' in the sense of actuality. The political left has struggled to come up with a future-oriented alternative that is not exclusionary and homogenizing. Alessandro Ferrara's political-liberal perspective might just be pointing in the right direction.

IV

FROM THE ACTIVITIES OF THE INSTITUTE

IZ RADA INSTITUTA

PREGLED TRIBINA I KONFERENCIJA U INSTITUTU ZA FILOZOFIJU I DRUŠTVENU TEORIJU ZA 2024. GODINU

Maja Pupovac i Tijana Uzelac

PREDAVANJA, SEMINARI, PANEL DISKUSIJE I PROMOCIJE KNJIGA:

FEBRUAR:

23.02. Predavanje Srđana Đurđevića "Globalizam i segregacija: Lakanova kritika savremenih grupnih režima" (CriticLab)

26.02. Okrugli sto o knjizi Franka Žoržija *Samoupravljanje u izgradnji, francuska levica i jugoslovenski "model" (1948-1981)* (YugoLab)

- Učesnici: Veljko Stanić, Dušan Marković, Srđan Milošević, Dragoljub Popović, Ivica Mladenović, Pavle Antonijević, Aleksandar Kraus, Nebojša Šarkić; moderator: Marko Božić

27.02. Predavanje Franka Žoržija "Jugoslovensko samoupravljanje kao model za francusku levicu?" (YugoLab)

MART:

04.03. Predavanje Zlatana Delića "Bosanskohercegovačke književnice međuratne Jugoslavije: književnost i društveni angažman" (GenLab)

07.03. Seminar o knjizi Alesandra Ferare *Sovereignty Across Generations* (CriticLab)

- Učesnici: Mihal Sladaček, Jelena Lončar, Milan Urošević, Vujo Ilić, Đorđe Hristov, Marko Konjović, Srđan Prodanović, Alesandro Ferara, moderator: Marjan Ivković

12.03. Razgovor o knjizi Dragana Stanojevića, Tanje Jakobi i Milovana Pisarija *Lokalne istorije i sećanja Roma i Romkinja u Srbiji i Bosni i Hercegovini na Drugi svetski rat* (ShoahLab)

- Učesnici: Dejan Marković, Tanja Jakobi, Dragan Stanojević, Milovan Pisari

13.03. Predavanje Sanje Bencetić "Inkluzivni dizajn za održivu budućnost: Šest predrasuda o inkluzivnom dizajnu" (SolidCare Lab, PerspectLab)

14.03. Zajedničko predavanje Petera Travnija i Rajnharda Meringa "Arhivski materijal / Izvori dela Karla Šmita" (CriticLab)

14.03. Predavanje sa Muratom Somerom "Strategije protiv autokratizacije" (ActiveLab)

- Učesnici: Murat Somer, Ivan Ejub Kostić, Filip Milačić, moderatorka: Gazela Pudar Draško

15.03. Seminar sa Peterom Travnijem i Rajnhardom Meringom: "Iz iskustva arhiva" (CriticLab)

15.03. Projekcija dokumentarnog filma *Nesahranjena osećanja: Sećanja na Holokaust u Mađarskoj* (ShoahLab) i razgovor sa autorom, Richardom Papom

19.03. Razgovori o knjizi Dubravke Stojanović *Prošlost dolazi* (YugoLab)

- Učesnici: Dubravka Stojanović, Nenad Makuljević, Marko Šuica, Srđan Radović, Rodoljub Jovanović, Adriana Zaharijević, Petar Žarković, Pavle Antonijević, moderator: Milivoj Bešlin

21.03. Razgovori o knjizi Jelene Lončar *Peformans političkog prestavljanja* (ActiveLab, GenLab)

- Učesnici: Jelena Lončar, Biljana Đorđević, Dušan Spasojević, Gazela Pudar Draško, Irena Fiket, Jelena Vasiljević, Adriana Zaharijević i Tara Tepavac

22.03. Seminar o knjizi Marka Armijera *Otpadocen: priče sa globalne deponije* (CriticLab, SolidCareLab)

- Učesnici: Vera Mevorah, Marko Armijero, Damir Arsenijević, Andrija Filipović, Marjan Ivković, Vukan Marković

APRIL:

01.04. Predavanje Bruna Perreire Coste "Upotreba društvenih medija – efekat Donalda Trampa" (DigiLab)

10.04. Seminar o knjizi Volfganga Šmalea *Istorija modernog prosvetiteljstva* (EduLab)

- Učesnici: Igor Cvejić, Đorđe Hristov, Ivan Ejub Kostić, Predrag Krstić, Slobodan Marković, Olga Nikolić, Dragan Prole, Milan Ristović, Nataša Šmelc, Volfgang Šmale

11.04. Okrugli sto "Otvoreno o bolu" (SolidCareLab)

- Učesnici: Andrija Jurić, Dejan Nešić, Ljiljana Pantović, Jasna Hrnčić, moderatorke: Aleksandra Bulatović, Milica Mađanović

16.04. Razgovor o knjizi Nenada Cekića *Etika: teorijski minimum* (CriticLab)

- Učesnici: Nenad Cekić, Igor Cvejić, Aleksandar Dobrijević, Ana Lipij, Stefan Mićić, Tamara Plećaš, Milica Smajević Roljić

18.04. Predavanje Ane Milojević "Medijska slika protesta: Postojanost paradigme protesta u polarizovanim društvima" (ActiveLab)

19.04. Panel diskusija "Alternativno filozofiranje i filozofska fikcija" (CriticLab)

- Učesnici: Stefano Gualeni, Matija Vigato, Luka Perušić

22.04. Predavanje Hans-Georga Moellera "Kakvo sopstvo? Kakav pol? Ka boljem narativu o rodu" (CriticLab)

23.04. Panel diskusija "Izbeglice i savremeno društvo – kontinuiteti i diskontinuiteti narativa" (ShoahLab, ActiveLab, YugoLab)

- Učesnici: Agneš Kelemen, Eszter Neuberger, Saša Dragojlo, Željka Oparnica

23.04. Promocija knjige Irene Fiket, Čedomira Markova, Vuje Ilića i Gazele Pudar Draško *Participativne demokratske inovacije u Jugoistočnoj Evropi* (ActiveLab)

25.04. Predavanje Jelene Guge i Jelene Novaković "Umetnost u doba veštačke inteligencije" (DigiLab)

MAJ:

08.05. Radionica "Pisanje prikaza knjiga: Kako se (i zbog čega) pišu osvrti, prikazi i kritike?" (Kritika: časopis za filozofiju i teoriju društva)

16.05. Panel diskusija "Svetski kongres Fuko: 40 godina kasnije, Beograd" (CriticLab)

- Učesnici: Adriana Zaharijević, Tamara Plećaš, Ljiljana Pantović, Aleksandar Ostojić, Jelena Vukićević, moderator: Milan Urošević

16.05. Predavanje "Upitna zdravstvena ponašanja – između psihologije i sistema" (ActiveLab)

- Učesnici: Danka Purić, Goran Knežević, Iris Žeželj, Marija Branković

17.05. Predavanje Ričarda Parnkata "Modelovanje klimatskog mortaliteta: Implikacije za etiku, ljudsku bezbednost i klimatske parnice" (PerspectLab)

20.05. Predavanje Ljiljane Pantović "Žena i žensko telo u medicini" (SolidCareLab)

21.05. Predavanje Esther Šarme "Porođaj na putu: Porođajna iskustva Avganistanki na putu ka EU preko Srbije" (SolidCareLab)

27-28.05. Međunarodna radionica "Intersubjektivnost afekata i društvena promena" (CriticLab)

- Učesnici: Bruno Frère, Morten Niessen, Jan Slaby, Simon Susen, Thomas Szanto, Igor Cvejić, Ana Đorđević, Marjan Ivković, Olga Nikolić, Srđan Prodanović

30.05. Seminar "Materijalnost: prostora, praksi, simbola" (PerspectLab)

- Učesnici: Željko Radinković, Zoran Erić, Sanja Iguman Glušac, Davor Ereš, Tamara Plećaš, Miloš Ćipranić, Milica Mađanović, moderatorka: Dušanka Milosavljević

JUN:

06.06. Predavanje Lovra Kralja "Evolucija Holokausta u NDH: Komparativni pristup regionalne istorije genocida" (ShoahLab)

20.06. Predavanje Dimitrisa Vardulakisa "Politike antagonizma i sudbina reprezentacije" (CriticLab)

21.06. Predavanje Ane Rajković Pejić "Svakodnevica radnika u Hrvatskoj u drugoj polovici 20. stoljeća na primjeru tvornice 'Đuro Đaković'" (YugoLab)

AVGUST:

21.08. Predavanje Milovana Pisarija "Uništavanje Jevreja u Jugoslaviji kao paradigma Holokausta u Evropi" (ShoahLab)

21.08. Otvoreni razgovori "Holokaust i genocidi u 20. veku: otvorena predavanja" (ShoahLab)

SEPTEMBAR:

04.09. Otvoreni razgovori sa Nevenom Daković "Holokaust na jugoslovenskim ekranima: poetike i politike reprezentacije" (ShoahLab)

18.09. Predavanje Stefana Radojkovića "Istorija sećanja. Holokaust u vojno-okupacionoj zoni 'Srbija'" (ShoahLab)

27.09. Seminar o časopisu Khōrein na Novoj školi u Njujorku (PerspectLab)

- Učesnici: Petar Bojanić, Andrea Kančlini, Pipo Kora, Sintija Dejvidson, Džejms Dod, Andrej Holder, Ketrin Ingaran, Mark Jarzombek, Sandford Kvinter, Sijvija Lavin, Miodrag Mitrašinović, Ana Nejmark, Spajros Papapetros, Hju Rafls, Mark Rakatanski, Bernard Mark Rakatansky, Bernard Tscumi, Peter Ajsenman i Snežana Vesnić

OKTOBAR:

14.10. Panel diksusija "Now-ness" na Bartlet školi arhitekture u Londonu (PerspectLab)

- Učesnici: Charlotte Skene Catling, Džonatan Wolf, Petar Bojanić, Andrea Kančlini, Lidija Gasperoni,

Stelios Giamarelos, Aja Džazerli, Mfo Matsipa i Snežana Vesnić

14.10. Predavanje Tomasa Marka Nemeta "Ukrajinske crkve u ratu. Izazovi za društvo i hrišćanstvo" (Grupa za istraživanje religije)

15.10. Promocija temata "Hegel i postmodernizam", časopisa Filozofija i društvo (CriticLab)

- Učesnici: Đorđe Hristov, Andrea Perunović, Predrag Krstić, Natascha Schmelz, Gary Browning, Bara Kolenc, Cynthia Cruz, Manuel Tangorra, Julian Ferreyra, Iñigo Baca Bordons, Ionuț Văduva, Angelo Narváez León, moderator: Đorđe Hristov

16.10. Predavanje Vere Mevorah "Industrija Holokausta: američka debata o instrumentalizaciji Šoe" (ShoahLab)

17.10. Panel diksusija "Plat-form", Conservatoire national des arts et métiers, Pariz (PerspectLab)

- Učesnici: Zona Zarić, Petar Bojanić, Snežana Vesnić, Odile Decq, Nicholas Hannequin, Cynthia Fleury, Antoine Fenoglio

25.10. Razgovor o knjizi Nikole Miloša Šugara *Zarazna omaška: psihoanalitičke studije, članci i kritike 1925–1941*(IFDT)

- Učesnici: Marko Čudić, Srđan Damnjanović, Damir Smiljanić, Jelena Zulević

26.10. Transdisciplinarni umetnički projekat "Pojavljivanja / Showing Up" (PerspectLab)

31.10. Predavanje Đorđa Đorđevića "Nikad više i kraj posleratnog međunarodnog poretka" (IFDT)

NOVEMBAR:

04.11. Seminar Nensi Frazer "Tri lica kapitalističkog rada: razotkrivanje skrivenih veza između roda, rase i klase" (CriticLab)

05.11. Predavanje Miše Kapetanovića "Tobelije kao kvir: Kako misliti neheteronormativne živote u ruralnim društvima" (GenLab)

07.11. Razgovor o knjizi Petra Žarkovića *Marko Nikezić. Diplomata u središtu Hladnog rata* (YugoLab)

- Učesnici: Tvrtko Jakovina, Milivoj Bešlin, Natalija Dimić Lompar, Petar Žarković

13.11. Predavanje Igora Velića "Kako oblikovati saobraćajni prostor po meri ranjivih učesnika u saobraćaju" (SolidCareLab, PerspectLab)

25.11. Predstavljanje knjige Dejana Bursaća *Osnovi reforme izbornog sistema* (ActiveLab)

- Učesnici: Gazela Pudar Draško, Jelena Vasiljević, Milan Jovanović, Dušan Vučićević, Dejan Bursać

25.11. Seminar o časopisu Khōrein na Školi arhitekture u Solunu (PerspectLab)

- Učesnici: Patar Bojanić, Ognen Marina

DECEMBAR:

11.12. Predstavljanje knjige Dejana Bursaća *Osnovi reforme izbornog sistema* (ActiveLab)

- Učesnici: Duško Radosavljević, Dušan Vučićević, Nikola Jović, Tara Tepavac

16.12. Okrugli sto "Graditeljsko nasleđe Beograda: Izazovi očuvanja u kontekstu savremene urbanizacije" (PerspectLab)

- Učesnici: Ksenija Radovanović, Dušanka Milosavljević, Miloš Ćipranić, Branko Milošević, Estela Radonjić Živkov, Vesna Marjanović, Miljan Salata, moderatorka: Sanja Iguman Glušac

18.12. Predavanje Bojane Jovićević "Racionalnost zla kod Hegela" (CriticLab)

20.12. Dodela nagrade "Miladin Životić" Mariji Todorovoj

20.12. Seminar o knjizi Marije Todorove "Izgubljeni svet socijalista na marginama Evrope"

- Učesnici: Tanja Petrović, Sanja Bojanić, Džeremi Volton, Dubravka Stojanović, Luka Filipović, Marija Mandić, Đorđe Hristov, moderatorka: Aleksandra Pavlović

23.12. Predavanje Gorana Markovića "Film i novac u socijalizmu i kapitalizmu"

- Učesnici: Srđan Prodanović, Petar Žarković, moderatorka: Dušanka Milosavljević

23.12. Seminar "Kako se misli prostor?" o knjizi Ane Nikezić *Scene urbanog života: porodična kuća u savremenom gradu* (PerspectLab)

- Učesnici: Jelena Atanacković-Jeličić, Petar Bojanić, Verica Krstić, Mina Miladinović, Pavle Stamenović, Snežana Vesnić, moderator: Marko Ristić

KONFERENCIJE, SIMPOZIJUMI I LETNJE/ ZIMSKE ŠKOLE:

JANUAR:

29.01. Manifestacija "Holokaust: nasleđe fašizma 6 – Genocid i teologija", Međunarodni dan sećanja na žrtve holokausta u muzeju "21. oktobar" – Kragujevac (Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju (ShoahLab), Savez jevrejskih opština Srbije, Centar za primenjenu istoriju – Beograd, Centar za studije sećanja Univerziteta u Kragujevcu, Udruženje "Jevrejska digitalna biblioteka", Centar za izgradnju mira – Kragujevac i Spomen-park "Kragujevački oktobar")

- Uvodna izlaganja: Marijana Stanković, Marko Terzić, Predrag Krstić
- Blok 1: Holokaust i mladi
  - Andrej Ivanji: "Oni koji su preživeli Holokaust"
  - Nada Banjanin Đuričić: "Kako razgovarati sa učenicima o Bogu i Holokaustu?"
- Blok 2: Promisao posle Aušvica?
  - Dragana Stojanović: "Postholokaustovska čitanja u jevrejskoj misli: trauma, vera i kontinuitet"
  - Saša Antonijević: "Susret Pravoslavne Crkve sa Holokaustom"
  - Ivan Ivanji: "Aušvic nije samo ime jednog logora nego pojam"
- Blok 3: Holokaust i teologija
  - Moderator: Predrag Krstić
  - Učesnici: Željko Šarić, Dragan Bošković, Vladan Kostadinović

FEBRUAR:

19-23.02. Zimska škola "Rod i nasilje" (Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju Univerziteta u Beogradu (GenLab), Univerzitet u Novom Sadu, TPO Fondacija, Univerzitetski gender resursni centar (UNIGERC) Univerziteta u Sarajevu)

- 19.02.
  - Uvodne reči: Sabina Halupka-Rešetar, Zilka Spahić-Šiljak, Gordana Lalić-Krstin, Lamija Subašić, Jelena Ćeriman, Krisztina Rácz
  - Marko Konjović: "Pol, rod i (ne) ravnopravnost"
  - Irena Fiket: "Patrijarhalne strukture u domaćinstvu kao osnova neravnopravnosti"
  - Bojana Dinić: "Rod i digitalno nasilje"
  - Đurđa Trajković: "Patrijarhalnost, rod i nasilje u društvu"
- 20.02.
  - Vedrana Lacmanović: "(Raz)otkrivanje femicida"

- Nermin Šehović: "Krivično-pravni aspekti femicida"
- Smiljana Milinkov: "Medijsko izveštavanje o rodno-zasnovanom nasilju"
- Midhat Izmirlija: "Pozitivne obaveze države u suzbijanju rodno-zasnovanog nasilja"

- 21.02.
  - Nada Padejski Šekerović: "Trgovina ženama"
  - Zona Zarić: "Pristanak i seksualno uznemiravanje: odnosi moći u vezi sa telom"
  - Ljiljana Pantović: "Žena i žensko telo u medicini"
  - Marija Radoman: "Rod, seksualnost, nasilje i diskriminacija"
- 22.02.
  - Marija Mandić: "Šta je problem sa rodno-osetljivim jezikom?"
  - Zara Saeidzadeh: "Trans* woman's socio-legal status in Sweden: The experiences of epistemic misrecognition"
  - Vladislava Gordić Petković: "Pravo na krik i bes: rodno-zasnovano nasilje u savremenoj ženskoj književnosti"
- 23.02.
  - Aleksandra Knežević: "Kako nauka doprinosi rodnoj neravnopravnosti i kako je održava?"
  - Milica Resanović: "Negativne reakcije na promišljanja i istraživanja o rodu"
  - Okrugli sto: "Razmišljanja o promeni: šta možemo da uradimo povodom rodno-zasnovanog nasilja?" (moderator: Bojan Todorović; učesnici/učesnice: Gorjana Mirčić Čaluković, Sadija Gicić i Nermin Šehović)

29.02-01.03 "Elections – Democracy – Crisis EDC Conference 2024" (Fakultet za političke nauke i međunarodne studije Univerziteta u Varšavi i Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju Univerziteta u Beogradu (ActiveLab))

- 29.02.
  - Panel 1: Understanding Populism
    - Chair: Spasimir Domaradzki (University of Warsaw)
    - Marta Pascal (Pompeu Fabra University): "Trust as a Regenerating Vector of Democracy in Europe"
    - Francisco Batista (Universidade Nova de Lisboa): "Populism as a Democratic Paradigm Rupture: A Brave New World on the Horizon?"
    - Yannis Tsafos, Soner Baskaya and John Tsoukalas (University of Glasgow): "Oil Price Shocks and Political Transitions: The Role of Fiscal Capacity"
  - Panel 2: Exploring the Link Between Participation and Democracy
    - Chair: Małgorzata Kaczorowska (University of Warsaw)
    - Anna Unger (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest): "Advocacy Potentials of Opposition Parties and NGOs by Direct Democracy: A Case Study from Hungary"
    - Mihaela Ivănescu (Ovidius University of Constanța): "Can There Be Democracy without Participation? On Electoral Absenteeism and the Chronic Crisis of Representation in Romania"
    - Dmitrij Wolodin (Kozminski University, Warsaw): "Democratic Innovations in War-torn Ukraine: A Beacon for Post-neo-liberal Democratic Resilience?"
    - Dejan Bursać and Nikola Jović (University of Belgrade):

"Voting Preferences of the Transitional Losers: A Perspective from Serbia"

- Panel 3: Parties and Party Leaders
  - Chair: Vadym Zheltovskyy (University of Warsaw)
  - Vujo llić and Dušan Spasojević (University of Belgrade): "The Demand Side of Political Personalization: The Determinants of Leader-over-Party Voter Preferences in Serbia"
  - Mattia Gatti (LUISS Guido Carli University, Rome): "Managing the Grumbles: How Do Intra-Party Dissent and Leader Domination Affect Salience Strategies in Western Europe?"
  - Erdogan Altun (Istanbul University): "When Clientelism is in Crisis: Local Brokers of JDP during 2014 and 2019 Local Elections in Turkey"
- Panel 4: Prospects for European Democracy
  - Chair: Piotr Tosiek (University of Warsaw)
  - Gerard Conway (Brunel Law School): "Democracy as a Justiciable Concept in the EU"
  - Anouk van Vliet and Jan Meijer (Leiden University): "MP's Attitudes towards European Authoritarian Leaders in Light of the Russo-Ukraine War"
  - André Pereira Matos and Vanda Amaro Dias (Universidade Portucalense; Universidade de Coimbra): "Addressing the Crisis of Democracy in Europe and Beyond: A Comparative Analysis of the EU's Democracy Promotion Strategies in Hungary, Turkey and Ukraine"
  - Gábor Kurunczi (Pázmány Péter Catholic University): "Is the European Union in crisis? The Relationship between EU Citizenship and Direct Democracy and its Impact on Democratic Legitimacy"
- Panel 5: Electoral Innovations
  - Chair: Dejan Bursać (University of Belgrade)
  - Bohdan Szklarski (University of Warsaw): "Built in Crisis Enhancing Mechanisms in Democratic Systems and How Democracies Deal with Them - A Comparison Between the USA and Europe"
  - Jurijs Ņikišins (University of Latvia): "The Quest for Democratic Bliss: Which Dimensions Hold the Key?"
  - lan Parenteau (Royal Military College Saint-Jean, Québec): "Are Electoral Management Bodies Ready to Mitigate New Electoral Risks?"

- 01.03.
  - Panel 6: State of Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe
    - Chair: Tomasz Grzegorz Grosse (University of Warsaw)
    - Adam Szymański (University of Warsaw): "Crisis of Democracy in Poland - Does It Affect the Subnational Levels?"
    - Dušan Vučićević and Viktor Stamenković (University of Belgrade; Institute for Political Studies Belgrade): "Leveraging Local Interests: A Content Analysis of Parliamentary Questions in Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, and Slovenia"
    - Cristina Matiuta (University of Oradea): "European Elections in Romania: A Framework for Analysis"

- Panel 7: Populist Concepts in and beyond Europe
  - Chair: Dušan Vučićević (University of Belgrade)
  - Khaled Imran (University of Pecs): "Uncivil Societies in Authoritarian Regimes: A Systematic Literature Review (2002-2022)"
  - Andrei Gheorghe (University of Bucharest): "The Construction of the Concept of Romanian People and his Enemies in AUR's Leaders' Discourses During the Covid-19 Crisis and Russian war in Ukraine"
  - Eszter Katona and Renáta Németh (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest): "Unveiling Geopolitical Shifts: The Evolution of the Carpathian Basin Discourse in Hungarian Parliament (1998-2020)"
  - Edoardo Lavezzo (University of York): "The Impact of Domestic Factors on the Middle Power Status: Examining Turkey's Presidentialism to Understand how the Country's Democratic Backlash Affects the Relationship with the EU"
- Closing remarks

MAJ:

09., 16. i 23.05. Razgovori "Tradicionalna arhitektura, graditeljstvo i urbanizam" (Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju (PerspectLab), INTBAU Srbija, Zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture grada Beograda, Centar za digitalno nasleđe, Arhitektonski fakultet, Unitec tehnološki institut (Novi Zeland))

- 09.05.
  - Učesnici: Renata Jadrešin Milić, Sanja Iguman, Nebojša Anteševi-ć, moderatori: Rade Mrlješ, Milica Mađanović
- 16.05.
  - Učesnici: Nađa Kurtović Folić, Marina Pavlović, Vladana Putnik, moderatori: Renata Jadrešin Milić, Milica Mađanović
- 23.05.
  - Učesnici: Jelena Bogdanović, Dimitrije Marinković, Jelica Jovanović, moderatori: Renata Jadrešin Milić, Rade Mrlješ

JUN:

01-07.06. Letnja škola na brodu "Vodeni pejzaži – nasleđe i životna sredina" 3. izdanje, Severni Jadran (Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju Univerziteta u Beogradu (PerspectLab), Univerzitet u Bergamu i Univerzitet Milano-Bicocca)

12-15.06. International Conference on CHANGE (Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade)

- 12.06.
  - Official opening of the conference – Jelena Vasiljević, Chair of the Program Board, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory
  - Panel session I (three parallel sessions)
    - Panel 1: Change in Philosophy and Theory 1 (Bojan Perović, Emory University School of Law: "Institutions and Resilience: Embracing Vulnerability Theory in Social Change"; Gabi Nair, Princeton University: "On the Necessity and Insufficiency of Prefigurative Politics")
    - Panel 2: Emotions, Discourse and Change (Alena Brabencova, Central European University: "Loss at the Heart of Change in Tony Kushner's Angels in America"; Gergana Nikolaeva Nenova, Sofia university "St. Kliment Ohridski": "Love,

intimacy and social change: reconsidering Niklas Luhmann's work"; Jelena Timotijević, School of Media, Arts and Humanities, University of Sussex, UK: "The role of discourse in affecting social change")

- Panel 3: Regulations and Change (Attila Nagy, Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, Germany: "The Role of Science and Soft Law in the Changing of Legal Systems"; Devrim Şahin and İlke Gürdal, The Cyprus Science University: "The Catalysts and Impacts of Social Change in Turkey: The Role of Power and Politics"; Miloš Kovačević, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade: "Breaking the Silence: Privacy as a Setback to Social Change")

◦ Panel session II (three parallel sessions)

- Panel 4: Resistance and Change 1 (İlayda Üstel, The Ohio State University: "Collective Political Action as Interruption: The Temporality of Inciting 'Change'"; Milan Urošević, Institute for Philosophy and Social theory, Belgrade: "Reorientation of desire – social change and resistance to neoliberal 'psychopolitics'"; Peter Langford, School of Law, Criminology and Policing, Edge Hill University, UK: "Progressive Social Change and the Notion of the Common")
- Panel 5: Change in the Balkans 1 (Anastasija Mladenovska, Miami University, Oxford, OH, United States: "Doomed if I Leave; Doomed if I Stay: Analyzing Brain Drain in the Western Balkans through the Lenses of Change"; Maja Petrović-Šteger, Research Center of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts: "Enlarging the Space of Social Possibility – Envisioning Societal Revision in Serbia"; Ana Dević and Peter Vermeersch, KU Leuven: "The Theatrics of National Commemoration versus Grassroots Inclusive Commemorative Practices: The Case of Vukovar and a Politics of Active Memory")
- Panel 6: Historical Processes and Change (David Menčik, PhD student of Philosophy at the University of Novi Sad: "Social Change versus Cultural Inertia – The Case of the Reunification of Germany and the Phenomenon of Ostalgie"; Nikolay Sarkisyan, University of Oxford: "Changing Faces of (counter)Revolution: Analyzing Stalinism's Dual Nature through the Evolution of the Petrograd-Leningrad State Museum (1920-30s)"; Gordan Maslov and Atila Lukić, independent researchers: "Things Made Possible: History of the Present and the Problematic of Post-socialism")

◦ Panel session III (three parallel sessions)

- Panel 7: History of Ideas of Change (Pengfei Hou, School of Political Science and Public Administration, Xinjiang University, China: "Whither World Order? China and 'Major Change Unseen for 100 Years'"; Tamara Plećaš and Predrag Krstić, Institute for Philosophy and Social theory, Belgrade: "The (Un) willingness to Change"; Đorđe Hristov, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, Belgrade: "Change between Heraclitus and Deleuze: Archaism and the Changing Past")

        - Panel 8: Militarism and Change (Julien Paret, Director, Alliance Centre for Eurasian Studies, Alliance University, School of Liberal Arts, Bangalore, India: "The Metanoia of Russia's Break with the 'Collective West': Aleksandr Dugin's Conservative Revolution as an Agent of Change"; Arina Pshenichnaya, Bard College: "Uniforms of Repression: Changes in Russian Police Uniforms as the Consolidation of Putin's Regime")
        - Panel 9: Change through the Optics of Critical Theory (Luiz Gustavo da Cunha De Souza, Federal University of Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, Brazil: "What Changes Work? Division of Labour, Citizenship, and Politics from Honneth to Durkheim and Back"; Rafael Augusto Palazi, Unicamp-Brazil/FU-Berlin: "System and Change within the Communicative Paradigm"; Nemanja Tubonjić, University of Banja Luka, Faculty of Philosophy: "Marx-Engels View of the Role of Technics in Shaping and Changing Human Consciousness towards the World")
    - (two parallel) Plenary lectures:
        - Stefano Micali, Husserl-Archives – KU Leuven: "Change Anxiety"
        - Stavros Stavrides, The National Technical University of Athens: "Commoning Power: Towards Emancipatory Social Changes"
    - Belgrade: the city of urban struggles – an activist tour guide
- 13.06.
    - Panel session IV (three parallel sessions):
        - Panel 10: Social Change and Ideological Contestations (Fábio Luís Ferreira Nóbrega Franco and Natália Zanatta Sena, Pontifical University of Sao Paulo: "Obliges to Change: the Brazilian Precarious Workers on the Tyranny of Global South Neoliberalism"; Hugo Fanton, RGAC, USP, ABI: "Contested Changes: Political and Ideological Disputes in the Brazilian Crisis"; Kennedy Mandunа, RGAC, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg: "Contested Lands and the Power of Eminent Domain: Spacetime Lived Experiences, Agency and Subjectivities of Communal Land Dwellers in Mining Communities in Zimbabwe"; Sagorika Singha, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), New Delhi: Content Creators as Custodians: "The Role of the Local Influencers in Changing the Landscape of Political Campaigns in India")
        - Panel 11: (Anti-) Gender Politics (in the Global South): The Crisis of Social Reproduction, Agencies, and Resistance (Firoozeh Farvardin, IRGAC, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation and MERGE (Middle East Research Group), Humboldt University of Berlin: "Horizons of New Feminisms: Unveiling Feminist Subjectivity in the Recent Uprising in Iran"; Sara Cufré, Rosa Luxemburg-Stiftung (IRGAC) research fellow at CEIL Argentina: "Struggles for Social Reproduction in the Trade Union Agenda: Insights from Argentina"; Melehat Kutun, Rosa Luxemburg-Stiftung (IRGAC) research fellow, Kassel University: "Renaturalizing the Gendered Dimension of the State Form: Response to the Crisis of Social Reproduction in Turkey")

        - Panel 12: Beyond Authoritarianism – Rethinking "Change" and "Resistance" in Times of Crisis (Damir Arsenijević and Jasmina Husanović, IRGAC Fellow; University of Tuzla: "The Wager of Continuity: Enacting Change through Community Assemblies for Social Justice in Bosnia and Herzegovina"; Inés Durán Matute, CIESAS, Mexico: "Knowledges for Other Worlds: Inspirations of the 'Struggle for Life' in Mexico"; Börries Nehe, IRGAC, Germany: "Resist, Subvert, Create: 7 Lessons about Authoritarianism and Counter-Strategies")
    - Honorary guest lectures
        - Axel Honneth, Goethe University Frankfurt and Columbia University: "One step forward, two steps back. Postcolonialism and the West"
        - Jonathan Wolff, Blavatnik School of Government, Oxford University: "The Point is to Change It"
        - Moderated by Jelena Vasiljević, Chair of the Program Board, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory; introductory words by Petar Bojanić, Chair of the IFDT International Scientific Advisory Board
    - Introductory words by Jelena Begović, Minister of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of Serbia, Vladan Đokić, Rector of the University of Belgrade, and Gazela Pudar Draško, Director of the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory
    - Doctor Honoris Causa Ceremony: Étienne Balibar, Axel Honneth, Jonathan Wolff followed by the short address of the honorary guests
    - Honorary Guest Discussion on Change
        - Étienne Balibar, University of Paris X Nanterre and University of Columbia
        - Jonathan Wolff, Blavatnik School of Government, Oxford University
        - Axel Honneth, Goethe University Frankfurt and Columbia University
        - Gazela Pudar Draško, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade
        - Moderated by: Ivan Vejvoda, Chair of IFDT Governing Board, Institute for Human Sciences Vienna
- 14.06.
    - Panel session V (three parallel sessions):
        - Panel 13: Change in Philosophy and Theory 2 (Yorgos Karagiannopoulos, University of Amsterdam: "Essentialism Strikes Back! Can Social Essentialism Grasp Genuine Change?"; Aleksandra Knežević, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, Belgrade: "Uncovering the Ontology of Social Change"; Zsolt Bagi, University of Pécs, Hungary: "Event and Transformation")
        - Panel 14: Revolution (Giustino De Michele, Aix-Marseille Université, CIELAM, Aix-en-Provence, France: "All and Nothing: Deconstruction, Revolution"; Csaba Jaksa, University of Pécs: "Conatus as a Political Concept against Revolution"; Giovanni Maria Mascaretti, University of Bergamo: "What is a 'Will to Revolution'? A Reappraisal of Michel Foucault's Writings on Iran"; Zona Zarić, Institute for Philosophy and

Social theory, Belgrade: "Crisis and Contemplation: Benjamin's Concept of Revolution as Interruption")

- Panel 15: Democracy and Change 1 (Vasiliki Akritidou, Tim Design for Change Srbija: "Embracing Change: Design for Change as a Catalyst for Transformative Education"; Sonja Dragović, DINÂMIA'CET – Center for Socioeconomic Change and Territorial Studies, University Institute of Lisbon: "Building Up to Breakdown? Facing the Strange Change of Kolašin"; Dimitris Loupetis, National and Technical University of Athens: "Inhabiting the/through Image: Locality Perspectives of the Center of Athens")

◦ (two parallel) Plenary lectures:

- Jörg Matthes, University of Vienna: "Digital Media as a Driver of Change: The Illusion to be Informed"
- Rachel Armstrong, KU Leuven, Belgium: "Dynamic Matter: Negotiating Change via Entropy and Synthesis through Metabolism"

◦ Panel session VI (three parallel sessions):

- Panel 16: Climate Change and Environmental Activism (Katarzyna Bielińska, Katarzyna Bogusz, Karolina Kulpa, Sonia Uribe, Center for Bioethics and Biolaw, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Warsaw: "Social Change in the Context of Climate Change: Latin America and Eastern Europe"; Marija Branković, Institute for Philosophy and Social theory, Belgrade: "What Do Animals Have to Do with It? The Link between Climate Change and Speciesism")
- Panel 17: Change in Philosophy and Theory 3 (Alexandre Tawil, Université of Reims Champagne-Ardenne, Université of Grenoble: "Evolutionist and Evolutionary Approaches to Social Sciences: Elaborating on a Helpful Distinction"; Florian Maiwald, Rhenish Friedrich Wilhelm University of Bonn: "The Will to Change – The Concept of Voluntarism between Historical Partiality and Social Change"; Viktor Ivanković, Institut za filozofiju, Zagreb: "Can Other-Regarding Nudges Be Morally Progressive?")
- Panel 18: Intersubjectivity of Affect and Social Change (Ana Đorđević, Olga Nikolić, Igor Cvejić, Srđan Prodanović and Marjan Ivković, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, Belgrade: "Intersubjectivity of Affects and Social Change")

◦ (two parallel) Plenary lectures:

- Regina Kreide, Justus Liebig University Giessen: "Who Owns the City? Toward a Notion of Collective Property"
- Emmanuel Picavet, Paris-1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University: "Shared and Plural Interpretations in Democratic Deliberation"

◦ Panel session VII (three parallel sessions):

- Panel 19: Progress, Regress, Conservation. Critical Views of Institutions in the Process of Change (Edward Djordjevic, Justus Liebig University, Giessen: "Institutions and Change in More and Swift"; Laura Soréna Tittel, Justus Liebig University, Giessen: "The Dialectics of Progress and Regression in

Political Theory"; Anna-Sophie Schönfelder, Justus Liebig University, Giessen: "Left behind in the Process of Change? On Roma Laborers in the Single EU Market"; Hannes Kaufmann, Justus Liebig University, Giessen: "From Disintegration to Institutionalization and Back? Institutions as Triggers and Blockades of Change"; Max Waibel, Justus Liebig University, Giessen: "Authority and Social Change")

- Panel 20: Technology and change (Wang Yinchun, Donghua University, Visiting Scholar at University College London (UCL): "Generative Artificial Intelligence and the Change of Knowledge Production Paradigm: From 'Dao of Changes' of the Book of Changes"; Mikhail Bukhtoyarov, Siberian Federal University, Krasnoyarsk and External associate, EduLab, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, Belgrade and Anna Bukhtoyarova, Independent researcher and External associate, EduLab, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, Belgrade: "Technostalgia in IT: Human Limits of Adaptation to Technological Change"; Anna Liadova and Inna Vershinina, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow: "Social Change and Artificial Intelligence: Potential Challenges and Obstacles"; Ljubiša Mitrović and Dunja Veličković, University of Niš: "A Contribution to the Demystification of the Concept and Process of Transition and the Role of the Internet Generation as a Social Actor")
- Panel 21: Change in philosophy and theory 4 (Nikola Mlađenović, Faculty of Diplomacy and Security, Union – Nikola Tesla University: "Control and Serpent: Gilles Deleuze, Cybernetics and Change"; Maroje Višić, Libertas International University Zagreb: "Herbert Marcuse's Relentless Search for Radical Social Change"; Jasmin Hasanović, University of Sarajevo, Faculty of Political Sciences: "Beyond the Eschatology of Change: Crafting Emancipatory Political Theory through Engagement")

• 15.06.

  ◦ Panel session VIII (three parallel sessions):

    - Panel 22: Geopolitics and change (Novak Gajić, Independent researcher: "De-Ideologisation in Late 20th Century and Re-Ideologisation in Early 21st Century"; Heqi Sun, Doctoral School of Social Sciences, University of Warsaw: "Relaunching European Integration, Changes, Dilemmas and New Thinking")
    - Panel 23: Change in the Balkans 2 (Andrijana Lazarević and Stefan Surlić, Institute for Political Studies and Faculty of Political Sciences, Belgrade: "Embracing Change? Assessing the Impact of Generation Z in Serbia on Kosovo Issue"; Bojana Selaković, Coordinator of the National Convention on European Union in Serbia: "The Role of the New Age Activism in Deconstructing Captive Society: Case of Novi Pazar")
    - Panel 24: Resistance and Change 2 (Jovana Isevski, University of California, Riverside: "Not so

Fast: Visceral Economy, Acceleration, and the Incursions of Molecular Resistance"; Tej Gonza, Gonzalo Hernandez Gutierrez, Hellen López Valladares, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana; ITESO, Universidad Jezuita de Guadalajara, Mexico; Department of Management Sciences, PUCP, Lima, Peru: "Real Economic Change in Europe and Latin America: Employee Ownership as an Instrument for Reducing Economic Inequalities"; Aleksandar Novaković, Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna: "The Collectivity of Change: Subjectivity and Dissidence within Social Transformation)"

- (two parallel) Plenary lectures:
  - Shijun Tong, NYU Shanghai: "Kant's Three Arguments for Human Progress"
  - Sanja Bojanić, University of Rijeka: "Why is art transformative?"
- (two parallel) Plenary lectures:
  - Laurent Jeanpierre, University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne: "Coming Revolutions"
  - Natalie Depraz, University of Paris X Nanterre: "The Transformative Virtue of Surprise"
- Panel session IX (three parallel sessions):
  - Panel 25: Change and Radical Transformation: For Better or for Worse? (Bojan Baća, Institute for Advanced Studies, University of Montenegro: "The Conspiracist Zeitgeist: Contemporary Conspiracy Theories as Far-Right Social Critique?"; Andrej Cvetić, Department of Political Science, Trinity College Dublin: "Does Presence of Far Right in Parliament Foster Disidentification with Host Country and Social Exclusion among Muslim Immigrants?"; Branislav Filipović and Lazar Žolt, College of Vocational Studies, Subotica and Faculty of Philosophy, Novi Sad: "The Phantasmagorical Novelty of the Populist Matrix of Obsessive-oppressive Power: Towards a Deliric Sameness of Changes"; Goran Petrović Lotina, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Sciences Po Parism, UC Louvain: "Shifting Identifications: Dynamics of Ethico-Political Change in Contemporary Europe")
  - Panel 26: Change in Philosophy and Theory 5 (Stefan Janković, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy: "The Anthropocene and Ecopolitical Transformation: On Perspectives of Planetary Change in Latour's Earthbounds and Geosocial Classes"; Sofia Porfiryeva, University of Ottawa: "Accidental Change: From Destructive Plasticity to Political Possibility"; Rasmus Sandnes Haukedal, East China Normal University: "Limitations and Creativity: The Adjacent Possible, Strong Emergence, and Change")
  - Panel 27: Democracy and Change 2 (Ceri Davies, National Centre for Social Research (UK): "Building a Deliberative Imagination for 21st Century Challenges"; Jonathan Lahey Dronsfield, Czech Academy of Sciences Prague: "Dissent and the plasticity of democracy"; Dragana Kostica, Hafencity University Hamburg: "The Roots of Social Change in the Planning Process")

- Closing session: Changing Democracy through Deliberative Methods? – with Ceri Davis, Čedomir Markov, Danilo Ćurčić and Jovana Timotijević; moderated by Irena Fiket

CHANGE CONFERENCE SIDE EVENTS:

- 11.06.
  - Workshop with Stavros Stavrides, The National Technical University of Athens: "Praxis of Commoning and Social Change"
- 12-15.06.
  - Workshop: "A Money View Analysis of China's Finacial System: From Reform and Opening Up to Today"
- 12-15.06.
  - Milena Putnik, Nemanja Lađić, Suzana Gavrilović and Milovan Milenković: "Solid Line Dashed Line: The Future of Liminal Landscapes" project presentation
- 13.06.
  - Projection of two connected short films: "While We Wait" (2023), 17', and "The Longer We Wait" (2024), 20' made in the framework of the project "Showing Up". Directed by Saša Karalić, concept by Saša Karalić and Željko Radinković, in collaboration with Snežana Vesnić, Zoran Erić and with the participation of IFDT researchers
- 14.06.
  - RECAS Fellows in conversation with Basil Kerski, Director of the European Solidarity Centre in Gdansk, editor-in-chief of the German-Polish magazine DIALOG in Berlin: "Lessons from the Solidarity Movement", moderated by Petar Žarković and Ivan Ejub Kostić, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory

25.06. Simpozijum "Filozofija u učionici" (Intitut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju Univerziteta u Beogradu (EduLab))

- Tematska rasprava I: Nastajanje pitanja ili zakoračiti iza očiglednog
  - Miloš Jeremić: "Kako je moguća nastava filozofije?"
  - Iris Janković: "Filozofija u učionici: zakoračiti iza očiglednog"
  - Danijela Grujić: "Kritički orijentisana nastava filozofije: Kako nastaju pitači u školi?"
- Tematska rasprava II: Sinestezije: pojmovi, slike i životna iskustva u nastavi filozofije
  - Damir Malešev: "Grafičke sheme kao didaktičko sredstvo u nastavi filozofije"
  - Siniša Mitrić: "Filozofska prelivanja i prelazi kroz analogne školske, duhovne i životne sadržaje"
  - Mirko Marković: "Mogućnosti primene projektnog učenja u nastavi filozofije"
- Tematska rasprava III: Od intimnosti iskustva do javnosti škole
  - Aleksandra Maksić: "Filozofija i ROK, radionice opšte kulture"
  - Marija Jovanović: "Filozofija u učionici: istraživanje ličnog iskustva"
  - Aleksandra Peričin: "Čemu filozofija u učionici?"
  - Zoran Bašić: "Filozofija u školi"

SEPTEMBAR:

02-06.09. Peta škola društvene Angažovanosti i DEMokratje (ANDEM) (Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju Univerziteta u Beogradu)

- 02.09.
  - Aleksandra Bulatović, Bojana Radovanović i Marko Konjović: "Blagostanje, razvoj i pravda"

- Srđan Prodanović i Bojana Radovanović: "Opšte dobro, javni interes, zajedničko dobro"
- Jelena Vasiljevic: "Novi društveni pokreti i solidarnost"

• 03.09.
- Aleksandra Kneževic: "Feministički angažman u nauci"
- Ana Đorđević i Sara Nikolić: "Angažovano istraživanje"
- Milica Resanović: "Rod – na raskršću između ideologije i ravnopravnosti"
- Centar E8: "Radionica o rodnoj ravnopravnosti"

• 04.09.
- Luka Glušac: "Demokratske institucije"
- Dejan Bursać: "Uzroci modernog populizma"
- Irena Fiket: "Deliberativna demokratija u teoriji i praksi"

• 05.09.
- Đorđe Hristov: "Angažman i konflikt"
- Dragana Stojanović: "Rodno uslovljene matrice ratnog stradanja i preživljavanja: slučaj Holokaust"
- Vukan Marković: "Kriza demokratije i sunovrat u nasilje: istorijske perspektive"

• 06.09.
- Igor Cvejić: "Pojam angažmana"
- Marjan Ivković: "Angažman i radikalna društvena promena"
- "Tribina o značaju angažmana", moderator: Predrag Krstić

OKTOBAR:

09-11.10. Četvrta međunarodna konferencija "Čemu još obrazovanje?": Doživljaj obrazovanja (Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju Univerziteta u Beogradu (EduLab))

• 09.10.
- Plenary Lecture: Gert Biesta: "The Experience of Education from the Angle of the Teacher", Moderator: Đorđe Hristov
- Session 1A: Experience in Education
  - Mark Losoncz: "Teaching Experience Itself: Contemplative Education as Meta-Awareness"
  - Nikola Stamenković: "James and Whitehead: Experience and Education"
  - Moderator: Olga Nikolić
- Session 1B: Humane Education in Contemporary World
  - Ana Kuburić Zotova: "Kada obrazovanje sputava proces doživljavanja"
  - Jovana Marojević: "Poslušna bića ili o pedagogiji brige i pedagogiji ljubavi"
  - Dragan Stanar and Srđan Starčević: "Uloga i svrha društveno-humanističkih nauka u procesu savremenog vojnog obrazovanja"
  - Moderator: Aleksandar Milovanović
- Session 2A: Education Towards Democracy
  - Tamara Kamatović and Michael A. Kozakowski: "Pedagogy and Praxis: The Evolving Role of Experience in Democratic Education"
  - Minna-Kerttu M. Kekki: "Too Obsessed with Facts: From Learning to Dialogue in the Public Sphere"
  - Nadja Čekolj: "The Transformative Role of School Volunteer Programme Coordinators"
  - Miloš Kovačević: "Education, Impartiality, and the Right to an Open Future"

    - Moderator: Igor Cvejić
  - Session 2B: Pedagogy, Art, Practice
    - Ana Bauer: "The Aura of a Realized Pedagogical Practice"
    - Helena Dahlberg: "Students' Learning Taking Place In-Between Praxis and Theory"
    - Aleksandar Milanković: "The Meaning and Value of Teaching Tools in the Perspective of Gilbert Simondon's Conception of Imagination"
    - Moderator: Milica Sekulović
  - Session 3A: Learning in Interaction
    - Christianne Smit: "Community-Engaged Learning in Academic Practice: Educational Design and Lived Experience"
    - Tamara Nikolić and Nikola Koruga: "Workshop Research Study on Performative Learning Experience in Higher Education"
    - Sanja Iguman Glušac and Elena Bougleux: "Navigating the Waves of Knowledge"
    - Moderator: Paolo Scotton
  - Session 3B: Digital Education – More Than a Click
    - Dragana Stojanović: "Produžena stvarnost savremenog iskustva učenja: život u dve obrazovne mediasfere"
    - Andrea Berber and Jelena Mijić: "O epistemičkoj pismenosti: ChatGPT i veliki jezički modeli u kontekstu obrazovanja"
    - Ana Petrović: "Faktori koji utiču na motivisanost studenata za aktivno učešće u onlajn i uživo nastavi engleskog jezika"
    - Moderator: Marija Velinov
- 10.10.
  - Plenary Lecture: Carla Rinaldi: "Education is the Answer", Moderator: Dragana Purešević (Department for Pedagogy and Andragogy, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade)
  - Session 4A: Early Childhood Education – More Than a Child
    - Monica Mitlin: "Are Preschool Teachers 'Skeptics'? Skepticism as an Analytic Tool in the Preschool Context"
    - Dragana Purešević: "Pedagogical Almanac – Experiences from Student Practice"
    - Milijana Lazarević and Marija Malović: "Shared Play Experiences as a Determinant of the Pedagogical Potential of Different Spaces in a Kindergarten"
    - Moderator: Nevena Mitranić Marinković
  - Session 4B: Whose Voices in Education?
    - Ivana Kokeza, Dragana Gagić and Anja Božić: "Kome/čemu služi portfolio?"
    - Duška Radmanović: "Alternative školskog rasporeda iz perspektive učenika"
    - Moderator: Miloš Janković
  - Session 5A: Being a Good Educator in Different Contexts
    - Bojana Milosavljević and Lidija Miškeljin: "Who Cares? Care as a Concept That Shapes Kindergarten Culture and Lived Experiences"
    - Tomáš Hejduk: "The Pedagogy of Joy"
    - Moderator: Natascha Schmelz
  - Session 5B: Empowering Parents: Moral, Decolonial, and Abolitionist Education

        - Florian Rieger: "Moral Education and Reactive Attitudes"
        - Quynh Do: "Toward a Decolonial Account of Raising Children in Vietnam Amid the 'Parenting' Era"
        - Moderator: Rodoljub Jovanović
    - Session 6A: Critical Stances in Education: Conflict, Aesthetics and Autonomy
        - Paolo Scotton and Àngel Pascual Martín: "Rethinking Bildung as a Critical Aesthetic Experience"
        - Daniel Gaivota: "Why Still School?"
        - Natascha Schmelz: "Alienated Spirit as a Diagnosis – From Bildung to Halbbildung"
        - Moderator: Đorđe Hristov
    - Session 6B: Education, Art and Technique
        - Aleksandar Kandić: "Doživljaj muzike u Platonovoj teoriji obrazovanja"
        - Aleksandar Ostojić: "Iskustvo obrazovanja u kasnoj renesansi: Znanje kao tehnika, tehnika kao suština"
        - Moderator: Ivan Nišavić
- 11.10.
    - Plenary Lecture: Malte Brinkmann: "Education and Bildung – Forgotten Relational and Educational Foundations", Moderator: Olga Nikolić
    - Session 7A: Transformative Educational Experiences
        - Anna Bloom-Christen: "Attention, Habit, and Institutional Culture: Challenges of Transforming Higher Education"
        - Olga Nikolić and Milica Sekulović: "Boredom: A Phenomenological and Pedagogical Perspective"
        - Moderator: Igor Cvejić
    - Session 7B: Embracing Diversity in Experience
        - Rayan Magon: "Do Gifted Abilities Lead to Creativity? — Awe and Curiosity as Mediators of Academic Talent Development"
        - Eva Marija Jurešić: "The Politics of Intelligence"
        - Moderator: Anna Bukhtoyarova
    - Session 8A: Becoming Through Experience: Emotion, Affect and Immanence
        - Igor Cvejić: "Transformative Experience and Emotions"
        - Đorđe Hristov: "Becoming and Education as the Experience of the Immanent Sublime"
        - Nevena Mitranić Marinković: "The Silence of the Class: Unwinding Experience of Affective Experimentation in Higher Education"
        - Moderator: Aleksandar Milovanović
    - Session 8B: Welcoming Narratives in Education: On Belonging, Community, and Hospitality
        - Lindsay Kelland: "Philosophical Enculturation: Alienation and Belonging in the South African Philosophical Community"
        - Aïda Palacios Morales: "On Education, Newcomers and Hospitality"
        - Keisha Ann Stewart: "Black Caribbean Male Students' Experiences Studying and Responding to Literature Texts"
        - Moderator: Rodoljub Jovanović
    - Session 9A: Mediating Experience
        - Anna Georgiou: "The Idea of University and the Concept of 'Useful' Knowledge"

- Anna Bukhtoyarova and Mikhail Bukhtoyarov: "Cut, Muted, Disconnected: Rethinking Educational Experience of a Digitized Teacher"
- Nataša Lacković: "What is Postdigital Literacy and How Does It Engage with the World? An Ecological, Sociomaterial and Relational Framing of Literacy"
- Moderator: Marija Petrović

◦ Session 9B: Concretizing the Experience: Practitioners' Perspective
- Tamara Banović and Ivica Štrbac: "Značaj istraživačkih projekata u obrazovanju"
- Ivana Bandić Štrbac and Marijana Bandić Buljan: "Suvremeni izazovi odgoja i obrazovanja u školskoj knjižnici"
- Miloš Kozić, Biljana Gradojević, Marija Golubović and Vesna Ignjatović: "Eko-bajke u digitalnom dobu: Integrisano učenje za održivi razvoj"
- Tamara Banović and Ivana Zemunik: "Društvene mreže – moderna bajka ili bijeg od stvarnosti"
- Moderator: Tamara Plećaš

28-29.10. Konferencija "Transformacije kasnog socijalizma: 1980-e" (Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju Univerziteta u Beogradu (YugoLab)

• 28.10.

◦ Welcome address – Gazela Pudar Draško

◦ Panel 1: Nationalism and The Institutional Collapse of Socialist Paradigms
- Adriana Zaharijević: "Populist Moment in Yugoslavia: Populus Camouflaged as Demos"
- Maja Kaninska, Ljubljana: "Uticaj Srpske pravoslavne crkve i intelektualne elite na pojavu i razvoj kulturnog nacionalizma 80-ih godina 20. veka"
- Elena Kusovac, University of Belgrade: "Remythologization of Leaders" (Komar and Melamid, Sokov, Kosolapov, Pepperstein)
- Vukan Marković: "Who Gets to End History? The Collapse of Socialism's Utopian Horizons in late 1980s as a Historical Contingency"

◦ Panel 2: Economy, the Crisis of Late Socialism, Contemporary Influences
- Katarina Peović, Rijeka: "Prvo kao postkomunizam onda kao postjugoslavenstvo"
- Ivica Mladenović, IFDT: "Klasna struktura kasnog socijalizma i endogeni razlozi razbijanja SFRJ"
- Ognjen Milivojević, Faculty of Philosophy University of Belgrade: "Evolucija prinudnog rada u socijalizmu i kapitalizmu: Tranzicija ka ekonomskoj kontroli tokom 1980-ih"
- Dragana Mrvoš, CEA SEE Rijeka, University of Tampa: "Where We Stand: Origins of Urban Restructuring in Rijeka"

◦ Panel 3: Education and Labour: Ideological Frameworks and Daily Life
- Timofey Rakov, Higher School of Economics: "The Space of Education and Acience in Late Socialism: Concepts and Representations"
- Maria Yantsen, Ural Federal University: "Corporeal Aspects of Motherhood in the 1980s in the USSR and the USA"
- Andrey Menshikov, University of Central Asia: "Educational

Policy and Non-governmental Initiatives on Human Development Projects in the USA in the 1970s-80s"

- Alexander Fokin, First Moscow State Medical University named after I.M. Sechenov of the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation (Sechenov University), Higher School of Economics: "Late Socialism and the Problem of Human Capital"

◦ Panel 4: Movements, Intellectuals and End of Socialism

- Natalija Jevtić, FDU: "Kulturno-umetnički pokret KPGT 1977-1984"
- Petar Žarković, IFDT: "'Da li je socijalizam moguć, i kakav?' – intelektualna opozicija i kritička percepcija 'realnog socijalizma' u Jugoslaviji krajem 1980-tih"
- Dimitrije Matić, INIS: "Sukobljeni saborci – udruženja veterana i kriza antifašizma, socijalizma i jugoslovenstva krajem 1980-ih godina"
- Mirko Matić: "Od nemira do sloma: Uticaj događaja iz 1968. na krah socijalizma u Istočnoj Evropi"

• 29.10.

◦ Panel 5: Perestoika and East European Perspectives

- Roman Vladimirovich Mamin, Université Paris Cité: "Как Фрейд возвращался в СССР: история психоанализа в Перестройку"
- Ekaterina Cherepanova, Ural Federal University: "Human Development Projects in the GDR in the 1980s as a Phenomenon of Post-conflict Culture"
- Petr Cheryomushkin, Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration: "The Crisis and Collapse of the Propaganda and Information System About the Countries of the Soviet Block in the USSR on the Example of TASS"
- Dmitrii Trubnikov, Center for Advanced Studies Southeast Europe, University of Rijeka: "Socialist Calculation and the Demise of Socialism in the 1980s"

◦ Panel 6: Science: Ideological Frameworks and Daily Life

- Anna Davletshina, Ural Federal University: "Ethical and Legal Aspects of Human Development Projects in the FRG and GDR in the 1980s of the 20th century"
- Ekaterina Trubnikova, independent researcher: "Party Privileges in the Academic Sphere"
- Aleksandr Lunkov, Ural Federal University: "Human Counter-projects in the Post-conflict World of the Second Half of the 20th Century: Mechanisms of Initiation"

◦ Panel 7: Culture of Late Socialism: Painting, Cinema, Sports, Literature I

- Kornelia Icin, University of Belgrade: "'Moscow and Muscovites' by Dmitry Prigov"
- Vasilisa Šljivar, University of Belgrade: "Funerary Monuments by Vadim Sidur"
- Danil Pigin, Ural Federal University: "The Role of the Black Wave in the formation of the Late Yugoslav War Cinema"

◦ Panel 8: Culture of Late Socialism: Painting, Cinema, Sports, Literature II

- Tatiana Kruglova, Ural Federal University: "The Soviet 1980s:

Cinematic Representations of the Great Patriotic War Within the Framework of the 'Ending the Past' Concept"

- Diana Satybaldina, Ural Federal University: "Football as a Practice of Constructing a Person in a Post-conflict Culture (on the Example of the USSR and Yugoslavia)"
- Sergey Vershinin, Ural State Mining University: "Society and People of the GDR in the 1980s Through the Eyes of German Writers"
- Inna Pimpia, Abkhaz State University, Perm Civil Engineering College: "Representation of History through Narrative in the State Museum of the Patriotic War of the People of Abkhazia Named After S.P. Dbar"
- Leonid Karpov, Ural Federal University: Macedonian Orthodox Church: "An Example of Healing a Schism"

◦ Panel 9: The Soviet as a Phenomenon

- Valentina Kudryavtseva, Ural Federal University: "The Joy of the Soviet Man: Concept, Image, Ideologeme"
- Alexey Sokolov, Saint Petersburg State University: "Socialism as a Reminder of the Future: From Anticipations to the Common Cause"
- Lyudmila Myasnikova, Humanitarian University: "Value Transformations of the Soviet Man"

NOVEMBAR:

15-16.11. Konferencija "ALF" Beogradska nedelja filozofije prava (Pravni fakultet Univerziteta u Beogradu i Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju Univerziteta u Beogradu)

- 15.11.
  - ◦ Pedro Moniz-Lopes (University of Lisbon): "Hypothetical Predictions"
  - ◦ Andrej Kristan (University of Genoa): "Precedents: An Empirical Investigation"
  - ◦ Jorge Sampaio (University of Lisbon): "The Logic of Discretion: Legal Norms, Indeterminacy, and Balancing"
  - ◦ Luka Glušac (Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory): "Identifying Fourth-Branch Institutions in the World's Constitutions"
  - ◦ Goran Dajović (University of Belgrade): "Homo Juridicus and Legal Reasoning Indatarminan and Dalansina"
  - ◦ Giovanni Battista Ratti (University of Genoa): "Bobbio and Hart on Legal Obligation"
  - ◦ Petar Mitrović (Union University of Belgrade): "On Intuitions in Jurisprudence"
  - ◦ Michal Sladeček (Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory): "Autonomy and Preferences from a Perfectionist Perspective"
- 16.11.
  - ◦ Adam Dyrda: "Ethics of Institutional Beliefs"
  - ◦ Cuizhu (Dawn) Wang: "Institutional Belief about Legality and Social Norms: Experimental Study"
  - ◦ Wojciech Zatuski: "The Human Mind and Its Resistance to Chance"
  - ◦ Sava Vojnovic: "Legal Liability and Free Will"
  - ◦ Klaudyna Horniczak: "Haslanger's Materiality of Social Systems: A Critical Look on Functional Attempts on Social Change"

- Katarzyna Eliasz: "Materialism and Women's Rights in Enlightenment France"
- Wojciech Ciszewski: "In Search of a Framework: Some Remarks on Freedom and Unfreedom"
- Maciej Macuga: "The Problem of Paternalistic Justification of Coercive Vaccination Policies in Public Health Ethics"

14-16.11. Radionica "O (ne)mogućnosti konceptualizovanja društvene promene u Istočnoj Evropi" (Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju Univerziteta u Beogradu (CriticLab))

- 14.11.
  - Mikołaj Ratajczak: "Reconceptualizing the Left with Four Polish Classics", Abramowski, Brzozowski, Krzywicki, Luxemburg
  - Mark Losoncz: "Conceptual Metaproblems of Postcapitalism"
  - Barbara Barysz: "Conceptualizing the (Im)Possible: Psychoanalysis as a Tool for Capturing Social and Political Change in Poland"
  - Andrea Perunović: "Psychotic Regimes: An Analysis of the Contemporary Political Conjecture"
  - Adam Lipszyc, Beyond Fratriarchy: "Juliet Mitchell and the Cultural Revolution in Contemporary Poland"
  - Milan Urošević: "'The All-Serbian Funhouse': Depoliticizing Fantasies in Contemporary Serbia"
- 15.11.
  - Adriana Zaharijević: "Postsocialist Feminism. Terms of Our Own"
  - Magda Grabowska: "Conceptualizing Critical Social Reproduction Theory in Eastern Europe: Marxism, Anti-communism, and Feminist Responses to Polycrisis"
  - Milica Resanović: "Anti-Gender Mobilizations in Eastern Europe: The Rise of Illiberal Threats"
  - Marta Szpala
  - Piotr Wesołowski: "The (Im)Possibility of the Field of Art in Contemporary Poland: Vicissitudes of the Symbolic Capital"
  - Marjan Ivković: "Postsocialism and Counterhegemony: A Burden or an Advantage?"
- 16.11.
  - Kuba Gorecki: "The Critique of Form and the Form of Critique. Benjamin, Adorno and the actuality of constellational thinking"
  - Igor Cvejić: "Social Engagement, Shared Emotions and Crisis"
  - Andrzej Frelek: "The Value of the Concept of Real Subsumption for a Critical Theory of the Domination of Nature in Capitalism"

DECEMBAR:

09-10.12. Dvodnevna radionica "Filozofija i eros" (Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju Univerziteta u Beogradu (CriticLab, GenLab))

- 09.12.
  - Joel Backström: "From Love's Longing to Perverse Fantasy: Displacing Sexuality and Moral Understanding"
  - Adriana Zaharijević: "Sexuality and Capitalism"
  - Niklas Toivakainen: "Dreams of Lawlessness: On Love, Recognition, and Incest Prohibition"
  - Andrea Perunović: "Eros Between Psychoanalysis and Philosophy: Drive, Desire, Love"
  - Milan Urošević: "The Loss of Eros and its Rebirth – Domination and Resistance in the "Self-devouring Society"

- Natascha Schmelz: "Beyond Desire: Seduction After Eros"
- Zona Zarić: "Can Love Become a Space for Authentic Relationality Rather than a Continuation of Patriarchal Norms? Exploring Love's Emancipatory and Oppressive Potentials in Feminist Theory"

• 10.12.
- Igor Cvejić: "Loneliness and Eros"
- Olga Nikolić: "Eros and Boredom"
- Aleksandar Ostojić: "Insight of Blindness: Eros, Passion and Reason on the Different Playground"
- Aleksandra Knežević: "Reconstructing Love: Beyond Deconstruction, Postmodernism, and Neoliberalism"

11-13.12. Konferencija "EMERGE 2024: Etika usklađivanja veštačke inteligencije" (Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju Univerziteta u Beogradu (DigiLab))

• 11.12.
- Session 1: Democracy and AI: Alignment, Trust, Polarization, Chair: Čedomir Markov
  - Aleksandra Krstić and Marko Nedeljković: "Ethical Considerations of AI in Journalism: The Perspective of Journalism Students"
  - Andrija Šoć: "AI Alignment in Times of Polarization"
  - Calogero Caltagirone, Antonio Estella, Livio Fenga, Federica Russo, Dolores Sanchez and Angelo Tumminelli: "Human Trust and Artificial Intelligence: Is an Alignment Possible?"
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  - Mariia Laktionkina: "Ethical Use of AI Tools in Writing-Based Learning Methods: Challenges and Opportunities"
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  - Nađa Pavlica: "AI-Driven Art: Visual Communication Redefined"
  - Catarina Lira Pereira, Domingos Loureiro and Diana Costa: "AI's Impact on Art and Mural Painting as a Strategy for Irreproducibility"
  - Jovana Tošić: "Posthuman Aesthetics and AI-Generated Architectural Design: Socio-Cultural Values"

- Session 3A: AI and Education: Skills, Literacy, Libraries, Chair: Mirjana Nećak Gavrilović
  - Dragana Milunović: "Library, Librarian and Robot – "Megdan: Between Water and Fire"
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  - Federica Porcheddu: "Objective - "Objective" Artificial Readings of Memory"
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  - Janie Brisson: "Anthropomorphic Bias, Risks of Human/AI Interactions and the Limits of AI literacy"
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  - Yifan Li: "Artificial Intelligence, Value Alignment, and Moral Objectivism
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  - Mahesh Vaijainthymala Krishnamoorthy: "Meta-Sealing: A Revolutionizing Integrity Assurance Framework for Transparent, Tamper-Proof, and Trustworthy AI System"
- Session 5A: AI and Democracy: Politics, Power, Values, Chair: Igor Išpanović
  - Dmitrii Trubnikov: "AI and the Future of Capitalism: Revisiting the Socialist Calculation Debate"
  - Sadia Tabassum: "The Evolving Landscape of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Regulations in the

United States: A Critical Legal Analysis"
    - Katarina Šmakić: "Democracy Values Threatened by Capitological Tools"
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    - Krzysztof Sołoducha and Karol Narożniak: "Multi-Agent Simulation of Hybrid AI Ethics and the Problem of Hidden Normativity"
    - Keith Begley: "Underdetermination in Machine Learning"
    - Mikhail Bukhtoyarov and Anna Bukhtoyarova: "A Hypothesis of Pragmatically Moral Superintelligence"
- 12.12.
  - Plenary 1: Henrik Carlsen, Stockholm Environment Institute Headquarters (SE): "Can large language models enhance our ability to construct long-term future scenarios for environmental science and policy?"
  - Plenary 2: Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, John Cabot University (IT): "AI, Art, and Creativity", Chair: Zoran Erić
  - Session 1A: AI Ethics, Environmental Technology, and More-Than-Human Ecologies, Chair: Andrija Filipović
    - Abootaleb Safdari: "The Emergence of Trust in Human-Otheroid Interactions through Empathy"
    - Ljupcho Stojkovski: "Technological Optimism and its Discontents: Why the AI Hype Around Climate Change is More Harmful than Useful for Global Climate Action?"
    - Stefan Aleksić and Slobodan Bubnjević: "Nuclear Powered, Luxury Data Capitalism: Will Robots Control Energy in the Future?"
    - Silvia Dadà: "Taking Care of Digital Environments. Towards an Ecology of AI"
  - Session 1B: Education and AI: Changes and Competencies, Chair: Ana Lipij
    - Ernest Ženko: "Changing a Tire on a Moving Car: The Challenge of AI Alignment in Education"
    - Tamara Kamatović: "AI for a Liberatory and Transformative Pedagogy
    - Nasreen Watson: "Critiquing Cross-Cultural Ethics in Artificial Intelligence In Education (AIED)"
  - Plenary 3: Bruno Daniel Ferreira da Costa, University Beira Interior (PT): Democracy and the challenges of the digital and technological revolution
  - Plenary 4: Yashar Deldjoo, Polytechnic University of Bari (IT), Chair: Čedomir Markov
  - Session 2A: AI and Democracy: Governance, Journalism, Accountability, Chair: Čedomir Markov
    - Alois Paulin: "Informatisation vs. Digitalisation – Different Approaches to Governance Transformation"
    - Elizabeth Calderón Lüning and Max Stearns: "Toward Democracy-in-the-Loop Technologies or Transparent and Accountable AI Systems"
    - Maria Zanzotto: "Generative AI, Political Communication, and Democracy: Does Generative AI Pose a Significantly Different Risk than Standard AI on Democracy?"

        - Tatjana Milić: "AI and Global Democracy: Signals from Global Debate"
    - Session 2B: Fairness and AI: Autonomy, Transparency, Trust, Chair: Zorica Dodevska
        - Valentin Noël: "Ethics in AI: A Bayesian Framework for Transparency and Accountability"
        - Miloš Agatonović: "Robot Autonomy and Responsibility"
        - Oleslav Antamoshkin: "Automated Action Classification and Threat Prediction in Video Streams"
    - Keynote: Marko Grobelnik, Jožef Stefan Institute (SI): "Anatomy of the (OECD) AI Definition", Chair: Ljubiša Bojić
    - Plenary 5: Joanna Zylinska, King's College London (UK): After AI Art
    - Plenary 6: Mustafa Ali, Open University (UK): "From AI and Religion to AI as Political Theology", Chair: Vera Mevorah
    - Session 3A: Art and AI: Creativity and Agency, Chair: Jelena Guga
        - Jelena Glišić Matović: "Artistic Agency and Artificial Intelligence: A Challenge for Cultural Policy"
        - Luka Bešlagić: "AI and Creativity: Art in the Age of Bourriaud's Postproduction"
        - Ana Ćemalović: "Art as a Machine in the Context of Artificial Intelligence: Ethico-Aesthetical Perspective"
        - Taha Berke Coruh: "Digitalization, Artificial Intelligence and Musician Creativity"
    - Session 3B: Well-Being and AI: Religion, Health, Emotions, Chair: Dragana Stojanović
        - Jonathan Pengelly: "Examining Religious Faith from the Machine Perspective"
        - Petar Stevanović: "Digital Resurrection: Ethical and Religious Implications of Postmortem Avatars"
        - Alexandra Prégent: "Emotional Quantification and Philosophical Thinking: Understanding Ourselves Better with Emotion Recognition Technology"
        - Vladimir Otašević, Jelena Lazić, Nikola Janković and Milan Jovanović: "AI Applications and Ethical Considerations: A Cross-Field Analysis of Recent Trends in Engineering, Natural Sciences, Language Sciences, and Medicine"
- 13.12.
    - Panel 1: Democracy, AI and Ethics, Moderator: Čedomir Markov
        - Anne Blickhan (Agora Strategy Group): "Charter of Trust"
        - Tanja Maksić (BIRN)
        - Bruno Daniel Ferreira da Costa, Universidade da Beira Interior, Portugal
    - Short Talk 1: Jörg Matthes, University of Vienna: "Rely on AI? A Cross-national Study on the Intended Use of AI for Health Information"
    - Short Talk 2: Achim Rettinger, Trier University, Germany: "Can AI-Agents replace us? And why this could be beneficial for the civic discourse online"
    - Keynote: Florian Röhrbein Chemnitz, University of Technology: "The Special Case of Embodied AI"
    - Panel 2 ECOLOGY and AI, Moderator: Vera Mevorah

- Ivana Krtolica, Research and Development Institute for Artificial Intelligence of Serbia (AI Applications in Ecology)
- Zoran Erić, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade (Ecological and Technological Justice)
- Veljko Prodanović, Research and Development Institute for Artificial Intelligence of Serbia (AI Systems for Flood Prediction)
- Vladimir Đurđević, Faculty of Physics, University of Belgrade (Environmental Activism, Meteorology)

◦ Short Talk 3: Petar Laušević and Bojan Kenig (CPN): "Cultivating interdisciplinary art+science collaborations"

◦ Short Talk 4: Nataša Lacković (Lancaster University): "An Educational Developer's Guide to Multimodal Learning and Generative AI"

◦ Short Talk 5: Dan Nechita, EU Director (Transatlantic Policy Network): "Dual-use AI and emerging technologies: priorities for the new Commission"

◦ Short Talk 6: Goran Savić (HTEC): "GenAI @HTEC: More Than Just Technology"

◦ Short Talk 7: Milan Gospić (Microsoft): "The Rise of AI as General Purpose Technology"

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