**Filozofija i društvo**, godište XXVII, broj 2
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Tiraž: 300. Časopis izlazi četiri puta godišnje.
Cena 350 dinara; godišnja pretplata 1200 dinara.

Objavljivanje časopisa finansijski pomaže Ministarstvo prosvete, nauke i tehnološkog razvoja Republike Srbije.

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# FILOZOFIJA I DRUŠTVO

broj 2, 2016.
godište XXVII

Beograd 2016.
YU ISSN 0353-5738 UDK 1+316+32

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# ENGAGING REFLEXIVITY, REFLECTING ENGAGEMENT

# I

## ANGAŽOVATI REFLEKSIVNOST, REFLEKTOVATI O ANGAŽOVANOSTI

Igor Krtolica
Adriana Zaharijević
Jelena Vasiljević

# Introductory Note: Why Are We in this Together?

One of the opening lines a person browsing the Web – a wandering cyber flâneur, if you will – would read upon coming across the Web presence of our group, are the following innocent-sounding statements: "The Group for Social Engagement Studies … combines theoretical and empirical research … realized by the community of philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists … [studying] productive reflection on the civic, public and social forms of engagement, that draws upon the vision which animated the founding act of the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory itself…". Yet, if one lingered over these words – indeed, if one *engaged* more deeply with the meaning behind them – several issues emerge that need to be addressed.

First, there is the invocation of the *interdisciplinary community* of goal-oriented people. Interdisciplinarity is one of those highly praised attributes of contemporary academic endeavours, an almost necessary condition for any scientific project to be funded, yet which has surprisingly low impact on the ways the corpus of knowledge, labelled 'social sciences and humanities', is reproduced. Departmentally entrenched divisions of theories, methods, objects of study and academic careers remain. So, how do we, exactly, as a 'community of various scholars' come together and perform a group-study of an object?

Second, the object in question – *engagement* – is conspicuous: in the introductory notes above, in our name, in the name of this volume. A word used so often, denoting so many disparate acts, relations and positions. Due to its elusiveness, but due even more to the centrality of its role – in this volume, as well as in our existence as a Group – we shall give it a special treatment in this introductory chapter.

Finally, the last segment from the quote speaks of the rootedness, or simply the historical and institutional background – to be interpreted in different ways: as a contextual background, as confirmation of tradition, as a call to break with that tradition, or a simple fact confirming that every field of study, and indeed every (in)formal group, has its founding fathers and mothers (see Zaharijević in this volume).

We shall address these three issues in reverse order, not because we wish particularly to honour tradition preceding us, but because a brief retreat into the past will serve as an excellent introduction into the present (im)possibilities of engagement itself.

*

Although Socialist Yugoslavia was, in comparison to other states of the Eastern Bloc, characterized by 'soft' communism, where citizens experienced far less political restrictions than in other communist regimes, the dissident movement did play an important role in invigorating overall social and academic life. Indeed, on several occasions, it did provoke severe state reactions. One such reaction was when a group of university teachers, active in the events of '68, got expelled from the University in 1975. After being deprived of their basic income, these intellectuals obtained strong support from international actors, even compelling the International Labour Organization to wade into the situation, calling on its conventions that forbade discrimination at work. In order to resolve the problem of 'disobedient' professors, the state founded the Center for Philosophy and Social Theory in 1981, within the auspices of the already extant Institute for Social Sciences. The Center provided space for intellectual work, albeit one that had to remain dissociated from teaching and direct transfer of knowledge. The transgressiveness implied in the very act of founding continued to pervade the space where knowledge was to be produced, but without 'spoiling the youth'.

Although their centre-stage influence had been formally removed, these dissident theorists would regain prominence at the moment when the Center obtained its current name – the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory – and independent status, in 1992. This was by all means due to the specificities of the era, and the particular understanding of the role of theory, developed in what had thus become an independent institution. Various intellectual activities of its members had a clear political aspect and indubitable influence on public opinion in Serbia. The Institute became a workplace of many researchers and theorists who would become prominent political actors. Among them were: Zoran Đinđić, the assassinated Prime Minister, Vojislav Koštunica, former president of the state, and Dragoljub Mićunović, former President of the Parliament. The Institute was also a hub that provided space for intellectual advancement of many others, engaged in the emergent civil society or becoming leading academics in Serbia.

Thus, engagement, academic, social, and political, became emblematic of the Institute and one of its appealing features. However, times have changed, and the role of public intellectuals perhaps even more so (see Pudar Draško on intellectuals in this volume). Theaforementioned researchers (turned politicians) were undoubtedly engaged figures, leaving their mark on society. The legacy, the nature, and the context of their engagement remain open questions. Yet, some historical distance may help us situate their engagement and analyse it as a socio-historical phenomenon. Setting that time at arm's-length has also been a prerequisite for a new type of grouping to take place within this – in so many ways still transgressive – institution.

The Group for Social Engagement Studies was established in early 2014. And, as it is often the case, the name predated acts. Saying that the time is ripe for something, almost always assumes a series of unintended, contingent, but happy circumstances. Such was the case with the founding of the Group. A performative act of naming produced a loose grouping out of several women and men, strong individuals and ardent scholars with different aspirations, objectives and disciplinary constraints – which this volume represents well. But it was the logic of the name that has imposed itself on us: what was so intriguing about 'social engagement', yet at the same time so common and so ambivalent? Being grouped around such a binding name compelled us to define how we understand ourselves as actors, as agents who engage with the social: do we envision ourselves as engaged subjects, or do we simply want to stand aside disengaged, and analyse engagement of other people (our predecessors included)? Gathered together in a new form of institutional sociality, we wanted to understand what it meant (to have power) to institute, and how we may at times dissociate and de-centre sociality itself? The 'we' (see also Cvejić in this volume) emerged in the process of intruding, traversing each other's disciplinary turfs, interfering and opening spaces and fields of sociality. This we – hidden behind the name of the group – is versatile, broad and delicate, as is the space for critical reflection on what it means to be socially engaged, the space where we encounter each other as an ever-widening group.

*

To what does the Group for Social Engagement Studies aspire? When we speak of 'social engagement studies', are we referring to a new field of study? A common sense answer to a preliminary question – what defines a field of studies? – would be twofold. First, we could assume that a field of study corresponds to an objective empirical reality. In that sense, 'social engagement' would define an object or an experience that exists regardless of whether somebody takes it into account. However, philosophy teaches us not to mistake words for things, to distinguish between the language we use and objective reality. That is why, second, we could assume that, on the contrary, a field of study only corresponds to a subjective construction, to a linguistic or a mental object. In that sense, 'social engagement' would define an abstract object an individual or a group decided to isolate in the continuous spectrum of experience. However, this answer raises a serious problem: we must consider certain conditions or circumstances under which an individual or a group is led to abstract an object of experience. From there perhaps, there is a third answer to our preliminary question: a field of study is determined to exist as long as, under certain empirical circumstances, a group of people is driven to isolate a fragment of reality, to baptise it with a new or an old name (for instance, 'social engagement'), and to study it collectively. In that third sense, *a field of study, be it old or new, would correspond to a certain relation between socio-historically framed experience and an individual or collective effort to respond to it theoretically.* From this last vantage point, our preliminary question becomes: for what reasons did we choose this name and what kind of relation between socio-historical experience and collective response does it express?

Many essays in this volume are looking expressly at how to explicate (or complicate) the very word 'engagement'. By way of a certain reduction of the vast historical, linguistic, philosophical, affective or strictly political field of uses and misuses of the word – to which the texts that follow pay much closer attention – we will here only touch upon its double genealogy. On the one hand, in its French resonance, this word is rooted in 20th century existential philosophy, and always calls to mind the fact that philosophical thought is never abstract. It germs and develops in the midst of a socially and historically determined situation. But where the French say '*engagement*', English might say 'commitment', which refers to a different 'practical' side of being engaged. Thus, on these two lexical levels, the word 'engagement' refers to the fact that a *situation* both preexists one's thought and action, and that it is at the same time the aim of the thought and action.

That is well captured by the double act of engaging reflexivity and reflecting engagement, because this parallel defines *critical theory* in its whole movement. On the one hand, 'reflecting engagement' means that theory critically reflects the conditions we live in, and is always subsequent. Our thought is not only situated, but also conditioned by a certain context, which is itself overdetermined. In other words: critical thought is never abstract, but has complex *empirical socio-historical* conditions, and the theory expresses these conditions. On the other hand, 'engaging reflexivity' means that critical theory must have social or political impact: it does not only speak *of* the social reality, it does not only say something *about* the political field, but as a theory it strives to have an impact on it (not to interpret it, but to transform it, as good old Marx said). In other words: critical theory is nothing else than a resistant and maybe revolutionary praxis.

But why social engagement studies *today*? 'Ideology' in the Marxist tradition was meant to explain the paradoxical conservatism of the masses. As Marx put it in the second half of the 19th century: why does the proletariat fight for its own exploitation rather than for its own objective interests? Later, in the 1930s, the Frankfurt School asked: why does the European working class turn towards authoritarian fascisms and totalitarianisms?; and then in the post-WWII period, they asked: why do the American people and Americanized European masses desire this new opium called ‘consumer society’, ’leisure society’, ‘entertainment society’, etc.? Today once again we must ask: why do most of the poor and vulnerable in Europe turn towards nationalist far-right movements instead of turning towards revolutionary groups? Thus, to the question ‘why social engagement studies *today*?’ we could say: *the problem is precisely that the nature of our socio-historical situation has become highly problematic, to such a point that the nature and possibility of engagement itself has also become exceedingly problematic*. Indeed, in Europe, resistance to the social order is a claim of far-right parties just as it is of the new Left movements. Then, what could be resistance today? What is radical, revolutionary? What are the potentials of solidarity (see Vasiljević in this volume)? Where does critique reside?

The history of the 20th century, and particularly the history of broadly defined public and intellectual engagement, revolved around the enemy localizable in the sociopolitical field (whether the State, Nazism, Fascism, Communism, Capitalism, etc.). But if such an enemy ever existed in history, an enemy that one could readily know and recognize and then fight against, it is certain that the contemporary foe now wears many different guises. If social engagement is particularly problematic today, perhaps that is due to disengagement, depoliticisation and demobilization have become the new spectres haunting Europe – maybe it is because new forms of engagement, politicization and mobilization, adequate to our historical situation, are yet to be reflected and invented.

*

And indeed, *the problematic nature of our historical situation has something to do with the interdisciplinarity we profess*. As far as the latter is concerned, we could say that there are sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists and philosophers among us, and that by articulating our different methods and objects we strive together to achieve a joint political goal. Yet both these institutional affiliations and these ready-made formulas barely say a thing about what we are dealing with now, collectively. Much like most researchers today, we no longer believe it is either possible or worth the effort to gather social sciences and philosophy under a unified Critical Theory – one that would, in turn, allocate a role to each discipline, and thus pave the way for a future emancipation of humanity. But this disbelief has historical causes too. What we are dealing with collectively – as well as individually – is a certain historical experience: something has been irretrievably fragmented, in our world and in our minds. There is a gap between, on the one hand, the subjectivity we have inherited from past decades of struggle, successes and mostly setbacks, and on the other, the fact that today there is no social space corresponding to this subjectivity.

Rather, it exists as a 'free-floating collective habitus', a disposition without any ground on which to grow (see Krtolica in this volume). We believe that, instead of striving to build a 'Great Unity', we may do better in seeking to *refract* this common experience through a prism of our various disciplinary methods, to *direct* this refracted experience onto our various objects and concepts, and to *engage* in the light of this critical work.

With this volume, we wish to give a general survey of our individual and mutual efforts in tackling the small-scale pieces of engagement – within disciplinary, theoretical and subject diversity – to present our personal academic and social preoccupations and put them on a joint platform. We wish to see if and how they work in dialogue, not only with each other, but also with various possible readings. We wish to call for a dialogue, and possibly a long-term conversation with other similar endeavours. This is why this volume should be read as a cogwheel in the machinery of joint research and actions we have undertaken over the past two years, bringing together other passionate researchers at some of the conferences we have organized: 'Engaging Foucault' in December 2014, 'Thinking Beyond Capitalism' in June 2015, 'How to Act Together. From Collective Engagement to Protest' in November 2015, 'Social Justice: New Perspectives, New Horizons' in May 2016. Hopefully, many more are yet to come.

UDK: 17.021.1 FILOZOFIJA I DRUŠTVO XXVII (2), 2016.
DOI: 10.2298/FID1602311Z
Original scientific article
Received: 20.2.2016 — Accepted: 13.3.2016

Adriana Zaharijević

# Pawning and Challenging in Concert: Engagement as a Field of Study

**Abstract** An introduction of sorts, this text opens the thematic collection of articles on engagement. It takes up the idea that a particular group of people engage the idea of engagement in order to establish a field of study. In so doing, the text proposes to tackle the specific creation of the field and of the 'we' that engages with its creation. The first portion of the text deals with the multiple meanings of engagement; the second with the idea of the group (of who the 'we' is and what it does); while the last segment engages the idea of the political in engagement. Its main aim is to show how the *we* and the field, at least for a time, cannot be easily disentangled.

**Keywords**: engagement, field of study, group, 'we', the engaged, the political

## Becoming a field of study

Suppose we are ambitious and want to establish a field of study. Suppose it gains ground, and becomes unfixed from where it began and disaffiliated from its initiators. This field is now a free-floating entity in an academic space, provided of course it is produced in a non-minority language. The field has been produced and is now acting as a material or a toolbox, to quote Foucault, for others to use (Foucault 1996a: 149). The way it has been conceived, debated, negotiated, repudiated, disassembled and then reassembled, usually can and does remain hidden. The field which has scored the name *studies* (such as gender studies, Victorian, discourse-analysis, disability studies, postcolonial studies and the like) can be certainly dis-assembled again, and its inventors and developers can be retrieved, at least in part. However, if we are not interested in discovering bio-bibliographical data, we could be perfectly content with using, keeping in mind readjustments, the mere ideas the field offers. In other words, when we wish to do research within certain studies, we do not necessarily have to think of who did it first and why. Even if we engage with names or specific ideas promulgated by certain people, we do not necessarily have to think of who they really were and how their historical – material and symbolic – conditioning brought them to their contribution. The studies outgrow their founding fathers and mothers.

As is the case with a great deal of work created in contemporary academia, our presumed field has been developed in some sort of community. This

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vague designation can refer to any type of community: from figurative 'community of scholars' who borrow, build and exchange each other's work, regardless of actual acquaintance with those who they borrow from, build with or against; to the more concrete community of idea-makers and idea-administrators who apply them through policies or politics; to a group of people who, by sharing the same institution, gather their enthusiasm and knowledge and through personal communication develop a common base – with aspirations of turning into a field of study. Legendary figures aside, a great deal of academic work arises today from direct and mutual exchange, whose principles, goals and even expected outcomes are set in advance. Against the infamous image of reclusiveness of academic work, more often than not, we work *with* each other. The era of Descartian insularity and contemplation of the self and divine existence by a fireplace – especially when reflection involves inventing the field of studies – is now bygones.

Let us now suppose we wish to propose a certain type of field, which we were determined to establish. The field revolves around social engagement and aspires to become recognized as 'social engagement studies'. No such field is recognized by deific Google, despite the fact that social engagement has innumerable entries. And then there enters the *we* of this text. The *we* designates the peregrinations of a group which has literally been gathering around myriad questions of what it means to be *engaged*. Still, this is not a text about *us*, not a historical note about a certain number of people who worked together at a certain place and time. The text does not presume to be a disassembling of bio-bibliographical data before we even began establishing ourselves as a field, that is, allowing it to become free-floating, unfixed, motherless. On the contrary, the text seeks to understand how a specific *we* gets created – if it does; how an ambition to create a specific field can be encouraged, but also thwarted; how embodied individuals, who later exist mostly as surnames in parentheses (with some numbers attached to them), get involved – or prefer not to get involved – with the creation of a field; and how the *we* and the field, at least for a time, cannot be easily disentangled.

## The logic behind the name: what is engagement?

Let us, for a brief moment, recall two relatively recent struggles around the name. The term 'post-colonial', particularly when attached to 'studies', remains a site of disciplinary and interpretative contestation, where both notions and the hyphen between them have stirred a significant debate over time. Post(-)colonial refers to a remarkably heterogeneous set of subject positions, critical enterprises, re-tooling of old notions, cultural markers and disciplinary activities (Slemon 1994). The very term "'post-colonial' is resonant with all the ambiguity and complexity of the many different cultural experiences it implicates" (Ashcroft et al. 2003: 2) – its field of reference is almost indeterminate. Something similar, although the contestation trajectories differ, may be said for gender in gender studies. Should we set aside quandaries about its disciplinary status, probably never to be fully resolved for plethora of reasons, academic and otherwise, the trouble with the name persists. If gender studies really ever outgrew its predecessor in name and in form – women's studies – it is still debatable whether it succeeded in 'circumscribing the uncircumscribable', that is, whether the mere change in name enabled it to resist ghettoization: constructing its coherence while preserving its cherished criticality and subversiveness (Brown 2005). Names almost always produce space for dispute and conceptual unease, simultaneously occluding some meanings and opening others. Can engagement prove to be different in that respect?

What does engagement stand for? Commitment and publicity come to mind first. Engagement seeks a certain kind of publicity, a certain kind of frame which involves others – in the guise of other persons or others personas, corporeal or corporate – who witness the pledge or vow. Contracts, enterprises or betrothals are recognized forms of engagement, synonymous with engagement itself. All of them require mutuality and a formal promise, the formality of which is ensured by institutionally protected public domain. Commitment is also inscribed into the very fibre of the word. Engagement assumes bodily existence of the engaged, either in the form of a subject who offers her life as a guarantee of good faith, who *gages* herself, or in the form of an object, a token of will deposited as a pledge. Originating from 'gage', engagement assumes both pawning and challenging, giving security and threatening to take it away. It refers to dedication, determination for a cause, a strong obligation to bind and be bound, or else to a hostile encounter, combat or conflict.

Internal struggle is enshrined in the concept itself, being patently discernible in its etymology, in uses and misuses of its truth (*etumon*). To be engaged means to be attracted to (a claim, a cause in order to become committed); to be hired (contractually bound, indentured, made liable); to be wed (a binding agreement to hold and protect, and hold and obey, unto death); and to bring troops into conflict (to engage the enemy). If we move away from the sediments of the word, the struggle does not disappear. The history of uses of the word is embedded into how it becomes enmeshed in the area of its prospective studies.

Moving from engagement to the engaged, to the bodily presence and the will to engage with, we ought to ask: what do the engaged stand for? What are we committed to and whom do we encounter as the enemy? Apparently, engagement includes choosing sides, being simultaneously for and against, pawning and challenging in concert. Adhering to a cause – and dismissing other concurrent causes – assumes the existence or invention of rivalling sides, poles in antagonism. This substantial antagonism seems to be the core politicality of engagement.

We may say that, on a surface level, if one is engaged, one cannot not will to be political. Let us recall Sartre's famous equation of speaking and acting in *Litterature engagée*: "by speaking, I reveal the situation by my very intention of changing it; I reveal it to myself and to others *in order* to change it… The 'engaged' writer knows that words are action. He knows that to reveal is to change and that one can reveal only by planning to change" (Sartre 1950: 22–23). The words become political; they act like 'loaded pistols'. One chooses engagement in the sense that one is not at liberty not to choose – abstinence is also a choice. The substantial antagonism here concerns the politicality of choice, of values we speak of in order to change the situation in which we find ourselves and to which we are bound. Public engagement is a total activity; it indebts the world by abolishing ignorance about it, and with it the innocence of choicelessness.

Therefore, there can be no studies of engagement which would somehow by-pass the political. However, the scope and the meaning of the political are always less than straightforward: pledging to a cause may take on many different guises. One may aim one's loaded pistols to fight for a better world as a totality, but also for a chunk of a better world. One may engage in common struggles and struggle for the commons, or with single-issue struggles only – how do we judge who is more in-common and more politically engaged? One may engage with the streets, and on them – by marching and chanting – or by unpicking mortar and crushing ground, provided of course there are streets to be treaded on at all (Butler 2015). Or one may, quite to the contrary, choose to engage with the institutions, from within the system, with the aim of bettering or battering it. Words may act as pistols in any of these politically quite different situations. Sometimes too it is not with words that we fight: assembled bodies have political meanings which are not enacted by discourse, although they still 'speak' "in ways that index another sense of the organic and the political" (Butler 2015: 181).

Do all conceivable politicalities matter? What kind of politicality deserves prioritizing and for what reasons? Also, the historical uses of certain words wear off or dramatically change the very core of their referent. If Sartre's post-war *public engagement* referred to carrying and using different kinds of arms in order to change the world, today this term has a rather ambiguous meaning, referring to agency mediated by policy agendas, included in the criteria for government schemes of competitive research funding (Baćević 2016). The word is one and the same, but the politicality it harbours is not. The former wanted to abolish inequality and injustice; the latter, even though it assumes investing in creating positive social change, fundamentally promotes "the practices which maintain those social and economic circumstances at the root of the causes of inequality and injustice" (Fasenfest 2010: 486). Had engagement studies been initiated in Sartre's time, would they have had the same subject as they might have today? How does context conditions the pawning and challenging in concert? How *the engaged* changes with the change in contexts? Can the subject remain one and the same through times of heightened war-induced responsibility for unforeseeable and unintended consequences (Baert 2015); in times such as '68, when the field of the political burst open to enable "plurality of questions posed to politics rather than the reinscription of the act of questioning in the framework of a political doctrine" (Foucault 1999b: 115); and in times after 1989 when the political doctrine camouflaged itself in a profusion of culturally based identifications, closing off the domain of plurality and democracy by racialising politics (Fassin 2012)?

The issue of the 'when' of engagement leads to the question of its 'where'. If the unification of proletarians of all countries made the ruling classes in 19th century tremble with fear of their engagement of deeply rooted antagonisms, the engagement which revolves around governmental funding schemes has negligible capacity to intimidate. The question 'what do the engaged stand for' thus needs to be supplemented: where do the engaged stand, spatially and temporarily? Do they stand in the streets, in the Parliament, at the pulpit, in the factory; do they appear as talking-heads, as keynote speakers, as experts, or as modern day troubadours? In what part of the world do they have the chance and the right to appear, and how do limits (linguistic, national, racial, gender etc.) to their appearance condition their relevance for engagement? The issue of 'where' also relates to the issue of inside/outside, and to the issue of capacities to be and remain outside, where 'outside' remains an almost entirely positive designation (referring to non-corruptedness, un-orthodoxy, powerful powerlessness).

## The engaged 'We'

Who can study engagement? Posed as such, the question seems banal. Anyone can engage in studying engagement: one may disavow participation in representative democracy or active citizenship and still study civic engagement; one can fully exclude oneself from community building, and yet have an interest in how social engagement works; one can be devoted to public engagement studies, and remain forever hidden in the proverbial ivory tower of academia. However, if we move from its platitudinous surface, this question gives rise to a host of other questions, relevant for understanding contemporary conjunctions of thought and action. The issue at hand is the 'who', but this time the subject is not *the engaged*, but the 'we' who wish to transform the engaged into an object of our study. Who is this 'we'? What is its habitat, with what type of bodies is it populated, with what kind of norms must they comply?

When there is a 'we', a group of people assembled to study engagement *together*, the initial banality of the question dwindles (see also Cvejić in this volume). The apparent differences in approach, disciplinary or experiental (in research or in direct engagement), do not necessarily lead to a prolific interdisciplinarity or tensionless exchange. Who we are, what we read, where we have learnt to read that way, how we learnt to disseminate what we know, and the audiences we choose or would wish to choose if that choice had not already been made for us, matters. Our colours matter. Our age and (class, ethnic, small town/big city) background matter. Our distance and proximity matter. Our private arrangements – the place where we go when we finish discussing engagement, the place where we cater to other people's needs and desires, the place which can act as the quiet and safe haven, or as a beehive – matter. Our sex matters, even when we wish to transcend it, confront it – we are all feminists, regardless of the body we were born into! – or relegate it to a domain of insignificance. 'We' is a group in which our corporealities matter differently and where this very corporeality, through the norms that permeate it, seeks engagement. The free-floating entity 'social engagement studies' has its rhizomes in a 'we' that is at the same time a collection of selves who produce thinking, and an assembly of embodied singularities who struggle with their own temporal and spatial confines.

The ideally conceived surrounding in which this 'we' engages with engagement would be in line with what Athena Athanasiou has termed agonistic democratic performativity: we is "to disseminate its own fixity and certainty, to embrace its situated contingency and provisionality, to suspend definitional closures of political subjectivity and action, and to remain ultimately open to its incalculable potentialities and misfires" (Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 155). However, when things need to be done, when thinking has to be replaced with structured action of minor or major importance (such as obtaining funds for a light lunch and refreshments at a seminar on utopia, or writing a group protest note on political machinations that hinder alternative forms of engagement), agonism needs to be suspended, at least for a moment. The 'tyranny of structurelessness', to quote the title of the old but still so useful pamphlet written by Jo Freeman (1970), lurks behind groupings that, in the name and spirit of engagement, wish to defy hierarchy, to disobey disciplinary matrices, to avoid baits of rewards and punishment, and to follow the patterns they wish to see institutionalised outside of the group itself. Needless to say, visions of this 'outside' need not overlap, even where there is tacit consensus about it.

This issue is especially acute today – in the academic setting, in which almost any type of studies, including those of engagement, is being produced – as well as in society at large alike. Being *for* agonistic democratic performativity needs urgent elaboration in times when democracy stands opposed not only to dictatorship and other forms of coercive and limitless rule, but also to the relentless transmutation of rule into governance and management (Brown 1995: 20). In times when but a shadow (not a spectre) of homo politicus remains to counter our embodiments as human capital, struggle for engagement, both in terms of action and thought, becomes vital, but is also always already thwarted. How can we engage against *ourselves* who act as entrepreneurs of and investors in our own selves, a role we either eagerly or reluctantly accept, in the absence of welfare or socialist states and the social subjectivities of the past (Feher 2009: 34)? How can we engage against self-appreciation, enhancement of competitiveness and value, and maximization of ratings and rankings, not only in our work in academia as thinking beings who produce thought on engagement, but also as subjectivities produced in times of severe responsibilisation and utter dispensability? How can we think of fighting inequality, when it becomes so ingrained and normalized in the relationality of human capital that we ourselves simultaneously think about combative engagement and cede to the conditions which effectively preclude it?

## Engagement and the political

This short piece is organised as a small proposal to think through different aspects of establishing an academic ambition to form a field. The prospective field and those who structure it, who tend to think as a group, to establish the field group-wise, become interlinked in many ways. The will to take into account the physicality of our own groupings, and its symbolic and material transposition in what we encircle as the field – willing it to become unfixed from *us*, to be taken away further – has its specific place in the formation of the establishing thought itself. The antagonism is enhanced, not stifled by the willed agonistic democratic performativity. It reveals itself on multiple levels: in what we wish to achieve by studying engagement (more of the political, more politics, more policy); in how we understand ourselves as engaged actors – and not mere students (those who would *take pains* only in learning, and not from taking punches); in how we differently understand the divide between theory and practice and how we work to mollify it; in how we conceive ourselves in engaging the antagonism – from the outside (as the constitutive or as the 'excised' outside) or from the inside (as a reformable or as a revolutionisable inside)?

The idea that one needs to be engaged in order to study engagement has been formerly rejected as trivial. However, if we wish to establish the field of studies that deals with engagement, the issue regains its significance. The specific position of a student, the one who does not need to be the subject of engagement in order to have engagement as one's object, sets forth the possibility of disengaged study of the engagement. What are we when we study engagement? Are we intellectuals (see Pudar Draško in this volume), those who have and use the intellect to pronounce and announce desirable ways of acting to some others, those all too immersed in mundane activities bereft of thinking? Are we inadvertently re-introducing ancient divisions between the theorists (those who look from afar, who have the privilege of distance), and the doers, who fight battles on the ground, giving us food for thought with which to engage (see Prodanović in this volume)? If we consider engagement always implicated in the political, does that mean that the 'students' may wish to engage with 'real politics', in order to actually mould the world they envision according to their best vision? Can we abstain from engaging and be content with a kind of Lyotardian postmodern 'philosophical politics', a passive individual act of resistance to dominant political theories, doctrines, ideologies and myths, and to the legitimate forms of intellectual political engagement that strives to actualize them (Savić 2004: 15)?

A certain disengagement is always already present in the hiatus produced by thinking, with – however temporary or situational – suspension of acting. This pausing of action and its translation into thinking may be read as disengagement, as the displacement of action from its *thereness* to a nowhere, a specific non-place of thinking (Arendt 1981). Thinking without professing, without being somewhere specific in the future – without putting on the mantle of a sage, prophet or legislator – secures us from action. Yet maybe, by being so immersed in what is *now*, we are actually in the midst of acting, and only then really able to tie the knot binding action and thinking. By studying engagement we may be dreaming, as Foucault does, of an intellectual "destroyer of evidence and universalities, the one who in the inertias and constraints of the present, locates and marks the weak points, the openings, the lines of power, who incessantly displaces himself, doesn't know exactly where he is heading nor what he'll think tomorrow because he is so attentive to the present" (Foucault 1996: 225). Maybe we are not impeding action when we are pausing to think, by being now if not there. This pausing may not be a solitary work which leads to a nowhere of thought, but a common act of reflection on the conditions and directions for acting, which has more than a mere instrumental value (Butler 2015: 123–124), and which must be done with others, among others, in exchange and in mutuality.

Unlike so many other fields of studies, the one surrounding engagement needs to revolve around the core politicality involved in engagement itself. This does not imply that a 'we' behind the field needs to act as a collection of strategists, experts or prospective politicians. But it does mean that it cannot turn its back on the 'now' of the material world and its multiple and profoundly political junctures. Being engaged with thinking engagement may not necessarily result in arranging the world according to a certain vision of order, but it would compel us to remain close, committed to the antagonisms which saturate the world we pause with thinking.

Studying engagement forces us to constantly review orders that arrange “tangible reality in which bodies are distributed in community” (Rancière 1990: 28). These are orders that allocate those who have their part (but also those that have no part), that assign them to a particular place or task by which they become visible and audible. Those orders govern what counts as intelligible appearance, they govern the distribution of spatial arrangement where one proves one’s being and having a part. Logic antagonistic to this, according to Rancière, is the political logic which cancels this configured harmony by shifting bodies from their assigned places, places they were ordered to occupy. Studying engagement forces us to remain attentive to the possibilities of achieving the contingency of equality, of opening up of the spaces where those who have no part burst onto the scene and, if only temporarily, redefine the meaning of community, politics and democracy.

It has been claimed that substantial antagonism is the core politicality of engagement. Some aspects of its antagonistic nature have been touched upon already. Let us, in conclusion, turn to the issue of antagonisms and coalitions. When we claim that antagonism is at the root of the politicality of engagement, does this imply that there is some Schmittian foe within thought or in the field of action that we need to engage in order to study engagement? Or does that mean that being engaged must be reduced solely to being contra, engaging the enemy[1]? Can we not also sleep with the enemy, as the old separatist slogan goes, thus keeping him closer than our friend?

Can there be coalitional thinking, if not coalitional action, which would go beyond hegemonic uses of antagonism – beyond crushing the enemy, toppling the sovereign, bearing arms for the sake of establishing a weaponless utopia, a utopia free from antagonism? Could it be possible to think of coalitions – and solidarity – based on a different kind of relationality, different type of groupings, which would gather together “in opposition to existing and expanding inequalities, to ever-increasing conditions of precarity for many populations both locally and globally, and to forms of authoritarian and securitarian control that seek to suppress democratic processes and movements” (Butler 2015: 135)? Could we employ the histories and trajectories of engagement, its changes, uses and misuses, in order to understand how the force of antagonisms, processes of their formation and effects of production (of vulnerability, in Butler’s terms, or those who have no part, in Rancière’s) may shape the new modes of coalitional action and thinking?

In effect, studying engagement might act as way of preventing us from moving away from antagonism. If engagement is to be found in the production of contracts, enterprises, betrothals and wars, if engagement *is* this very production, it also assumes, by the logic of this production, taking sides, and having those on either side bound and gaged. Thus, studying engagement impels us to take antagonism earnestly; to not remove politicality all too easily from the fields, spheres and niches which seem less than political, or are historically categorised thus; and to engage in imagining or reinventing "'new relational modes' across the incommensurate scenes of work-nature-intimate stranger, and not just among lovers" (Berlant 2010).

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[1] Enemy being not only opponent on the battlefield, but also wife in British slang.

## Post-scriptum

During the final preparations for this thought-piece, I encountered a passage which would probably best sum up my own intuitions about what it means to be engaged. It says that

> revolutionary change [is] something immediate, something we must do now, where we are, where we live, where we work. It means starting this moment to do away with authoritarian, cruel relationships – between men and women, between parents and children, between one kind of worker and another kind. Such revolutionary action cannot be crushed like an armed uprising. It takes place in everyday life, in the tiny crannies where the powerful but clumsy hands of state power cannot easily reach. It is not centralized and isolated, so that it can be wiped out by the rich, the police, the military. It takes place in a hundred thousand places at once, in families, on streets, in neighborhoods, in places of work. It is a revolution of the whole culture. Squelched in one place, it springs up in another, until it is everywhere. (Zinn 2009, 653)

However, when I communicated it to a close fellow group member, her response was ruthlessly simple: "not enough". This is the reason why a 'we' runs throughout this text. It is also the reason why this text does not pretend to be a polished set of solutions, a manual or a manifesto. The chosen form of this essay is also prompted by the firm belief, in line with the passage quoted above, that a 'we' that wants to study engagement – and more than that, to establish its field of study – cannot and shall not be a one-headed giant, but a many-headed hydra.

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Adriana Zaharijević

## Zalog i izazov: angažman kao polje studija

**Rezime**

Tekst predstavlja svojevrstan uvod u tematski skup članaka koji različito pristupaju pojmu i problemu angažmana. Polazi se od pretpostavke da je za pokušaj zasnivanja polja studija koje se bave angažmanom i angažovanošću, neophodno uzeti u obzir kako mnoštvo značenja samog pojma, tako i sastav i aspiracije onih koji tvrde da polažu pravo na utemeljenje takvog polja. U tom smislu, u prvom segmentu tekst razmatra različita značenja angažmana (etimologiju, razlike u načinu upotrebe, aktivnosti onih koji su angažovani); u drugom se usredsređuje na ideju grupe koja nastoji da ustanovi polje studija (na pitanja veze teorije i prakse, neophodnosti angažovanja onih koji promišljaju angažman itd.); dok se treći deo teksta bavi odnosom političkog i angažovanosti. Osnovni cilj je da se pokaže kako se u pokušaju ustanovljenja polja studija angažmana, polje i oni koji žele da ga ustanove kao polje, ne mogu s lakoćom razdvojiti.

**Ključne reči**: angažman, polje studija, grupa, „mi“, angažovani, političko

UDK: 17:316.772
DOI: 10.2298/FID1602322K
Original scientific article
Received: 10.3.2016 — Accepted: 1.4.2016

FILOZOFIJA I DRUŠTVO XXVII (2), 2016.

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# Can Something Take Place?

**Abstract** First, starting from a text Deleuze and Guattari wrote in 1984 on the aftermath of May 1968 in France ("May 68 Did Not Take Place"), this article tries to analyze in what way this diagnosis – made in the middle of the 1980s, when what is now commonly called neo-liberalism was unfolding both in America and in Europe – can apply to our current political situation. Secondly, this analysis shows that maybe the very conditions of social critique and social engagement are endangered today more than yesterday, because of the new patterns of social restraint embodied by the evolution of communication (especially television). Thirdly, the author asks the question: therefore, under which conditions social critique and engagement are now possible?

**Keywords**: engagement, Deleuze, Guattari, May 68, event, critic, television, communication

The debate on social engagement would not come up if we were conclusively guarded against the ongoing risk of disengagement. Neither would the debate come up *today* if that risk did not relate to new patterns of social restraint which are driving us to invent the forms of engagement that are suited and tailored to the new situation.

In 1984, in the middle of those wintry years when, both in America and in Europe, what is now commonly called neo-liberalism was unfolding, Deleuze and Guattari wrote a text on the events of May 1968 in France, sixteen years after these same events. In this document entitled "May 68 Did Not Take place", they stated five points. 1°) First, they argued that an event is defined as an opening of possibilities and what unlocks in there will remain unraveled. Although set in the past, an event shall never be gone past. "In historical phenomena such as the revolution of 1789, the Commune, the revolution of 1917, there is always one part of the *event* that is irreducible to any social determinism, or to causal chains. Historians are not very fond of this aspect: they restore causality after the fact. Yet the event is itself a splitting off from, or a breaking with causality; it is a bifurcation, a deviation with respect to laws, an unstable condition which opens up a new field of the possible. […] In this sense, an event can be turned around, repressed, hijacked, betrayed, but there still is something there that cannot be outdated. Only renegades would say: it's outdated. But even if the event is ancient, it can never be outdated: it is an opening onto the possible. It passes as much into the interior of individuals as into the depths of a society" (Deleuze 2003: 215). In Deleuze and Guattari's view, the events of May 1968 in

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France were of the same kind inasmuch as they opened new possibilities, "new relations with the body, with time, sexuality, the immediate surroundings, with culture, work…" (Deleuze 2003: 216). 2°) Secondly, Deleuze and Guattari yet argued that although the event cannot be gone past as such, it needs realization, it requires some forms of institutional embodiments that can actually fulfil the possibilities it opened. Well, now "May 68 Did Not Take Place" (*Mai 68 n'a pas eu lieu*) means precisely that French society failed to materialize the events of May 1968 into such institutions: "The American New Deal and the Japanese boom corresponded to two very different examples of subjective redeployment, with all sorts of ambiguities and even reactionary structures, but also with enough initiative and creativity to provide a new social state capable of responding to the demands of the event. Following '68 in France, on the contrary, the authorities did not stop living with the idea that 'things will settle down'. And indeed, things did settle down, but under catastrophic conditions. May '68 was not the result of a crisis, nor was it a reaction to a crisis. It is rather the opposite. It is the current crisis, the impasses of the current crisis in France that stem directly from the inability of French society to assimilate May '68. French society has shown a radical incapacity to create a subjective redeployment on the collective level, which is what '68 demands; in light of this, how could it now trigger an economic redeployment that would satisfy the expectations of the 'Left'? French society never came up with anything for the people: not at school nor at work. Everything that was new has been marginalized or turned into a caricature. […] Each time the possible was closed off" (Deleuze 2003: 216). 3°) Thirdly, from then on Deleuze and Guattari could suggest that the 'children of May 68' found themselves caught up in a contradictory situation. For if the event of May 1968 did continue to run through them, to labor them and sometimes heat them up, nothing in their social reality could meet this subjective disposition; and since nothing but silence would echo their subjectivity, they developed the feeling that what was going on did not really apply or relate to them, they started showing strange unconcerned interest to what was happening to them. "They are strangely indifferent, and yet very well-informed. They have stopped being demanding or narcissistic, but they know perfectly well that there is nothing today that corresponds to their subjectivity, to their potential of energy. They even know reforms are rather directed against them. They are determined to mind their own business as much as they can. They keep it open, hang on to something possible" (Deleuze 2003: 217). 4°) Fourthly, Deleuze and Guattari argued that their reading of French society in the mid-eighties could apply to the rest of the world, given the events of 1968 were worldwide[1].

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[1] Deleuze will remind it in a long comment of his book on Foucault : "To read some analyses, you would think that 1968 took place in the heads of a few Parisian intellectuals. We must therefore remember that it is the product of a long chain of world

"This is true of the entire world. What we institutionalize in unemployment, in retirement, or in school, are controlled 'situations of abandonment', for which the handicapped are the model. The only subjective redeployment actually occurring on a collective level are those of an unbridled American-style capitalism, or even a Muslim fundamentalism like in Iran, or of Afro-American religions like in Brazil: they are reversed figures of a new orthodoxy (one should add here European neo-Papism). Europe has nothing to suggest, and France seem to no longer have any other ambition than to assume the leadership of an Americanized and over-armed Europe that would impose from above the necessary economic redeployment" (Deleuze 2003: 217). 5°) But this reading was not a pessimistic one since Deleuze and Guattari were making a point that, fifthly, there survived a field of possibilities that is likely to be realized. "Yet the field of the possible lies elsewhere: *along the East-West axis*, in pacifism, insofar as it intends to break up relations of conflict, or over-armament, but also of complicity and distribution between the United States and the Soviet Union. *Along the North-South axis*, in a new internationalism that no longer relies solely on an alliance with the Third-World, but on the phenomena of third-worldification in the rich countries themselves (for example, the evolution of metropolises, the decline of the inner-cities, the rise of a European third-world, such as Paul Virilio has theorized them)" (Deleuze 2003: 217).

A year later, in 1985, in *The Time-Image,* the second volume of his study on cinema, Deleuze would raise this diagnosis on his time to the rank of 'modern fact'. "The modern fact is that we no longer believe in this world. We do not even believe in the events which happen to us, love, death, as if they only half concerned us. It is not we who make cinema; it is the world which looks to us like a bad film. […] The link between man and world is broken" (Deleuze 1985: 223). Yet, the following year, in 1986, in an introduction to the book *Ciné-Journal* by film critic Serge Daney ("Letter to Serge

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events, and of a series of currents of international thought, that already linked *the emergence of new forms of struggle to the production of a new subjectivity,* if only in its critique of centralism and its qualitative claims concerning the 'quality of life'. On the level of world events we can briefly quote the experiment with self-management in Yugoslavia, the Czech Spring and its subsequent repression, the Vietnam War, the Algerian War and the question of networks, but we can also point to the signs of a 'new class' (the new working class), the emergence of farmers' or students' unions, the so-called institutional psychiatric and educational centers, and so on. On the level of currents of thought we must no doubt go back to Lukacs, whose *History and Class Consciousness* was already raising questions to do with a new subjectivity; then the Frankfurt School, Italian Marxism and the first signs of 'autonomy' (Tronti); the reflection that revolved around Sartre on the question of the new working class (Gorz); the groups such as 'Socialism or Barbarism', 'Situationism', 'the Communist Way' (especially Felix Guattari and the 'micropolitics of desire'). Certain currents and events have continued to make their influence felt." (Deleuze 1986: 123).

Daney: Optimism, Pessimism and Travel"), we would find out that the loss of the world was also the definition of television: "the world is lost, the world itself 'turns to film', any film at all, and this is what television amounts to, the world turning to any film at all, and, as you say here, 'nothing happening to human beings any more, but everything happening only to images'" – "that's just what television amounts to, the whole world turning to film" (Deleuze 1990: 107–110). Of course, it is not insignificant that this diagnosis on the current situation was indeed formulated in texts engaging both political philosophy and aesthetics, dealing with the two major mass media in the twentieth century, namely cinema and television. Our not believing in this world is definitely a subjective disposition, our current subjective disposition. Yet, this subjective disposition proceeds from a new form of social restraint, from new forms of power which have a direct effect on the way we perceive and feel, which shape "postures, attitudes, perceptions, expectations" (Deleuze and Guattari 1980: 262). Well, now audio-visual mass media are those that primarily work this way to fashion and chisel individuals that are adapted to the social standards. And it is down to television to play the part of this inner relationship between, on the one hand, the proliferation of clichés in which our world becomes a bad film, and on the other hand the function of social engineering, both being closely linked together so that people's reactions and responses are pre-tuned to the social demands. This is incidentally Deleuze's second definition of television: "television is the form in which the new powers of 'control' become immediate and direct" (Deleuze 1990: 107).

At the end of the 1980s Deleuze will call this new form of power 'communication'. What defines communication is the tranmission of information in which information designates a series of order-words. Thus, every time we are informed "we are not ask to believe but to behave as if we did" (Deleuze 2003: 298–299), as in "police or government announcements, which often have little plausibility or truthfulness, but say very clearly what should be observed and retained" (Deleuze and Guattari 1980: 96). That is, in other words, the gap has turned into depths: Not only we've stopped believing in this world but we are not even requested to believe in it, only to pretend, which is to say behave accordingly to what we are told. The short history of television fully proves this diagnosis right. The truth is television has always been the field of transmission for public opinion, the place where social consensus circulates. However, the conversion in the early 1980s from a national public television to a privately owned commercial television marked a passage of this media now devoted to the social construction of brains that are fitted to the demands of the market. This becomes even more self-evident when looking at the recent history of reality TV which, at the beginning involved, in the artificial conditions of a recording studio, producing a laboratory-reality that would be useful for the voyeuristic observation of average individuals through the conducts and manners of whom we were notified to identify with. But reality TV quickly turned into an open-air personal coaching operation meant to specifically choose the candidates who would be most in keeping with the requirements of individual performance as dictated by the labor market, while in the meantime weeding out the other applicants. The study of social consensus (in which television is yet again a privileged means of communication) cannot disregard a study of capitalism. It is the production, the distribution and the consumption of conformist attitudes that are suited to the market's demands, it is the fostering of the company-form down to the scale of the individual, what Michel Foucault discussed in 1979 in his lectures on *The Birth of Biopolitics.* The famous selection of the rivals which has instituted the typical traits of democracy since Athens now only conforms to the cost-effectiveness standards – but it is introduced in the guise of self-fulfilment.

The well-renowned study of work psychology Alain Ehrenberg published in 1998, *The Weariness of the Self* (*La fatigue d'être soi*), shows how this new form of power produces some subjectivity's new illnesses in return, the pathologies of depression. Ehrenberg writes that "depression starts succeeding as soon as the disciplinary design of conducts, the rules of authority and compliance with standards to what is forbidden which used to designate a prospect to classes and both sexes, depression rules when these designs have given way to the norms that encourage each and every one to personal initiative demanding one should fulfil themselves. [Depression] takes the form of an obsession with liability in which the prevailing feeling is that of inadequacy or inefficiency. The depressed person does not measure up, he is tired of having to become himself" (Ehrenberg 1998: 10-11). When this helplessness haunts him, when he suddenly feels his future has been taken away from him and when he finds out he has been displaced into the past, the depressed individual has become a has-been, an outmoded individual of no significance. Therefore, "depression is a pathology of our time (the depressed individual has no future) and a pathology of motivation (the depressed individual lacks energy and is stuck in a slump)" (Ehrenberg 1998: 294). This is similar to what Deleuze had diagnosed in the early 1990s when, in a short publication on Beckett, *The Exhausted,* he named 'fatigue' this new subjective disposition ("The tired hasn't got any more (subjective) possibility: he therefore cannot realize the smallest (objective) possibility" (Deleuze 1992: 57), but also, conversely, when reporting on control societies he warned against the general request to constantly remain motivated ("Many young people have a strange craving to be 'motivated', they're always asking for special courses and continuing education; it's their job to discover whose ends these serve" (Deleuze 1990: 247).

There is yet no sign indicating that the situation has changed much over the last twenty years – or that it has got better. What about the grandchildren of May 68? For them as for the generation of their parents, it would be impossible to say that the possibilities have closed up because these are still laboring them, although they still haven't found any institutional embodiment or any particular place to develop in collective modes of existence. On the other hand, the field of possibilities has become smaller: If one may sometimes feel that 'there is no alternative', it is perhaps because the fight seems to be one-sided, even more unfair today than it was yesterday. Indeed, how can one fight against the economic forces of neoliberalism and stock-market speculation, how can one fight against the political powers of communication and populism, against the police and military powers of the security order, how can one fight against the religious powers of fundamentalism or against the media powers of an arrogant conformism? Given these conditions, how can we resist? Yet, has philosophical thinking ever been placed in a different situation than this one here? In 1990 Deleuze stated that philosophy cannot wage war against these forms of power, but that it nonetheless engages in negotiations with them, and more than that it engages in a guerrilla warfare against them.

But what could this paradoxical option really mean? Engaging in negotiations but without exchanging, without communicating? It is clear that the opposition between negotiating and communicating first betrays some sort of suspicion and distrust, not only of the circumstances in which we are condemned to express ourselves (the submission of mass-media to the authority of audience rating) but, above all a distrust of communication as such, a distrust of the demand and command to express ourselves.

> "We sometimes go on as though people can't express themselves. In fact they're always expressing themselves. The sorriest couples are those where the woman can't be preoccupied or tired without the man saying 'What's wrong? Say something…', or the man, without the woman saying…, and so on. Radio and television have spread this spirit everywhere, and we're riddled with pointless talk, insane quantities of words and images. Stupidity's never blind or mute. So it's not a problem of getting people to express themselves but of providing little gaps of solitude and silence in which they might eventually find something to say. Repressive forces don't stop people expressing themselves but rather force them to express themselves. What a relief to have nothing to say, the right to say nothing, because only then is there a chance of framing the rare, and ever rarer, thing that might be worth saying. What we're plagued by these days isn't any blocking of communication, but pointless statements" (Deleuze 1990: 176–177).

In 1990 in an interview with Toni Negri, Deleuze will drive this point home: "Maybe speech and communication have been corrupted. They're thoroughly permeated by money – and not by accident but by their very nature. We've got to hijack speech. Creating has always been something different from communicating. The key thing may be to create vacuoles of non communication, circuit breakers, so we can elude control" (Deleuze 1990: 238).

We have no reason to believe that these are threats *only* to television and common speech, and that they do not apply to the expression of critical thinking. Contrary to what we can sometimes hear, there may not be such an undersupply of critical thinkers, neither an insufficient supply of journals to help their idea circulate, nor a lack in public space where these ideas could be welcome. Probably, what is missing most is time to produce and receive critical thinking, we need this time-out that blends with the event itself and which the supremacy of instant communication will suppress. The problem is not, as some would have it, that the world is getting up in speed but that this time-out is shrinking and dying out. This is not about singing the praises of slowness, as speed and slowness are more complementary than in an adversarial situation. This is about the necessity of a time-out which is a common feature of both head-spinning speeds and the greatest slowness.

> "I don't think the media have much capacity or inclination to grasp an event. In the first place, they often show a beginning or end, whereas even a short or instantaneous event is something going on. And then, they want something spectacular, whereas events always involve periods when nothing happens. It's not even a matter of there being such periods before and after some event, they're part of the event itself: you can't, for example, extract the instant of some terribly brutal accident from the vast empty time in which you see it coming, staring at what hasn't yet happened, waiting ages for it to happen. The most ordinary event casts us as visionaries, whereas the media turn us into mere passive onlookers, or worse still, voyeurs" (Deleuze 1990: 217–218).

Bourdieu was the living proof of a double impossibility that affects the expression of criticism: the impossibility for the philosopher to remain in his academic and scholarly ivory tower, the impossibility for him to criticize the media inside the media, to condemn television on television[2]. So what can we do, then? How, on the one hand, can we set up a blank space in which something could happen, in which something could take place and out of which a thought that deserves to be uttered may bloom, without this same blank space being mistaken for some ivory tower? And, on the other hand, how can we formulate this idea, how can we hold and maintain this resistance speech against the social powers, how can we do it without falling into that media pulp, into that generalized comparability of personal opinions? In short, how can we make criticism and silence run through each other? This debate on the expression of critical thinking cannot part from another debate about its content. Where, today, does that field of possibilities lie? How can we wrest an idea from snowballing clichés, an idea that would not bear that look of déjà-vu?

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[2] See Bourdieu 2002. On television, see Bourdieu 2002: 409–416.

As for the mode of expression of criticism, it would be a mistake to underestimate the political scope of the analysis Deleuze made of mannerism in the 1980s, from *A Thousand Plateaus* in 1980 to "Bartleby; or The Formula" in 1988 to *The Fold* and the "Letter to Serge Daney" in 1986. It is true that mannerism is quite a complex category. First, in the history of art it is a controversial aesthetic category (between the Renaissance and the Baroque) but it is also a clinical category used to refer to some positions that are typical of schizophrenics (a high-flown distancing of the world and others). But as suggested by Deleuze's analyses, this category generally applies to a series of reactions to a social situation that tends to be unbearable to live in. During the sixteenth century these were the glaring contradiction of Renaissance Europe: a yearning for harmony and balance reaching for the universal on the one hand, and on the other hand violent wars, the violence of religious wars and peasant wars, the massacres that accompanied the invasion of Central Europe by the Turks, the development of the colonies in America. In the second half of the twentieth century, the consequences of an all set of factors are now breaking about "the idea of one single misery, internal and external, in the world and in consciousness" (Deleuze 1983: 282): the Second World War and its aftermaths, the swaying of the American Dream, the awareness of ethnic and sexual minorities, the development of advanced capitalism, the building up of audio-visual clichés both in the real world and our mind, etc. – a whole open series of factors which do not relate to a global situation or to one that could apply to the whole world but factors which relate to a fragmented world, to a dispersive reality. In any case, the 'manners' of the artist as that of the schizophrenic entail a tactic of the balk, some displayed unwillingness, a split personality to be regarded as a response to the impossibility to join in the world as to free oneself from it. This is a response that more thoroughly refers to a tactic aimed at neutralizing the world and the identities it is purporting to allocate us all. A humorous reaction and a very critical one that creates a distance which goal is to temporarily suspend the difference between resistance and escape, between engagement and disengagement[3]. Or, as Bartleby would have it: "I would prefer not to…"[4]. There is no reason to believe that mannerism cannot apply to philosophy or to the critical stance in general. Rather the contrary, in a situation where no one believes in the world that

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[3] See Sibertin-Blanc 2016: chap. 13.

[4] "At each occurrence, there is a stupor surrounding Bartleby, as if one had heard the Unspeakable or the Unstoppable. And there is Bartleby's silence, as if he had said everything and exhausted the language at the same time" (Deleuze 1993: 91).

looks like a bad film and a film we feel does not apply to us, where the connections between the citizen and the world have been severed, where the common comforts have become worthless, mannerism implies this operation through which this relation proves to be mainly a problematic one, one which possibility is not given and one that a language that is confronted to the silence within will eventually reap and collect.

What are today's examples of those problematic relations? Or, similarly: Where does the field of the im-possibilities lie? In a recent publication "The German Dream: Neoliberalism and Fortress of Europe" Sociologist Eric Fassin and Journalist Aurélie Windels asked "What is the nature of the link between the reign of neoliberalism and political xenophobia in Europe?" (Fassin and Windels 2016). They showed how Germany, by taking advantage of the economic and the migrant crisis that are swaying Europe today, have taken over what was the main idea of the American dream – namely its imperialist logic: the union of an expansionist liberal economic policy and a migratory policy bent on hospitality for the wretched of the earth, so that in the end Germany have made its power desirable. Following a double axis East-West and North-South, the possibilities are yet somewhere else: moving the war and sovereignty issue away by supporting a policy of power-lessness (*im-puissance*) such as Etienne Balibar had put forward in 2003 in his book entitled *Europe, America, War*; to make this powerlessness attractive by thwarting the division between the wretched of the earth from the Middle-East and Africa on the one hand and, on the other hand those who pretend it is their responsibility to look after other people's lands, by establishing a symmetrical effect between those who are claiming their 'right' to migrate and those who are claiming their 'right' to welcome them or block them out; shifting both these rights to the common ecological principle which determine them, the im-possibility to inhabit and share a world that was not created for us.

Translated in English by Frédéric Dupont

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Igor Krtolica

## Može li se nešto dogoditi?

### Rezime

Najpre polazim od teksta koji su Delez i Gatari napisali 1984. godine o posledicama majskih događaja 1968. u Francuskoj ("Maj '68 se nije dogodio"), da bih u svom prilogu pokušao da analiziram na koji način se njihova dijagnoza – izvedena sredinom osamdesetih u vreme razvoja sada uobičajenog neoliberalizma u Americi i Evropi – može primeniti na našu trenutnu političku situaciju. Drugo, ta analiza ukazuje da su možda upravo danas više nego ikad ugroženi uslovi društvene kritike i društvenog angažmana s razvojem novih obrazaca društvene prinude sadržane u evoluciji komunikacija (posebno televizije). Treće, stoga se pitam, pod kojim uslovima su društvena kritika i angažman danas uopšte mogući?

**Ključne reči**: angažman, Delez, Gatari, Maj '68, događaj, kritika, televizija, komunikacija

UDK: 177
DOI: 10.2298/FID1602332C
Original scientific article
Received: 21.2.2016 – Accepted: 15.3.2016

FILOZOFIJA I DRUŠTVO XXVII (2), 2016.

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# The Forms of Social Engagement Regarding the Subject of Import

**Abstract** My aim is to draw attention to the different forms of social engagement regarding the subject of import. The concept of import was introduced in the theory of action by Bennet Helm. It denotes an intentional characteristic of an object, to be viewed as worthy of pursuit or avoidance. However, according to Helm, the subject of import could be: either an individual person, the other or plural agent. Using this division in the context of social engagement, I propose to distinguish three forms of social engagement: (1) personal social engagement, (2) social engagement for the sake of others and (3) social engagement as togetherness. Social engagement as togetherness (plural agent) should not be confused with plural action with the same goal-directedness (which is part of personal social engagement). This argumentative step was enabled by Helm's complex theory about "us" as a subject of import, contrary to some contemporary theorists who dispute the possibility of plural agents.

**Keywords**: engagement, import, action, plural agents, we-intentions

The purpose of this text is to draw attention to certain distinctions that I find pivotal both for our (self)understanding and for the exercise of social engagement. I argue that these distinctions are engendered by the different constitutions of the import of an object. The concept of 'import' is borrowed from Bennet W. Helm. It denotes an intentional characteristic of an object or an event, to be viewed as worthy of pursuit or avoidance, or having some significance for us (Helm 2001: 21). An import could be constituted in three ways according to the qualitative differences of the subject of import: on a personal level, by sharing the import *of* others, together *with* others. This would lead to distinctions in the phenomenological structure of the import. In line with this, I argue, we have to distinguish three forms of social engagement: (1) *personal* social engagement, (2) social engagement *for the sake of* others and (3) social engagement *as togetherness*.

## Social Engagement and the Problem of Import

The term *social* engagement (chosen among other candidates[1]) refers to activities and actions undertaken in a social sphere, community or group. As such, it underlines an absence of emphatically private individual actions, that are not societal in any significant way.

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[1] Similar terms are public engagement, civic engagement and community engagement. *Public engagement* is today mostly used to refer to interaction of experts with

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Helm's notion of import seems very important for understanding rational actions in general. The so-called belief/desire model for explanation and justification of rational action, introduced by Donald Davidson (Davidson 1963), is still standard today. This model explains reason-based actions as necessarily having two basic components: (1) a conative component, goal-directedness or desire (so-called world-to-mind direction of fit); and (2) a cognitive component, a belief concerning the type of activity that would lead to the realization of goals (mind-to-world direction of fit). An action, according to this model, could be rationally explained and justified if both the goal of this particular action and the appropriate belief that this action would lead to the stated goal could be denoted. However, Helm argues that there is a discrepancy between goal-directedness and our usual commitment to some goals and objects of our actions, which he calls the problem of import. Here is his example about the difference between goal-directedness of a computer to win a game of chess and commitment to realization of goals usual for a desiring person:

> "To characterize the computer as playing chess is to articulate a goal around which the computer's behavior is organized: its outputs are intelligible as nonrandom legal moves that make some sense as attempts to win. For all practical purposes, this ability requires that the computer be able to apply at least a rudimentary form of instrumental rationality […]. However, does the computer *desire* to win? For this to be so, winning itself must be intelligible as worth pursuing for the computer. Yet the appeal to instrumental rationality so far simply presupposes the worthiness of winning and cannot on its own provide an account of it. Because we cannot make sense of winning as worth pursuing by the computer's lights, the best we can say is that the computer exhibits rationally mediated goal-directedness rather than a genuine desire.
>
> By contrast, a dog can desire to go out on a walk. This means not merely that the dog is able to behave in ways that are instrumental to its going on a walk by, for example, bringing its leash to its master or scratching at the back door, but also that the dog cares about going on walks: this is something that matters or has significance or importance to it, as is clear in part from its frustration or anger at not being let out and its joy when it finally is." (Helm 2001: 31–32)

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wider public. In Great Britain it is even defined by NCCPE (*National Co-Ordinating Centre for Public Engagement*) and HEFCE (*The Higher Education Funding Council for England*) as: "the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public" (NCCPE, internet). Defined thus, this term is too narrow for my purposes. *Civic engagement* mainly refers to participation of citizens in some political activities and institutions. In liberal-democratic societies it mostly refers to participation of individuals in elections, volunteering etc. *Community engagement* is the term used to denote collective, 'bottom-up' actions in local communities. Although all of these terms are potentially applicable, the term *social engagement* seems the least polluted and much broader than others.

The point of this example is that we need to distinguish between goal-directedness and desires, in the sense that desires involve some significance that objects/actions have for us, as being worthy of pursuit. This enables Helm to easily introduce the concept of import:

> "I shall use *'import'* to denote any such worthiness imparted by a subject's concern for something. As such, import provides a non-instrumental reason for the dog's pursuit of the walk and therefore makes intelligible the idea that the dog desires it and finds it worth pursuing. Consequently, the dog is intelligible as a qualitatively different kind of thing than a chess-playing computer: the dog is a potential subject of import and as such has a 'stake' in the outcome in a way that is simply unintelligible for the computer." (Helm 2001: 32)

I will now link the problem of import with social engagement. We may say that many activities we have, activities that can be understood as social, do not necessarily involve our commitment to their goals. These could be dull administrative or military services, or jobs we do only to get paid (for example, a person who works 'for' terrorists in an illegal weapon factory to secure means for a numerous and starving family, against or regardless of his moral sentiments), etc. This is what Kant referred to as the private use of reason, the limited use of reason, where objectives are not to be questioned:

> "I call 'private use' that use which a man makes of his reason in a civic post that has been entrusted to him. In some affairs affecting the interest of the community a certain [governmental] mechanism is necessary in which some members of the community remain passive. This creates an artificial unanimity which will serve the fulfillment of public objectives (*Zwecken*), or at least keep these objectives from being destroyed. Here arguing is not permitted: one must obey." (WA, AA 08: 37)

In contrast to these types of social activities, social engagement presupposes certain activities, certain commitments to goals one sets to achieve. In this sense, a possible definition of social engagement, as the participation in social activities, would be all too broad. Many social activities we partake in have some kind of rational goal-directed pattern, but we are not committed to the objectives of actions in all of them. This is exactly where import, as defined by Helm, comes in. Therefore, I suggest that we should understand social engagement as the social activity with a commitment to the objectives of this activity, i.e. a social activity undertaken by someone who is the subject of import. It should be noted that this definition is in itself also broad, because it involves what can be understood as social engagement only tentatively (for example, a person protests, all by himself, in front of the Parliament). (1) Social engagement usually presupposes commitment exercised *with* another person or a group of persons, whereas individual social actions could be based only on a limited (private) single evaluative perspective. (2) Thus, following Helm, we could differentiate between actions mentioned above and actions that are not based on a single evaluative perspective *per simpliciter*, but relative to the other(s) as a subject of import. Helm names these actions *engaged actions* (Helm 2009: 93). (3) We could also make a further step, and introduce a case where an import is not relative only to a single evaluative perspective or to the others as the subject of import, but where the group or a community itself becomes the subject of import. Helm's term for the latter is *plural robust agency* (Helm 2009: 266) – in the context of social engagement I chose to use the term 'social engagement as togetherness'.

## 1. Personal Social Engagement

By personal social engagement, I refer to those social activities in which import is relative only to a single evaluative perspective. People have a variety of reasons for their actions, different goals and different imports; different objects have significance for them, and each and every one of us has specific evaluative perspective. Many, if not all our actions compel us to engage in different kinds of social activities, be they the simplest collective actions, or battles with others for social status, or, ultimately, common engagement to obtain the best possible system in which to live. They include not only desires and private interests, but also attitudes and personal views on how our social structure should be arranged. As persons, we are not mere subjects of desires and needs; we are also capable to evaluate those desires and needs and to constitute our own rational goals (Helm 2009: 97).

Before I offer a definition of personal social engagement, I want to draw attention to a specific kind of limitation linked to this concept. It refers to the limitation of a single evaluative perspective that constitutes the import. I find it important because it is contrasted to the one commonly held prejudice that the only relevant distinction is the one between private goals (e.g. to get better income) and public goals (e.g. to improve the educational system for the good of society). This is a distinction in goal-directedness: I could program a computer to exercise a rational pattern that would provide me with better income, or I could program a computer to work for the development of the educational system. However, apart from goal-directedness, persons also have desires, objects have some significance to them to which they are receptive, i.e., they are the subjects of import. Moreover, they evaluate their goals and by doing so they constitute what it is that has an import for them.

Hence, personal social engagement refers to social activities where the subject of import is the individual person confined to his/her own single evaluative perspective. Different goal-directedness does not denote a difference in the subject of import, which will be clarified below. Engaging for the sake of my own private interest or for certain public goals can be based on a single evaluative perspective.

### Plural personal social engagement

There is another difference between actions that I undertake *alone* (on my own) and those actions that I do *with others*. The most common case of acting in concert (actions with others) relies on the proper matching of goal-directedness: there are many people who have the same goals and they may act collectively to realize these goals. This could also be called *plural intentional system* (Helm 2009: 252). However, as Searle has already argued, we have to intuitively make a distinction between matching individual intentions (I-intentions) and "collective intentional behavior that cannot be analyzed as just the summation of individual intentional behavior" (We-intentions) (Searle 1990). The same goal-directedness of many 'personal' actors does not implicate a qualitative distinction regarding the subject of import. Therefore, plural intentional systems are not to be misread as *plural agents* who themselves are the subjects of import.

Thus, by plural personal social engagement I refer to all kinds of social activities undertaken by many persons who have the same goal-directedness, and where the subject of import is relative only to his/her own single individual evaluative perspective. For example, if a policy has a negative effect on the unemployed, they all may realize (from a single evaluative perspective) the damage that could be inflicted on their well-being and engage to restrict this policy; the same can be said about anti-capitalist activists (who from their own single evaluative perspective have a personal view on how our social structure should be arranged) who engage in the same activities as the unemployed, but for different reasons (due to their political discontent with new neoliberal policies). There could be, evidently, cases where the main objectives (focuses) are not the same, but the target of action is (in the previous example, the unemployed and activists have the same target, but different focuses).

## 2. Social Engagement for the Sake of Others

In order to introduce qualitative differences regarding the subject of import, I will once again refer to one important conceptual division elaborated in Helm's theory of action. He introduces the terms *social action* (Helm 2002: 206) and *engaged action* (Helm 2009: 93) to explain actions undertaken for the sake of others, as caring for others for their own sake.

There are, of course, many actions that we do for the sake of others. Some of them could be explained as egoistic through instrumental reasons (e.g. I care about someone because I will have an indirect benefit from it). However, the challenge is to understand non-instrumental (non-egoistic) reasons that we could have to care about others. Of course, there are those who would claim that in the final instance every imaginable reason could be reduced to egoism. Even if probably no objective criteria exist to guarantee that an action is *not* based on egoistic reasons, we can follow Helm in his pursuit to explain the specific differences in the (phenomenological) structure of those actions that are based on non-egoistic reasons.

For Helm, the notion of caring is practically identical to that of import, because to care about something is for it to be a focus of a rationally constituted import (Helm 2009: 75; Helm 2002: 195). Helm states that there are different ways of caring about someone. (1) We could care about someone for some instrumental reason (instrumental caring), or (2) we could care about one's well-being (to care about someone as such), while a distinct part of this second sense would be (3) to care about others as agents. I will focus on the third case.

What does it mean to care about others as agents? It means that we take others to have their own preferences, desires, focuses, their own cares and evaluative perspectives, i.e. that the other is also a subject of import. To care about others as agents means that their objectives, also have import for me, or that I share their import and care for those things that have import for them. Thus, caring about someone as an agent involves that you care not only for his/her well-being, but also for the things he or she cares about:

> "Thus, if someone I care about cares about raising prize-winning Malamutes, he fares as his dogs fare, and so in caring about him I ought to attend and act on behalf of his success and failures in this aspect of life. […] I ought to feel joyful when he (and his dogs) win a competition, sad or disappointed when he loses, frustrated with and angry at the judge who rates his dogs much lower than they deserve because of internal politics of the American Kennel Association, etc. In this way, his frustrations, joys, fears, hopes, desires etc. are in an important sense mine as well, for I care about his raising prize-winning Malamutes as a part of caring about him." (Helm 2002: 199)

Caring about others as agents also produces a distinctive phenomenological structure which could not be reduced to a single evaluative perspective. Import (that things have for us) could be understood as an intentional characteristic of being viewed as worthy of pursuit or avoidance. Helm explains this phenomenological structure by using some concepts from the theory of emotions:[2] those of focus, target and formal intentional object of an emotion (Helm 2002: 191).[3] The formal object of emotion is the kind of import that defines an emotion as the kind of emotion it is, e.g. fear, anger etc.; the target of an emotion is that which the emotion is directed at; the focus of an emotion is the background object having import to which a target is related in such a way as to make intelligible the target's having the property defined by the formal object. Perhaps an example would make this point clearer:

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[2] This is understandable since Helm's use of the concept of import is very close to that of an emotion: emotions are intentional feelings of import (Helm 2002: 192).

[3] These concepts were first introduced by Ronald De Sousa (De Sousa 1987: 115-123)

> "I might be afraid as the neighbor kid throws a ball that comes perilously close to smashing a vase. Here the target of my fear is the ball, which the emotion presents as having a formal object – as being dangerous; the focus of my fear is the vase, for it is in virtue of both the import the vase has for me and the relation the ball has to it (as potentially smashing it) that the ball is intelligible as a danger." (Helm 2002: 192)

However, the whole structure changes if we care about others as agents. To care about someone presupposes that that someone has import to us, i.e. that the person itself is the focus of our emotions. If we care about someone as an agent, it presupposes that he/she is the subject of import, or that he/she has his/her own focuses, to which we are subfocused and accordingly have a target related to those subfocuses. In other words, it presupposes dynamical intentionality toward someone else and his/her evaluative perspective, in relation to which we constitute our subfocuses, and consequently targets related to those subfocuses. Practically, it means that what primarily has import to someone else, has import to me, through the fact that he/she, as a subject of import, has import for me.

> "When I get a paper rejected because of an undeservedly negative referee report, my anger consists in the feeling of the import of my scholarship as such impressing itself on me in the present circumstances in such a way that I am pained by the offense that rejection presents [...]. Such anger differs from the anger I would feel on behalf of a colleague I care about in similar circumstances [...]. Thus in being angry on her behalf, the pain I feel consists in part in the feeling not only of the import she (the focus) has to me but also of the import her scholarship (the subfocus) has to her, so that the rejection feels bad because of its bearing on the well-being of both her scholarship and her; in this respect my anger on her behalf differs phenomenologically from my anger at my own paper's rejection" (Helm 2009: 89)

Taking this under consideration, in *the social engagement for the sake of others* I would include those social activities in which someone else is the subject of import and those who are engaged share his/her import. Let us provide an example. Suppose that I find helping the Roma population worth pursuing and I am really engaged in some activities (e.g. helping them to find a job and ensure basic income). However, after some time spent with a Roma family, I realize that those things that I found important are actually trivial for them, and that they find some other things, which I find irrelevant, worth pursuing. Suddenly, my own perspective is changed, and I am not only engaged in helping the Roma family, but I also share the import they have, and I find some things worth pursuing only because it is worthy of pursuit for them, i.e. I am socially engaged for them as the subjects of import.[4]

## 3. Social Engagement as Togetherness

In the previous paragraphs I have tried to explain one specific distinction that could be made among social actions regarding the subject of import, if someone else is the subject of import. I claimed that we need to distinguish social engagement relative only to a single evaluative perspective, on the one hand, and social engagement for the sake of other(s), on the other. Could we make one simple step further and say that we sometimes care about *us*?I have already singled out actions which are themselves plural, but in which the subject of import is relative only to a single evaluative perspective. Matching personal goals constitutes only a plural intentional system, not a plural agent. In order to appear as plural agency, there has to be a specific subject of import – a "we" – and some things that have import for "us". In other words, they will have import for me, only in relation to "us". But, what do we mean by "us"? Does the "we" have its own preferences, its own mind and evaluations? With this we approach the core of the problem if we do not want to deny the fact that all actions are undertaken, and intended, by the individuals and not by some mysterious "we". As Searle wrote:

> "I find this talk [of 'group minds, the collective unconscious, and so on'] at best mysterious and at worst incoherent. […] Since society consists entirely of individuals, there cannot be a group mind or group consciousness. All consciousness is in individual minds, in individual brains." (Searle 1990: 404–406)

Bratman shares this idea:

> "shared intention is not an attitude in the mind of some superagent consisting literally of some fusion of the two agents. There is no single mind which is the fusion of your mind and mine." (Bratman 1999: 111)

Certainly, it would be hard to claim that there is an additional mind over and above individual minds. However, we have some intuitions and language use that indicate some kind of existence of a 'we', if 'we do something' or if 'someone belongs to us' – belonging here presupposes an expectation that an individual would act differently than from a single evaluative perspective. The solution could be to say that there is an agreement among members, who are then obligated to an agreed evaluative perspective (to the import that some final goal has for us) (Gilbert 2000), or that there is some primitive background sense of belonging, which is not rationally explainable and functions as a background of our motivation. Although this could be taken as an explanation for some of our actions, I argue that it could not account for social engagement – because social engagement assumes activity that precludes one's being a passive subject of some unexplainable intimacy or more dynamics or just being a subject governed by obligations of an agreement[5].

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[4] Certainly, care for other as an agent does not have to go only in one direction. People often mutually care for each other, which is called solidarity on a societal level (see also Vasiljević in this volume). Moreover, sometimes a degree of caring for someone is appropriate to the care that another gives to me, such is reciprocity in mutual caring. Although I do not believe that this requires a specific explanation, I wanted to point to one more possible modification of social engagement for the sake of others.

What does it mean that a 'we' is the subject of import? It means that things have import *for us*. The crucial question here is not *whether* we care about something, but *how* we care? Namely, this situation presupposes that I care about something only in the way in which *we* care about something. Analogous to the previous situation of caring about others, to care about something we care about is to care about us, and not only about our well-being, but about us as an agent. It means that 'we' as a subject of import is my focus, and related to this focus are my subfocuses and targets. It differs from caring about others insofar as the focus is not someone else, but 'us' to whom I belong as being the part of the 'we'. Furthermore, this implies another difference, because someone else exists as a subject of import independently of those who care about him/her, while some 'we' exists only insofar as there are members of the 'we' that care about 'us' as the subject of import.

One possible objection to this argument is its seeming circularity: I should be focused on 'us' to constitute 'us', who had not existed before it has been constituted, but to focus on 'us' as an agent implies that the group should already be a plural agent. However, what I think we can infer from this is that the linear causal language is inappropriate here. Caring about us and 'being us' as an agent are not two contiguous events separated in time; they rather occur simultaneously (Helm 2009: 282). In that sense, the idea of *social engagement as togetherness* refers to those social activities in which the subject of import is 'us', or to social activities that consist in caring about 'us' as an agent.

This idea does not evoke a completely different and separable collective brain which is somewhere above or beyond your or my brain. However, it does in a sense involve an idea of a phenomenologically distinct 'collective' mind irreducible to a single evaluative perspective, i.e. to your and my focus on our relationship that constitutes 'us' as the subject of import.

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[5] Helm describes Gilbert's account as an account of coordinated we-commitments, rather than plural subjects (Helm 2009: 266).

Without a doubt, disagreements between us are possible or even probable (a single individual person also evaluates his/her own conflicting views) and debate about them, as well as the process of their resolution, are a part of the constitution of 'us' as an agent.

## Radical social engagement

Persons have a possibility to evaluate their own goals and by doing so they constitute their own import. Similarly, the members of some groups (or a society as a whole) could discuss what has import to them, as a group. From a certain perspective it could be said that disagreement about what a 'we' means, what has import for us, demonstrates that a 'we' does not exist. I believe, quite to the contrary, that striving to remain adamantly in a discussion about what has import for us shows that 'us' has a higher degree of import for those of us engaged in the discussion than disagreements that may arise (see Zaharijević in this volume). Indeed, that usually happens in friendship and love relationships. A high degree of import is one thing that makes a social engagement radical. There is also another one. 'We' could be friends, lovers, engaged groups, and, from a global perspective, society as a whole. In that sense, the most radical form of social engagement, according to this enquiry, would refer to those social activities in which the subject of import is society as a whole, which has a high degree of import for persons that belong to that society.

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Igor Cvejić

## Oblici društvenog angažmana s obzirom na subjekat importa

### Rezime

Namera ovog rada je da se ukaže na različite forme društvenog angažmana s obzirom na subjekat importa. Import je pojam koji je u teoriju delanja uveo Benet Helm, a koji označava intencionalnu karakteristiku objekta, da je percipiran kao vredan zalaganja ili izbegavanja. Međutim, prema Helmu subjekat importa može biti individualna osoba, drugi ili grupa (*plural agent*). Sledeći ovu podelu možemo razlikovati tri osnovne forme društvenog angažmana: (1) lični društveni angažman, (2) društveni angažman za drugog-e i (3) društveni angažman kao zajedništvo. Društveni angažman kao zajedništvo, prema tome, ne treba pobrkati sa akcijama mnoštva koje deli usmerenost ka cilju (a koje pripadaju ličnom društvenom angažmanu). Ovaj argumentativni korak omogućen je kompleksnom Helmovom teorijom o „nama“ kao subjektu importa, nasuprot nekim savremenim teoretičarima koji poriču mogućnost pluralnog agenta.

**Ključne reči**: angažman, import, grupe, delanje, mi-intencije

UDK: 316.344 FILOZOFIJA I DRUŠTVO XXVII (2), 2016.
DOI: 10.2298/FID1602343P
Original scientific article
Received: 2.3.2016 — Accepted: 28.3.2016

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# Do Intellectuals Matter?

## Proposal for a Study of Influence

**Abstract** The paper strives to explore the (non)existence of influence of intellectuals in society. Intellectuals are seen as a loose elite network of specific social actors who possess advance *knowledge* or *creativity* recognized in the cultural field of academia and/or art, hold a certain *authority* or power to be heard in the public, and who are *publicly engaged*. The aim of the paper is to fill the gap in the sociology of intellectuals and offer a possible framework for empirical research of intellectuals' influence. This framework is operationalized using three levels: *self-evaluation* of their own influence, estimation of their *social status* and *intellectual authority* over (primarily) elites, and finally *external "objectified" measures*. The author hereby calls on the testing of the proposed model and any proposals for its improvement.

**Keywords**: Intellectuals, Engagement, Influence, Power, Social Network

## Why Intellectuals?

There is a story about the intellectual who ought to be a moral individual, standing up against social injustice and opposing the powers that be in the name of the powerless. This is a story that speaks of the greatest individual virtues and represents an elusive role model, a kind of utopia for the majority of individuals. This is a story of perceived influence, and power of words and knowledge. But the intriguing question remains – is there any influence, any power that can be ascribed to intellectuals?

Further, when we think of intellectuals, we immediately think of engagement. The current issue of the journal explores the notion of engagement, questioning whether we can claim there are new forms of the engagement, politicization and mobilization present and/or necessary in society today. As the introductory article points out, "'engaging reflexivity' means that critical theory must have a social or a political impact: it does not only speak *of* the social reality, it does not only say something *about* the political field, but as a theory it pretends to have an impact on it (not to interpret it, but to transform it, as old Marx said)" (Krtolica et al, 2016).

If we disregard the obvious question of why social theory needs to be critical in this sense, we can focus on the social act – of critical theory – which requires specific actors. When social theory says something of society to society and when social theory pretends to or does have impact on society,

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it is intellectuals who are actually speaking or channeling the messages. A French intellectual, Eric Fassin clearly emphasized this:

> "L'intellectuel a selon moi une mission de service public. Je suis sociologue, mon métier est de parler de la société, mais je dois aussi parler à la société" [Intellectuals, I believe, have a mission of public service. I am a sociologist, my job is to speak of society, but I also have to speak to society] (Cavignioli, 2015).

This is a contemporary rewriting of what Wright Mills already expected from social sciences:

> "It is the political task of the social scientist – as of any liberal educator – continually to translate personal troubles into public issues, and public issues into the terms of their human meaning for a variety of individuals. It is his task to display in his work – and, as an educator, in his life as well – this kind of sociological imagination" (Wright Mills, 1959[2000]: 187).

Why intellectuals? We could easily argue that some other social groups exercise much more power to influence society then do intellectuals. Political elites are defined through claims for power and economic elites "buy" their power. Civil society activists also exercise some power by organizing collectively around pursued/desired social change. So, why does engagement of intellectuals matter?

To be able to answer this question, first we need to clarify who is an intellectual. Despite numerous classifications and slightly fewer definitions of the term, there are several aspects which I find common in sociology of intellectuals, delineating the concept in the dynamic aggregation of social actors. First is *knowledge* or *creativity,* recognized in a cultural field of academia and/or art. Second, this recognition provides intellectuals with specific *authority* or power to be heard in the public sphere. Third, intellectuals are always engaged with the public. Possessing an intelligence that "can remain in the private domain, may it be in their own dwellings or in cloistered environments such as temples, churches, mosques, yeshivas, or monasteries" (Sassower, 2014: 9) is not to be equated with being an intellectual. There can be no such thing as a public intellectual, as being in the public, speaking to the public is already intrinsic to being an intellectual. He/she speaks to society and this engagement is specific since it is not only diagnosing society and its problems, but also requires engagement *pro* or *contra*. Finally, the last characteristic points to their very substance and the reason why there are so many expectations of intellectuals, at least in the European societies (Anglo-American society nurtures a slightly different tradition of intellectuals). Therefore, it is the *public* sociologist, as Burawoy defined him/her (or anthropologist, or historian etc.), who produces reflexive knowledge intended to influence the actions of a broad extra-academic audience who can be defined as an intellectual (Burawoy, 2005; Brym, 2009).

Intellectuals are expected to be independent, impartial and to “speak truth to power”. They are expected to be *contra* actual social order, to be *contra* dominant political elites (as well as other elites), but to be *the elite* that knows where a particular society should head and how it should get there. These expectations pretty much define why intellectual engagement is important on a *symbolic* level in society. The very birth of the notion of intellectuals tells its story regarding engagement. The story is connected to the opposition, to the *contra* argument against social order, contra *injustices* (nota bene) of the society where the intellectual was born. It was the Dreyfus affair that provoked French cultural workers, to be named intellectuals after, to step into the public realm and make a statement *contra* an anti-Semitic government action. And it was Russian intellectuals who, engaged politically *contra* the establishment, brought down the Russian empire. And while these engagements of early modern intellectuals were engagement *contra*, at the same time, they also had *pro* engagements. In the French case, it was for the freedom of individuals over national security and for equal treatment. In the Russian case, it was for the revolution and subsequently for different visions of Russian society, later clashing with one another and causing the persecution of intellectuals in Russia. We could even name coordinated actions of contemporary intellectuals, such as petitions and individual voices calling for relief in the Greek crisis (Pudar Draško, 2015) or condemning Turkish operations against Kurds (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

The role of intellectuals in social change is the question at hand. This role, whatever it is, could be a major indicator and also the *raison d’être* of intellectuals in society. Sociological theories dealing with social change inevitably focus on power relations and power structures. Hence, the important question here is what kind of power intellectuals possess (if any) and how that power is manifested in society? Here, I claim that intellectuals represent a loose elite network within society. Elite, because they exercise certain power through their authority enabling them to be heard in society (instead of someone else). Loose, because they do not form a social group in the strict sense, as they do not need to have (and usually do not have) a common interest. Network, because even though they are not a group, they are interconnected without a single central power relation.

My understanding of intellectual groups is closest to Mannheim’s “free-floating intelligentsia” (Mannheim, 1936). Intellectuals could be, according to Mannheim, recruited from different classes, or undergo similar educational paths. They are capable of social criticism, creativity and dedication which allows them to overcome their membership in a particular class and become part of another class. However, this position does not mean that the individual intellectuals are independent of particular influence, or that they do not bring their views and values to the context in which they operate.

On the contrary, it is the totality of these particular positions of intellectuals that forms the collective intellectual heterogeneity, which is defined as the free-floating intelligentsia. Independence is only possible if the group is seen as an aggregate of individuals with their individual contexts. Yet it is very difficult to estimate the effects of their engagement in the real time, in ongoing change (presuming we define real change), even if we disregard the notion of independence. Pointing out possible paths would be a challenging but ultimately rewarding endeavor.

## Having Impact?

My intention here is to explore models which could help us identify whether intellectual engagement actually has impact on society. Of course, in the sociology of intellectuals, there is no consensus on this issue. Moreover, there are no developed models that could be used to explore the impact of intellectuals' engagement, except several attempts which employ a biographical method. Mapping the influence of ideas is a long process that requires historical distance. Therefore, this cannot be the objective of this article, nor any other that deals with contemporary intellectuals and their engagement. My attempt, rather, will be directed towards possible methods of identification of impact of intellectuals parallel to their engagement. Therefore, it is my aim to explore the notion of intellectual impact in contemporary society. The scope of this task obviously goes beyond this article, but here is a model that can be used in further research.

There are two questions relevant for the exploration of intellectuals' impact. First, as we saw, intellectuals are intrinsically public figures. It is important to identify what is the public at stake. Crucially for the argument, it is necessary to delineate the public to whom he/she speaks and the public listening. Could we claim that this is the same audience? Could we claim that intellectuals are addressing civil society in general, with the purpose of advancing civil emancipation (Goldfarb, 1998)? Or are those rather homogenous groups, ideologically united, the ones who utilize intellectuals (willingly or unwillingly), not as initiators of dialogue or challengers of opinion, but as mere spokespersons?

Posner, for example, argues that intellectuals are not catalyst of opinion change, but rather proponents of existing opinions, attracting attention of the audience that tends to agree with their premises (Posner, 2001). This theory has psychological grounding and significantly resembling Leon Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory (1957). Festinger suggests that people tend to ignore opinions and actions that are inconsistent with their adopted beliefs. Such homophily is recognized as a tendency in society, from classic philosophers to present days, and it could be summarized in the proverbial expression used by Merton and Lazarsfeld – "birds of a feather flock together": individuals are more likely to associate with others who share their views or social characteristics (McPherson et al, 2001). The statement is partially confirmed and/or promoted through the practice of the main internet media as Google or Facebook to select and present information based on our searches, limiting our surrounding to the concepts of our interest.

Wright Mills, along with many others, supported the view that intellectuals are powerless. Following his extensive work on the power and elites in United States, Mills considered the centers of political initiative less and less accessible to intellectuals. In his 1944 essay on the social role of intellectuals, Mills openly claimed that we live under the illusion that his (dominantly his at that time) thinking makes a difference.

> "In the world of today the more his knowledge of affairs grows, the less effective the impact of his thinking seems to become. Since he grows more frustrated as his knowledge increases, it seems that knowledge leads to powerlessness. He feels helpless in the fundamental sense that he cannot control what he is able to foresee. This is not only true of the consequences of his own attempts to act; it is true of the acts of powerful men whom he observes" (Mills, Horowitz, 1963: 293).

In speaking of influence, Mills even then recognized the challenges of addressing the public, an act inseparable from the intellectual. Modern society, with its structure and rapidly increasing communication channels and complexity of relations, requires public actors to speak on current themes, popular topics. The power of intellectuals to implore or bring forth issues they truly consider relevant is limited in today's society. The actions of intellectuals have been seen as decreasing in importance in mediatized societies that cultivate production of celebrities, and where seemingly all have a say while none truly does (Collini, 2006: 451).

However, there is some evidence that intellectuals do matter. The history of intellectual engagement reveals that some of these figures contributed greatly to social changes in certain societies (Russia, Czech Republic, Serbia). Dahrendorf points out that intellectuals come into focus in times of crisis and temptations, as they are expected to take intellectual and even political leadership, or at least point out the directions of desirable changes (Dahrendorf, 2008). All three examples mentioned in the brackets above witness to his point.

Political and social changes that happened in Serbia in the early '90s, first with the introduction of parliamentary elections and later with the so-called "petooktobarske promene [October 5th changes]" in 2000, were marked by a significant contribution of intellectuals. It is difficult to find a political party in '90s Serbia which was not founded and led by intellectuals, including the former state president Vojislav Koštunica, the assassinated prime minister Zoran Đinđić, the former dissident and president of the parliament Dragoljub Mićunović etc. Without dwelling on the question of political engagement of intellectuals and the delineation of the political and non-political social engagement here, it is enough to say that these intellectuals stepped into politics as intellectuals, becoming prominent party figures. However, the question remains whether intellectual engagement can bring change and produce an impact without intellectuals acting as political figures *sensu stricto*.

## Intellectuals' Network and Influence

In the following paragraphs, I turn attention to the question of social networks, opinion leaders and measuring intellectual influence in those networks. Perhaps the word "measuring" here is not the most appropriate choice, but it is difficult to find another describing exactly what is being explored – the level of intellectuals' impact in society.

The notion of social networks is usually connected to online media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. However, this concept has been exploited in social sciences for a century or more, pointing to the interconnectedness of the social actors on different levels. Social networks are created in the interaction of individuals, but more importantly for this paper, in the interaction of the social roles, positions, statuses, groups and institutions. These networks evolve from individuals interacting and producing invisible extended structures that can change the very institutions and social relations (see Kadushin, 2012). We could to a certain degree observe all of society as a large interconnected network of networks, which is further conceiving global society as a network. The preference here of using the concept of network comes from its usefulness in describing and explaining the flow between its points, or "nodes" as they are usually called in theory. Social network theories, with their software solutions, create ample possibilities for showing how the nodes in the network (people, groups, institutions and even objects) interact with each other and create the flows between the nodes.

Nadel, as one of the first to employ this concept, believed that the social network approach offered the opportunity to describe a social system in terms of a hierarchically interlocking structure of roles (Cavanagh, 2007: 27). The claim here is that the flow between the nods could be observed as a prerequisite for power relations or more specifically for the influence of particular social actors/roles at stake here – intellectuals. As I have emphasized in the introduction, intellectuals are an excellent example of a possible elite network that can be observed on the national and also international level. It is a loose network of *individual* social actors, where flow among the nodes (intellectuals) can be direct or indirect. Engagement of one node in the network inevitably affects others, whether causing reactions directly or indirectly through the imposition of narratives and themes. As Kadushin states:

> “Elites in different domains such as politics, business, media, and intellectuals tend to pay attention to other elites in their circles and form opinions and policy views in reaction to others in their circles” (Kadushin, 2012: 146).

We can observe these phenomena in a given civil society, but also globally. I will once more use the example of the Thomas Piketty (2014) and his global bestseller *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, which somehow brought back the question of capital into focus on a larger scale – to the intellectual community/network but also to a wider audience.

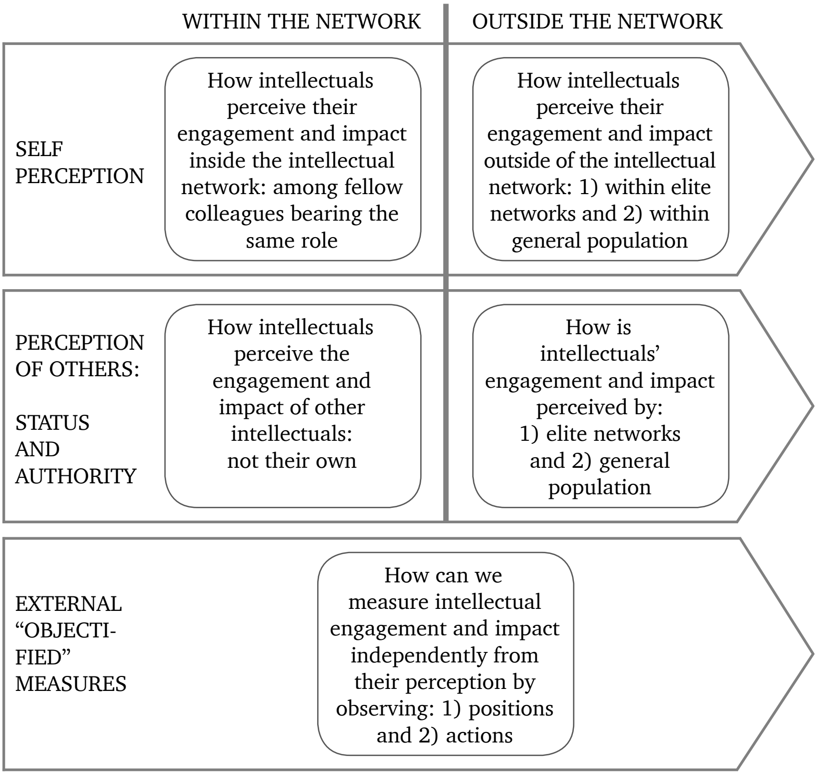
However, one has to be very careful not to claim that intellectuals function as a free-floating network, independent from influence of other societal actors. Intellectuals form just one of the many interconnected networks, and it is difficult to distinguish between the influence it exerts and that of other networks. Networks are not reducible to the intentions only of the actors who constitute them. Although agency remains in the nodes of the network, with intellectuals in this case, these nodes or better to say, these roles are culturally patterned, as Cavanagh rightfully notes (Cavanagh, 2007: 29). Nevertheless, I would like to map several layers of possible exploration of this issue.

## Setting the Research Framework

There are many reasons to be very cautious with measuring influence. The biggest is how to trace the influence process. This can be done with less uncertainty within a network of intellectuals. Researchers have already produced several studies mapping the citation flows and flow of ideas, which could be reasonably good indicators of the influence within academia and partially within intellectuals’ network (Andres, 2009; Collins, 2002). Ultimately, almost all academics are pressured by the citation indexes that show the impact of particular authors. But, how can we operationalize the source and nature of the influence, and how can we eliminate, as much as possible, given relations, in order to isolate the crucial one? Methodologically, analyzing multiple relationships within networks remains a challenge. The principal question is whether we can claim any causal relation between an intellectual and any other network. Relations yes, but causal?

The concept of intellectuals as a loose network in society could be linked to the notion of opinion leaders. Opinion leaders’ investigations mark an entire research field, especially in the United States, where the concept is frequently used in action research and finds application in policy and management. There is much experimental evidence that deliberate interventions to find, create, and inform opinion produces real change in communities (see Valente, 2010). The link between these two concepts is obvious. Intellectuals are believed to define the desired parameters of thought and action in a particular society. They are the ones who have the power to produce and/or influence public discourse and to strengthen or relativize the importance of certain values that citizens should strive for. This is very similar to opinion leaders, who are transferring those values on a lower scale, in smaller communities. Valente claims that opinion leaders influence behavior in their communities through four pathways, as they (a) raise awareness, (b) persuade others, (c) establish or reinforce norms, and (d) leverage resources (Valente, 2007: 891).

This is why research of opinion leaders is useful for setting the framework for researching the influence of the intellectuals in society. In doing so, we need to distinguish between influence within and beyond the intellectual network. Even if it is difficult to demarcate one network from another in a complex and multiplex society, this has to be done for analytical purposes.



| | WITHIN THE NETWORK | OUTSIDE THE NETWORK |
|---|---|---|
| SELF PERCEPTION | How intellectuals perceive their engagement and impact inside the intellectual network: among fellow colleagues bearing the same role | How intellectuals perceive their engagement and impact outside of the intellectual network: 1) within elite networks and 2) within general population |
| PERCEPTION OF OTHERS:<br>STATUS AND AUTHORITY | How intellectuals perceive the engagement and impact of other intellectuals: not their own | How is intellectuals' engagement and impact perceived by: 1) elite networks and 2) general population |
| EXTERNAL "OBJECTIFIED" MEASURES | How can we measure intellectual engagement and impact independently from their perception by observing: 1) positions and 2) actions | |

Figure 1. The research proposal diagram

I will rely here on the *engagement model* (Keller and Berry, 2003) which defines opinion leadership as a combination of social embeddedness (measured as density of connections in the network) and persuasion potential (which is impact itself). Hereby, social embededness will be estimated using the "objectified" external measures, explained below, while persuasive potential will be measured based on the activities directly addressing audiences and people (perception and self-perception).

Therefore, I consider here two major levels of analysis of intellectual influence:

1. Who or what is the indicator of influence?
2. Is the influence measured within the intellectual network or outside in other networks or society in general?

This general framework is yet to be developed in detail. The first layer presented above relies only on *self-evaluation* of internal influence and it is the most frequent in the opinion leadership research, as Nisbet reports (Nisbet, 2005). The second layer is dedicated to the estimation of the *social status* and the *intellectual authority* (power to be heard). These two layers can be operationalized using indicators borrowed from Roper ASW's engagement instrument (Keller and Berry, 2003), further adjusted here. The instrument measures the *presence/absence* of the specific activities.

| Self-evaluation | | Evaluating status and authority | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Have you performed any of the following actions in the last (one, three, five) years | | In your opinion, who are *the most influential* intellectuals you have observed to perform the following actions in the last (one, three, five) years | |
| a. | Written or called any politician at the state, local, or national level | a. | Having connections with politicians at the state, local, or national level |
| b. | Attended a political rally or speech | b. | / |
| c. | Signed any petition | c. | Stood behind any petition |
| d. | Made a public speech not addressing your professional audience | d. | Made a public speech you have followed |
| e. | Personally organized protest/ campaign of any kind | e. | Stood behind the organizing protest/campaign of any kind |
| f. | Held or run for political function | f. | Held or run for political function |
| g. | Served on a committee/board/has been active member of some civil society organization | g. | Served on a committee/board/has been active member of some civil society organization |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| h. | Worked for a political party/ served in any political party body | h. | Worked for a political party/ served in any political party body |
| i. | Been an active member of any group that tries to influence public policy or government | i. | Been an active member of any group that tries to influence public policy or government |
| j. | Written an article for a magazine or newspaper | j. | Written an article for a magazine or newspaper |
| k. | Been active (posting daily) in online media and networks (Twitter, blogs, op-eds) | k. | Been active in online media and networks (Twitter, blogs, op-eds) |

Table 1. The research instrument I

In addition, we should pay attention to the layer called *external "objectified" measures.* This aspect of the research framework is important for bringing in some "hard" data on the position, roles and independently measurable actions of intellectuals. Indicators used to calculate social positioning of intellectuals include, but are not limited to:

a. Appearance in social media – number of postings and their reach, e.g. Paul Krugman's reach was 1,413,988 accounts on Twitter as of March 15th 2016, while Yanis Varufakis amounted to 761,972 accounts[1].
b. Appearance in non-electronic media – the number and positioning of the contributions in printed media. This method has been previously used for selecting influential intellectuals in my previous work (Pudar Draško, 2016).
c. Having formal positions on the non-political/cultural/economic scene – Board/Committee members in institutions, bodies (other than political) and major companies.
d. Having formal positions in think tanks and non-governmental organizations.
e. Having awards or other major recognitions of their professional and public engagement.

Influence within the intellectual network is probably the least challenging and difficult in this research framework, especially if we have in mind that these networks are not particularly large in size. On the other hand, we cannot rely solely on the self-perception of intellectuals: external perception is thus valuable for estimating primarily the status and authority of intellectuals in society. There are higher chances that intellectuals named by members of other networks will be more influential in the public and able to demonstrate their persuasion potential. Even more specifically, we could claim that those who are named by other elite network members enjoy significantly higher status and authority, and possibly have greater influence. This happens because elites possess more power and are able to set the frames under which other groups and networks operate in society. Considering this, together with other factors – chief among them mediatization of the society – we could even claim that researching perception of intellectuals among the general population cannot bring valid results for estimating intellectuals' influence. Focusing on political, cultural and economic elites can be crucial for the framing of this research.

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[1] TweetReach Report at https://tweetreach.com/, accessed on 15.03.2016.

## Conclusion

This text is an attempt to call attention to some visible gaps in the sociology of intellectuals. In spite of numerous studies and mostly theoretical works, this field of sociology has failed to produce systematic research frameworks which could explore the position and influence of intellectuals in contemporary societies. The important issue for researchers in the field is how to apply sociological methods without losing his/her sociological imagination to reach the valid and reliable results on intellectuals as a loose network of specific social actors. Here is a presentation of a draft of a research model that could be tested empirically and also further improved.

In a certain way, dealing with intellectuals and their influence and trying to find the source of their assumed influence can be viewed as an attempt to further our own engagement as public sociologist. Yet we still cannot say whether intellectuals have real influence on the social changes and social processes or not. But once again, I choose to follow Wright Mills in this paper, ending with this thought:

> "If he is to think politically in a realistic way, the intellectual must constantly know his own social position. This is necessary in order that he may be aware of the sphere of strategy that is really open to his influence. If he forgets this, his thinking may exceed his sphere of strategy so far as to make impossible any translation of his thought into action, his own or that of others… If he remembers his powerlessness too well, assumes that his sphere of strategy is restricted to the point of impotence, then his thought may easily become politically trivial" (Mills, Horowitz, 1963: 300).

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Gazela Pudar Draško

# Da li je intelektualac važan?
# Predložak za istraživanje uticaja

**Apstrakt**

U radu se istražuje (ne)postojanje uticaja intelektualaca u društvu. Pri tome, intelektualci se posmatraju kao labava elitna mreža specifičnih društvenih aktera, koji poseduju *znanje ili kreativnost* prepoznatu u kulturnom polju akademije i/ili umetnosti, *autoritet* ili moć da ih publika sluša i koji su aktivno *društveno angažovani*. Cilj rada jeste da ponudi mogući okvir za empirijsko istraživanje intelektualnog uticaja. Ovaj okvir je operacionalizovan kroz tri segmenta: samoodređenje sopstvenog uticaja, procenu društvenog statusa i autoriteta intelektualaca među drugima, prvenstveno elitom i konačno, korišćenje spoljašnjih „objektiviziranih" činilaca. Autorka stoga poziva na testiranje predloženog modela i svaki mogući doprinos njegovom unapređenju.

**Ključne reči**: intelektualci, angažman, uticaj, moć, društvena mreža

UDK: 323.22(497.11)
DOI: 10.2298/FID1602356I
Original scientific article
Received: 12.3.2016 — Accepted: 1.4.2016

FILOZOFIJA I DRUŠTVO XXVII (2), 2016.

Marjan Ivković

# Social Critique and Engagement between Universalism, Anti-Authoritarianism and Diagnosis of Domination

**Abstract** The paper discusses a particular 'isomorphy' between two forms of social criticism: the 'holistic' theoretical social critique represented by such authors as Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth and 'collective social engagement' represented by such civic movements as the 'We Won't Let Belgrade D(r)own' initiative in contemporary Serbia, which the paper tries to distinguish from more conventional forms of popular protest. This 'isomorphy', the paper argues, consists in a tension between three distinct imperatives of the justification of critique – those of normative universalism, epistemological anti-authoritarianism, and diagnosis of social domination – produced by the attempts of both the 'holistic' social critics and the collectively engaged actors to simultaneously respond to all three imperatives. After presenting the three types of theoretical critique that crystallize around each imperative, the paper discusses the internal tension that arises in the works of 'holistic' theoretical critics and then identifies the same kind of tension in the 'We Won't Let Belgrade D(r)own' initiative. The tension in the movement's critique is outlined through a brief analysis of the activists' discourse as articulated in the bulletin *We Won't Let Belgrade D(r)own* issued in March 2015. Since the examples also suggest that collective engagement is better than theoretical critique at keeping this tension 'productive', the paper finally offers some tentative thoughts on the possible reasons for this difference.

**Keywords**: isomorphy, tension, critique, justification, engagement, universalism, contextualism, diagnosis, Serbia

## Introduction

This paper tries to identify and outline a particular 'isomorphy' between contemporary theoretical attempts at articulating a 'holistic' social critique, on the one hand, and contemporary forms of civic protest that I term 'collective social engagement' on the other. Both, I argue, are characterized by a tension that is created through an attempt to simultaneously respond to three principal *imperatives of the justification of critique*: those of *normative universalism*, *anti-authoritarianism* and *societal diagnosis*, which I briefly explain below. This tension can only be resolved by focusing on satisfying, as completely as possible, one of the three imperatives at the cost of the other two, and most types of theoretical social critique resort to this strategy. One exception are the 'holistic' social critics such as Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth who persist in simultaneously pursuing and interweaving the goals of normative universalism, anti-authoritarianism and a diagnosis of contemporary forms of injustice and domination. Theoretical critique

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with a 'holistic' ambition, I argue, has difficulties maintaining an equilibrium between the three imperatives of justification, as they pull the theorist in mutually diverging directions. The temptation to reduce the complexity of critique by focusing on only one or two of the imperatives is present even in Habermas and Honneth, but such reductive inclinations make their perspectives either more normatively particularistic and ultimately unjustifiable (if they abandon universalism or anti-authoritarianism) or insensitive to actual societal problems (if they abandon the diagnostic task).

As I will try to show on the example of one prominent contemporary civic movement in Serbia – the initiative 'We Won't Let Belgrade D(r)own' ('Ne da[vi]mo Beograd') – the form of political action that I term 'collective social engagement' is characterized by the same kind of internal tension, as the actors involved in the movement simultaneously use the language of universalism, anti-authoritarianism and societal diagnosis. In the case of engagement as opposed to theoretical critique, the tension arises from the engaged actors' primary aim of transforming the 'cause' of their engagement, a phenomenon that had hitherto been considered non-political, into a political issue. To achieve this complex task, mobilizing only one vocabulary of critique – universalism, contextualism or diagnosis – would be insufficient.

## The tension at the core of theoretical social critique

There are three main contemporary imperatives of the justification of normative claims raised in theoretical social critique: those of *normative universalism* (the claim to a trans-contextual validity of normative statements), *epistemological anti-authoritarianism* ('epistemic humility' that gives up on 'transcending' a particular socio-historical context) and the imperative of the *diagnosis* of real-world social injustices and domination that are often left completely unaddressed by abstract, 'free-floating' universalist theories of justice or contextualist forms of critique. One can identify these imperatives as fundamental due to the fact that most contemporary forms of theoretical critique crystallize around either one of them. Contemporary varieties of theoretical critique can therefore be divided into three very broad categories, by no means internally homogeneous and characterized by significant overlaps:

1. The *universalist* (proceduralist) type, which is characterized by a *deontological* approach to the grounding of critique that safeguards the *universal validity* of its normative claims. Universalist perspectives most often asume the form of a purely proceduralist (or formal) deontological political theory or theory of justice that provides the normative standard of criticism in all particular socio-historical contexts. For example, the majority of the contemporary 'third-generation' critical theorists such as Seyla Benhabib,

Maeve Cooke, Rainer Forst, Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato have focused on elaborating the political-theoretic dimension of Habermasian critical theory while the *social-theoretical* side of Habermas' project has largely slid into the background (e.g. Benhabib 2004; Forst 2002, 2003; Cohen 2012; Cohen and Arato 1994). The reason, I would argue, should be looked for in a contemporary distrust of social theory as epistemologically 'authoritarian' due to its predominantly positivist orientation (Cooke 2006). Universalist theoretical critique generally avoids or treats as illegitimate the question of *diagnosing* societal problems in the form of the causal (structural) explanations of social injustices and forms of domination, and also avoids grounding critique in an explicit social ontology or a theory of the subject. Instead of tracing the causal mechanisms behind forms of social injustice, proceduralist theorists usually rely on mere empirical descriptions of instances of injustice and then apply univeralist norms of critique to them.

2. The *contextualist* variety (Michael Walzer, Richard Rorty, Luc Boltanski), the type of social critique that focuses on satisfying the normative imperative of *epistemological anti-authoritarianism*, brings together diverse currents across disciplinary boundaries such as pragmatism, communitarianism in political philosophy and Luc Boltanski's 'sociology of critique'. What the contextualists have in common is the (more or less explicit) treatment of forms of critique that aspire either to normative universalism or the 'diagnosis' of societal maladies as epistemologically *authoritarian*. The universalist theorist of justice and the radical 'diagnostic' both require that we, 'ordinary actors', endorse their normative perspective on reality as the only right (or 'true') one. As they reject this authoritarian position, contextualists also share another fundamental premise in grounding critique: they mostly relegate the task of critique to the 'actors themselves'. They either rely on the existing (institutionalized or informal) norms in a given socio-historical context and try to apply them in a more systematic manner, or they try to 'reconstruct' ordinary actors' perspectives in the form of a coherent system. In any case, they refrain from substantive normative speculation and locate the criteria of critique in the empirically existing (and theoretically reconstructed) discourses of justification and political contestation (Boltanski, 2011; Walzer, 1983; Rorty, 1989).

This is the only type of critique that satisfies the 'strong' conception of post-metaphysical thought as articulated in Richard Rorty's works, which requires that social critique be fully *nominalist*, that it fully acknowledge the *contingency of history* and abandon any form of historical teleology (e.g. Jürgen Habermas' 'rationalization of the lifeworld'); and that the normative grounds of critique be free of any *substantive ontological speculation* (a theory of the subject, a social ontology, or any 'trans-contextual' characteristics of social reality in general) (see Rorty, 1989; see also Prodanović in this volume).

3. The *diagnostic* critique (contemporary neo-Marxism, critique inspired by the works of Michel Foucault, by Lacanian or Freudian psychonalysis, etc.): this approach to social critique, in contrast to the previous two, is based on a high degree of speculation regarding the nature of the human subject and the ontology of the social (even though much of it is devoted to 'deconstructing' the conventional notions of subjectivity and social action). The approach tends to focus on the 'deep-lying' dynamics of social domination operating at the level of human *subjectivation* (the socially conditioned self-formation) and is therefore very effective in conceptualizing what one could term 'structural domination' (e.g. Butler, Laclau and Žižek, 2000). Also unlike the previous two types, this form of critique mostly follows the strategy of quietly ignoring the issues of epistemological authoritarianism and universal normative validity, and prefers instead to go 'straight to the matter', to the pressing issues of injustice and domination in the real world. In spite of their emancipatory intent, diagnostic standpoints can be very authoritarian towards what Richard Rorty calls the 'final vocabularies' of ordinary social actors (Rorty, 1989). In the language of critical theory, 'diagnosticians' often reduce the 'empirically effective' normativity of social action – the normative claims of ordinary actors – to epiphenomenal effects of structural power. Diagnostic perspectives are sometimes underpinned by very counter-intuitive normative foundations, such as the psychoanalytic theories of the subject and corresponding social ontologies. Within this type of social critique the entire social reality often appears as fundamentally and intrinsically 'domination-producing', and any universalist or contextualist perspective which tries to envision a transformation of social reality in the more conventional, 'Enlightenment' sense of the term looks irredeemably 'naive' and 'superficial'[1].

Each of the three outlined types of theoretical social critique is particularly good at satisfying one of the imperatives of justification. The proceduralist type produces ever more complex and nuanced attempts at articulating a universalist *theory of justice*; the contextualist variety manages quite successfully to ground critique in a fully *post-metaphysical epistemology* (nominalism) and a 'non-authoritarian' view on the role of the theorist (e.g. the 'situated critic' of Michael Walzer's perspective); and the diagnostic current displays a particularly acute understanding of 'structural domination' in various social orders, i.e. how the *relations of power* permeate the process of subject-formation in different socio-economic formations. However, as a result of this crystallization around one of the three imperatives of justification, each of the three varieties gives up on at least one crucial task of social critique. The proceduralist variety gives up on articulating a diagnosis of social domination grounded in explanatory propositions about social reality (social theory); the contextualist one on securing the foundations of critique which would be somewhat more independent of the fluctuations in the normative self-understanding of a given political community; and the diagnostic one, in contrast, gives up on articulating a more 'non-authoritarian' basis of critique that would resonate to a greater degree with the self-understanding of 'ordinary' social actors.

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[1] Maeve Cooke reaches a similar conclusion in her critique of Hardt's and Negri's *Empire*: 'the immanence of power dissemination and perpetuation means that political change will be insufficient: even a radical democratization of the market – for instance, one that encompasses redistribution of wealth, reorganizing of work practices, and redressing of imbalances in social status – will fail to remedy its dominating effects. So long as social domination is stamped on the brains and bodies of subjectivities and reproduced by their ways of being in the world, democratization is futile' (Cooke, 2006: 193).

## 'Holistic' social critique: Habermas and Honneth

As mentioned earlier, one exception to the increasing crystallization of forms of theoretical social critique around one or the other of the three imperatives of justification is the 'intersubjectivist' strand within contemporary critical theory represented by authors such as Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth. Jürgen Habermas' social critique, most systematically articulated in his two-volume *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas, 1984, 1987) can, for example, be seen as an attempt to simultaneously satisfy all three imperatives of justification within a *holistic* type of critique. Habermas attempts to formulate a normatively universalist foundation of critique (discourse ethics) that is at the same time grounded in the perspectives of ordinary social actors (everyday speech situations) and that also has a diagnostic intent: Habermas diagnoses forms of social domination (e.g. the concept of the 'systemic colonization of the lifeworld') on the grounds of a social-theoretical concept of 'communicative reason'. More generally, Habermas conceptualizes social domination as all forms of the 'systematic distortion' of rational communication by power and by the imperatives of material social reproduction (Habermas, 1984, 1987).

However, the perspective from which Habermas theorizes social domination, I would argue, is rather narrow and removed from the self-understanding of 'ordinary' social actors, particularly those engaged in political action informed by progressive normative claims (feminist, ecological, minority-rights movements, etc.). As Habermas' conception of domination is rooted in his broader theorization of the 'social', it has rather little sensitivity for an entire dimension of social dynamic which we could define, in the spirit of Pierre Bourdieu's work, as the 'symbolic struggle' between social groups for the realization of their normative worldviews within modern institutional complexes. Due to Habermas' strong philosophical 'anti-essentialism', his theoretical diagnosis of social domination is, in my view, very restricted and ignores a whole range of theoretical concerns which motivated the first-generation critical theorists such as 'commodity fetishism', 'culture industry', the 'repression of drives', 'identity thinking' or the progressive expansion of 'instrumental reason' (e.g. Adorno, 1981, 2001; Marcuse, 1974, 1991). Habermas' strong orientation towards normative universalism ultimately results in the marginalization of the diagnostic task. As Christopher Zurn, for example, asks:

> what had become of the great critical areas of interest of the past: the phenomenal changes in cultural life through the industrialized mass media and new communications technology, the transformations of personality structures, the nature and role of ideology in the maintenance of structures of domination and oppression? What had become of the leading social concepts imbued with emancipatory content: alienation, anomie, commodification, reification ... and so on (Zurn, 2010: 9)?

The work of Axel Honneth, a leading figure in the 'third-generation' critical theory, tries to reintroduce some of these concerns into the Habermasian type of social critique. One of the central aims of Honneth's work has been to shift the social-theoretical 'optic' of Habermasian critical theory towards the earlier mentioned dimension of social reality neglected by Habermas – the fundamental conflict over the normative frameworks of social action – and to develop the corresponding 'conflict-theoretic' accounts of social integration and change. Honneth's project of developing a *social-philosophical* critical theory (Honneth, 2009) is motivated by two key ambitions. On the one hand, the early Honneth's works were underpinned by a conviction that critical theory has lost some of its Marxist 'edge' with Habermas' linguistic turn, and Honneth therefore envisaged his own project as that of formulating the missing critique of capitalism and a theorization of class conflict within the confines of Habermas' intersubjectivist paradigm (Honneth, 1991)[2]. This diagnostic task, however, required Honneth to return to a normatively more *substantive* approach to social critique than Habermas' abstract discourse ethics, one that would have something to say, for example, about the political struggles against the economic injustices of today. On the other hand, Honneth has had little doubt that Habermas has greatly enhanced both the normative universalism and the epistemological anti-authoritarianism of critical theory with the linguistic turn. The second main task that Honneth had set himself can thus be understood as the further enhancement of Habermasian critical theory along the lines of normative univesalism and contextualist anti-authoritarianism.

It is precisely this (overly) ambitious project of a *simultaneous* radicalization of critique and a further refinement of critical theory's normative foundations which makes Honneth's theory internally conflicted and vulnerable to an array of criticisms (see Alexander and Pia Lara, 1996; Deranty, 2010, 2009; Ivković, 2014). In his attempt to rearticulate Habermasian critical theory in all three dimensions, Honneth has ultimately made a somewhat controversial move. He has largely abandoned Habermas' normative 'formalism' (the proceduralism which characterizes discourse ethics), the core of the latter's post-metaphysical perspective, and has introduced instead a normatively substantive foundation of critique in the form of the 'universal preconditions of human self-formation' (Honneth, 1996). In Honneth's perspective, these preconditions consist in three distinct forms of intersubjective *recognition*: love, respect, and esteem. The concept of the three varieties of recognition at the same time provides the basis for the *diagnostic* aspect of Honneth's critique (various 'pathologies' of intersubjective recognition) and allows Honneth to make a 'contextualist' argument that his own grounds of critique in the form of social actors' normative 'claims to recognition' are merely *reconstructions* of these actors' everyday experiences (Honneth, 1996).

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[2] As Deranty points out in *Beyond Communication*, 'the complexity of this relationship [Honneth's to Habermas], stems from the fact that the many critical objections brought against Habermas are themselves inspired by Honneth's early Neo-Marxist position' (Deranty, 2009: 11).

Just as the tension between the three imperatives of justification induced Habermas to severely restrict the diagnostic aspect of his work to safeguard the first two (universalist and contextualist), the same tension in Honneth's project seems to have resulted in a marginalization of the pursuit of universalism.

## Collective social engagement as a particular type of political action

The above discussed tension at the core of 'holistic' social critique such as Habermas' and Honneth's mirrors the one that exists in certain forms of contemporary political action which could be termed 'collective social engagement'. However, unlike the realm of theoretical critique where, as I tried to show on Habermas' and Honneth's examples, the tension has so far proven paralyzing to some extent (as it has induced both of them to marginalize the pursuit of one of the imperatives), collective social engagement has a greater potential to keep this tension a 'productive' one.

Let me first clarify how I conceptualize 'collective social engagement' against the background of the broader notion of 'popular protest'. While conventional popular protest has a cause within the sphere of institutional politics, collective engagement is the type of political action that takes place (at least in its initial phases) *outside* this sphere, as it arises from certain social actors' 'experience of injustice' in everyday life, and its first phase is the collective articulation of this experience that constitutes the given group of actors as the 'agent' of engagement. While conventional protest movements rally around a cause that is already perceived as political by the general public (e.g. electoral fraud, legal discrimination of a minority), the most important trait of engagement is the engaged actors' aim to 'politicize' a certain concrete issue that would otherwise not be considered political (contested) by the general public.[3] 'Political' in this sense means above all normatively *contested*: a certain occurrence, phenomenon or course of action becomes 'political' once there are two or more opposing normative perspectives on it in the public sphere (see also Zaharijević in this volume). The engaged actors have the aim of *generalizing* the normative contest that first arises in relation to a concrete experience of injustice. Ultimately, the engaged actors most often also aim to 'institutionalize' their standpoint, which means that their standpoint should be included in the legal framework that regulates the state's action with respect to the object of their engagement.

The crucial difference between collective engagement and conventional protest lies in the constitution (articulation) of the movement's *cause*: in a classical political protest, the cause is 'always already' political (contested in the public) at the initial point of the experience of injustice. In collective social engagement the experience of injustice pertains to a cause that is not-yet-political, and it is the successful articulation of that experience that transforms the 'special interest' of a particular group into a matter of general concern. The 'politicization' of the cause, as I argued in the introduction, requires the simultaneous pursuit of three different strategies of justifying critique that correspond to the three normative imperatives. Below I analyze briefly the case of one prominent instance of collective social engagement in contemporary Serbia – the 'We Won't Let Belgrade D(r)own' initiative – in order to point out the tension between the three distinct 'vocabularies' of critique employed by the movement that is 'isomorphic' with the one we found in the realm of theory. However, when looking at the concrete examples of the three vocabularies, one also observes that they can much more easily be 'interwoven' and kept in a state of 'productive tension' than in theoretical social critique. In the concluding section I will briefly discuss the reasons for this greater 'productivity' of tension in collective engagement as opposed to theory.

## 'We Won't Let Belgrade D(r)own' Initiative: politicization through a 'holistic' vocabulary of critique

In the 2012 election campaign in Serbia, the Serbian Progressive Party introduced for the first time the idea of a large-scale project of urban renovation in downtown Belgrade entitled 'Belgrade Waterfront' ('Beograd na vodi').[4] Sometime upon coming to power, the Progressive Party decided to realize the project, now declared to be of 'national significance', and found a partner in a private company 'Eagle Hills' from United Arab Emirates. The project required that the Serbian state lease around 100 acres of land along the river Sava in downtown Belgrade to the private investor (Eagle Hills), who would build around 200 objects for commercial and residential purposes on this plot of land. At the time the project was presented to the public, the company's prospective investment was supposed to be worth around 3,5 billion euros, but the exact figure that later appeared in the contract proved to be much lower: 150 million. As specified by the contract, the Serbian state is obliged to infrastructurally prepare the whole terrain for building at a huge cost, while the investor will enjoy extra-territorial rights on this part of sovereign Serbian territory over a period of 30 years, which is the envisaged period for completing the whole urban development plan.

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[3] Saying that a given phenomenon is not (yet) contested in public does not necessarily imply that the public sees it as *justified*; it is sufficient that there is a lack of a perceivable normative contest (a public debate) in relation to it.

Although a large section of the expert public in Serbia (architects, urban planners, engineers, legal scholars, etc.) immediately criticized the project, the broader public was mostly silent on the issue and the climate seemed to be one of a general acceptance of the project as justified and politically uncontroversial. The scope of this paper prevents an independent discussion of the project, but suffice it to say that the project has since its very inception fitted into the broader neoliberal agenda of the Serbian Progressive Party government led by Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić. This agenda of an accelerated socio-economic transformation of Serbia into a peripheral capitalist state includes the reshaping of downtown Belgrade into a gentrified, increasingly gated island of economic prosperity surrounded by the rest of the country in the form of an impoverished recruitment pool of low-wage labor for local economic elites and global capital. Similar projects of large-scale 'urban renewal' which serve the (overlapping) interests of global capital and local political and economic elites exist throughout the world and could be seen as part of a global trend of 'neoliberalization'. Moreover, it remains unclear whether the project will at all be realized to any significant degree, or whether it was from the outset conceived largely as a propaganda device or a money laundering scheme. The official contract between the Serbian government and the private investor was signed on 26. April 2015, became accessible to the public on 20. September, and the initial stages of the project's realization began in the immediate aftermath.

In October 2014, soon after the Serbian government's announcement of the 'Plan for the Special Purpose Area' which presented the stages of the project's realization over a period of 30 years, the citizens' initiative 'We

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[4] The Serbian title of the project would literally translate as 'Belgrade on Water' – this is why the Initiative against it uses the metaphor of 'drowning' Belgrade in its name.

Won't Let Belgrade D(r)own' was founded and immediately presented a list of thorough and professionally competent objections to the Plan. The most active members of the initiative, which soon gained a considerable following, have engaged in various forms of civic activism, organizing protests when crucial official documents related to the project were being signed, holding public debates, attending the meetings of the relevant government bodies open to the public, starting a website and Facebook page and issuing a bulletin with detailed analyses and criticisms of the project. As stated on its website, the initiative considers the 'Belgrade Waterfront' project to be 'catastrophic for Belgrade and Serbia from an economic, transportation and urban development aspects', and maintains that it 'in no way constitutes a project of national significance' ('Ne da(vi)mo Beograd', internet)[5]. In defining the movement, members of the initiative state that

> the initiative 'We Won't Let Belgrade D(r)own' was created because it is opposed to the project 'Belgrade Waterfront', its objectives, consequences and the way the whole process of 'planning' and the legalization of the project takes place. Through its activities, the initiative has brought together - and continues to bring - a large number of experts, associations, NGOs, collectives, lawyers, academics, journalists, architects, urban planners, with the idea to stress the importance of citizen participation in issues of urban development, both in terms of the project 'Belgrade Waterfront' and on the broader front of the city's development as a whole. The ambition of the initiative is to expand to the greatest possible degree the public awareness of where and how we want to live ('Ne da(vi)mo Beograd', internet).

The initiative is clearly an instance of 'collective social engagement' as defined above, and can be situated within the broader 'right to the city' type of political protest (similar initiatives exist in the region and across the world, for example in Zagreb and Dubrovnik in Croatia, but also in Hamburg, in South Africa, in the United States as the 'Right to the City Alliance', etc.). The aim of the movement is the re-articulation of an issue that the Serbian government wishes to present as a non-ideological, 'technocratic' and 'developmental' matter (as 'progress' pure and simple) into a political one – an issue that includes questions of justice, public welfare, arbitrary exercise of power, transparency, economic exploitation and many others. For this purpose, the movement uses the language of *normative universalism*, criticizing the project as *unjust* due to the fact that it is detrimental to public welfare and serves the interest of the ruling political and economic elites.

Another universalist component of the movement's discourse is the *proceduralist* criticism of the government's violation of democratic and constitutional procedures and its arbitrary amendment of existing laws, as members of the movement state that their aim is to make the processes of urban planning and realization of projects more transparent and subject to public debate. However, the movement also uses the language of *contextualist* critique as it questions the *legality* of the 'Belgrade Waterfront' project from the point of view of the existing legal framework in Serbia (which is being amended by the government to legalize the project). Finally, some of the activists also engage in *societal diagnosis* as they analyze the planning and the initial stages of the project's realization not only in terms of the authoritarian behavior of the government but as forms of structural social domination embedded in the broader socio-economic transformation of Serbia into a peripheral capitalist state[6].

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[5] All translations from Serbian in the paper are mine.

Below are some examples of the three varieties (vocabularies) of social critique and their partial entwinement that can be found in the analytical bulletin *Ne da(vi)mo Beograd!* [*We Won't Let Belgrade D(r)own!*] that the movement issued in March 2015.

## Universalism

The following statements in the bulletin illustrate the proceduralist aspect of the movement's universalism centred around the critique of the Serbian government's authoritarian behavior in relation to the project 'Belgrade Waterfront':

> 'Our desire is to arise the citizens' interest in the development of their environment; to contribute to the processes and procedures related to the project 'Belgrade Waterfront' becoming more transparent; to insist on the establishing of new institutions and procedures and the functioning of the existing ones whose aim is to involve citizens in a dialogue about their living environment and the protection of the public interest, and not (only) that of investors' (*Ne da(vi)mo Beograd!* 2015a).

> 'The government of Serbia has declared the photographs of a model of 'Belgrade Waterfront' – two million square meters of residential/commercial spaces that a friend of Serbia, Mohammed Al Abar, intends to build and rent – a "project of national significance"(!?)' (*Ne da(vi)mo Beograd!* 2015b).

> 'Such elimination of the institutions[7] that have launched and were responsible for one of the (proclaimed) largest projects in recent Serbian history

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[6] It should be stressed that the 'diagnostic' type of discourse within the movement which inclines towards (various types of) neo-Marxism is limited to some members of the movement. The movement is ideologically heterogenous, its members ranging from classical and left liberals to (a minority of) radical leftists.

[7] The institutions the text refers to include the abolished Serbian National Agency for Spatial Planning and the General Plan of Belgrade (often referred to as the 'Urban Development Constitution' of Belgrade) which was amended in April 2014.

> gives us reason to doubt the seriousness of the project and the competence of its authors and perpetrators' (*Ne da(vi)mo Beograd!* 2015c).

The statement below, on the other hand, demonstrates the movement's commitment to a universalist theory of justice (egalitarianism) which questions the very institutional system of today's Serbia (as it calls for the creation of a 'new social architecture'):

> 'The treatment of housing as an investment option prevents an ever greater number of people from leading a dignified life. To change this situation we must collectively create a new social architecture that will treat housing as a basic common good, and not as basis for enrichment' (*Ne da(vi)mo Beograd!* 2015d).

## Contextualism

In its critique of the government's arbitrary exercise of power, the movement also relies to some extent on the existing legal framework in Serbia and points to the violation of specific laws and regulations. For example, in relation to an unexpected inspection of private homes in Karađorđeva Street in Belgrade by representatives of the Agency for Urban Development Land, the movement invokes the existing Serbian Law on Expropriation:

> 'Maybe they were impatient in the City Administration (after all, their wings are carrying us toward the realization of a project of national significance), but the Law on Expropriation is explicit in ensuring that such preparatory actions may only be carried out after obtaining a license from the Ministry of Finance' (*Ne da(vi)mo Beograd!* 2015e).

In relation to the controversial building of the promotional object 'Sava Nova' on the river bank, the movement once again relies on the existing regulations:

> 'The real user is not the state enterprise "Belgrade Waterfront Ltd" but a private user – although all types of transmission of the right to use the temporary object are expressly prohibited by existing regulations. The private user would have to be selected in an official competition process for setting up a temporary facility' (*Ne da(vi)mo Beograd!* 2015f).

And below we see an instance of a successful interweaving of universalist and contextualist components of the movement's discourse:

> 'The project of (proclaimed but never demonstrated) national importance is characterized by non-transparent processes, potentially huge risks and the evasion and distortion of legal and legislative mechanisms. Existing documents related to planning are expressly deregulated and adopted contrary to the law, in a non-democratic procedure in which the participation of citizens is reduced to nothing more than a formality' (*Ne da(vi)mo Beograd!* 2015a).

### Diagnosis

A crucial aspect of the ‘We Won’t let Belgrade D(r)own’ initiative (even if it is limited to some members only) is an attempt to analyze and critique the ‘Belgrade Waterfront’ project beyond the charge of the government’s authoritarianism, through situating the project in the broader context of the Serbian socio-economic transition to peripheral capitalism:

> ‘And so, while we stare at the sky, doubting that the city on water will ever become reality, money from the budget is disappearing under our very noses…’ (*Ne da(vi)mo Beograd!* 2015g)
>
> ‘The purpose of these mega-projects is not to contribute to the competitiveness of cities but to give more power to political elites. These are politically orchestrated spectacles. The *modus operandi* of these ‘Dubaisations’ is always the same: it starts with an aggressive marketing campaign and the ceremonial opening of the model, with the politicians and investors photographed next to it’ (*Ne da(vi)mo Beograd!* 2015h)

A particularly acute diagnostic passage:

> ‘The remnants of the state housing funds are destroyed in a planned manner and the land on which they are built is sold for a pittance. All of that goes hand in hand with brutal austerity measures of centralized European institutions that affect the poorest strata most acutely. All elements of the housing infrastructure such as the existing apartments, public and municipal land and rent prices are pushed onto the international speculative market’ (*Ne da(vi)mo Beograd!* 2015d).

And below is an instance of a successful interweaving of universalist vocabulary with that of diagnosis:

> ‘Modification of plans, and even laws, in the interest of individuals or certain groups indicates a disorganized state and the ignoring of the public interest and citizens. In the end, the individual profits and the city bears the risks’ (*Ne da(vi)mo Beograd!* 2015i).

## Conclusion: a productive tension

As the above examples demonstrate, the ‘politicization’ of a phenomenon such as a megalomaniacal urban renewal project – the persuasion of the public that a certain issue is not merely a matter of ‘development’ and ‘progress’, or that it is not merely of concern to a small group of actors – requires a simultaneous battle on three different fronts of justification. It requires the interweaving of the three vocabularies of critique in a comprehensive or ‘holistic’ type of collective social engagement exemplified by the ‘We Won’t let Belgrade D(r)own’ initiative. If the initiative’s members only employed the vocabulary of abstract normative universalism (the universalist principle of egalitarianism and the proceduralist insistence on participation and transparency), they could easily be criticized from a 'contextualist' perspective as 'utopians', as people who reject completely the existing (by definition imperfect) legal/institutional system in Serbia. If they only relied on the existing legal regulations (or rather their violation) as standards of critique, they would lose the grounds of critique once the government arbitrarily changed these regulations. Finally, if they only used a 'diagnostic' vocabulary of causal explanation (e.g. the Marxist-inspired explanation of the project as driven by the logic of capital) they would be vulnerable to the charge of 'epistemological authoritarianism'. Why should their fellow citizens who do not endorse the broader vision of the social reality that underpins the causal explanation (diagnosis) endorse their critique?

On the other hand, the interweaving of the three vocabularies of critique produces a certain tension in the engaged actors' discourse, and the above examples and brief analyses of selected statements offer some insight in this respect. Since the movement uses the universalist language of egalitarianism to criticize the country's legal system as a framework in which a particular unjust phenomenon occurs but also invokes the existing laws of that order (which do not live up to the demanding universalist standard of egalitarianism) to criticize their violation in the relevant context, one can identify a particular 'universalist-contextualist' tension between the two vocabularies of critique.

The movement's universalist language that focuses on the importance of *procedures* also sits somewhat uneasily with the activists' *diagnosis* of the 'Belgrade Waterfront' project as part of the 'neoliberalization' of Serbia, since the citizens who disagree with the broader social-theoretical premises of this diagnosis are under no obligation to accept it (we thus see a 'universalist-diagnostic' tension arise). Finally, the contextualist focus on the government's violation of existing laws and regulations is somewhat difficult to square *both* with the universalist conception of justice that the movement endorses (consider the activists' notion of a 'new social architecture' in contrast to their reliance on the existing Law on Expropriation) *and* with the language of diagnosis. In the left-leaning diagnostic perspective that exists within the movement, the current legal framework should appear as a product of the twenty five years of Serbia's socio-economic transition to peripheral capitalism, and is thus part of the problem rather than solution.

However, the two above examples that could be seen as instances of a 'successful interweaving' of different vocabularies within one critical statement (the examples of the fusion of universalism and contextualism and of universalism and diagnosis) indicate that collective social engagement might be somewhat more successful in maintaining the 'productive tension' between the three imperatives of justification than the theoretical 'holistic' critique such as Habermas' or Honneth's. This, I would argue, is due to the fact that, unlike theoretical critiques which often merely aspire to an 'intrinsic relation to practice' (e.g. the tradition of critical theory), forms of collective social engagement such as the 'We Won't Let Belgrade D(r)own' movement really *have* such an intrinsic connection. Their logic could be seen as 'inductive' in the sense that the elaboration of critique starts from an experience of injustice related to a concrete societal phenomenon and then 'generalizes' it through complex attempts at transforming this phenomenon into a political issue. The normative statements that the engaged actors articulate in all three vocabularies of critique can at all times be traced back to this primary impetus of 'politicization'. They are 'intrinsically' related to practice in the sense that they serve the emancipatory purpose of politicization, and this is what makes their internal tension inherently 'productive'. Theoretical perspectives such as Habermas' and Honneth's, on the other hand, follow the 'deductive' logic of applying purely theoretically justified criteria of critique to concrete empirical phenomena, so that the tension between the three imperatives arises before, and independently of, the societal phenomena that are criticized, and is not characterized by an 'inherent' productivity of politicization. In this sense, collective social engagement can to some extent serve as a model for holistic social critique articulated within the confines of theory.

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Marjan Ivković

## Društvena kritika i angažman između univerzalizma, anti-autoritarnosti i dijagnoze društvene dominacije

### Apstrakt

U radu se razmatra specifična „izomorfija" koja se može uočiti između dve forme društvene kritike: 'holističke' teorijske kritike koju predstavljaju autori poput

Jirgena Habermasa i Aksela Honeta i ‘kolektivnog društvenog angažmana’ koji predstavljaju pokreti poput ‘Ne da(vi)mo Beograd’ u današnjoj Srbiji, a koje rad nastoji da razgraniči od konvencionalnijih formi građanskog protesta. Ova izomorfija, kako rad nastoji da pokaže, ogleda se u tenziji između tri imperativa opravdanja kritike – imperativa normativnog univerzalizma, epistemološke antiautoritarnosti i dijagnoze društvene dominacije – koja nastaje usled pokušaja ‘holističkih’ teorijskih kritičara i kolektivnog angažovanih aktera da istovremeno odgovore na zahteve sva tri imperativa. Nakon predstavljanja tri vrste teorijske društvene kritike koje se kristalizuju oko svakog od imperativa, rad najpre razmatra tenziju između sva tri imperativa u formi u kojoj se javlja kod ‘holističkih’ teorijskih kritičara Habermasa i Honeta, a potom identifikuje istu vrstu tenzije u inicijativi ‘Ne da(vi)mo Beograd’. Tenzija unutar diskursa ovog pokreta oslikana je kroz kraću analizu biltena *Ne da(vi)mo Beograd* koji je pokret izdao u martu 2015. Pošto analizirani primeri ukazuju da je kolektivni angažman uspešniji od teorijske kritike u održavanju pomenute tenzije „produktivnom”, rad naposletku nakratko razmatra moguće uzroke ove razlike.

**Ključne reči**: izomorfija, tenzija, kritika, opravdanje, angažman, univerzalizam, kontekstualizam, dijagnoza, Srbija

UDK: 316.628:17.026.2 FILOZOFIJA I DRUŠTVO XXVII (2), 2016.
DOI: 10.2298/FID1602373V
Original scientific article
Received: 15.2.2016 — Accepted: 15.3.2016

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# The possibilities and constraints of engaging solidarity in citizenship

**Abstract** In a broader sense, this article is interested in solidarity as a politically operational concept. To be able to answer more general questions – like *What does it mean to base a political community on the principles of solidarity? Can acts of solidarity be used not only to help (support) others, but with the aim to change power relations and constitute new political orders as well?* – we must first situate solidarity in relation to some already established frameworks of thinking about the political community. It is within theories and models of citizenship that I want to situate my exploration of the political value of solidarity in this paper. Firstly, if we want to go beyond isolated gestures and actions of solidarity, to question its general capacities for political reordering, we need to firmly anchor it in broad concepts that capture the ideals and visions of political community. Without a doubt, citizenship is one such concept. Secondly, there is hardly a theory or approach to citizenship that does not presuppose some aspects of solidarity as foundational. Finally, and closely related to the previous point, citizenship and solidarity, although often conceptually intertwined, form a paradoxical duo, reflecting further potential paradoxes that may arise from endeavours to engage solidarity as a political principle. In short, citizenship is a simultaneously inclusive and exclusive notion, incorporating the idea that some sort of boundary encircles a body of citizens (most often, but not exclusively, nation-state boundaries), despite the fact that solidarity loses much of its meaning when expected to operate and be exercised within certain imposed limits.

**Keywords**: solidarity, citizenship, citizenship rights, equality, justice, global citizenship

## New ‘solidarity talk’

Solidarity is on everyone’s lips these days. Whether the news is about collapsed national economies, natural catastrophes – which seem to be growing in number due to rapid climate change – or the emergent refugee crisis caused by wars in the Middle East, all around the world we hear pleas for solidarity with an ever-growing number of people who have lost their jobs, their homes, their savings, their safety and their loved ones. Media and social networks are flooded with stories of ‘ordinary’ citizens providing shelter and food to those in need; stories that speak as much about human compassion as they do about the failure of state and international institutions. Moreover, these acts of solidarity – depicted in such a way as to counter the effects of mainstream policies – are sometimes presented as models for the potential, and allegedly better, socio-economic arrangements

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we should be striving for, in other words, as politically instructive.[1] The topic of this article is a broad one, and hence will be touched upon fragmentally – mostly as an appeal to further rethink proposed frameworks and problems – namely, in terms of how can we think about solidarity as a politically operational concept. What does it mean to base a political community on the principles of solidarity? Can acts of solidarity be used not only to help (support) others, but with the aim to change power relations and constitute new political orders as well? In other words, can solidarity be political? If so, is it justifiable to claim solidarity for progressive, emancipatory political projects only, or can it equally be part of a conservative, right-wing agenda?

The idea of relating solidarity to political community is hardly a new one, as many political theories (most notably anarchist, communist and socialist, but others as well) rely on specific visions of solidarity as the cohesive force that turns individuals into members of society. However, there have been very few attempts, especially in more recent political and social theories, to discuss solidarity from a theoretical point of view and to provide a coherent framework that explains the role of solidarity in constituting the fibre of a political community (Hechter 1988, Bayertz 1999, Arnspenger and Varoufakis 2003, Scholz 2008). Moreover, social theory interpretations of solidarity have predominantly viewed it as a given feature of every group or as the essence of cooperative behaviour. For instance, both mechanical and organic solidarity are assumed in Durkheim's account, emerging from the particular character of individuals and groups (Durkheim 1991). It is usually also presumed that solidarity takes place between actors who are alike, or, as in rational choice theory, who strive to achieve the same goal. In other words, these accounts do not treat solidarity as created, agitated for, and as *transformative* – capable of challenging and establishing political and social orders. The contexts mentioned at the beginning of this text, which have brought the topic of solidarity to the surface (again), have mostly generated writing that positions solidarity as a corrective and neglected aspect of interpersonal behaviour, now advocated as a tool for overcoming the consequences of the current capitalist and liberal-representative models of governance (Bauman 2013). In a way, they can be said to be part of a new wave of utopian thinking.

However, this emerging 'solidarity talk' is not without opposition. There is strong criticism – even from within the strain of thought focused on alternative ways of organizing modern communities in the face of imminent economic, geo-political and climate dangers – regarding whether 'better' societies can be founded on principles of solidarity. Critics say that solidarity is insufficiently political, relying primarily on instantaneous individual or group reactions and on human emotions instead of on systemic, institutional solutions; or that it is something of a companion to neoliberal policies – for, with the implosion of the welfare state and the significant depletion, or even outright abandonment, of policies designed to help the poor, immigrants, and those less-fortunate, direct solidarity among people has emerged to fill institutional gaps. This is said to be in accordance with neoliberal principles of governance, as it fits the formula, 'do it yourself,' and is why some have highlighted the co-optation of concepts usually thought of as radical or anti-establishment, like *active citizenship* and *direct action*, but also solidarity, into mainstream politics (Joseph 2013). My contention here is that in order to fully explore the political dimension of solidarity, we must first situate the concept in relation to some (preferably many) already established frameworks of thinking about the political community.

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[1] See for instance http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/23/greece-solidarity-movement-cooperatives-syriza, and http://greecesolidarity.org/?page_id=1114, last accessed on Feb 1 2016.

## Solidarity and citizenship – a paradoxical alliance

It is within theories and models of citizenship that I want to situate my (limited) exploration of the political value of solidarity. There are a couple of reasons for this. Firstly, if we want to go beyond isolated gestures and actions of solidarity, to question its general capacities for political reordering, we need to firmly anchor it in broad concepts that capture the ideals and visions of political community. Without a doubt, citizenship is one such concept. Secondly, as I will shortly elaborate in more detail, there is hardly a theory or approach to citizenship that does not presuppose some aspects of solidarity as foundational. Finally, and closely related to the previous point, citizenship and solidarity, although often conceptually intertwined, form a paradoxical duo, reflecting further potential paradoxes that may arise from endeavours to engage solidarity as a political principle. In short, citizenship is a simultaneously inclusive and exclusive notion, incorporating the idea that some sort of boundary encircles a body of citizens (most often, but not exclusively, nation-state boundaries), despite the fact that solidarity loses much of its meaning when expected to operate and be exercised within certain imposed limits. I will return to this point briefly, too.

Citizenship is an indispensable element of every political community: encompassing dimensions of statuses, rights and identities (Joppke 2007),[2] it serves as every polity's "legal foundation and social glue" (Shafir 1998:

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[2] Shaw and Štiks (2012: 317) have noticed a tendency among citizenship studies scholars to use triadic divisions when explaining constitutive elements of citizenship. Similar to Joppke's division, authors like Wiener, Bauböck, and Bellamy have used, respectively: rights, access and belonging; membership, rights and practices; rights, belonging and participation.

3). It is “intimately linked to the ideas of individual entitlement on the one hand and of attachment to a particular community on the other” (Kymlicka and Norman 1995: 283). Above all, it is a relational concept with three constitutive elements: individual, community, and the relationship between them (Wiener 1999: 199). Thus, transcending issues of legal and formal statuses and rights (as well as obligations), citizenship is pertinent to wider social questions of who belongs (who *ought* to belong; under which rules), who is left out (and why), what types of relationships co-citizens form, what kinds of relationships exist between citizens and the state, and the nature of relations between citizens and non-citizens. These relationships are not only the result of policies and constitutional settings, but to a large extent are shaped, directed and mediated by public discourse and widely-shared narratives, in which the motif of solidarity plays an important role. The idea of solidarity with co-ethnics or with other co-nationals under the same state institutions helped underpin *national citizenship* in its modern inceptions (Brubaker 1992). *Social citizenship* (rights to education, health and social protection, etc.), implemented through an institutional distribution of national wealth, is built on ideas of egalitarianism and solidarity with less-fortunate co-citizens; *multicultural citizenship*, in its quest for the recognition of differences, accentuates solidarity within ethnic and religious groups; and so on.

Solidarity thus, as a *discursive trope*, can be found in different narratives and interpretative frameworks to purport different ideas and ideals of citizenship, as the latter remains conceptually heavily indebted to the former. However, solidarity’s role is often only presupposed, or taken for granted, and rarely thematized as a consistent feature of interpersonal relations that demands its systematic place in citizenship. The two basic models, or generative “ideals of citizenship” (Pocock 1998), namely republican and liberal – both developed in ancient times, in Greece and Rome, respectively – envisioned strong communal ties that enabled the birth of citizenship, but accentuated other features that had to do more with individuals as citizens than with the relationship between them. The republican vision of *zoon politikon* valued the citizen as free and agentic (a property-owning male, needless to say), “capable of ruling and being ruled,” as Aristotle famously put it. The Roman citizen gradually evolved into *legalis homo*, a man whose rights are acknowledged and protected. Both traditions are echoed in today’s understanding of citizens as free, right-bearing members of society and agents in their political communities, but what role has solidarity played in the evolution of these ideas?

Throughout modern history, citizenship has developed a space for *struggle* – for inclusion into the political community and for the protection of rights, which have gradually been seen as inseparable from the essence of what it means to be human. Equality and inclusion have thus become principles propelling the fight to secure and expand citizenship rights. It was social contract theories that posited, albeit in different ways, that the *natural* state of human beings, gathered together in a community, mandated that some *natural* and inalienable rights be recognized. The American and the French revolutions, by way of the United States Constitution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (*Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen*), transformed, even if only declaratively, all acknowledged members of the community into equal citizens. Though many remained outside this citizenry, most notably slaves and women, a new ideal of citizenship was set and a new era in the fight for citizenship rights was ready to begin. Citizenship struggles of the 19th and 20th centuries, exemplified in movements like abolitionism and the fight for universal suffrage, further accentuated the ideals of equality and solidarity. Abolitionism and the suffrage movement especially relied on principles of solidarity, as they were international movements, in which there was an even greater need for transnational ties, mutual recognition and support, and the capacity to put mass pressure on national governments.

Solidarity and citizenship grew conceptually closer as a consequence of two historical trends. On one hand, solidary networks, built across nation-states, emerged from the common fight for equal citizenship. On the other hand, those very struggles helped stabilize the notion of *national citizenship*, and the nation-state as its container – where solidarity was needed *among* citizens (of a nation) – and was often strengthened and maintained with the help of nationalist ideologies. In a way, this intra-national solidarity worked to undermine international forms of solidarity, especially when the latter threatened to work against the interests of the nation-states themselves. This is how Balibar (1988) explains the role of the rise of equal citizenship in suppressing the international workers' movement:

> "…[n]ationalism is entirely constituted in its modern form in the context of the class struggle and the 'social question' which it has tended to control and, if possible, to supplant. The denial of class identity and the affirmation of national identity go hand in hand… [t]he recognition of 'universal suffrage' is closely coupled with imperialism… The 'dangerous classes' have been allowed access to citizenship – let alone begun to have their workers' rights acknowledged as one of its necessary components – only on condition that they transform themselves into constituent parts of the 'body' of the nation, and therefore into (real or imaginary) masters or, more exactly, foreman of imperialist domination." (Balibar 1988: 726)

We can already see how solidarity and citizenship, and especially solidarity within citizenship, form a peculiar dynamic. However, the historical experience of two world wars, together with the turbulent inter-war period – during which unprecedented waves of migration occurred when tens of thousands were stripped of their humanity, primarily because they were stripped of their citizenship statuses – strengthened the argument for citizenship as "the right to have rights" (Arendt 1951). Then, the post-World War II political order of the West and the triumph of the welfare state solidified the role of solidarity in consolidating citizenship. This is particularly highlighted in T. H. Marshall's famous essay (1998) on "Citizenship and the Social Class," where he outlined the history of citizenship in Great Britain as the history of the struggle between capitalism, which stratifies society, and citizenship rights, which aim to bring equality to all, and concluded with an optimistic look at the then-present epoch, in which *social* citizenship (equal access to health care, education and other social services) had allegedly transformed the whole population of post-war Britain into one class of citizens.

Solidarity in citizenship, thus, in our recent history, has mostly meant the acceptance of new social contracts by which some portion of accumulated wealth is distributed (mostly through taxation) in such a way as to accommodate the ideal of an equal citizenry. However, as we know, this social contract has been challenged for quite some time, as has the idea of a universal citizenship exemplified in Marshall's essay. These challenges, along with attempts at reframing citizenship, which I will outline briefly below, have given new meaning to citizenship solidarity as well.

New social movements, coupled with a rise in identity politics from the 1960s onward, destabilized universal citizenship and its ideals of equal political and social rights. *Culture* and *identities* became new sites of struggle, as the claim that the so-called universal citizen actually has gender, ethnicity, and religion – namely, that s/he is not universal at all – grew stronger (Nash 2000). This questioning of formal/legal equality, said to mask unrecognized inequalities, transformed the dominant understanding of the political within citizenship, and gave rise to new calls for solidarity among minorities and repressed groups. An overall *cultural turn* and an increasing prominence of *politics of recognition* reframed the struggle for citizenship rights, most notably with advocacies for *different rights* for differently disadvantaged groups through new normative models such as group-differentiated citizenship and multicultural citizenship (Marion Young 1989, Kymlicka 1995). This opened up new debates on the place and role of solidarity as a cohesive force in citizenship. Whereas proponents of different variants of multicultural citizenship insist on the need for solidarity with those who feel excluded and marginalized – solidarity that presumes acceptance of special rights, exemption from certain laws, and cultural sensitivity in public domains and discourses – critics point to the ghettoization of citizens and a consequent loss of solidarity bonds with the wider citizenry (Carens 2000, Barry 2001, Phillips 1999). This shift from 'old' to 'new' notions of citizenship solidarity, therefore, was a result of the shift from redistribution to recognition (Fraser 1995). Indeed, although Kymlicka

(2009), for instance, insisted that the fight for different sets of rights (social or cultural) cannot be seen as a “zero sum game”, it is hard not to notice the decoupling of cultural issues from socio-economic ones that coincides with the rise of politics of identities (Phillips 1999) and the “relative eclipse” of social politics by cultural politics (Fraser 1997: 2). Or, as Joppke put it: “With the ethnic diversification of society the basis for social rights becomes brittle while other types of rights move to the fore: rights of anti-discrimination and multicultural recognition.” (Joppke 2007: 38-39).

Besides these shifts within the paradigm of citizenship rights and entitlements, a re-conceptualization of citizenship has also occurred vis-à-vis processes of globalization. The flourishing of concepts like cosmopolitan citizenship, post-national citizenship, de-national citizenship, etc. (Bosniak 2000, Soysal 1998) indicate that modern conditions of accelerated globalization impact our way of thinking about the place and role of individual citizens in a world that is no longer dominated exclusively by nation-states, but also by global interests, international institutions and politics, and ever growing flows of people and capital. Here, I want to single out two concepts of citizenship that rely on such insights and demand the appropriate regulation of citizens’ rights and duties to accommodate emerging global conditions. *Ecological citizenship* stresses the need for the just distribution of ecological space and suggests new international politico-legal regulations, based on *ecological footprints*, where those with greater footprints would be legally accountable to those whose access to natural resources is limited or endangered. As Andrew Dobson argues (1995; 2004), we need to think of these regulations in terms of citizenship, since access to shared ecological space concerns us all as citizens and should therefore be regulated as a political issue. Even though citizens around the world participate in a single ecological community, access to and use of ecological resources is not equal, and the distribution of those resources is not just. Therefore, the regulations of ecological citizenship would impose obligations and reparation measures on those with a larger ecological impact (the subjects of this obligation-centred citizenship are primarily states).

Another example of a global citizenship model, again with a stronger focus on obligations, is the proposition of Isin and Turner (2007) for a global system of taxation on different kinds of transnational mobilities, which would create an international fund to alleviate the consequences of global catastrophes and at the same time strengthen the mutual rights and duties of all citizens in the world:

> “If people started, albeit in a modest way, to pay for their rights and to contribute through taxation to the common good at a global level, human rights would become a more tangible part of everyday life. The ‘ordinary man and woman’ would feel involved in global projects to prevent famine

> and drought, and they would begin acting as cosmopolitan citizens. Without a cosmopolitan taxation system, the UN will continue to be largely dependent on US funding and generosity, both of which have been declining anyway. Without these changes, human rights will be subject to the criticism that they are fake rights because they do not correspond to duties." (ibid: 16)

This overview of various conjunctions between citizenship and solidarity treats the latter in an unusual way given that one of its most common features – namely internationalism – is not thematized. This is due to the unique role solidarity plays in strengthening the sense of membership and belonging *within* citizenship. Bearing that in mind, and even though solidarity figures as a necessary *rhetorical* tool for different variants of citizenship (national, welfare, multicultural, global, etc.), we could perhaps assert that it is in fact *incommensurable* with the notion of citizenship. Citizenship functions simultaneously as an inclusionary and exclusionary concept, because it "in itself embodies legalized discrimination, since it presupposes a legitimate distinction between citizens and non-citizens" (Dedić, Jalušić and Zorn 2003: 25). The exception to this is found in the last two examples above, but it must be stressed that they represent only theoretical models and that they face strong criticism – together with other models of 'alternative' or 'hyphenated citizenships' – by scholars who insist that the concept of citizenship only functions within real existing political communities and is operative only when it indicates state membership (Joppke 2007; Oommen 1997).

Can solidarity, then, play any constitutive role in building social and political relations if boundaries defining who is included are set in advance? Or could we claim that the political *engagement* of solidarity actually instrumentalises its powerful connotations to mask *other* political imperatives and motives? Here, we are dangerously approaching the problematic claim of a *true nature* of solidarity and we could perhaps engage in a different, non-exclusionary way. But, again, could it be for political purposes, given that political community always implies (exclusionary) boundaries? Or should we presume that citizenship can indeed be applicable to global, transnational contexts? Below, I will focus on some of the defining features of solidarity itself and will then return to the question of its relationship with citizenship.

## What kind of engagement is solidarity and can it help build political institutions?

To be able to deal further with the questions raised above, we need to define what types of relationships could be said to take the form of solidarity. First, we must differentiate between solidarity and other forms of empathic behaviour. Discussing the differences between pity, compassion and solidarity in her book *On Revolution*, Hannah Arendt remarks:

> “It is out of pity that men are ‘attracted toward les hommes faibles’, but it is out of solidarity that they establish deliberately and, as it were, dispassionately a community of interest with the oppressed and exploited… For solidarity, because it partakes of reason, and hence of generality, is able to comprehend a multitude conceptually, not only the multitude of a class or a nation or a people, but eventually all mankind… Terminologically speaking, solidarity is a principle that can inspire and guide action, compassion is one of the passions, and pity is a sentiment.” (Arendt 1990: 88-89).

It is not only the nature of affection and action that sets solidarity apart from other empathic impulses, it is also *the nature of the relationships* it builds. So, let us consider further how solidarity differs from charity. One of the defining traits of solidarity, I would argue, is an implicit *levelling* that occurs between the parties involved, and this is where the difference between charity and solidarity resides – in the principle of equality. Charity does not imply a critique of existing hierarchies; it merely ‘prescribes’ the desirable moral conduct for those on top of the social and economic ladder. Solidarity, on the other hand, emerges from situations in which people recognize each other as equal, and thus entitled to the same rights and living conditions. We act in solidarity when we want to alleviate some sort of *injustice* or respond to its consequences (whether man- or nature-made). Hence, the social values underlying solidarity are equality and justice, mutually intertwined, as the just order is seen, in this respect, as the order of equality.

I would also contend that solidarity is defined as an act (or a condition for acting, and for living) when we simultaneously *give* something and *give up* on something (again, a levelling occurs). To be in *solidarity with* thus implies the sharing of a position or experience with those who need or seek solidarity, and a partaking in their situation. This also means that acts of solidarity do not necessarily have to be acts at all (in the sense of agency). Sometimes, it is with *inaction*, with a refusal to act, or with self-censorship that we show our solidarity. This point is illuminated by an answer Judith Butler gave to the question ‘What does solidarity mean to you?’ in a recent interview: “Solidarity means that you stay in the group with others because you share the feeling of revolt or injustice and you want to change the world, and you stay with that group even though you may not like all the people there … it asks a lot of your time, it means spending your time with people you do not necessarily like, it asks of you to give up on the simplicity of your private life… it means to stay with the group and to stay together to attain the shared goal”.[3] Solidarity thus imposes limits on our individual agency, and to individualism in general, stressing the higher importance of a group cause or principle we share with others. In other words, some sort of *communalism* is always implied in solidarity.

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[3] The interview can be found on: http://www.rwfund.org/2015/11/25/judith-butler-zadrzati-fokus/, last accessed Feb 1 2016.

Now, returning to the question of citizenship – and keeping in mind its particular historical and political meanings, its different frameworks, and the various interpretations of the internal force of citizens' solidarity – we can ask again, within citizenship, where do potentials for *engaging* solidarity exist?

Since citizenship is still predominantly a state-bound concept, let me begin with this 'traditional' understanding of it, involving constitutional protections of statuses and rights and established norms for relations among members. State citizenship has an almost asymptotic relationship with equality, striving to attain it as a proper constitutive ideal, but constantly reproducing internal hierarchies and classes of not-so-equal citizens. Solidarity thus produces tensions with citizenship, not only regarding the exclusionary nature of the latter, but also, in a narrower sense, regarding failures to accommodate the equality of the statuses, rights and identities of all citizens. In this respect, solidarity could hardly be expected to perform as anything more than a corrective, or as a warning of the need for more inclusive communal citizenship in which identities are not entrenched but work toward stabilizing a shared political identity. Yet, a formula by which political freedoms and social equality can co-exist must still be found. The welfare state's model of social citizenship is, in my mind (however pessimistic this may seem), the pinnacle of institutionalized solidarity within the modern nation-state – with systems of taxation that rely on inter-generational, inter-regional and social and economic solidarity. The biggest threats to this model are current austerity measures and politically-manipulated narratives of changing ethnic and 'cultural' balances. Here, we should consider the dangers of what Richard Sennett called "the destructive solidarity of us-against-them": "The perverse power of solidarity, in its us-against-them form, remains alive in the civil societies of liberal democracies, as in European attitudes toward ethnic immigrants who seem to threaten social solidarity, or in American demands for a return to 'family values'." (Sennett 2013: 279). These threats need to be challenged and opposed from the position that social solidarity is essential for building just and equal citizenship communities. In that sense, Rorty was right to point out that "feelings of solidarity are necessarily a matter of which similarities and dissimilarities strike us as salient, and that such salience is a function of a *historically contingent* final vocabulary … we should *create* a more expansive sense of solidarity than we presently have and we should take into account those we instinctively think of as 'they' rather than 'us'" (Rorty 1989: 192, emphasis added). However, I want to underline that solidarity, within this frame (of state-bound citizenship), inevitably remains 'thin' and expected to 'work' inside state boundaries, and is thus susceptible to a loss of its argumentative power when confronted with dangers presented as 'external'.

International solidarity – of the kind scholars and activists predominantly have in mind when exploring and engaging the concept – expresses the ideals of equality and justice more purely, in a broader political space that transcends nation-states and encompasses the whole of humanity. Instances of international solidarity can indeed be political in that they are capable of forming institutional relationships and challenging power relations, as well as creating new ones. But this comes with significant limitations, especially related to the durability of such endeavours – which usually do not produce lasting political formations, let alone political communities – and due to the fact that they do not significantly challenge *state* institutions, which remain the primary locus of political power managing our statuses, mobility and fundamental rights.

Finally, models of international, global citizenship – despite the criticism they receive for overstretching the concept of citizenship – are important to bear in mind when thinking about the prospects for linking solidarity and citizenship. These models rely on a vocabulary of rights, obligations and durable institutions, and take into account the global condition of citizens' universal rights, thus embarking on an attempt to define, however loosely, the global community of citizens. Isin and Turner's thoughts on cosmopolitan citizenship, for example, resonate particularly loudly right now, as the world faces one of the biggest refugee crises in recent history. For, when we travel or move abroad, we move from one citizenship regime[4] to another, retaining some of the entitlements from the previous regime and expecting protection from the one in which we are entering. Or at least this is what *some of us* expect and receive. We take these rights to mobility and protection of our interests for granted, as established freedoms won some time ago. However, at this very moment, we are witnessing constraints on the freedom of movement, the protection of human rights and the right to seek asylum. In debates about the refugee crisis in Europe, the cost of accommodating refugees is often raised, and is used by many member countries as a pretext for not dealing with the issue. And though it is clearly not the only contestable question, the recent deal between the EU and Turkey did reveal that accommodating a great influx of population comes with a price tag. If we could reach a global consensus that human destinies should never be made subject to budgetary negotiations, would it not make sense to develop an international system of taxation – of the global mobility of both people and capital – that could transform the privilege enjoyed by some into an assistance fund for others? This would incorporate both elements of citizenship and solidarity; and yet, this model has its limits as well, for it does not include partaking in shared experiences and it supports equality and justice in a very restricted manner. Therefore, this is another variant of a 'thin' form of solidarity, devoid from direct involvement and bottom-up action.

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[4] *Citizenship regime* as defined by Shaw and Štiks (2012: 311) encompasses "the citizenship laws, regulations and administrative practices regarding the citizenship status of individuals but, in addition to that, it also refers to existing mechanisms of political participation. More precisely, a citizenship regime is based on a given country's citizenship legislation defining the body of citizens (i.e. who is entitled to citizenship and all duties and rights attached to that status), on administrative policies in dealing with citizenship matters and the status of individuals, and, finally, on the official or non-official dynamic of political inclusion and exclusion."

With no current plausible linkage between 'thick' solidarity and citizenship, the relationship between these two mutually-related concepts remains open but is nevertheless crucial for further thinking about the politically transformative potential of solidarity. Citizenship's essential ideal of equality must be formulated in such a way that it does not create tensions between unity and inclusion (a dilemma Sennett sees as overlapping with the disputes between the political Left and the Social Left, Sennett 2013: 39–40) – where unity justifies exclusionary measures, and inclusion (diversity) is said to weaken unity. And solidarity's appealing force should not too readily be attributed to its presupposed universal character: solidarity is instead a process, in which joint effort and work is a necessity, that does not *rely* on any universal presumption but is itself "a universalizing political relation" (Featherstone 2012: 38) rooted in concepts of rights, status and a sense of shared membership, epitomized best in the notion of citizenship.

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## Mogućnosti i ograničenja angažovanja solidarnosti u građanstvu

### Rezime

U širem smislu, ovaj rad se bavi solidarnošću kao politički operativnim pojmom. Kako bismo mogli da odgovorimo na opštija pitanja, poput: *Šta znači zasnovati političku zajednicu na principima solidarnosti? Mogu li akti solidarnosti poslužiti ne samo kao pomoć (podrška) drugima, već i u cilju promene odnosa moći i konstituisanja novih političkih poredaka*, isprva moramo pozicionirati solidarnost spram nekih već etabliranih okvira mišljenja o političkoj zajednici. U ovom radu razmotriću političku vrednost solidarnosti unutar različitih teorija i modela građantva. Kao prvo, ukoliko nas zanima solidarnost izvan izolovanih gesta i akcija, te ukoliko ispitujemo opštije kapacitete ovog pojma za proizvođenje novih političkih poredaka, moramo ga usidriti u postojane, a ipak dovoljno široke konceptualne okvire koji sadrže u sebi probleme ideala i vizija političke zajednice. Bez sumnje, građanstvo je jedan takav okvir. Uz to, skoro da i nema teorije ili sistematskog pristupa građanstvu koji ne podrazumeva neke od aspekata solidarnosti kao svoje elementarne postavke. Konačno, u bliskoj vezi s prethodno rečenim, građanstvo i solidarnost, iako stoje u pojmovnoj svezi, sačinjavaju paradoksalan par iz čega se mogu proizvesti i neki budući potencijalni paradoksi s obzirom na poduhvate angažovanja solidarnosti kao političkog principa. Ukratko, građanstvo je ujedno inkluzivan i isključujući pojam, koji u sebi sadrži ideju granice koja obuhvata telo građanstva (najčešće, mada ne isključivo, granice nacije-države), dok solidarnost uglavnom gubi svoj smisao ukoliko se očekuje da bude primenjivana unutar određenih nametnutih granica.

**Ključne reči**: solidarnost, građanstvo, građanska prava, jednakost, pravda, globalno građanstvo

UDK: 323.2 FILOZOFIJA I DRUŠTVO XXVII (2), 2016.
DOI: 10.2298/FID1602387M
Original scientific article
Received: 21.3.2016 — Accepted: 3.4.2016

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# Activism and Capitalism:

## On the Forms of Engagement

**Abstract** This short essay aims at providing an outline for a critical reflection on the notion of activism and to bring to attention the significance for distinguishing between different *forms* of engagement in contemporary neoliberal societies. The article traces the history of the notion of 'activism' and argues that it went hand in hand with the reduction of heterogeneous political activity to immediate generic action. In order to counter such a reduction, the article relies on the work of Ellen Meiksins Wood and her critical history of the development of the liberal conception of citizenship. In conclusion, it will be argued that the conceptual significance of the notion of capitalism is crucial for distinguishing between different forms and figures of political activity – from the 'activist', 'active citizen' and what Engin Isin termed 'activist citizenship'.

**Keywords**: active citizenship, activism, Ellen Meiksins Wood, Engin Isin, capitalism

Although they have become academic and political buzzwords, notions such as civic and social engagement, 'active citizenship' and the like, are neither new nor separate from their liberal conceptual heritage. I will argue that the emergence of the notion of 'activism' went hand in hand with the reduction of its political content which was then seamlessly transposed onto other notions of engagement, often blurring the lines that lie between them. The first section of this article will thus tackle the conceptual history of the notion of 'activism' while the second and third will focus on its roots in liberal conceptions of citizenship and the trajectories which point beyond them.

## 1. The history of the activist

The history of the term 'activist' is a telling one. Even though originally conceived as inextricable from the sphere of the political, it gradually came to signify generic political action, paradoxically disassociated from any concrete political struggle:

> "Unlike the term *organizer*, with its clear roots in trade union and labor politics, *activist* has murky origins. Associated early on with German idealist philosopher Rudolf Eucken — who believed that striving is necessary to a spiritual life — it was then sometimes used to describe outspoken supporters of the Central Powers during the First World War. Eventually, the term came to signify political action more broadly […]. In the early 1960s the *New York Times* described both Bertrand Russell and C. Wright

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> Mills as ‘activists’ […] and searches through archival records from that period reveal scattered mentions of labor activists, and then civil rights activists, and then student activists.” (Taylor, internet)

According to Astra Taylor it was through politics of identity in the sixties and seventies that the term ‘activist’ began to proliferate. However, this proliferation of ‘activism’ came at the expense of its political content as well as the entirely different varieties of political action which were once expressed through various terms of socialist, unionist and/or feminist origins. Briefly, when ‘activism’ first appeared on the political stage, not only did it broaden its initial meaning to encompass various different strands of political action, but political action itself became much less differentiated in common language and hence much harder to grasp – not least, through the politics of identity which were on the rise at the time.

> “Unlike *abolitionist*, *populist*, *suffragette*, *unionist*, and *socialist*, which all convey a clear position on an issue, *activist* is a generic category […]. While there are notable exceptions, many strands of contemporary activism risk emphasizing the self over the collective. By contrast, organizing is cooperative by definition: it aims to bring others into the fold, to build and exercise shared power.” (Taylor, internet)

Since some of these notions came from revolutionary and/or worker’s movements, it should not come as a surprise that the proponents of these political traditions reacted fiercely to their conflation with generic political activity. In fact, it is in 20th century Marxist and communist political thought that we find a development of a critique of the notion of activism: Amadeo Bordiga, the founder of the Communist Party of Italy, called activism “an illness of the workers’ movement that requires continuous treatment” (Bordiga 1952); the French *Organisation des Jeunes Travailleurs Revolutionnaires* (Organization of Young Revolutionary Workers), inspired by the Situationist Internationale, in 1972 published the study *Le Militantisme – Stade Supreme De L’alienation* (Activism – the Highest Stage of Alienation) (OJTR: 2005, internet); while Theodor Adorno, who famously opposed student movements, criticized activism for its ‘immediatism’ to which he contrasted the universality of thought that points beyond immediate relations. To emphasize this juxtaposition, in his brief essay on *Resignation,* Adorno even uses the term ‘actionism’, *Aktionismus¸* which, for him, remains a pseudo-activity: “Pseudo-activity is generally the attempt to rescue enclaves of immediacy in the midst of a thoroughly mediated and rigidified society” (Adorno 1998: 291). In this sense, the critical reactions towards the proliferation of activism point to exactly this shift in meaning: to the reduction of the mediate to immediate, of the organized to spontaneous and generic, of the universal to particular, and so on. Of course, the history of the term ‘activism’ should not mean that it was less important or effective than the figures of the ‘organizer’/‘suffragette’/‘socialist’/etc. Activism, in a sense, even helped establish novel political action: for example, the fact is that gay or queer, student or civic activism were not initially considered favorable by many strands of the communist left across Europe and the USA all the way up to the end of the 20th century[1].

But ultimately, its history is telling in another sense. The ambiguity of its political content and its strong emphasis on activity can only have one meaningful use: to juxtapose the otherwise 'passive' citizenry to its more 'active' parts. In this sense, 'activism' is more of a reaction to *passive citizenship*. But unlike those who see it as a symptom of the *decay* of (liberal) democracy (including the quoted Astra Taylor), it can be said that it is a symptom not of decay, but of the vitality of one *particular conception* of citizenship. It is interesting to see a similar distinction developing fairly early, namely, during the French Revolution. It was as early as October 1789, whilst wrestling with the issues of sovereignty and elective principles, that the Constitution foresaw the bifurcation of 'the people' into 'active' and 'passive citizens' – essentially, propertied males over 25 who paid annual taxes and were entitled to vote and stand office, and others who could not. Thus: "By creating the active and passive citizens, the Revolution had already become ambivalent as to who were the people were. While the people in abstract remained sovereign, the Constitutent had deliberately placed all attributes of sovereignty in the hands of active citizens alone" (Mitchel 1988: 111). Of course, one cannot claim that this distinction is to blame for the upsurge of 'activism' in the 20th century nor that the two are related by more than a coincidence. However, both of them belong to the same inherently *passive* configuration of citizenship which was already bifurcated *in itself* from the very moment of its inception. Thus, by focusing on the nature of this configuration, we may be better able to distinguish between different forms of engagement (such as the 'activist', the 'active citizen' and what Isin Engin called 'activist citizenship', described in section 3). In order to do so, we would need to go beyond this brief philological account and to turn to the origins of the distinctively liberal conception of citizenship and its formal-democratic expressions.

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[1] One should recall for example the French PCF and the initial quarrels between its militants – to use another 'old' term for 'activism' (coming from the French verb 'militaire', 'to campaign for') – and its theorists, including Foucault. Of course, there are plenty of examples of these issues being covered or at least tackled upon by progressive movements and parties across Europe: examples include the abolishment of the Tsarist laws in the Soviet Union and the legalization of homosexuality, abortion, no-fault divorce in post-revolutionary (and pre-Stalinist) Russia and the key roles that some of the leading figures of Marxist feminism, like Clara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg have played within and beyond the German Spartacus League and the KPD, etc. Nevertheless, the proliferation of 'activism' did help in making visible and indeed changing the status of otherwise repressed social groups.

## 2. Capitalism/Civil Society/Citizenship Triad

In this section I will introduce the issue of the distinction between different forms of 'activism' within the broader context of the 'liberal' conception of citizenship. I argue that the 'liberal' conception of citizenship is inseparable from the notion of capitalism *as an underlying system which accounts for the causality of its changes.* However, it is important to contrast the explanatory significance that keeping the notion of capitalism as such a system has over its rejection. This could be seen, for example, in the discourse on civil society, when it is rejected in favor of a reduced conception of repression which presents civil society through a state/non-state dichotomy. Hence, before proceeding, we will briefly describe the issue.

For one, the fairly recent come-back of the public and political discourse on civil society could be said to originate from the experience of the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc as well as the rise of neoliberal policies. The connection between the two is that after the 1990's it was the advocates of the free market that saw in civil society a useful actor for 'counter-balancing' state policies and introducing 'market-enabling' and 'market-sustaining' reforms. What brought civil society into public discourse then was the 'need' of new regimes to rely on the state's supposed antagonist – seen precisely in civil society – to spearhead the so-called 'return' to normal, liberal-democracies and market economies in Eastern European countries following the disintegration of their communist regimes. This led to the reduction not only of the rich conceptual history of the notion of civil society to the sphere of the 'non-state' but also of the state to its coercive role and of the negation of any systematic unity which would comprise them both. Of course, most philosophical traditions from which the notion of civil society can be derived were far from such reductive conceptions. Whether they revolved around social contract (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau) or the emergence of civil society within the nascent nation-states (Adam Ferguson, Kant's universal civil society, Hegel and Marx's subsequent critique, Alexis de Tocqueville, etc.) or attempted to underlie the significance of civil society for ideological struggles or functional democracies (Gramsci and the concept of the integral state or Habermas and the debates on the public sphere, etc.), most of these theories never simply juxtaposed the state and civil society in such a reductive way. However, what the 'state/non-state' dichotomy downplayed was the role of repression *within* civil society: by opposing conjoining these two notions, the very notion of repression was itself impoverished. This reduction of oppression to the 'state/non-state' dichotomy only helped obscure, rather than explain, the complex relations of power found across any society driven by the contradictions of the market economy – exactly at the time such an economy was making a 'come-back' itself. In the words of Ellen Meiksins Wood: "Just when reformers in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe are looking to Western capitalism for paradigms of economic and political success, many of us appear to be abdicating the traditional role of the Western left as critic of capitalism." (E. M. Wood: 1990:60) More importantly, she argued that it was during this time that the Left began to 'conceptualize away the notion of capitalism' and that in "conceptually dissolving capitalism, they often share one especially serviceable concept: 'civil society'" (E. M. Wood: 1990:60). This conceptual dissolution often left unthematized what Ishay Landa called 'the liberal split' between the spheres of economy and politics, or rather, between an 'economic' strand of liberalism and its more politically-minded parts (Landa 2010: 21). And, conversely, by overly thematizing the distinctions 'public/private', 'state/non-state', 'market/non-market', 'individual/collective', etc., the crucial relation between the spheres of economy and politics was often overlooked. And consequentially, by overlooking the relations between the spheres of economy and politics, any take on the histories of citizenship or indeed the histories of its inceptions would remain conceptually futile. Briefly, without the notion of capitalism, any history of the origins of liberal citizenship would remain vague. It is here that I would like to expand on the work of Ellen Meiksins Wood who stressed all of these points in great detail – which we should only briefly summarize here.

In her 1995 book *Democracy Against Capitalism*, Wood introduces *two histories* of citizenship (E. M. Wood: 1995). The first stems, according to Wood, from the ancient Athenian conceptions of democracy, from Solon and Cleisthenes, and represents an ascendancy of the 'peasant-citizen', a figure marking the historical elevation of the *demos* to citizenship. The other historical trajectory is essentially modern, and emerges from within the contradictions of European feudalism: its development was paved and secured by events such as the *Magna Carta* and the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which mark the ascent of the propertied classes. As Wood contends: "In this case, it is not a question of peasants liberating themselves from the political domination of their overlords, but lords themselves asserting their independent powers against the claims of monarchy" (E. M. Wood 1995: 204). If the representatives of the first history were peasant-citizens, the epitomes of the second would be the feudal baron and the Whig aristocrat.

To further deepen this narrative, we should also take into account the following insights. The emergence of the second history and its subsequent domination over the first, according to Wood, assumed two things: 1) that the nascent civil society came to be constituted as an exclusive political nation made up of propertied classes, and 2) that the Parliament would become the embodiment, the representative body of all of the Commonwealth's subjects, whose function would become to constantly 'check' the power of the monarch. Thus, although at least partly accountable to its 'electorate', the Parliament functioned on a premise that 'the people' had not been fully sovereign – initially even *regardless of* whether they had the right to vote or not. The people were ultimately depoliticized players in a territorially centralized arena, where all politics relating to the people was to be confined to the Parliament. By spreading its representational power over what it presupposed to be 'the people', it depoliticized all those that did not purport to be members of the exclusive club of propertied classes. And if this history sounds too 'English' it is because it precisely is English: the period which Wood speaks of is the period of the emergence of capitalism in England at the turn of the 17th century, in times when citizenship also underwent fundamental transformations. It would cease to embody the obsolete feudal relations of power and slowly come to reflect those of a society in which its 'economic' sphere, based on the principles of market competition, was more and more distinguished from the rest of society. Citizenship would in time become less a thing of the lords and barons and more of the presumed subject of 'the people'. But at the same time it would lose its social and economic significance that it may have had in its previous conceptions (as in the 'Athenian' or 'demotic' traditions). The reason for this was the aforementioned 'autonomization' of the sphere of economy during the primitive accumulation and the subsequent rise of market economy. Accordingly: "Capitalism, by shifting the locus of power from lordship to property, made civic status less salient, as the benefits of political privilege gave way to purely 'economic' advantage" (E. M. Wood 1995: 208). Citizenship, in short, was 'spread out' to include the non-propertied classes and the 'laboring multitude' (which was previously stripped of their self-subsistence and deprived of their reliance on the commons)[2]. The fact that they were not counted as citizens did not offer them any protection against purely economic compulsion in a system in which economic compulsion *per se* was the main determinant of economy.

The main reason for this coupling of capitalism and the liberal traditions of citizenship could be summed in the distinction between civil, political and social rights that T. H. Marshall made in his "Citizenship and Social Class": "The explanation lies in fact at the core of citizenship at this stage was composed of civil rights. And civil rights were indispensable for a competitive market economy. They gave each man, as part of his individual status, the power to engage as an independent unit in an economic struggle and made it possible to deny him social protection on the ground that he was equipped with the means to protect himself" (Marshall 2009: 150). Hence, it was market competition that conditioned the liberal amalgam of a quasi-inclusive but fundamentally *passive* conception of citizenship within the presupposed framework of the nation-state. The conceptual significance and the necessity of conceptually outlining such a historical move for the differentiation between different sorts of engagements, will be the task of the last section.

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[2] For a detailed description of the deprivation of the emerging working class of their commons and self-subsistence, see Perelman: 2000: 13, available at: https://is.vsfs.cz/el/6410/leto2013/BA_ETD/um/3968033/The_Invention_of_Capitalism.pdf (last accessed: 03. 25. 2016.)

## 3. 'Active citizenship' versus 'activist citizenship'

So far, the argument focused on the history of 'activism' and pointed out the shift in its meaning whereby it became a notion encompassing different political activities, albeit in reduced form. We then proceeded to account for the formation of the liberal conception of citizenship as an inherently formal or passive conception which went hand in hand with the emergence of capitalism as an underlying socio-economic system. In this section I will argue that capitalism plays a pivotal role in shaping our understandings about what it means to be an 'active citizen' and contrast the 'active citizen' to what Isin Engin termed 'activist citizenship' in his debate with Étienne Balibar.

The meaning of 'active citizen' – today, most certainly, quite different from the one defined by the Revolutionary Constitution of 1789 – can perhaps be grasped by contrasting the positions of Isin Engin and Étienne Balibar in the debate on the *sans-papiers*. Namely, unlike Balibar who saw in the *sans-papiers* an invigorated figure of *active citizens,* Isin distinguished between *active citizens* and what he termed '*activist citizenship*'. Isin argues that the actors of citizenship are not necessarily those who hold the status of citizenship. Instead, "if we understand citizenship as an instituted subject-position, it can be performed or enacted by various categories of subjects including aliens, migrants, refugees, states, courts and so on. The political is not limited to an already constituted territory or its legal 'subjects': it always exceeds them." (Isin: 2009: 379) Rather than focusing on the already constituted actors, scales or sites of citizenship, we need to take into account the transformations that are making citizenship vivid and not merely an abstract category of state governing. Indeed, if we understand citizenship as the very enactment of being political, and not as a designation of membership of any given state, then it is possible to speak of 'acts of citizenship', which are in no way reducible to any pre-given actor or state of affairs. In fact, Isin describes these acts as the ones "that transform forms (orientations, strategies, technologies) and modes (citizens, strangers, outsiders, aliens) of being political by bringing into being new actors as activist citizens (that is, claimants of rights) through creating or transforming sites and stretching scales." (Isin: 2009: 383). Unlike Balibar, who makes no such similar strong distinctions, Isin designates a clear line of distinction between the formal realization of abstract categories of citizenship enforced by the nation-states and 'acts of citizenship' which break up or introduce a caesura in these categories themselves. The former can easily be subsumed under the term 'active citizens' to designate more or less successful participation in regular or irregular 'scripted' activities (voting, taxpaying, enlisting, etc.) which in no way alter the inner structure of citizenship – instead of questioning it, ‘active citizens’ simply follow it. However, opposite these ‘scripted’ events lies the ‘activist citizenship’ or the concrete acts of what Isin calls ‘activist citizens’. They do not have to be possessors of any tangible citizenship but can, in fact, *act* or *perform* in the name of citizenship as an instituted subject-position. Thus, they seek or induce transformations in their non- or mis-recognized status and, in turn, in the content of citizenship itself, remove it from its abstractness. The prime example for this would be the *sans-papiers* in France who, despite being illegalized and undergoing police roundups, various political attacks and no legal recognition for long periods of time, were able to influence the state to alter its citizenship so as to accept their role in French society. But, how we interpret their acts rests on our understanding of citizenship. Contrary to their description by the public authorities, Balibar described them as “privileged moments in the development of *active citizenship* (or, if you prefer, direct participation in *public affairs*) without which there exists no polity, but only a state form cut off from society and petrified in its own abstraction.” (Balibar: 2004: 48) Isin, on the other hand, described them not as active citizens but as *activist citizens* – those who carried out *acts of citizenship par excellence.* According to him, Balibar neglects that the *sans-papiers* were in no way following ‘scripted’ lines of active citizenship, but were in fact altering the fiber of citizenship itself: “Thus, an analysis of ‘activist citizens’ over an analysis of ‘active citizens’ is critical to the framework developed here. By contrast to active citizens who act out already written scripts such as voting, taxpaying and enlisting, activist citizens engage in writing scripts and creating the scene.” (Isin: 2009: 381).

From these contrasted positions we see how political content easily escapes the notion of ‘active citizen’ the very moment the formality of the conception of citizenship is questioned. However, while Isin is right in presenting citizenship as not solely a membership in any given state, but as an inherently dynamic category as well, it seems that his account could be complemented by emphasizing the *causality* behind the dynamics of its changes and transformations. According to him, there were simply several times when an ‘unnamed figure’ had ‘entered history’ and ‘challenged citizenship’, its scales and sites. For example, in ancient Greece the *polis* was a new site of politics, and in Roman times, although its scale grew, citizenship was still mediated *through* the city; and while the former had its actor-citizen in the figure of a propertied male warrior, for the latter it was “but a peaceful merchant and artisan of the medieval commune”. (Isin: 2009: 373). Likewise, in the case of the *sans-papiers* and similar ‘activist citizens’, there is a new ‘unsettling figure’ for which we use different categories: „foreigner, migrant, irregular migrant, illegal alien, immigrant, wanderer, refugee, émigré, exile, nomad, sojourner and many more that attempt to fix it.“ (Isin: 2009:

367). Although this figure cannot be subsumed under any one of these names, all of them do challenge the notion of citizenship.

However, what can be added to these descriptions is an emphasis on the *causality:* of how and why these transformations of citizenship happen. For example, we might ask what distinguishes these appearances of actor-citizens: what separates them, both historically and conceptually? It cannot be that they simply 'appeared in history' *ex nihilo* or that the various configurations of citizenship are only contingently linked to one another. Also, different actors may be similarly described but ultimately belonging to different configurations (a propertied warrior is not the same as a propertied *burgher*). And, as we have seen is often the case with the 'activist' heritage, Isin's conception of 'activist citizenship' emphasizes the dynamics of change while downplaying the differences between the myriad acts of citizenship which ultimately end up as various versions of 'being' and 'becoming political'. And, as Isin himself writes elsewhere: "Becoming political can perhaps be defined as acts of transfiguration and transvaluation by noncitizens. In the end, we may owe the existence of politics not to citizens, but to strangers, outsiders, and aliens." (Isin: 1992: 282)

This is why taking into account the notion of capitalism as an underlying system proves to have a considerable conceptual significance: it allows us to distinguish between the various modes of 'being' and 'becoming political' and between the histories and functions of its different categories, which may or may not belong to it (like property, labor, etc. – categories which were often taken to be ahistorical, not least in classical economics). In fact, one might argue that the notion of capitalism represents a conceptual requirement of any description of the concrete dynamics of modern citizenship: its qualitative transformations over time and how they differ from past configurations of citizenship. For one, precisely because it does not exhaust itself *in citizenship* but *underlies it*, it helps us highlight how different citizenship/non-citizenship relations function, how they relate to concrete social actors and *vice versa*. Examples might include what Balibar termed the 'non-citizenship' of women: without any notion of capitalism it would be impossible to understand how the space of private relations and 'non-citizenship' underwent changes before women could be integrated into the public space and political domain (Balibar: 1988: 724). Inversely, how actors influenced the qualitative changes of citizenship can be seen in the transformation that T. H. Marshall claims citizenship underwent when collective workers' agreements were recognized, transcending the sphere of individual civil rights (Marshall: 2009: 156). As Balibar also writes, it is crucial to account for the institutional 'dialectic' between "formal autonomy and actual subjection" – how the changes in citizenship "passed through representative institutions and administrative (unions and parties and public arbitrations and social security and public conventions). Thus the development of rights is paid for by the development of the state." (Balibar: 1988: 725) Ultimately, to distinguish between the role of different social functions and categories present in different historical formations (such as property, money, etc. – which were used to distinguish between the status of different citizens since ancient times) one has to contend that at least some notion of an underlying system is needed.

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Coming back to the marriage between the liberal conception of citizenship and the notion of capitalism, one may conclude that instead of separating citizenship from any underlying system of socio-economic dynamics – as is perhaps inherent in the notion of 'active citizen' – it can be said that it is precisely this connection which holds considerable critical potential; ultimately, it is this connection that defines the boundaries of what an 'active citizen' might at all be. This is why we have argued that the conceptual presence of the notion of capitalism is needed to distinguish between those forms of engagement which do in fact *question* the underlying causes of various forms of social inequality, and others which claim to do so, but ultimately end up following what Isin termed as 'scripted events'. In this sense, we can say that the purely *political* activism which does not question the separation between the economic and the political, also ends up following its own logic of 'scripted events' (like ephemeral protests, petitions, the hyper-production of forum discussions, etc.). Whether they question the social order (as in 'activism'/'actionism') without seeking its structural alteration or wish to enhance it and make it work better (as in 'active citizenship'), both forms of engagement follow the same logic of *not engaging* with the very *causes* of social inequalities beyond the realm of the political. Thus it is not enough to draw the line of distinction between forms of engagement based on purely political lines (as some do in the case of 'civic' *versus* 'political' participation)[3]; in doing so one ends up negating the separation between the political and economic in capitalism and reducing the scope and limits of engagement itself. And in the end, without acknowledging such a separation, it is easy to forget that what counts is not the distinction between active/passive citizenship, but its expansion to include what has, as a rule, been excluded from it – the promise of social welfare and economic democracy.

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[3] For example, between civic participation in the sense of "nonremunerative, publicly spirited collective action that is not motivated by the desire to affect public policy" and political participation in the sense to do so (Campbell: 2004), available at: http://citation.allacademic.com//meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/0/8/2/6/0/pages82606/p82606-8.php

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## Aleksandar Matković

### Aktivizam i kapitalizam: o oblicima angažmana

**Apstrakt**

Namera ovog kratkog eseja je da pruži nacrt kritičke refleksije o pojmu aktivizma i da skrene pažnju na potrebu da se pravi razlika između različitih oblika angažmana u savremenim neoliberalnim društvima. Rad trasira istoriju pojma „aktivizam“ i tvrdi da je ona išla ruku pod ruku sa redukcijom heterogene političke aktivnosti na neposrednu generičku akciju. Radi kontriranja takvoj redukciji, članak se oslanja na rad Elen Meksins Vud i njenu kritičku istoriju razvoja liberalne koncepcije građanstva. U krajnjem, tvrdiće se da je konceptualni značaj pojma kapitalizma ključan radi razlikovanja različitih formi i figura političke aktivnosti – od „aktiviste“ i „aktivnog građanina“ do onoga što je Isin Engin nazvao „aktivističkim državljanstvom“.

**Ključne reči**: aktivno građanstvo, aktivizam, Elen Meksins Vud, Engin Isin, kapitalizam

UDK: 304.5
DOI: 10.2298/FID1602398P
Original scientific article
Received: 18.3.2016 — Accepted: 3.4.2016

FILOZOFIJA I DRUŠTVO XXVII (2), 2016.

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# Pragmatic Epistemology and the Community of Engaged Actors

**Abstract** In this paper I will explore the relation between engagement and social science. I will try to argue that positivist epistemology found in the early days of social sciences still greatly influences our understanding of social engagement. In the first part of the paper, I will analyze the epistemology of social sciences advocated by Fourier and Saint-Simon and try to show that, for them, scientific method was primarily the means for taming social change, as well as projecting private desires and plans onto the public sphere. In the second part, I will offer an alternative account of social engagement using the epistemic role of the community found in pragmatism.

**Keywords**: pragmatism, social science, social engagement, epistemology

## Introduction

Social engagement is one of those notions that usually appears easy to apprehend and define, but which becomes strangely elusive as soon as we try to come up with a precise definition of the term. It seems that the main reason why ‘engagement’ remains so intangible is to be found in its somewhat strange ability to bring closer together relatively different theoretical contexts. Indeed, this notion brings a promise of overcoming the enduring distinctions between intellectuals and ‘the public’ (see Pudar Draško in this volume), theory and practice (see Zaharijević in this volume), the ‘abstract’ and the ‘concrete’. However, by the same token, one could argue that this notion fosters inherent tensions that limit its use in theoretical investigation.

Moreover, ‘to be social’ *and* ‘to be engaged’ only seems to make the whole endeavor of understanding engagement even more complex. For instance, even superficial theoretical insight into ‘social engagement’ should somehow explain the fact that, as an engaged social group, we act upon concrete social practices with the idea of (radically) changing our social environment. On the other hand, in order to act as an organized social group, we also need to rely on various kinds of social conventions (promises must be kept, we perhaps need technology to communicate efficiently, etc.). In that sense, one could claim that social engagement potentially disrupts or changes some social relationships *only if* it maintains others successfully. The importance of stable conventions also has epistemological implications.

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Namely, one could maintain that the scientific method of social sciences is a specific type of convention which gives the social scientist a reliable knowledge about 'what is to be done' in a given situation. Here we run into a couple of very important questions for our investigation: can we claim that, within a group of 'socially engaged individuals', the status of those individuals who are familiar with the scientific method is (epistemologically) privileged? Also, must every kind of social engagement that advocates relatively radical social change involve this sort of entitlement?

The aim of this paper is to explore the relation between collectively engaged action and the epistemology of social sciences. The scope of this problem is enormous. Hence, it is inevitable that every insight we intend to provide will remain sketchy and fragmented. Still, we will try to show that the elusive nature of engagement is to a great degree the result of a specific kind of epistemological approach in social sciences. As we shall see in the first section, the pioneers of social sciences believed that they could construe a dependable and verifiable method of resolving and overcoming concrete public problems. These kind of ideas marked the beginning of the positivistic discourse in social sciences which entails that the social scientist is able to 'engage' such complex phenomena ranging from bipolar disorder to capitalism, primarily because he follows some variety of realist epistemology that gives him a rather privileged status in resolving specific social issues.

In 20th century's social theory, however, there were numerous efforts to abolish this kind of epistemological privilege. Wittgenstein, Foucault, Garfinkel, Latour and many other prominent theorists quite solidly argued that it is illusory to think that there could ever be any kind of epistemological insight that is outside the 'noise' of history, everyday language and relations of power. Unfortunately, many of the those authors also believed that precisely *because* our epistemology is so immersed in social interactions and history, our ability to change society must remain rather limited. In this paper we will argue that pragmatism gives us a way to maintain a critical stance towards privileged (metaphysical) epistemological positions in science, while at the same time it also tries to provide a hope for the possibility of a social change. This is why in the second section we investigate the role that the *community* plays in the pragmatic account of post-metaphysical social engagement.

## The birth of social science and the certainty of social change

When someone is 'getting involved' with some specific social problem, we tend to suppose that she or he must have some sort of competence or deeper insight into the issue at hand. It seems perfectly reasonable to think that in order to change this part of social reality, we first need to 'properly' know various aspects of our environment. It might also be perfectly reasonable to look for the knowledge needed for our engagement among the theories taught at the social sciences departments. However, even if we agree with this positivistic outlook, it would be difficult to deny the fact that social action and social change also tend to have a sporadic and contingent character. In that sense, we could be cynical and say that there has not been a modern revolution or crisis that did not take the majority of social scientists almost completely by surprise.[1] Therefore, in spite of the general popularity of the idea that we must have 'proper' scientific knowledge if we are to be 'certain' that specific social change will occur, it also seems reasonable that we somehow take into account the *contingency* of collective action. This approach is not compatible with any kind of 'algorithmic' thinking about social reality. It seems that as soon as we try to frame the epistemological 'nature' of engagement, we immediately face the question whether the knowledge produced by social sciences is capable of *inducing* social change (which is ultimately the aim of any kind of social engagement).

The idea that social sciences could somehow foster knowledge that brings real, palpable social change becomes less intuitive if we take into account the history of social sciences. Namely, the advent of the French Revolution played a crucial role in the formation of social sciences. Some intellectuals took this major event and the tide of social change that followed as a beacon of hope, while for others it became synonymous with the grave danger of the future (Wallerstein 1991). Nonetheless, for all early classics of social sciences the Revolution had an 'unbearable element' of surprise. This was taken as an argument that conventional philosophy was not up to the task of explaining social problems. Hence, this new kind of thinkers claimed that in order to make 'the behavior of Men' (Fourier 1971: 156) more predictable, we first need to embrace new scientific methodology. In this regard the so-called Utopian Socialists are particularly illustrative. For example, Charles Fourier is almost vehement in his accusation of traditional philosophy:

> "What is the error committed by the philosophers? What branch of learning have they failed to investigate? There are several, and notably the branch with which they claim to have been particularly concerned: I mean the study of Man. Although they claim to have exhausted the subject, they know absolutely nothing about it".
>
> Fourier 1971: 156

The main goal of Fourier's attack is to point out how "Old Philosophy" is plagued with uncertainty and that – if we wish to move away from a gradual reform to make a *radical* leap in moral and political thinking – a precise method of calculating our destiny is more than necessary:

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[1] For instance, in 1989 there was a whole army of so-called Sovietologists, who were completely taken by surprise when the Berlin Wall fell. More recently, in 2007 the majority of prominent economists failed to foresee the collapse of the financial market.

> “So long as the human mind has not discovered *the calculus of the social destinies* … we must remain in a state of political cretinism. Our progress in a few of the natural sciences… is useless, for it has not provided us with a remedy for any of man’s ills. The accomplishments of these sciences only serve to emphasize the confusion of social thought which has done nothing to promote human happiness and which, after thirty centuries of *correctives* and *reforms*, has left all social evils as deeply rooted as ever”
> Fourier 1971: 157 [emphasis added]

According to Fourier, three thousand years of metaphysical philosophy has amounted to nothing more than confusion which was useless in the face of real problems, problems that evidently demand our scientific engagement if we wish to avoid being ‘political cretins’ who just find ourselves one day in the midst of a Revolution.

Saint-Simon has a very similar argument. For him, the social scientist must tackle social issues directly[2] – especially in dire times of crisis, such as Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars “when Europe is slaying itself” (in: Durkheim 2009: 61). Unsurprisingly, Saint-Simon thinks that in attaining some desirable social outcome we should rely exclusively on the method of social science(s). The early pioneer of social sciences informs us that: “the knowledge of man is the single thing that can lead to the *discovery of the means of reconciling peoples’ interests*…” (in Durkheim 2009: 61 [emphasis added]).

One of the stories every freshman in social sciences learns during his/her first lessons is that social sciences seek to know the relations between groups and individuals only for the sake of knowledge itself. Evidently, this was not the case for its early pioneers such as Fourier and Saint-Simon, since they thought that social sciences were primarily the means for taming social change through the use of rational ‘calculable methods’. It is therefore important to understand that it was precisely this political and moral promise of predictable change – rather than a development of some reliable method – which produced the privileged epistemological position for the social scientist as a new form of intellectual avant-garde.

But the discovery of this ‘precise’ scientific method of governing our public actions had one more interesting consequence. The projections of future made by this new class of avant-garde intellectuals were not just wishful thinking, since there was finally a method of settling debates (‘reconciling peoples’ interests’ as Saint-Simon calls it) about different goals and different practical actions for achieving them. In that sense, the deepest private desires could be translated into public values and all in the name of scientific progress. One could therefore argue that the early social sciences 'bore the mark of the 19th century', because this type of understanding of change, in which private desires must shape the public, is in fact very compatible with the Romantic imperative of (political) imagination (Gordon 1993). Moreover, projections that were made possible by social sciences paved the way for a new scientific twist on the Romantic ideas of self-expression and self-creation (Gordon 1993).

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[2] Unlike Fourier, Saint-Simon is not as dismissive in regard to conventional philosophy. According to him, we must have new social science (which he calls social psychology) in order to pursue any kind of abstract philosophical debate about moral and knowledge (Durkheim 2009: 67).

It is quite easy to highlight the shortcomings and the general naivety of these first attempts to formulate social sciences. The 'real classics' of social sciences like Durkheim, Marx, Boas, Tarde, Weber, Lévi-Strauss and others of course developed much more complex theoretical systems which, if anything, showed how difficult it was to develop Fourier's 'calculus of destinies'. However, even these sophisticated theories shared some of the premises of Fourier's and Saint-Simon's work: 1) we have at our disposal a method which has the ability to discover the truth about (social) experience and to consequently settle differences about practical issues at hand, and for good; 2) this method opens up the possibility to project our private desires and plans onto the public sphere in order to enable us to *engage it* and (together with others) change it.[3]

## Epistemological Relevance of the Community in Classical Pragmatism

Of course, there are many ways to criticize the underlying combination of positivism and romanticism found in the early versions of social sciences. Some of the most prominent authors in the second half of the 19th century made their names by criticizing the idea that the 'sciences of Man' could somehow rise above the society itself, and take a 'God's View' which would enable scientists to direct issues of the ordinary, everyday life. In that sense, we could justifiably use a variety of notions for our aims: Foucault's episteme, Kuhn's paradigm, Goffman's frame or Latour's network. Undoubtedly, all of these conceptions could easily be used to reformulate a well-known criticism according to which scientific investigation depends upon particular 'mundane' social conditions and/or power relations. Evan though the heuristic value of these authors is unquestionable, I focus here on the contributions of pragmatism. There are several reasons for this. First, as we shall see, the pragmatists remain critical of any aspiration to 'God's View'. But, unlike the aforementioned authors, pragmatists believe that social scientists, if they focused on concrete social issues, could still (*together* with the public [Dewey

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[3] Marx neatly summarizes this point in his third Thesis on Feuerbach: " …changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change [*Selbstveränderung*] can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice" (Marx, internet)

1954]) generate social change that would create a more just world. This is an important feature of pragmatism that Rorty has rightly named 'social hope' (Rorty 1982: 191–195). Second, pragmatists were very critical of any kind of privileged epistemology. They 'secularized' every mode of theoretical thinking, claiming that our ability to attain truth has nothing to do with Reason, but rather that theory is deeply linked to our ability to *communicate* with other persons in our *community*.

This focus on social change or on practice within pragmatist epistemology was already discernible in Peirce's formulation of the pragmatist maxim:

> "Consider the *practical effects of the objects of your conception*. Then, your conception of those effects is the *whole* of your conception of the object."
> Peirce 2011: 31[emphasis added]

As we can see, practice plays a pivotal role in pragmatism. However, it is too often overlooked that Peirce's pragmatic epistemology also stressed the importance of the *community*, which is paramount because our conception of practical effects must be affected to some degree by our relation with others. It is perhaps also worth noticing that Peirce's insistence that we need to consider the effects of a conception is just another way of saying that we *project* future outcomes when trying to understand a notion.

William James further secularized our conception of truth and claimed that truth was in fact just another variety of the good. Hence, James is even more willing to acknowledge the communal aspects of epistemology. Truths belong to the sphere of the good *because* they are 'made' among and together with peers. This in effect means that they are made through agreement that leads "…to consistency, stability and flowing human intercourse" and on the other hand leads "…away from eccentricity and isolation…" (James 2005: 31).

Finally, John Dewey took perhaps the most radical step by positing pragmatism in a wider historical context. Namely, for Dewey the emergence of the scientific method was not only an important event in the history of ideas, but also an event with far-reaching social and political implications. The biggest innovation that modern science brought was the practice of experiment, which, according to Dewey, blurred the distinction between theory and practice. Namely, in experiments we turn experience into data with the sole purpose of testing potential interactions between different parts of experience which could not be perceived otherwise. Dewey argues that the focus on interaction means that scientific inquiry does not have any kind of ultimate metaphysical goal: experimental scientific knowledge engages with the concrete problem – which is relatable to our everyday life – that we solve using abstract notions in order to make our environment more receptive to human desires and purposes. Dewey summarizes this position in his *Quest for Certainty:*

> [Science] is interested in the mechanism of occurrences instead of in final causes. In dealing with the proximate instead of with the ultimate, knowledge deals with the world in which we live, the world which is experienced, instead of attempting through the intellect to escape to a higher realm. Experimental knowledge is a mode of doing, and like all doing takes place at a time, in a place, and under specifiable conditions in connection with a definite problem.
>
> Dewey 1929:102

Dewey's account of knowledge as a form of action entails that science – and especially social sciences – has a moral duty to enrich the ordinary world which we inhabit. This enrichment can only be attained together in a community that values communication, in a community which is not on the lookout for the Ultimate Realm, but rather nurtures a more open-ended, experimental, mode of (self)reflexivity. Therefore, in *Reconstruction in Philosophy* Dewey claims that

> "Investigation has become a dominant life occupation for some persons... But these persons represent a social division of labor; and their specialization can be trusted only when such persons are in unobstructed co-operation with other social occupations, sensitive to others' problem and transmitting results to them for wider application in action."
>
> Dewey 1948: 147

As we can see, for Dewey there is something untrustworthy and treacherous in the 'ideal' of the socially aloof scientist, since, according to him, the sensitiveness for the needs of others is the only way to guarantee objective inquiry (Dewey 1948: 148). This means that in Dewey's pragmatism the role of the public is not a passive one. Unlike Fourier and Saint-Simon, pragmatists – and especially Dewey – maintain that the social scientist cannot project anymore his or her private desires onto the public simply because in his or her engagement they follow some 'methodological procedures'. In Deweyian terms, the point is rather to use scientific methodology with the purpose of making our collective desires more intelligent (Dewey 1957). In that sense we might say that pragmatists drop the idea of the Scientist who always engages his environment as an individual, and argue instead that engagement can only be collective.

## Instead of Conclusion: The Dangers of Relativism?

As soon as we start speaking about pragmatism claiming that the community plays a key role in the formation of any kind of 'epistemic insight', we can expect the unavoidable accusation of relativism. After all, the somewhat dominant view holds that 'objectivity' is attained in a purely abstract manner (i.e. if a proposition satisfies a specific truth condition), that is, *without* the influence of the (wider) community. Therefore, to many it may seem that pragmatic epistemology negates objectivity as the key notion of modern science. Given the scope of this paper, we will not delve into a never-ending debate on relativism, but it is still important to stress that the pragmatic conceptualization of the community does not present a real threat to objective truth. Namely, according to pragmatists, objective truth cannot be derived from some eternal Faculty or Principle that we as humans have in our possession, but is rather a product of communication and debate about a concrete problem. In other words, pragmatists think that objectivity is a communally generated practice of investigation which is inherently susceptible to change. And how this change occurs is important for understanding the pragmatic account of engagement.

If we follow the cues of contemporary pragmatists such as Kuhn (Kuhn 2012) and Feyerabend (Feyerabend 2010), when it comes to changing objectively valid truth, the change may occur in two different ways. The first way is the more conventional one in which, in our research practice, we encounter a particular problem that could be resolved using the current state of scientific vocabularies that we, as a *community of peers*, have at our disposal. In other words, in this case we can at best only slightly *modify* our scientific vocabularies. However, other types of problems are so 'disruptive' that they cannot be resolved easily by using any of the current vocabularies, and in order to resolve them completely new meanings must be *invented*.

This *collective* modification and invention of meaning can be applied to the institutional and social realm. If we make this theoretical move, we might understand the contemporary trouble with engagement a little better. As *a community of peers* engaged in understanding and resolving a particular social issue, we, must, to use Dewey's terms, co-operate 'with other social occupations' and '*transmit*' our results to the public in order for our insight to have a 'wider application in action'. Here we evidently have a more conventional case of engagement in which a specialized vocabulary (i.e. scientific method) is used to enrich the public knowledge which in turn enables a particular social change. On the other hand, if we wish to change some larger part of institutional reality, we need to create new meanings and potentially new institutions. This calls for a more open understanding of community. Namely, the collective *invention* of institutions cannot be a product of 'transmission' between peers and the wider public simply because there are no intersubjectivly shared vocabularies that would provide this kind of transmission.[4] This means that the engaged actors who wish to push for a more radical change must make their claims *maximally interpretable* to others. However, in order to do so they must be willing to drop *every* type of vocabulary they have mastered over time – especially the ones that are highly specialized (i.e. scientific method). We could therefore make a final claim that radical engagement cannot have a method other than a maximally open dialog with the public.

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[4] This is why Raymond Geuss (2014: 41) holds that when we are trying to create new forms of living, we must embrace vagueness, since much of what we take to be clear seems that way only because repressive social forces impose restrictive, determinate forms on our behavior and on our modes of thinking and imagining (ibid: 44).

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## Pragmatička epistemologija i zajednica angažovanih delatnika

### Apstrakt

U ovom radu ćemo istraživati vezu između angažmana i društvene nauke. Tvrdićemo da pozitivistička epistemologija iz rane faze razvoja društvenih nauka i dalje u velikoj meri utiče na naše razumevanje društvenog angažmana. U prvom delu rada, analiziraćemo epistemologiju društvenih nauka koju su zagovarali Furije i Sen Simon kako bismo pokazali da je za njih naučni metod pre svega predstavljao sredstvo za usmerenje društvene promene i projekciju privatnih želja i planova na javnu sferu. U drugom delu rada ćemo ponuditi alternativno obrazloženje društvenog angažmana služeći se epistemičkom ulogom zajednice koju nalazimo u pragmatizmu.

**Ključne reči**: pragmatizam, društvena nauka, društveni angažman, epistemologija

UDK: 316.2
DOI: 10.2298/FID1602407P
Original scientific article
Received: 19.3.2016 — Accepted: 3.4.2016

FILOZOFIJA I DRUŠTVO XXVII (2), 2016.

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# *Between the Critical and the Engaged*: On the Importance of Studying Symbolic Aspects of the Reproduction of Social Order

**Abstract** Late 20th century developments in social sciences and humanities have placed particular focus on the symbolic aspects of reproduction of social order, stressing the importance of discursive work in the process. It has become widely accepted that discourse is profoundly embedded in society and culture, and hence, closely related also to all forms of power and social inequality. Therefore, it rightfully assumes a central position among the research objects of contemporary social sciences. The aim of this article is to critically examine the impact of the interpretive turn on the study of culture and symbolic registers of society. The analysis focuses on three approaches to the study of discourse, culture and society: critical discourse analysis, Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of culture and Jeffrey Alexander's strong program in cultural sociology. These approaches are further analyzed according to their position within Burawoy's division of sociological labor, particularly between critical and public (engaged) sociology. Finally, the author suggests that engagement in detailed reconstructions of discursive manifestations of power, symbolic struggles and/or discursive codes in a society can provide valuable insight that could open up space for social engagement. However, in order to fully grasp the importance of symbolic aspects for the everyday reproduction of social order, the focus of analysis must also be placed on the role cultural traits and practices (understood as a discursive resources like any other) play in constructing stratificational categories, identities and distinctions, masking the very roots of inequalities that created the perceived cultural differences in the first place.

**Keywords**: discourse, culture, symbolic order, interpretive turn, critical sociology, public sociology

It has become common to speak of various 'turns' that have shaped contemporary paradigms in social sciences and humanities. In significant parts of these intellectual fields, the late 20th century developments have placed particular focus on the symbolic aspects of (re)production of social order, stressing the importance of discursive work in the process. Discourse has become frequently recognized as closely related to power and viewed as a site of meaningful social differences, of conflicts and struggles that result in numerous social-structural effects, and the symbolic sphere of society has been understood as a key to approaching social reality in many disciplines (Blommaert 2005, van Dijk 2007). In short, "the critical examination of the discursive realms of human existence has become a central matter of interest in the contemporary social sciences" (Susen 2015: 65).

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More broadly, while ‘culture’ (here viewed as the matter of all things symbolic) provides the very grounds for human communication and interaction and shapes social actors’ understanding of reality; it can also be understood as a source of domination, enabling the mechanisms of support in establishing and maintaining social hierarchies and social order itself (Swartz 1997). In line with the body of work on social classifications and symbolic boundaries (most notably: Bourdieu 1984, Lamont 1992), I am suggesting that the same ‘culture’, both in terms of a specific discursive code (the language of cultural evaluation and exclusion) and as discursive treatment of actual cultural practices (such as cultural consumption, symbolic affiliation, taste, or engagement with the so-called high culture) should be the object of rigorous investigation in critical social science.

The aim of this article is to critically examine the impact of the interpretive turn on the study of reproduction of social order in its symbolic register and in the cultural field. The analysis will focus on the three approaches[1] to the study of discourse, culture and society: critical discourse analysis, Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology of culture and Jeffrey Alexander’s strong program in cultural sociology. Additionally, I claim that all three approaches assume certain positions in the field of scientific endeavors between the critical and the engaged; therefore the second goal of this paper is to examine how each approach addresses the notions of social critique and public engagement according to their theoretical frameworks and research agendas.

The question that remains amongst the crucial ones of 21st century sociology is the one that asks all involved in the discipline whether they believe sociology should keep far away from the interest-laden and ideological fiber of the ‘ordinary world’ beyond the ivory tower; or is it, on the contrary, the duty of sociologists (already inscribed in the roots of the discipline) to become publicly involved and offer their unique specialist knowledge to all members of society, thus contributing to the betterment of society and abolishing of social injustice (Spasić 2012: 15, see also Prodanović in this volume). Michael Burawoy’s American Sociological Association presidential address, adapted and published in his influential 2005 text *For Public Sociology,* provoked considerable attention and academic debate, forcing many sociologists all over the world to rethink the implications of their work. “Over the last half century”, Burawoy writes “the political center of gravity of sociology has moved in a critical direction while the world it studies has moved in the opposite direction” (Burawoy 2005: 7). Burawoy places an open call for *public sociology*, both the *traditional* and *organic* public sociology. The former is represented, for example, by sociologists who write in the opinion pages of newspapers and comment on matters of public importance, or in a public debate fueled by a sociological book. For its part, organic public sociology is one that directly engages in a dialogue and, more importantly, in a process of mutual education with various *publics* and *counterpublics* (labor movement, neighborhood associations, communities of faith, immigrant rights groups etc.). On the other hand, the role of *critical sociology* in his view is to examine the foundations of the research programs of professional sociology, to make it aware of its biases and blind spots, and to promote new research programs built on alternative foundations[2]. Critical sociology, metaphorically speaking, should be the conscience of professional sociology. Both critical and public sociology produce reflexive knowledge, interrogating the value premises of society as well as of the sociological profession itself (Burawoy 2005: 7–11). In addition to Burawoy’s analytical scheme, critical sociology can also be understood as a study of power, sociological practice of social critique, of unmasking and debunking the hidden, taken-for-granted power relations shaping social life (Swartz 2003: 797). Having this distinction in mind, we will now turn to the three approaches to study of culture and symbolic practices, each being critical and engaged in its own particular way.

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[1] The choice of those three approaches is guided by the theoretical and methodological closeness to the central subject of this article – the symbolic aspects of social reality, but the list is certainly not exhaustive. For example, the absence of British cultural studies is quite apparent. All the more so given that the rise and rapid expansion of cultural studies almost resulted in sociology losing its analytical monopoly over one of its prime objects of study – culture. A decade ago, Kurasawa argued that in certain English-speaking intellectual environments (the UK, Australia, Canada) “sociology could become a subfield of its rebellious stepchild, which appears to be more in tune with the contemporary preoccupations and interests of academic and lay audiences alike” (Kurasawa 2004: 53–54). However, the choice was placed on critical discourse analysis instead, as it stresses the discursive aspect of the subject at interest more strongly (Blommaert 2005: 23).

## Culture as powerful symbolic practice: the three approaches to discourse, culture and society

### I Critical discourse analysis: the special guest appearance

Before turning to the rivalry of Bourdieu’s and Alexander’s sociological takes on studying the symbolic dimensions of social order, in this part of the paper I will examine one of the key gestures towards the development of critical approaches to language, culture, and society outside sociology – critical discourse analysis (CDA). Critical discourse analysis presents an interdisciplinary field gravitating around several distinguishable schools guided by a common interest in de-mystifying ideologies and power through the systematic investigation of semiotic data. In the tradition of CDA, discourse has been conceptualized as socially constitutive, but at a same time socially conditioned and constituted. CDA analyzes discourse as a form of social practice, and considers *the context of language use* crucial. This implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and situations, institutions and social structures which frame it (Fairclough and Wodak 1997). The overall impact of discourse analysis on social research methodology may be described as *the interpretive turn*, the systematic exploration of the meaning-laden dimensions of social life, driven by the imperative that "the hermeneutically oriented enquiry into social practices is one of the key tasks of critical social science" (Susen 2015: 64).

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[2] These roles are set according to Burawoy’s division of sociological labor into four analytically distinguishable sociologies: professional, critical, policy and public sociology.

The role of critical discourse analysis in establishing the legitimacy of a linguistically oriented discourse analysis firmly anchored in social reality and driven by a deep interest in various forms of social inequality was groundbreaking. CDA was founded on the premises that linguistic analysis can, and indeed should, provide valuable additional perspective for the existing scientific approaches to social critique (Blommaert 2005: 6, 22). Researchers in CDA strive towards uncovering powerful and discriminatory ways in which social structure constitutes and is constituted by discourse patterns and in this cross-section they situate the critical dimension of their work. However, as is often claimed among the CDA scholars, it is not enough to uncover the social dimensions of language use, these dimensions should become the legitimate objects of moral and political evaluation, and their analysis should have effects in society: empowering the powerless, giving voices to the voiceless, exposing power abuse, and mobilizing people to remedy social wrongs (Blommaert 2005: 25).

Power (more precisely, linguistic manifestations of power) is the central theme of CDA and researchers are interested in the way discourse (re) produces social domination. Main areas of CDA inquiry therefore include political and institutional discourse, language in media, ideology, racism, discourse on immigration and similar topics. However, the objects under investigation do not have to be 'negative' or exceptionally 'serious' social or political events or social texts, in fact, any social phenomenon can be challenged and not taken for granted in the analysis (Wodak and Meier 2009: 2). Having that in mind, it is curious that the role that discursively shaped cultural practices and traits play in constructing stratificational categories, identities and distinctions is rarely investigated in this field. Aside from the shared views on the nature of symbolic order as a site of conflicts and struggles that result in numerous social-structural effects, there is little exchange between CDA and traditions of studying social classifications and symbolic boundaries. What we may term the 'discourses of culture' (language of cultural evaluation and exclusion and discursive treatment of actual cultural practices) are constitutive of symbolic boundaries and therefore frequently used as tools in the symbolic struggles in society. There is no reason why these should not be understood as discursive resources like any other and subjected to critical discourse analysis.

The second weakness of critical discourse analysis is that, although the empowerment of subjects and giving voice to lay actors is one of the central goals of CDA, more often than not there is in fact ‘a problem of voice’ in CDA. This manifests in producing a ‘view from above rather than from below’, as the ordinary actor is pushed out of the analysis and the researcher remains the ultimate referee of meaning. Critical discourse analysis is also not properly equipped to analyze how a text can be read in many ways (Blommaert 2005: 31, 33). This constitutes a problem for an approach claiming to be *not only critical, but also engaged* (and engaged in a double conversation with various publics, in Burawoy’s terms), an issue that critical interpretive research programs often share.

## II Pierre Bourdieu: language, culture and symbolic power

> If there is no science but of the hidden, then the science of society is, per se, critical (…) the hidden is, in this case, a secret, and a well-kept one, even when no one is commissioned to keep it, because it contributes to the reproduction of a ‘social order’ based on concealment of the most efficacious mechanisms of its reproduction and thereby serves the interests of those who have a vested interest in the conservation of that order.
>
> Bourdieu and Passeron 1990: 218

In his 2003 article David Swartz discusses how Pierre Bourdieu became a leading public intellectual in the later part of his career, a role that contrasts largely with his many years as a professional and critical sociologist (Swartz 2003). Indeed, for most of his sociological struggle, Bourdieu voiced sharp criticism of certain forms of political activism of intellectuals and stressed the importance of building sociology as a rigorous but critical scientific craft, exempt from external constraints. His political fights then were largely internal to the intellectual field, and against academic bureaucrats and pop sociologists (Gartman 2007: 408). Swartz offers an explanation for the sharp shift in Bourdieu’s strategy, from critical to public sociology, taking into account various factors such as his move from a position of marginal obscurity to one of increasing institutional centrality and public visibility in 1990s, which gave him more symbolic power to fight. Changes within the French intellectual field which undermined the autonomy of the intellectual, together with increasing media orientation of French intellectual life were also important moments that brought about Bourdieu’s political engagement (Swartz 2003: 799–803).

Before he came to assume the role of public intellectual in France during the 1990s, Bourdieu devoted much of his theoretical and empirical research to founding and building upon his critical sociology of symbolic power. In his view, sociology is at its best when it is critical and committed to revealing domination, inequality, violence, socially induced suffering, particularly in social phenomena where it is not immediately visible (such as in 'noble' spheres of education, art, cultural practices and tastes, science) hidden behind various veils of legitimation (Spasić 2012: 18–20). Throughout his work, he was dedicated to exposing the social mechanisms of creation and reproduction of power structures in society, guided by belief that theoretically and empirically founded social critique is the best tool to undermine their legitimacy. For Bourdieu, the sociological endeavor should be *critical* from the beginning and *engaged* only later. That is to say that the very choice of research topic should reflect the researcher's moral and political considerations; in this way the research output could be politically relevant and significant[3] (Swartz 2003: 792–798).

Regardless of the particular research subject, Swartz contends, Bourdieu "always asks one and the same crucial question: how do systems of social hierarchy and domination persist and reproduce themselves from one generation to the next, without much overt resistance, but also without conscious, explicit recognition by their members" (Swartz 1997)? In Bourdieu's view, symbols are the instruments *par excellence* of social integration: the consensus regarding the meaning of the social world contributes substantially to the reproduction of the social order. Due to its significance in the founding of the social order, the symbolic field is always dynamic and figures as the arena for multiple *symbolic struggles*, the struggles over the very definition of the social world (Bourdieu 1991: 166–167). One of the main stakes is the monopoly over official, authorized (and legitimate) naming and classifying, and *symbolic work* is crucial in these struggles. Individual and collective agents wielding this right, control *the production of common sense* and are in a position to "impose as legitimate the principles of construction of social reality most favourable to his or her social being" (Bourdieu 2000: 187). Also, while the political field is the primary ground where the "dominant principle of domination" is decided, the struggles do not remain limited to the area explicitly marked as political: all cultural symbols and practices embody interests and serve to enhance social inequalities (Swartz 1997: 6). Therefore, in Bourdieu's view, if sociology remains at the level of the objective establishment of classes and class relations, measuring exclusively 'hard' variables, it misses an essential part of the picture – the symbolic work that gives domination the appearance of legitimacy[4].

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[3] This, in turn, poses a threat to critical sociology as it often looks for domination and domination is what it finds (Spasić 2012: 21).

[4] Despite his insistence on the analysis of the symbolic work in the constitution and reproduction of social order, as well as on the need to take the subjective representations of social agents into sociological account, Bourdieu's approach might not be the

To conclude, Bourdieu the critical sociologist, sees as his duty to expose the symbolic mechanisms of reproduction of social order in order to break the spell of misrecognition: "if people understand the ways in which cultural capital serves as a disinterested cover for the reproduction of economic interests, then the system of inequalities will stand exposed to the informed and concerted actions of the dominated" (Gartman 2007: 400). For "to change the world", he writes, "one has to change the ways of world-making, that is, the vision of the world and the practical operations by which groups are produced and reproduced" (Bourdieu 1989: 23).

## III Jeffrey Alexander: the strong program in cultural sociology

> Sociology has never allowed culture to speak its name. By contrast, the other arenas of society – whether economics, politics, religion or family – have been thoroughly described, their structures deconstructed and their internal logics articulated, even as analysts have connected such structures to forces 'outside'. This has not been the case for culture. It has been reduced to ideology or to values, and its contents have largely been read off the architecture of other structures, as a reflection or an inverted mirror. The ambition of my cultural sociology has been to open up this black box, to provide the internal architecture of social meaning via concepts of code, narrative and symbolic action, so that culture can finally assume its rightful place as equivalent to, and interpenetrated with, other kinds of structuring social force.
> Alexander 2005: 22

Another recently advocated approach which contributes significantly to theorizing culture as symbolic code is the strong program in cultural sociology, devised by Jeffrey Alexander and his associates and presented in his seminal book *The Meanings of Social Life* (Alexander 2003). Cultural sociology can be seen as one of the manifestations of the interpretive turn in social sciences and humanities that has positioned meaning at the heart of social life, and therefore in the center of social inquiry (Kurasawa 2004: 54). As culture's central category is the creation of meaning, Alexander proposes that this is where any adequate analysis of social reality must start. This was not really the case before, he claims, as the history of social sciences has always featured a sociology *of* culture, seeking to explain what created meanings, how structures of culture were formed by other (material) structures, and never *cultural sociology* as he envisions it (Alexander 2003: 5).

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most representative of the interpretive turn. His ambition, in fact, was to overcome what he conceived as an artificial and counterproductive dichotomy of the 'subjectivist' and 'objectivist' modes of knowledge, manifesting in oppositions between positivist and hermeneutic on one side, and empiricist and interpretivist approaches in the social sciences, on the other. He, in turn, proposed their integration into a more general framework, a 'general science of practices' (Bourdieu 1989; see also Swartz 1997: 52–60, Susen 2011: 402).

The starting premise of the program is that culture is one of the distinct, relatively autonomous and irreducible ‘environments’ of human action. Therefore, instead of being treated as a weak, dependent variable, it should be given back its significance and its true share in the shaping of social life. In order to accomplish this, Alexander invites us to refrain from reducing culture to what it is not – to class divisions, economic capital, power distribution, status markers, market mechanisms, or individual psychology. In brief, the ‘relative autonomy’ of culture, sharp analytical uncoupling of culture from social structure, is the first and most important of the three defining characteristics of the strong program. The second is “the commitment to hermeneutically reconstructing social texts in a rich and persuasive way”, or a Geertzian thick description of codes, narratives and symbols that create the webs of social meaning. The third premise entails the need to anchor causality of meaning-making in concrete actors and agencies, through a detail empirical specification of how culture interferes and directs what really happens in society (Alexander and Smith 2003: 12–14).

Some authors have pointed out Alexander’s tendency to prematurely discard other frameworks for the study of culture (sociologies *of* culture), instead of seeking to establish a conversation with them. This particularly applies to *The Meanings of Social Life* where Alexander is looking to establish paradigms, with its manifesto-like opening chapter clearing the field of approaches to culture from other contributors, most notably from Pierre Bourdieu (Kurasawa 2004; Gartman 2007). This should not come as a surprise, since the two antagonists differ both in terms of the foundations of their critique and in the objectives of public engagement of their sociologies.

To begin with the notion of critique, Bourdieu’s approach is critical in the sense of a conflict theory of society, while Alexander’s cultural sociology is critical exactly in Burawoy’s sense of the term, as its primary goal is to promote new research program that addresses the biases and blind spots of professional sociology. In other words, Alexander is critical of critical theories of culture, and his call for the autonomy of culture sometimes arrives at the familiar gate of functionalism’s value consensus. Most importantly, while for Bourdieu the cultural practices are complexly intertwined with the competition for power and material resources, Alexander insists that cultural structures (epitomized in ‘the civil sphere’ as he envisions it) can also provide grounds for critical distance from the social structure and the resources to criticize or even to gain independence from the structures of power and inequality (Gartman 2007: 386, Spasić 2011: 234). In short, Alexander sees the civil sphere as a stronghold of critique, the foundation of critique immanent to social practice, and this is one of the reasons he needs the normative frame of the autonomy of culture.

Thus emerge the differences in their views on public engagement of sociology. Aligning with Bourdieu's position, Gartman states that the biggest weakness of Alexander's approach is in the assumption that political discourse of the American civil sphere is based on a shared set of codes and symbolic structures, employed equally by all (Gartman 2007: 397). Gartman goes on to suggest that Alexander's criticism of Bourdieu's cultural sociology is driven not merely by theoretical concerns in sociology but also by a political interest – his defense of the liberal democratic project. Here we can see how the two rivals diverge not only in the professional and critical dimensions of their sociologies, but also in the matter of the goal of their public engagement. It is Alexander's devotion to democracy which leads him outside academia's ivory tower and motivates him to make contributions to society by theorizing democracy and criticizing its current aberrations, reminding lay actors of democratic promises of emancipation and inclusion (Spasić 2011: 233). For critical sociologists such as Bourdieu, the stage is set in a fundamentally different way. The autonomy of culture from the economy and material structures, in their view, is not, as Alexander claims: "a prerequisite for the proper understanding of social life. It is the accomplishment of social life, the end and aim of associated humanity. To assert that this end has already been achieved, in the here and now, is not only a barrier to good social science; it is also a barrier to the realization of autonomy itself" (Gartman 2007: 411).

## Conclusion

What could be the conclusion from this brief examination of the three approaches, which differ from each other in terms of their research agenda, approach to social critique and public engagement as much as they seem to overlap? It should be noted that I am not interested here in taking a seat at the negotiating table for the custody of study of culture. Whether culture and the symbolic sphere in general are considered an independent or dependent variable, all three approaches elaborate on the importance of studying symbolic structures for social sciences and humanities and it is precisely in this field of enquiry where they place their stakes on the critical and engaged dimension of their approach. This is based on a shared conviction that engagement in detailed reconstruction of discursive manifestations of power, symbolic struggles or discursive codes and cultural structures in a given society can provide valuable insight that could open up space for social engagement. However, I would argue that in order to fully grasp the importance of symbolic aspects for the everyday reproduction of social order, the focus of analysis must also be placed on the role cultural traits and practices (understood as a discursive resources like any others) play in constructing stratificational categories, identities and distinctions, masking the very roots of inequalities that created the perceived cultural differences in the first place. In this respect, Bourdieu's perspective might be complemented with Alexander's dedication to hermeneutically thick description and thus improved in its interpretive power, adding the material power of cultural structures to the picture. The same applies to critical discourse analysis' contribution to the methods of studying the specific instances of discourse, and elaborate research tools for discursive strategies applied in symbolic struggles.

Finally, the problem of voice is also an issue that should be addressed. The question which remains to be solved is the following: How could we engage in organic public sociology and at the same time produce social critique, while insisting on the critical interpretation of symbolic aspects of reproduction of social order? Put differently, is there a way to avoid taking up the privileged epistemological position inside the critical interpretive approach to discourse, society and culture? All the more so given that the subject at hand involves structures of meaning and method of interpretation, which brings into play considerably more risk of pushing ordinary actors out of the analysis and producing top-down social critique. One need not be a critical discourse analyst to see that the position of the author of these pages is very close to Bourdieu's, stressing the importance of being critical, and only after, if possible, engaged. But is it cowardly then to give organic public sociology up too easily and remain within critical sociology, in the safe zone of academia's ivory tower where one is engaged only in conversation with closed texts? The answers to this question go far beyond the scope of this paper. One of the remedies might lie in reflexivity, for to be good at being critical, one must excel at being reflexive. And one must always remember to save place in the analysis for ordinary actors and their voice(s).

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Tamara Petrović Trifunović

## *Između kritičkog i angažovanog*: zašto je važno istraživati simboličke aspekte reprodukcije društvenog poretka

### Apstrakt

Krajem 20. veka dogodile su se značajne promene u društvenim i humanističkim naukama. Simbolički aspekti reprodukcije društvenog poretka, kao i uloga kulturnih praksi i diskurzivnog rada u tom procesu, našli su se u središtu proučavanja u okviru ovih oblasti. Opšte je prihvaćeno shvatanje da je diskurs duboko utkan u društvo i kulturu, te da je stoga i blisko povezan sa svim oblicima moći i društvenih nejednakosti i da ga samim tim treba uvrstiti među centralne istraživačke teme savremenih društvenih nauka. Cilj ovog rada je da kritički preispita uticaj tzv. „interpretativnog obrta“ na proučavanje kulture i simboličkih struktura u društvu. Analiza se fokusira na tri pristupa proučavanju diskursa, kulture i društva: kritičku analizu diskursa, sociologiju kulture Pjera Burdijea i strogi program kulturne sociologije Džefrija Aleksandera. Svaki od datih pristupa se zatim provlači kroz analitičku rešetku zasnovanu na podeli sociološkog rada koju je osmislio Buravoj, pogotovo na distinkciju između kritičkog i angažovanog momenta u sociologiji i društvenim naukama uopšte. Na kraju, autorka smatra da detaljnom rekonstrukcijom simboličkih borbi u društvu možemo steći značajne nalaze o načinu funkcionisanja društvenog sveta, koji posledično mogu da otvore put novim oblicima društvenog angažmana. Međutim, kako bi se u potpunosti razumeo značaj simboličkih aspekata reprodukcije društvenog poretka u svakodnevnom životu, analiza mora da obuhvati i ulogu koju kulturne odlike i prakse igraju u stvaranju stratifikacijskih kategorija, identiteta i distinkcija, prikrivajući ukorenjenost kulturnih razlika u društvenim nejednakostima.

**Ključne reči**: diskurs, kultura, simbolički poredak, interpretativni obrt, kritička sociologija, javna sociologija

UDK: 342.2:343.45 FILOZOFIJA I DRUŠTVO XXVII (2), 2016.
DOI: 10.2298/FID1602419L
Original scientific article
Received: 10.3.2016 — Accepted: 2.4.2016

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# Engagement Against/For Secrecy

**Abstract** This essay discusses engagement *against* state secrecy and engagement *for* secrecy, free from interference. By exploring divisions introduced by state secrecy (through exclusion, subjection and oppression), it identifies the distortions of equal participation in political communities. The author introduces the notion of pata-politics in order to describe the false relation to the secrecy effect. Furthermore, the text examines key issues of today's intelligence studies (such as democratic intelligence oversight and the balance of powers doctrine), with special emphasis on the possible limits of a liberal approach. Additionally, the author elaborates a metacritique of the framework in which the private sphere is one-sidedly described as a victim of wrong interference by state institutions.

**Keywords**: state secrecy, intelligence studies, democratic intelligence oversight, privacy movements, public sphere

This essay discusses political questions that imply numerous perplexing dilemmas, profound paradoxes and maybe even truly unsolvable aporias. Are intelligence agencies and so-called democratic oversight compatible with each other? Does the existence of state (or simply governmental) secrecy necessarily distort the ideals of legitimacy, equal participation, transparency and accountability? Is civic engagement against increased mass surveillance possible and desirable? Even though we will explore essential problems of contemporary societies, it is important to remark that these issues are mostly still a blind spot in political philosophy. Perhaps the reason lies in the fact that this kind of secrecy dwells in the gray area of 'zone of indistinction' (Gilles Deleuze, Giorgio Agamben)[1] where public and infrapolitical interests are so closely intertwined that the difference between them disappears. In other words, it is obvious that the power connected to state secrecy cannot be dominantly personal (or private). On the other hand, this sort of secrecy cannot become entirely public by definition. Thus, it is neither completely personal or private, nor public, that is, belonging to some land of nowhere. These problems exceed the ordinary framework and preconceptions of political philosophy as they cannot be reduced to the standard question of 'legitimate coercion' or to the often-mentioned dilemma of security and freedom. This is precisely what makes them so difficult to engage with.

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[1] On conceptual nuances between indistinction and indiscernibility with regard to Deleuzian and Agambenian philosophy see: Gilson 2007: 106.

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## 1. Does state secrecy divide citizens?

In this part we will discuss some basic political concepts (informed consent, state of exception and political enmity) from the viewpoint of state secrecy. It is often believed that mere existence of such secrecy implies certain inequalities among citizens:

A. Many theories, including that of Jürgen Habermas, suggest that the modern public sphere appeared owing to the refusal of the *arcana imperii* of the absolutist state. Historically, just as the Enlightenment refused the theological-political mysteries of the premodern state, our political predecessors ruled out entirely uncontrollable state secrecy that made truly free public debates impossible. Yet even post-absolutist states distort both discourse and communication in civil societies. State secrecy is by its very nature based on negative communication or potentially manipulated discourse that can make informed consent extremely difficult (as demonstrated by the fake evidence that served as a rationale for the Iraq War). Put differently, there might be an essential tension between public interest in knowing and the state as a discommunicator or self-conscious disinformant. How can the equally accessible discursive space of the public realm exist in a society in which the head of the state claims that "every morning I start my day with an intelligence report"? (Bill Clinton as cited in: Johnson 2007: 5) (Needless to say, the possibility of unchecked propaganda or calculated lying, astroturfing, systematic infiltration of political parties or civil organizations and psychological operations [PSYOP] are not compatible with an open society either.) To sum up, the existence of state secrecy necessarily implies inequality and hierarchy between the selected few who belong to the discretionary space of the 'quiet option' (whose social capital is secrecy itself) and those 'impure' citizens who are not supposed to hear state secrets (and who can be defined by this very lack of access to secrecy). This exclusiveness concerning 'operationally sensitive information' always already precedes the allegedly equal participation in the public sphere. In addition, within this framework, it might seem that citizens' consent to the actions of intelligence is necessarily hypothetical and simulated, or, more precisely, that it is sacrificed in advance. As we will see later, this aspect is one of the most important challenges to democratic oversight.

B. Another kind of inequality is embodied in intelligence agencies which apply the principle of state of exception to the actions of their spies. This does not only mean flexible, legal and executive treatment in times of crisis (when intelligence agencies might be OBE – overtaken by events), but also special laws and special codes that make spies immune from ordinary laws, regardless of the current situation.

Paradoxically, these are 'legal lawbreakers' who can act as micro-sovereigns, under the pretext of protecting order. This is exactly how Carl Schmitt described the ambivalent nature of state secrecy in his theory of sovereignty: it might ignore the law in order to make it truly effective (Schmitt 1995: XVIII). Or, seen from the opposite point of view, state secrecy might undermine the very rule of law that it is supposed to stabilize. Once again, it is as if the institution of intelligence agencies split citizens into two parts: those who are extralegal or supralegal and those subjected to the first group's discretionary power.

C. The politics of enmity is at the heart of the logic of state secrecy. Obviously, what makes such secrecy justifiable is first of all the need for protecting order in the political community. Counter-terrorism, counter-espionage and counter-radicalization policy as the identification and elimination of inner (or semi-inner or potentially inner) enemies always already divide citizens into 'innocents' and suspects. The functioning of an intelligence agency as the extension and institutionalization of martial mechanisms presupposes a pre-political, *ex ante* decision regarding what can be substantially harmful and what cannot. (To illustrate, let us recall the fact that the FBI treated the Occupy movement as a potential terrorist and criminal threat, or recall the death of Jean Charles de Menezes who was mistakenly killed by Scotland Yard in 2005.) Taking advantage of terrorism fears in states of emergency or the exploitation of extreme tragedies only confirms an already existing practice. Intelligence is always already "haunted by the powerful phantasm of 'the enemy'" (Horn 2013: 38) and it often seems to be forced to defend the conditions of democracy by undemocratic means. By spying on some of its own citizens, the state defends itself – thus prolonging the inner state of war. In certain cases this conflict appears as a competition between different types of secrecy, for instance when the institutions of state secrecy oppress secret societies (the conspirative *Stillen im Lande*, to quote Schmitt again) (Schmitt 1938: 92). Secrecy assures the existence of the political community and, at the same time, makes it impossible.

The call for absolute transparency in the private lives of citizens as well as the desire for absolutely secret state mechanisms are complementary threats to democracy. To summarize, the existence of institutions of state secrecy implies a number of asymmetrical divisions among citizens. Nevertheless, these founding inequalities with regard to exclusion, subjection and oppression effectively contribute to the undermining of the exoteric ideals of civic ethos, public reason and equal participation. Thus, the latent or opaque side of power might have affective-corporeal consequences (fear and vulnerability) and perceptive-cognitive side effects (mistrust and political paranoia).

Hence, before thematizing engagement against state secrecy (or certain of its forms), one should first pay attention to pata-political mechanisms that pose a threat to engagement as such. Put simply: how could one freely and equally engage in a political system in which state secrecy seems to endanger the very coordinates of free and equal political action? What is more, the secrecy effect implies a certain *Unbehagen*, a hardly eliminable distrust or despair that could make even modest forms of civic activism ineffective and meaningless.

## 2. The danger of pata-politics

As mentioned, the post-absolutist logic of secrecy is in sharp contrast to the *arcana imperii* with regard to the question of legitimacy. Here is Eva Horn's description of this change:

> "Whereas the logic of *arcanum* regards secrecy as a legitimate dimension of government, a modern logic of *secretum* is marked by an inextricable dialectics between the withdrawal and communication of knowledge, between secrecy and publicity. Here, the secret is not so much a piece of withheld knowledge as a 'secrecy effect' that binds the realm of secrecy to the public sphere by a dialectics of permanent suspicion and scandal. … As a result of modern democracy's ideal of transparency and of the moralization of politics, secrecy has become precarious and problematic, something seen as both necessary and noxious, something constantly in need of legitimization yet never really legitimate. … That's the political secret today: a thing spoken of *ad infinitum*." (Horn 2011: 1–3)

This purely non-substantial definition of contemporary secrecy as 'secrecy effect' (heavily influenced by Jacques Derrida) rightly suggests that the obscure side of state power has a much broader, virtual scope than the brute facts concerning intelligence agencies. According to this vision, secrecy and transparency cannot be separated.[2] Paradoxically, in today's societies 'secrecy' appears in broad daylight as well. We might illustrate this with the architecture of intelligence agency buildings: as indicators of the operativeness of power, they are imposingly monumental; however, they must also be carefully closed and extremely secured. Indeed, the relation between state secrecy and the public sphere deepens this paradox and makes it more complicated: state secrecy constantly shifts between the mechanisms of self-concealing (secrecy tends to be secret) and the permanent need to legitimize itself (as its existence and its actions are not self-evidently justifiable).

Within this framework, secrecy always already implies a surplus of secrecy. As state secrecy appears as a known unknown which could even hide unknown unknowns, it necessarily produces weakly-grounded suspicions, semi-fictional hypotheses, overdramatized paranoia, profound distrust of imaginary groups, speculative catastrophisms and all-embracing superconspiracy theories. This is what we call pata-politics[3] – an alternative relation to politics which has depoliticizing effects in many ways. By exclusively seeking the 'deeper' truth of power and the hidden souterrain of the 'Big Other', it underestimates and leaves uncriticized what is going on in the exoteric dimensions of politics. Furthermore, by presenting unfalsifiable theories, it undermines the argumentative field of the public sphere. In addition, even though pata-politics often has certain anti-elitist aspects (as it identifies the 'Enemies Above'), its exponents are 'exclusively included' in relation to secrecy – they themselves somehow belong to the extraordinary citizens who know. Finally, pata-politics leaves in fact unquestioned the very power it intends to criticize: instead of a truly effective institutional analysis, it tends to disarm criticism by magnifying the irrational and hopelessly uncontrollable character of intelligence. According to this, engagement against state secrecy must be aware of the depoliticizing danger of pata-politics. Its practitioners should reject "the common Romantic nonsense which has the magic of 'secret' at its center" (Tamás, internet), that is to say, they should relentlessly demystify secrecy, without being naïve.

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[2] This is why Clare Birchall (Birchall 2011) introduced the terms "transparency-as-secrecy" and "secrecy-as-transparency".

## 3. *Aude, vide, tace!* – the aporias of democratic intelligence

Theoreticians of intelligence studies often emphasize that the catchword 'democratic intelligence' (or more precisely: 'democratic intelligence oversight') appeared only recently. Regardless whether or not this expression is a true oxymoron, it is easy to understand why it took so long to initiate any democratization in this field. Obviously, when state secrecy becomes accessible to all, it is not simply compromised – it looses its function. In this light, democratization, that is the inclusion of the people, seems impossible. Further, there is enormous fear of a state within a state (*statum in statu*), as a 'no-go' zone for democratic scrutiny by ordinary citizens, a special power with a life of its own and accountable only to itself. "Veiled under the shroud of non-communication, non-documentation and non-reporting" (Horn 2011: 14), such an entity would possess various possibilities for an abuse of power, such as extra-legal surveillance missions, monitoring electronic conversations, collecting sensitive data, bodily or house searches, and so on. Then again, what does it mean when something essential is revealed only *in camera*, that is to say, non-publicly and in chambers? Similarly, what does it mean when a region like Greenland or Åland gains autonomy, except for autonomy with regard to mainland intelligence agencies? Likewise, what would it mean if an even more uncontrollable, common European intelligence agency were created? (Wetzling: 2009)

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[3] We introduce the term 'pata-politics' in order to conceptualize the possible ideological and affective consequences of state secrecy. *Pata* means 'above' or 'beyond', and thus pata-politics refers to distorted political discourses that usually do not engage in political parties or movements and seek to unveil power mechanisms behind the surface of ordinary politics. The term 'pata-politics' is also useful because it connotes 'pathological' (thus, phenomena like political hysteria or paranoia). It is not a synonym for 'parapolitics' that refers to the 'deep politics' of the state (as in Peter Dale Scott's theory) or to the conceptualization of the margins and founding principles of politics (as in Raghavan Iyer's theory).

In fact, what is usually meant by 'democratic intelligence' refers to the careful combination of the branches of power, sometimes including all of them (executive, parliamentary and judiciary accountability). Generally speaking, the balance of power doctrine should not blur the line between the real, direct empowerment of people and the system of electoral-representative or 'aristocratic' institutions that are not responsible to the people (that is the case with non-governmental state institutions in many countries, e. g. the central bank or the ombudsman). However, it seems that the logic of state secrecy requires additional depoliticization. Hans Born and Thorsten Wetzling illustrate this point well: "introduction of more transparency and public accountability leads to a better system of checks and balances on the services. On the other hand, the services and their activities are becoming part of the normal political debate, which leads to the danger that the actors in that political debate will use the services and their work for their own benefit" (Born and Wetzling 2007: 325). In other words, there is even a built-in fear of indirect democratization and it seems that the pre-political and infrapolitical character of intelligence services must be defended. As if politicization is to be excluded precisely in the place where it should enter the field of intelligence, by virtue of the aporetic character of state secrecy. The very same concerns may lead to diametrically opposite conclusions: for instance, parliamentarians may be prevented from pursuing intelligence oversight precisely in order to prevent the politicization of intelligence; but the same fear resulted in the restriction of the executive's influence on intelligence and the increase of bipartisan parliamentary oversight, in order to prevent the politicization of intelligence. Moreover, while many theorists claim that political parties may take advantage of intelligence oversight, others suggest that there is insufficient motivation for parliamentarians to engage in proactive oversight given the fact that there is no direct reward from voters for closed committee sanctuaries. When there is an input relation and direction, that is to say, an *ex ante* relation between the executive and the intelligence services, there is a danger that state secrecy will be governed by arbitrary political preferences, far beyond political neutrality. On the other hand, when there is an output relation and control, that is to say, an *ex post* relation between parliamentarians and intelligence services, there is a danger that *ex post facto* accountability will be merely reduced to a feeble putting out of fires. All of which is to say that there is always a meta-dilemma of de-politicization and political decisions. Thus, intelligence agencies must not be political: “no intelligence agency shall exert influence over the institutional, political, military, police, social and economic situation of the country and the existence of legally formed political parties” (cited in Estévez, internet); yet, there are necessarily matters of political sensitivity and the executive has to be involved in the decision-making. Therefore intelligence agencies are constantly vacillating between self-depoliticization and excessive ‘open-door’ politicization, pure autonomy as re-arcanization and heteronomy as the betrayal of pure secrecy.

Very similar difficulties appear with regard to other branches of power. For instance, it is claimed that “too intrusive control by the judges carries them into the executive sphere, that is to say, it blurs the separation of powers between the two branches of the state” (Leigh 2007: 76). So, who guards the guardians? Obviously, administrative, parliamentary or executive oversight is possible only to the extent that intelligence agencies want to subject themselves to outer control and report even on their most dubious actions they have taken within their own walls. And vice versa, oversight can be put into effect only to the extent that there is institutionally assured interests in controlling state secrecy. As demonstrated by a case study on Poland’s oversight practices, the parliamentary access to sensitive information remains dependent on the discretion of intelligence agencies (Zybertowitz 2005).

## 4. The intelligence factory and the possible limits of a liberal approach

Given that normative opposition to the abuse of power by intelligence is dominated by liberal theorists, let us pay attention to certain liberal assumptions and interpretative models. These theorists do not only mention the balance of power doctrine, but rather also speak of defending privacy as the outstanding victim of intelligence agencies. Even though intelligence, after the so-called open-source revolution, overwhelmingly relies on sources that are potentially accessible to everyone, the conflict between privacy and state secrecy still exists. As far as state secrecy and liberalism are concerned, Alain Dewerpe summarized his own position categorically: “‘The social contract’ abolishes any possibility of secrecy in the execution of power, any lack of transparency in the intentions of the sovereign, any excess in carrying out government business, and any legal threshold region that would allow for the employment of clandestine means. All power will be dominated by the principle of publicity. Liberal thought … censures the space of the secret” (Dewerpe 1994: 78). Obviously, this statement is an exaggeration. Nevertheless, Dewerpe rightly emphasizes that state secrecy should be treated as unacceptable or highly problematic within liberalism, at least from a strongly normative point of view. Furthermore, the defense of privacy cannot be reduced to the demand for transparent and accountable power. Derived from the right to private property, the defense of privacy exceeds the question of regulating state institutions.

Liberal theories of secrecy are mostly one-sidedly focused on the defense of the private sphere which they oppose to the realm of 'legitimate coercion' that has to be limited and controlled, because otherwise it becomes tyrannical, absolutist or totalitarian. Put differently, liberal theories operate within the binary opposition of an authentic private sphere and dangerous state institutions – the right to secrecy as freedom from interference is contrasted with state secrecy. However, the very framework of this approach is problematic. First of all, it repeats the standard liberal attitude, according to which the questions of equal participation, symmetry and transparency can be posed only with regard to the sphere of 'legitimate coercion'. Subsequently, this understanding remains blind to the increasing intertwinement of state institutions and the private sphere. Today's open-source intelligence may serve as an illustration of this: "OSINT is changing the traditional conception of intelligence; by 2015 most small or medium sized states will be able to acquire intelligence from a diverse range of commercial satellites. This development will progressively lead to the importance of the private sector in intelligence. The technological revolution in general and OSINT in particular are multiplying the competition in intelligence production. There are now more actors in intelligence, which has consequently led to the concept of an 'intelligence factory'" (Díaz Matey, internet). Indeed, the true danger does not comes from the possibility of a state within a state, but from the intelligence factory that blurs the line between the private sphere and state institutions. The problem of increased mass surveillance within the private sphere and the challenge concerning the 'intelligence-industrial complex' remains a blind spot for liberal theories of secrecy to the extent that they glorify the private sphere as the innocent realm of free contractual relations.

## 5. Changing engagement perspective

What conclusion could be drawn from the previous suggestions, without providing any patronizing directives for movements? Indeed, today it is much easier to thematize intelligence issues than it was ten years ago, owing to whistleblowers and activists like Edward Snowden, Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning. However, their achievements often go hand-in-hand with romantic ideas of 'outlaws who rewrite the law' and 'heroes speaking truth to/about power', instead of paying attention to systematized, institutionalized accountability and transparency, with particular emphasis on external reviews by independent civil society organizations.[4] Is it not naïve to think that in the long run illegitimate activities could be effectively prevented from a purely informal or moralistic or defensive standpoint? Furthermore, we should think of checks and balances that would be able to provide pluralistic, flexible accountability mechanisms within today's 'disaggregated sovereignty' and 'networked governance', beyond merely internal intelligence control that is not open to public negotiation.

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[4] According to Hans Born and Thorsten Wretzling, "civil society organizations may curtail the functioning of intelligence services by giving an alternative view (think tanks),

As discussed earlier, there are many risk factors for engagement against/for secrecy. Even though we should not underestimate practical suggestions concerning safe internet usage (privacy-enhancing technologies, such as uncrackable encrypted communications), we should keep in mind that a merely defensive strategy only prolongs an essentially asymmetrical framework in which ordinary citizens cannot influence intelligence. What is more, as we argued earlier, pro-privacy movements and digital rights groups should not be blind to the fact that the private sphere is not an innocent realm opposed to potentially illegitimate state mechanisms. Thus, engagement against/for secrecy should fight against naivety in two directions: on the one hand, it should take into consideration that the private sphere is itself a field that significantly contributes to the increase of mass surveillance (according to this, it should put pressure on private companies as well), and on the other hand, it should also be aware of dangers within the public sphere (from manipulated public discourse and the 'security theater' to pata-politics). Freedom from domination by the intelligence factory is not merely a question of privacy as a lack of wrong interference, or the possibility of public contestation – it is the common good of the effective control of power. It is a political question. Needless to say, the role of today's whistleblowers could not be more important. Yet, without creating new institutions or transforming the existing ones their torch bearing efforts will only remain solitary actions. It is impossible to change the world of state secrecy without taking power within it, at least in a certain way. And maybe one day even a post-secret politics will become imaginable.

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disclosing scandals and crises (media), or by raising complaints concerning wrongdoing (citizens)" (Born and Wretzling 2007: 317). Yet, maybe alternative mechanisms are imaginable that could be institutionalized in such a way that citizens would be able to control intelligence more directly. For instance, special delegates could represent the people (or at least human rights organizations) within the parliamentary control of intelligence, independently from the usual alternation of political parties in power.

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Mark Lošonc

## Angažman protiv tajnovitosti i za tajnovitost

**Apstrakt**

Ovaj rad je posvećen angažmanu protiv državne tajne odnosno angažmanu za tajnovitost, slobodnu od uplitanja. Kroz analizu podela koje proističu iz postojanja državne tajne (u obliku isključivanja, potčinjavanja i tlačenja) identifikuje se način na koji tajnovitost iskrivljava jednako učešće u političkim zajednicama. Autor uvodi pojam patapolitike ne bi li opisao pogrešan odnos prema efektu tajnovitosti. Nadalje, u radu se tematizuju ključna pitanja savremenih *intelligence studies*-a (npr. demokratska kontrola tajnih službi ili doktrina o ravnoteži vlasti), sa posebnim osvrtom na moguće granice liberalnog pristupa. Na kraju, autor izrađuje metakritiku okvira u kojem se privatna sfera idealizuje kao puka žrtva pogrešnog uplitanja.

**Ključne reči**: državna tajna, *intelligence studies*, demokratska kontrola tajnih službi, pokreti za privatnost, javna sfera

UDK: 316.3
DOI: 10.2298/FID1602429P
Original scientific article
Received: 1.3.2016 — Accepted: 25.3.2016

FILOZOFIJA I DRUŠTVO XXVII (2), 2016.

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# Institutional social engagement

**Abstract** I am referring to social engagement as a value-based choice to actively intervene in social reality in order to modify existing collective identities and social practices with the goal of realizing the public good. The very term 'engagement', necessarily involves the starting awareness of a social deficit or flaw and presupposes a critical attitude towards social reality. In this article, I will attempt to provide arguments in favour of the thesis about the possibility (and, later, necessity) of institutional engagement, critical action and even institutional protest, basing this view on the thesis that institutions are fundamentally collective or social agents whose actions must be guided by ethical and epistemic virtues.

**Keywords**: institutions, social engagement, collective agents, institutional virtues, institutional research, decision-making process

The term 'social engagement' has a very complex normative or value-based dimension. In fact, it does not refer to mere involvement or agency directed towards a neutral social goal, but the meaning of the term is, on a value basis, strongly related to the common good as the motive and aim of action. It is important to note that the common good can be understood in various ways, but it is crucial that the term implies a form of commitment focused on a public good that we deem worthy of special effort. I am, therefore, fond of the view that the term refers to a value-based choice to actively intervene in social reality in order to modify (up to a certain degree or whole) existing collective identities and social practices with the goal of acquiring the public good. Consequently, the very term 'engagement', necessarily involves the starting awareness of a social deficit or flaw and presupposes a critical attitude towards social reality.

Institutions are unlikely to be perceived as an area of social engagement, action and least of all protest. On the contrary, they are usually envisioned as a tool of the *status quo*, the guardians of the existing collective imaginary, identities and social practices. The system's institutions are consequently considered a natural target of various forms of social engagement due to them prevalently being perceived as conservative and conformist fortifications of the privileged. Social engagement has, almost by definition, been placed primarily into the space of the non-institutional or the alternative. In contrast to the above-mentioned stereotype that is shared by many critically thinking individuals, I will attempt to argue in favour of the thesis about the possibility of institutional engagement, critical action and even institutional protest. This does not mean that I am unaware of the fact that

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institutions often deserve to be the target of social engagement. However, such a fact only accentuates the drawbacks of the prevailing institutional (non) culture in which institutions happen to be the causes of deficit. The aforementioned fact about institutional deficits does not rule out the possibility of institutional activity in the domain of social engagement.

I have initially based my view of the possibility (and, later, necessity) of institutional engagement on the thesis that institutions are fundamentally collective or social agents whose actions must be guided by the ideas of ethical and epistemic virtues and responsibilities in a way that is not substantially different from the activity of individual agents. If individuals and groups can conduct social engagement on the basis of ethical and epistemic responsibility, then it must be an equally possible feat for structured social agents such as institutions. Institutions fulfil their political/ethical and epistemic task only if their actions are congruent with the freedom and equality of each individual and if their decisions are made in a way that ensures epistemic quality by the means of their correctness, truthfulness or ability to resolve the problems of the majority of citizens. This view of institutions as collective agents who base their purpose on justice and truthfulness is derived from the philosophical theory of justice supported by the likes of John Rawls (Rawls 1999) who developed elaborate theories concerning the normative principles of justice that ought to govern social institutions, and the social epistemology of Alvin Goldman (Goldman 1999, 2010) who claims that social entities such as institutions need to comply to the epistemic feature of truth-conductiveness. The social engagement of institutions is consequently comprised of autonomous and responsible actions aimed at improving the social reality in which there is an established ethical/political or epistemic deficit. In other words, this means that not every occurrence of investing special effort on the basis of values (defined by ideological bias) can be considered social engagement. Sometimes it is simply the usage of institutional power in order to generate a deficit.

Also, it is worthy to point out that not every action can be considered social engagement. Just like individuals, institutions ought to derive the purpose of social engagement from the fact that additional effort is needed to improve a critical element of social reality. It could be said that institutions are obliged to always act in the best manner they possibly can, so additional efforts are not indicators of engagement, but rather of a well-functioning (as opposed to non-functioning) institution. I could agree with the statement that desirable action can be considered synonymous with continuous social engagement. However, given the absence of this regulatory ideal in the real world, one should ascribe additional value to any occasional stronger engagement targeted at the elimination of a clear, present and serious deficit.

However, although I consider institutional engagement possible, it is still methodologically different from the engagement of individuals or non-institutional groups. Institutions intrinsically consist of procedures, regulations which determine the manner in which the institution operates, a clearly defined structure (often a hierarchy) and a certain amount of power over a larger or smaller group of people. When defending the idea of institutional engagement, I by no means intend to imply that institutions ought to abandon their structures and procedures, or even power relations. Namely, structured institutional power is not necessary a vicious social fact, but can instead be referred to in terms of its positive and negative uses, as clearly explicated by Miranda Fricker (Fricker 2007). By relinquishing their key characteristics institutions would cease to be institutions and instead become a different social construct. The aforementioned procedures, organization and structured power ought to serve as a dam preventing arbitrary, reckless, thoughtless, uncontrolled and partial changes that could be detrimental to society. Institutional engagement is based on mobilising its structural power to raise awareness of a prevalent and dangerous deficit and on striving to regulate the procedure so that the deficit is systematically eliminated as a contribution to the common good. Institutions which implement this sort of conduct in societies marked by institutional neglect and ignorance towards democratic and intellectual virtues are, consequently and by definition, acting in the sphere of institutional engagement, institutional criticism and even protests.

Finally, I believe that institutional commitment is not only possible, but rather necessary for any democratic society. The common good cannot rest solely on non-institutional engagement which, however welcome and important, simply cannot be sufficiently effective. The methodology of non-institutional activity has its own logic and its role is precious and irreplaceable in democratic societies, but it is an illusion to think that they could in any way sufficiently contribute to the rectification of dangerous deficits and the establishment of a public good. That is why it is important not to relinquish hope in the institution as a critical and active collective agent.

## Institutional research, smart institutional decision making and a proper institutional engagement

The most common causes of social deficits can be found at the junction of egoistic and altruistic behaviour, as well as of general and particular interests. To understand what I mean, attempt to recall the famous prisoner's dilemma. Two people, who we may name Robby and Bobby, are detained in two separate prison cells after committing a relatively mild crime. A police officer talks to each of them separately in a way that encourages them to confess to committing the crime, despite the obvious lack of evidence. In order to acquire their confessions, the officer warns them that in the case that the other prisoner confesses, the one that does not will become subject to both penalties. In these circumstances Robby is considering several potential scenarios: (i) if he confesses, but Bobby does not, he will be released, and Bobby will get 5 years in prison; (ii) if he does not confess yet Bobby does, he will get 5 years, and Bobby will be free to walk out of prison; (iii) if both confess, they will both be given a yearlong penalty; (iv) if neither of them confess, the police only have sufficient evidence for them to remain in custody for six months. Bobby undergoes the same thought process. In short, both separately come to the conclusion: if they confess they can either be penalized for a year or go home, and if they do not confess they can be penalized for either 5 years or 6 months. Confessing clearly seems like a rational choice to both Robby and Bobby, separated by their respective prison cells. The risk of spending a long time in prison is far smaller. If both choose to do what they deem rational, both will confess and be imprisoned for a year. What is the point of this story? The prisoner's dilemma confronts us with the realisation that everyone will, regardless of what others may do, feel inclined to make a decision that protects their own interest (in this case, to confess) rather than choose to protect others (in this case, to remain silent). However, if they had both thought about the other – and had remained silent – they would both only be imprisoned for six months, which is a better outcome than the one acquired by catering only to their self-interest. This dilemma clearly demonstrates a situation in which rational selfish choice leads to an outcome worse than the alternative: it would evidently be better for all of us to take care of others who are affected by our actions. However, we fail to do so. We can only attempt to imagine how this would manifest in complex social situations involving more than two agents who do not know what others will do and who aim to protect their own interests. One can easily imagine how this situation could result in different forms of social deficits – human rights violations, discrimination, corruption and other forms of cheating.

My second favourite example is the free rider problem. If each of us was focused on working in the direction of the public good, we would all benefit from the common action. However, an individual can think that his contribution to the public good is too irrelevant for anyone – especially for him – to notice. Therefore, he concludes that he may choose not to contribute his share or, in other words, to become a free rider who thrives on the beneficial actions of others. The key dilemma for the rest, or the majority, is to decide whether to keep defending the public good, and therefore consciously insure benefits to free riders (cheaters), or to become free riders and, in the long run, ruin the public good. This example proves to be incredibly lucid in accentuating the dilemma of the individual faced with the protection of the common good.

Each institution, including the scientific institutions whose internal structure I am best familiar with, must harmonize their activities with this tension between the public and the private, the individualized and the general, the egoistic and the altruistic. Every scientist is naturally opposed to anyone else telling him what to examine, how to spend funds provided by the project and who to work with. He is likely to be particularly wary of anyone attempting to measure his effectiveness or the extent of his success in relation to other colleagues. However, each institution naturally strives to encourage efficiency in order to maintain its reputation or acquire money (or both), and to control and reduce the improper usage of resources. While the scientist is likely to perceive any form of restriction as a threat, the institution will see any resistance as subversion. Similarly, each higher education institution aims to acquire as much funds as possible with the minimum expenditure of time, effort and resources. In case the funds cannot be sourced from the state budget, which would be ideal, the simplest alternative is found in charging students higher tuition fees. Students are, clearly, opposed to any increase in tuition fees. Both cases cause deficits. In the first case there is an epistemic deficit: scientists will attempt to meet the institutional requirements by corrupting the very system that limited their private (and egoistically rational) interest. They may resort to modifying scientific results in order to appeal to sponsors, developing scientific and publishing lobbies or taking part in various forms of research misconduct such as plagiarism, fabrication, falsification and the like. In the second case, there is a democratic deficit which prevents the access of young people of poorer socio-economic status to higher education.

What does institutional engagement consist of in such cases? Of course, it is based on making additional efforts to raise awareness and eliminate deficits. It lies in the struggle to develop ethical codes which sanction misconduct in scientific research and in consciously reducing tuition fees. However, I think that the purpose of true and inherent institutional engagement lies in something deeper – in developing truth-conductive, democratic and egalitarian institutional mechanisms which could systematically recognize, detect, prevent and abolish such deficits. Or, in other words, it lies in developing institutional intelligence by introducing smart decision-making policies. The prisoner's dilemma and the free rider problem, just like the aforementioned examples, serve to accentuate the extreme complexity of the institutional decision-making process. The logic of collective action and social choice is extremely complex because decisions made in real world circumstances are unavoidably influenced by (i) risk and extreme uncertainty, (ii) permanent and intrinsic conflict between individual interests/preferences/benefits and institutional interests/preferences/benefits, (iii) the fact that participants' rational choices usually appeal to their own particular interests/preferences/benefits.

In short, real institutional engagement does not lie in correcting the symptoms, but in understanding and preventing the deficit. Although we recognize the intuitive capacities of talented and experienced decision makers, the relationship between intuitive and informed decision-making is not a question of dispute. Informed and smart decision-making must be based on institutional research, data collection and analysis in order to be able to produce good decisions. Institutional research needs to focus on exploring, understanding and explaining the institution to the institution itself with the intention of creating public good. The adoption of uninformed decisions is a fundamental deficit of our institutional culture because such decisions facilitate attempts to corrupt the system. Institutional research and evidence based decision-making are thus the key tools of institutional engagement.

Allow me to end with an example. In our higher education institutions, decisions to introduce or alter tuition fees are generally made on the basis of reduced state funding or the fact that other countries (even those with the most developed higher education, such as Great Britain and the US) have high tuition fees. It is claimed that high quality requires high fees. This is not an entirely unconvincing argument and my point is not to state that each institution should fight for free education and oppose academic capitalism. I would like to stress that institutions ought to prove whether academic capitalism is, in relation to their own causes, an ethically, politically and epistemically bad decision. In other words, this decision must be made on the basis of extensive institutional research examining the real cost of education within various scientific fields and education cycles, the average length of study, the income, revenues and expenses of institutions, the extent to which the costs are covered by the state budget, the structure of the institution's own income, the possible expenses or a way of streamlining that would not detract from the presently achieved quality, the GDP of relevant countries and planned projections of its growth/decline, the social structure of potential students, the existence of a scheme which provides scholarships and credits or other forms of financial aid, the likelihood of employment and loan repayment, the strategic objectives related to the purpose of higher education, the consequences that changes within the educational system pose for society as a whole, but also the societal requirement for certain employee profiles and a myriad of other relevant elements.

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Snježana Prijić-Samaržija

## Institucionalna društvena angažovanost

### Apstrakt

Upućujem na društvenu angažovanost kao na vrednosno zasnovan izbor da se aktivno interveniše u društvenu zbilju, kako bi se preinačili postojeći kolektivni identiteti i društvene prakse, a s ciljem ostvarivanja javnog dobra. Sam pojam 'angažman' nužno uključuje početnu svest o društvenom deficitu ili mani, te pretpostavlja kritički stav spram društvene stvarnosti. U ovom tekstu pokušaću da iznesem argumente u prilog tezi o mogućem ( vremenom, i nužnom) institucionalnom angažmanu, kritičkoj akciji, pa čak i institucionalnom protestu, zasnivajući ovo stanovište na tezi da su institucije fundamentalno kolektivni ili društveni agenti čijim akcijama nužno rukovode etičke i epistemičke vrednosti.

**Ključne reči**: institucije, društveni angažman, kolektivni agenti, institucionalne vrednosti, institucionalno istraživanje, proces donošenja odluka

UDK: 17
DOI: 10.2298/FID1602436M
Original scientific article
Received: 29.2.2016 — Accepted: 19.3.2016

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# ...Beyond *Folie à Deux*...

**Abstract** In this text I attempt to recognize and identify two conditions that make engagement possible. One certainly refers to the word, while the other is inscribed onto the body – every or any body – and it regards affect. I illustrate the first condition by a brief reading of a poem by Samuel Beckett, whose English translation the author dedicated to his friend and long-term collaborator, Joseph Chaikin. The second condition I place into Spinoza's, that is, Deleuze's understanding of affect.

**Keywords**: word, affect, body, engagement, context, situation

folly—
folly for to—
for to—
what is the word—
(…) *Samuel Beckett* (1990)

Thanks to Ruby Cohn, theater scholar, friend and intimate acquaintance of Beckett's life and work, the last poem he wrote in French ("comment dire", 1989),[1] Beckett also translated into English. Consisting of fifty-three lines, the poem appeared shortly after the author suffered a stroke. "what is the word" (the lower case writing is in Beckett's manuscript) is nearly always interpreted as part and paradoxical continuity with Beckett's poetics of renouncement and withdrawal, but also his relentless search for grounding. Reading all seven versions of the poem, Cohn recognizes in it a clear link between the stuttering poetic language and aphasia, and thinks of the actor, director Joseph Chaikin, Beckett's friend, who, following open-heart surgery in 1984 also became aphasic. Cohn recalls: "Since Joe knows no French, I asked Beckett to translate the poem, but he could not recall having written it. After I sent him a copy, he dedicated his translation to Joe. It was Beckett's last creation" (Cohn 2001: 382, note).

Simultaneously together aphasic, the two men had previously also spent a lot of time together creating – indeed, were inseparable: what one thought and wrote, the other staged and acted. Together they were *committed to*

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[1] Folie—
folie que de—
que de—
comment dire—
(…)

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Beckett's endeavor. What do I mean by Beckett's endeavor? Why would a text about commitment to joint effort and engagement for the common good even mention poetry and the ever more impotent, all too resigned, end of a life – in this case, the illness and end of two artists – two strong individuals?

I will attempt to bring into focus two conditions that seem to me to make engagement at all possible. One certainly refers to the word, while the other is inscribed onto the body, any body and every, and regards the affect. In so doing, I follow Spinoza's, that is Deleuze (in this paper specifically) and Guattari's understanding of affect in the framework of understanding the theory of affect developed in the last twenty years.

Perhaps it is enough to say that engagement begins with the right word. Agency unfolds when someone at the right moment utters the right word. Beckett's poem precisely searches for the right word, the one that does not stop at naming or referring, nor at indicating injustice, suffering and misery, nor their description, a word that is not satisfied by conceptualizing a problem. The right word is not necessarily the first word or the word that already has a singular meaning. Still, neither is it a word that can somehow stand decontextualized. It is, however, a word that greatly depends on the situation.

Beckett's poem seeks the formula to open a space of unconditional closeness to another. Therefore, the poet asks: *comment dire?* Actually, *quel est le mot?* was more than a pressing question during Beckett's stay in the *Hôpital Pasteur* and the nursing home *Le Tiers Temps* in July 1988, and searching for the poet's reasons to put *comment dire* into more idiomatic language (which occurred in the second version of the poem) and rendering it afterwards as *what is the word* might divert us into paradoxes and problems of translation studies (another field of study that meticulously pays attention to detail without losing sight of context) – a reading we leave open here. I will give myself up to Beckett's aphasic intuition that respects the moment, with which he is attempting to return into the space of meaning. Which is certainly important, as evidenced by the moment when the right word allows him to establish the conditions for the appearance of closeness. The space of closeness, however, appears only after the uttered or scribbled password (*shibboleth*) because closeness is also a call to action: from proximity and entwinement comes the spark of joint agency. Closeness, on the other hand, can also create friction, resistance, could call to boycott and diversion by its presents. Proximity, then, opens the space for joint agency, although one must keep in mind that closeness could also render passive, stifling action. Closeness ought to be accepted, but not endured. Not all proximities are equal, nor can they last forever. In both the French and English version of Beckett's poem, conjunctions, adverbs, prepositions and here a pronoun in the case of a *que* (*que de / for to*), these little accessories with which we link naming and intention of action, the purposes of use and intentionality – remain burdened with meaning and sense. Thus in homonymy, the French version of *que de / for to* sounds like *que deux*, that is 'of two' as well as 'only two.' The English version sounds like 'for two,' that is, the English version of *pour deux*. Even with these meanings, the poem is far from exhausted in what it could convey.

Are two enough for engagement? Does engagement begin with at least two, or does it require more than that? What binds two? Is a word sufficient or does it require a sort of *folie à deux*? I am not offering an answer to this last question using psychiatric jargon of *shared psychosis*, or the system of famous syndromes conceptualized as far back as the golden age of psychiatry in the 19th century (Lasègue-Falret Syndrome), or as recently as the famous example of the Papin sisters who Jacques Lacan describes in his doctoral thesis: "les sœurs ne pouvaient même pas prendre la distance qu'il faut pour se meurtrir" ["the sisters could not even stay at a sufficient distance to harm each other"] (Lacan 1972: 25). Nor will there be speak of the sword of Damocles of joint belief and agency that so easily turns into mass hysteria, since the field of belief, as well as conviction of joint agency too broad and excessively demanding to be addressed in these brief notes about the conditions of engagement.

Simply, the assumption is that engagement is something more than shared beliefs and illusions. However, insofar as it is different from fanaticism, it is necessary to ask 'what is the word', that is, it is necessary in a way to remain within the question of evaluation of the right word, and it is crucially important not to allow belief to predominate. It is necessary to follow everything that rings out in the poem while searching for the right word, following all sighs, hesitations, disjunctions, all the hyphens – or as Beckett called them, combining with the French *traits d'union, traits de désunion* (hyphens of division / discord) – after which we expect something, some event or change, the fruit of joint agency. Apart from representing a conjunction and simple pause, punctuation that connect or divide could also easily signify a shift, an incentive, a stirring and awakening. They are a call directed at another. Ever a consideration of the other.

Following Beckett, I am not throwing together these random notes about engagement by lauding action that necessarily turns us towards one another. I am simply setting up signposts on my exploration of the nature and purpose of closeness, forms that lead to encounters of bodies, about words that bind, as well as the aim of studying engagement in the formal framework of engagement studies. Clearly, it is insufficient to simply declaratively seek justice between any two; nor are context and situatedness strong enough motivators of a unitary drive of a joint agency (where this agency might be the study or reflection upon engagement, thus themselves becoming a form of engagement).

Yet it is certain that we are not all equally gifted to seek the right word, or to patiently wait its arrival. We are not even all equally ready to tenaciously seek it. Some among us are active trackers of right words, while there are those (larger in numbers) who, recognizing that the right word has already been spoken, simply accept to follow the one (or the many) who has (have) uttered it. Engagement about a joint cause, ensuing from the right word, the right call, becomes much like tuning a fine instrument. It is even insufficient for each string independently to be well tuned, but rather that they all resonate together for an irrepressible sound. Or, put another way, they offer a sound to which we can yield. Engagement for a joint cause in the struggle for justice and equality, however, regardless of the spoken word, demands delimitation of the field of agency of the individual, as well as a careful sorting of priorities. It is this which, now echoing Sartre, limits the individual: "freedom within the limits of a situation", when it is easily testable to what extent "the exercise of this freedom [is] considered as authentic or inauthentic according to the choices made in the situation" (Sartre 1995: 90). Sartre claims: "it is almost needless to say, [that authenticity] consists in having a true and lucid consciousness of the situation, in assuming the responsibilities and risks that it involves, in accepting it in pride or humiliation, sometimes in horror and hate" (*ibid.*). Awareness of a situation (to which I would add awareness of context) requires tuning, in order to be possibly followed by advancement (uttering the right word) or withdrawal at a moment when someone else emerges with the right word. The situation also demands that all, without exception, recognize the right word. As in the case of Beckett's poem, limited to a scant number of words that also themselves on their own signify nothing in particular, and employing minimal maneuvering skills and inevitable repetition as the basic stylistic means (nothing here guarantees that the author behind these words truly does not have difficulty recalling syllables, stems and lexemes cobbled into real words), engagement itself demands: 'language in disequilibrium'. We owe the phrase to Deleuze who utilized it to describe Beckett's "*minor use* of the major language" in the essay "He Stuttered" (Deleuze 1998: 109–111, emphasis in the original). This off-kilter language, unafraid of announcing a new linguistic combination, above all demands an unstable field of agency and uncertainty. It is necessary that the one who seeks the right word constantly refer back to the already said and consistently abjure all that distinguishes from others. It is necessary also to begin to approach that which binds him to another in similarity. Engagement thus equally demands erased meanings when it is not necessary to look for new words and coin new terms, as well as to imbue old words with new purposes. As in the case of 'inclusive disjunctions', by breathing new word combinations across its borders, engagement builds new relations. Just like the hyphens, these new word combinations open up spaces of future closeness, linking by disjointing, hewing syllables into words that construct performatives, even performatives that manifest situatedness (or authenticity) of the individual or group.

After the question "what is the word," still following Beckett and adding Deleuze, I would like to take a sharp turn away from Sartre, for whom nothing but "true and lucid consciousness of the situation" would ensure authentic engagement. Is really only true and lucid consciousness sufficient for "assuming the responsibilities and risks that [authenticity] involves?" It is entirely unclear how consciousness of a situation becomes true and lucid, as well as how it all leads to authentic agency. But let us leave aside the innumerable studies and books dedicated to criticism of Sartre's ethical subjectivism, and all other relativisms to boot – my notes veer away from that. (Charles Taylor certainly is among those who provided careful and thorough criticism [see Taylor, 1991].) Contrary to what Sartre wrote, I am interested in the way a given situation manifests its specificity and singularity, even before we reach the stage of rationalization or justification of a gesture. Yet, I am not even interested in his problematization of authenticity itself, which now seems to me to belong to a different historical time. Allowing himself a slight reduction, when upon "true and lucid consciousness of the situation" he opens the Pandora box of psychological states and emotions, Sartre writes that authenticity of engagement ought to be accepted "in pride or humiliation, sometimes in horror and hate" (*ibid.*). States of the psyche thus remain decontextualized and hidden behind the signifier of the feelings and descriptions of states of pride, humiliation, horror and loathing. In other words, as Deleuze said in his seminar on Spinoza, speech about states of the psyche should follow a certain alteration in speed of demonstration of what is thought (Deleuze, internet/a).

Going from chapter to chapter, from inquiry concerning God, nature of mind, origin and nature of the emotions, human bondage or strength of the emotions, to the power of understanding of human freedom in book V of the *Ethics*, Deleuze explains that Spinoza, having arrived at "troisième genre de connaissance" ["third type of consciousness/thinking"], changes the speed of execution and conducts a contraction of thought. The contraction, of course, is not the result of change in speed of thinking, nor is it conditioned by whether we are fast or slow when thinking. Neither is it a condition by a certain relation and comparison of contrasted values. Above all, it is a result of the object of thinking itself, and Spinoza shows this best in the scholia of book V of the *Ethics*. What is this object of our thinking that we ought to analyze and for which we ought to offer explanation of how emerge pride, humiliation, or other various psychological states of horror and hatred? In their immediacy and directness of execution, scholia explain the unpredictability of affect, in contrast to the previous four books of the *Ethics* in which there has been a demonstration of the development of concepts. Deleuze remarks, "the continuity of development of concepts in scholia becomes the discontinuity of affect" (*ibid.*). In a word, when we get to this point, "we should pay particular attention to getting to know each emotion as far as possible clearly and distinctly, so that the mind may thus be determined from the emotion to think those things that it clearly and distinctly perceives" (*Ethics* V, P4, S),[2] which then becomes impossible to represent in thought in the way it was represented thus far, that is, it requires a different kind of proof execution. How do we then interpret grimacing, a specific gesticulation or the uncontrollable timber or tone of voice? How explain the moment when word becomes superfluous, when it turns into a cry, and when despite all its rational willful control and suppression, the body performs (rather than utters, for that is its language) the message. In brief, what of the transmission of rationally inexpressible content? Along the way, but not at all by accident, Deleuze speaks of the scream ("cris de base ... cris de la pensée" ["deep cries ... cries of thought"]) when interpreting and explaining the way in which Spinoza thematizes the body.

In the same way that I assume that engagement begins with the right word, in searching for the right words – lest we forget, language should remain "in disequilibrium" – so does the manifestation of unequivocal committed action begin with the body. It appears in the indications we interpret if we are able to comprehend what the body manifests. However, can a single body (self-)engage? Does not engagement require at least two for something to happen, for an exchange, for influence, critique? For some one to utter a word, do they not need another to hear and follow? Let us recall that the Beckettian endeavor also demanded at least two: together, Samuel Beckett, poet, playwright, and Joseph Chaikin, actor, director, left an indelible trace in performing arts not only of an aesthetic, but crucially, of an ethical nature. In Beckett's poetics this is entirely clear: if two bodies achieve closeness without touching, they need not necessarily connect, nor does the closeness they achieve have to be amorous. Perhaps it is in constantly delaying symbiosis, at the right distance and remaining separate, that the bodies accomplish something more than a *folie à deux* of creation, of joint thinking and engagement. What is it in these bodies that would bring them closer, without connecting them?

Perhaps the answer is precisely in a different understanding of the body, as in a new reading of sustainable distance between at least two bodies? Spinoza writes: "two individuals of the same nature joined with each other constitute an individual which is twice as powerful as either" (E IV, P18, S). This, at first glace paradox, in which these two who are joined become "an individual which is twice as powerful as either," should not be read through the lens of contemporary theories (politics) of identity and literal causal narratives of liberalism in which individuality acquires/ed a fastened sovereignty. In his February 1981 seminar (Deleuze, internet/b) dedicated to this very analysis of Spinoza's construction of the individual, Deleuze says: "L'individu est rapport. C'est peut-être une des premières fois, il me semble, dans l'histoire de l'individu, que va se dessiner une tentative pour penser le rapport à l'état pur" ["The individual is relational. It is perhaps one of the first moments, it seems to me, in the history of the individual, that we will be presented with an attempt to think relation in its purest form"]. Further developing reasons that justify the novelty with which he does not think the substantiality of the individual (and thus its limitation), in its further execution, Deleuze refers to the construction: "L'individu n'est pas forme, il est puissance (*potentia*)" ["The individual is not a form, it is potentiality (*potentia*)"]. Individuals are in relation, and it is the necessity of their reference to one another, and their cooperation, that empowers them. The cooperation of one individual with another improves the potentiality of their joint agency. In this way, it is possible to think that their emotional states – to briefly return to Sartre – no longer remain hidden behind particular feelings, occasional and culminating emotions, that is, behind vague and disparate descriptions of pride, humiliation, horror and loathing.

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[2] There is no pagination provided for Spinoza's *Ethics* but rather notation indicating the Part (I, II, III, IV or V), followed by numbers of Axiom (A) and Proposition (P), scholium (S) or appendix (App.).

Since "tout individu comme tel est composé d'une infinité de parties" ["all individuals as such are already composed of infinite portions"] (Deleuze, internet/c), it is possible to think the potentiality of their complicated relation, it is possible to think their closeness and distance even independently of their individual, personalized and emotional states. In order to reach this point it is necessary to make the distinction and systematize feelings, emotions and affects, all the while keeping in mind that affect can occur only if an individual has an idea of the object of that affect. It follows, then, that affect is ever double:[3] the effect of affect is followed if one considers simultaneously that which acts and which is acted upon. Spinoza points this out in the third axiom of the second book of the *Ethics*: "The modes of thinking, such as love and desire or whatever affects of the mind are designed by name, do not occur except that there occur in the same individual the idea of the thing loved, desired, etc." (E II, A3) And while our most immediate and surface reactions towards others are shown through feelings and emotions, at their core, they are formed by affects. In Brian Massumi's words:

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[3] AFFECT/AFFECTION. Neither word denotes a personal feeling (*sentiment* in Deleuze and Guattari). *L'affect* (Spinoza's *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a pre-personal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act. *L'affection* (Spinoza's *affectio*) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include 'mental' or ideal bodies). (Massumi 1987: xvi)

> Reserve the term 'emotion' for the personalized content, and affect for the continuation. Emotion is contextual. Affect is situational: event-fully ingressive to context. Serially so: affect is trans-situational. As processual as it is precessual, affect inhabits the passage. It is pre- and postcontextual, pre- and postpersonal, an excess of continuity invested only in the ongoing: its own. Self-continuity across the gaps. Impersonal affect is the connecting thread of experience. It is the invisible glue that holds the world together. In event. The world-glue of event of an autonomy of event-connection continuing across its own serialized capture in context. (Massumi 2002: 217)

And although it was never easy, in the current circumstances (in theory, in mass media, in the world…) it is more difficult still to differentiate and evaluate feelings and emotions. In a time burdened by various forms of emphasis and singularization, in a language incapable of avoiding hyperbole and shocking statements and images, it is difficult to spring the trap of identification and comparisons that simply and reductively most often result in unjust and exaggerating hierarchies. Even before scanning the elements that formulate a situation, which are supposed to provide insight into a given state, evaluations and descriptions, qualitative estimates are introduced, followed, of course, by quantitative measurements that only ever follow their context. More specifically, in them the context is underscored at the expense of neglecting the (historical, social, economical, ideological, gender, racial, class…) situation. What, after all, does it mean that 'emotion is contextual' and that 'affect is situational'? And what does this have to do with my claim, according to which one of the conditions of engagement, aside from the right word – uttered or written – is precisely affect?

To understand the agency that exceeds the borders of (the contemporary, sovereign) individual, and of which we learn little by delving into primarily or exclusively his/her own context (since it is always experienced as a spectrum of disparate and contradictory feelings of humiliation, pride, terror, loathing...), it is necessary to recognize the markings of what happens in continuity. This continuity is plausibly analyzable on still obscure parameters (determined not only and exclusively by context, but more broadly, multi-dimensionally by the understanding of the situation), and which cannot be understood rationally or translated immediately into concepts. Following Massumi's words that the "event [is] fully ingressive to context", continuity emerges from a sequence of events that build the situation, since they contain, yet also surpass, the particularity of individual contexts. Only in continuity of what takes place, only at the moment when engagement begins to achieve its constancy in relation to other/s do we as individuals begin to become aware of the situation. Our engagement is recognized at the moment of engagement with other/s. In a way, all our various contents (equally among the many rational ones are those that bring feelings and emotions) become recognizable and are potentially decodable into the same (or at least similar) language when along with the recognized (heard and accepted) word, we recognize what is common to various contexts. And not only what is common to us all, but what we have in common. Affect is common because it is impersonal, because it is passage and that which is passing. As material proof of togetherness, it is sufficient to sense and be sensitive. Of course, this does not mean that it is evenly distributed or that its distribution is controllable (despite the tendency to attempt to do so). It is very difficult to control or master affect, precisely because it is double, in equal measure "as pro-cessual as it is pre-cessual, affect inhabits the passage". Feelings and emotions are only a partial expression of affect because they are limited to personal memories, specificities and difficult to describe contents (whether traumatic or pleasurable, joyful), which activate only a limited and narrowed choice of reflexes and tendencies, strivings of reactions. This is simply the result of feelings and emotions by definition introducing a reduction that not only narrows the choice of reaction on the rational plane, but also the impulse with which we have to demonstrate a reaction or answer any stimulus beyond who we are as individuals. No state imbued full of emotion in the individual could encompass the common experience or the shared experience of action without also containing conglomerations of beliefs, propensities, beliefs – simply, the entire background of the idea or metaphor of *folie à deux*, which in the process of contextualization and rationalization can easily aspire to normativization of negative social acts, such as conquests, wars, or even mass murders (or in the case of contemporary terrorist actions, suicides, the counter-reactions, securitizing and hysterical strategies of defense and protection). All of which leads us to the rather dangerous indication of something we must here leave unattended: the difference between mass hysteria and engagement.

(I leave the development of the difference between mass hysteria and engagement entirely open and ending in ellipsis, although it would certainly open new frontiers of thinking joint agency, activity, protest, revolt, revolution, etc. Perhaps to write about jointly with someone.)

I return to Beckett and his last poem as a sign that hints at how joint agency continues to be conducted even when we lose our field of reference, our own context, to aphasia. Despite living a life in decline, becoming inexorably and irreversibly ever more lonely, Beckett leaves space for the joint, the common. Indeed, he does not only accept it passively (accepting that he is translating a poem he no longer remembers writing), but manifests this togetherness on the edges of meaning, through connectors and prepositions, linguistic accessories – yet all deeply affective and tightly bound. Deleuze begins his short text "He Stuttered" with a brief analysis of the "different voice of intonations", describing the need of writers to vary their dialogic markers following direct speech. There are those who "either … *do it*" (such as Balzac) or "else … *say it without doing it*" (Deleuze 1997: 107, emphasis in the original). But since he was and remained sovereign in his use of language – which Deleuze describes by associating the French translation of Austin's title "How to Do Things with Words" / "Quand dire c'est faire" – Beckett's last poem is an example that precisely performs "*saying is doing*."

> afaint afar away over there what—
> folly for to need to seem to glimpse afaint afar away over there what—
> what—
> what is the word—
>
> what is the word[4]

"This is what happens when the stuttering affects preexisting words, but itself introduces the words it affects; these words no longer exist independently of the stutter, which selects and links them together through itself. It is no longer the character who stutters in speech; it is the writer who becomes *a stutterer in language*" (*ibid.*, emphasis in the original).

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[4] loin là là-bas à peine quoi—
folie que d'y vouloir croire entrevoir quoi—
quoi—
comment dire—

comment dire

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Sanja Milutinović Bojanić

## ... Više od *Folie à deux*...

### Apstrakt

U tekstu pokušavam da prepoznam i identifikujem dva uslova koji uopšte omogućavaju angažman. Jedan se svakako odnosi na reč, dok se drugi upisuje u telo, u svako ili bilo koje telo i i odnosi se na afekt. Prvi uslov ilustrujem kratkim osvrtom na pesmu Samjuela Beketa, čiji engleski prevod autor posvećuje prijatelju i dugogodišnjem saradniku Džozefu Čajkinu, dok drugi upisujem u okvire Spinozinog, odnosno Delezovog razumevanja afekta.

Pitam se o svrsi i ulozi reči koja spaja, o načinu na koji se formira blizina, o telima koja se susreću, a onda i o angažmanu u okviru studija angažovanosti.

**Ključne reči**: reč, afekt, telo, angažman, kontekst, situacija

*APPENDIX*

# FURTHER THOUGHTS ON SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

# DALJA RAZMIŠLJANJA O DRUŠTVENOM ANGAŽMANU

Petar Bojanić
Edvard Đorđević

# *Engagement* + (Joint) Commitment

## On the Obligation to Act Together

What is the difference, or compatibility, between two words or two protocols – the French-English engagement (*engager*) and the English-French commitment (*commettre*)? Could a few acts (activity, agency, work, effort), potentially named by these two terms, imply very specific kinds of obligation? Our intention is to show that complementarity and correlation of the concepts of commitment (joint commitment) and engagement in the English language (although not exclusively) could be an introduction into the existence of a new kind of obligation (which is neither a perfect, nor simply an imperfect obligation). We would like to elaborate in a few steps, or by way of a few operations, the process of constituting group agency (an engaged group, such as the Group for Social Engagement Studies). Our assumption is that individuals who simultaneously research and thematize engagement or group agency together, who write and study together (discipline means studying something together and in a group) are indeed engaged individuals and are a group or make (up) a group. (In Serbian and Croatian, the verb *činiti* means to act or to do, but also to be a part of an entity, constitute it, make it up, be part of its content.)

Preliminarily, we insist on there being an entirely inexact or uncertain number of different unclassified activities (which is why we are speaking of processes and steps) that have the capacity to:

a) not only encourage or obligate another (or others) to identical or similar action or reciprocal reaction, but also to produce an obligation that implies a joint, group action ('to do something as a body'), and

b) not only obligate members of a group to do something together, but to exceed the borders of joint commitment of the group, *a priori* obligating non-members or all potential and future participants to joint and coordinated action.

What are these actions like, then, the ones that engage others (all others) or that have the capacity to commit (to bring together, collect and bind even those who are not present in one place simultaneously)? Let us describe and list, that is, assume a few meanings of the verbs 'commit' and 'engage'. These three verbs in the first person plural imperative (let us 'describe',

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‘list’, ‘assume’), which could be uttered sufficiently loudly by any individual at the same time suspending their own speech in the first person singular (only ‘we’ can replace ‘I’; and only ‘I’ can utter the pronoun ‘we’), could together represent a kind of obligation for all those who are potentially within earshot and understand the utterances. The way these verbs were used potentially connects, mobilizes and invites others to individual agreement or action, but at the same time (also) summons them to (the same, common) answer. Their joint answer or joint action[1] is confirmed not only when each of us conducts a given activity (e.g. describing, assuming or listing meanings of the words ‘commit’ and ‘engage’) or else when simultaneously and with total commitment, abandon and concentrated activity performs a collective performance of ‘assuming’, ‘describing’ and ‘listing’. It is also confirmed when these three imperatives are repeated or simply uttered: ‘let us describe and assume and list’. The first person plural imperative is one of the initial, but conditionless, conditions of institutionalizing the work of a group or of joint commitment. Yet certainly not the only one. Verbs such as ask, suggest, entreat, supplicate, appeal, demand, order, as well as prove, argument, justify or defend (not even necessarily used in the imperative) could encourage to engagement and potentially to joint commitment.

The first book of the *Torah* (Chapter 11) describes the first constituting of joint commitment, joint work and first great architectural and institutional adventure. In addition to the imperative that sets collective intentionality in motion (several times, too: ‘come, let us [*havah*] make bricks…’; ‘come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make ourselves a name, lest we be scattered upon the face of the entire Earth’), and in addition to the grandiose project and majestic goal, singleness of the space and time for all members of the group, the introduction of new technology, the discovery of incorporation and the invention of the entity of the company (name), and in addition to the ability of the group to produce a nearly unbelievably powerful instance that disrupts and ultimately destroys the very project – in addition to all that, the group, also, possesses *ad hoc* the same language, thus ensuring the clear and complete communication of all its members.

Engaged action would then be the one that is above all public or announced (for it cannot be a kind of negative social act or a secret, an undisclosed action performed in silence). Further, it is provocative in nature, really a call or message to all, to others (*com-mittere* can mean to send), a prompting of all to come closer, to join (not only members of a group, but also those absent), because 'to commit' precisely means an action that encourages or obligates others to do something together by doing so as members of a future committee ("joint commitment obligates the parties one to the other to act in accordance with the commitments"; M. Gilbert). However, engaged action is specific in that it supposes this type of great or grand work, adherence ('giving one's all', 'committed to the end') and abandon (a kind of sacrifice for others or with other or towards others, or in their stead, sacrifice as bringing closer, but also as work that calls others to join, repeat our action and thus construct future joint work) – all with the goal of bringing us closer to others. (The word *engager* comes from the verb *vado*, with the German word *wadi*, Latin *vas, vadis* meaning '*je m'avance vers quelqu'un*', 'I am advancing towards another'; P. Kemp.) We advance towards or are brought closer to others either when we become bound to them or bind them to us, when we 'invest' or 'place something' into or before others, when we '*mettre en gage*' / 'pledge' or '*donner en gage*' / 'give a pledge'.

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[1] Would it be too irrelevant a digression to stop for a moment in order to let our ear listen to the subtle difference between common and joint? Where common implies a simple commonality, that something is *happens* to be happening in two or more places, or an opinion *happens* to be held by more than one person, joint implies a more complicated unity, one not only with more intentionality (than simple commonality) but also comprising two steps: the first step of agreement and the second of expression. A common feeling or opinion is one that simply recurs; a joint feeling or opinion calls to mind a feeling or opinion *arrived* at, with a prior state of potential disagreement.

What does this mean? What does it mean to place a pledge or burden (guarantee, bail, *hypothèque*; '*engager, c'est hypothéquer*') before an other or before all (the whole community), and to what extent is that a form of modest violence and forcing others (or all) to choose whether they would join this specific action or not? What kind of action does not principally have to be in strictly direct relation with another ('if I am doing something, then you or she must do likewise'), but that certainly binds me to another (and the other to me) such that it jointly obligates us to conduct it ('if I act, then we all act', 'if you act, then all act')? If my public activities involve collecting money for caring for gravely ill children, organizing temporary shelter for war refugees from a neighboring state, or if I often visit slaughterhouses to protest against (the way of) killing animals, would not all these activities be called engaged (and 'activist')? Each could represent 'personal commitment' (*engagement personnel*), and at the same time, none could be performed individually, but would always require smaller or larger groups of people ('joint commitment'). However, this transformation of individual into group agency need not necessarily be the most significant characteristic of these actions. The beginning of the explanation of this transformation was long ago constructed by Kant, where he speaks of duties to oneself as such (*Pflicht gegen sich selbst*), of debt or obligation to oneself that always precedes and underpins/conditions any possible obligation to others (which he will call external duty).

Far more complicated, but also perhaps more crucial, is the set of actions that could be located in that place in English where two complementary words or strategies overlap and at the same time diverge: engagement and commitment. Personal engaged action (crucially perhaps in contradistinction to the French *engagement*) remains personal, such as me being engaged in my career or caring for the ill. Only a handful of people, in my more or less immediate circle, will recognize this engagement, and in recognizing the engagement might feel that it is 'a thing of public importance', and thus an obligation to join in. Commitment or joint commitment, for it is always in the plural, calls for a different kind of obligation. Namely, when I call a lunch meeting of our Group for Social Engagement Studies at a nearby restaurant, and promise to attend the beginning of the meeting, then I am truly engaged and all those who answer the meeting call will confirm my action, thus also becoming engaged. But the joint commitment of our group ('to act in accordance with commitments') occurs only when the actions of the group produce sufficient reason or obligation for those who do not initially belong to our group, or those who are still not at the scheduled meetings, to necessarily join. If our group truly acts together, if it is jointly engaged (such action always referring to the vital connections and relationships that hold the community or the group together), then I am obligated to join it, to become engaged ('if all act, then I act'). Such an obligation is different from a non-perfect obligation, because the person that gives charity or uses polite protocols or helps the poor in no way produces the identical obligation in me. By contrast, joint commitment of a group could never leave me or us indifferent.

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# Becoming engaged, surprising oneself

We are always already engaged, in spite of us and prior to all volitional, deliberate or articulate act of engagement. However, we can also *become* engaged: that is, we become answerable to the pervasive social norms and resources through which we come to be formed as engaged and engaging subjects. Occasionally, we might also become *critically* engaged in these established matrices and definitional closures of subjectivity that render and condition us as intelligible and relational beings. And we might do so in ways that are not unilaterally and hopelessly subsumed by the unjust and injurious logic of these matrices. In other words, such formative modes of subjectivation can serve a performative enactment of social and political engagement. This would be about an incalculable performativity of engagement (but also an engagement with the performative), which implies the indeterminate forces of responsiveness, critical displacement, vulnerability, persistence and resistance.

What interests me here is to think about this intertwinement between 'always already engaged' and 'becoming engaged' beyond a register of chronological and teleological transition from the 'already' to the 'not yet'. This would require unsettling the division between a primary power, or interpellation, which constitutes and forms the subject and a secondary force of self-originating self-in-becoming as external to those constitutive powers of subjectivation. Instead, the intertwinement between 'always already engaged' and 'becoming engaged' invokes the way in which performativity takes place as a situated contingency: incessant, non-teleological, and unattainable – because it is through its unattainability that engagement is sustained.

This performative conjunction of 'always already engaged' and 'becoming engaged' seeks to address the inherently ambivalent and undecidable powers of subjectivation: subjects are constituted and regulated, but in contingent, differential, unforeseen, and contestable ways, in ways that both involve and might displace the terms of subjectivation. The performativity of critical engagement (as much as the critical engagement with the performative) is always implicated in the nexus of that which it seeks to contest (Butler 1993: 1997).

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## Engagement as exposure

This is all about the sociality of engagement. Being engaged amounts to being reflectively situated and reconfiguring that very implication – in the nexus of that which critical engagement seeks to contest. And yet, one's engagement can never and entirely be assumed as one's own. It can occur only with others and through others. It concerns becoming available to each other. In our critical engagements, we are enmeshed with others, we get injured by others, and we take courage from others. We let ourselves be affected, altered, pluralized, exceeded, and prompted by several singular pluralities and plural singularities, to recall Jean-Luc Nancy. Our capacity and desire to engage critically with the world is indebted to this multi-layered relationality. In this sense, I would claim that engagement is a self-deconstructing mode; a mode of self-reconfiguration, which does not concern the self, but rather indicates a condition of becoming exposed to the other than oneself. Engagement, then, depends on one's own constitutive disjointedness and openness to others. In this way, we might think engagement not in terms of autonomous and sovereign activity, but rather as inter-active and inter-passive process "of relating to norms and to others" (Butler in Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 68): in other words, as an ongoing and irresolvable dialectic of affecting and being affected.

In *Being Singular Plural*, Jean-Luc Nancy suggests the word *conatus* would be aptly translated as 'engagement'. In his words: "To be responsible is not, primarily, being indebted to or accountable before some normative authority. It is to be engaged by its Being to the very end of this Being, in such a way that this engagement or *conatus* is the very essence of Being" (Nancy 2000: 183). For Nancy, engagement is linked to the responsibility of a certain connectedness. We are already responsible even before we assume responsibility. Responsibility is akin to what Nancy calls a "law without law" (*loi sans loi*). We are always already before this law without law – one that does not offer guidelines or prescriptions as to how, when, and with whom we should act. We are corporeally enmeshed in, and exposed to, it; and this exposure is what unceasingly constitutes our existence as co-existence (*être en commun*).

Engagement, then, entails being and becoming exposed; being and becoming answerable to others; appearing to others, and with others, in the world. As Nancy has shown evocatively, it is a matter of 'singular plural' existence, infinitely connected with the experience of freedom as 'the affair of existence'. He writes: "The fact of freedom, or the practical fact, thus absolutely and radically 'established' without any establishing procedure being able to produce this fact as a theoretical object, is the fact of what is to be done in this sense, or, rather, it is the fact *that there is* something to be done, or is even the fact that there is the *to be done* [*à faire*], or that there is the affair [*affaire*] of existence. Freedom is factual in that it is the *affair* of existence" (Nancy 1993: 31, italics in the original). The question what is to be done, implying that *that there is* something to be done, is not reducible to the managerial logic of executing a plan. Rather, as much as it implies a pressing and urgent need, it is the overcoming of the logic of teleology, causality and immediately present effectivity. In Nancy's words again: "History is perhaps not so much that which unwinds and links itself, like the time of a causality, as that which *surprises itself*. 'Surprising itself', we will see, is a mark proper to freedom" (Nancy 1993: 15).

The question of what is to be done, as a question which affirms, again and again, that *there is* something to be done, amounts to the register of *praxis* – including, of course, the *praxis* of thought – as an opening of time and space, which comes into being precisely through producing its own agents. Indeed, there is no agency that precedes the exposure to the 'with' of being-with. Furthermore, the register of *praxis* cannot be caught in the closure of either self-sufficient, self-affirming, free-willed agency (akin to liberal and libertarian individualism) or the deterministic subjection to a metaphysical power construed negatively as constraining system and univocal meaning. Rather, situated between and beyond these two outposts, engaged *praxis* is always that which opens the political to the incomplete, unforeseeable, and coexistential historicity of 'surprising itself".

## Deconstructing actuality

Arguably, there can be no event without surprise (Critchley and Derrida 1994). The configuration of 'surprise' evokes here the political promise of a coming actuality, an actuality to come, or an actuality that comes to unsettle any mode of thinking existing actuality as given. So, I propose to think Nancy's coexistential analysis in tandem with Jacques Derrida's deconstructive reading of Heidegger's existential perspective as well as with Judith Butler's deconstructive account of performativity. Derrida has engaged with actuality through deconstructing its normative implications of presence and the present. Actuality, he writes, is *artifactuality*, which "means that actuality is indeed *made*". He continues by describing and deconstructing the performative forces that are at play in the *artifactual* production of actuality:

> "It is important to know what it [actuality] is made of, but it is even more necessary to recognize that it is made. It is not given, but actively produced; it is sorted, invested and performatively interpreted by a range of hierarchizing and selective procedures – *factitious* or *artificial* procedures which are always subservient to various powers and interests of which their 'subjects' and agents (producers and consumers of actuality, always interpreters, and in some cases 'philosophers' too), are never sufficiently aware. The 'reality' of 'actuality' – however individual, irreducible, stubborn, painful

> or tragic it may be – only reaches us through fictional devices. The only way to analyze it is through a work of resistance, of vigilant counter-interpretation, etc." (Derrida in Critchley and Derrida, 1994: 28).

Reality can never be fully present. It is always to be known, read, interpreted, acted upon, and re-enacted only within discourse and through performative reiteration that attempts to fix it. Although the underlying, non-present specificities and determinacies of actuality are never fully accessible to its agents, actuality is indeed a site of performative production. At the same time, there is always absence and spectrality at play in actuality. As a relation of simultaneous difference and deferral, the relation of the actual and the possible is inextricable and imperfect. *Différance*, then, is what leaves the space open for the as-yet-unrealized possibility: a possibility with no guarantees, no purity, and no teleological conclusion. Actuality, in this sense, is an infinitely undecidable articulation of the relation of the actual and the possible that constitutes *différance*. And so engagement entails a new thinking of the possible, which is itself riven with difference.

## The *aporetic* structure of engagement

What is implied in this deconstructive reading of the performative forces that are at play in the *artifactual* production of actuality is the political gesture of engagement as *aporia*; or, to put it differently, the political gesture of engaging with the impossible as the *aporetic* condition of the possible. And yet, how do we make sense of the experience of the *aporia*? Through what fictional devices – i.e., the possible as impossible, the impossible as possible, or the impossible as becoming-possible – do we engage with it? Here is how Derrida thinks the register of becoming possible: "as an impossibility that can nevertheless appear or announce itself *as such*, an impossibility whose appearing as such would be possible (to *Dasein* and not to the living animal), an impossibility that one can await or expect, an impossibility the limits of which one can expect or at whose limits one can wait" (Derrida 1993: 73).

The waiting that Derrida mentions is beyond active vs. passive. It involves and compels being disposed toward others, responding, acting, and engaging. Rather than amounting to impossibility itself, *aporia* engages the impossible as possibilization. It carries within it the imperative to think in action before nonpassable borders. Engagement, as deconstructive thinking in action and before nonpassable borders, is a commitment to infinitely bringing forth and making possible what has been foreclosed by those matrices of recognizability that pass as 'present actuality'. As much as engagement presents itself in the ontological terms that have hitherto defined presence and the present, it also works to transform these very terms. Thus understood as deconstructive engagement with actuality, engagement remains urgently attentive to the multiple ways through which the actual exceeds that which can at any given moment be discursively assimilable into the normative power of 'given' actuality. It indicates what is not yet and what renders one answerable to the other.

## The politics of engagement as performative event

Taking place at the abject borders of signification, critical engagement seeks to contest, in Judith Butler's words, "what has become sedimented in and as the ordinary" (Butler 1997: 145). It does so through working with/in historically situated processes of subjectivation, regulatory laws, social temporalities, im-possibilities, failures, embodied positionalities and relational differences. In this sense, critical engagement plays out within the realm of materialization, which, in Butler, concerns a historically specific temporal process of sedimentation of pervasive discursive effects. It emerges in as well as reiterates and possibly eludes or displaces "a chain of binding conventions" (Butler 1993: 225). The performative force of critical engagement is derived from the citationality/iterability of signification: namely, the movement of decontextualization, expropriation and reappropriation that allows for a possibility of infelicitous reiteration, resignification and even unpredictable transformation of/within these preceding and binding chains of constitutive conventions. So, the possibility of alteration – as a space of persistent and irresolvable ambiguity – is inherent in any established discursive convention. Critical engagement exposes, and becomes exposed to, the contingent iterability of the norms and their aberrations.

The unanticipated possibility for resignification, which emerges in the context of differentiation and deferral of meaning, becomes the site of what Butler calls "opening up the possibility of agency" (Butler 1997: 15). Agency, however, does not indicate the restoration of a sovereign individual subject of speech and action, but rather a discourse's iterable and productive force that enables the inherently unstable and ambivalent process of subjectivation:

> "The paradox of subjectivation (*assujettissement*) is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms. Although this constitutive constraint does not foreclose the possibility of agency, it does locate agency as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power" (Butler 1993: 15).

Performative engagement extrapolates the multiple and indeterminate ways in which signification is haunted by "that which is strictly foreclosed: the unlivable, the non-narrativizable, the traumatic" (Butler 1993: 188). At the same time, deconstructive performativity relies upon discursive citationality as an open but situated possibility of resignification, rearticulation, and change. In 'failing' to achieve a definitive identification and final materialization, the performative emerges time and again as "an exercise of articulation that brings an open-ended reality into existence" (Butler in Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 130). As Butler writes: "In this sense, what is constituted in discourse is not fixed in or by discourse, but becomes the condition and occasion for further action" (Butler 1993: 187). It is precisely this ineradicable caesura that enables the always unprefigurable, and potentially subversive, performative politics of critical engagement.

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# Scattered Remarks on the Concept of Engagement:

## A Socio-Philosophical Approach

Reflecting on the concept of engagement constitutes a paradoxical task: it requires the person undertaking this contemplative endeavour to step back from, while engaging in and with, the very process of engagement. In a socio-philosophical sense, 'engagement' can be defined as a form of active, purposive, and meaning-laden involvement in the world in general or in specific aspects of the world in particular. Engagement is so fundamental to our everyday immersion in the world that even the aim of objectifying it is achievable only by realizing it. Put differently, the act of theorizing engagement presupposes the possibility of practising engagement. Any attempt to develop a theory of engagement is inconceivable without the practice of engaging in and with engagement. We cannot *not* engage in and with engagement because, as immersive beings, we can relate to the world only insofar as we engage in and with it. Instead of getting caught up in the self-referential exercise of providing tautological definitions, however, let us consider some of the main ways in which we are able to make sense of the socio-ontological significance of engagement by grappling with its multifaceted omnipresence in human life.

## I.

One may classify 'engagements' in terms of their *socio-ontological referentiality*. Three *types of engagement* that are, respectively, embedded in three *realms of existence* are of paramount importance:

(a) *Objective engagements are embedded in realms of objectivity.*
(b) *Normative engagements are embedded in realms of normativity.*
(c) *Subjective engagements are embedded in realms of subjectivity.*

In other words, human beings act upon, make sense of, and construct the world on the basis of *objective*, *normative*, and *subjective* engagements.

(a) As physical beings, we are immersed in *objectivity*. As such, we engage with different elements of the natural world. Our bodies have a finite life span, are composed of various organic constituents, and cannot be dissociated from the environment in which they are materially situated.

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(b) As social beings, we are immersed in *normativity*. As such, we engage with different elements of the cultural world. We possess species-constitutive faculties that have permitted us to build a human universe, which comprises a series of empowering resources – notably those derived from our productive, reflexive, socio-constructive, desiderative, and experiential capacities.

(c) As self-conscious beings, we are immersed in *subjectivity*. As such, we engage with different elements of our personal world. As individuals capable of developing a sense of identity, we are placed not only in an external world of objectivity and normativity but also in an inner world of subjectivity, to which we have privileged access. Both rationally and emotionally constituted processes of cognition – which are articulated in thoughts and reflections, as well as in moods and sensations – are part and parcel of what it means to be human.

In short, we are constantly immersed in spheres of (a) *objectivity*, (b) *normativity*, and (c) *subjectivity*. The existential centrality of this tripartite structure of the human being-in-the-world manifests itself on various levels, especially in relation to five anthropological foundations:

- *Labour:* As working beings, we are (a) *purposive*, (b) *cooperative*, and (c) *creative* entities.
- *Language:* As linguistic beings, we are (a) *assertive*, (b) *regulative*, and (c) *expressive* entities.
- *Culture:* As cultural beings, we are (a) *connective*, (b) *collective*, and (c) *individuative* entities.
- *Desire:* As longing beings, we are (a) *intentional*, (b) *coprojective*, and (c) *imaginative* entities.
- *Experience:* As experiential beings, we are (a) *objective*, (b) *normative*, and (c) *subjective* entities.

Irrespective of whether we engage in and with the world through labour, language, culture, desire, or experience (or through any other foundational components inherent in our species-distinctive condition), human life forms have always been, and will always remain, polycentric realms of existence that are objectively, normatively, and subjectively constituted.

## II.

One may classify 'engagements' in terms of their *socio-ontological conditioning*. Three *types of engagement* that are, respectively, embedded in three *types of social conditions* are of paramount importance:

(a) *Behavioural engagements are embedded in behavioural conditions.*
(b) *Ideological engagements are embedded in ideological conditions.*
(c) *Institutional engagements are embedded in institutional conditions.*

In other words, human beings act upon, make sense of, and construct the world on the basis of *behavioural*, *ideological*, and *institutional* engagements.

(a) We engage in and with the world by virtue of different *actions*, which enable us to shape particular aspects of our existence. These actions may be categorized on several levels: individual or collective, conscious or unconscious, spontaneous or habitualized, reflexive or intuitive – to mention only a few. It is by virtue of our actions that we convert ourselves into the protagonists of our lives.

(b) We engage in and with the world by virtue of different *worldviews*, which permit us to make ideologically shaped – and, hence, perspective- and value-laden – assumptions about specific aspects of our existence. These worldviews constitute ideologies, in the sense that they reflect our interest-laden positioning in social reality, which is stratified in terms of key sociological factors – such as status, class, ethnicity, gender, age, and ability.

(c) We engage in and with the world by virtue of different *institutions*, which allow us to generate relatively solidified – and, hence, more or less predictable – patterns of social imaginaries and practices. These institutions – regardless of whether they are primarily economic, political, cultural, artistic, linguistic, sexual, educational, judicial, military, religious, scientific, or otherwise – make us relate to the world in a socially organized and symbolically codified manner.

## III.

One may classify 'engagements' in terms of their *socio-ontological situatedness*. Three *types of engagement* that are, respectively, embedded in three *types of social fields* are of paramount importance:

(a) *Foundational engagements are embedded in foundational fields.*
(b) *Contingent engagements are embedded in contingent fields.*
(c) *Ephemeral engagements are embedded in ephemeral fields.*

In other words, human beings act upon, make sense of, and construct the world on the basis of *foundational*, *contingent*, and *ephemeral* engagements.

(a) *Foundational fields* constitute civilizational ensembles of relationally structured conditions the existence of which is *necessary* for the emergence of social order. *Foundational engagements* constitute activities that take place within, and unfold in relation to, foundational fields. These engagements are equally *necessary* for the emergence of social order. Unless human actors undertake foundational engagements, social order collapses or does not come into existence in the first place. Obvious examples of both foundational fields and foundational engagements are those that are primarily (i) *economic*, (ii) *political*, (iii) *cultural*, (iv) *artistic*, (v) *linguistic*, and/or (vi) *sexual*. No society can exist without (i) some degree of division of labour, (ii) small-scale and large-scale modes of value-guided action coordination, (iii) various forms of habitualization, (iv) diversified realms of aesthetic expression, (v) everyday spaces of communicative interaction, and (vi) subtle or overt methods of regulating sexuality.

(b) *Contingent fields* constitute societal ensembles of relationally structured conditions the existence of which is *possible* within, but not necessary for, the emergence of social order. *Contingent engagements* constitute activities that take place within, and unfold in relation to, contingent fields. These engagements are equally *possible* within, but not necessary for, the emergence of social order. By undertaking contingent engagements, human actors may shape, as well as experience, social order in a meaningful fashion. Yet, in principle, the latter can exist and persist without the former. There are abundant examples of both contingent fields and contingent engagements, such as those that are primarily (i) *judicial*, (ii) *military*, (iii) *religious*, (iv) *scientific*, (v) *academic*, and/or (vi) *journalistic*. Society may be organized more or less efficiently with, but can – at least in principle – exist without, (i) legal arrangements, (ii) armed forces, (iii) spiritual practices and sacred institutions, (iv) systematic forms of knowledge production, (v) disciplinary divisions of cognition, and (vi) media industries.

(c) *Ephemeral fields* constitute interactional ensembles of relationally structured conditions the existence of which is largely *irrelevant* to the emergence of social order, although they tend to be far from meaningless to the actors by whose performances they are brought into being. *Ephemeral engagements* constitute activities that take place within, and unfold in relation to, ephemeral fields. These engagements are also largely *irrelevant* to the emergence of social order. Granted, by undertaking ephemeral engagements, human actors may contribute to the quotidian production and reproduction of social order in significant ways. Yet, in principle, the latter can exist and persist without the former. Given the diversity of everyday involvements in the world, one may identify a countless number of examples demonstrating the prevalence of both ephemeral fields and ephemeral engagements, which are, by definition, relatively short-lived and which, in terms of their typological specificity, are not indispensable to the reproduction, let alone to the emergence, of social order.

## Summary

One may classify 'engagements' in terms of a *combination of socio-ontological variables*, notably in relation to the aforementioned dimensions. Numerous *types of engagement* that *intersect* with different *socio-ontological variables* are vital to human existence. As such, they can be constituted by an assemblage of the following – interconnected – modes of being-in-the-world:

I. objective, normative, and/or subjective;

II. behavioural, ideological, and/or institutional;

III. foundational, contingent, and/or ephemeral.

More specifically, these crucial modes of being-in-the-world have significant implications for a critical understanding of human existence:

I. Human beings act upon, make sense of, and construct the world on the basis of *objective*, *normative*, and *subjective* engagements. The domains of objectivity, normativity, and subjectivity constitute the principal spheres in and through which human actors establish a materially constituted, symbolically mediated, and personally assimilated relation to the world.

II. Human beings act upon, make sense of, and construct the world on the basis of *behavioural*, *ideological*, and *institutional* engagements. It is by virtue of their interactional, conceptual, and organizational capacities that human creatures engage in and with the world in a performative, reflective, and coordinative manner.

III. Human beings act upon, make sense of, and construct the world on the basis of *foundational*, *contingent*, and *ephemeral* engagements. The first type is necessary for, the second type is possible within, and the third type is irrelevant to the emergence of social order.

As illustrated above, the task of shedding light on key forms of human engagement in and with the world is a complex affair. When navigating our way through the universe, we pursue a large variety of conceptually distinguishable, yet ontologically intertwined, forms of engagement. As immersive entities, we cannot live in the world unless we act upon, make sense of, and construct it. We cannot find our place in the world unless we engage in and with the multiple ways in which reality presents itself, and poses an existential challenge, to us on a daily basis. The challenge of engaging in and with the challenge of engagement remains, and will always remain, a challenge based on engagement.

Wolfgang Merkel

# Economy, Culture, Discourse and Engagement in Heterogeneous Societies

Globalization has changed our worlds domestically and beyond the nation-state. Our societies are facing opportunities and risks. It depends not at least on political action what will prevail. Three major factors will be decisive for social and political cohesion in our advanced democratic societies, but they can be changed and are not set in concrete. They are the essential screws for knocking politics into shape.

- Class: socio-economic inequality
- Culture, religion, ethnicity: cultural heterogeneity
- Cosmopolitan elites and communitarian citizens: which engagement?

All three variables can be separated out analytically but, in reality, they are very closely woven together, they overlap and buttress each other. If there's any mismatch then they may become deactivated; if they overlap then conflicts mount and the problems of integration intensify. Theoretical considerations as well as empirical facts suggest the following basic hypothesis: intelligent political action can create the social and cultural pre-conditions for successful societal integration and political engagement in liberal democracies. But to do so you must put to one side the postmodern naivety of multi-cultural and cosmopolitan optimism and to accept the empirically proven fact that it's harder to govern heterogeneous societies than homogeneous ones. What IS and what SHOULD BE the case must not be mixed up in any sober analysis.

## 1. Social class and socio-economic inequality

From the beginning of the 1980s inequality of income and wealth rose in the OECD club of economies regardless of the indicator used: Gini-index, upper and lower quintile, decile, poverty ratio or especially the top 1.0 or 0.1% of the income pyramid (cf. inter alia Piketty 2014). This steep rise in inequality is not the 'natural' consequence of the digital revolution, the knowledge economy or bold creative disruption. Mainly, it's a result of political decisions that have been propagating this particular form of market empowerment and the shrinking of the state for pretty well three decades.

At the same time, the OECD group of countries is witnessing lower turnouts at elections as well as declining membership of political parties and larger

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collective bodies in society. The lower third of society in particular has turned its back on politics. New or direct forms of political participation such as NGOs, referenda, citizen councils and participatory budgeting or deliberative fora are socially much more selective than the ailing institutions of representative democracy. The participatory world of the OECD has witnessed the emergence of two-thirds democracies. The lower third has broken away from political engagement and our democracies.

Democracy lives on assumptions that cannot be reproduced by economy and society alone. This is not a structural fault of democracy. Rather, we are dealing with a partially deliberate, partially careless surrender of the state's capacity to regulate and intervene in an economy that structurally creates socio-economic inequality and erodes the fundamental democratic principle of political equality. So the issue is to strengthen the state and reboot much more strongly redistribution as a general *leitmotiv* within fiscal, economic and education policy. The more socially just the more integrated a society and, with that, the higher the quality of democracy. Social equality, societal integration, and political engagement by the people are closely connected.

## 2. Governing Heterogeneous Societies

Culturally homogeneous societies are easier to govern. Heterogeneous societies tend to draw ethnic cleavages, to fragment into sub-cultures, to create parallel societies and cut back on the build-up of inclusive social capital. That sounds alarming because heterogeneous societies *are* our future and many aspects of them can be exceedingly positive, such as cultural diversity, economic and social creativity as well as the practice of tolerance and recognition of the other.

Empirical research can demonstrate the following about social capital: the greater the socio-economic and ethno-religious inequality the lower the level of mutual trust among citizens. This link is not unavoidable but it can be mitigated – including via: economic growth, meritocratic mechanisms in society (equal life chances: Amartya Sen), social security, fair rules of redistribution beyond the markets, low levels of social inequality, and strong social links between ethnic communities (bridging social capital).

The negative scenario in our society would be: no growth, high economic inequality, a weak welfare state, high levels of ethnic diversity with, at the same time, barely any cross-ethnic community social organizations. This has been the path followed in the last three decades. But turn these around and there's a positive integration scenario.

The removal of socio-economic inequality in a prosperous economy could unleash a special pro-integration dynamic that, over the long term, could help bridge not only economic, but also cultural gaps. Right now, there's the risk of a cleavage becoming starker between Arab Muslims and European immigration societies whether these are laicistic like France, or liberal-multicultural like Holland, or Catholic like Poland and Slovakia. Today's Europe demonstrates barely a successful example of Muslim integration: neither of Arab Muslims in France, Belgium, Holland, Spain nor of Turkish Muslims in Germany, Switzerland and Austria nor again of Pakistani Muslims in Great Britain. One cause of this is certainly a failed policy of integration. The immigration country did not take their engagements connected to immigration and necessary for integration sufficiently serious.

But is that all? Have all countries simply failed? The liberal multi-cultural policies in The Netherlands, the laicistic republican policy of France and the much stronger bent towards ethnic assimilation in Switzerland, Austria and Germany? Or is it the case that people from Muslim cultures are the hardest religious-ethnic minorities to integrate in European societies because core elements of their current communities display the greatest distance towards the guiding principles of our liberal and secular social cultures? There are signs of evidence if you look at the cultural modernization that's happened in our society in recent decades: gender equality, gay rights and the right to determine ones own sexuality, right to skepticism, irony and satire vis-à-vis religion in general, freedom to convert religious beliefs, and last but not least the condemnation of anti-Semitism.

These exemplary cultural achievements are protected under law. But it's not enough just to respect the law when it comes to integration but to accept the core values of the immigrant community. Of course, the immigrants' values are construed at an individual level in society but, as in all societies, it's a question here of deep-rooted social dispositions which cannot be 'unconstrued' haphazardly or in a short timeframe. The offer of language and integration courses is a necessary but certainly far from sufficient condition. Immigrants have to engage actively in politics and societies.

At least just as important is swift integration into the labour market. Long waiting times for work permits are fatal. But integration into the labour market cannot undermine important regulations such as the minimum wage or job protection, including against dismissal. And it's crystal clear that any such squaring of the circle can only involves painful compromises for social democratic policy. Neoliberal labour markets can absorb unskilled migrant labour easier than regulated markets. In the short term, one might be sceptical that such partial re-regulations can be won against any trade union veto – and the unions can, for their part, claim legitimate grounds for their positioning. Social democratic labour and welfare policies have to navigate between Scylla and Charybdis.

It will be even tougher to undertake that 'deconstruction' of deep-rooted patriarchal and anti-Enlightenment value models that is essential for integration.

Anybody thinking in shortened timeframes does not want to understand how deeply ethno-religious values are rooted in an individual's personality. It's not improbable that parallel societies emerge that may well not run up against the constitutional decrees of the state but may still reflect patriarchal and illiberal traditions. But the parallel subcultural societies rarely engage in common organizations, projects and activities. The likely medium-term perspective is therefore neither the normatively unacceptable assimilation to a dominant culture nor a multi-cultural mishmash but the hopefully peaceful co-existence of segregated cultures. Such a realistic perspective does not negate the need for cultural integration but it does separate the diagnosis of what IS from an ever-valid perspective on what SHOULD BE.

## 3. Discursive Engagement: cosmopolitanism versus communitarianism

There's a third cleavage that's starting to form in our societies in the wake of globalization: that between cosmopolitan elites – the sociologist Richard Sennett mocks these as *frequent flyers* – and the intellectually, geographically as well as socially immobile parts of our societies.

Three principles define the normative core of cosmopolitanism: individualism, universalism and openness. Cosmopolitans want open borders, open-door immigration, easier access to citizenship, cultural pluralism as well as global responsibility for universally valid human rights and environmental protection. Cosmopolitans play up the opportunities of globalization, communitarians its risks. The latter prefer communities built on solidarity, controlled borders, they stand for limits on immigration, opt for cultural identity and stress the value of social cohesion and engagement that is supposedly easier to maintain in small definable communities than in unbounded social spaces whose texture rapidly alters. A positive variant of communitarianism would be the social democratic "Folkhemmet" (*people's home*) in Sweden or Denmark, a negative or chauvinist model today's rampant right-wing populism. The first is a political project of solidaristic engagement, the latter is an ethnic exclusion of the immigrants and new citizens.

Cosmopolitan views are found above all among the educated middle classes. Many of them are the winners of globalization. They enjoy the human capital enabling them to cope with cultural differences and economically forced geographical mobility. These are the social groups that social democracy has won over even more strongly since the 1970s. The lower half of society is less mobile and more critically disposed towards open borders, immigration, imposed mobility, multiculturalism and competition in the least-qualified segment of the labour market. These are the losers of globalization and potential voters of right wing populist parties. And, of course, it's not dicey to speculate that they bear the biggest brunt of open borders within their local quarters as well as in daily and working life. They bear the costs of open borders most of all while the upper and parts of the middle classes profit from them.

These new cleavages have for some time grown into a dilemma for European social democrats: if they make concessions to one side they lose votes on the other. The decline in voter support over the past decade precisely reflects this dilemma. The influx of refugees and the so far uniquely cosmopolitan policy of the federal government within Europe have served to deepen this dilemma. This is an even bigger challenge for the communitarian, conservatively positioned Christian Democrats. They wanted openness for the free exchange of economic goods and services, not for migrant cultures or the massive inflow of culturally ‘alien’ people of whom it’s impossible to say whether they will help or hinder the economy and the exchequer.

Despite all these difficulties, the contours of a social democratic narrative can be discerned in this integration debate: the widening socio-economic divide between winners and losers of globalization must be closed; a strong state shows itself not only as a reliable set of laws but also as a guarantor of social advancement and equal life chances for all; this holds true not least for refugees and immigrants; to help them integrate they need disproportionate financial support, if necessary even with affirmative action. Those affirmative actions have to be extended to the lower third of our society. It would make our societies more just and resilient against right-wing populist temptations.

Initiatives to build bridges and stimulate engagements between ethnic communities, organizations and associations within civil society must be promoted from below. The immigrants and the majority within modern and just societies must change too. But there can be no negotiation of the rule of law and the cultural values of an open society. That’s as true for indigenous xenophobia on one side as it is for religious-based intolerance in many current Islamic utterances on the other.

Željko Radinković

# Hermeneutics of Engagement

The philosophical perspective of the question of engagement is often intimately bound with questions of intentionality, freedom, corporeality and in general the relation of man and the "world." Indeed, in phenomenological discussions, man is considered to exist if and when his constitutive moment is in relation to the world (as the horizon of his own possibilities) (Gillissen 2008). In his book, *Being and Time* (although elsewhere as well), Heidegger will place the existential Being-in-the-World (*In-der-Welt-sein*) at the heart of his existential-ontological considerations about the structure of *Dasein* (Being-there), and designate the relation to the world as an integral part of its structure. As such, *Dasein* does not relate to the world contingently, that is, as if this relation could also potentially not be present, but is rather ontologically determined by its "worldliness" (Heidegger 1993). Also following phenomenological considerations about worldliness as a constitutive aspect of the human being is the so-called philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, which, adopting Heidegger's thesis about the timeliness of human existence, attempts to return the moment of *subtilitas applicandi* into hermeneutic discussions. In addition to *subtilitas intelligendi* (understanding) and *subtilitas explicandi* (exposition), at the moment of application, Gadamer recognizes the aspect of situatedness, so inescapable for hermeneutics, which had somewhat lost its importance over time due, above all, to the influence of Romantic hermeneutics. Not only Heidegger's existential ontology, but also traditional hermeneutics emphasizes the situatedness of understanding. Gadamer points to the original role of theological and legal hermeneutics, and the constitutive difference and tension between the abstraction of the originally theological or legal text (religious revelation or law in effect) and the concrete situation of its exposition. According to Gadamer, to understand the message of salvation or a given provision in the law, does not mean understanding them as mere historical document, but always considering them as modalities of their application in concrete historical situations. The universality of the hermeneutic approach, advocated by Gadamer, simultaneously also means the universality of the moment of application. Any understanding, whether understanding a text, a person's gestures, historical context, etc. inherently includes the moment of application to the situation of the one who understands (Gadamer 1986).

Criticizing this universalistic approach of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, Jürgen Habermas underscores his reservations regarding universal

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hermeneutic consciousness. Namely, this all-encompassing radical historicity levels out and reduces precisely the reflexive moments of understanding (method, hermeneutic gestures specific to different fields), and in so doing tends to overtake systematically distorted communication. Thus Habermas points to the (at least provisional, pragmatically established) necessity of a position of reflection in relation to Gadamerian "event of understanding." According to Habermas, "enlightened hermeneutics," whose task consists of revealing and presenting the pathologically and ideologically condition pseudo-communication, which appears in the form of false consensus and fake normalcy, must, in addition to insights into the historicity of understanding, also integrate into itself the "metahermeneutical knowledge concerning the conditions which make systematically distorted communication possible" (Habermas 1971).

When speaking of hermeneutics of engagement, we are speaking about the conditions of application with regard to the historicity of the process of understanding. A special place in the framework of this problem belongs to the tension between the inevitability of historical conditionality of understanding and considerations of the possibility of reflection and methodological approach that would preserve within them the possibility of emancipation from the very same historicity.

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Predrag Krstić

# W(h)ithering Political Phantasms

**Abstract** Looking at the opposing discursive and political strategies of Serbia in the 1990s, the text examines the nature of wondering about the "path" this community chose. It suggests that there are benefits to rejecting the dramatic fatefulness of this question, and even holds a certain truthfulness in the commonsensical antihistorical conception, *nihil novum*. The conclusion, however, also expresses the limits of the proverb's validity, that is, the justification of its argumentative function as a corrective, but no as principle.

**Keywords**: the people, destiny, orientation, movement, rest, standstill, resistance

## A Cry for Orientation

It was the nineties. Grotesque faces ruled public space: ever pouring historical dimensions onto microphone or paper, grandiosly speechifying, they forever presented ultimate solutions and calls to something, some drama, some epic event, some thorn in the paw regarding the status or relation of East and West, of geopolitics, of cosmic justice. It appeared that basic manners demanded that in such an environment one simply declined to be equally pretentious, refused to participate in conversations about ever groundbreaking meetings and decisive battles, in foundation-shaking, all in order to increase one's own importance. In short, one needed to react to the deafening noise of speakers and guns, in self-defense, in desperation or because lacking any other means, in a more measured tone and more subtle voice.

The delirium of overwhelming engagement could perhaps most conspicuously be read in that not at all innocent question, taken up in innumerable discussions, from barrooms to courtrooms: "Whither Serbia?" I too had to participate in a panel discussing the topic. What else could I do? I resorted to tried and true philosophical contrivances. Since I am disinclined to offer grand historic destinations, and I tend to be suspicious of indicating directions and giving directives, I decided on a strategy of questioning the question itself. A naive, disinterested, responsible and competent observer could thus glean a series of suppositions that lurk behind the question, and are smuggled with its hidden assumptions.

Above all, the question "Whither Serbia?" claims that there is some entity, whether political, cultural, military, bound (up) by blood or interest – we know not. In any case, an entity of considerable level of abstraction, and

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hence indetermination, yet to the questioner, and seemingly others, not only recognizable, but obvious, clear and present, unambiguously distinct from others. It further turns out that this entity is going through some sort of episode, it is in motion, headed somewhere. Finally, it seems that we are tacitly saying that it also possesses auto-ambulation, its movement independent from our will, that it is auto-kinetically headed in an unknown direction, and that we are simply wondering about its destination.

This dispirited, if not entirely soulless, analysis must absolutely be opposed at least on this last point. No, if we are asking about the direction and goal of movement, the intention is certainly not, or not exclusively, to reveal the anonymous structures that overdetermine its course (to use an Althusserian word), nor is it the cold curiosity of the physicist puzzling over the mechanical laws of a body's movement, calculating inertia, lines of momentum and resistance. Rather, it is a willingness to first assess the current situation, coordinates, placement, terrain topography, and thus grab the wheel of history, that is, rudder, place it into one's own hands in order to choose one's destiny. Else, at the very least, intervene, to the extent possible, as far as "objective circumstances" allow, in setting the coordinates of by now the aware and voluntary – given the revealed and chosen desired goal – movement. This hidden content of the question, which concerns its intention and is certainly its most important aspect, can, however, only be found in its intonation.

Yet, entirely unexpectedly, it will turn out that the analysis of this intonation would speak less in favor of justification of the question posed thus than would a strict analysis of its text. If, unencumbered, we listen carefully, we will be able to hear a hint of pretension in the question "whither... ," as well as an inappropriate ambition, a tasteless theatricality, a solemn tone filled with anticipation. Much as the Russian, "Что делать?" ["What is to be done?"] (cf. Chernyshevsky 1971; Lenin 1943). One could even say that at best, today it sounds somewhat unsophisticated, frivolous, infantile, or else to be harsh, threatening. If we imagine an invitation to a panel or subscription for a brochure themed "Whither... ?" or, as it were, "What Is to Be Done?", and if we imagine that it is placed into a stable and well ordered state, such a directly and seditiously formulated question could hardly be seen by an average and reasonably informed citizen as other than a despicable promotion of yet another radical political sect, one in collusion with historical providence, garnering its appropriate conspiratorial audience. In our own community, as in the Russian one, this is not (yet) the case. Our fundamental inquisitiveness regarding "what" and especially "whither" is nearly the traditionalism of thinking politics: it is a timeless question, never to find its answer, less resolving than exhausting itself, upon which we might deal with less global and less crucial problems.

This schizophrenic position, ever-at-the-crossroads, ever-at-the-turning-point, seems not at all comfortable, but could for some, even many, perhaps be so. It only suits the regeneration of neurotic grand-designers and conspiratorial redeemers, although they and their followers are not at all few in number, or not even, at least potentially, in the minority. And that is not only the shameless, but the truly dangerous timbre in the question "Whither Serbia?" It invites what was thought to have been worn out, to have been tragically discredited long ago in some war times or other. Perhaps that is why behind it one hears the mumbling of a desire for prophetic universal insight, one gleans the process of writing out another invitation for the next monster social engineering, one visualizes the scowl of uniformed figures in consternating concern, huddled over maps and the historical being of the people. Such concerns for Serbia, or any entity for that matter, ought to be diverted by direct evidence, if not by other means, such as reading into others' experience. For it is precisely when such concerns were at their greatest height and scope that the citizens of Serbia ended up doomed – much like other entities (as testified by Robert Musil's *Man Without Qualities*, about Austria-Hungary prior to entering World War I, as it turns out, its final war (Musil 2006)).

Does the potential malignancy of the topic, supported by direct personified insight from this region, demand silence? Is it worth declaring it absurd and treating it as a sort of collective clinical chart? Is there a way to form utterances about indubitably important questions beyond messianic pathos and adequate political psycho- and socio-pathology? Can something like the Fate of the Nation or State be spoken or thought of unpretentiously, softly, tenderly? It seem that what decides this questions is measure: measure in understanding the scope of procedure being undergone, measure in its conscious, willful and responsible limitation of validity of any findings, and, in particular, in recognition of the consequence of the findings' presentation. Yet, is it also possible, as in any theoretical game, that its loyal partner therein, practically disempowered and disinvested inquiry, remain uncompromising in unmasking the object spoken of.

## A Yearning for Rest

It is an established fact that being always pensive leads to paralysis. In particular in those not naturally disposed to movement. Those whose character, personal affinity or life choice is, put kindly, immobile. Another murky mega-term, "people," is such in principle (whatever context great narratives place it in) – now and forever. At least until it is not moved by misfortune. Testimony enough is the resistance encountered to that coded allusion to the slightest movement from a state of rest: "reform." As far as "people" are concerned, nothing new under the sun and ruling scepter, certainly nothing that could alter the established order, that is mobilize, no less force, the smallest of changes. Nor was it ever different.

Legend has it that there were attempts in 19th century Serbia to name Austrian-educated men as administrators, to see if they might bring order to documents, cadastres, taxation, the people, to see if they might uproot leisureliness, irresponsibility, relaxation, in short, custom, thus internally (re)ordering the country, bringing it into the family of bureaucratically organized states. How did it end? Well, finally, the whole set up was abandoned and educated fellows were replaced by "ordinary" people who had more of an "ear" and "feel" for local timeless circumstances and customs. The order of things that acquired sufficient temporal and spacial scope is immutably stable and resistant with regard to any intervention, no less reversal, however such change might be rationally convincing and generally advisable.

It was actually interesting to further sharpen, i.e. follow to its logical conclusion, and thus test the previously proposed thesis as a provocative response to the suspicious question "Whither Serbia?" by answering – nowhere. Nothing of any importance changes. Nor has it ever. Not through uprisings, coup d'etats, dynastic shifts, putsches, not even through armed or velvet revolutions. Perhaps we are, truth be told, indeed an "unhistorical people," as we were considered by the classical philosophers of history. Like India. Or China. There is no progress of spirit; the so-called public mind remains the same as ever or exists not at all. Rulers come and go, even parliamentary advantages are put forth, but the rickshaw still is pulled, rice is distributed, potatoes are sold in dirty markets, people are crushed in the streets and find no motive for any sort of historical flights when it comes to reorganization of parts of their own body politic (see, of course, Hegel, 1924). Except that we, as opposed to the Indians and Chinese, are also small, on the periphery, and, despite or precisely because of meaningless vows, self-insufficient – compounding our sense of inferiority.

Yet here as there invincible life wins out. Only survival, continuation and sustainment are victorious. Such obdurate, lumbering, burdened, leery, hesitant, eternalized mentality, grown into national character, suffers all reform. A basic, primitive, brutal conservatism, free of conceptualization, already all too immune to any plan of reshaping, it is entirely impulsively, directly, organically and automatically in antithesis to any difference and change, indeed could experience change as naught else than harassment, attack, catastrophic possibility of the irrevocable infection of the established. As Milan Kangrga used to indefatigably repeat – to the point that it made it into canonical philosophical education – the *The Ballads of Petrica Kerempuha* Krleža masterfully express this vegetative implacability, particularly in the poem “Khevenhiller” where the horizon of the eternally lasting past becomes explicitly determinative of any potential future dimension.

> It has never been so
> that it hasn’t been somehow,
> so neither will it be
> that it won’t be somehow for us.
> (…)[1]

## Will for Resistance

Although there was a real danger that meddling Krleža, the Croat into “the Serbian question,” that is the “question of Serbia,” would be considered a tasteless and over-the-top provocation, I gambled with another statement attributed to the author, in which, as far as I can remember, he is again dealing with equating “us with them.” Allegedly he said something to the tune of: “All right. You’ve had Svetozar Marković with ‘Serbia in the East’, you’ve had Radomir Konstantinović’s ‘Small Town Philosophy’, and what has changed?” (cf. Marković 1984; Konstantinović 2013; Krleža 2014). We could yet add another few brilliant diagnosticians and their ill-fated attempts and poor outcomes to cure their cantankerous compatriots out of their listlessness. But, truly, except such an immiserated or gasping intellectual environment, where have these findings, declarations, reviews, challenges been taken to heart and by whom? Who has read any of this at all? Who has, for that matter, read Voltaire and Diderot, except the revolutionaries who, convinced of their own enlightened righteousness, falsified them politically? And who among us, reducing such authors to humorless and all to verisimilar pronouncements, did not attempt to alter “the state of things,” changing them in ways different from the authorly intent, all the while garnering illusory hopes of revising an ancient way of life by exposing it?

Yet it was this very Serbia whose (im)mobility was written about that would not suffer the thundering question “Whither Serbia?” Nor is this the full thesis that ought to be forced through. Its complement, its normative corrective, its sobering and hopeful explanation would like to swing its own punch for the argument. Serbia, namely, is “going” nowhere, much as it never “went” anywhere. And in a sense (perhaps even an important one), this is good, for Serbia as for any community; certainly better than going anywhere. Especially since imagining some movement or suggesting a direction, no less actually heading towards something, has never ended well.

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[1] The verses, whose alliterations and vernacular rhythm make them untranslatable, go as follows in the original. “Nigdar ni tak bilo / da ni nekak bilo / pak ni vezda nebu / da nam nekak nebu [...] Kak je tak je, tak je navek bilo, / Kak bu tak bu, a bu vre nekak kak bu! [...] Kajgod kakgod bilo opet je tak bilo, / Kak je bilo tak je tak bude bilo” (Krleža 2013: 34; Kangrga 2008: 156).

What was the answer to the question about whither Serbia and whither it ought go, when we posed it in the nineties? Did we move towards compensating historical accounts and finally resolving the question of our own identity? What was the result? The example is tendentious, to be sure, but what better, more complete, more plastic way to picture "going?" Well, if we can at all speak in that ambulatory sense, then Serbia really did go, and it was then that we heard speak of how "Serbia has risen" and "stood up from its knees," not to mention that it was universally experienced as moving: towards justice and autonomy or doom and war, no matter. It was moving. Just like Germany was moving in 1914 (to leave its subsequent ambulations aside) in the images of streaming volunteers, the hats flung high, frenzied shedding of civil clothes for military garb, that collective illusory fervor, the idolatry of the front (cf, for example, Jünger 1980; Sloterdijk 1983; Jaspers 1987).

In Germany or in Serbia, or really anywhere, true "going," the kind that peeks behind the question "Whither...?" takes place, that is, "a people happens," only as part of so-called foreign policy. Of course, foreign policy by those other, confrontational, means. It is a redundant truism, but a truism that nevertheless still reveals the malevolent dimension of the word, to say that the "going" of a country unfolds only by "mobilizing" its population. It is therefore worthwhile to turn one's attention to the fact that internal changes do not motivate "going" toward some "where," certainly never so intensely, nor, I dare say, as extensively, as when, without changing, one must affirm one's own immobility via others who are differently unchanging. That is where one jumps on one's horse and flies, once more charges unto the breach.

One ought to keep in mind the dangerous possibility, nay, the certainty, of such collective, that is, collectivistic movement whenever its "whither?" is thematized. This type of caution might be cultivated or simply shared by the very same immobility of stale folksy life. That is its right. Resistance to imprudent designers and planners of historical routes, a guardedness against messianic narrators and eschatological announcers, an indolent dismissive wave of the hand to grand stories and perfectionist plans. Perhaps even such healthy or commonsensical skepticism gives rise to faith in small, immediate moves and changes. But as long as there are foundational questions and global expectations, misgiving is an understandable reaction both to solvable problems and justified hopes.

Therefore, things being what they are, perhaps it is best for Serbia not to go anywhere, and it is perhaps entirely appropriate that it is going nowhere. Such a notion ought to be nurtured. Which was not hard. One would never say of Switzerland that it is budging anywhere, and look how they are doing? Some five hundred years of peace and we too could reasonably expect to come to terms with “trivial” internal transformations that concern quality of life. At least we will not stand at the ready at every hint of self-reformation. The revealing “truth” reached by countries with less turbulence than has befallen us, the distrust of gradual undermining and the final, if only theoretical, rejection of the emphatic idea of (not only linear, but singular in meaning) progress, and in general, directional historical movement, has by ancient wisdom or cantankerous obtuseness been woven into our character and actually already “inscribed” long ago. Albeit in such a way that it serves as alibi for not-in-the-least movement, for investing only in arguments in favor of negation and minimal possibility of bettering and consequently, reasons for effort in that regard.

Still, one should have and ought to also notice and say the following. Our question, “Whither Serbia?” emerges as a symptom of precisely the very same anti-progressivist and stale unmove whose antidote is found only in its amputation: removal of fetishization of History and its inexorable flow. Only seemingly paradoxical, and only upon its dethroning might there be a chance to avoid that in which we are mired: an ahistorical mythic curse of the eternal cycle of dissolution and establishment, along with its appropriately ritualistic mourning. Only thus do we not step outside the questioning from the beginning, yet still refuse to program into it – as, by the way, into anything else – the end.

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Tromesečno. – Drugo izdanje na drugom medijumu: Filozofija i društvo (Online) = ISSN 2334-8577
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