

# The Symposium of Philosophy *or* the Philosophy of Symposium

Ethics and Politics in Society of the Spectacle

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*Dedicated to Chrissa.*

## I

In a world torn apart by poverty and war, is there any reason why one should be the least interested in the philosophical interplay between ethics and politics? Put otherwise: in a world that is, by most people's standards, unethical, is there any room left for an authentic engagement in what constitutes, or should constitute, an ethical approach toward the continuation of democratic public discourse?

This is precisely the question that the *1<sup>st</sup> International Philosophical Symposium*<sup>1</sup>, which took place in Heraklion-Crete, Greece, was confronted with. A very eclectic group of speakers was lined up, from linguist turned superstar agitator Noam Chomsky to Alex Callinicos, leader of the english communist party, to speculate and reflect on the role of ethics in contemporary politics. The philosophers' symposium, orchestrated by the Municipality of Heraklion, was purportedly aimed at igniting a social dialogue pertaining to burning issues facing society today. Oddly enough, the symposium boasted its social relevance, rather than its academico-theoretical odour. Mere hours before the inaugural speech by Giannis Kourakis, Mayor of Heraklion, Panajiotis Georgoudis, charged with interfacing with the press, made it crystal clear to me: “the symposium is not to be taken lightly for a critique of everyday life is to be enunciated during its activities”. This approach toward philosophy, which is rarely if ever encountered in contemporary greek academia, both excited and surprised me. At last, I thought, a philosophical inquiry toward the truth that connects to the mundane realities of our everyday life. For someone galvanised in the theory of practice, this approach, I have to admit, was a teaser I could not resist. Having kept that firmly in mind, I contemplated the next day with impatience.

In this state of mind, I woke up in the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup> of May, lit a cigarette, smiled as the first rays of morning light softly caressed my forehead, and filled out into the grey streets looking for what seems to be lost in contemporary philosophy, namely the sense of excitement and hope that once inhabited the hearts of brave men who sought to transform the world, rather than merely describe it. I arrived at the site of the symposium around nine, which, by that time, was crowded. That is a good sign, I thought to myself; shows that actual people's concern has not evaporated into thin air. Of course, that was to be anticipated as the first speaker after the Mayor of Heraklion and the President of the Organisation Team was Noam Chomsky. And Chomsky, as was also expected, was lavish with his fulmination against the new world order: current US policy forces the globe to a historical standstill, he offered, and went on to proclaim that unless we ordinary people stand up and cry out for justice, freedom, ethos, and equality, all is in jeopardy of spiralling further down into a miserable state of moral bankruptsy and collective hopelessness. But as I said, Chomsky, his good intentions and literary wit notwithstanding, is, above and beyond all things, a predictable speaker: understandably, which path we should follow to

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1 URI: <http://www.philosophycrete.edu.gr>

express this discontent and frustration, that is, whether we should filter our voice through professional politicians and entrenched decision-making channels, or destroy affirmatively everything within reach like a new race of barbarians in order to create anew is a discussion that he, as expected, chose to delegate promiscuously to other less prominent speakers.

Yet, a distressing surprise soon followed. No sooner had Chomsky finished his speech and stepped down than most attendees started leaving. When the image that mediates social relations disappears from view, the spectacle cannot re-constitute itself, but the void remains<sup>2</sup>. The auditorium, which mere minutes ago was bursting with life, resumed back to its typical tranquil rhythm. Perhaps everybody flocked to the beach, I thought, for this is the only logical explanation I could come up with. Partly satisfied with this explanation, I decided to drive down to the beach, mesmerised by the expectation of a promising cool breeze. There, I ran into D., whom I had met a while ago at the symposium. After exchanging a few casual remarks about such things as the constant and methodical expansion of the city of Heraklion that now stretches far into what was once touted as the epitome of the cretan wilderness, and the corresponding urbanisation-cementing of the landscape, he told me he came to the symposium in pursuit of stimulating conversations with interesting people as his everyday life is a far cry from anything even remotely considered as interesting or exciting. I concurred, muttering “on a long enough timeline, everyone's survival rate drops to zero”<sup>3</sup>. And, unfortunately, he added, this process is dramatically accelerated by the eclipse of excitement in shared lived experience. Paradoxically, this frustration was also echoed in the speeches. In his speech, *Political disaffection as an outcome of institutional practices? Some post-Tocquevillean speculations*, which took place on May 27<sup>th</sup>, Claus Offe expressed his frustration with the current state of disaffection in politics. This apathy, Offe argued, is symptomatic of the victory of the neoliberal agenda over any other alternative frame of governance. Politics was exciting and vibrant when the critical political question still revolved around the bipolar opposition between capitalism and communism. However, the underlying desiring machines that were hard-coded in that bygone battle of ideas dissipated as the passionate ideological battle that fed on the Cold War receded into the background. Its immediate effects aside, one more subtle consequence of the demise of the Soviet Union would be to henceforth bring discredit on any attempt to articulate an alternative to the end of history that is encapsulated in the neoliberal perspective. The growing de-politicisation and disinterestedness of the body politic, as manifest in the high abstention in the elections, attested (and continues to attest) to the contraction of space for the articulation of radical alternatives. The disappearance of excitement that Offe locates in the mainstream political discourse and process is connected to the disappearance of excitement in shared lived experience in a profound way: the pursuit

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2 And as the weight of the void becomes unbearable, a new image is sought in order to give the appearance that social relations, that is, unmediated social relations are still possible. Then the spectacle re-constitutes itself.

3 C. Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, Vintage, 2003 (1996).

of excitement migrated from the realm of mainstream politics to the market, for only the market seemed to provide a social space wherein choices about alternatives could be made. In short, everyone was now on the market for a paid-for lifestyle, for all hopes for excitement were reposed in the market. In the continuum of a wicked metaphysics of political economy, the citizen transmogrified into the consumer, the excessive forces of consumption were recognised as at least equal if not superior to the economical forces of production, and the commodity became the de facto image through which society understood itself.

As life turns into a race for the latest upgrade, and communication is no longer feasible outside of basic banalities, relationships, that is, the only thing that gives actual meaning to the space of one's life has been re-packaged as a commodity worth spending a lifetime slaving away in order to buy. Karl Marx's speculation that in due time even that which is reckoned to be non-exchangeable and inalienable (that which people share and communicate but do not exchange) - such as virtue, love, conviction, knowledge, conscience - would pass into the sphere of commerce has come full circle<sup>4</sup>. The consumer expectation though that all these great "things" can be acquired at a price is a chimaira, for in reality these "things" can be neither purchased nor exchanged; only the expectation can. Take, for example, real unconditional love. Nowadays, love has become equally inaccessible for both poor and rich. But there is a critical difference between the two: the latter expect that the inaccessible will become accessible if they keep throwing more money into the market for sign values, whereas the former expect that the inaccessible will become accessible when they finally find the money required to procure the much-coveted sign values on the market. And as with all great satires and tragedies that life plays on men, both rich and poor subscribe myopically to hubris: inasmuch as the quest for love is concerned, the rich envy the poor because the poor, reckon the rich, are still capable of loving and of being loved truly, since, according to the rich, money does not interfere with their relationships, at least not to the extent that it does among the rich. The rich says: "A poor man can take his girlfriend for a promenade, offer her a flower he cut on his way to meeting her, tell her that the beauty of the stars and the moon is reflected in her eyes, and she will love him eternally. And all that with no need to spend a single penny. Whereas I would have to keep buying her incredibly expensive things, and take her to posh restaurants to make her love me, for I am a rich man and this is how a rich man is expected to treat a woman". Similarly blind and deaf, the poor envy the rich for they reckon that love, inextricably linked to the imperatives of material culture as it is, cannot be accessed in the absence of money, and thus love is accessible only for the moneyed. Says the poor: "I have no money and that is why no woman would even consider loving me. If I were rich, and thus able to take a woman out for dinner at fancy restaurants, and give her nice expensive gifts, then I would definitely find love". But the operationalisation of the logic of the spectacle does not

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4 K. Marx. *The Poverty of Philosophy*. Translated by the Institute of Marxism Leninsim, Progress Publishers, 1955, accessible online at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/poverty-philosophy/index.htm> .

stop at the delusive twilight of ornamented confusion, for there is absolutely no limit to the leverage of the spectacle<sup>5</sup>.

In parallel with extracting as much surplus value as it can from this socially unfolding staged satire, on a regular footing the spectacular apparatuses of capture - commonly referred to by the servants of the spectacle as marketing strategies or tactics - infuse a *fashion*<sup>6</sup> into the consumer market(s). Whether this tactic is employed for the sake of profit, or merely in order to weave a more resilient web of perplexity atop the one which is already in place is hardly a question worth pondering. Confusion - consumption - disorientation - consumption - diversion - self-consumption - nullification - boredom - apathy - atrophy - paralysis - self-consumption - hypnosis - castration - consumption - dehumanisation - submission - automation: this is how the spectacle gradually proceeds in processing natural law and shared lived experience, ultimately causing human existence to degenerate down to the level of the separated automaton, of a humanoid guided by the imperatives of the natural law of perversion, linked mechanically to other cellular automata in the grand assembly line of the production of repressive numbness. For the purpose of elucidation, consider the following example: six months ago, I run into an old girlfriend who has been working at the greek fashion industry for eight years, first as a model, and now as a public relations manager. Anyhow, I asked her if she is dating anyone these days, to which she replied negatively. Given how attractive she is, and thus finding this hard to believe, I asked her why. She told me she works long hours to begin with, and besides “nobody fucks anymore”. “It is no longer fashionable”. I thought she was joking, but she was not<sup>7</sup>. I told her I stubbornly remain an old-fashioned kind of guy and kissed her goodbye. Stunned as I was by what she told me, I could not stop thinking about what this fashion of anorgasmia and abstinence meant. Under certain circumstances, an apathetic person can be more easily controlled and efficiently manipulated than one charged with sexual desire, or any other intense and compulsive feeling for that matter. Further, as the human entity is discharged from its inherent eroticism, and thus is increasingly more removed from natural law, the project of work is no longer threatened by sexuality and eros, and the stage is set for the cessation of the historical distinction between dead-time (work) and free-time (play), which, in turn, extends the dominion of the totalising logic of the factory to the totality of lived time. As the diffusion of the factory stretches far beyond the business enterprise and waged labour to encompass the whole of society, the concept of full-employment (as well as productivity and performativity) takes on a whole new meaning. Now, subjects, in order to maintain the uninterrupted production of the spectacle (that is, in order to

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5 A socially constructed system of values and beliefs can be neither less nor more irrational in comparison to another similar-in-scope system, for there are no different scales or degrees of irrationality.

6 Fashion can be defined as a usually ephemeral format and code of behaviour, promoted and dictated by the spectacular-industrial complex, which is identified with a certain set of sign values, and, hence, becomes operational with the purchase and social display of these commodified sign values .

7 As a matter of fact, what she told me is confirmed by the archetypes promoted and projected by the fashion industry; riffle through any fashion magazine and all you see is anorexic images of boys and girls deprived of their sexuality (and thus of their gender) portraying as role models for teenagers.

be “productive” for post-industrial capitalism), turn to the consumption of sign values, for they hope they will at last rediscover some sense of excitement there. But the excitement that emanates from the consumption of commodities is short-lived, and never leads to a lasting state of satiety. And the vicious circle of consumption goes on. From the perspective of Capital, it is now far more “productive” to consume than to produce. The bottom line is that everything now seems boring and everyone bored. Without excitement, there is nothing. Not even hope, for hope by definition contemplates from the present an infinitely more exciting future. There is no future where excitement does not exist.

Perhaps it is just me craving for a quick fix, a shallow fuck. But I refuse to accept this explanation, one so commonly invoked by the high priests of our decadent technocratic culture, psychologists. In a society that cannot ejaculate its desires into the social field, and thus accumulates desire after desire, and need after need, for need and desire are one and the same thing, deep inside the oblivion of its collective subconscious to the point where it becomes irrational and schizophrenic, the isolated individual is hallucinating if he thinks the problem lies with him exclusively. “The only indication of health is our confirmed madness”<sup>8</sup>. Abstinence and moderation are no longer virtues possessed by charismatic men, as was reckoned in ancient Greece; in an anorexic and anorgasmic society, they are essential to ensure the passivity-pacification that conditions the totality of social expressions. If the collective sperm of society is too weak to impregnate new situations, why should yours? Bluntly put, we are way too fucked by progress and practical reason (or fucked up) to want to fuck. Our repressed desire is the desire of repression. Beyond the shadow of doubt, the subject of late capitalism is the schizo. But this schizo, though short-circuited by desire<sup>9</sup>, is stupefied: a caricaturesque pathetic ailing old creature with a languid voice, blank eyes and shaky hands that lacks the ecstatic forcefulness and feverish drive encountered in contagiously erotic, scandalous, and exuberant nocturnal stalkers and predators, whose most powerful expression takes the shape of the vampire.

The (power of the attractiveness of the) vampire, we should not forget, has always posed a threat to all historical models of class society which are founded on the imaginary of the necessity of forced labour and hierarchical organisation, and the corresponding repression of human instincts that the principle of performativity, which governs the sphere of alienated labour, implies. The reason for this is twofold: Whatever it is that vampires do cannot be classified as work. And most crucially the fulfilment of instinct is pivotal in their existence. Due to these two defining traits, the vampire dismantles and exposes the poverty of the image of a pacified human

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8 Quote taken from *Καραμπογιάς*, Issue 2, February 2006. *Καραμπογιάς* is an independent publication by the *Rosa Nera Squat* (Chania, Greece) which was distributed as a samizdat during the symposium. Translated from greek by the author.

9 Strictly speaking, the subject of late capitalism – the schizo - is produced in the first instance by desire. The definitive text on “schizophrenia as the process of the production of desire” and “the product of the capitalist machine” is G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by R. Huxley, M. Seem and H.R. Lane, Continuum, 2004 (1972).

existence that expresses nothing but its desire to be put to sleep after a long and strenuous day of labour. One could also easily identify other subversive forces in the function of the vampire. Indicatively, Negri and Hardt argue that “the vampire undermines the reproductive order of the family with its own, alternative mechanism of reproduction”.<sup>10</sup> But as Negri and Hardt also recognise, “the threat of the vampire is, first of all, its excessive sexuality. Its desire for flesh is insatiable, and its erotic bite strikes men and women equally, undermining the order of heterosexual coupling”.<sup>11</sup> For the vampire, the desire for flesh is synonymous to the desire of flesh, for their flesh needs flesh. It is not a question of vulgar gluttony. For the vampire to preserve its physical hypostasis, flesh must be continuously mixed with flesh. And the immanent desire of flesh precedes and transcends the historical class desire. This is where the real subversiveness of the vampire rests: in reminding a monstrous world that we all are primarily flesh, and if we forget this fundamental truth, and forgo the desire of flesh for flesh, the vampire will be there waiting in the shadows to make us remember that what we have forgotten remains nonetheless the single most important thing in our lives. The distinction in common sense between desire and need is entirely devoid of meaning when applied to such lustful and hedonistic creatures. What vampires desire is what vampires need, and reversely. For this reason, and not only because it reflects the real monstrosity of society, the vampire is an agent of emancipation. “For us, marginally, need can be satisfied without desire, but desire never can without need”<sup>12</sup>. The revolutionary project today depends on the reconciliation of the historical tension between desire and need, on their becoming one. When desire and need are finally unified by consciousness, the revolutionary problem will cease to exist, for the redefinition of the concepts of progress and freedom will no longer demand the sacrifice of pleasure and the repression of desire in the name of necessity.

Not much else to say about the symposium-as-conference. Only what is exciting should be remembered. André Breton was right in reproaching Dostoevski for taking us into a room whose description fails to elude the specter of the banal and the boring. “When one ceases to feel, I am of the opinion one should keep quiet. I am only saying that I do not take particular note of the empty moments of my life, that it may be unworthy for any man to crystallize those which seem to him to be so. I shall, with your permission, *ignore* the description of that room, and many more like it”<sup>13</sup>. With one exception perhaps. Alex Callinicos's speech on the 27<sup>th</sup>, entitled *Critical Theory confronted with a global state of exception*, stood out in one major respect: it was downright disappointing to see the theoretical motor of the english communists be so

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10 M. Hardt and A. Negri. *Multitude, War and Democracy in the Age of the Empire*, Penguin: N.Y., 2004, p.193.

11 *Ibid.*

12 A. Jorn. Speech to Penguins, in *To Αισθητικό και το Πολιτικό*, translated by Π. Τσαγανέας and Ν.Β. Αλεξίου, Ελεύθερος Τύπος: Αθήνα, 1996, translated from greek by the author.

13 A. Breton. *Manifesto of Surrealism*, 1924, accessible online at <http://www.tcf.ua.edu/courses/Jbutler/T340/SurManifesto/ManifestoOfSurrealism.htm>

passionate about such platitude. Callinicos<sup>14</sup> emphatically stated at the very start of his speech that he would not go into metaphysics, as any self-respecting dyed-in-the-wool materialist would proudly proclaim...A statement that he repeated a time too many during his speech, which, disappointingly, was exclusively centred on attacking - and not very successfully, I have to say - the ontology advanced by Toni Negri and a similarly useless, convoluted, and utterly metaphysical tenet of Bourdieu. In retrospect, the frustratingly short duration of all talks and presentations severely impaired any effort by the speakers to either elaborate or delve deep into the subjects that formed the epicentre of discussion. On the other hand, empirically speaking, this deficiency of the organisational format is often blunted by the presence of critical and engaging informal conversations taking place in the periphery of the formal event, in places like the smokers' corner or the vending machine. Indeed, the passionate exchange of viewpoints and the heated debate that several informal "round-tables" stirred, counter-balanced, to a certain extent, the superficial gaze offered by the majority of formal presentations, partially ameliorating the situation. A notable characteristic that differentiated those chaotic round-tables was their proximity to the point of rupture that is everyday life: seen from the prism of everyday life, all theses advanced in these accidental forums were scrutinised according to how readily applicable to everyday life they were perceived to be; submitted to thorough questioning regarding the feasibility of the implementation of a new model atop an old derelict one, the translatability of a theory into a coherent social practice.

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14 Callinicos, it should be noted, prove himself to be a far more charismatic and capable speaker than most of the invited speakers, as he did not need to read his speech aloud like most others did, and this contributed to his coming across as concerned and real.

## II

Ethics and politics are more than words; they are perspectives. And perspectives are empowered by people; given meaning by the concrete social practices of the masses as manifest in the tainted, yet still potent, abode of the real; inscribed in the desiring machines traversing frenetically the impoverished terrain of social production. In some twisted fashion, we are now facing much the same situation that the Utilitarians faced in the past: they tried to shed light on the relationship between ethics and law; we try to substantiate and re-formulate politics on an ethical foundation. However, despite any good intentions bathed in euphoria and hope that one starts this enterprise with, as with the utilitarians, we also find ourselves in the unfortunate position, if we seek to see the situation in its real dimensions, to have to admit that politics does not need to be ethical in order to be politics, that is, in order to be operational. On this plane, three potentialities forcibly assert themselves: ethics and politics coincide, therefore politics is congruent with society's moral postulates; ethics and politics are reckoned to be distinct, separate spheres linked together solely by means of philosophical inquiry and spectacular "public relations" interfaces; or ethics and politics collide in which case the institution of the imaginary is set into motion to usurp collective subjectivity by indoctrinating the masses into believing that real-world politics is grounded on what society ostensibly deems ethical.

Unfortunately, at this point philosophical inquiry comes to an end. Even though politics, in the hands and mouths of political zealots and academic opportunists, claims its being inextricably linked to the moral basis of society, fact of the matter is that it is not. While ethics does not need spectacular politics to acquire hypostasis and meaning - for ethics invariably spills over into the political by the affirmative practices of the masses in the social field - spectacular politics, by stark contrast, needs to work behind the veil of morality; needs to justify its articulations, and, hence, its form, on ethical propositions. Otherwise put: "all that politics asks of us is to receive it as moral or to oppose it in the name of morality. Because these are the same, which can be thought of in another way: formerly one worked to dissimulate scandal - today one works to conceal that there is none"<sup>15</sup>. Dominant politics, at least in the form that prevails today, can be nothing but the politics of domination. And reversely: politics, by necessity, will remain separated from ethics for as long as the ethos of politics is separation. Yet, separation is experienced at many different levels, of different magnitude. This can be explained by the fact that even though the constituent components of classes, and thus of power, have undergone dramatic transformations, spectacular society is still a society founded on the separation of classes. The spectacle integrates the separate, but integrates it *as separate*<sup>16</sup>.

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15 I am here paraphrasing J. Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, translated by S.F. Glaser, University of Michigan Press, 1994, p.15.

16 G. Debord. *Society of the Spectacle*. #29.

For the ruling class, politics, as well as ethics, is primarily aesthetical, that is, spectacular, for it apprehends ethics as the result of aesthetics. The ruling class, having its interests so zealously served and protected by professional politics, finds no reason whatsoever to cast a sceptical doubt upon the logical underpinnings of dominant political rhetoric and process, to regard it as anything but ethical. But “there is no rational belief in power. There is submission and, from the side of those who possess power, desire to preserve it”<sup>17</sup>. Dialectical materialism has taught us this lesson well: human consciousness is conditioned by materiality. Since the ruling class benefits from spectacular politics, it follows then that spectacular politics is ethical. But as politics is reduced to a televised contest between images radiant with success, determination, sentiment and concern, in which the candidate having the whitest teeth wins, the ethical shell of politics mutates into a repugnant aesthetical value: Kant’s conclusion that what is ethical has to be beautiful too is turned to its head; now, what is (masqueraded as) beautiful has to be ethical also. Hence, the presidential candidate with the prettiest teeth has to be the most ethical as well. This obsession is epitomised in the “Mystic Box”: “Throw switch ‘on.’ Box rumbles and quivers. Lid slowly rises, a hand emerges and pushes switch off. Hand disappears as lid slams shut. Does absolutely nothing but switch off!” The nihilism of modern politics is merely an introduction to the politics of modern nihilism<sup>18</sup>; it is the field of convergence between aesthetics and ethics where the lightness of the modern politics of separation becomes truly unbearable. The real problem with this conception of aesthetics does not consist in the implied underlying notion that ethics has to pass through the transitional phase of the aesthetical state in order to become conscious. Unlike Friedrich Schiller or Herbert Marcuse, both of whom recognised a latent, yet potent, ethical value in the aesthetic dimension<sup>19</sup>, the striking success of the Spectacle rests on identifying an ethical value *not* in the aesthetic dimension per se, but in the aesthetic dimension of the perspective of power. And this is crucial. For if “the object of power is power”<sup>20</sup>, then it follows that an ethical value emanating from the aesthetic dimension of the perspective of power can only be constituted insofar as it invests power with an apparent edifying mantle, insofar as it assigns the value that it itself desires to its own Self. Alternatively, this can be more acutely visualised as a perpetual cyclical movement whose object can only be the affirmation of itself through a concurrent self-referential movement. Says the Spectacle: “what is good appears. What appears is good”<sup>21</sup>. In other words, it says nothing at all, except perhaps from concealing and denying the fundamental fact that its alleged ethos has operational value only insofar as it is pure aesthetics, pure abstract form with no

17 Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, in *Αγάπη*, translated by E. Γραμμένος, Εκδόσεις Μπουκουμάνη: Αθήνα, 1974, translated from greek by the author.

18 I am here paraphrasing Timothy Clark, Christopher Gray, Donald Nicholson-Smith & Charles Radcliffe. *The Revolution of Modern Art and the Modern Art of Revolution*. 1967, unpublished text, accessible online at <http://www.notbored.org/english.html> and <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/modernart.html> .

19 See H. Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*; and F. Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 1794, accessible online at <http://schiller.classicauthors.net/LettersUponTheAestheticEducationOfMan/> .

20 G. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. 1949, accessible online at <http://www.netcharles.com/orwell/books/1984.htm> .

21 G. Debord. *Society of the Spectacle*. #12.

content. And this is precisely the value that the Spectacle has discovered and mobilised: the value of nothingness, the irresistible seduction of emptiness, a suffocating integrated collection of spectacles that promise to lead the spectator somewhere else, away from the desert of signs that reproduce the factory in leisure<sup>22</sup>.

For the bourgeoisie, politics and ethics are not only separated, but in dire straits. Frustratingly, the bourgeoisie, despite the clear understanding of the situation that it collectively possess, that is, its apprehension of the truth, has still to re-discover its radical subjectivity. For the bourgeoisie, due to the limitations emanating from its assimilation, is only capable of articulating a critique of the spectacle that is in itself spectacular, or purely contained in a spectacular carrier. The quintessential example of the former is TV programming that critiques the role and function of television. As for the latter, the activism of groups like Greenpeace who resort to spectacular violence is paradigmatic. By spectacular violence what I mean here is that their actions can only have an effect if mediated by images offered by the mass media, a fact well known to activists. Despite this obvious shortcoming, which is immanent in the dependence upon a spectacular medium-host, a critique that expresses a real demand, fueled by a desiring machine that is strong enough, can have a progressive effect in a society plunged in pure simulacrum. This is known for a long time: practices such as detournement, culture jamming, and even hacking have long recognised this possibility for expropriation and subversion, and envisaged the power of the reversal of perspective that occurs when one armed with marginal resources appropriates the enemy's weapons and puts them into a different use, often in ways diametrically opposed to the ones originally intended by its creators. But this is not because only a staged critique can be effective in a society where everything is staged. Such a syllogism is nonsensical. That, say, a staged bank robbery can have the same end-result with a real robbery, that is, the robber getting killed, should not be interpreted as to mean that spectacular violence is the most effective form of violence or equally effective to other forms of violence. What essentially determines the actual effectiveness of spectacular violence is the extent to which the masses experience and adopt the end that incites and employs violence as a means, as their own.

For the materialist, politics and ethics are connected in a dialectical condition. In spectacular society, politics starts where ethics dies. The dialectical materialist is thus given two options: either work on reforming the political process from within institutional structures, or fight for the emergence of a new ethos on the outside of the industrial-political complex. Only by fostering and nurturing this ethos of participation and re-appropriation could we really hope for a new politics to emerge. By following the opposite direction, by channeling our energies and actions toward

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<sup>22</sup> On these grounds, we could speculate that one need only attack the aesthetic shell of spectacular politics and, as a consequence, the entire superimposed pseudo-ethical construct will collapse. By demonstrating and bringing into the foreground the anti-aesthetical character, as well as effect, of the aesthetics (of the dominant politics), one elucidates the unethical character of the ethos of dominant politics.

rehabilitating politics we can only hope for a long and boring death. But without excitement, there is nothing. Besides, history is quick to point out the blatant failure of the regime of “really existing socialism” in catapulting society to emancipation through a project of transitional politico-historical sabotage. On the contrary, by fighting for the primacy of ethics one realises the impotence of politics and lays the foundations for the rebirth of the body politic in a society that is no longer afraid to get excited, no longer transformed by the economy into a society that economises on its own life, a society that does not seek to be intelligible but emancipated. In a nutshell: the time has come for us to stop moralising politics and start politicising morals. For it is there that the potentialities for rupture, for a radical break with the present, are present.

#### **Publication Notes.**

This essay started as a gonzo dispatch from the trenches of *The First International Conference on Ethics and Politics (a.k.a. the 1<sup>st</sup> International Symposium of Philosophy* at <http://www.philosophycrete.edu.gr> ), which took place in Heraklion-Crete, Greece, from May 24 to May 28, 2006. That is why several references and allusions to the symposium and its activities constitute an integral part of the text. However, for several reasons that need not be elaborated here, it soon became obvious to the author that the living text persistently drifted toward a different direction, and that this tendency should not be resisted. Hence the present text.

#### **About the author.**

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