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van Rahden/Völz
Horizonte der Demokratie

Marlène Laruelle
The Revolution To Come

Holly Case
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Prune Antoine
Psychiatry and Women

John Palattella
False Prophets, False Promises

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Editorial

Der zentrale Artikel der vorliegenden Ausgabe reagiert auf eine allgegenwärtige Stimmung unserer Zeit. Vor dem Hintergrund mehrerer anhaltender globaler Krisen, deren Bewältigung zunehmend schwer vorzustellen ist, genießen apokalyptische Zukunftsvisionen Hochkonjunktur. Nach John Palattella verwechseln jedoch die falschen Propheten unserer Zeit die Zerstörung der Menschheit mit der Erlösung. Inspiriert von Elizabeth Bishop warnt der Autor davor, die notwendige Erkenntnisarbeit zugunsten der Faszination dieser Visionen aufzugeben.

Auch diese Ausgabe der IWM*post* legt Zeugnis von der disziplinären Vielfalt des IWM und dem breiten Spektrum von Themen, die am Institut behandelt werden, ab. Die Autoren der vorliegenden Ausgabe kommen aus der Geschichte, Philosophie, Politikwissenschaft, Ökonomie, Anthropologie, Soziologie, Theologie, Medienwissenschaft, Literaturwissenschaft, der Kunst und dem (Investigativ-)Journalismus. Die Themen der Beiträge reichen von Schwerpunkten, die für das IWM und die IWM*post* profilprägend sind – wie Fragen der Demokratie und Solidarität, und der Fokus auf Mittel- und Osteuropa einschließlich der kriegserschütterten Ukraine –, über akute Problemstellungen der (Informations-)Technologie, die weltweit auf zunehmendes Interesse stoßen, bis hin zu Fragen von Gender, originellen Perspektiven auf Care und spannenden Fragen zu Literatur und Gesellschaft. Auch Beiträge zur Wiener Vergangenheit und Gegenwart fehlen nicht.

Im Namen des IWM wünsche ich Ihnen viel Freude beim Lesen! ◃

The main essay in this IWM*post* issue responds to a pervasive mood of our time. Against the backdrop of several ongoing global crises, from which it is becoming increasingly difficult to imagine a way out, apocalyptic visions of the future are booming. However, according to John Palattella, the false prophets of our time confuse the destruction of humanity with salvation. Inspired by Elizabeth Bishop, the author warns against abandoning the necessary work of understanding for the fascination of these visions.

The present issue of the IWM*post* is another testimony to IWM's disciplinary and topical diversity. The contributing authors come from the fields of history, philosophy, political science, economics, anthropology, sociology, theology, media studies, literary studies, art, and investigative journalism. The topics of the essays range from key areas of the IWM's work—such as democracy, solidarity, and developments in Central and Eastern Europe, including war-torn Ukraine—through to pressing problems of information technology, which are attracting increasing interest worldwide, all the way to gender issues, original perspectives on care, and exciting questions about literature and society. Essays on Vienna's past and present are not missing this time either.

I hope you enjoy the read! ◃

Evangelos Karagiannis

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False Prophets, False Promises

BY JOHN PALATTELLA

The visions of an apocalypse peddled by nihilistic humanists and misanthropic transhumanists confuse the destruction of humankind with salvation.

Scene in the underworld with lake of fire and Thoth's baboons. Detail from the *Book of the Dead* (Collection of sayings concerning the Afterlife). Egyptian, New Kingdom, 21st dynasty, 1170–945 BCE. Painting on papyrus. Turin, Museo Egizio.

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"And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps." That's the *Book of Revelation*, but the words might as well have been spoken by an American anytime between the religious revivals of the 18th century and the chiliastic chat threads of today. Many terrible endings have come and gone in the United States: civil war, slavery, two world wars, assassinations, dirty wars, a Capitol stormed by hooligans. Yet the reality is otherwise: the world as we know it, in all its beauty and horror, mystery and terror, is still here. People continue to think otherwise, however—that, as the literary critic Frank Kermode once suggested, the apocalypse might be true, or cannot but be true, in a different sense.

In the spirit of Kermode, it would be rash not to acknowledge that if our virtual communications networks are glutted with lakes of fire and talking heads who speak in devilish tongues, it is because the sense of promise offered by political systems and new technologies has soured. And not only that: hot wars, a warming climate, and resurgent fascism are no longer uncommon. Nor is an ancient, ugly trope recently poured into a new, environment-friendly bottle: that people themselves are the problem. In 2018, the philosopher Todd May published an op-ed in *The New York Times* that asked "whether it would be a tragedy if the planet no longer contained human beings. And the answer I am going to give might seem puzzling at first. I want to suggest, at least tentatively, both that it would be a tragedy and that it might just be a good thing." To escape an apocalypse, in other words, we must pass not through the eye of a needle but another apocalypse. For May, an apocalypse is a morally desirable solution to problems like global warming. Call it the higher misanthropy. If anything, the circularity of May's thinking reinforces his sense of humanity being trapped by its own thoughts and devices, virtual or real.

A second strain of contemporary antihumanism is promoted by tech tycoons like Elon Musk and Peter Thiel. They dream of new forms of human intelligence that will no longer be human, such as artificial general intelligence or an embodied internet. Why privilege the human brain, they ask, if computing power can always leapfrog it, so much so that computers threaten to make thinking by mere humans superfluous. But the misanthropic appeal to "transhumanism"—reason untethered from the brain, and therefore pure—is itself a form of evangelism, not "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" but rather "Ideas in the Service of Oligarchs." The Silicon Valley gurus are promising enchantment of a perverse kind: digital paradises of untrammeled thinking and the cultivation of ecotopias no longer spoiled by human beings. Musk and Thiel, too, are harpers harping with their harps.

*

Forty-five years ago—hardly a blink of the eye in the long history of apocalyptic thinking—the novelist and philosopher Maurice Blanchot asserted in *The Writing of Disaster* that "We are on the edge of disaster without being able to situate it in the future." The reason, he said, is that disaster "is rather always already past." What Blanchot meant is that disaster is recognized only after it has happened. In this sense, an apocalypse is never a revelation of something new; instead, it reveals the unsettling dimensions of a world that we already know.

I was reminded of this during the Covid-19 pandemic. As it happened, although there was no snow on the ground at the time I was thinking about icebergs. "We'd rather have the iceberg than the ship," begins the first stanza of Elizabeth Bishop's poem "The Imaginary Iceberg," which continues,

although it meant the end of travel.
Although it stood stock-still
like cloudy rock
and all the sea were moving marble.

During that time these lines came to me in all kinds of weather. "The Imaginary Iceberg" is a poem that I love, although at the time I could not remember when I had last read it. Yet there it was, its first four lines on repeat in my mind's ear, a phantom verse.

It was March and I was in a small city in eastern Germany. The nearest icebergs were at least 2,000 miles to the northwest. Soon it became difficult to see much of anything because Covid-19 restrictions shrank my daily ramble to the short walk between my apartment and office. There was polite grumbling about the restrictions. That changed in April, when anti-vaxxers began to organize weekly protests in Germany's big cities. No matter how clamorous those gatherings became, they were subdued compared to a common response to the pandemic in the United States. The pastor David Jeremiah, who was one of President Trump's evangelical advisers, wondered if the virus was biblical prophecy, and called the pandemic "the most apocalyptic thing that has ever happened to us." Many Americans agreed: by the middle of March, publishers in the United States were reporting strong sales for books about apocalypse.

As the weeks in lockdown passed and an apocalyptic fervor showed no signs of fading, I came to understand what "The Imaginary Iceberg" was nudging me to hear. The poem has three 11-line stanzas, and as they unfold the tight rhyme and rhythmical schemes established in the first stanza are gradually relaxed, the only exception being the rhyming couplets that end each stanza. Bishop takes the poem's metaphors in the opposite direction, stressing self-containment and the loss of sight: "The iceberg cuts its facets from within." Beginning innocently enough with an unambiguous statement, the poem becomes a parable about the dangers of valuing the imaginary over the imagined, of treasuring an iceberg that is "Like jewelry from a grave," that "saves itself perpetually and adorns / only itself."

Bishop is cautioning against surrendering the necessary work of perception and comprehension for the seduction of apocalyptic revelation, no matter how enticing that may be. "We'd rather have the iceberg than the ship, / although it meant the end of travel." Be wary of ways of thinking that hinge on a catastrophic break between the present and the past, I heard the poem saying. Bishop's wise caution comes with a gift: the dimensions of an imaginary iceberg can be explored with her as your guide, even if you put an end to travel. ◁

John Palattella is an editor at *The Point* and was previously the literary editor of *The Nation*. He is a recurrent visiting fellow at the IWM.

Horizonte der Demokratie: Offene Lebensformen nach Walt Whitman

VON TILL VAN RAHDEN UND JOHANNES VÖLZ

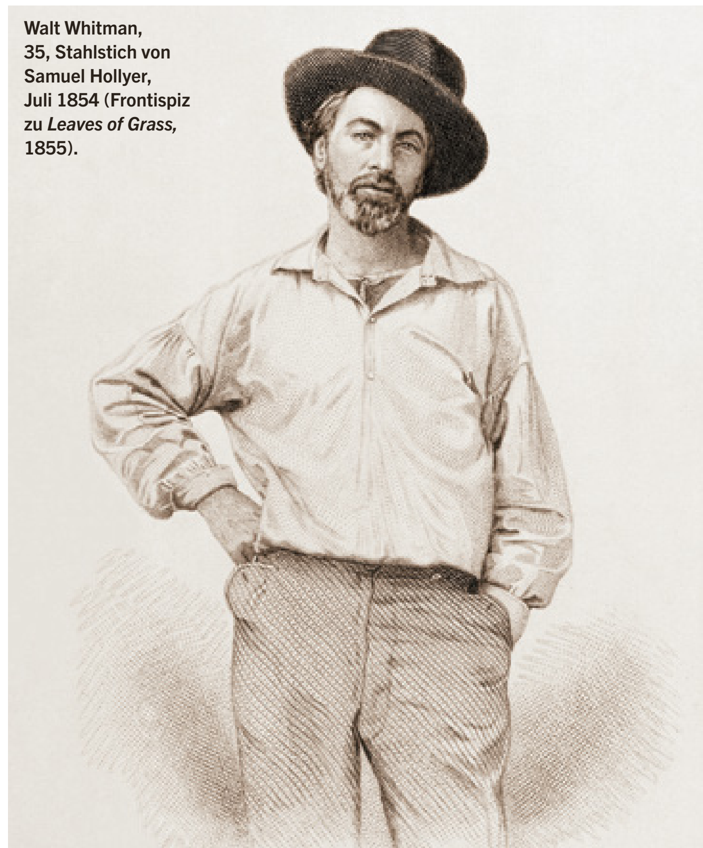
Walt Whitmans Werk bietet viele Anregungen, um über das Versprechen, die Möglichkeiten und die Hemmnisse – kurz: über die Horizonte der Demokratie – nachzudenken. Statt ein weiteres Mal nachzuzeichnen, wie Demokratien sterben, lässt sich mit Whitman fragen, was sie am Leben hält.

Tief steckte die amerikanische Demokratie in der Krise. Die Gesellschaft war in zwei Lager gespalten. Immer weiter öffnete sich die Schere zwischen arm und reich. Etablierte Parteien verschwanden in der Bedeutungslosigkeit, Splitterparteien kamen und gingen, machten Stimmung gegen Einwandererinnen und Einwanderer, gegen „die da oben", gegen „das System". Politische Gewalt war allgegenwärtig. Viele raunten, ein Bürgerkrieg stehe bevor.

Es war das Jahr 1854. Das Jahr, in dem ein 35-jähriger Journalist, Schriftsteller, Buchdrucker, Handwerker und Immobilienhändler, kurz: ein vielseitiger, bis dahin unbekannter Mann seine Berufung fand: als Dichter der amerikanischen Demokratie, als Prediger des Glaubens an ihre große Zukunft, als radikaler Neuerfinder moderner Lyrik. Walter Whitman, den viele bald nur noch als Walt kannten, entdeckte in der Krise der Demokratie seine eigene Stimme. Leidenschaftlich erhob er sie für die Demokratie, auch wenn er der Möglichkeit ins Auge sehen musste, dass die noch so junge republikanische Tradition zu scheitern drohte. Whitman gab seine Tätigkeit als Zeitungsredakteur vorübergehend auf und konzentrierte sich zum ersten Mal ganz aufs Dichten, brachte zwölf Gedichte zu Papier, die anders waren als alles, was man sich bis dahin unter Lyrik vorstellte. Freie Verse, kein Reim, kein Metrum. Menschen in allen Lebenslagen, die Ausgestoßenen, Sklaven, Prostituierte, Arbeiterinnen und Arbeiter, ein *Epos* der Gleichheit.

Heute, 170 Jahre später, ist die Krise der Demokratie zurück. Rechtsextreme Parteien sind auf dem Vormarsch, die Gesellschaft ist zunehmend gespalten. In den USA gilt der Trumpismus, in Ungarn die „illiberale Demokratie" als normal. In Deutschland verhöhnt die AfD die Demokratie. Die Ungleichheit wächst, die Unzufriedenheit auch, links wie rechts und in der Mitte. Autoritarismus ist das Schlagwort der Stunde. Bürgerkrieg ist wieder vorstellbar, jedenfalls in den USA. Hass prägt die öffentliche Auseinandersetzung.

Die lautstarke Rede vom Niedergang der Demokratie erschwert das Nachdenken darüber, was sie am Leben hält. Überall wächst die Sorge, die Demokratie sei den Herausforderungen unserer Zeit nicht gewachsen. Viele, die die Idee einer Gesellschaft der Freien und Gleichen verteidigen, stehen selbsternannten Systemgegnern gegenüber. Immer selbstbewusster behaupten diese, nicht die Eliten, sondern sie verkörperten den wahren Volkswillen.



Walt Whitman, 35, Stahlstich von Samuel Hollyer, Juli 1854 (Frontispiz zu *Leaves of Grass*, 1855).

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Whitman begegnete dem vermeintlich bevorstehenden Ende der Demokratie, indem er eine ursprüngliche Kraft für die Demokratie behauptete. Wer konnte eine solche Naturkraft besser zum Ausdruck bringen als ein Sprachkünstler? Dessen Lyrik Leserinnen und Leser auf der ganzen Welt bis heute mitreißt, weil sie mit den Mitteln der Sprache eine Kraft zu entfalten vermag, die sich kaum anders begreifen lässt denn als Naturgewalt?

Whitman formulierte seine Idee der Demokratie vor allem in der Schrift *Democratic Vistas*. „Glaubst auch du, mein Freund, Demokratie sei nur etwas für Wahlen, für Politik oder den Namen einer Partei?", fragte er 1871: „Ich sage, dass die Demokratie nur in der gesamten Lebensführung, in den höchsten Formen der Beziehungen von Menschen wachsen, erblühen und Früchte tragen kann, im Glauben, in der Religion, der Literatur, den Colleges und Schulen – in allem öffentlichen und privaten Leben, auch in der Armee und in der Marine."

Für Whitman ist die Demokratie auch eine Lebensform. Sie bezeichnet mehr als ein politisches System, es geht nicht nur darum, angemessene Verfahren und Regeln kollektiver Selbstregierung zu finden. Um die Demokratie im Alltag zu verankern, ihr den Zuspruch zu sichern, den sie zum Überleben braucht, bedarf es eines umfassenderen Verständnisses von Demokratie: Demokratie bezeichnet eine Form des Zusammenlebens – des Streitens und Aushandelns, des Protestierens und miteinander Redens. All das bedeutet, dass sie im alltäglichen Zusammenleben gründet. „Die neue Gestalt der Demokratie", schreibt Whitman in *Democratic Vistas*, sei mit Leben zu füllen, sie müsse „fest und warm in den Herzen, in den Gefühlen und im Glauben der Menschen verwurzelt" sein.

Wenn Demokratie auch eine Lebensform ist, dann erweitert sich das Feld der Fragen: Wie gehen wir miteinander um, wenn wir als Fremde aufeinandertreffen? Wie stellen wir uns Gesellschaft und Gemeinschaft vor? Welche Formen des Ausdrucks finden wir, um Freiheit und Gleichheit erfahrbar zu machen? Oder, umgekehrt betrachtet: Wie werden wir unserem Wunsch nach Freiheit und Gleichheit gerecht angesichts der Tatsache, dass wir diese Ideale oftmals auf verstörende Art und Weise verfehlen?

Streit ist nicht alles. Die Demokratie wird es schwerhaben, wenn die Menschen keinen Begriff davon haben, was sie verbindet. Demokratie setzt Formen des Zusammenlebens voraus, die im praktischen Miteinander begreifbar machen, was es heißt, eine Stimme zu haben, sich die eigene Gleichwertigkeit anzumaßen und diese anderen nicht nur zuzugestehen, sondern zuzumuten. Einige der berühmtesten Zeilen aus *Song of Myself* sind diesem Gedanken gewidmet: „Ich spreche die ewige Losung … ich gebe das Zeichen der Demokratie; / Bei Gott! Ich nehme nichts für mich was nicht alle genauso haben können unter gleichen Bedingungen."

Bei Whitman wird die Demokratie zur Lebensform, indem Gleichheit und Freiheit in Erscheinung treten – mögen sie der politischen Realität auch noch so widersprechen. Er begründet die Gleichheit damit, dass wir alle teilhaben an einer geistigen, spirituellen Sphäre, die er „Seele" nennt. Doch Whitman ist kein säkularer Theologe, der uns eine „spirituelle Demokratie" verordnen will. Für sein Postulat menschlicher Gleichheit führt er noch einen handfesteren Grund als die Seele an: unseren Körper. Unsere Körperlichkeit verbürgt nicht nur Gleichheit, sondern auch Veränderbarkeit. Die Formen des demokratischen Zusammenlebens müssen offen sein wie das Leben selbst.

Wer sich auf Whitman beruft, muss im Blick behalten, dass er häufig scheiterte. Dass Kultur die politische Spaltung verhindern könne, diese Hoffnung zerschlug sich bereits, als *Leaves of Grass* 1855 in Brooklyn erschien. Das Buch nahm kaum jemand wahr. Stattdessen schritt die Zerrüttung der amerikanischen Nation weiter voran. In unserem Zeitalter, in dem die Kultur selbst zum Ort politischer Kämpfe wird, wirkt es naiv, auf die heilende Kraft der Kunst zu setzen, auf ihre Fähigkeit, gesellschaftliche Konflikte sinnlich erfahrbar zu machen. Whitman mag sich kaum als Säulenheiliger der Demokratie eignen. Doch bietet sein Werk viele Anregungen, um über das Versprechen, die Möglichkeiten und die Hemmnisse – kurz: über die Horizonte der Demokratie – nachzudenken.

Mit Whitman gewinnen wir ein Gespür dafür zurück, wie fragil die Demokratie ist. Statt ein weiteres Mal nachzuzeichnen, wie Demokratien sterben, lässt sich mit Whitman fragen, was sie am Leben hält. Er erinnert daran, dass die Demokratie ohne sorgfältige Pflege „in der Luft" hängt, wie Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde vor zwanzig Jahren im Sinne Whitmans betonte. Doch was genau ist zu pflegen? Die kulturellen Voraussetzungen der Demokratie hat Böckenförde auf den Begriff des „demokratischen Ethos" gebracht. Der Staatsrechtler versteht hierunter Umgangsformen, deren Ausgangspunkt die individuelle Freiheit ist. Der Whitman-Interpret George Kateb hat hierfür den Begriff der „demokratischen Individualität" geprägt. Sie sei der Grundstein einer demokratischen Kultur. Deren Merkmale seien Toleranz, Gastfreundschaft und das „Verlangen nach Bewegung, dem Neuen, der Vermischung und der Unreinheit".

Der demokratische Staat kann seine kulturellen Voraussetzungen schützen, indem er Lebensformen fördert, welche die Chance bieten, Gleichheit und Freiheit zu begreifen und zu erfahren. Die Demokratie lebt davon, dass die Bürgerinnen und Bürger sie in ihrem Alltag tragen, gestalten und erneuern. Damit der Streit nicht im Bürgerkrieg endet, braucht die Demokratie jene Orte, die allen die Gelegenheit bieten, sich wechselseitig als frei und gleich anzuerkennen. Darauf zielt Whitmans Frage nach der Bedeutung von sinnlichen Erfahrungen für die Demokratie. Die Verfassungsordnung mag noch so gelungen sein, ohne die Möglichkeit demokratischer Erfahrungen geht sie ein. ◃

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Das Buch *Horizonte der Demokratie: Offene Lebensformen nach Walt Whitman*, ist 2024 im transcript Verlag erschienen.

The Revolution to Come. The U.S. Election and the Future of Trumpism

BY MARLÈNE LARUELLE

The 2024 presidential election puts the United States in uncharted territory—and the rest of the world with it. An insurrection in case Trump is defeated and an institutional coup in case he is elected are likely possibilities. This turbulent and dangerous situation highlights the challenges for liberal democracies in Europe too.

A lot can still happen between now and November, especially with the legal trials Donald Trump has to face and a very instable international situation in the Middle East. But compared to the 2016 U.S. presidential election, whose result was largely unexpected, including for Donald Trump, things will be very different this time. Trump and his team have been preparing for four years since their defeat in 2020. In case President Joe Biden is reelected, street violence against the result of the election and dissidence from some Republican-run states against the federal institutions is the most probable scenario. Two-thirds of Republicans say the 2020 election was stolen,[1] and a large part of the Trump electorate and of the party's establishment will refuse to recognize the result if he loses again.

Photo: Charlie Neibergall / AP / picturedesk.com

Because the United States is a federal state with strong sociospatial differences and a history of civil war, there may be symbolic gestures of secessionism. This year, there have already been such tensions in Texas over the issue of the border with Mexico, with the state's authorities, supported by 25 other Republican-run states, refusing to follow orders from the Supreme Court.

Should Trump be elected, his second presidency will be totally different from the first, shaped by his supporters preparedness for taking power and by revanchism against those who served in the Biden administration. Project 2025—prepared by the Heritage Foundation with about 80 other conservative organizations participating, and funded by many big names on the reactionary scene, such as the Koch brothers and Leonard Leo—is an impressive attempt at doing the groundwork for institutionalizing Trumpism once in office.[2]

Project 2025 is moving Trumpism away from being a populist strategy to gain power to a coherent political doctrine accompanied by policy implementation. Trump has been resentful toward the institutional checks and balances that hampered his power during his presidency. While his 2016 election campaign was a populist one against the traditional "establishment," his current campaign is an anti-democratic and anti-liberal one directly targeting U.S. institutions.

The establishment of unchecked presidential power and the weakening of the federal administration—what Trump calls the "deep state"—is central to Project 2025. This would target especially the Central Intelligence Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Department of Justice, but it would also eliminate the Departments of Education and Commerce.[3] This announced dismantlement of some federal institutions will be complemented with strong attacks on progressive organizations and those defined as "woke culture warriors." Even if Project 2025's 900-page plan may not be implemented whole, the scale of the vision gives an idea of the scope of the revisionism at work.

To make sense of this revolution that could surge in the United States, one has to capture the depth of the profound transformations of American society—especially through three key factors.

First, socioeconomic factors are the bedrock of these transformations. Socieconomic inequalities have been growing, especially geographic income inequality, which has risen by more than 40 percent between 1980 and 2021.[4] Blue-collar America feels, for good reasons, abandoned by a technocratic expert class that claims a false de-ideologization of politics. Second, polarization and culture wars have been tearing society apart. The gap in values and worldviews has been growing over the years, with now more two-thirds of citizens regarding the other political side as immoral (the share is almost three-quarters among Republicans).[5] Third, the United States' power projection has been challenged and it has had to learn the painful lesson that being the only superpower does not result in the rest of the world complying with its preferences.

Whatever one thinks of its content, Trumpism offers discursive solutions to these issues. The Make America Great Again slogan is fed by retrotopia—the projection of a utopian future based on a return to the past, in this case that of the supposed Golden Age of the 1950s with a White and prosperous United States. The America First slogan supposes not only the return of isolationism as the backbone of foreign policy but also, implicitly, the idea of a world that would conform to the United States' vision of what the international scene should be. Society is in tune with this fear of decline: between two-thirds and three-quarters of Americans say that, by 2050, the country's economy will be weaker, its politics more divisive, and wealth and income inequality worse, and a majority believe that decline is already happening and that life was better 50 years ago.[6]

Trumpism also advances broader answers to society's evolutions. More than just being populist in its denunciation of the "elite," the "establishment," and the "system," it proposes an authoritarian transformation in the name of efficiency against a representative democracy that it perceives as opaque, partisan, and inefficient. American society's demand for authoritarianism and "law and order" has to be put into the context of a strong decline in citizens' trust in institutions such as the judiciary, the media, and schools.[7]

Trumpism also operationalizes the desire of part of society to slow down cultural transformations, and for the most radical part to revert them, which simultaneously is fed by and feeds fears of demographic decline for Whites and of moral decay for Trump voters who do not share his pro-White stance. Trumpism is thus giving birth to a new grand narrative of belonging. In this regard, it should be understood as the mirror of the progressive ideology and as the conservative version of the identity politics that dominate the U.S. political landscape. Once morality and identity define stances, and perceptions of reality are entrenched into antinomic interpretive frameworks based on a "post-truth" logic, it becomes challenging for citizens to identify shared values that make them part of the same polity.

While the United States is quite a unique case in its political bipolarization and the risks of an insurrection or coup that would transform fundamentally the established institutions, Europe is experiencing a similar malaise in its relationship to the meta-ideology of Western modernity. There too, liberalism, individualism, progress, and universalism are challenged under different combinations and radicalities, even if no political project of transformation on such a scale has been as electorally successful as Trumpism has.

But the Europe Union's construction and its fragile equilibrium between nation-states and supranational institutions, as well as a more unstable geopolitical environment to its east and south, make it more at risk. It would not take a revolution on the scale of Project 2025 to weaken the EU. What is more, with many predicting the June 2024 European Parliament elections to see a far-right surge, a Trump win in November would mean societies on both sides of the Atlantic have moved in the same illiberal direction.

Welcome to a world where even the near future is not written. ◃

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The Liberal and Illiberal Politics of Rights in East Central Europe

BY MICHAL KOPEČEK

From the 1960s on, a great deal of politics became the politics of rights in the Western world. In East Central Europe, jumping on the bandwagon in 1989, the politics of rights was turbo-boosted by liberal democratic transformation and EU integration. Today, the illiberal politics of rights seems to be a mirror image of its liberal predecessor.

Photo: Hungarian Helsinki Committee

The team of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee.

Rights are a double-edged sword. They can promote subversion and integration alike; they can emancipate but also suppress. We should differentiate between the politics of rights as a legal-political regime and the politics of rights as a resistance strategy. They have much in common, but they have usually stood in opposition to each other.

The important prelude to the "human rights revolution" in communist East Central Europe in 1989 was the dissident politics of rights in the 1970s and 1980s. The mythology of the victorious liberal narrative described the process as a gradual but inevitable victory of human rights (with civic and political rights standing at the center) over unlawful communist dictatorships that did not heed human rights beyond lip service. Yet, recent historical research shows that dissidents and late communist dictatorships each had their politics of rights: one served subversion, the other social integration. In other words, dissident legalistic resistance would not work unless the preconditions for it were created by the gradual constitutionalization of dictatorship.

After 1989, the dissident politics of human rights was transformed—with the help of Western constitutional doctrine—into a legal-political regime and a technique of governance with human rights backed by a powerful judiciary at its core. In the dialectic of history, it was probably inevitable that the illiberal politics of rights then emerged as an effective form of resistance to the liberal iteration. However, the current illiberal politics of rights has a distinctive character and status quite different from its liberal model.

If "illiberal rights" seem oxymoronic, the illiberal politics of rights is a familiar historical phenomenon. A reaction to liberal and progressive success, it is not a blanket refusal of the politics of rights but a skilful reformulation of the language of rights. In a time of culture wars, it is a resistance strategy par excellence. "Human-rightism" is portrayed as synonymous with liberal elitism and—similar to "gender ideology," "juristocracy," and other alleged liberal tricks for circumventing the will of the majority—criticized as fundamentally flawed and undemocratic. National conservatives claim that they are the true defenders of human rights, not those of cosmopolitan elites or culturally aggressive minorities. They defend the human rights of families, the religious and other rights of the majority, and its right to national self-determination. The national conservative reconfiguration of the human rights discourse has a particular gendered and biopolitical aspect. Conferences on demography and the traditional family are platforms for conspicuously downgrading women's rights, sexual minorities' rights, and gender equality in favor of the rights and normative patterns of traditional heterosexual families.

These reframings are in many ways inspired and braced by successful transnational conservative activism and alliances (for example, anti-abortion campaigns). Yet they also draw on a considerable cultural and intellectual repertoire of the anti-communist opposition of the 1980s. For instance, Christian human rights played an enormously important role in dissent everywhere, but particularly in Poland. There they continued to be at the center of political life after 1989, with anti-abortion campaigning and the Roman Catholic Church's robust intervention in politics throughout the transition period. However, a distinctive, illiberal politics of rights' only fully takes shape during culture wars. It is then that several areas—particularly those related to identity politics, gender, LGBTQ+ and women's rights—become the focus of political conflict between liberal and illiberal rights discourses.

And yet, the politics of rights at the incipient time of an illiberal regime, such as in Hungary after 2010 and Poland after 2015, is not a mirror image of the liberal politics of rights of the 1990s. The trouble with illiberal human rights politics is similar to the difficulties noted with the notion of illiberal constitutionalism. There is hardly an illiberal constitutional blueprint or playbook; there are mostly illiberal practices hijacking and building on the liberal constitutionalist design.[1] Similarly, beyond an ideological mobilization and resistance strategy, the illiberal politics of rights is a hotchpotch of measures and practices that does not amount to a self-contained human rights legal-political regime—at least not at the moment.

From the point of view of relatively functioning liberal democracies, such as earlier in Hungary and Poland, there is an apparent deterioration. The scope of human rights has been narrowed, while inequality, exclusion, and intolerance increase alongside the capture of institutions, such as the highest courts or the ombudsman. The gradual dismantling of institutional guarantees undermines respect for human rights in various areas, such as freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, academic freedom, certain economic freedoms, and even privacy rights. This is accompanied by the reorientation of human rights doctrine in the direction of a communitarian and neopatriarchal vision of the state, nation, and family, where the rights of the majority community are prioritized over the rights of individuals, including vulnerable people (such as migrants or the disabled) and minority groups.[2]

However, in contrast to countries such as Russia or Turkey, there are no gross violations of human rights in Hungary and Poland, which also have significantly higher levels of compliance with international and European human rights regimes. The fact that the countries of East Central Europe are anchored in the European human rights and legal system—embodied by the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights, and the Court of Justice of the EU—is making illiberal takeover more complicated and gives some leverage to the defenders of the liberal iteration of human rights.

What, then, is the liberal politics of rights today? It turns into the politics of resistance, yet it does not resemble the dissident one from before 1989, although sometimes it may feel so. At the national level, what is at stake is constitutional politics, namely the defense of the crumbling edifice of the rule of law based on liberal human rights doctrine. Since the state of electoral democracy in these countries does not, so far, exclude the possibility of a change of political representation, as the October 2023 parliamentary elections in Poland showed, the success of the liberal politics of rights is largely dependent on the results of political competition.

At the level of human rights activism, things are quite different. Activists fighting democratic backsliding today face dilemmas and challenges similar to the ones faced by dissidents before, but often as if in reverse order. Many human rights NGOs are children of the 1990s and, thus, grandchildren of the dissident organizations. But they were born in liberal-democratic times or adapted to them. Their professional "NGO-ist" ways and means do not work well in the rising illiberal regimes. Most of the dissident human rights politics consisted of monitoring and publicly exposing human rights abuses. Their main power was the power of opinion, which dissidents developed based on the elaboration of the rising international human rights discourse. Today's NGOs, widely harassed as "foreign agents," use the language of human rights as well as the international human rights framework, but their power is mainly the power of litigation, based on lawyering. Their power of opinion is weak and less cultivated in comparison to that of their dissident predecessors. ◁

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The Enduring Strength of Bulgaria's Deep State

BY YAVOR SIDEROV

Democratic backsliding in Europe is usually associated with political leaders in East Central Europe. Bulgaria's relative obscurity, together with the hulking figure of ex-PM Boyko Borissov and his knack for winning and retaining the favor of the European center-right, has meant that the country has largely avoided scrutiny. For a while it looked like Borissov's downfall would loosen the grip of the deep state. But no-one is sure anymore.

Bulgaria is veering toward a sixth round of parliamentary elections in three years—a trend wryly described by the German Ambassador to Sofia as a 'sign of instability.' Stability was Boyko Borissov's favorite word as prime minister, and for a decade he took special pride in being able to provide it for his center-right partners in Europe, foremost among them German Chancellor Angela Merkel. In return he was spared excessive scrutiny. Bulgaria was left alone, notwithstanding the largely ineffectual Cooperation and Verification Mechanism, the European Commission's retrospective attempt at instigating judicial and anti-corruption reform after Bulgaria and Romania had become EU members.

Times change though, and so do political actors. After many years in power, Mrs. Merkel left office, and in 2021 Borissov was finally undone by incessant corruption scandals, a combative president, and general weariness with his rule. He resigned and was eventually replaced by a duo of youngish Harvard MBAs boasting avowedly Western values: Kiril Petkov and Asen Vassilev. Both had previous experience as ministers in caretaker cabinets appointed by President Roumen Radev.

Protesters hold a poster with the symbol of the Bulgarian oligarchy Delyan Peevski, who took over most of the country's businesses (Sofia, July 14, 2020).

Photo: Anton P. Daskalov / shutterstock.com

Petkov and Vassilev were quick to assemble their own electoral vehicle, *We Continue Change* (PP), and allied themselves with an older opposition formation, *Democratic Bulgaria* (DB). This new coalition pushed for swift judicial reforms, prosecution of corrupt politicians, and providing Ukraine with lethal aid—the only political force to openly take that position at the time. PP-DB's main goal was, and is, to finally free Bulgaria of its deep state and place it at the center of EU and NATO affairs.

Once in power, Petkov–Vassilev humiliated Borissov by subjecting him to a very public arrest. The former prime minister found himself fighting not just for his political survival but also for his freedom from prosecution and possible indictment. But it was a poorly thought-out move, and the investigation into his alleged misdeeds was squashed by the Prosecutor General's Office, even though they read like a Corruption 101 syllabus.

The Petkov-Vassilev duo proved much better at winning power than at holding it. Their first attempt at government was propped up by a motley coalition of center-right reformists, old-style socialists, and the populist formation of an ex-television showman. It lasted nine months. Military aid to Ukraine proved especially contentious and the newcomers were rudely unseated. They clawed their way back in June 2023, this time at the helm of an even unlikelier crowd. Attempting to emulate the grand coalitions that ruled Germany and Italy, the reformists embraced their sworn enemies in GERB, whose leader, Boyko Borissov, they had recently tried to indict. In getting him on board they also got saddled with a far greater liability in Delyan Peevski.

Believed by many to be the core from which political and business rot emanates, Peevski has been called 'a successful young man'—a sarcastic media reference to his meteoric rise, first under the wing of tsar-turned-prime minister Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, then in alignment with longtime *eminence grise* Ahmed Dogan, and finally as an influential wheeler-dealer in his own right. Peevski has come to control large swathes of the economy and almost all the national media. In 2013 he was close to being appointed head of the State Agency for National Security, a move that triggered year-long mass protests. His name has come up in countless scandals, most prominently the hijacking and subsequent closure of a commercial bank.

Peevski's pivotal role in keeping Bulgarian politics and business in thrall to shady interests eventually earned him US sanctions under the Magnitsky Act. The Dogan–Peevski power center exerts control over a wide range of businesses and institutions, from energy to media to the Prosecutor's Office and the secret services. Their leanings towards Russia are particularly worrying. Dogan, Peevski and Borissov had involved themselves in various Russian projects, some of which, particularly in the energy infrastructure sector, were of strategic importance to Moscow. There was always circumstantial evidence of cooperation between Borissov and Peevski, from concerted parliamentary action to business favors and government appointments. But the extent of their relationship came to the fore only recently.

Petkov and Vassilev thus entered into an alliance with the very people they were supposed to be pursuing. Many supporters of PP-DB found the logic behind this move unfathomable. The leadership argued, not without reason, that their own rather modest electoral showing and the low voter turnout made it impossible to carry out constitutional reform or to wrestle back control of the judiciary. A coalition culture, they claimed, would first need to develop and majorities won if Bulgaria was to be reformed. Their electorate mostly agreed, though many could still not bring themselves to accept the rationale behind this hitherto unthinkable alliance. In the meantime, work got underway on curtailing the powers of the president—a common goal for Borissov and his new partners.

Overhauling the Prosecutor General's Office proved much more problematic. By deliberately failing to prosecute Borissov and Peevski and by targeting their opponents, the Office had made it impossible to investigate high-level crime. As the linchpin of informal networks of power and influence, it can ruin careers, businesses, and whole organizations—and has. Whereas constitutional reform proved less contentious, ceding informal control over the judiciary and the secret services proved too hard to swallow for Borissov and Peevski. Given the latter's influence over the former, the coalition's days were all but numbered.

The informal agreement between PP-DB and GERB involved a rotating premiership, with PP-DB governing first. Power was supposed to be transferred to GERB's choice for prime minister, former European commissioner Maria Gabriel, in February. Under pressure from Borissov and Peevski, she refused to form a government. Amid a barrage of bitter mutual recriminations, her decision made new elections inevitable. Modest successes like Bulgaria's partial acceptance into the Schengen zone and a substantial raise in salaries and pensions did little to lift the spirits of the reformist politicians or voters in general. Meanwhile, the important goal of eurozone membership fell victim to rising inflation.

Worst of all was the sense of futility that overcame the reformists. In a bare-all interview on 19 April, Petkov lifted the lid on the workings of Bulgaria's deep state. His claims shocked the public and had the Sofia commentariat up in arms. He admitted to the virtual powerlessness of the executive, or at least its elected members, in the face of an administration completely beholden to vested interests. He admitted that as prime minister he could not fire anyone he distrusted because the separation of powers made it impossible to do so. He alleged that his bodyguards had spied on him, and that some of his deputy ministers had subverted the government's agenda.

It was a sad litany of sabotage and obstruction, and testimony to the enduring strength of the deep state. According to Petkov, even Borissov is beholden to it, despite all his experience in power and proven ability to accommodate powerful interests. Given the weakness of the party system, voter apathy and institutional infighting, the interview raised fundamental questions about Bulgaria's democracy. Eleven years after the mass protests in support of transparency and good governance, and the emergence of new parties willing to fight corruption, the political landscape remains murky. The developments that led to the elections on June 9 have thrown these problems into sharp relief. ◃

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War Remakes Ukrainian Media, and Media Remake Ukraine

BY ALEKSANDER PALIKOT

Rockets and shells killing journalists, the Kremlin sowing disinformation, government-controlled television, the wild popularity of unregulated Telegram, and intimidation of investigative outlets—all this does not sound like an environment for a free press. Yet Ukrainian media not only proved resilient in the face of Russia's full-scale invasion but also turned into a key element of Ukraine's wartime balance of power.

Ukraine's top investigative journalists gathered at a media conference organized recently in Bucha, a town on Kyiv's outskirts where the Russian army brutally killed hundreds of civilians, held no illusions about their country's ruling elite and its attitude toward independent media.

"Life teaches them nothing," said Nastya Stanko, editor-in-chief of *Slidstovo.info,* an investigative outlet whose journalist Yevhen Shulhat has been targeted by military draft officers after he published an article exposing the personal wealth of the head of the cybersecurity department of Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) in April. The case was outrageous but what made it particularly disenchanting was the fact that it followed an earlier scandal that sent shockwaves in the media community and provoked reactions from the country's international partners.

Photo: ALINA SMUTKO / REUTERS / Picturedesk.com

Ukraine's President Zelensky holds a press conference in Kyiv, December 19, 2023.

In January, journalists from the investigative outlet *Bihus.Info* became the target of a comprehensive smear campaign. A recording published by *The People's Truth,* a fake YouTube channel created for this occasion, showed the company's camera operators allegedly taking drugs during a corporate event. In their emblematic style combining sarcastic commentary with hard evidence, *Bihus.Info* traced back the people who secretly installed cameras in the rented venue to the SBU. According to Denys Bihus, the outlet's funder, his employees had been under surveillance by as many as 30 individuals for at least several months.

Another investigative journalist, Yuriy Nikolov, editor-in-chief of *Nashi Hroshi,* who broke the biggest wartime corruption story when he reported in 2023 that the Defense Ministry had been buying eggs and other products for the army at inflated prices, was targeted just two days earlier. Unidentified men tried to break into his home and covered its door with graffiti demanding he enlists in the military. The move was preceded by a "black" public relations campaign on anonymous pro-government Telegram channels.

Following these events, the independent media association *Mediarukh* said that the pressure on journalists was systemic and that at least ten other outlets had been targeted in various ways. Oksana Romanyuk, the director of the *Institute for Mass Information,* compared the situation to the times of President Viktor Yanukovych when many journalists were prosecuted and targeted by such campaigns.

A reprimand from President Volodymyr Zelensky and an internal SBU investigation into the *Bihus.Info* case ensued. The ambassadors of the G7 countries meet with Ukrainian journalists in Kyiv and discussed concerns about the decline of press freedom. But for the independent media, the attacks marked the definite end of the trust they place in the authorities at the beginning of the invasion.

Back then, when Russian troops bore on Kyiv, the media united and focused on delivering operational, often lifesaving, information to millions of shocked citizens, reporting developments at the front, countering Russian propaganda, and keeping the fighting spirit high. For a while Ukraine was heard and Ukrainians were unified as never before.

In the first days of the invasion, the main television channels, which for years had been subservient to their oligarchic owners with their own agendas, came together and started broadcasting shared round-the-clock programming coproduced in coordination with state officials. The so-called *Telemarathon,* which has not stopped to this day and has marginalized oppositional stations, soon turned into a key tool of Zelensky's media policy.

Russia declared war not only on Ukraine's army and state but also on its media. It has destroyed telecommunication infrastructure, seized editorial offices in the occupied territories, and targeted journalists. According to the *Institute for Mass Information,* as of May 2024, 86 media workers had died as a result of Russian military activities (ten while on editorial assignments), 14 had gone missing, and 34 had been wounded. There were 25 instances of kidnapping recorded.

When the dust of the first battles settled, it became clear that Ukraine was in a new reality where it had to strike the right balance between preserving unity, mobilizing resources, and keeping its democratic system.

The government's control of television and wartime restrictions on information has significantly changed media consumption trends. According to an analysis by Internews in November 2023, 73 percent of Ukrainians rely on social media to get their news, 41 percent on news sites, 30 percent on television, 10 percent on the radio, and 3 percent on printed newspapers.

The golden era of Ukrainian television is gone, with audience dropping from 85 percent in 2015 to 30 percent in 2023. Moreover, trust in the *Telemarathon,* which dominates broadcasting but is increasingly criticized for providing an overly optimistic and pro-government version of events, dropped from 69 percent in May 2022 to 36 percent in February 2024, according to the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology. Some backers of *Telemarathon* believe that it freed television from oligarchic influence, but others argue that it de facto turned an oligopolistic market into a cartel where government pumps money into the pockets of friendly channel owners.

Ironically, Telegram, an app founded by the Russian entrepreneur Pavel Durov, emerged as Ukraine's key wartime medium. It provides access to unfiltered and unrestricted information, and it beats the alternative media in terms of speed. The quick information on Telegram is often of poor quality, and most creators on it stay anonymous. Unlike official media, many Telegram channels use Russian. Moreover, the platform is accused of having ties to the Russian state and of facilitating its war effort. Ukraine's parliament wants to regulate Telegram, but shutting it down seems unlikely. Its surging popularity as well as the rise of YouTube as a popular alternative to television and of the largly unfiltered TikTok show how official and professional media struggle to grasp an audience that is increasingly divided as social cohesion declines and internal conflicts boil up.

Despite the wartime challenges, Ukraine jumped from 106th to 61st position in *Reporters Without Borders's World Press Freedom Index* between 2022 and 2024. But is this judgment warranted?

In practice, ordinary Ukrainians have access to a wide range of information from various sources. Criticism of the government is hardly restricted. And the country's independent media, at the forefront of this battle, feel their power. As Sevgil Musayeva, the editor-in-chief of *Ukrainska Pravda,* put it during the Bucha conference, investigative journalism became "a powerful factor of political life" throughout the decade following the Maidan protests of 2014. Indeed, dozens of top officials, including former defence minister Oleksiy Reznikov and former culture minister Oleksandr Tkachenko, lost their job due to critical domestic coverage, and even the conduct of military operations is increasingly scrutinized.

Some argue the media's power results from the weakness of the political system. "With no balance of power in Ukraine, media are the last instance able to control authorities," Yuriy Nikolov told the author. With an absolute majority in the parliament, extraordinary prerogatives granted to him under martial law, and practical control of the judiciary, all power in Ukraine is concentrated in the hands of Zelensky and his office, he argued.

In the first weeks of the all-out war, shock followed shock, and when Ukraine emerged unbroken by the Kremlin's attempt to subjugate it, observers in the West looked for an explanation. They quickly fell in love with Zelensky, and he promptly used that opportunity to deliver the message of the Ukrainian people fighting for their freedom to the global audience.

"What do we hear today?," Zelensky asked on February 24, 2022, before answering: "It is not just rocket explosions, battles, the roar of aircraft. It is the sound of a new Iron Curtain lowering and closing Russia away from the civilized world."

Those times are long gone, the war is raging, its toll staggering, and those who wanted to cheer the democratic David and waited to see him compromising the authoritarian Goliath now see how naive their optimism was. Russia appears determined to show the Western world that its political system is superior, and that Ukraine's fragile democracy is destined to fall. Ukrainian media are fighting to prove this wrong but their work is carried out under fire and under pressure. ◃

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Ukraine's Constitution and its Guardian Court

BY MIKHAIL MINAKOV

Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine is testing the values, norms, and institutions that defined the republic's development in the last three decades. One of these fundamental structures is the constitutional order and its guardian institution, the Constitutional Court of Ukraine.

Ukraine's constitutional order is a nexus of political and legal systems that were established in the 1990s and evolved in the 21st century to ensure that Soviet power practices and normative nihilism would not return to harm achieved rights and liberties. The founders of the independent republic came to a consensus on the constitution only in 1996, after almost five years of debates. This made Ukraine the last of the post-Soviet states to define its constitution. But the slowness of the polylogue among the different power groups and political institutions led to a text that applied the political wisdom learned by the late-Soviet generation to the benefit of the post-independence generations.

Hall of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine.

Photo: Iren Moroz / shutterstock.com

This collective wisdom aimed at overcoming the ills of Soviet politics and at ensuring that totalitarianism would not return. For example, the republic's founders set constitutional norms banning the government from establishing an ideological monopoly or from stripping individuals of citizenship. The emerging constitutional order also fragmented the Soviet-era supreme power into the branches of government and autonomous power centers. These elements were to establish a sophisticated system of checks and balances for a new post-communist democratizing nation.

Ukraine's constitutional cocktail mixes liberal and late-Soviet legal-political elements to ensure that no political group would be able to establish control over all centers of power. It also includes autonomous institutions to make usurpation even more difficult, such as the National Bank, the Ombudsperson, and the Constitutional Court. The latter has a special systemic role as the guardian of constitutional checks and balances. It must decide the compliance of all governmental decisions, laws, and decrees with the constitution. The court's 18 members—six appointed by the president, the parliament, and the Congress of Judges each—are the only official interpreters of constitutional norms.

The Constitutional Court was expected to play countermajoritarian and enlightening roles; that is, to invalidate unconstitutional acts approved by other branches of power and to promote social norms not yet accepted by a majority in society. Both roles are critically important for Ukraine's European integration.

Sadly, in the 28 years of its existence, the court has rarely been able to fulfill this *raison d'être*. Instead, it has been vulnerable to informal influence by successive presidents, oligarchic clans, and judges' corporate egoism. The latter refers to their salaries and privileges, which shapes their thinking too often. Thus, it has often betrayed the constitution. For example, in 2003, it allowed President Leonid Kuchma to be elected for an unconstitutional third term by using Kafkaesque formalistic arguments; and, in 2010, it reverted constitutional amendments made following the Orange Revolution that increased the powers of parliament and decreased the president's authority, which made President Viktor Yanukovych much more powerful than his predecessor.

Due to such political "flexibility," the Constitutional Court peacefully coexisted with Ukraine's presidents until 2020 when Volodymyr Zelensky started creating his "power vertical." The conflict between the presidency and the court was a new phenomenon. Post-Euromaidan reforms made the judiciary more autonomous, which has influenced the behavior of its judges. Under Zelensky, the Office of the President initially seemed less able to establish informal control over the court than under President Petro Poroshenko. For these reasons, the court started behaving in an unprecedentedly independent way and entered into institutional conflict with the Office of President and the National Security and Defense Council.

Despite growing risks for Ukraine's security from the Covid-19 pandemic and then from Russia's full-scale invasion, this conflict lasted until May 2022, when the chairperson of the Constitutional Court, Oleksandr Tupytsky, retired at the end of his term. In that period, the court approved several decisions that rejected the constitutionality of some post-Euromaidan reforms. For example, in 2020, some of its decisions stopped activities of the new anticorruption system as well as the new e-assets declaration. The presidential team responded to this with the submission of an urgent draft law to parliament that declared these decisions "insignificant." At the same time, the Cabinet of Ministers ordered the restoration of the activities of the anticorruption agencies. This was the first time in the history of independent Ukraine that the executive openly refused to follow decisions of the court.

The conflict grew when Zelensky tried to suspend Tupytsky, which exceeded the president's constitutional powers. In response, in December 2020, the court ruled that this presidential decree was "legally insignificant." During the next 13 months Zelensky and the court's judges undermined each other's legitimacy. Civil society activists, who tried to defend the anticorruption reforms, supported the president, while the Supreme Court supported the Constitutional Court. This conflict shook the institutional foundations of the constitutional order at a time of existential threats for Ukraine.

Zelensky was the winner in this conflict. The Constitutional Court almost fully lost the ability to participate in the constitutional process when the country was dealing with further European integration and resistance to the Russian invasion.

Since then, the court has functioned with decreasing efficiency. First, the invasion interrupted its work in February and April 2022. Then, several of its judges resigned in 2022, and the mandate of three more will expire by end of this year. With only 13 of its intended 18 members, the court has barely been able to make decisions in the past two years. This is also the reason why it has had only an acting chairperson since Tupytsky's retirement, which limits its ability to function even more. While the conflict with the presidency is over, this institutional impotence has left the constitution an orphan.

This is reflected in the mounting number of constitutional issues left unresolved in the wartime context. The collision between the constitutional five-year limit on the presidential term of office and the legal prohibition on holding a presidential election under martial law is a major one. There are also issues with the rights of national minorities and with relations between the government and religious organizations that require the court's involvement, but only the EU and its agencies currently care about them. Ukraine's constitutional order needs the guardian court to be back.

Reform of the Constitutional Court, which is part of the EU membership requirements, offers a way out. This focuses on the restoration of its membership through a transparent selection process. Accordingly, in 2022, parliament created a six-member Advisory Group of Experts that should preselect the candidates to be appointed by the president, the parliament, and the Congress of Judges. International or national organizations that assist the state with legal and anticorruption reforms nominate three of the group's members, who have the decisive voice when the six are tied.

The Constitutional Court is still in dire shape, but a solution is close. With full membership and a new chairperson, it may become a guardian of a Europeanizing Ukraine, where countermajoritarian and enlightening functions are highly needed. And it will be needed one day for drafting a new constitution that reflects new realities and opportunities for Ukraine. Post-Soviet democratization is in the past. When the war is over, Ukraine will work fully on its socioeconomic recovery and EU membership. The changes involved should be reflected in a new constitution and a better, more proactive role for its guardian. ◁

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A New Social Contract for Ukraine and for the World?

BY YULIYA YURCHENKO

Amid resistance to a neocolonial invasion, the armature of Ukraine's immediate destiny is being cast through the internationally collaborative development of the postwar reconstruction framework. Preexisting and new challenges can be either resolved or exacerbated in the process. Ukraine—and the world—is in desperate need of a new social contract with people and nature at its core.

Some 80 years have passed since the fall of Nazi Germany and the end of the the Second World War. Amidst commemoration of these events, militarized fascism strides the global scene once again. As the multipolarity drive away from post-1945 universalism intensifies, the question is why is this happening and how many people in fact can exercise the universal human rights of individual and national self-determination. For the world's majority, these unfortunately did not materialize beyond declarations. Wars and genocide keep happening because rule enforcers appear powerless, attackers get away without suffering the consequences while victims suffer from systemic violence, odious debts, exclusion from social security guarantees, and climate catastrophes they did not produce nor deserve.

Militarized competition and productivist economic systems generate ecocidal effects and hurry us toward a future on an uninhabitable planet. The post-1945 mass consumption/mass production approach to global economic development brought a better quality of life for some while cannibalizing many, made climate change an immediate threat to the survival of the world's ecosystems, and intensified competition pressures. Socioeconomic destitution drives people toward fascism and conflict; therefore, global inequalities must be eradicated in order to reduce the possibility of future wars.

Social classes and modes of extraction of value from humans and nature are organized transnationally in today's global political economy. They function simultaneously through and in circumvention of the institution of the state, as well as through state-created extra-jurisdictional mechanisms and spaces such as "offshore" and special economic zones. The imperialist logic of poorly regulated capitalism pushes the limits of the possible in the everyday, across time and space, making intersectionally experienced inequalities more sharply manifest each day across the globe. This means that the solutions to the problems emerging as a result of militarized capitalist competition and predatory-lending geopolitics too must be global in reach and facilitated by international institutions—modernized and democratized versions of the Bretton Woods and United Nations systems.

Participants observe a minute of silence during the closing plenary during the Ukraine Recovery Conference, July 5, 2022 in Lugano, Switzerland.

Photo: ALESSANDRO DELLA VALLE / Keystone / picturedesk.com

Ukraine has changed drastically through ten years of war. As economic situation already damaged by numerous previous crises has deteriorated, so has the state of the social contract enshrined in the constitution yet never quite fully experienced by the majority. The erosion of social security combined with the emboldening of capital at the expense of labor and nature, as well as the state's inability to serve as the guarantor of constitutional rights and freedoms, largely conditioned the Revolution of Dignity and necessitated the emergence of a thriving civil society. The latter, embodied in thousands of nongovernmental organizations and individual volunteers, began to perform the function of the state and the market in the provision of goods and services where needed, often "free of charge"—that is, financed through donations of goods, money, skills, and time. This concrete state failure is interpreted by the ruling Servant of the People party, paradoxically, as a reason to further dismantle the state, including its ability to oversee the function of capital. In 2022, the Lugano Principles for postwar reconstruction were announced at the Ukraine Recovery Conference, which has been followed by similar meetings in London in 2023 and Berlin in 2024. In delivering the principles, civil society is assigned a responsibility to be the "watchdog and the sledge dog" of postwar recovery, while private investor capital is entrusted to carry out the rebuilding of the economy and the state is further shrunk and digitized.

It is crucial to note here that the state is a complex institution of a polity whose apparatuses mediate and regulate the relationship between society and capital, with nature as a source of resources and a waste sink for that relationship's proceeds. The discourse around the Lugano Principles is focused on the protection of private investment and property rights while the social security of the citizens is dismantled—they are expected to cater for themselves where public services used to be. The social contract that has been eroding for years is at risk of completely falling apart. In this context, what incentive do citizens have to consent to the rule of the sovereign if the sovereign does not reciprocate by providing security and services? When some get exemptions while inequalities leave basic needs unmet and determine who gets sent to the front?

Public investment and infrastructure ownership, the full deployment of state-funded public services and scaffolding of labor in private and public economic initiatives instead of neoliberalism amid the war are key elements for the success of recovery. We learned this from two world wars whose destruction was remedied through government spending on infrastructure, education, the welfare state, public services, housing programs, business subsidies, research and development (R&D), and the facilitation of trade. A recovery that reflects Ukraine's EU membership aspirations and decarbonization commitments calls for green and low-carbon job creation; that is, in the care economy, the arts, education, environmental preservation and regeneration, and sustainability R&D. These can be spearheaded through the faster integration of the country in European Green Deal initiatives and the NextGenerationEU program. A just transition and energy democracy are crucial for economic self-sufficiency and reduced import dependence in key sectors. This would look like a post-Keynesian vision of state-led domestic investment and expansionary fiscal policy, with local enterprises having priority over their foreign rivals. Job and conditions creation are key for displaced Ukrainians so they have somewhere and something to return to—some 6.5 million of them without whom the most sophisticated reconstruction plans will be just that: plans.

Promising new developments of the Lugano framework state that the "whole of society" approach is key alongside the principles of sustainability and justice, with Ukrainians leading the process. For that to materialize, a foundational legal framework needs to be established and enforced. It would solidify a fair social contract that secures Ukraine as a sovereign and independent, democratic, social, law-based state, with its constitution enshrining the foundations of the social contract as the highest legal force. This would be a document that guarantees social security for all human beings and holds their life and health, honour and dignity, inviolability and security as the highest social values. For Ukrainians to lead the process and retain the product of it, they must own the land, subsoil, atmosphere, water, and other natural resources within Ukraine's territory, as well as the natural resources of its continental shelf and its exclusive maritime economic zone. For recovery to be sustainable, the use of property must not cause harm to the rights, freedoms, and dignity of citizens as well as the interests of society, or aggravate the ecological situation and the natural qualities of the land. In fact, all these positions are already in the current constitution. Ahead lies the reinstatement of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty, the enforcement of the constitution through reforms that would finally deliver the materialization of the rights and social guarantees for and by those who perform the function of the state and who constitute it—all those who call Ukraine home.

I really hope that this happens for Ukrainians and for all humans and ecosystems. I hope that the next year's May Day is a celebration of labor in a world without fascism and that Victory Day is meaningful again. I want to sit under my mother's blooming cherry, apple, and pear trees, with the only sound in the fragrant air being the returning bees and June bugs. ◃

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Land After War

BY IRYNA ZAMURUIEVA

Why look at plants during the war? Artist and researcher Iryna Zamuruieva writes about rapeseed, taking a long view of the political ecology of land relations in Ukraine and what it means for postwar social and ecological recovery.

Photo: Iryna Zamuruieva

There are many shades of yellow one sees from the train across Ukraine: corn, soybeans, sunflower, wheat, and, more recently, rapeseed. Rapeseed's pale yellow, near-lemon hue flowers can be seen in most central regions, where the soil is neither too arid nor too swampy for it to be grown and harvested, in millions of tons annually. Its stem is sleek, with seed pods sticking out on all sides, flowers each having strictly four petals, in the shape of a cross.

In recent years, the rapeseed fields in Ukraine have nearly tripled in size, reaching 1.5 million hectares. In 2022, despite the beginning of the full-scale war, the country exported $1.55 billion's worth of rapeseed, making it the world's third-largest exporter of the crop. The reason behind this expansion is the consistent and high demand for feedstock by the EU countries, which import about 90 percent of Ukraine's rapeseed. Rapeseed is mostly known for making cooking oil, but its cultivation in Ukraine has little to do with food.

Rapeseed has been tangled in the EU's attempt to address climate change for nearly three decades. Like several other oil-rich plants—such as soya and palm—it can be turned into fuel for diesel engines. Rapeseed thus enters the EU climate stage as a supposedly clean, sustainable, and renewable energy source. However, an overview of EU energy statistics makes it clear that relying on such monocrop plantations to prevent climate collapse has not led to any significant decreases in fossil fuels over the past 30 years. If anything, it is causing more harm, albeit in less discernible ways.

There is nothing inherently wrong with rapeseed—the method, the scale, and the infrastructures of its cultivation are the problem. With more land in Ukraine used for monocrop rapeseed plantations, and a projected increase in the coming years, what is often omitted from political visions of an energy transition reliant on agrofuels is the amount of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers used to maintain high yields, as well as the social and ecological consequences. While the EU eventually made a policy U-turn on biofuel's role in the energy transition, going from promoting to capping, its demand for oilseeds for cooking and agrofuel production remains a key driver behind Ukraine's rapeseed expansion, with Poland, Romania, Germany, and Belgium the top importers.

The production, distribution, and usage of fertilizers in particular lead to high emissions of nitrous oxide, a powerful greenhouse gas that can trap heat 300 times more than carbon dioxide, thus escalating climate change. With 100,000 tons of pesticides entering Ukraine's soil and eventually waters annually, their toxicity along with the absence of any legal pesticide-destruction facilities and the cross-border trafficking of counterfeit chemicals pose a severe threat to the country's future as the human and ecological effects of these might take decades to manifest themselves.

Paradoxically, to look at the social and ecological effects of rapeseed plantations, we are forced to look away from the plant itself and back at those actors behind its growing presence in Ukrainian soils. The top three are subsidiaries of the United States' ADM (Archer Daniels Midland) and Cargill, and of Switzerland's Glencore. The rest include a mix of other foreign subsidiaries and large Ukrainian agricultural holdings such as NIBULON, COFCO, and MHP (Myronivsky Hliboproduct). Some looking at the politics of land in Ukraine also point to the domestic and EU political elites that foster an oligarchic agrofuel project, reinforcing injustices by turning vast swaths of Ukrainian land into a commodity and a raw-material provision ground, amenable to exhaustion.[1]

Looking at rapeseed is an exercise not only in spatial but also temporal imagination. "This project should guarantee constant supply for our companies, because in Ukraine, as before, a large area of land is not used," said Peter Schrum in 2007, the head of Germany's Federal Association of Regenerative Mobility at the time.[2] He explained its intention to rent 50,000 hectares of land in Ukraine to secure access to raw material for biofuel production.

A certain "before" is sometimes evoked as one particular starting point of arguments on the future of land relations in Ukraine: 1917 and the following decade, when the Bolsheviks abolished private property and began redistributing land among peasants with no compensation for the former landowners and persecution of those who refused or resisted forced collectivization. The image of this point in time creates a particular backdrop to the narrative around the land reform put into law by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in 2020, in which enforcement of the land market—the key purpose of the reform—was portrayed as the reversal of a century of historic injustice.

Ukraine's government and environmentalists understandably draw the world's attention to the ecological destruction Russia is committing at scale in the country. Its consequences are devastating, with about 30 percent of agricultural, "natural," and residential land covered in land mines as well as chemical and physical pollution. Eruptions from aerial bombs and artillery shelling, mined territories, destroyed heavy military equipment, leakage of oil products, burned areas from fires, and mass tree, plant, and animal deaths are all evidence of the war-induced harm to the living worlds.[3] Heavy metals like arsenic, copper, and lead are left behind from war actions and, like agricultural pesticides, they can accumulate in plants and the bodies of animals and travel across the food web, bringing toxicity to bodies near and far from the front line. However, understanding the ongoing environmental degradation requires seeing successive land reforms—to-ing and fro-ing between private and collective ownership—and ecological harm in a wider timeframe, not just through the most politically convenient recent point in history.

The difficult part of the story is that what is often referred to as "ecocide" might have an earlier starting date. Before the full-scale war, more than 20 percent of Ukraine's agricultural land had already been degraded[4] (agricultural land occupies 70 percent of the country) and about half a million tons of soil lost each year due to erosion. This is exacerbated by climate change, but it is largely due to continuous extractivist agriculture, during Soviet and independence times, that prioritize fast and large-scale production of export "cash crops," like rapeseed, instead of taking care of the health of the soil, biodiversity, and ecological health in the long run.

There is no convenient "before" to go back to in the postwar recovery, and there is no way around learning to see many facets and feral effects of harm to life, be it because of the war or agri-logistics. While there are some voices in Ukraine working to prevent it from slipping back into the prewar agriculture model, many questions remain: who is and will be dealing with the toxicity left behind? What prospects does rapeseed have compared to forest-steppe plants like adonis vernalis? What places will become a priority and receive more resources for recovery? And how might this alleviate or exacerbate existing social injustices? How we imagine and construct answers to these questions will depend on how we collectively understand the long and political history of environmental degradation. ◁

1) See for example, Christina Plank, "The Agrofuels Project in Ukraine: How Oligarchs and the EU Foster Agrarian Injustice," in Melanie Pichler et al (Eds.), *Fairness and Justice in Natural Resource Politics*, Routledge, 2016, pp. 230–48.
2) Korrespondent.net, "German biofuel producers intend to lease Ukrainian lands" (in Ukrainian). October 3, 2007, ua.korrespondent.net
3) Ecoaction – Centre for Environmental Initiatives, "The impact of Russia's war against Ukraine on the state of the country's soil Analysis results," May 16, 2023, en.ecoaction.org.ua
4) Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), "FAO kicks off project aimed at tackling land degradation in Ukraine," May 10, 2018. www.fao.org

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Anthropology of Political Care

BY ANASTASIIA OMELIANUK

Ukrainian female volunteers reveal radical forms of mobilizing that extend beyond immediate crisis response, challenging us to redefine what it means to care politically.

In my anthropological inquiries, I immersed myself in the world of small grassroots Ukrainian women's organizations to explore how the women involved leverage personal resources and relationships to support their communities. These collectives, sometimes dubbed the "volunteering frontier," bring together people from various walks of life: a kindergarten teacher, a pole-dance studio owner, an unemployed mother, an academic, and a refugee from a city that has become a ghost in the occupied lands. Their activities cover a wide range, from helping the displaced to organizing online counter-propaganda campaigns and anticorruption protests. They come with engaging strategies for grassroots fundraising as well as repairing and delivering pickup trucks to the frontlines, loaded with handwoven socks and masking nets, cigarettes, coffee, condensed milk, and—in smaller quantities—drones and thermal imagers. The list goes on. Many have been active since Russia's occupation of Crimea and Donbas in 2014. Euromaidan was a catalyst for versatile independent grassroots movements, but even before 2014 some were mobilizing locally, on a smaller scale but with strong fervor to rectify issues faced by the struggling young state.

Over the last ten years, the activities of volunteering collectives across Ukraine have extend beyond simple acts of kindness or rapid responses to crises when state actors fall behind. Instead of aid-based help, their efforts are rooted in long-term relationship-building and the enactment of mutual responsibility. Ultimately, volunteer and activist projects are based on caring practices. This care is inherently political, as it is moulded and sustained by their awareness of the historical and political contexts. This awareness not only elucidates the necessity of additional community care but also directs grassroots strategic implementation.

This perspective—volunteering as political care—opens vast opportunities for scholars and activists to think of voluntarism not merely as isolated acts of aid but rather as part of a comprehensive, politically conscious society-building.

Volunteer Nadiia Chuprakova.

Photo: Alina Andreieva, 2022

Knowledge of the Margins?

Ethics of care were historically linked to the "female" and "private" realms. Bolstered by diverse feminist scholarships, the concept of care has shed its marginalized status considerably over the past few decades. Today, the politics and ethics of care concern a broader spectrum of societal, legal, and institutional structures. In 2023, Olga Shparaga, in *Feministische Politik und Fürsorge,* brought attention to the crucial role of care infrastructures—whether state-provided or community-nurtured—as vital during turbulent times. She demonstrated how practices of care among activists were a driving force behind the 2020 protests in Belarus.

Yet, beyond the feminist sidelines, the full multifaceted potential of care as a transformative and even revolutionary power remains under-recognized. Many still essentialize care by categorizing it either as labor (commodity service, such as nursing, health care, and child care) or as an individual practice of support among kin relations. Unfortunately, thinkers who remain disengaged from the rich tapestry of feminist political projects, philosophies, and literature often continue to marginalize the concept of care. They perceive it as perhaps important and relevant for feminist or women's issues, but not as an urgent concern for broader discourse, governance, and decision-making.

What Does It Mean To Be Political?

To clarify with the simple yet transgressive slogan of Carol Hanisch and American radical feminists: the personal is political. Being political is a process of self-reflection, and self-reflection provides an awareness of one's entanglement in complex sociopolitical structures—and that of others. Therefore, politics in the work of Ukrainian volunteers is not primarily tied to their electoral commitments or left/right leanings. Instead, they are political in their commitments to explorations of their history and culture, to informally educating themselves and filling blank spots: about the imperial and colonial roots of the war, about the fate of Donbas, about why it used to be embarrassing to speak Ukrainian, about corruption during wartime, about what nationalism is, and about women in the army and among the Azov fighters. They unpack these stories in online and offline chats alongside their volunteering work. These stories help to explain motivations for their commitments and to engage people around them to join their causes. Some volunteers are inspired by the work of Soviet dissidents, of movements, and of liberation figures who resisted Russian/Soviet imperial domination in the 19th and 20th centuries. Volunteers perceive their ongoing work as a continuation of the Ukrainian struggle for sovereignty in 2014 and of efforts against cultural erasures in the Soviet Union and toward liberation from Moscow's imperialism.

This awareness of one's own positionality and what political predicaments shape it fosters the opportunity to recognize ways to act, to change, and to contribute through practices of communal support—to enact political care.

What Does It Mean To Care?

Although a wide array of support acts can be characterized as care, care is not neccesarily a committment to the ultimate good. Care labor produces inequalities and marginalizes. Care can be a premise for paternalistic control (neocolonial NGO development or liberal protection of the "rights" of the powerful). Political care practices and relationships are not free of frictions, juxtapositions, and complexities.

So what constitutes care? Theories of living in precariousness call for transnational solidarities and the awareness of our dependency on one another. Political care requires not only acknowledgment of interdependency but also responsibility toward one's community and society. This is why political care extends beyond the binary between caregiver and care receiver. Those who are on the front lines protect the lives and futures of those in the rear. Civilian activists and volunteers, in turn, support soldiers and other civilians, establishing a reciprocal relationship of support and care between the front and rear. This is what allows political care to materialize—as a practice of the everyday and a tool for strategizing the nearest future.

"Who, if not me?" is an unspoken motto of Ukrainian female volunteers. They take responsibility for identifying and meeting the societal needs that the state fails to fulfil. Volunteers imagine responsibility neither as a duty (as in deontological ethics) nor as the neoliberal conception of individual autonomy. Instead, the need to exercise responsibility as part of the community is ultimately political and understood as a collective anti-colonial fight for freedom: to be part of the past fight (anti-imperial and anti-Soviet resistance), the present fight (full-scale war), and the future bettering of the hard-won land.

Both interdependency and responsibility begin with the intimate, local, and tangible. Thread by thread, knot by knot, they extend to national and global politics, economies, and relationships.

Somewhere Between Utopia and Practical Necessity

In an increasingly turbulent, polarized world, it is hard to count all hopeful and promising attempts to find just ways of coexistence: cosmopolitanism, decolonization of institutions, identity politics, sustainability, human rights, and multiculturalism. Care, as a fundamental political activity, is not a utopian attempt to imagine a more just world. Many communities have long been building their livelihood, guided by the acknowledgment of radical interdependency and responsibility. We see political care in action: in the work of Ukrainian volunteers and activists, in the tireless struggles of Belarusian and Siberian freedom fighters, in Mahsa Amini protests, in community kitchens in Gaza, in self-organizing, and in alternative governing in Rojava and Chiapas.

Political care is not merely an alternative strategy. It is a vital approach to engagement that reshapes how we think and interact with our surroundings. Care as a practice can—and must—be applied to political decision-making and guide political action. It should be researched, discussed, and practised as a strategy not only in feminist academic networks or alternative brave spaces.

We must concentrate our interdisciplinary efforts on political care to better understand how communities function and continue to thrive, even under the most dooming conditions and forecasts. ◃

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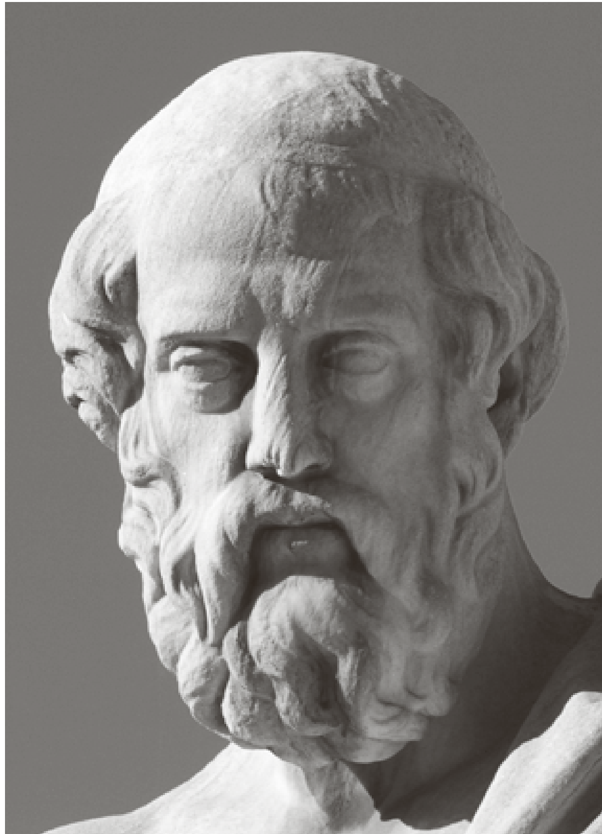
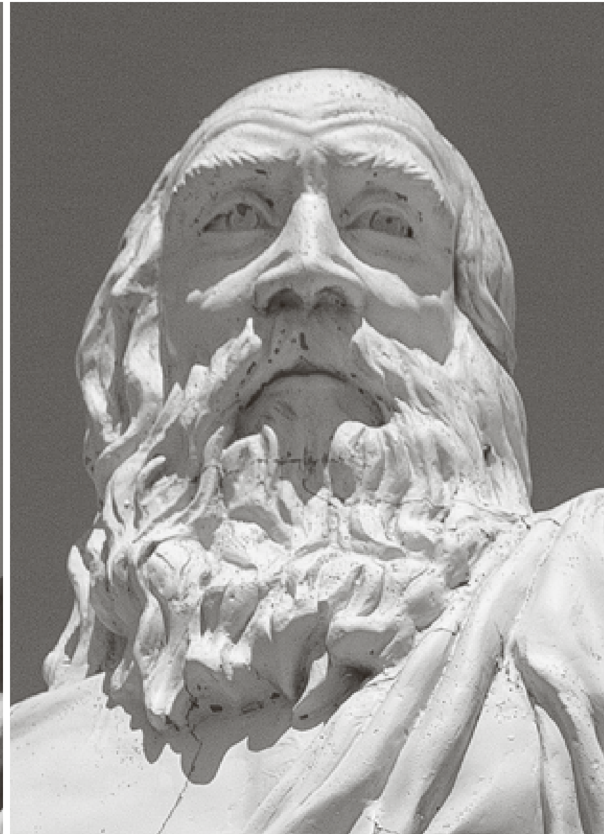
Care for the Soul

BY DARREN M. GARDNER

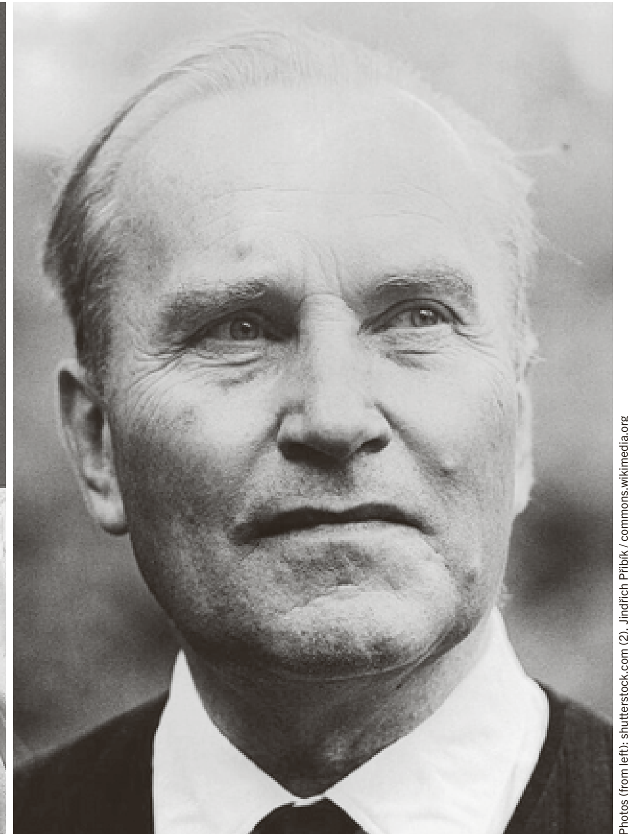
The Socratic tradition inaugurated the care of the soul as the essential practice of philosophical reflection that is definitive for who we are and how we are. From Plato to Patočka, care of the soul is fundamental. This practice of reflection and open inquiry is still needed, especially in times of sedimented polarization. We should reflect upon how we might we promote the care for the soul in ourselves and others.



Platon



Diogenes



Jan Patočka

Photos (from left): shutterstock.com (2), Jindřich Přibík / commons.wikimedia.org

There is an old battle of wits, a contest between two luminary figures of philosophy. On the one side sits Plato, the great writer of Socratic dialogue, whose abstract ideas or "forms" are still a subject of examination and inspiration in countless philosophy seminars. Plato's legacy runs wide, and in reading him we continue to ask important questions: Is an ideal social arrangement possible? Would there be more justice if rulers where philosophers?

On another side we find the cynic Diogenes who sits in his barrel, going outside to shine his lantern on the ways we tend to behave by acting shamelessly in public. While he makes fun of Plato, and almost everyone else, he can be understood not as a modern cynic but as a philosopher of care. His antics are intended to make visible the unreflective ways we act. Where Plato comes from an aristocratic family and discusses philosophy with eager students, Diogenes appears as a homeless beggar who, rather like Socrates, engages in public antics with the *hoi polloi* in the market, at festivals, and at other gatherings. They offer two different paths for seeking truth: one from above, one from below.

Plato and Diogenes reflect different approaches to the maxim "know thyself." But to do that, to acquire something even approaching self-knowledge requires *care*. Care should not be understood as a response to illness or social stress, a bromide of yoga to undo the accumulated aches of daily life; rather care as *epimeleia* is more active than reactive—to care for the soul is to be what we are. To this end, in order to live well, to live in accord with ourself, Socrates, Plato, and even Diogenes suggest that we must cultivate our soul that animates our life, including our thoughts and beliefs. So how can we best care for our soul or cultivate the self?

Socrates was known as a gadfly in Athens. His irritating behavior was to ask if someone knew and could truly define ethical ideas like virtue or justice, showing those who would listen that those who claim to know about virtue do not. But this kind of display irritated politicians and defenders of power, leading to his execution. This Socratic practice also put on display a continued seeking after what is unknown, and this practice is the care for the soul; by engaging its activity to openly examine and reflect, the soul is both utilized and exercised. Insofar as Socrates challenged his audience to examine ethical ideas, he was acting not only in his own *self*-interest but also in the interest of others individually and collectively, shaking apart sedimented opinions. In this way gadfly-ism could or should promote a healthy reconsideration of our social commitments and beliefs while displaying the practice of the care for the soul.

Plato provides this account of Socrates, so it is no stretch to see that the philosophical maxim to "know thyself" and to care for the soul are part of the bedrock of Plato's philosophy. While Socrates spoke in public and never wrote, Plato offers a different engagement in dramatic dialogue form. These dialogues persist and continue to provoke open discourse and, in doing so, promote the care for the soul, but they have a limited effect and an even more limited readership.

What about Diogenes? He is known less as a philosopher and more as a countercultural persona. Indeed, he is the one who speaks courageously against Alexander the Great, who lights his lantern during the day, and who challenged dogmatic religion, public decorum, and conventional living. How do his street antics, far from the discussions with Plato in his Academy, reflect a care for the self as a care for the soul?

Diogenes claimed that the public was uninterested in discussing serious matters of philosophy. Yet, he noticed that if he acted strangely, he would draw a crowd. People were more interested in looking at nonsense than speaking about matters of virtue! Following this insight, Diogenes took up the task of acting doggishly in an attempt to more directly confront contingent behaviors. He was "Socrates gone mad," as one account says, and his confrontations are the prelude to open discourse in the form of care. He routinely caused embarrassment but, in doing so, tried to occasion the possibility of social change. He claimed to a youth who was blushing in embarrassment "Cheer up! Blushing is a hue of virtue!"

Diogenes acted in this way to confront civic behavior in order to occasion open thinking about alternatives. Alterity, if it can be taken without offense, alerts the public that social practices are contingent. The cynic tries to put the public into a position to reconsider who has power and who does not, what the value of money is, what should be private and public, and so forth. It is done through scandalous street antics because it attempts to draw a crowd to address social issues from below, outside the elite aspects of the Academy. It is a public call to care for the soul—to open a horizon of reflection on what social arrangements might be reconsidered. But is this kind of confrontation, perhaps satire today, apropos for the care of the soul? Or does it merely isolate those who feel shame and embarrassment? Perhaps this is why the cynic demands that we have strength.

Centuries later, a thinker who was far from a cynic but who was a figurehead for social change nonetheless, Jan Patočka, also asked us to reconsider the importance of the care for the soul. For him, care for the soul is the fundamental tradition of the West, a practice of openness and inquiry that allows one to live in truth. For Patočka, the history of Europe can be seen as the history of the care for the soul in decline. Overcome by materialism, dogmatism, ideology, and determinism, the care to seek and to know has steadily been overtaken by the care to *have* and the care to *have determined*. This story, the decline of Europe as the history of the care of the soul, is rich and complex, but what I want to consider is his notion of the rupturing that might alert us again, in solidarity, to the openness of the care of the soul as a society.

Patočka suggests at the end of the *Heretical Essays* that what offers such a possibility is not a return to Plato if that means thinking about ascending to the abstract realm of ideas, nor a social provocation like Diogenes, but a radical rupture in the form of a cataclysm that forces open a horizon by taking down the edifice of our social, political, and philosophical commitments that have become sclerotic in modern society. The rupture of having been shaken by the catastrophe of life on the front line of war is the example Patočka uses to illustrate the solidarity to reorient care as the essential openness in the soul.

But do we need a radical rupture to dislodge sedimented disregard for philosophical openness? Does Diogenes's provocation or perhaps our modern equivalent in a character like Borat offer a helpful push from below? If so, how do we recognize Diogenes from a mere troll? Has the emancipatory hopes of Diogenes run afoul in the success of the more conservative forces of today? Perhaps Plato's Academy is the way to promote the care of the soul best, but the time required to read and discuss and to place our beliefs in dialogue with Socrates and others seems to restrict the cultivation of care to those with leisure or privilege. In the Socratic spirit we might begin by asking why. ◃

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The Solidarity Question. Romanian Farmers, Ukrainian Grains, and the European Union

STEFAN VOICU

The trade in Ukrainian grain during the war raises questions about what different actors in the European Union mean when talking about solidarity.

One month into Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the European Union adopted a plan to create Solidarity Lanes. These were conceived as transport corridors that would enable the export of Ukrainian agricultural goods. Ukraine is one of the world's largest producers of wheat, maize, and sunflower. These exports are central not only to its economy but also to European and global food security. The danger of Ukraine not being able to export its grains led to a sharp rise in prices and raised concerns about an impending global food crisis. With the Solidarity Lanes the EU sought to suspend import tariffs and quotas as well as to make phytosanitary controls more flexible.

The Solidarity Lanes, and later the Black Sea Grain Initiative brokered by the United Nations, helped lower prices. However, at the end of January 2023, Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia jointly requested the EU to take immediate measures to mitigate the financial losses their farmers incurred since the Solidarity Lanes were established. According to them, Ukrainian grain was being sold at a discount and spilled into the local markets, undercutting domestic farmers. Moreover, the lanes had created logistical bottlenecks that hampered the sales of local farmers and further depressed prices.

Two months later, the EU announced compensations only for farmers in Bulgaria, Romania, and Poland, but the amount of this financial relief did not satisfy the claimants and protests ensued. Farmers protested in Brussels and in the different countries, with tractors blocking borders and highways. Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia announced unilateral bans on imports of Ukrainian grain, and Romania threatened to do the same.

Following closely the Romanian protests, I noticed how the farmers' contestation challenged the notion of solidarity implied in the creation of the Solidarity Lanes. They held banners that said: "Solidarity, not suffering," "Do not punish our solidarity!" or "Solidarity should not be a risk!" What were they trying to say?

To better understand these messages, one needs to look at how they were first articulated in an open letter addressed to Romania's officials at the end of February 2023 by the

Romanian farmers protest in the front of the European Commission headquarters in Bucharest on April 7, 2023.

Photo: DANIEL MIHAILESCU / AFP / picturedesk.com

Alliance for Agriculture and Cooperation, an organization formed by four of the country's biggest farmers' professional associations. It stated:

We are in solidarity with the Ukrainian people and we understand the farmers' desperate need to sell their current grain stocks at a discount to prepare for the new season. Nevertheless, although we understood the need for a transit corridor last year and we do our best to support the Ukrainians, thinking of their farms in a humanitarian way, we cannot do this if the European Union does not treat Romanian farmers in the same way. Until now the costs of this solidarity lane was not shared equally amongst member states, the most affected being the states that share a border [with Ukraine].[1]

What the farmers' representatives argued is that solidarity is grounded in a humanitarian perspective, but also that the financial costs entailed by the act of solidarity have to be distributed collectively and equitably among EU members.

Solidarity has been a staple feature of the political discourse in the EU since the 2008 financial crisis, appearing in political debates about the Greek debt crisis, the refugee crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic, and now Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Although grassroots networks were mobilized by ideas of solidarity during these moments of crisis, in political talk the notion of solidarity appears as an empty signifier employed instrumentally.[2] There are many reasons to believe that this is also the case now.

Some politicians, pundits, and scholars argue that EU's solidarity hides a geopolitical interest, usually describing the war in Ukraine as a "proxy war" between the United States, its Western allies, and Russia, which is also the Kremlin's argument. In the case of the Solidarity Lanes, the perspective of some Romanian farmers is that they help not Ukraine but rather American companies that operate the grain transit.[3]

Others argue that the farmers blocking the transit of Ukrainian grain and the governments that ban it show a lack of solidarity or a "part-time solidarity," which contributes directly or indirectly to Russia's weaponization of food. In his speech to the UN General Assembly in September 2023, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that: "It is a clear Russian attempt to weaponize the food shortage on the global market, in exchange for recognition of some, if not all, of the captured territories" and that "it is alarming to see how some in Europe play out solidarity in a political theatre—making thriller from the grain. They may seem to play their own role but in fact, they are helping set the stage to a Moscow actor."[4]

The farmers' insistence on banning Ukrainian agricultural goods from transiting their country is also seen as creating opportunities for spreading Russian propaganda and as opening up a discursive space for right-wing parties preparing for elections. What seems to be behind this lack of or part-time solidarity is the pursuit of profit. Farmers, some argue, are either trying to make up for losses from trying to speculate on prices at the beginning of the war or to get as many subsidies as possible.

This debacle that puts European solidarity in question is because, unlike some of the grassroots solidarity initiatives emerging in times of crisis, politicians, entrepreneurs, and even scholars cannot imagine solidarity that is not mediated by the capitalist market. EU solidarity is formulated in terms of re-establishing the market equilibrium to restore prices to their prewar level. The farmers consider this an intervention that distorts the market and seek to mitigate the effects of this distortion by asking for compensation, the reinstatement of lifted tariffs and quotas, or for a ban on transit. Ukraine sues the countries that banned the grain transit for violating international trade regulations. It is as if, as in Frederic Jameson's quip, "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism."[5]

By arguing this I am not trying to reproduce the distinction between an affective morally led solidarity and a neoliberal self-interested calculative one.[6] As Daria Krivonos showed, solidarity cannot be sustained by affect alone.[7] Moreover, grassroots networks of solidarity might themselves reinforce unjust hierarchies based on class, gender, and race. Nonetheless, networks such as the Solidarity Collective[8] can offer ideas and practical solutions for imagining scalable alternatives beyond capitalism. Their work in establishing an international anti-authoritarian network that supports those in Ukraine who fight Russia not for an imagined nation but for social, economic, and gender equality can be a source of inspiration for future EU and international solidarity. ◃

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2) Grimmel, A., "Solidarity in the European Union: Fundamental Value or ʿEmpty Signifierʾ," in Grimmel, A. and My Giang, S. (eds.), *Solidarity in the European Union. A Fundamental Value in Crisis* (Springer Cham, 2017).
3) "Fermierul Ștefan Muscă acuză: Nu ajutăm Ucraina, ci firmele americana care își tranzitează cerealele prin România," AgroTV, January 1, 2023.
4) "Full text: Zelenskyy's speech to the UN General Assembly," Al Jazeera, September 20, 2023.
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6) Lynch, K. and Kalaitzake, M., "Affective and calculative solidarity: The impact of individualism and neoliberal capitalism," *European Journal of Social Theory,* Vol. 23, No. 2, 2020.
7) Krivonos, D., "Evaporating Solidarity: The Response to Displacement Cannot be Sustained by Empathy Alone," *LeftEast,* March 25, 2024.
8) www.solidaritycollectives.org/en/manifesto-en/

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Is It Stupid To Think Information Wants To Be Free?

BY LACHLAN KERMODE

It is said that information wants to be free. How should we understand this statement given the obvious entanglement of capital and computing? Marx's method of analysis offers us a model through which we can assess if this statement makes any sense.

As Karl Marx infamously put it in the first volume of *Capital,* in capitalist society value "is constantly changing from one form into the other, without becoming lost in this movement; it thus becomes transformed into an automatic subject." In its status as such a subject, value acquires "the occult ability to add value to itself. It brings forth living offspring, or at least lays golden eggs."[1]

The specter of surplus-value in capitalism, in other words, blurs our ability to see straight. Money is capable of aggrandizing itself, and as such is minted as something mystical and occult, a prized possession, a gift that keeps on giving. However, though it appears mystically reproductive, money cannot actually grow value out of itself unless it is given the right kind of care, much like a living organism (albeit of an alien kind). To properly vegetate from an original state to a new state of itself with a surplus, money must *circulate.* It "grows" when it is moving in exchange, developing its interest, and only in circulation eventually returns to its owner in a greater quantity than the seed amount. (Thus the madman miser, who fetishizes money as valuable without circulation, is distinguished from the rational capitalist.) Marx's analysis reveals that the golden-egg-laying principle of capital, the quasi-scientific belief that the economy simply *does* grow by virtue of it being the economy, is in fact supported by a specific set of social relations. The fetishism of money's reproduction at the expense of humanity's (and the environment's) is the moral of the life and times of capital.

© AI / Lachlan Kermode

AI generated image of a man who resembles Alan Turing works in the foreground of others working.

In this way, it makes sense to think of capital as an automatic subject. It operates as if it has no labor sustaining it, reducing the life and times of humanity operating within it to its schematic function as manpower for money's reproduction, instead of seeing labor as the very reason and sake of the social system's existence in the first place. Capital is programmed not as a rising tide that lifts all boats but as an engine that churns out economic growth. This machine is indifferent to humanity and the environment as life-forms, treating them only as inputs. Capital strives as an automatic subject toward the reproduction of surplus value, and in doing so it comes to appear as if it has a will of its own, a kind of *desire* to pullulate that operates independently of our own needs and wants. The system first and foremost serves and services its own desires, like a parent who puts on their own oxygen mask before their child's. Money, capital's prodigal son, acquires the occult capacity to add value to itself. Capital nepotistically puts the growth of money first, endowing its object with the subjective quality of wanting: money wants to come back around with a surplus.

Information, on the other hand, wants to be free. Or, at least, so goes the mantra of American free-software pioneers such as Stewart Brand, one of the more influential "thought leaders" of the early Internet. If information wants to be free and capital wants money to increase, how should we understand the intimate and ongoing affair between computing and capital?

We could start out by denying that information wants to be free at all. Information does not want to be anything, we might reasonably say, as it is not a person with desires but a lifeless collection of data. On this logic, it would be similarly stupid to say that money wants to grow in value, for it too is not a subject but an object, a tool that we (as subjects) think through in particular ways to achieve our economic, political, and social ends. Marx's theory of capital can, it would seem, accordingly be dismissed because it confuses inert and inanimate objects—commodities or numbers—with living entities.

Yet the subject-object distortion of the commodity as an object of thought is, as we know, *the point de capiton* of *Capital.* Marx's theory is not a critical account of how we *should* think when it comes to capital, money, commodities, and so on. It is rather an account of how capital *itself* thinks, how it critically disfigures our capacity to think, and how it wants us to think. This is the argument that Moishe Postone advances in his important book, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (1996). Marx critiques capital not by standing outside it and pointing at its stupidities with unbiased tools of thought, but by *reproducing the bias of its own logic* so as to expose what it stupidly *cannot* conceptualize.

It makes a certain kind of sense, in this Marxian manner, to say that information wants to be free. There is some structure at work that disfigures information, evidently a simple object of thought, into a subject of sorts, capable of its own desires. If commodity fetishism causes tables to seem to want to dance as if of their own free will, as Marx puts forward, perhaps information can be said to move itself too. So let us suspend disbelief for a moment and accept that the statement "information wants to be free" makes a certain kind of sense. Now: that a statement makes sense does not necessarily mean that it rings true. The question we should ask is: how credible is this truism as an axiom? Can we work from it as a principle and derive a social logic that is sensible in the materiality of the present day, as Marx did with the axiom of value's endless increase in formulating his theory of capital?

Due to the way that capitalism produces this misthinking on our part (what some refer to as an "alienated" subjectivity), it appears in capital that money has a mystical and occult quality to reproduce itself with interest when it is in circulation in exchange. Perhaps information is like money, in this sense. It appears as if it wants to be free on account of a social relation that has distorted our capacity to see it straight. If information does indeed have a tendency towards its own "freedom"—that is, toward being freely duplicated and shared for its own better social use—what is the structure that sustains this tendency? Could one derive a reasonable account of this fetishism that sustains an informatic axiom of data proliferation, or would closer scrutiny reveal that it cannot really even be counted as fetishism and is just pure ideology or dissimulation? There are surely contradictions at work in this freedom theory of information, just as there were in the theory of British political economy (put forward by economists like David Ricardo and Adam Smith) in Marx's time, and they demand more dialectical analysis if we are to take them seriously.

This view on information begs some even bigger questions. If our societies are now characterized by a logic that produces a fetishism or ideology of information, does this logic supplant the logic of capital or complement it? Perhaps information does not want to be free (to proliferate) at all, but rather loves its own detention. Or is it that there is a world where information wants to be free, but ours is one in which it simply cannot realize that desire, as capital is holding it captive? ◃

1) Karl Marx. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1.* Penguin Classics, 1992, p. 255.

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The Time to Democratize our Digital Future Has Come

BY GEORGE METAKIDES

The recent stunning AI developments call for fast and vigorous action, free from the illusions of the turn of the 21st century, so that the benevolent potential of these technologies can start being harnessed for the collective good.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Western-type liberal representative democracy was no longer considered under threat and it started being taken for granted. The theory was put forward that liberal democracy was a "natural state" to be nurtured, preserved, and spread by market power and globalization. This created a sense of euphoria characterized emblematically by Francis Fukuyama's "end of history."

While the related geopolitical developments have been addressed by historians and political scientists, it is often overlooked that, practically concurrently, the World Wide Web was born and began to blossom, further strengthening the euphoria of the 1990s as it appeared to pave the way for a digital golden age of democracy—a cultural renaissance that would reinvent democracy as a digital Athenian agora where goods as well as ideas would be freely exchanged. This in turn, it was believed, with substantial preliminary evidence (for example, the early hopes of the Arab Spring), would empower more direct and informed citizen participation in open democratic societies.

Photo: gguy / shutterstock.com

Alas, this vision of milk, honey, and digital democratic bliss turned out to be an illusion. The undeniable positive attributes of the Web came with an increasing number of negative ones. As democracy started backsliding worldwide, scepticism about the impact of the Internet started growing, leading eventually Tim Berners-Lee in 2019 to call for "global action to save the Web from political manipulation, fake news, privacy manipulation and other malign forces that threaten to plunge the world into a digital dystopia." His dystopia has now been further exacerbated by the advent of generative AI and its facilitation of AI-powered disinformation, mob-driven social network behavior, democracy-threatening polarization, and threats to children's mental health.

In fact, democracy and digital technology have lived "parallel lives" since the 1990s. The euphoria immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union caused a weakening of the defense and promotion of democracy in what Timothy Snyder called a "unilateral moral disarmament." A very similar and simultaneous sense of euphoria and unbridled techno-optimism prevented the anticipation of some of the negative impacts of digital technologies and the emergence of Big Tech, with its gigantic-scale monetization of personal data and the potential of its platforms to be used to disrupt and corrupt democratic processes. Market utopianism and techno-utopianism went hand in hand and reinforced each other.

How times change! At the beginning of the 21st century, "digital activists" were justifiably worried about potential government control of the digital public sphere but they failed to anticipate the threat of control by a very small number of very large companies. It is ironic that today they justifiably call for vigorous government intervention to rescue us from domination and control by Big Tech.

At the start of the Arab Spring, the role of social media was glorified, including with proposals like giving the Nobel Prize to Twitter. Fast forward to a recent U.S. Senate hearing during which Senator Lindsay Graham told Meta's Mark Zuckerberg that he had "blood on his hands."

The U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) is now suing Big Tech companies in an effort to curtail their monopolistic power and accuses them of "surreptitiously rewriting their privacy policies to allow themselves to use consumer data for their AI product development." In the EU a similar drive is underway through the Digital Market Act, the Digital Services Act, and the recently approved AI act. This sets the stage for a "tempered techno-optimism" approach that, perhaps ironically again, may be helped by the hype around generative AI developments in terms of expectations as well as of fears.

Civil society and political decision-makers are more ready than ever to support an approach of regulation and public investment to minimize the risks that digital technologies, and AI in particular, entail and at the same time to help harness the beneficent potential of these technologies for the collective good.

They also increasingly appreciate the threats that unprecedented concentration of economic and political power in the hands of a few superlarge companies implies. Together, the "Magnificent Seven" (Apple, Amazon, Google, Meta, Microsoft, NVIDIA, and the group of companies owned by Elon Musk), currently have a valuation of about $13 trillion, rivalling the sum of the GDP of the four largest European economies (Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and Italy). Their economic power is coupled with the political power to manipulate, herd, and polarize to an extent that the public sphere that is essential for liberal democracy to function properly is severely corrupted.

That the concentration of economic and political power represents a danger to democracy was recognized in the United States in the 1890s as articulated by Senator John Sherman (of Sherman Antitrust Act fame), which led to vigorous antitrust legislation resulting in the breakup of Standard Oil and, much later, AT&T. This spirit was weakened in the 1970s and has not recovered since. The abovementioned efforts in the United States and the EU are an effort to revive this spirit after redesigning antitrust legal tools so that they are suited to the evolving digital ecosystem.

The sensitization and awareness that the recent AI developments have triggered can help us not to be collectively duped again into the same passive techno-optimism that allowed, for example, the unregulated and, in many ways, catastrophic development of social network platforms.

They can also accompany the regulatory framework that the EU has pioneered and must now be promoted for the broadest possible worldwide adoption, with adjustments, leveraging the "Brussels effect." This must come with generous public investments that allow all companies as well as national and local governments globally to develop digital tools designed to assist people rather than to replace them.

These investments are absolutely needed to make available to all the three main prerequisites for innovative, human-centered AI research and development: computing power, multilingual and locally curated data, and human resources with the required expertise. Failing to provide investment to enable such a "democratization of AI futures" will mean not only surrendering to current technological domination but also leaving the power to determine future research directions exclusively in the hands of Big Tech. This will in turn mean the abandonment of any pretence of a democratic public sphere as the Big Tech companies will continue, to quote Tim Berners-Lee's March 2024 open letter, "exploiting people's time and data with the creation of deep profiles that allow for targeted advertising and ultimately control over the information people are fed".

In the history of technological development, the owners of innovating companies (from the railroad, steel, and oil barons onward) always enjoyed a "grace period" during which they made their own rules and earned big profits as the fruits of their innovation. Then came a time when society realized that such a grace period lasting beyond a certain point leads to exploitation, the destruction of market competition, and eventually harms collective well-being. At that point, society decided to take action in the form of regulation accompanied by public investment.

The digital oligarchs have had their grace period for too long. The time to democratize our digital future is now. ◁

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The Twenties Are Coming

BY HOLLY CASE

What does it feel like to live in an age of perpetual technological transformation? Like losing something that only technology can help to restore.

In 1980, the American writer George Trow published a long and peculiar essay in *The New Yorker* titled "Within the Context of No Context." It was obliquely about television, for it was through television that he detected a change in the "movement of history."

The direction of the movement paused, sat silent for a moment, and reversed. From that moment, vastness was the start, not the finish. The movement now began with the fact of two hundred million, and the movement was toward a unit of one, alone. Groups of more than one were now united not by common history but by common characteristics.

"Television is a mystery," Trow conceded, but one thing was certain: "It has a *scale.*" The inferential statistics behind television broke audiences down into characteristics inhabiting a theoretical multidimensional space, separated these characteristics from the contexts that gave rise to them, flattened them to groups of points within a single dimension, and then fed them back, cleansed of experience, to audiences in the form of advertising and programming. "Do you go from house to house—houses formed into little units, constituting parts, then, of larger units, which are, in turn, parts of larger units," Trow wondered of the method behind what appeared on a television screen, "Or do you start instead with the two hundred million and slice it up? There's a difference." The difference was palpable, but difficult to describe. Today the scope and application of what troubled Trow is broader still. "Your audience is online, in the billions," promises a company that uses "industry-specific vertical AI" running on an "audience demographics platform." It goes on: "Map the audience demographics behind each conversation using interests, affinities, personality traits and buying habits. Segment your audiences by affinity to better predict behavior."

Even a decade and a half later, with the republication of the essay in book form, Trow still struggled to express what "Within the Context of No Context" was really about and to make sense out of the "informed confusion" of the original essay. "I think I was trying to raise a hue and cry," he concluded. "I think I was saying, 'THE TWENTIES ARE COMING, THE TWENTIES ARE COMING.' I think I was right; the 1920s were in the wings, then."

QUARANTE-QUATRIÈME ANNÉE N° 39 — 1 FRANC LE NUMÉRO — 23 SEPTEMBRE 1928.

LE PATRIOTE ILLUSTRÉ

REVUE HEBDOMADAIRE

L'AUTOMATE QUI FAIT L'ÉMERVEILLEMENT DE LONDRES

The weekly magazine *Le patriote illustré* reports on Eric, the first British robot at the Society of Model Engineers exhibition in London in 1928.

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In Virgina Woolf's 1928 novel *Orlando,* the title character muses: "I rise through the air; I listen to voices in America; I see men flying—but how it's done, I can't even begin to wonder." A technology is the culmination of a million labors over generations and of knowledge about the use of tools; it is about timing, coordination, technique, learning, knowledge itself. Once built into a machine, all that history becomes invisible, collapsed into a few visible controls. As Karl Marx put it in *Capital,* "The process disappears in the product." We see neither how it works nor what went into making it work.

What is more, the machine can be picked up and moved and made to work somewhere else, under a different sun to different ends, alienated from the processes and figures that gave rise to it. The machine is nowhere—or everywhere—at home. Like a late-stage or defunct empire of the sort that littered the geopolitical landscape of the 1920s, the machine is at once the whole of the thing and the dead hulk and empty operation of the thing.

The French poet Paul Valéry, writing from such an empire in 1925, saw interaction with machines as analogous to the brain on drugs: "The more useful the machine seems to us, the more it becomes so; and the more it becomes so, the more *incomplete* we are, the more incapable of doing without it. There is such a thing as *the reciprocal* of the useful." Soon thereafter, in the former imperial capital of Vienna, Sigmund Freud wrote his famous 1929 work *Civilization and Its Discontents.* Though we owe much to "the era of scientific and technical advances," he conceded, "most of these satisfactions follow the model of the 'cheap enjoyment,'" comparable to "putting a bare leg from under the bedclothes on a cold winter night and drawing it in again." This fickle rush was registered by Trow, too, in connection with television. "The charm lasts just for a moment, but it does last for a moment and is powerful in that moment. A slot machine is interesting, for example, and a con man spinning a story. These things create a context. It's like *home,* but just for a moment."

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How is it that the 1920s seem to come round and round again? And why does it feel nonetheless so disorienting each time they do? Perhaps because technology cements the results of past learning, such that anyone alive tends to possess a growing mass of obsolete knowledge and experience: how to use a phonebook or a floppy disk, read a map, or adjust an antenna. The first time the 1920s happened, Valéry wondered whether he was observing a "crisis of intelligence" as it seemed "the world is becoming stupid." In a subsequent iteration, adeptly rendered in a short story by the Ecuadorian writer Alicia Yánez Cossío 1975, the narrator describes a smallish, all-knowing device called the IWM 1000 that is "an extension of the human brain. Many people would not be separated from it even during the most personal, intimate acts. The more they depended on the machine," it seemed, "the wiser they became." Before long, however, "They did not know how to read or write. They were ignorant of the most elementary things."

Our supposedly unique human ability to "learn to learn" is deployed almost wholly in the realm of redefining a relationship between ourselves and the latest technology that has not only rendered our earlier skills, social relations, and the interactions they engendered null and void, but also frozen and multiplied the errors and oversights that underpinned those skills and relations. This is what "problem-solving" looks like here on the ground: it means solving the problems created by a previous attempt to solve a problem. Whether we choose to call this frenzied activity "progress" or not, we are forced to acknowledge its momentous force. For Marx, jumping into the scrum of inexorable industrial automation was not so much a path to utopia as a necessity of survival. In 1978, the Czech dissident Vacláv Havel observed how people on both sides of the Iron Curtain were "being dragged helplessly along" by "the automatism of technological civilization and the industrial-consumer society."

Karel Čapek, the Czech writer who coined the word "robot" in his 1920 play *R.U.R.,* imagined an industrialist holding forth on how "The word 'fabrication' is derived from *febris,* and it means 'feverish activity.' […] the task of industry is to process the whole world. The world must become a factory!" To that end, the industrialist says, he employs "chosen people," the castoffs of society, and—depriving them of human connection, friendship, and family feeling—he turns them effectively into soulless machines. "Every one is like a separate cell in a battery." Valéry spoke in similar terms of "the monstrous scale of *one man per cell.*"

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In 1921, as Čapek's play hit stages across Europe and elsewhere, there was lively commentary and debate surrounding the proper way to interpret the story of robots designed for factory work becoming more human even as they destroy humanity to take over the world. Was it an allegory of revolution? Or of the battle of the sexes? Or of technological hubris?

Only in 1923 did Čapek declare that none to date had correctly identified the play's true substance. *R.U.R.,* he insisted, was on the one hand a "comedy of science" and on the other a "comedy of truth." It was a comedy of science because "this terrible machinery must not stop, for if it does it would destroy the lives of thousands. It must […] go on faster and faster, even though in the process it destroys thousands and thousands of lives." And it is a "comedy of truth" because all the various conflicting attitudes toward the problem and motives for action represented by the various human characters in the play are in some sense true. "In the play, the factory director Domin establishes that technical progress emancipates man from hard manual labour, and he is quite right," Čapek wrote. "The Tolstoyan Alquist, to the contrary, believes that technological progress demoralizes him, and I think he is right, too." Welcome to the 1920s. ◃

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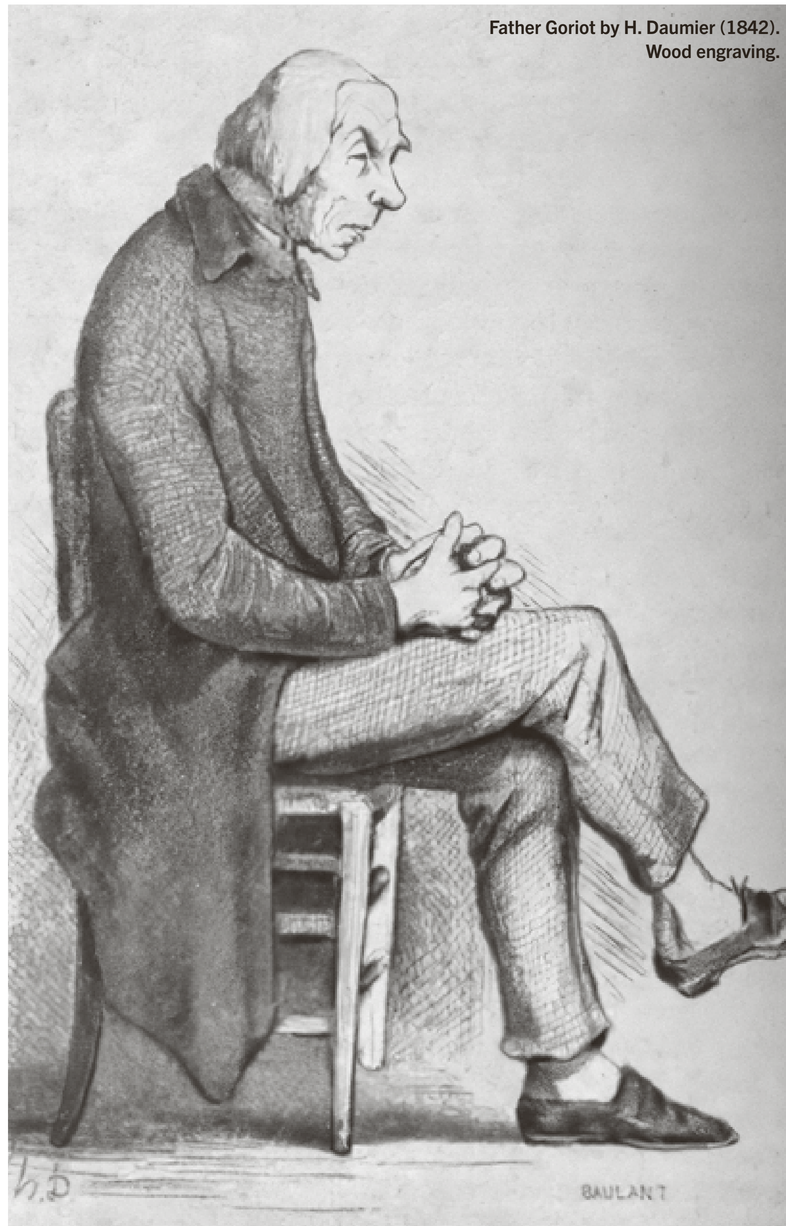
Tragedy, The Novel, and Modern Society

BY ANNA SCHUBERTOVÁ

Currently, the novel is the most prominent serious narrative literary genre. This was not always the case: in the 19th century, it challenged tragedy as the "high" genre, reflecting and participating in broader changes from feudal to modern democratic societies. How should we account for and evaluate this shift?

As European societies became broader, more fragmented, and less integrated, so changed the dominant way artistic forms represent human lives and actions. Ordinary individuals replaced aristocratic heroes and heroines, amorphous prosaicness replaced the rigid structure of tragedy, and the solitary experience of reading and writing superseded communal performances. Drama, exemplified in the "classical tragedy" of William Shakespeare or Sophocles, provided a problematic norm for the modern realist novel: the question of how and to what extent the novel should take up this model is a vital issue for novelists such as Honoré de Balzac and novel theorists such as György Lukács and Erich Auerbach. For all of them, the novel's relationship to tragedy exceeds a narrowly formal problem: the shift has implications for its status as art and for its ability to represent modern democratic values.

In the influential Mimesis: *The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946), Erich Auerbach characterizes the realist novel as a successful synthesis of the serious style of tragedy and ordinary subject matter. Ordinary characters from the lower classes, previously used for the "lowly" style of comedy—where they were depicted either in a grotesque or a light, pleasant way—became the subjects of "serious, problematic or even tragic representation"[1] in realist fiction. Auerbach's account of the history of representation covers the development from Greek epos and biblical narrative up to contemporary modernist novels, with realism depicted as a culmination.



Father Goriot by H. Daumier (1842). Wood engraving.

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Auerbach registers some difficulties in the realist novel's succession to tragedy. In Stendhal's writing, the giving of serious attention is still conditioned by the protagonist demonstrating aristocratic values. Balzac, on the other hand, distributes his sympathy without any limits, "bombastically exaggerating" the passions and misfortunes of minor characters, which leads to his work bordering on melodrama. Auerbach portrays Gustave Flaubert's work, overcoming the shortcomings of his predecessors, as the completion of this development. Flaubert's method of impartial observation resulted in the banishment of his subjectivity from the narrative, with his subjects finally portrayed as they were.

Auerbach's account, written in exile after the Second World War, bears a message of hope. Modern literature came to terms with reality, overcame ideological prejudices, and fulfilled its role in objectively depicting human lives. His account relies on a liberal humanist narrative in which modern rationality is linked to democratization, as if cognitive shortcomings were the primary motivator of injustices. When we see the world as it really is, the privileges previously reserved to aristocrats will surely be extended to everyone.

Lukács approaches the relationship between the novel and tragedy from a different perspective. His main concern is the contrast between the intense communication and emotional effects of the latter and the subdued resonance of the former. Tragedy's unified and condensed structure, organized around a central collision, the generality of its themes, and the strong personality of its heroes ensured its immediate and powerful effect on the viewing public. The novel's unstructured narration and ordinary and strange characters enmeshed in their respective social milieu make it challenging for the reader to relate to them seriously.

In the opening pages of *Father Goriot,* Balzac addresses the reader and paints a gloomy vision of the novel's reception. He predicts that instead of seriously relating to Goriot's suffering, his reader will devour the story along with other distractions and consumables. Balzac hopes to overcome his readers' insensitivity: he refers to his work as a *drame,* hoping that readers can relate to Goriot's experience "in their own heart."

Lukács is skeptical that the novel could achieve a genuine synthesis with tragedy. In *The History of the Development of Modern Drama* (1911), he argues that the form of drama became problematic justly, along with the social institutions that made it possible. The force of classical tragedy relied on unjust social structures: its general content was based on a shared value framework enforced by religion and state; its unified character system was contingent on a hierarchically organized society; and the strong personality of tragic heroes depended on a social structure that posed no substantial barriers to the will.

Lukács firmly rejects the possibility of democratizing the individuality and will of dramatic characters: "In vain has our democratic age claimed an equal right for all to be tragic; all attempts to open this kingdom of heaven to the poor in spirit have proved fruitless."[2] Such attempts, he argues, forget that the full realization of personality requires suppressing the personality of others: for every aristocratic hero expressing their will, servants are resigning their own. Lukács does not believe that the modern world is without hierarchies. Still, he claims that modern individuals gained a *sense of autonomy* that would make such a complete identification artistically implausible.

In *The Theory of the Novel* (1916), Lukács identifies a solution to the precariousness of novelistic form. The novel's structure, capable of unifying the dispersed nature of the modern world, is a biographical narrative of a problematic individual following their development, leading to a recognition of their place in the world, which irradiates their life as its immanent meaning. This meaning needs to be accompanied by irony, the reflexive moment of the novel introduced by the narrator's perspective and directed toward not only the protagonist but also toward themselves. The novel's meaning thus emerges as an interplay between the narrator's ironic response to the protagonist's life story and their own uncertainty in this response. Unlike in tragedy, in which the hero's recognition of their life's meaning affects everyone in their surroundings fatally, sometimes prompting mass death, the realist novel carefully restricts the resonance an individual life can and should evoke.

In the final parts of *Father Goriot,* Eugène de Rastignac, the novel's protagonist, complains about the cold response his cohabitants show to the "tragic" event of Goriot's death. Similarly to the reader envisioned by Balzac earlier, a tutor living in the boarding house cannot wait to have his meal: "There were sixty other deaths today: why don't you go and weep over the hecatomb of all Paris? […] If you're that fond of him, go and take care of him and leave the rest of us to eat our dinner in peace."[3] The rational perspective, which in Auerbach's account leads to an objective and unbiased distribution of serious attention, is taken to different conclusions in this passage. The abstract broadening of claims for a meaningful existence to all citizens would lead us to weep incessantly, so we had better not weep at all. An intense, empathetic response to one individual's suffering does not make rational sense.

Rastignac's challenges his cohabitants' cynical approach through his own actions. He sacrifices the last of his money to supply the dying man with medicine and, later, a dignified burial, chastising Goriot's rich daughters for failing to live up to their duty. But, however intense his identification with Goriot is, it is short-lived: in the end, he realizes that he needs one of Goriot's daughters for his social advancement and leaves to have dinner at her place. While we could see the novel's end as inconsistent with the standpoint Balzac expressed initially, the author is hardly to blame. Following Lukács, we can read the novel as an expression of a paradox haunting modern liberal society: the tension existing between the universal promise of abstract equality and its very imperfect, emotionally taxing, and paradoxical realization. Rastignac's limited, irrational, and perhaps hypocritical empathy is not the ideal response to this dilemma, but perhaps it is better than nothing. ◃

1) Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013) p. 554.
2) György Lukács, "The Metaphysics of Tragedy," in John T. Sanders and Katie Terezakis (eds.), *Soul and Form,* trans. Anna Bostock, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 197.
3) Balzac, *Father Goriot,* p. 392.

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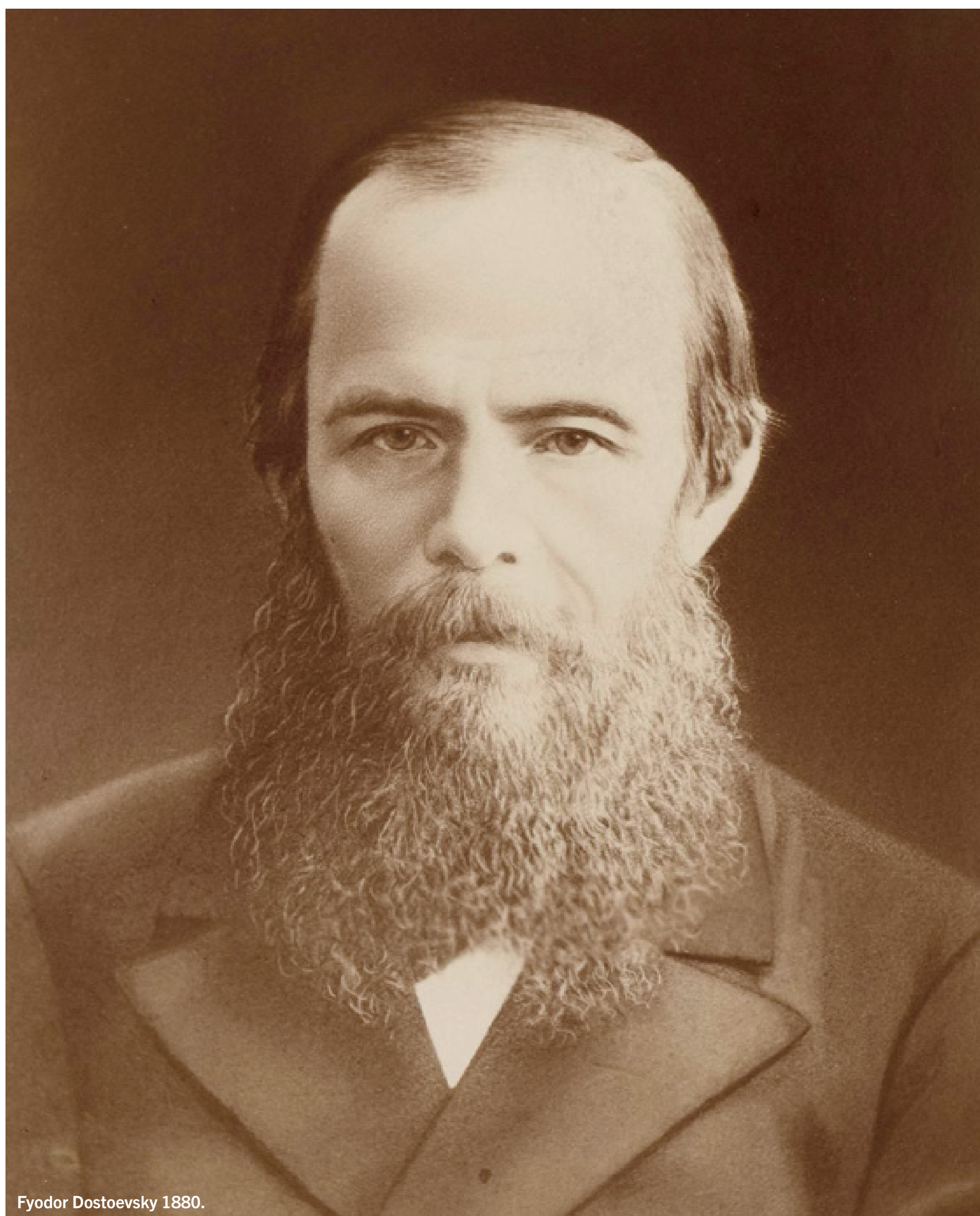
Conversations with Dostoevsky

BY GEORGE PATTISON

Conversations with Dostoevsky on God, Russia, Literature, and Life *(Oxford University Press, 2024), presents a series of fictional conversations between the Russian author and a Glasgow University academic, experiencing a midlife crisis. These cover issues from metaphysical despair, through Dostoevsky's politics, to what, following Orthodox liturgy, Dostoevsky calls "eternal memory."*

In the 150 years since his death, Fyodor Dostoevsky has been read in many different ways. In his lifetime, he was celebrated as speaking for the socially marginalized, the "poor folk" and the convicts among whom he had lived. To his first Western readers he revealed the depth and pathos of "the Russian soul" before becoming the prophet of the revolution. Friedrich Nietzsche said of him that he was the only writer from whom he had learned anything in psychology, while Albert Camus and other existentialists read him as giving voice to their own protest atheism. For some Christian readers Dostoevsky is an apologist for Russian Orthodoxy, but for others he represents a more humanistic kind of faith, not exclusive to any one church. His literary originality has provoked intense admiration and equally assured dismissal—Virginia Woolf once said he was clearly the greatest novelist who ever lived, but Vladimir Nabokov thought him "rather mediocre." Today, he is cited by President Vladimir Putin in support of a fundamental clash of civilizations between Russia and the West, giving us a political Dostoevsky stripped of all nuance and ambiguity.


Fyodor Dostoevsky 1880.
Photo: commons.wikimedia.org

Each of these readings has some basis in Dostoevsky's writings. Nevertheless, reflecting on the long, tortuous, and sometimes risible history of Dostoevsky reception, we soon realize that the issue is not only *what* he wrote or even *how* he wrote it, but how each generation is reading him in the light of its own questions and concerns. That is probably true of all literature, but it is—inevitably—all the more strikingly true in the case of a writer like Dostoevsky, whose work is so consistently extreme, intense, conflicted, and existentially demanding.

Since the end of the Soviet Union, international Dostoevsky research has been immeasurably enriched by the easy flow of scholarly exchange between Russia and the West, and Dostoevsky scholarship today is at a high point of academic achievement. How the new Iron Curtain will affect future developments is unknowable, though it should be mentioned that the International Dostoevsky Society places a strongly worded denunciation of Putin's invasion of Ukraine at the top of its web page. Yet alongside scholarship—always necessary and always to be listened to—there is always the question as to the existential motivations that draw people to Dostoevsky's work. For many, this remains his power to illuminate humanity's religious or, as some would prefer, "spiritual" impulse—whether or not this is identified with Russian Orthodoxy.

However, whether we think of this as religious, spiritual, or Orthodox, what Dostoevsky says about God is intimately connected with his beliefs about Russia and Russia's spiritual vocation to renew Orthodox Christianity. This is now inescapably problematic. His political journalism clearly articulates a kind of Russian exceptionalism, as in his conviction that Russia was divinely destined to seize Constantinople and restore it as the capital of Orthodox Christianity. His novels too contain passages that resonate with a strongly nationalist sensibility, although these always require careful reading, taking into account the character who is speaking, to whom they are speaking, and the specific context within the novel. The most discussed example is the speech by Ivan Shatov (in *Demons*) that Russia is a god-bearing nation. But while some have read this as a more or less straightforward expression of Dostoevsky's own views, it is also very possible to read this as, in fact, a demonstration of how not to mix religion and politics. Indeed, there are strong indications in the novel that Shatov's messianic nationalism is no less atheistic than the various other kinds of demonic possession unmasked there. Nevertheless, such questions cannot today be easily excised, not even if we give full weight to the philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin's insight into the polyphonic nature of Dostoevsky's novels and the way in which they present multiple voices engaged in ongoing and open-ended dialogue. True, Dostoevsky never or very rarely gives us a direct statement in his own voice, but his choice of topics and his delineation of character is already setting a certain agenda. In his influential 1923 study, the philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev simply brushed aside what he saw as Dostoevsky's religious populism and "messianic pretensions" as an "aberration," but it is not so easy for us to do that today.

At the same time, Dostoevsky never saw "Russia" solely in political or even religious terms: for him, as a writer, it was inseparable from Russian literature and the question of its destiny was also a question of Russian literature's place in what we could call the global economy of literature. Russia's "new word" to the world was, in this perspective, not to be propagated by the sword but by its writers—and, as Dostoevsky himself acknowledged, even though Alexander Pushkin and Nikolai Gogol were decisive, he could only have become the writer he became in dialogue with Charles Dickens, George Sand, Victor Hugo, William Shakespeare, Miguel de Cervantes, and other figures of Western literature (two Dickens novels, for example, were the only books he was able to read in his four years in the penal colony, apart from the New Testament and some magazines). Of course, this does not immediately solve the question of Dostoevsky's nationalism and its implications, since we are now sensitized to the role that literature has played in reinforcing national identities and national ambitions across the board and Dostoevsky, like so many Western authors of the 19th century, must undergo the scrutiny of a postcolonial reading. This is all the more so since literature was not just a matter for private readers or literary salons for Dostoevsky: literature mattered only to the extent that it engaged questions of life and helped readers to live their lives more fully, individually and in community. Dostoevsky did not, of course, know the expression *littérature engagée* but this was certainly what he practised.

If the generation of interwar émigrés could create a Dostoevsky who represented a universally human faith of humble, active love untrammelled by Russian exceptionalism, the post-Soviet legitimation of Dostoevsky has effectively closed this option. It may yet be that the defining curve of Dostoevsky's thought takes it beyond the narrowly nationalistic (I think it does), but this is undoubtedly an obstacle that we now have to confront in a manner and to a degree that earlier generations did not. Of course, if Dostoevsky was only the anti-Western polemicist that Putin perhaps wants him to be, then it would be tempting to walk away. But no great writer can ever be fitted into the narrow gauge of any ideological project. Literature is more than propaganda, even when it is used for propagandistic purposes. Literature requires us to work at the truths with which it presents us, not merely to pass the message on to its designated recipients. Literature disturbs, disrupts, and demands attention to the text and self-examination on the part of the reader. Again, this is true of all great literature but eminently true in the case of Dostoevsky. He certainly does not emerge unscathed from this kind of reading and there are pages we must resist. Nevertheless, even when Dostoevsky is at what we might regard as his worst he has an uncanny knack of bringing decisive questions to a head and casting them in a light that shows subtle and contrary tendencies. To read Dostoevsky today, we must match a hermeneutics of suspicion with an openness to the text—and see where that goes.

This is why my book *Conversations with Dostoevsky* is just that: a series of fictional conversations, not studies, since conversations do not pretend to yield results or outcomes but can nevertheless deepen and extend the issues at play in them as well as allow for unresolved knots and perhaps unresolvable disagreements. None of this is easy—but nor is God, or Russia, or literature, or life. ◃

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Thanatographies: Stories of Loss and Grief

BY JAN MUSIL

During the latter half of the 20th century, numerous thinkers voiced the opinion that death had been made into a taboo by European society and projected into violent art genres. Thanatographies, on the other hand, present a more complex example of works of art concerned with death and mourning—a positive trend of Europe's society opening up to both.

Around the 1970s, several French thinkers came to the conclusion, based on research in different areas, that there was something strange in modern European society's relationship to death. In *La Mort,* published in 1966, Vladimir Jankélévitch tried to grasp death as something radically other and intangible, a tragedy we forgot; Philippe Ariés claimed in his *Essais sur l'histoire de la mort en Occident,* written in 1975, that death had been medicalized and pushed out of sight; and Jean Baudrillard, in *L'Échange symbolique et la mort,* published a year later, saw late-stage capitalism, which had made death into the opposite of life rather than its complement, as the culprit.

In 1967, Cicely Saunders founded St. Christopher's, the first modern hospice in southwest London, which was soon imitated all over the world.

In late 1971, Maria Handke decided to end her life. A couple of months later, Peter Handke, her son, published one of the seminal thanatographies, *Wunschloses Unglück,* which was later quoted by many Central European authors—such as Peter Esterházy, Friederike Mayröcker, and Josef Winkler—as a source of relief as well as of inspiration for their own grief writing.

These three different developments give us the contours of a panorama of thinking about death and mourning, which always go hand in hand, in the period. They also marked a turn in the way European societies deal with death. All the authors above share concerns with how death and the dying are treated symbolically as well as practically. They remind us that we tend to abject death and the dying because they threaten our happiness, comfort, and symbolic systems, and their work has a specific context. To what did they react?

Rather than give a synthetic account in this essay, I just want to mention two works that might help us understand how death and mourning were perceived in Europe after the Second World War. In a notorious essay, *The Pornography of Death,* Geoffrey Gorer, writing in 1955, suggested that death became a taboo in postwar England. The reason was the discrepancy between the war experience, in which death was excessive, and everyday life, in which it became less and less common to encounter death within a household. Death became an obscenity and a taboo, and it was often *consumed* in the form of genre literature. This was especially the case for the younger generation. "If we make death unmentionable in polite society—'not before the children'—we almost ensure the continuation of the 'horror comic,'" reads Gorer's warning at the end of the essay. It may sound far-fetched from today's perspective, but it does clarify a certain trend and its perception.

Philosophical Faculty, Charles University Prague.

Photo: Daniel Baránek, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

A decade later, Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, a couple of German psychoanalysts, came to a similar conclusion from a different perspective in their book *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern.* They explain the suppression of grief in mainly West Germany as an act of self-preservation. Rather than falling into melancholic slumber, the country focused on economic productivity, becoming a *Wirtschaftswunder* rather than a *Mitleidswunder* along the way.

Today, we might be still experiencing what Tony Walter, in 1994, called the revival of death. People begin ever more openly to deal with such practicalities as the form their body will take after they die. Natural burial is becoming widespread, while the scattering of ashes at football stadiums is being banned. Yet we still watch detailed, hyper-realistic generated shots of dead bodies in crime, thriller, and horror films. I am tempted to say—in the postmodern manner of my upbringing—that this is okay. But I will abstain from assessing popular culture and turn to the core of my text instead. Among different cultural artefacts that take death and mourning as their topic, thanatographies, or writing about death and mourning, approach death in the most complex and sensitive manner.

Peter Handke's *Wunschloses Unglück*—published in English as *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams* in 1975—is an important text for several reasons. He narrates the life of his mother as one of patriarchal oppression and deep depression. Thus, it seamlessly fits the theory of Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, in which an insensitive society forces individuals to repress their emotional needs instead of working with them. Men might be the victims of the battlefield, but women are the victims of the household. Moreover, Handke's text revolves around a trope that is typical for modern thinking about death. Whereas in antiquity and the Middle Ages death was personified and had its own realm (for example, Hades and the underworld, or the dances of the dead and Christian last things, respectively), in modernity death and consequent grief is deemed something beyond words and imagination.

The central tension in Handke's thanatographical novella is between the urge to confess and the notion that an individual experience is indescribable: "I need the feeling that what I am going through is incomprehensible and incommunicable; only then does the horror seem meaningful and real." Yet the author writes, and he writes to tell a story reaching far beyond the tiny note in the newspapers announcing that "a housewife, aged 51, committed suicide on Friday night by taking an overdose of sleeping pills." Yet again, he wants to present this as an "exemplary case." He needs to choose a genre in order to be able to write *something.* The result is a biography in quotation marks: "I compare, sentence by sentence, the stock of formulas applicable to the biography of a woman with my mother's particular life." The portrait of Maria Handke that makes up most of the text is indeed rather abstract and distant; it is the portrait of *a* woman.

Cut.

This is what I had been concerned with during my stay at IWM from October to December 2023. On December 21, I was on my way home from Vienna to Prague and I watched "live" the shooting on the fourth floor of the Faculty of Arts of Charles University, where I had spent many years during my studies. The attacker murdered 14 people. There was a deep hum in my head the whole journey and it was not the noise of wheels on rails.

Ever since I started to think seriously about pursuing a PhD with a project focused on grief writing, months before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, I have challenged my research with utmost scepticism. Do I just seek arousal from other people's despair? Do I do this because death and mourning are moving topics, and therefore potentially easy to monetize in academia? Do I want to keep explaining what I do at lunches? Is it pretentious to work *theoretically* on such topics if you have not lost a parent, a wife, a child?

Immediately after the Prague shooting, the reflections became even weightier. I was unable to read for a couple of weeks, because I was irritated by most of the texts I was dealing with. I was irritated by words. What is the point of literature, I asked. After some time, I caught myself working on my project again, in an aloof, cold manner, like a surgeon, dissecting sentences charged with well-crafted pathos.

But it took me about four months to gather energy and read Antoine Leiris's book *You will not have my hate,* written after Hélène Muyal-Leiris was murdered in a terrorist attack in the Bataclan club in November 2015 (an event that for me is not a simile of the Prague shooting but a metonymy). She was his wife and the mother of a 17-months old boy. The scholar as well as the naive reader in me were moved. As banal as it sounds, my scepticism was surmounted by the conclusion that it is important to write these stories, and that it is crucial to read them. They might not heal, and they definitely do not bring back anyone to life, but they do help us get through such messes. At least for me it worked. I am not sure if it worked for Leiris though. He became a totem, a measure of grief.

As a kid, I laughed at experts' opinions that children should not consume violent culture. Today, I do not think it is about the children. "I'm sure some filmmakers are already making notes to turn this thing into a movie. Based on a true story," a friend told me in a fit of anger several weeks after the Prague shooting. I hope this does not turn out to be true. Death should not be the climax of a story. Death is flat. ◃

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Psychiatry and Women. Status: It's Complicated

BY PRUNE ANTOINE

Throughout history, as in La Salpêtrière hospital in Paris or the theories of Sigmund Freud in Vienna, psychiatry has been often wielded as a tool to silence women who dared to challenge societal norms. The boom in reproductive psychiatry in the United States has started a revolution for tackling better the gender bias in the diagnosis and treatment of the mental health of women.

Upon arriving at the IWM on a Milena Jesenská Journalistic Fellowship, I was unexpectedly drawn into a serendipitous connection with the story of Milena. This brilliant mind of the Viennese intelligentsia of the beginning 20th century is mostly remembered for being the greatest love of Franz Kafka—having a brief liaison with one of the most famous male writers of your time certainly does not help to highlight your remarkable journalistic legacy. In 1917, aged 17, on the order of her father, Milena spent a few months confined within the walls of the Veleslavín insane asylum in Prague, following a vague diagnosis of "moral insanity." Her perceived unconventional behavior, particularly her romantic involvement with a man that her father did not approve of, prompted her incarceration. Her poignant story is not unique. For a significant period, psychiatry was used to "treat" or to "cure" women who were a bit too free or too independent for their time.

Photo: Igor Martis / shutterstock.com

Statistics continue to reveal an enduring stark disparity between genders when it comes to mental health experiences. Women are three times more likely than men to experience mental health issues. This state of affairs prompted the core of my research: Is mental disease a female specificity, or is society so ill-suited to the female gender that it pushes women automatically to the brink—and to the shrink?

I started my investigative journey on this thrilling topic in 2022 as a reporter investigating a high-profile criminal case in Germany: that of Christiane K., a 27-year-old woman who killed five of her six children in September 2020 between two Covid-19 lockdowns. Though she pleaded not guilty and was the victim of repeated sexual and domestic violence, she received a life sentence. What struck me about this case was not solely the criminal act itself, although few crimes are as taboo as infanticide by women. Rather, it was how it raised the societal perceptions of and judgments cast upon women, particularly mothers, who break down and through their violence—or desperation—challenge the whole myth of maternal perfection and the patriarchal underpinnings of society. How are women, especially mothers, evaluated and perceived? To what extent do gender biases pervade criminal justice systems? Moreover, how does psychiatry, particularly within judicial contexts, discredit or validate women's behaviors? How can we ensure that forensic psychiatric assessments are accurate and devoid of gender discrimination?

As the result of a blend of chance and audacity, Christiane K.'s lawyer granted me unrestricted access to trial documents, witness testimonies, police reports, and psychiatric evaluations. Additionally, I met Christiane in prison several times, and we interacted regularly through talks and letters. While in Vienna, finishing the first version of a book that will soon be published in France and in Germany, I received around 60 letters written on school paper: the private journal of Christiane in jail—an incredible journey through her mind, memories, and traumatic psychiatric past. Above all, an incredible journey about what it means to be a mother, with all its ambivalences.

As I later discovered through my research at the IWM, psychiatry assesses women through antiquated methodologies—employing tests, questionnaires, and evaluation frameworks developed in a political and social context where the role of women was clearly and narrowly defined: to be at home, with children, without the slightest financial autonomy or intellectual independence. Analogous to traditional medicine, the diagnosis of mental illnesses such as schizophrenia and autism is predicated on criteria largely centered on male experiences.

A telling experiment by psychiatrists Marti Loring and Brian Powell in the 1990s exemplifies this bias: they tasked 290 male and female psychiatrists with assessing two case studies of patient behavior, using standardized diagnostic criteria. When the patients were depicted as "male," 56 percent received a diagnosis of schizophrenia, whereas 20 percent were when they were characterized as "female." Another study revealed that clinicians in the United States equated "mentally healthy adult" behavior with "mentally healthy male" conduct. Consequently, women were often deemed less mentally healthy if they deviated from stereotypical "male" behavior. The syndrome of "hysteria" was expunged from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders,* often called the bible of psychiatry, only in 1980—a telling sign about the modernity of the discipline.

More recently, some data indicated a disproportionate use of chemical restraints on women in psychiatric facilities during the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly in the United Kingdom. An investigation by *The Independent,* based on National Health Service statistics collected from October 2020 to February 2021, revealed that 63 percent of thousands of forced chemical restraints administered monthly in psychiatric facilities were on women. Another inquiry in 2022 exposed a gender imbalance in electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) prescriptions in the United Kingdom, with women making up two-thirds of recipients. And this though research has shown women are also more likely to experience more frequent and severe side effects, including retrograde amnesia, which is attributed to the lack of dose adjustment per ECT session.

In a transatlantic echo to the Christiane K. story, the Lindsay Clancy case has sparked heated debates in the United States on maternal metal health. In January 2023, the 33-year-old nurse and mother from Massachusetts, described as wholly devoted to them, strangled her three children—aged five years, three years, and eight months—to death before attempting suicide. In her ongoing trial, she has pleaded not guilty to infanticide on the basis that her actions had been driven by severe postpartum depression exacerbated by inappropriate medication. Alleging premeditation, prosecutors have sought the maximum penalty: life imprisonment. Often socially romanticized, motherhood can precipitate depression, psychosis, and, tragically, infanticide. Postpartum depression affects about 20 percent of new mothers and yet the first efficient treatment was only authorized in 2023 in the United States. When mothers harm or kill their children, legal systems struggle to discern illness from intent. Suicide is the leading cause of death for young mothers within a year following childbirth. Mental health complications during pregnancy and after giving birth are prevalent but remains a glaring blind spot.

All of this shows why "reproductive psychiatry" is a crucial development, at least in the United States. Taught at universities, this new discipline boasts specialized physicians and dedicated units. It has started a revolution in the way psychiatry considers women, encompassing various conditions and experiences throughout the reproductive-health spectrum. From conception attempts to pregnancy, postpartum, and menopause, reproduction marks a significant milestone in many women's lives, often precipitating mental health challenges from depression to mood disorders. While female mental health during menopause remains inadequately understood, reproductive psychiatry can provide vital support for menopausal patients grappling with mood disorders, cognitive changes, identity crises, sexual health concerns, and more. Following pregnancy and postpartum, perimenopause represents another critical juncture marked by heightened depression and anxiety, influenced by hormonal, immunological, and autoimmune factors. The boom in reproductive psychiatry, with its experts, new theories, tailored treatments, and clinics dedicated to women challenges the historical narrative of women's insanity and could be the antidote to the longtime androcentric conception of what mental illness means. Stories such as those of Milena or Christiane K. should serve as a rallying cry to improve the understanding of the mechanisms of mental illness for more social justice and fair healthcare. ◃

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Remembering Freud in Vienna: From Exile to Pop Icon

BY SLOBODAN G. MARKOVICH

Sigmund Freud had to flee Vienna in June 1938 under dramatic circumstances. In postwar Austria he gradually became the city's valuable brand, tourist asset, and pop icon. American intellectual historians facilitated this transition, which also resonates with a globalized vision of the 20th century as "the century of the self."

After the annexation of Austria by the Third Reich on March 13, 1938, Sigmund Freud was finally convinced by his colleagues to leave Vienna, which he had stubbornly refused to do. His rescue turned out to be an international operation, and he was allowed to leave Vienna on June 4, 1938.

Freud moved to London, where he died three weeks after the beginning of the Second World War. His fellow psychoanalysts, particularly those of Jewish origin, left continental Europe *en masse* and settled mostly in the United States. Psychoanalysis was embraced by important parts of the American cultural mainstream, which secured a high academic and social position for psychoanalysis in the United States, but its medicalization and masculinization had a price—and a quite high one, at that. As Russell Jacoby noted in 1983, the Freudians of the first two generations were "cosmopolitan intellectuals, not narrow medical therapists. Compared to recent American analysts, they represent another species."

Increased democratization of American society brought harsh criticism of American psychoanalysis, which undeservedly became synonymous with Freudianism. In this way, Freud was accused of elitism, phallocentrism, and Eurocentric views. Elements of all these unavoidably exist in Freud's writings as the hallmarks of his zeitgeist. He was, however, predominantly a humanist, intensely focused on finding ways to liberate humanity from its legacy of cultural and sexual repression, and the liberation was meant for all and was certainly not limited to American white men of the middle and upper classes.

The postwar situation in Vienna was radically different than that in the United States. The city where psychoanalysis was born could not really focus on Freud during the early years of rebuilding. Interest was limited to groups of dedicated followers, who were divided into two associations. It took 20 to 30 years for Freud's legacy to begin finding its place in Vienna and Austria.

Among his children, only Anna Freud went into psychoanalytic practice. She was the key person to be approached about a possible Freud center or museum in Vienna but, as her biographer Elisabeth Young-Bruehl put it, "she had consistently refused any public connection with Germany or Austria." It was the idea to establish a museum in the city that convinced her to change her stance. In her reply to its mayor, she thanked him for supporting this project and expressed her "*Freude und Genugtuung* [joy and satisfaction/reparation]," and the ambivalence of the second word was noticed already by her biographer. The Sigmund Freud Museum opened in 1971, when Anna Freud made her first visit to Vienna, 33 years after her exile.

Sigmund Freud Monument in Sigmund Freud Parc, Vienna, on July 9, 2021.

Photo: S. G. Markovich

Since the early 1960s, Freud's intellectual achievement has been seriously studied and admired by leading American intellectual historians. Carl E. Schorske's brilliant studies were published in succession from 1961 and collected in his famous book *Fin-de-siècle Vienna* (1980). He identified Freud as one of the leading persons of early 20th century Vienna but also as one who "long since established himself as a major figure in American thinking." William M. Johnston went one step further. In 1972, he published his much acclaimed and penetrating book *The Austrian Mind*. Out of more than 70 persons of prominence, who had all contributed to the distinctive intellectual climate of Vienna, Freud was the only one to be the subject of three chapters, and Johnston made it clear who had made the most decisive mark on posterity. "First place undoubtedly must go to Freud. No other thinker of the twentieth century, Austrian or otherwise, has so impregnated contemporary consciousness, permeating every facet of economic, social, and intellectual life." The renewed interest of top American intellectual historians corresponded with and reinforced a renewed intertest in Freud in Vienna.

Freud as a Viennese Cultural Hero and Pop Icon

After the opening of the museum, other places in Vienna followed suit in acknowledging Freud. In 1984, the park in front of Hotel Regina was renamed Sigmund Freud Park. The following year, a memorial stone to psychoanalysis was unveiled there. At the end of 1987, a new series of 50 schilling banknotes had Freud's portrait. Finally, in 2018, on the 80th anniversary of his exile, Oscar Nemon's statue of Freud was unveiled on the grounds of the Medical University. On that occasion, the university's rector, Markus Mueller, acknowledged "our responsibility as the Medical University of Vienna for the expulsion of this outstanding scientist," while the head of the Department of Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy, Stephan Doering, proudly mentioned that Freud was "Austria's most frequently cited researcher, with a Hirsch-index of 282."

By the end of the 20th century, Freud was branded as one of the most illustrious citizens of Vienna ever. Major museums have also redefined his role. The permanent exhibition at the Jewish Museum at Dorotheergasse pays as much attention to Freud as to Theodor Herzl, the father of Zionism. In addition to his portrait by Wilhelm Krausz, Freud figures designed for popular culture are also exhibited.

The Leopold Museum displays a showcase dedicated to his "groundbreaking work" *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The main exhibition, opened in 2019, is entitled "Vienna 1900. Birth of Modernism." It clearly links Freud's discovery of the unconscious and the emergence of new art in Vienna around the turn of the century, and it is very much based on the narratives first established by Schorske and further elaborated in Eric Kandel's book *The Age of Insight* (2012). Freud does not only feature as one of the main "modernizers" in the museum; he is also the central figure on the exhibition's placard and prominently present in the gift shop through various mass-consumption souvenirs.

It is, however, the Sigmund Freud Museum that has played a pivotal role in spreading awareness of Freud in Vienna, Austria, and beyond since its foundation. In 2020, it was renovated and expanded. The visitors entering the building at Bergasse 19 may now see a panel titled "Sigmund Freud—Breaker of Taboos." The new exhibition is much more appealing to younger generations, and is very carefully made to cover various aspects of his life, including sensitive issues that feminist and other critiques have had about psychoanalysis. However, it also contains a section on Freud's correspondence with Albert Einstein from 1933. While the text of the new exhibition insists on the sentence "We are pacifists", it intentionally omits another message of the letter—that war was "scarcely avoidable." This message of Freud could be seen as a warning that reverberated soon after the letter was written and continued to do so to this day.

The rise of Freud as a pop icon of Vienna has been concomitant with the emergence and development of pacifist postwar Austria. It was culturally framed by American intellectual historians (Schorske, Johnston, William McGrath, Peter Gay), later joined by a neuroscientist (Kandel) and psychiatrist (George Makari)—all of whom portrayed Freud and the Viennese intellectual climax as inseparable. They have all contributed to the new contextualizations of Freud that have survived various attempts by scholars to hypercritically dismiss the Freudian legacy. As Gay aptly summarized Freud's achievement in *Time* magazine in 1999, "For good or ill, Sigmund Freud, more than any other explorer of the psyche, has shaped the mind of the 20th century."

An exile from Vienna became half a century later a symbol of the city about which he had been deeply ambivalent. Some psychoanalysts might argue that this reappraisal of Freud in his hometown may be interpreted as an expression of the *Genugtuung* of the Viennese: satisfaction that such a celebrity had lived in the town, coupled with a need for reparation stemming from a sense of guilt. In a global context, it may also be viewed as an acknowledgement that "the century of the self", as the BBC once described the 20th century, marked by Freud and Freudianism, still haunts us. Some of the best tools to understand it are still those conceptualized by Freud, his followers and renegades, many of whom were also Viennese. ◃

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Der Dritte Mann und der Wiener Schwarzmarkt

VON NATHAN MARCUS

Anders als in Carol Reeds Der Dritte Mann *war der Wiener Schwarzmarkt der Nachkriegszeit kein gemeingefährlicher Sumpf organisierten Verbrechens. Vielmehr sicherte der illegale Handel nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg das Überleben der hungernden Bevölkerung in der ausgebombten Großstadt.*

Nach der Befreiung Wiens durch die Rote Armee im Jahre 1945 und während der anfänglichen Verwaltung der Hauptstadt durch die Siegermächte stieg die Zahl derer, die für Vergehen gegen das sogenannte Bedarfdeckungsstrafgesetz angeklagt wurden, stark an. Dies lag zumeist daran, dass mit Kriegsende die Versorgungslage in Wien sich katastrophal verschlechterte, da die Alliierten nicht in der Lage waren, die Stadtbevölkerung ausreichlich mit Nahrung zu versorgen. Nach Angaben des Wiener Magistrats waren noch 1947 70 Prozent der Kinder Wiens unterernährt. Auf legalem Wege waren bewirtschaftete Waren wie Eier, Mehl, Schuhe oder Zigaretten nur mit offiziellen Marken zu kaufen. Wer für sich und seine Familie etwas mehr wollte als ihnen gesetzlich zustand, musste sich dies auf dem Schwarzmarkt besorgen.

Beinahe alle Bevölkerungsgruppen waren im Schwarzmarkt involviert und es ging dabei vornehmlich um den Kauf von Grundnahrungsmitteln in kleinen Mengen, oft im Tauschhandel. Ganz im Gegensatz zu den Machenschaften des *Dritten Manns* waren diese Geschäfte (über-)lebenswichtig und nicht lebensbedrohlich. Auffällig ist dabei, in welchem Ausmaß der Schwarzhandel durch Zigaretten abgewickelt wurde. Geld war zwar nicht ganz wertlos geworden, aber Zigaretten, vor allem amerikanische, wurden von der Bevölkerung als wertbeständiger und liquider eingestuft. Das verlorene Vertrauen in offizielle Geldscheine widerspiegelte nicht nur Angst vor Inflation, sondern vor allem den Autoritätsverlust der offiziellen Behörden, welche nicht imstande waren, die Ernährung der Bevölkerung zu garantieren. Kriminelle Elemente widmeten sich daher vor allem dem Schmuggel von Zigaretten und Tabakwaren. 1949 verfolgten die Briten noch immer eine internationale Bande, welche mit Hilfe russischer Lastwagen amerikanische Zigaretten von Rotterdam nach Budapest schmuggelte, um damit in Osteuropa lukrative Tauschgeschäfte abzuschließen.

Die Wirtschaftspolizei war bereits im Sommer 1945 wiederbelebt worden, um zur Bekämpfung des Schwarzmarktes beizutragen. Deren leitende Beamte beklagten jedoch im September 1948, dass ihnen Personal und Mittel fehlten, um den grossen Schmugglerbanden das Handwerk zu legen. Umso erfolgreicher waren sie hingegen bei den Kontrollen von Privatpersonen und Fahrzeugen an Bahnhöfen und Einfallstraßen. Bei diesen bereits im August 1945 begonnenen „Kordonkontrollen“, wurden Reiseproviant oder Lebensmittel, für die Bescheinigungen vorlagen, den Privatpersonen zwar belassen, aber der Rest von der Polizei beschlagnahmt. Im Monat September 1945 wurden so 119 Tonnen Kartoffeln sichergestellt und fünf Tonnen Getreide sowie kleinere Mengen an anderen Lebensmitteln. Noch ein halbes Jahr später, wurden in nur einer Woche, 4511 Fahrzeuge und 921 Personen kontrolliert und dabei über sieben Tonnen Kartoffeln, über 500 kg Getreide und mehr als 3000 Eier in Beschlag genommen. In kleineren Mengen wurden jeweils auch alltägliche Bedarfsgüter beschlagnahmt: z.B. Batterien, Schokolade, Süßstoff und Süßigkeiten oder Frauenkleider und Damenstrümpfe.

Photo: Otto Croy / Österreichische Nationalbibliothek Bildarchiv und Grafiksammlung CRO 7438W

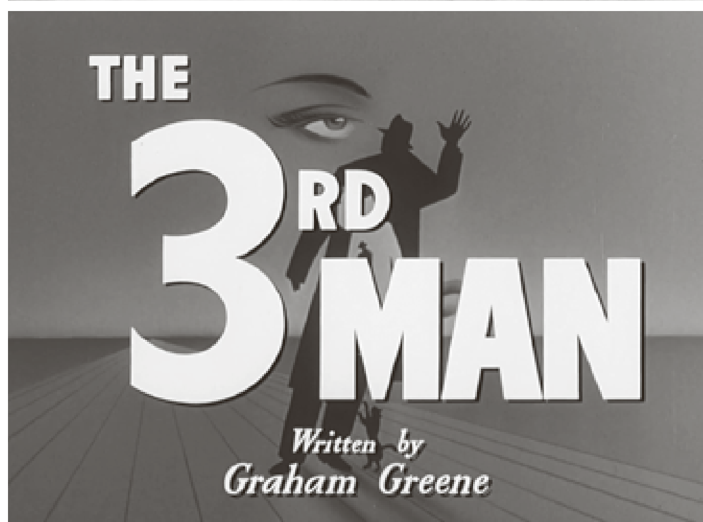

Photo: Mayimbu / commons.wikimedia.org

Oben: Schwarzmarkt im Resselpark, 1945–1946. Links: Filmstill aus dem Trailer des Films „Der Dritte Mann“.

Im *Dritten Mann,* jedoch, verdünnten Harry Lime (Orson Welles) und seine Komplizen gestohlenes Penicillin, welches dann an Patient:innen verabreicht diesen schweren Schaden zufügte, teilweise mit Todesfolgen. Zwar weilte Graham Greene, der für das Drehbuch verantwortlich zeichnete, im Februar 1948 in Wien, „um sich von wahren Gegebenheiten inspirieren zu lassen“, in Wahrheit gibt es aber keine Anzeichen auf ein derart grausames Unterfangen. Ein Fall, der jenem des *Dritten Mannes* ähnelt aber nicht nahekommt, ist der von vier Griechen, welche im Mai 1947 von der Polizei verhaftet wurden. Sie steckten minderwertiges österreichisches Saccharin kiloweise in tschechische Verpackungen, um es dann als hochwertigeres Süßmittel auf dem Schwarzmarkt zu verkaufen. Gesundheitlich geschadet haben sie damit aber vermutlich niemandem. Und laut einem britischem Polizeibericht kam zwar im Dezember 1945 eine große Menge Penicillin auf den Markt, von einer Medikamentfälschung war aber nicht die Rede.

Gleich zu Beginn des Films wird die Wiener Nachkriegszeit als „klassische Periode des Schwarzmarkts“ bezeichnet. Als Holly Martins (Joseph Cotten) einen Freund Limes fragt, was an den Anschuldigungen, Lime wäre in eine Gaunerei verwickelt, denn wahr sei, antwortet ihm dieser: „Everyone in Vienna is. We all sell cigarettes and that kind of thing.“ Doch die meisten der Schwarzmarktdelikte, welche uns durch historische Quellen überliefert sind, betreffen Einzelpersonen, welche in schwierigen Zeiten etwas mehr Genussmittel haben wollten, als ihnen offiziell zustand. Sogar wer kommerzielle Schwarzschlachtungen vornahm und Fleisch an Kunden ohne Bezugsscheine verkaufte, übertrat zwar das Gesetz, kann aber schwerlich als Mörder bezeichnet werden. Was veranlasste also die Macher des *Dritten Manns* dazu, die grauenhaften Verbrechen von Lime und Konsorten mit dem Schwarzmarkt zu assoziieren?

Bezugnehmend auf die Nachkriegszeit in Frankreich bemerkt der Historiker Stefanos Geroulanos, dass der Schwarzmarkt des Alltags den Behörden, welche sich um die Wiedergewinnung der Autorität über die Bevölkerung bemühten, ein Dorn im Auge war. Staatliche Behörden wünschten sich mehr Einblick in und Kontrolle über das Leben der Bürger:innen, letztere wiederum widersetzten sich auf ihre Art der wachsenden Staatsgewalt. Bezeichnenderweise begeisterten sich Kinobesucher:innen damals für Gangsterfilme, in denen der Verbrecher, statt asozial und gefährlich zu wirken, zum Volkshelden wird, welcher im Geheimen agierend eine Ethik vertritt, die der Gesellschaft verloren gegangen ist. Dieser Antagonismus zwischen Staat und Gesellschaft war vielleicht in Frankreich besonders ausgeprägt, beruhte jedoch unter anderem auf einer weit verbreiteten Auffassung, zumindest in linken Kreisen, welche den staatlichen Behörden, nicht zuletzt aufgrund der Erfahrungen der Kriegszeit, als diese mit deutschen Nazis kollaborierten, bürgerliche Heuchelei vorwarf.

Der Dritte Mann ist eine Anklage gegen den Schwarzmarkt und somit ein Plädoyer für die Kontrolle des Staates. Anfangs hält Holly Martins die Anschuldigungen für übertrieben. Was wird Lime schon getan haben, fragt er den britischen Polizisten, welcher seinem Freund auf der Spur ist. Illegal Reifen wird er verkauft haben, oder sonst Benzin oder vielleicht Süßstoff? Holly hält den Schwarzmarkt zuerst für relativ harmlos und ungefährlich (wie auch die von mir eingesehenen Akten bezeugen). Dann aber wird er mit dem elenden Anblick sterbender Pantient:innen im Kinderspital konfrontiert, den unschuldigen Opfern von Limes dreckigen Geschäften. Holly ändert daraufhin seine Ansicht, und mit ihm konvertieren auch die gebannten Zuschauer:innen. Zuerst verrät er Lime und dann verfolgt er ihn in der unterirdischen Wiener Kanalisation, wo er ihn letztlich stellt und erschießt.

Nach der Befreiung vom totalitären Faschismus, in welchem sich der Westen vornehmlich auf den Wert der Freiheit berufen hatte, mobilisierten die Regierungen in Paris und Wien (und auch in Washington und London) moralische Argumente, um ihre Kontrolle über die Gesellschaft wiederzugewinnen. Sich der Kontrolle des Staates zu entziehen war keine Heldentat, sondern ein Verbrechen. Wer im Schwarzmarkt kaufte und verkaufte, handelte nicht harmlos, sondern riskierte sich und anderen damit körperlich zu schaden, setzte sein eigenes Leben und das von anderen aufs Spiel. Somit widerspiegelt *Der Dritte Mann* nicht die historische Realität des Wiener Scharzmarkts der Nachkriegszeit, sondern den Wunsch nach einer wiedererstarkten Kontrolle des Staates über seine Bevölkerung in Vorbereitung auf den nächsten Krieg, den Kalten Krieg. ◁

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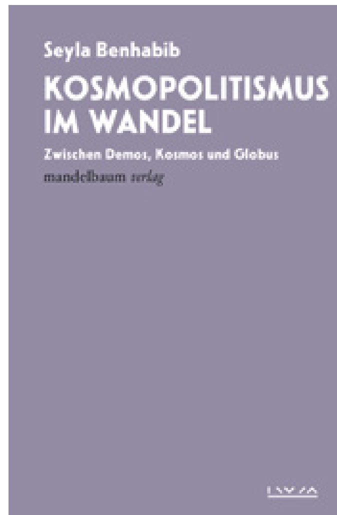
Publikationen des IWM

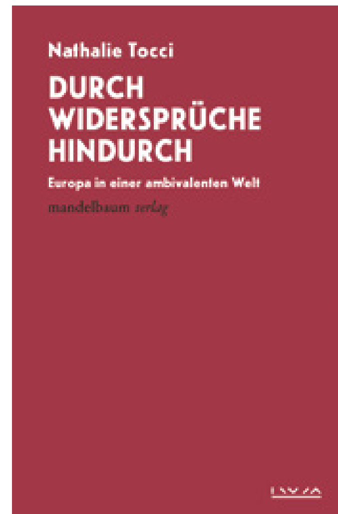
Seyla Benhabib
Kosmopolitismus im Wandel: Zwischen Demos, Kosmos und Globus
Wien: Mandelbaum Verlag, März 2024, ca. 100 S., aus dem Amerikanischen von Andreas Wirthensohn, Herausgegeben vom Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen (IWM-Vorlesungen), ISBN 978-3-99136-053-7.



Seit den letzten beiden Jahrzehnten des 20. Jahrhunderts ist ein starkes Interesse am Kosmopolitismus in den Sozial-, Kultur- und Rechtswissenschaften zu verzeichnen. Allerdings hat der Kosmopolitismus seit Beginn des neuen Jahrhunderts einen schweren Stand. Vor diesem Hintergrund formuliert Seyla Benhabib den Kosmopolitismus neu. Im Fokus ihrer Überlegungen steht die Frage, wie er sich in der heutigen Welt zusammen mit dem Bemühen um Gerechtigkeit im Globalen Süden und dem Streben nach planetarischer Nachhaltigkeit neu denken lässt.

Benhabib geht den zeitgenössischen Kritiken am Kosmopolitismus nach und kommt zum Schluss, dass es weiterhin möglich ist, den Kosmopolitismus zu verteidigen, indem man ihn von der Geschichte des westlichen Kapitalismus und dem Zeitalter des Imperialismus und Kolonialismus loslöst. Sie grenzt den Kosmopolitismus von gängigen liberalen normativen Modellen unserer Zeit klar ab, und zeigt auf, dass allein der Kosmopolitismus die Fortschritte im Bereich der internationalen Menschenrechte integrieren kann. Nicht zuletzt plädiert sie für ein Verständnis des Kosmopolitismus, in dem auch das neue planetarische Bewusstsein, das im Gefolge der ökologischen Katastrophen unserer Zeit entsteht, seinen Niederschlag findet.

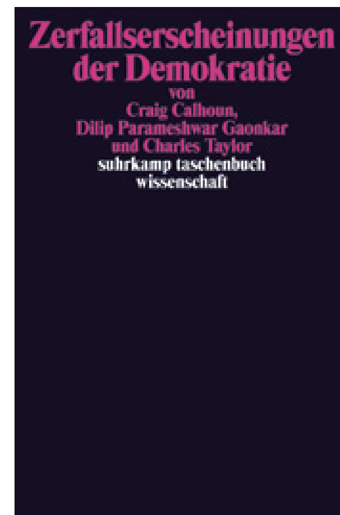
Nathalie Tocci
Durch Widersprüche hindurch: Europa in einer ambivalenten Welt
Wien: Mandelbaum Verlag, Oktober 2024, ca. 100 S., aus dem Amerikanischen von Andreas Wirthensohn, Herausgegeben vom Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen



Das europäische Projekt entstand in einer durch Offenheit geprägten westlichen Welt, der Jahre des Krieges, des Nationalismus und der Abschottung vorausgegangen waren. Dieser Trend zur Öffnung erfasste nach Ende des Kalten Krieges den gesamten Globus. In dieser offenen Welt wurde gegenseitige Abhängigkeit als Quelle von Frieden und Wohlstand gesehen und Demokratisierung als linearer, irreversibler und mit dem Kapitalismus eng verbundener Prozess gedacht. Seit der Jahrtausendwende haben die Sicherheitskrise im Gefolge des 11. September, die globale Finanzkrise, die Krise der liberalen Demokratie und die damit einhergehende Welle des euroskeptischen Nationalismus, die Pandemiekrise und schließlich die Kriege in Europa und im Nahen Osten eine Welt entstehen lassen, in der es schrittweise zu immer weitreichenderen Schließungen kam. Doch es wäre ein Irrglaube anzunehmen, wir lebten heute in einer geschlossenen Welt. Vielmehr bestehen in der Welt von heute Offenheit und Abschottung nebeneinander. Vor diesem Hintergrund müssen althergebrachte Konzepte und Ansätze revidiert werden. Europa muss Wege finden, durch diese neue, ambivalente Welt zu navigieren.

Die Politikwissenschaftlerin Nathalie Tocci war außenpolitische Beraterin der beiden Hohen Vertreter der EU für Außenpolitik, Federica Mogherini und Josep Borrell, und in dieser Funktion federführend für die Globale Strategie der EU für Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik verantwortlich. Sie ist Direktorin des Istituto Affari Internazionali in Rom und war Gastprofessorin an der Harvard Kennedy School sowie Fellow am Centre for European Policy Studies in Brüssel, am Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies in Florenz und am Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen in Wien.

Craig Calhoun, Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, Charles Taylor
Zerfallserscheinungen der Demokratie
Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag (suhrkamp taschenbuch wissenschaft), Februar 2024, 500 S., ISBN: 978-3-518-30019-0, Originaltitel: *Degenerations of Democracy* (Harvard University Press), Deutsche Erstausgabe, aus dem Amerikanischen von Andreas Wirthensohn, Herausgegeben vom Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen.



Mit analytischer Schärfe zeichnen Craig Calhoun, Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar und Charles Taylor in diesem Buch aus unterschiedlichen Perspektiven die Aushöhlung unserer Demokratie nach. Sie beleuchten, wie die herrschenden Eliten versuchen, ihre Privilegien zu sichern, und wie individuelle Freiheit zum Feind von Gleichheit und Solidarität wurde. Aber sie zeigen auch Wege einer möglichen demokratischen Erneuerung auf: Zum einen gilt es, die Idee des Gemeinwohls wiederzuentdecken und an republikanische Traditionen anzuschließen, zum anderen könnten soziale Bewegungen wie Black Lives Matter oder der Green New Deal als Kompass dienen. Ein Weckruf.

Jan Patočka
Ludger Hagedorn und Klaus Nellen (Hrsg.)
Europa und Nach-Europa: Zur Phänomenologie einer Idee
Baden-Baden: Verlag Karl Alber, 2024, 320 S., ISBN 978-3-495-48806-5

Patočkas Reflexionen über Europa sind ein Nach-Denken im echten Sinne: Sie entwerfen eine Idee Europas nach seinem Ende – ohne ein Lamento über Verfall und Untergang zu sein. Im Gegenteil bilden seine Skizzen vom Anfang und Ende Europas, von seiner besonderen Stellung in der Geschichte und als Geschichte, nur den Auftakt für eine vertiefte Auseinandersetzung mit dem, was das Phänomen Europa gerade für die nacheuropäische Welt bedeuten könnte.

Weit davon entfernt, eine Apologie Europas nach seinem Scheitern zu sein, werden Patočkas Reflexionen aber auch nicht zur historischen Abrechnung, wie sie heute en vogue ist. „Vielleicht ist der Sinn von Europas Untergang positiv." Dieser Satz signalisiert, dass gerade mit der Dezentrierung Europas eine Brücke zu den kulturellen Differenzen der globalisierten Welt gewonnen ist.

Vienna Humanities Festival 2024
Uncharted / Neuland

© Das grafische Büro, Marcel Neundörfer / Illustration: Blagovesta Bakardjieva

As powerful technologies play an ever more influential role in our lives and the ideological certainties of the Cold War become but a distant memory, humanity has no choice but to negotiate new worlds that are unfamiliar and unmapped. Climate change, new forms of warfare, global health crises and artificial intelligence pose unprecedented challenges to our well-being and the ability to shape our own destiny. All these coincide with collapsing levels of trust in political mechanisms both domestically and internationally and the steady rise in authoritarian ideologies. To navigate our way through these treacherous territories will require more creativity, exploration and experimentation than humans have demonstrated ever before.

The *Vienna Humanities Festival* will gather some of the world's most innovative thinkers to examine and interpret the political, ecological, technological, economic, artistic and philosophical dilemmas which sometimes threaten to overwhelm us as individuals and communities. Their ideas will help us start to outline the contours of our changing new realities and enable us to fashion the new tools we will need in order to travel around these worlds with greater confidence and a more developed sense of direction, whether they are local or planetary, virtual or real, revolutionary or reactionary.

The Vienna Humanities Festival will take place from Tuesday September 24 to Sunday September 29, 2024.

This festival is a cooperation between the Institute for Human Sciences and The European Network of Houses for Debate "Time to Talk". More information and an schedule of events will be available on the Festival and IWM websites: ***www.humanitiesfestival.at*** *and* ***www.iwm.at***

Publications by Fellows

Till van Rahden und Johannes Völz (Hrsg.)
Horizonte der Demokratie: Offene Lebensformen nach Walt Whitman
Bielefeld: Transcript, 2024, 170 S., ISBN: 978-3-8376-6273-3

Demokratie ist mehr als eine Regierungsform. Mit dem US-amerikanischen Dichter Walt Whitman lässt sie sich als eine offene Lebensform begreifen: vielfältig, unvorhersehbar und angewiesen auf Impulse aus den Künsten. Im Dialog aus Essay und Replik treffen Mitglieder des Frankfurter Forschungskreises „Democratic Vistas" auf internationale Gesprächspartner. Die Beiträge nehmen Whitmans Anregungen auf und suchen nach Momenten der demokratischen Öffnung. Fündig werden sie an unterschiedlichsten Orten: im China der 1920er Jahre, in der südafrikanischen Fotografie der Post-Apartheid-Ära, im Werk Schwarzer Lyrikerinnen oder in der auf Billionen-Beträge hochskalierten Wirtschaftspolitik.

George Pattison
Conversations with Dostoevsky: On God, Russia, Literature, and Life
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024, 320 pp., ISBN-10 0198881541, ISBN-13 978-0198881544

Conversations with Dostoevsky presents a series of fictional conversations taking place between November 2018 and Spring 2019 in the narrator's Glasgow apartment and elsewhere in the city. The themes discussed include love, faith, suicide, truth and lies, guilt, determinism, literature, the Bible, Mary, Christ, Dostoevsky and film, 'the woman question,' nationalism, war, the Church, the Jewish question, immortality, and God. In addition to conversations between the narrator and Dostoevsky, we drop in on a dinner party at which Dostoevsky is discussed from various points of view. In another conversation, Dostoevsky is joined by the philosopher Vladimir Solovyov to discuss nationalism, the Church, and life. We also attend a seminar on 'Dostoevsky, Anti-Semitism, and Nazism,' and visit Glasgow's Necropolis on Easter Eve. The conversations in the first part of the volume are accompanied by a series of commentaries in a second part, which contextualize the issues discussed in the conversations with references to his novels, journalism, letters, and notebooks as well as engaging the relevant critical literature.

Peter Demetz 1922–2024

Photo: IWM

Wir trauern um Peter Demetz. Der 1922 geborene Autor, Literaturwissenschaftler und Übersetzer starb am 30. April. Er war, wie die *FAZ* titelte, eine „Jahrhundertfigur der Literaturwissenschaft" und dem IWM über viele Jahre eng verbunden. Zu seinem 100. Geburtstag erschien in der IWM*post* 130 eine von Klaus Nellen verfasste Würdigung.