

develop concepts, hypotheses, or theories based upon sound empirical knowledge, Guerra's work forms an excellent starting point. It is apparent that Guerra knows the Polish context and Polish political and societal reality exceedingly well.

The book's structure is clear. The author combines a chronological approach (with chapters on the periods before and after accession) with a division on the basis of the research questions and issues related to them. After presenting her research framework in the first chapter, Guerra shows in Chapters 2 and 3 how attitudes once driven almost purely by positive affect began to transform for utilitarian reasons, taking into account ever greater economic concerns, particularly the changes in the domestic economic situation, as the main variable to explain the shift in mass attitudes towards the EU in Poland. Guerra also demonstrates another important factor that has motivated the path from 'Euroenthusiasm' to 'Euroneutrality' (p. 54). This is the continuous, even rising mistrust of domestic political institutions and the strong perception that the country and its political elite are corrupt.

Chapter 4 is a fairly conventional analysis of the EP elections in Central Eastern Europe in 2004 and 2009. The chapter completes the picture drawn in the previous sections but adds little to the ongoing debate over applying the second-order-elections concept within Central Eastern Europe. A similar feeling arises upon reading Chapter 6 on Euro-scepticism. Far more interesting was Chapter 5, which deals with the scope and sources of information citizens have available to learn about EU affairs. Especially valuable is the focus group research and the output from it, with commentary.

All in all, Simona Guerra has produced an interesting, valuable book based on sound original research, deep knowledge of relevant concepts and impressive knowledge of the specific features of the Central

Eastern European EU Member States. The book is a valuable source of information and interpretation for any scholar attempting to understand how citizens have reacted to European integration, why they have reacted in this way, and how the relationship between European and domestic politics functions as a source of mass political attitudes.

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The Emancipatory Vocabulary, with the Benefit of Two and Half Centuries' Hindsight**

The idea of emancipation, which has been developing since the late eighteenth century, has undoubtedly become an important part of the semantics of modern society, it means, an ideational tool that helps to structure modern

* From the English originals *Emancipation(s)* (London: Verso, 1996), 'Democracy and the Question of Power' (*Constellations* 8, no. 1, 2001, 3–14) and 'Populism: What's in a Name' (*Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*. Ed. F. Panizza. London: Verso, 2005, 32–49) translated by Jan Bība and Josef Fulka. Supplemented with Jan Bība's introduction 'Ernesto Laclau: Postmarxismus, diskurs a radikální demokracie'. In the text the book is referred to as 'Laclau 2013'.

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social life. This tool, which emerged during the transition from a stratified to a functionally differentiated society, expresses the notion that social life should be directed at human autonomy.

At the outset, the idea of emancipation was bound up with the philosophy of subject, which based human autonomy on the concept of human essence. Modernity has understood man as a self-determining subject realizing himself in the world he freely creates. At first, emancipation took shape as the liberation of civil society from the oppressive modern state. Nevertheless, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the idea of emancipation was radicalized into the notion of full self-realization. For the Young Hegelians, this presupposed the complete freedom to determine one's own life, unhindered by alienating and self-alienating forces. The Left-Hegelian critique of alienation and self-alienation culminated with Marx, who ascribed them to economic forces. In his view, autonomy, which requires the elimination of all forms of personal and material dependence, cannot be established by the bourgeois 'rule of law', but only by a proletarian revolution that grows out of the logic of history. The final revolutionary act is conceived as the total break that will end the struggle between the forces of production and the relations of production, establishing a classless, stateless society that gives rise to a world created by free and equal persons (see Velek 1993).

This neat scheme indicates the basic categories of the emancipatory vocabulary. The idea of emancipation is founded on subjectivity, necessity, finality, and universality. That is to say, on concepts contested by various currents of twentieth-century philosophy, such as pragmatism, the analytical philosophy of language, and post/structuralism. These concepts have failed both epistemologically and normatively. The modern emancipatory project has encoun-

tered its own flawed theoretical foundations, which render it repressive instead of liberating. And it has also encountered particular historical facts, that is, events like Auschwitz or Berlin 1953 or Budapest 1956 or Czechoslovakia 1968 or Poland 1980 (see Lyotard 1997: 17–38).

In addition, the idea of emancipation has been undermined by the structural social changes of the latter half of the twentieth century. Although Marxism assumed the social structure of capitalist society will be simplified into a class dichotomy, the working class gradually disappeared and in place of a homogeneous revolutionary subject, various social movements with diverse claims emerged.

These shifts give rise to a fundamental question about the validity of the concept of emancipation: Can the emancipatory vocabulary be reformulated in a way that re-establishes the credibility of the idea of emancipation? The polemical and creative response to the interconnection of failed practice with flawed theory claims not only to correct theory so as not to harm practice, but to replace false theoretical presuppositions and thus to extend original normative expectations. Precisely such a strategy is practiced in the post-Marxism of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe.

This version of post-Marxism, which draws upon various currents both inside and outside Marxism, discards modern epistemological, social and political foundationalism to stretch beyond the theoretical and political horizons of Marxism. As one early text states, 'the eschatological and epistemological ambitions are more modest, but the liberating aspirations are wider and deeper' (Laclau, Mouffe 2013: 59). Renouncing the *telos* of a fully liberated society is thus supposed not to impede the extension and radicalization of social struggle. Similarly, the disappearance of the working class and attendant fragmentation of the collective subject into a plurality

of social agents and struggles is considered salutary for the task of the full realization of 'humanist values'. Since it cannot dispense with democracy nor with the language of rights, radical politics becomes squeezed into the framework of representative democracy, and this acceptance of democracy and rights brings the post-Marxism of Laclau and Mouffe closer to another tradition that considers the emancipatory project 'unfinished', that of late critical theory.

Critical theory enjoys greater popularity among Czech scholars than does post-Marxism (see, e.g., Hrubec 2013). But the lesser attention attracted by the latter is unfortunate. The picture of current conceptions of emancipation remains incomplete without it. The Czech translation of Laclau's significant work, whose main focus is emancipation, hence to some extent fills that infelicitous gap.

The key issue of Laclau's collection of essays, most of which were written in the critical period 1991–1995, is rethinking emancipation in light of universality and particularity, which are to be newly configured. Unlike stances privileging one of the two elements, Laclau wants neither to subordinate the particular nor to destroy the universal, but to establish the symmetrical relation between them. As he claims, he searches for *the logic of* possible mediation between universality and particularity.

Of course, such an effort suggests a paradox, and the paradox is really the conspicuous figure of Laclau's thought, which draws keenly upon deconstruction. But in line with deconstruction, the paradox is not something to be resolved and removed. To the contrary; Laclau, thinking with the benefit of historical hindsight, employs it for a certainly commendable aim. Universality — the key category of the emancipatory vocabulary — enables us to continue in goals and demands of modernity. However, universality must be restricted so as not to give rise to

negative consequences like repression, unification, and hypertrophy. The paradox therefore functions practically to bring about the reciprocal subversion of both the universal and the particular.

In contrast to postmodernism, Laclau opts not for the negation of modernity but for the deconstruction of its main categories and the modification of its fundamental principles. Drawing chiefly upon various currents in the philosophy of language and upon the Gramscian tradition of Marxism, he creates a new vocabulary which — by re-articulating mainly the concepts of universalism, hegemony, and representation — serves as a tool to restore and radicalize the emancipatory content of modernity.

The obvious question is then: Is Laclau's version of emancipation plausible? Does it cope with the problems posed by the old emancipatory gesture? Does it comply with deepening normative expectations? To answer these questions, I will proceed in two steps. First, I will critically reconstruct Laclau's concept of emancipation. Second, I will raise some (partially anticipated) theoretical and practical objections to it.

The Paradoxical Nature of Emancipation

Although Laclau's theoretical apparatus is highly abstract and intricate, the functioning of the mechanism whose articulation it serves seems relatively simple. First and foremost, Laclau endeavours to define the mechanism, or logic, of constituting a protest movement. Laclau's political theory, revolving as it does around conflict, seems to take tacit inspiration from Carl Schmitt's concept of the political which, as I will show, helps cast a critical light on this theory.

To reconstruct that basic logic — and it is the logic of emancipation, as well — it is useful to start with the concept of the system (clarified chiefly in the third essay 'Why

Do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics?' p. 69–80), which also elucidates the notions of 'objectivity' and 'ground'.

Laclau's understanding of the system is based upon a semantics which manifests itself as well in his conception of discourse. Discourse, which provides a way of constituting meaning (see the translator's introduction), is defined as a 'systematic set of relations' (Laclau, Mouffe 2013: 61) that exist within the totality of linguistic as well as nonlinguistic elements. Meaning is established by these relations, which are not natural but rather conventional, that is, socially constructed. This relational conception of meaning has obvious ties to structuralist semantics, which originated in Saussure's linguistics — also the starting point for Laclau's thinking about the system, that is, 'objective order'.

According to Saussure, a linguistic sign — a binary entity consisting of signifier (sound-image) and signified (concept) — is defined by delimitation. This means that it is separated from its entire environment as constituted by other delimited entities. A sign obtains its value — identity — only from differences, or more precisely, from oppositions. Since language is not a substance but a form, it is based on relations, that is, *solely* on these oppositions (like *woman* : *women*; *noc* : *noc*, etc.). As Saussure states, 'in language there are only differences *without positive terms*' (Saussure 1959: 120). A sign has no intrinsic, preordained value, but it is defined only *negatively* by its relations with other signs in the system. Simply, it is what the others are not. From this it also follows that signification means relation, and that in every act of signification the *totality* of language is included (Saussure 1959: 102–122).

Laclau further involves the question of the boundary that demarcates a system. The system, not only the system of language but sign systems in general, *requires* a boundary,

and this requirement, according to Laclau, entails the paradoxical interconnection of possibility with impossibility. Basically, every act of signification is conditioned by the system, but the system is, in turn, conditioned by its boundary. This means every act of signification is conditioned by the existence of the boundary that at the same time blocks it. Thus, the boundary stops the expansion of signification. The boundary restricts — it manifests itself as the *interruption* or *breakdown* of the process of signification.

To avoid giving rise to another mere difference in an endless play of differences, Laclau bases the boundary (limits) of the system on *exclusion*. However, he also conceives the boundary to be *antagonistic*, giving exclusion the character of a negation (the actualization of one side of the boundary renders its other side impossible). As Laclau contends, 'true limits are always antagonistic' and the outside is constituted by 'pure negativity' or 'pure threat' (Laclau 1996: 37–38; Laclau 2013: 71–72). And better still, the system signifies itself by *demonization*, that is to say, by demonizing the excluded outside. But although the boundary is really based on exclusion, the question arises as to whether 'being excluded' and 'being antagonistic' are somehow connected. Why should we not settle for a *simple*, non-antagonistic and non-intensified boundary? Is such a negation logically necessary, and whence does it come?

Unlike mere difference, the boundary is a distinction which constitutes a *binary* opposition. This sort of distinction separates *two* sides, positive and negative. For when someone marks a boundary, he or she can choose only *one* of its sides, which then becomes internal, marked, and known. What occurs on the other side of this boundary becomes by contrast external, unmarked, and unknown, the unseeable outside or the environment, united into a *single* negative pole.

But the question remains as to the character of the boundary and its sides.

Laclau's theoretical position is derived from the notion that the boundary is a *limit*, that is, something *blocking*.¹ The boundary limits the *constantly expanding* process of signification (i.e., the delimitation of further differences). The system is both constituted and blocked by the boundary, rendering it simultaneously possible and impossible. But contrary to Laclau, I find no paradox here. From a conceptual point of view, the system, brought into existence by the boundary, may expand at will. For it expands — or functions — on its side of the boundary.² The system need not exceed the boundary. It only pushes the boundary further as it 'inflates' itself. Although such an expanding system creates tensions with its outside or environment, this does not mean its borders are antagonistic in Laclau's sense. The crux of the matter is rather that what Laclau regards as the general logic of the system is merely the logic of a very specific (and crucial) system, i.e., *conflict*.

Another noteworthy paradox, though, does emerge. Since the system occupies only *one* side of the boundary, some fundamentally unreachable totality exists. This allows Laclau to speak of 'a constitutive lack', an adequately unrepresentable 'impossible object', 'absent fullness', or 'an absent *totality*' (Laclau 1996: 40, 42; Laclau 2013: 73, 76; my italics). Nevertheless, the system itself is, according to Laclau, also a totality, achieved by its positive determination (see below). This means the system is both *part* and *whole* in one and the same instant. And this gives rise to the problem of how these two relate. The system realizes there is something 'outside', but the question is, what can be seen?

In my estimation, two perspectives may be differentiated — that of a participant situated *within* the system (or to the system side of the boundary), versus that of an observer positioned *outside* it. While the system can-

not see beyond *its own* boundary (present as the horizon) and is screened off from the outside, the observer sees the boundary *itself*. And whereas the system sees selectively, reconstructing the opaque outside only from within, the observer sees the particularity of the system and is capable of *reflecting* on its (semantic, not structural) constraints. Accordingly, the system, being merely a part, can assume itself to be the whole, the totality, the only positivity, and thus behave *as if* it were the totality.

Needless to say, Laclau's conception of the system, or his thinking on the boundary, also influences his concept of emancipation. Laclau's deconstruction of the classical concept of emancipation (in the first essay 'Beyond Emancipation', p. 33–51) discloses two basic logics or dimensions, namely the dichotomic (or antagonistic) dimension and the dimension of the ground, which is structured into several sub-dimensions (holism, transparency, pre-existence, ground and rationality).³ The key thesis is that these logics inject an irresolvable paradox into the notion of emancipation. For although both logics are mutually incompatible, each requires the other.

The dichotomic dimension entails a radical break, a chasm between the old social order and the act of emancipation, but at the same time it stipulates the ground that elicits assimilatory effects and thereby rescinds radicality. While the antagonistic dimension requires a radical opposition and otherness, the ground establishes sameness, converting oppositions to mere differences. It creates a common measure which gives meaning to both sides of the dichotomy. In this case, the identities of the oppressor and the oppressed, the old and the new, arise from a deeper, positive fundament (like the objective historical process of the Hegelian-Marxist style). Laclau says a radical foundation of transparent and rational order that completely liberates the true human essence

also involves the rational foundational act, disentangled from power relations. In line with the dichotomic dimension, this order requires a total break with its radical opposition, that is, the irrational past. But with no common measure, neither the foundational act nor the established social order can be rational but only *contingent* and tainted by power relations. In Laclau's view, the definitive *logical* impossibility of both the dichotomic dimension and the ground leads to the important consequence that 'any totalizing effects' are thwarted (Laclau 1996: 13; Laclau 2013: 45).

Since Laclau naturally rejects the contention that the collapse of both dimensions makes emancipation impossible, the question is how to conceive it. And since both these dimensions are closely connected with universality (the universal human essence, the universal actor, etc.), the question of how to understand the universal also arises.

Both ideas, of course, may be based upon the conception of the system or the boundary. We have seen that Laclau's boundary, in my view tailored to conflict, is antagonistic. Laclau's mechanism of antagonism operates in a very traditional, that is, integrative manner. The identity of every single element of a system is split into difference, referring to the inside, and equivalence, referring to the outside (negativity and threat). Whereas the logic of difference differentiates some element from other elements occupying the same side of the boundary, the logic of equivalence renders all elements that fall on to the same — positive — side of the boundary identical. Various elements are simply unified by their reference to the exterior, as may be seen in the emergence of a social movement. Although there are a number of partial struggles and mobilizations, they share opposition to a common enemy (cf. Laclau 1996: 40–41; Laclau 2013: 74).

But we have also seen that there is an absent totality. Even though the system

signifies itself as a totality by privileging the common dimension of equivalence, this totality is, in fact, incomplete. In Laclau's view, universality symbolizes an absent, unreachable totality or fullness, 'a certain universal impossibility' generated by existence of the border. Both poles of the border form a dichotomic, symmetrical structure. Since the negative side is transformed into 'general negativity' or 'the universal form of negativity as such', the positive side as well becomes 'the general form of fullness' or 'the universal form of fullness or identity' (Laclau 1996: 14, 93; Laclau 2013: 46, 130). Even though a particular system of oppression stands on the negative side, it is remoulded into the symbol of oppression as such.

Since, however, Laclau rejects a pre-given ground or objectivity, that fullness is empty and must only be filled. The system must determine its positive side (i.e. itself). This filling is secured by a hegemonic operation. Hegemony, a concept borrowed from Antonio Gramsci, Laclau defines as 'the type of political relation by which a particularity assumes the representation of an (impossible) universality entirely incommensurable with it' (Laclau 2001: 5; Laclau 2013: 166–167). That is to say, *some* particular social force which has been able to assert itself in a hegemonic contest becomes the source of content. This social agent will *confer* the concrete meaning on 'the social', and thereby fill the empty place of 'the ground' and constitute an 'objective' order, in other words, collective identity.

The hegemonic social agent represents 'a chain of equivalences', and therefore must minimize its own content. But how can representation be accomplished when Laclau stresses the incommensurability of this particularity with universality and that modern society is too complex and too pluralized to accord with one social will? Instead of a mirror image, the concept of representa-

tion must be altered into the principle which co-constitutes the identity of what is to be represented.

Laclau's subversion of the universal and the particular is explicitly meant as reciprocal deformation of both poles. Particularity is enhanced by universality, which is 'tainted' by it (see Laclau 2001: 11; Laclau 2013: 174). For that reason, hegemony remains contingent, unstable and temporary. 'The chain of equivalences' does not lead to homogenization (pure equivalence), something that is supposedly impossible not only empirically but logically as well.

Of course, the gap between universality and particularity is to serve in favour of democracy. True universality, true totality or true ground excludes hegemony, and thereby democracy as well. If democracy and politics itself is to be maintained, this gap, by contrast, cannot be closed. Not only does democracy presuppose 'the empty place of power' (Lefort), but this emptiness must also be actively, constantly produced. This is why the incessant contestation of particular forces is necessary.

Semantics of Emancipation and the Face of the Enemy

The last paragraph of the critical reconstruction of Laclau's idea of emancipation already points to its fundamental problem. While 'the olds' thought crucial concepts 'truly', Laclau thinks them 'as if', in quotation marks. It is theoretically unclear why the boundary forms a universal instead of only a general structure, as Laclau himself admits, or how universality can be stained by particularity and yet not be reduced to mere generality (cf. p. 174, 175). This paradox is something that *should* be resolved. But it is also glaring. Hence, it is advisable to focus on less obvious problems, namely on the question of semantics and of radicality.

Semantic Deficit in Laclau's Political Theory

Laclau's political conception is strictly formalistic. Although by showing only a specific mechanism Laclau attempts to meet modern contingency, which renders social reality changeable and unpredictable, he simultaneously creates something that might be called the semantic deficit.

As we have seen, Laclau's (alleged) universality is a sort of structure. This structure requires certain semantic tools, so-called empty and floating signifiers. The empty signifier is a sign that demarcates a system. According to Laclau, it is 'a signifier of the pure cancellation of all differences' (Laclau 1996: 38; Laclau 2013: 72). Simply put, it is a word (like unity, justice, revolution, emancipation, order, etc.) that names the boundary of the system, or rather its positive side (what the system is). The act of hegemony consists in filling this empty sign with concrete content. Since no particular social force is chosen, various social agents (liberals, socialists, fascists, etc.) employ ambiguous signs for this task — floating signifiers (freedom, equality, etc.).⁴ They try to appropriate these signs by privileging one of their possible meanings and suppressing the others, so that they may win the hegemonic contest over the future shape of a particular social-political order.

But just at this point, a serious problem arises. Laclau's universality, required by emancipation, has nothing to do with the universalistic *content* of those signs, i.e., with universal justice, universal equality, universal freedom, etc. The universal is only the *structure*, not the content (which cannot be simply generated by that structure). However, the content is what is missing and what should be, in fact, justified. Although Laclau's formalism also permits the embrace of right-wing movements, which is the strength of his theory, the theory consequently misses the true sense of the universal. Laclau

correctly understands that some particular social agent raising particular claims cannot make do with these particular claims. Nevertheless, he is also aware that these claims are inevitably protected by principles that are (ex definitione) *general*, not universal or universalistic (cf. Laclau 1996: 26; Laclau 2013: 59–60). For instance, German National Socialism, which underpinned its claims by race, that is, by a general principle filled with obviously particularistic content, fits excellently into Laclau's theoretical scheme. But then it is unclear how to carry through 'progressive', emancipatory meanings.

According to Laclau's diagnosis, 'those discourses attempting to close a context around certain principles or values will be confronted and limited by discourses of *rights*, which try to limit the closure of any context. This is what makes so unconvincing the attempts by contemporary neo-Aristotelians such as McIntyre at accepting only the contextualizing dimension and closing society around a substantive vision of the common good' (Laclau 1996: 60; Laclau 2013: 94–95). Laclau is not mistaken that communitarian semantics rather fails. But the real ground of this failure is not any 'closing' or reduction to a context, but the employment of unsatisfactory *general* concepts such as the common good. There are many reasons why some ideas and concepts are ineffective and incapable of sedimentation in society. Particularity is not one of them. Similarly to the concept of the common good, which functioned for centuries, the concept of 'human' rights, which *only* opens any context, could also end up on the ideological scrap heap if thinkers like Laclau do a poor job. Universalistic concepts are not self-asserting and self-perpetuating. They are certainly not strategic fictions that can be enforced by bluster in the streets.

For the same reason, Laclau also disregards the role of specific semantics in generating protest movements. Although a large

set of usable emblems may exist, the fundamental concepts are rather few in number. As some adherents of critical theory maintain, redistribution and recognition are primary (see Fraser, Honneth 2001). Apart from some elementary cases perhaps, needs and interests are not simply given and they do not automatically lead to demands addressable to a regime. To the contrary, both needs and interests must be interpreted and directed with the help of ideas. Although Laclau, in his theorizing of populism, i.e., formation of social movements, assumes that demands (i.e., basic elements of this formation) tend to re-aggregate themselves on the negative basis of dissatisfaction, the whole matter seems more complex. Demands are rather transient in nature. To consolidate into more stable daily struggles that can be mobilized into antagonism, they require a specific semantic filter — cultivating the consciousness of entitlement. For it may be said: 'Grievances are everywhere, movements not' (Japp cited in Hellmann 1996: 12).

Laclau's Enemy

Compared to classical emancipatory thinking directed at the radical institution of full human autonomy (cf. p. 170), Laclau's intention to deepen 'liberating aspirations' (cf. *ibid.*) appears rather unconvincing. But from a standpoint that underscores the various dimensions of liberation or permanence in this process, this stance is acceptable. Instead a different question comes to the fore.

Laclau wants to theorize a politics that is radical and at the same time (conceptually) limited. Although violence is unavoidable and active struggle engenders new human abilities, it is naturally necessary to evade the destructive, revolutionary violence Laclau associates with the idea of the ground or foundation (see 'Community and its Paradoxes: Richard Rorty's 'Liberal Utopia', p. 143–162). Since the hegemonic operation is an act of grounding, but contingent and

therefore unstable and temporary, Laclau must have meant the final ground. And because this sort of ground has failed, we may remain calm. Radicality is not 'truly radical' (cf. Laclau 1996: 13; Laclau 2013: 45). Emancipation works, but not at full stretch.

However, Laclau also states that logical contradiction does not lead to social ineffectiveness. Indeed, the classical notion of emancipation has always been logically contradictory, but the Bolshevik revolution was implemented quite radically, with a struggle to open Laclau's theoretically impossible chasm. Although Laclau naturally jettisons the untenable ideas like that of human essence, which stirred the minds of the old revolutionaries, he does not divest himself of the driving force of universalism. Finally, his conception of the system or boundary is entangled in not 'untrue' radicality.

First, there is the perspective of the participant and the perspective of the observer (see p. 173). Although from the latter we see that the system (a social movement) does not constitute *the* totality, involved social agents, unable to see beyond their exclusive horizon, can, in principle, continue with 'business as usual'. Even though, as Laclau declares, turning a social whole upside down (or operating at 'the ground' of 'the social') certainly does not make sense and is doomed to fail, there is no *internal* constraint that bars it.

Second, Laclau seems inspired by Schmitt's concept of the political as based on antagonism, or more precisely, on the friend/enemy distinction. The political act is connected to antagonistic conflict, the term 'the political' (though almost unemployed in the book) hints at liberating struggle, and Laclau's populism requires the discursive construction of an enemy. Schmitt castigated the absolutization of an enemy caused by his impregnation with abstract universalistic ideas whose privileged bearer was, of course, Marxist socialism. According to Laclau, the

system whose outside is constituted by 'pure negativity' or 'a pure threat' signifies itself by demonization (see p. 172). And when, in the last resort, it demonizes an enemy as 'pure anti-community, pure evil and negation' (Laclau 1996: 42; Laclau 2013: 75), one gets the impression one has encountered the old, familiar countenance of the diabolical bourgeois. One may only hope that against such villainy, 'pure community' and 'pure good' will arise. Although Laclau might object that antagonism is a matter of degree, he offers no differentiated conception of fruitful versus damaging antagonism. In addition, the driving force of ideas still remains. When leaders of contemporary social movements invoke humanity, they certainly mean humanity (not 'humanity'). And the only subversive response consists in pointing out that it is a fiction or lie. As is evident, one is still confronted with distorted, not particularly human faces, those of Hayek and Friedman, for instance. Thus, even though the 'pure' universal actor of history has finally foundered, despite all of history, some particular, 'as if' agents still persist.

Notes:

1. Although Laclau himself uses the term 'limits', I prefer the neutral term 'boundary'.
2. Because the system is constituted not by essential principles, etc., but by the boundary, it is not static but highly dynamic. Consider, for instance, demands (which are typically open-ended) as the 'building material' of Laclau's 'popular subjectivity', that is, the system of a social movement (cf. the last essay 'Populism: What's in a Name,' p. 179–195).
3. *Holism* means that emancipation involves all social spheres, the varied content of which essentially overlaps. *Transparency* entails that the repressed human essence must coincide with itself, unhindered by relations of power and domination. The aspect of *pre-existence* consists in the pre-existence of an entity which is to be emancipated. That is to say, the existence of this entity precedes the act of emancipation,

which cannot mean creation but uncovering. The partial aspect of *ground* bears the meaning of fundamentality. Radical emancipation must operate at the ground of ‘the social’ and requires complete destruction of the old order. Finally, *rationality* assures the total immanence of reality, which in secular eschatologies (like Marxism) cannot refer to something external (for example to God). For a better notion, cf. the introductory scheme of emancipation (p. 170).

4. As Laclau puts it, empty and floating signifiers are only analytical categories which overlap empirically.

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There are books we open in the hopes of learning something new. And there are those we open with trepidation. Martin Štefek, the author of *Za Fasádou Jednoty (Behind the Façade of Unity)*. *KSC a SED po Roce 1985*, a comparative study published last year by Pavel Mervart, surely had this readers’ dilemma in mind. As his book’s title makes clear, Štefek’s main ambition was to lay bare a fiction: that the leaders of the two westernmost Eastern European single-party communist states acted — and reacted to the events of the period leading up to 1989 — monolithically. The book is structured to serve this purpose. It opens with a theoretical section, followed by a section focusing on the KSC, another on SED, and finally, a closing summary.

Nothing wrong so far — little is more irritating than an academic text that lacks ambition and conviction on the part of the author that the book is fresh in its outlook and approach. But a problem arises when we create the image of an ‘enemy’ out of whole cloth. And this is exactly what Štefek does. The entire book is constructed around fictitious statements — series of straw man arguments — set up to be disproved by primary research. As an illustrative example, on page 99, Štefek disproves the ‘stereotype’ that the top leadership of the KSC was rigid. He does so by referring to a discussion in the Politburo of the KSC Central Committee that revealed, he says, ‘even the most obdurate opponents of perestroika were aware of the need to