Why Constructing a People Is the Main Task of Radical Politics

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I have been rather surprised by Slavoj Žižek's critique of my book *On Populist Reason* (see Slavoj Žižek, "Against the Populist Temptation," *Critical Inquiry* 32 [Spring 2006]: 551–74).[1] Given that the latter is strongly critical of Žižek's approach, I was expecting, of course, some reaction on his part. He has chosen for his reply, however, a rather indirect and oblique road; he does not answer a single of my criticisms of his work and formulates, instead, a series of objections to my book that only make sense if one fully accepts his theoretical perspective—which is, precisely, what I had questioned. To avoid continuing with this dialogue of the deaf I will take the bull by the horns, reasserting what I see as fundamentally wrong in Žižek's approach and, in the course of this argument, I will refute also Žižek's criticisms.

Populism and Class Struggle

I will leave aside the sections of Žižek's essay dealing with the French and Dutch referenda—a matter on which my own views are not far from his[2]—and will instead concentrate on the theoretical parts, where he states our divergences. Žižek starts by saying that I prefer populism to class struggle (see p. 554). This is a rather nonsensical way of presenting the argument. It suggests that populism and class struggle are two entities actually existing in the world, between which one would have to choose, such as when one

I want to thank the editors of *Critical Inquiry* for having invited me to answer Slavoj Žižek's criticisms of my work.

1. See Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London, 2005).

2. Except, of course, when he identifies the particular feature of the "No" campaigns with defining characteristics of all possible populism.

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chooses to belong to a political party or to a football club. The actual fact is that my notion of the people and the classical Marxist conception of class struggle are two different ways of conceiving the construction of social identities, so that if one is correct the other has to be dismissed—or, rather, reabsorbed and redefined in terms of the alternative view. Žižek gives, however, an accurate description of the points where the two outlooks differ:

> Class struggle presupposes a particular social group (the working class) as a privileged political agent; this privilege is not itself the outcome of hegemonic struggle, but grounded in the "objective social position" of this group—the ideologico-political struggle is thus ultimately reduced to an epiphenomenon of "objective" social processes, powers, and their conflicts. For Laclau, on the contrary, the fact that some particular struggle is elevated into the "universal equivalent" of all struggles is not a predetermined fact but itself the result of the contingent political struggle for hegemony. In some constellation, this struggle can be the workers' struggle, in another constellation, the patriotic anticolonialist struggle, in yet another constellation, the antiracist struggle for cultural tolerance. There is nothing in the inherent positive qualities of some particular struggle that predestines it for such a hegemonic role as the "general equivalent" of all struggles. [P. 554]

Although this description of the contrast is obviously incomplete, I do not object to the general picture of the basic distinction between the two approaches that it provides. To this, however, Žižek proposes a further feature of populism that I would not have taken into account. While I would have rightly pointed out the empty character of the master signifier embodying the enemy, I would have not mentioned the *pseudoconcreteness* of the figure incarnating such an enemy. I must say that I do not find any substance in this charge. My whole analysis is precisely based in asserting that any politico-discursive field is always structured through a reciprocal process by which emptiness weakens the particularity of a concrete signifier but, conversely, that particularity reacts by giving to universality a necessary incarnating body. I have defined hegemony as a relationship by which a

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certain particularity becomes the name of an utterly incommensurable universality. So the universal, lacking any means of direct representation, obtains only a borrowed presence through the distorted means of its investment in a certain particularity.

But let us leave this issue aside for the time being, for Žižek has a far more fundamental addition to propose to my theoretical notion of populism. According to him,

> one needs also to consider the way in which populist discourse displaces the antagonism and constructs the enemy. In populism, the enemy is externalized or reified into a positive ontological entity (even if this entity is spectral) whose annihilation would restore balance and justice; symmetrically, our own—the populist political agent's—identity is also perceived as preexisting the enemy's onslaught. [P. 555]

Of course, I never said that populist identity preexists the enemy's onslaught, but exactly the opposite: that such an onslaught is the precondition of any popular identity. I have even quoted, to describe the relation I had in mind, Saint-Just as saying that the unity of the Republic is only the destruction of what is opposed to it. But let us see how Žižek's argument unfolds. He asserts that reifying antagonism into a positive entity involves an elementary form of ideological mystification and that although populism can move in a variety of political directions (reactionary, nationalist, progressive nationalist, and so on), "insofar as, in its very notion, it displaces the immanent social antagonism into the antagonism between the unified people and its external enemy, it harbors in the last instance a long-term protofascist tendency" (p. 557). To this he adds his reasons to think that communist movements can never be populistic, that while in fascism the Idea is subordinated to the will of the leader, in Communism Stalin is a *secondary* leader—in the Freudian sense—because he is subordinated to the Idea. A beautiful compliment to Stalin! As everybody knows, he *was not* subordinated to *any* ideology but manipulated the latter in the most grotesque way to make it serve his pragmatic political agenda. For example, the principle of national self-determination had pride of place in the Stalinist ideological universe; there was, however, the proviso that it had to be applied "dialectically," which meant that it could be violated as many times as was considered politically convenient. Stalin was not a particularity subsumable under a conceptual universality; instead, conceptual universality was subsumed under the name Stalin. From this point of view, Hitler was not lacking in political ideas either—the Fatherland, the race, and so on—which he equally manipulated for reasons of political expediency. I am not saying that the Nazi and the Stalinist regimes were indistinguishable, of course, but,

instead, that whatever differences between them one can find they are not grounded in a different ontological relationship between the Leader and the Idea.[3] (As for the actual relationship between populism and communism I will come back to that presently.)

But let us go back to the logical steps through which Žižek's analysis is structured—that is, how he conceives of his supplement to my theoretical construct. His argument is hardly anything more than a succession of non-sequitur conclusions. The sequence is as follows: (1) he starts by quoting a passage from my book in which, referring to the way popular identities were constituted in British Chartism, I show that the evils of society were not presented as deriving from the economic system, but from the abuse of power by parasitic and speculative groups;[4] (2) he finds that something similar happens in fascist discourse, where the figure of the Jew becomes the concrete incarnation of everything that is wrong with society (this concretization is presented by him as an operation of reification); (3) he concludes that this shows that in all populism (why? how?) there is "a long-term protofascist tendency"; (4) communism, however, would be immune to populism because, in its discourse, reification does not take place, and the leader safely remains as a secondary one. It is not difficult to perceive the fallacy of this whole argument. First, Chartism and fascism are presented as two species of the genus populism; second, one of the species's (fascism's) modus operandi is conceived as reification; third, for no stated reasons (at this point the Chartist example is silently forgotten), that makes the modus operandi of the species become the defining feature of the whole genus; fourth, as a result, one of the species becomes the teleological destiny of all the other species belonging to that genus. To this we should add, fifth, as a further unwarranted conclusion, that if communism cannot be a species of the genus populism, it is *presumably* (the point is nowhere explicitly made)

3. A cheap trick to be found in several places in Žižek's work consists in identifying the assertion by some authors of a certain degree of comparability between features of the Nazi and the Stalinist regimes, with the impossibility of distinguishing between them postulated by conservative authors such as Nolte. The relationship between a political leader and his "ideology" is, actually, a very complicated business, involving multiple nuances. There is never a situation in which the leader would be *totally* exterior to his ideology and having a purely instrumental relation to the latter. Many strategic mistakes made by Hitler in the course of the war, especially during the Russian campaign, can only be explained by the fact that he actually identified with basic tenets of his own ideological discourse, that he was, in that sense, a "secondary" leader vis-à-vis the latter. But if it is wrong to make of the manipulative relation between leader and ideology the essence of some kind of undifferentiated "totalitarian" regime, it is equally wrong to assert, as Žižek does, a mechanical differentiation between a (communist) regime in which the leader would be purely secondary and a (fascist) regime in which he would have an unrestricted primacy.

4. In the passage quoted by Žižek I am just summarizing, approvingly, the analysis of Chartism by Gareth Stedman Jones, "Rethinking Chartism," *Languages of Class, Studies in Working Class History 1832–1902* (Cambridge, 1983).

because reification does not take place in it. In the case of communism we would have an unmediated universality; this would be the reason why the supreme incarnation of the concrete, the Leader, has to be entirely subordinated to the Idea. Needless to say, this last conclusion is not grounded on any historical evidence but on a purely a prioristic argument.

More important, however, than insisting on the obvious circularity of Žižek's whole reasoning, is to explore the two unargued assumptions on which the latter is based. They are as follows: (1) any incarnation of the universal in the particular should be conceived as reification; (2) such an incarnation is inherently fascist. To these postulates we will oppose two theses: (1) that the notion of reification is entirely inadequate to understand the kind of incarnation of the universal in the particular that is inherent in the construction of a popular identity; (2) that such an incarnation—rightly understood—far from being a characteristic of fascism or of any other political movement, is inherent to any kind of hegemonic relation—that is, to the kind of relation inherent to the political as such.

Let us start with *reification.* This is not a common-language term but has a very specific philosophical content. It was first introduced by Lukács, although most of its dimensions were already operating *avant la lettre* in several of Marx's texts, especially in the section of *Capital* concerning commodity fetishism. The omnipotence of exchange-value in capitalist society would make impossible access to the viewpoint of totality; relations between men would take an objective character and, while individuals would be turned into things, things would appear as the true social agents. Now if we take a careful look at the structure of reification one salient feature becomes visible immediately: it essentially consists in an operation of *inversion.* What is derivative appears as originary; what is apparential is presented as essential. The inversion of the relationship subject/predicate is the kernel of any reification. It is, in that sense, a process of ideological mystification through and through, and its subjective correlatum is the notion of false consciousness. The categorial ensemble reification/false consciousness only makes sense, however, if the ideological distortion can be reversed; if it was constitutive of consciousness we could not speak of distortion. This is the reason Žižek, in order to stick to his notion of false consciousness, has to conceive of social antagonisms as grounded in some kind of *immanent* mechanism that has to see the consciousness of social agents as merely derivative—or rather, in which the latter, if it is admitted at all, is seen as a transparent expression of the former. The universal would speak in a direct way, without needing any mediating role from the concrete. In his words: populism "displaces the immanent social antagonism into the antagonism between the unified people and its external enemy." That is, the discursive

construction of the enemy is presented as an operation of distortion. And indeed, if the universal inhabiting antagonism had the possibility of an unmediated expression, the mediation through the concrete could only be conceived of as reification.

Unfortunately for Žižek, the kind of articulation between the universal and the particular that my approach to the question of popular identities presupposes is radically incompatible with notions such as reification and ideological distortion. We are not dealing with a false consciousness opposed to a true one—which would be waiting for us as a teleologically programmed destiny—but with the contingent construction of a consciousness tout court. So what Žižek presents as his supplement to my approach is not a supplement at all but the putting into question of its basic premises. These premises result from an understanding of the relation between the universal and the particular, the abstract and the concrete, which I have discussed in my work from three perspectives—psychoanalytic, linguistic, and political—and which I want briefly to summarize here to show its incompatibility with Žižek's crude false-consciousness model.

Let us start with psychoanalysis. I have attempted to show in *On Populist Reason* how the logic of hegemony and that of the Lacanian *objet a* largely overlap and refer to a fundamental ontological relation in which fullness can only be touched through a radical investment in a partial object—which is not a partiality *within* the totality but a partiality which *is* the totality. In this point my work has drawn a great deal from the analysis of Joan Copjec, who has made a serious exploration of the logical implications of Lacanian categories, without distorting them à la Žižek with superficial Hegelian analogies. The most relevant point for our subject is that fullness—the Freudian Thing—is unachievable; it is only a retrospective illusion that is substituted by partial objects embodying that impossible totality. In Lacan's words: sublimation consists in elevating an object to the dignity of the Thing. As I have tried to show, the hegemonic relation reproduces all these structural moments; a certain particularity assumes the representation of an always receding universality. As we see, the reification/distortion/false-consciousness model is radically incompatible with the hegemony/*objet a* one; while the former presupposes the achievement of fullness through the reversion of the process of reification, the latter conceives of fullness (the Thing) as unachievable because it is devoid of any content; and while the former sees incarnation in the concrete as a distorted reification, the latter sees radical investment in an object as the only way in which a certain fullness is achievable. Žižek can maintain his reification/false consciousness approach only at the price of radically eradicating the logic of the *objet a* from the field of political relations.

Next step: signification. (What I have called the linguistic perspective refers not only to the linguistic in the strict sense but to all systems of signification. As the latter are coterminous with social life, the categories and relations explored by linguistic analysis do not belong to regional areas, but to the field of a general ontology.) Here we have the same imbrication between particularity and universality that we have found in the psychoanalytic perspective. I have shown elsewhere that the totalization of a system of differences is impossible without a *constitutive* exclusion.[5] The latter, however, has, as a primary logical effect, the split of any signifying element between an equivalential and a differential side. As these two sides cannot be logically sutured, the result is that any suture will be *rhetorical*; a certain particularity, without ceasing to be particular, will assume a certain role of universal signification. Ergo, unevenness within signification is the only terrain within which a signifying process can unfold. Catachresis = rhetoricity = the very possibility of meaning. The same logic that we found in psychoanalysis between the (impossible) Thing and the *objet a* we find again as the very condition of signification. Žižek's analysis does not directly engage with signification, but it is not difficult to draw the conclusion that would derive, in this field, from his reification approach: any kind of rhetorical substitution that stops short of a fully fledged signifying reconciliation would amount to false consciousness.

Finally, politics. Let us take an example that I have used at several points in *On Populist Reason*: *Solidarnosc* in Poland. We have there a society where the frustration of a plurality of demands by an oppressive regime had created a spontaneous equivalence between them, which, however, needed to be expressed by some form of symbolic unity. We have here a clear alternative: either there is an ultimately *conceptually* specifiable content that is negated by the oppressive regime—in which case that content can be directly expressed, in its *positive* differential identity—or the demands are radically heterogeneous and the only thing they share is a *negative* feature—their common opposition to the oppressive regime. In that case, it is not a question of a *direct* expression of a positive feature underlying the different demands; because what has to be expressed is an irreducible negativity, its representation will necessarily have a symbolic character.[6] The demands of *Solidarnosc* will become the symbol of a wider chain of demands whose unstable equivalence around that symbol will constitute a wider popular

5. See Laclau, "Why Do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics?" *Emancipation(s)* (London, 1996), pp. 36–46.

6. Here I am not using the term *symbolic* in the Lacanian sense but in the one frequently found in discussions concerning representation. See, for instance, Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley, 1967), chap. 5.

identity. This constitution of the symbolic unity of the popular camp—and its correlatum: the symbolic unification of the oppressive regime through similar discursive/equivalential means—is what Žižek suggests that we should conceive as reification. But he is utterly wrong. In reification we have, as we have seen, an inversion in the relation between true and distorted expression, while here the opposition true/distorted does not make any sense; given that the equivalential link is established between radically heterogeneous demands, their "homogenization" through an empty signifier is a pure *passage à l'acte,* the construction of something essentially new and not the revelation of any underlying "true" identity. That is the reason why in my book I have insisted that the empty signifier is a pure name that does not belong to the conceptual order. So there is no question of true or false consciousness. As in the case of the psychoanalytic perspective—the elevation of an object to the dignity of the Thing, as in the case of signification—where we have the presence of a figural term that is catachrestical because it names and, thus, gives discursive presence to an essential void within the signifying structure, we have in politics also a constitution of new agents—peoples, in our sense—through the articulation between equivalential and differential logics. These logics involve figural embodiments resulting from a *creatio ex nihilo* that is not possible to reduce to any preceding or ultimate literality. So forget reification.

What we have said so far already anticipates that, in our view, the second thesis of Žižek, according to which symbolic representation—which he conceives as reification—would be essentially or, at least, tendentially fascist, does not fare any better. Here Žižek uses a demagogic device: the role of the Jew in Nazi discourse, which immediately evokes all the horrors of the Holocaust and provokes an instinctive negative reaction. Now it is true that fascist discourse employed forms of symbolic representation, but there is nothing specifically fascist in doing so, for there is no political discourse that does not construct its own symbols in that way. I would even say that this construction is the very definition of what politics is about. The arsenal of possible ideological examples different from the one Žižek has chosen is inexhaustible. What, rather than a symbolic embodiment, is involved in a political discourse that presents Wall Street as the source of all economic evils? Or in the burning of the American flag by third world demonstrators? Or in the rural, antimodernist emblems of Gandhi's agitations? Or in the burning of Buenos Aires's cathedral by the Peronist masses? We will identify with some symbols while rejecting others, but that is no reason to assert that the matrix of a symbolic structure varies according to the material content of the symbols. That assertion is not possible without some notion of reification à la Žižek, which would make it possible to ascribe some contents

to true consciousness and others to a false one. But even this naïve operation would not succeed without the further postulate that any form of symbolic incarnation will be an expression of false consciousness, while true consciousness would be totally exempt from symbolic mediation. (This is the point at which Lacanian theory becomes Žižek's nemesis; to do away entirely with symbolic mediation and have a pure expression of true consciousness is the same as to claim that there is a direct access to the Thing as such, while *objects a* will only be granted the status of distorted representations.)

Demands: Between Requests and Claims

The minimal unit in our social analysis is the category of demand. It presupposes that the social group is not an ultimately homogeneous referent but that its unity should rather be conceived as an articulation of heterogeneous demands. Žižek has formulated two main objections to this approach: the first, that the notion of demand does not grasp the true confrontational nature of the revolutionary act ("Does the proper revolutionary or emancipatory political act not move beyond this horizon of demands? The revolutionary subject no longer operates at the level of demanding something from those in power; he wants to destroy them" [p. 558]); the second, that there is no correlation between the plurality implicit in the notion of an equivalential chain of demands and the actual aims of a populist mobilization because many populist movements are structured around one-issue objectives ("A more general remark should be made here about one-issue popular movements. Take, for example, the 'tax revolts' in the U.S. Although they function in a populist way, mobilizing the people around a demand that is not met by the democratic institutions, it does *not* seem to rely on a complex chain of equivalences, but remains focused on one singular demand" [p. 560]).

Žižek's two objections have utterly missed the point. Let us start with the first. Although Žižek refers to the tension request/claim around which our notion of demand is explicitly constructed, he is entirely unaware of its theoretical consequences. In our view, any demand starts as a *request;* institutions of local power, for instance, are asked to meet the grievances of people in a particular area—for example, housing. This is the only situation that Žižek envisages; those in power are asked to graciously acquiesce to the request of a group of people. From this perspective, the situation would be utterly uneven; granting the demand would be a *concession* from those in power. But to reduce the issue to that case is to ignore the second dimension of our analysis, the social process through which a request is transformed into a *claim*. How does this mutation take place? As I have argued, it happens

through the operation of the equivalential logic. People whose demands concerning housing are frustrated see that other demands concerning transport, health, security, schooling, and so on are not met either. This triggers a process that I have described *in extenso* in my book. It boils down to the following: the frustration of an *individual* demand transforms the request into a claim as far as people see themselves as bearers of rights that are not recognized. These claims are, however, limited, for the referential entity to which they are addressed is perfectly identifiable—in our example of housing, the town hall. But if the equivalence between claims is extended—in our example: housing, transport, health, schooling, and so on—it becomes far more difficult to determine which is the instance to which the claims are addressed. One has to discursively construct the enemy—the oligarchy, the establishment, big money, capitalism, globalization, and so on—and, for the same reason, the identity of the claimers is transformed in this process of universalization of both the aims and the enemy. The whole process of the Russian revolution started with three demands: "peace, bread, and land." To whom were these demands addressed? The more the equivalence expanded, the more clear it became that it was not just to the tsarist regime. Once we move beyond a certain point, what were requests *within* institutions became claims addressed *to* institutions, and at some stage they became claims *against* the institutional order. When this process has overflown the institutional apparatuses beyond a certain limit, we start having the people of populism.

We could ask ourselves, Why should social actions always be conceived as demands? The reason, as I have explained in *On Populist Reason*, is that the subject is always the subject of lack; it always emerges out of an asymmetry between the (impossible) fullness of the community and the particularism of a place of enunciation. That also explains why the names of fullness will always result from a radical investment of universal value in a certain particularity—again: the elevation of a particular object to the dignity of the Thing. But it is important to realize that this investment does not leave the particular object unchanged. It "universalizes" that object through its inscription within an infrastructure of equivalential relations. That is why this can never be a pure matter of reification, as Žižek argues. (Reification involves, as we have said, an *inversion* by which particularity and universality exchange places without changing their identities, while the hegemonic relation presupposes contamination between the particular and the universal.)

This situation, by which a certain particularity is never *mere* particularity because it is always crisscrossed by equivalential relations that "universalize" its content, is enough to answer the second of Žižek's objections,

namely, that one-issue mobilizations, having particularistic aims, cannot constitute wider political identities. This is a complete illusion. The ostensive issue could be particular, but it is only the tip of the iceberg. Behind the individual issue, a much wider world of associations and affects contaminate it and transform it into the expression of much more general trends. To take the one-issue character of mobilization at face value would be the same as reducing the analysis of a dream to its manifest content. The French and Dutch referenda are good examples. The issue was a punctual one but, as Žižek himself shows, a whole world of frustrations, fears, and prejudices found its expression in the No. And everybody knows that what is at stake in the tax referenda in the U.S. are deep political displacements of communitarian common sense. The conclusion is that the latent meaning of a mobilization can never be read off its literal slogans and proclaimed aims; a political analysis worthy of its name only starts when one probes the overdetermination that sustains that literality.

So what general conclusions can be derived from this complex set of interconnections between popular identities and demands and within demands themselves, between requests and claims? The most important one is that each of the possible articulations within this structural matrix leads to a different way of constituting social identities and to different degrees in the universalization of their claims. At one extreme, when the demands do not go beyond the stage of mere requests, we have a highly institutionalized arrangement. Social actors have an "immanent" existence within the objective locations delineating the institutional order of society. (Of course this is a purely ideal extreme; society is never so structured that social agents are entirely absorbed within institutions.) The second scenario is one in which there is a more permanent tension between demands and what the institutional order can absorb. Here requests tend to become claims, and there is a critique of institutions rather than just a passive acceptance of their legitimacy. Finally, when relations of equivalence between a plurality of demands go beyond a certain point, we have broad mobilizations against the institutional order as a whole. We have here the emergence of the people as a more universal historical actor, whose aims will necessarily crystallize around empty signifiers as objects of political identification. There is a radicalization of claims that can lead to a revolutionary reshaping of the entire institutional order. This is probably the kind of development that Žižek has in mind when he speaks of not demanding anything from those in power, but wanting to destroy them instead. The difference between his approach and mine is, however, that for me the emergence of emancipatory actors has a logic of its own, which is anchored in the structure of the demand as the basic unit of social action, while for Žižek there is no such logic; eman-

cipatory subjects are conceived as fully fledged creatures, who emerge without any kind of genetic process, as Minerva from Jupiter's head. The section in my book that deals with Žižek's work has, as a title, "Žižek: Waiting for the Martians." There is, indeed, something extraterrestrial about Žižek's emancipatory subjects; their conditions as revolutionary agents are specified within such a rigid geometry of social effects that no empirical actor can fit the bill. In his recent writings, however, Žižek deploys a new strategy in naming revolutionary agents, consisting in choosing some actually existing social actors to whom he attributes however so many imaginary features that they become Martians in everything but name. We will later return to Žižek's strategy of "Martianization."

Heterogeneity and Social Practices

We should now move to a set of remarks that Žižek makes concerning the status of Marxist theory. The most important one refers to Marxian political economy. According to him, my basic reproach to the latter would be that it is "a positive 'ontic' science that delimits a part of substantial social reality, so that any direct grounding of emancipatory politics in CPE [critique of political economy] (or, in other words, any privilege given to class struggle) reduces the political to an epiphenomenon embedded in substantial reality" (p. 565). After that, in order to refute the claims that he attributes to me, Žižek embarks on a long tirade in which he tries to show that commodity fetishism is an internal effect of the capital form as such and that this form is not abstract, for it determines actual social processes: "this abstraction . . . [is] real in the precise sense of determining the structure of the very material social processes. The fate of whole strata of population and sometimes of whole countries can be decided by the solipsistic speculative dance of capital, which pursues its goal of profitability in a blessed indifference with regard to how its movement will affect social reality" (p. 566). Having so detected the central systemic violence of capitalism, Žižek concludes: "Here we encounter the Lacanian difference between reality and the Real: reality is the social reality of the actual people involved in interaction and in the productive processes, while the Real is the inexorable abstract spectral logic of capital that determines what goes on in social reality" (p. 566).

The last remark is, purely and simply, a misrepresentation of the Lacanian notion of the Real—a good example of how Žižek systematically distorts Lacanian theory to make it compatible with a Hegelianism that is, in most respects, its very opposite. The Real cannot be an inexorable spectral logic and even less something that determines what goes on in social reality for the simple reason that the Real is not a specifiable object endowed with laws

of movement of its own but, on the contrary, something that only exists and shows itself through its disruptive effects within the Symbolic.[7] It is not an *object* but an internal *limit* preventing the ultimate constitution of any objectivity. To identify the Real with the logic of capital is a nice example of that reification to which Žižek always returns. His mistake is similar to Kant's, who after having said that categories apply only to phenomena and not to things in themselves, asserted that the latter are the external cause of appearances, thus applying a category—cause—to something that cannot legitimately be subsumed under *any* category. The reason why Žižek has to distort the notion of the Real in this way is clear: only if the logic of capital is self-determined can it operate as an infrastructure determining what goes on in social reality. But the Real, in the Lacanian sense, does exactly the opposite; it establishes a limit that prevents any self-determination by the Symbolic. All this cheap metaphoric use of the reality/Real duality to refer to something that is no more than the old base/superstructure distinction is entirely out of place; it is evident that the logic of capital is as symbolic as the social reality that it is supposed to determine. The consequence is that, if the logic of capital and social reality are in *pari materia*—both of them are symbolic—the holes and disruptions created in social reality by the presence of the Real will also be present within the very logic of capital self-development (which, as a result, will be contaminated by something heterogeneous with itself; it will not be pure *self*-development).

What I am saying is not that the Real is not relevant for the issues that we are discussing but that Žižek has looked for it in all the wrong places. To conceive the Real as an objective, conceptually specifiable logic does not make any sense. However, before attempting to give to the Real its precise ontological location—if we can use these terms in connection with something whose presence, precisely, subverts all locations—I want to refer to Žižek's assertion that I have "reproached" Marxian political economy for being an ontic science delimiting a region of social reality and reducing the political to an epiphenomenal position. This "reproach" attributed to me is a pure invention of Žižek. I have never asserted that Marx's political economy is a regional science, for the simple reason that, whatever its merits or deficiencies, it is a discourse concerning social totality ("the anatomy of civil society is political economy"). So the only two possible ways of criticizing it are either to prove that there are logical inconsistencies in the sequence of its categories or to show that there is a heterogeneous outside preventing political economy from closing itself around its internal categories and thus constituting the *fundamentum inconcussum* of the social. Now the first criti-

7. We now move to the strictly Lacanian notion of the Symbolic.

cism is possible, and—although I have not engaged in formulating it myself—it has been repeatedly made over the last century to the point where little remains of the labor theory of value the way it was presented by Marx. It is enough to mention the names of Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk, Ladislaus Bortkiewicz, Joan Robinson, or Piero Sraffa.[8] The whole discussion about the transformation of values into prices at the beginning of the twentieth century was a first stage in this critical analysis. Žižek totally ignores this literature and continues asserting Marx's version of the labor theory of value as an unchallengeable dogma.

But let's not waste time with this sterile dogmatism, and let's go to the second possible criticism of Marxian economics, which is far more relevant for our subject. The alternative is as follows. A first possible scenario would be one in which there would be no outside to the process described by the succession of the economic categories; history would just be their endogenous unfolding. So the ontic—to use Žižek's terms—story that they depict would, at the same time, be ontological. Thus we would have a purely internal process not interrupted by any outside. The logical succession would also have a metaphysical value. What, however, about the forces *opposing* capitalism? In this model, they can only be an internal effect of capitalism itself. It is well known how class struggle features in this objectivist perspective: capitalism creates its own grave diggers. The second scenario results from the opposite assumption: forces opposing capitalism are not just the result of capitalist logic, but they *interrupt* it from the outside, so that the story of capitalism cannot result from the unfolding of its internal categories. To give just one example: as several studies have shown, the transition from absolute to relative surplus value is not only the result of movements in the logic of profit in a conflict-free space but also a response to workers' mobilizations. If this is so, there is no purely internal history of capitalism, as the one described by the preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*, but a conflict-ridden history that cannot be apprehended by any kind of conceptually graspable development. I want to insist on this point because it will lead us straight onto the notion of people as presented in *On Populist Reason*.

Needless to say, of the two options within this alternative, we definitely choose the second. In actual fact, *On Populist Reason* is, to a large extent, the attempt to unfold the theoretical consequences following from this choice. Žižek, however, thinks that he knows better and opts for denying that the alternative exists. Thus: "Marx distinguishes between working class and proletariat: working class effectively is a particular social group, while

8. See the excellent book by Ian Steedman, *Marx after Sraffa* (London, 1977).

proletariat designates a subjective position" (p. 564). Now, to start with, Marx *never* made such a distinction. Perhaps he should have done, but he did not. On the contrary, all his theoretical effort was to show that the riddle of history could only be solved as far as revolutionary subjectivity was firmly rooted in an objective position, resulting itself from a process governed by immanent and necessary laws. Has Žižek ever read the *Communist Manifesto*? If he had, he would have known that for Marx and Engels "not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons—the modern working class, the proletarians."[9] Has he read *The Holy Family* where, against Bruno Bauer, they argue for the inevitability of communism based precisely in the dehumanization of the proletariat (working class) brought about by the logic of private property? Has he read *The German Ideology*, where they oppose true socialism and present division of labor—that is, a structured ensemble of objective social positions—as the root and source of human alienation? And what are *Capital* and *Grundisse* but a sustained attempt to root exploitation in an objective process whose necessary counterpart is working-class struggle? Enough. There is no point in continuing to refer to an argument that any undergraduate knows. Moreover, it is plainly clear what Marx would have thought about a taxonomic distinction between the subjective and the objective; he would have said that, from the point of view of social totality, what matters is not the distinction as such but the logic and topography of the interconnections between its two terms; and the preface to the *Critique of Political Economy* makes perfectly clear what such an interconnection was for him.

The alternative that we have presented is, actually, reflected in a contradictory way in Žižek's thought. The distinction between the subjective and the objective, on the one hand, is vital for Žižek for, following Alain Badiou's duality between situation and event,[10] he wants to establish a radical discontinuity between the revolutionary break and what had preceded it. The corollary is that the revolutionary act should have nothing in common with the situation within which it takes place. Žižek has also insisted, on the other hand, *ad nauseam*, on the centrality of the anticapitalist *economic* struggle, which means that something in the existing situation—the economic as particular location within a social topography—has a transcendental structuring role of sorts, determining a priori the events that can actually take place. So the situation would have ontological primacy over the event,

9. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, trans. pub., ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York, 1978), p. 478.

10. See Alain Badiou, *L'Être et l'événement* (Paris, 1988).

whose chasm with that situation could not, as a result, be radical. So Žižek is confronted with an *exclusive* alternative, and it is rather comic that he does not realize it and continues asserting both options in a perfectly contradictory way.

Let us leave Žižek to enjoy his contradiction, and let us, instead, move to the way in which the alternative is dealt with in Marx's work. There is no doubt that, for Marx, the objective side has the upper hand. History is a coherent story because the development of productive forces establishes its underlying meaning. Technological progress leads to increasing exploitation, so the workers' struggle helps to hasten the crisis of capitalism, but it is not its source. The final breakdown of the system, although it is not mechanical, does not have its ultimate source in the actions of the workers. It would be however a mistake to think that, for him, historical necessity reduced freedom of action to a mere epiphenomenon. The question is rather that historical necessity and free revolutionary action coincide, in such a way that they become indistinguishable from each other. The Spinozist notion of freedom as being consciousness of necessity, which still had an essentially speculative dimension in Hegel, becomes in Marx an *active* principle identifying necessity and freedom. That is the reason why, for Marx, there is no possible distinction between the descriptive and the normative and why, as a result, Marxism cannot have an ethics independently grounded. And this is also why Žižek's distinction between proletariat and working class, subjective and objective, would have been anathema for Marx.

The difficulties started later on, with the increasing realization that there was an essential opaqueness that prevented the smooth transition from one economic category to the next and from one social antagonism to another. The Marxist view of the destiny of capitalist society was based on a postulate: the simplification of social structure under capitalism. The peasantry and the middle classes would disappear and, in the end, the bulk of the population would be a vast proletarian mass, so the last antagonistic confrontation of history would be a showdown between the bourgeoisie and the working class. Very quickly, however, it was seen that this strategic model showed all kinds of inconsistencies, both at the theoretical level and as a reading of what was going on in society. The labor theory of value was shown to be plagued by theoretical inconsistencies; the internal differentiations between sectors of the economy could not be intellectually grasped by any kind of unified law of tendency; social structure, far from being more homogeneous, became more complex and diversified; even within the working class, the splits between economic and political struggle became less and less politically manageable. In this situation, the initial reaction was

to try to maintain the basic lines of classical theory, but to multiply the system of mediations that, while becoming the guarantors of its ultimate validity, would assume the heroic task of homogenizing the heterogeneous. Lukács's notion of false consciousness—whose correlatum was the location of the true consciousness of the proletariat in the Party—is a typical expression of this laborious but ultimately useless exercise. And, within structurally oriented Marxism, Nicos Poulantzas's distinction between "determination in the last instance" and "dominant role" did not fare any better. The only possible alternative was to accept heterogeneity at face value, without trying to reduce it to any kind of concealed or underlying homogeneity, and to address the question of how a certain totalization is possible, which is however compatible with an irreducible heterogeneity. To outline the contours of an answer to this issue is our next task.

Before embarking upon it, however, I would like to comment on pages 565–68 of Žižek's essay, for they present what most approaches in his piece a sustained and coherent argument. The main points are the following:

1) There are two logics of universality that have to be strictly distinguished. The first would correspond to the state as conceived by Hegel, as the universal class, the direct agent of the social order. The second would be a supernumerary universality, internal to the existing order but without a proper place within it—"the part of no part" of Rancière. So we would not have a particular content that "will hegemonize the empty form of universality, but struggle between two exclusive *forms* of universality themselves" (p. 564).

2) The proletariat would embody this second kind of universality. (This is the place where Žižek distinguishes between the proletariat and the working class in the way we have discussed.) Here Žižek criticizes my book's approach to the question of the *lumpenproletariat,* arguing that its difference from the proletariat *strictu senso* is not "the one between an objective social group and a nongroup, a remainder-excess with no proper place within the social edifice, but a distinction between two modes of this remainder-excess that generates two different subjective positions" (p. 564). While the *lumpenproletariat*, as a nongroup, can be incorporated into the strategy of any social group—that is, it is infinitely manipulable—the working class *as a group* is in the contradictory position of having a precise location within capitalist accumulation and, however, being unable to find a place within the capitalist order.

3) The abstract logic of capital produces concrete effects. Here Žižek proposes his distinction between reality ("actual people involved in interaction and in the productive processes" [p. 566]) and the Real ("the inexorable abstract spectral logic of capital that determines what goes on in social

reality"). I have already shown the inconsistencies of this distinction, and I will not go back to it. He adds, however, a further point: "the categories of political economy (say, the value of the commodity working force or the degree of profit) are not objective socioeconomic data but data that always signal the outcome of a political struggle" (p. 566). So the political cannot be an epiphenomenon.

4) Žižek then adds a critique to the way I conceptualize, in an opposition A-B, the Bness of the B that resists symbolic transformation into a pure relation A-not A. As discussion of this point requires reference to some premises of my argument that I will present later on in this essay, I postpone discussion of this criticism.

5) "Capitalism is thus not merely a category that delimits a positive social sphere but a formal-transcendental matrix that structures the entire social space—literally, a mode of production" (p. 567).

Which, among these various criticisms, has an at least tentative plausibility? The answer is simple: none. Let us consider them one after the other.

1) The two universalities described by Žižek cannot coexist in the same space of representation, not even under the form of an antagonistic presence. The mere presence of one of them makes the other impossible. The universality inherent in Hegel's universal class *totalizes* a social space, so nothing *ultimately* antagonistic could exist within it; otherwise, the state would not be the sphere of reconciliation of the particularities of civil society, and it would be unable to fulfil its universal role. What happens, however, if this role is threatened by a particularism that it cannot master? In that case there is, simply, no reconciliation; universality, *conceived as uncontaminated universality*, is a sham. Because the relation between the state's universality and what escapes its reconciling role is a relation of pure exteriority, it is essentially contingent, which is the same as saying that it should be conceived as a system of *power*. Universality is not an *underlying* datum, but a power that, as with all power, is exercised over something different from itself. Ergo, any kind of universality is nothing else than a particularity that has succeeded in contingently articulating around itself a large number of differences. But this is nothing other than the definition of a *hegemonic* relation. Let us now move to the second of Žižek's universalities—that of a sector that, although present within a social space, cannot be counted as a member of that space. The case of the *sans papiers* in France is frequently quoted as a relevant example. Let us say, to start with, that the mere fact of being outside the system of locations defining a social framework does not endow a group of people with any kind of universality. The *sans papiers* want to have *papiers*, and if the latter are conceded by the state, they could become one more difference within an expanded state. In order

to become universal something else is needed—namely, that their situation of being outsiders becomes a symbol to other outsiders or marginals within society—that is, that a contingent aggregation of heterogeneous elements takes place. This aggregation is what we have called a people. This type of universalization, again, is what we understand by hegemony. We arrive at the same conclusion that we had reached when we referred to the universality of the state. This is why Gramsci spoke of the "becoming State of the working class," which presupposes a reaggregation of elements at a certain nodal point at the expense of others. Gramsci called this movement "a war of position" between antagonistic universalities. The fact that Žižek hypostasizes his two universalities and cannot explain what the struggle between them could consist of and that, in addition, he conceives the hegemonic struggle as one particularity hegemonizing "the empty form of universality" shows that he has not understood even the ABCs of the theory of hegemony.

2) Concerning the question of the *lumpenproletariat,* Žižek, again, clouds the issue. He says that, in the case of the proletariat, there is a contradiction between its precise location within capitalist accumulation and its lack of place within capitalist order; while in the case of the *lumpenproletariat* the first type of location would be absent, so its sociopolitical identity would be infinitely malleable. The real question, however, is whether the lack of place of the proletariat is so anchored in its precise location within capitalist accumulation that an equivalence could not be established with other out-of-place sectors, so a broader identity of the excluded could be formed that overflows *any* particular location. If so, the marginality of the *lumpenproletariat* would be the symptom of a much wider phenomenon. We will come back to this point.

3) The economic field is, for Žižek, intrinsically political because it is the field where class struggle is structured. With an assertion of such a generality, I also, of course, agree. Gramsci wrote that the construction of hegemony starts at the factory level. The disagreement starts, however, when we try to define what we understand by the political. For me the political has a primary structuring role because social relations are ultimately contingent, and any prevailing articulation results from an antagonistic confrontation whose outcome is not decided beforehand. For Žižek, instead, socioeconomic data always signal the outcome of a political struggle—that is, if there is a logical transition from the economic data to the political outcome, the political is simply an internal category of the economy. It is not, perhaps, an epiphenomenon, in the sense that its ontological status is not merely reflective of a substantial reality but part of the latter, but precisely because of that it lacks any autonomy. While my analysis leads to a politicization of the economy, Žižek's ends in an "economization" of politics.

5) As I said, we will discuss point 4 later on. As for point 5, Žižek does not simply sustain the idea that there is such a thing as a structured space called mode of production, but he also asserts that such a space (1) is a formal-transcendental matrix and (2) directly structures the entire social space—that is, that at no point social reality overflows what that matrix can determine and control (except, presumably, in the transition from one mode of production to another, but, as such a transition, if the model is coherent, would have to be governed by a logic internal to the mode of production itself, this would not make any difference). Žižek's whole account holds or falls depending on the validity of these two assumptions. This is what we will discuss next.

Heterogeneity and Dialectics

We will start our discussion trying to determine the status of the heterogeneous. We understand by a heterogeneous relation one existing between elements that do not belong to the same space of representation.[11] This notion requires a set of specifications, for a space of representation can be multiply constituted. The unity of such a space can, firstly, be the result of dialectical mediations—that is, a type of connection between elements so that I have in each of them everything needed to logically move to all the others. In the duality A-not A the identity of each pole is exhausted in being the pure negation of the other. So dialectical transitions are not only compatible with contradiction but have to rely on contradiction as the condition of their unity within a homogeneous space. There is nothing heterogeneous in a dialectical contradiction. For that reason, dialectical transitions can only take place in a saturated space. Any remnant of a contingent empiricity that is not dialectically mastered by the whole would jeopardize the latter, for, in that case, the contingency of the unmastered element would make the whole equally contingent, and the very possibility of a dialectical mediation would be put into question (this is the Krug's pen objection to dialectics, which Hegel answered with a brisk dismissal that hardly concealed the fact that he had no answer). Žižek's assertion that socioeconomic data "signal the outcome of a political struggle" is a good example of a dialectical transition—that is, one taking place in a homogeneous space that thus entirely eliminates the possibility of radical negativity (p. 566). But homogeneity does not necessarily require dialectical transitions between the elements delimiting a space. A semiological relation between elements is also a possible alternative. Saussure's conception of language as a system of differences presupposes also homogeneity, as far as the identity of each ele-

11. How a relation is possible between elements belonging to different spaces of representation is something we will discuss later on.

ment requires its difference from all the others. Heterogeneity only enters the game if it could be shown that the very logic of totality—being dialectical or semiological—fails at some point as a result of an aporia that cannot be solved within that totality's structuring principles.

Let us take as our starting point the Hegelian conception of history. The basic premise is that the movement of historical events is governed by an inner logic, conceptually apprehensible and conceived as a succession of dialectical reversals and retrievals. The arrival of various people to the historical arena is the phenomenic manifestation of such logic. There is, however, a blind spot in this picture: what Hegel calls the "peoples without history," who do not represent any differentiated moment in the dialectical series. I have compared them, in my book, with what Lacan calls the *caput mortuum*, the residue left in a tube after a chemical experiment. This nonhistorical presence is like the drop of petrol that spoils the bowl of honey, for the existence of a contingent excess overflowing the dialectics of history makes this dialectics equally contingent and, as a result, the whole vision of history as a coherent story is at the very least jeopardized. The same happens with Žižek's model of historicity. For capitalism to be "a formal-transcendental matrix that structures the entire social space" what is necessary is that such a matrix strictly functions as a ground, that is, that nothing in the social space exceeds the mastering abilities of the matrix (p. 567). Some sort of pragmatic version of the dialectical model is, however, possible; although this new version would considerably water down the dialectical ambitions, it could still be asserted that the "excess" is marginal vis-à-vis the main lines of historical development, so from the perspective of a universal history it can be safely ignored. If the whole issue comes to that, it is clear that it is just a matter of appreciation to decide whether the actual facts grant the assumptions of this pragmatic new version.

At this point we should move from Hegel to Marx, of whose work most of Žižek's analyses can be considered as derivative. Let us first, however, recapitulate our previous theoretical steps. First, as we have seen, any kind of dialectical transition is grounded in a saturated logical terrain where nothing can escape dialectical determination. Second, however, this logical closure is unachievable because something within that terrain escapes dialectical mastery; we have taken the example of peoples without history, but, obviously, many others could be brought forward. Third, referring now to the terrain of history, this excess vis-à-vis dialectical development can only be conceptualized through its contingent relation with the *main line* of historical development. Fourth, the fact that this main line has a contingent relation to something external to itself means that it, itself, becomes contingent. Fifth, the claims of that line to be the main one cease, as a result,

to be grounded in a necessary dialectical development and could only be asserted as a historically *proved* contingent process. So the question is: is there any entity in Marx's theory that, in its contingency, is homologous to Hegel's "peoples without history"? In my view there is, and it is the *lumpenproletariat*. And the result of its presence will be to destroy the claims of the proletariat to have an a priori central role as a necessary agent of historical development.

History for Marx, as far as it is a coherent story, is a history of production (the development of productive forces and its compatibility/incompatibility with the relations of production). So occupying a precise location within the relations of production is, for Marx, the only possible claim to be a *historical* actor. But this location is precisely what the *lumpenproletariat* does not have. Marx draws, without hesitation, what, starting from his premises, is the only possible conclusion: the *lumpenproletariat* should be denied any historicity; it is a parasitic sector inhabiting the interstices of all social formations. We see here the structural similitude with Hegel's "peoples without history"; vis-à-vis the main line of historical development its existence is marginal and contingent. If that were the whole matter, there would be no major problem; although the *lumpenproletariat* would have no place in a dialectically conceived historical narrative, its confinement as a category to the rabble of the city—which clearly is a marginal sector—would not put into question the pragmatic version of the dialectical story. The difficulties, however, persist. The *lumpenproletariat* has for Marx, no doubt, the rabble of the city as an intuitive referent, but he also gives a conceptual definition of that referent, to be found in the *lumpenproletariat*'s distance from the productive process. Very soon, however, he realized that such a distance is not exclusive to the rabble of the city, but it is present in many other sectors; he speaks, for instance, of the financial aristocracy as the reemergence of the *lumpenproletariat* at the heights of society. And with the unfolding of the whole discussion concerning productive and unproductive labor—an issue that had already called the attention of classical political economists—the notion of history as history of production was increasingly under fire, and its defense required the most unlikely contortions. Clearly, the pragmatic test had not been passed. This is why the question of the *lumpenproletariat* is important for me. It is the royal road that makes visible a wider issue: the whole question of the logics structuring social totality. That is why I have said that the question of the *lumpenproletariat* is a symptom.

There is, however, something else that puts even more radically into question Žižek's approach. It is the whole issue concerning the theoretical status of social antagonisms. Let us go back to his assertion that the working class "is a group that is in itself, as a group within the social edifice, a non-

group, in other words, one whose position is in itself contradictory; they are a productive force, society (and those in power) needs them in order to reproduce themselves and their rule, but, nonetheless, they cannot find a proper place for them" (p. 565). This can only mean one of two things: *either* that the objective position of the worker within the relations of production is the *source* of his or her contradictory position within capitalist society as a whole *or* that the absence of that objective position within capitalist society as a whole derives from the idea that the worker is *beyond* his objective position within the relations of production. Given Žižek's general outlook, it is clear that he can only mean the first. But this is what is theoretically unsustainable. For the worker's position within the relations of production to be a purely objective one, the worker has to be reduced to the category of seller of labor power, and the capitalist to that of buyer of labor power as a commodity. In that case, however, we are not defining any antagonism because the fact that the capitalist extracts surplus labor from the worker does not involve antagonism unless the worker *resists* such an extraction, but that resistance cannot be logically derived from the mere analysis of the category of seller of labor power. That is why, in several places in my work, I have argued that social antagonisms are not objective relations but the limit of all objectivity, so society is never a purely objective order but is constructed around an ultimate impossibility.[12]

It is clear at this point that the only way out of this theoretical blind alley is to move to the second possible meaning of Žižek's assertion (that he systematically avoids), namely, that the capitalist does not negate in the worker something inherent in the category of seller of labor power, but that the worker is *beyond* that category (the fact that, below a certain wage level, he or she cannot have access to a minimal consumption, to a decent life, and so on). So antagonism is not internal to the relation of production but takes place *between* the relation of production and something external to it. In other words, the two poles of the antagonism are linked by a nonrelational relation; that is, they are essentially heterogeneous with each other. As society is crisscrossed by antagonisms, heterogeneity is to be found at the very heart of social relations.

The consequences of this displacement from the notion of a homogeneous, saturated space to one in which heterogeneity is constitutive rapidly follow. In the first place, asserting that a social antagonism emerges out of an insurmountable heterogeneity involves as a necessary corollary that the

12. See Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, trans. Winston Moore and Paul Cammack (London, 1985), chap. 3, and Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (London, 1990), pp. 17–27 and *On Populist Reason*, pp. 139–56.

antagonistic relation is conceptually ungraspable. There is no Absolute Spirit that can assign to it an objectively determinable content. This means that its two poles do not belong to the same space of representation. We are here in a strictly homologous situation to that described by Lacan through his famous dictum that there is no such thing as a sexual relation. By this he was obviously not asserting that people do not make love but that there is no single formula of sexuation that would absorb the masculine and feminine poles within a unified and complementary whole.[13] This is a radical outside that cannot be symbolically mastered. Heterogeneity is another name for the Real.[14] This fully explains why Žižek cannot understand the theoretical status of the Lacanian Real. If the mode of production was—as it is for him—a formal-transcendental matrix of the social, everything in society would have to be explained out of that matrix's own endogenous movements; ergo, there would be no place for heterogeneity (= the presence of a Real). Žižek's nonsensical attribution to the Real of a formal-transcendental content is at odds with the most elementary notions of Lacan's theory. It is interesting to observe that, within the Marxist tradition itself, the imperialistic epistemological ambitions of the category of mode of production have been downgraded a long time ago. To refer only to the Althusserian school, Étienne Balibar has demolished the essentialism of *Reading Capital* and shown that the unity of a social formation cannot be thought out of a mode-of-production matrix.[15]

There is, however, a still more important consequence of giving this constitutive role to heterogeneity, and it is that the category of class struggle is overflown in all directions. Let us just mention the most important.

1) If antagonisms are not internal to the relations of production but take place *between* the relations of production and the way social agents are constituted *outside* them, it is impossible to determine the nature and pattern of an antagonism (at the limit: whether it is going to exist at all and its degree of intensity) from the mere analysis of the internal structure of the relations of production. We know that, empirically, groups of people can react to what, technically, are movements in the rate of exploitation in the most divergent ways. And we also know that, theoretically, it could not be otherwise given the heterogeneity inherent in antagonisms. So there is no longer any room for that childish talk about false consciousness, which pre-

13. See on this subject the classic article by Joan Copjec, "Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason," *Read My Desire: Lacan against the Historicists* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994), pp. 201–36.

14. Which involves the representation of the unrepresentable leading to what Hans Blumenberg called "the absolute metaphor."

15. See Balibar, "Sur la dialectique historique: Quelques remarques critiques à propos de *Lire le Capital*," *Cinq Études du materialisme historique* (Paris, 1974), pp. 205–45.

supposes an enlightened elite whose possession of the truth makes it possible to determine what the true interests of a class are.

2) But heterogeneity destabilizes working-class centrality in still another sense. Once it is accepted that antagonisms presuppose a radical outside, there is no reason to think that locations within the relations of production are going to be privileged points of their emergence. Contemporary capitalism generates all kinds of imbalances and critical areas: ecological crises, marginalization and unemployment, unevenness in the development of different sectors of the economy, imperialist exploitation, and so on. This means that antagonistic points are going to be multiple and that any construction of a popular subjectivity will have to start from this heterogeneity. No narrow class-based limitation will do the trick.

3) This has a third capital consequence that I have discussed in detail in my book. The overflowing of any narrow class identity by equivalential logics has to take into account the fact that equivalences operate over a substratum of essentially heterogeneous demands. This means that the kind of unity that it is possible to constitute out of them is going to be *nominal* and not *conceptual*. As I have argued, the name is the ground of the thing. So popular identities are always historical *singularities*.

We now have all the elements to answer Žižek's objection concerning what he calls my reduction of the Real to the empirical determinations of the object. His target is a passage of my book where it is asserted that "'the opposition A-B will never fully become A-not A. The B-ness of the B will be ultimately nondialectizable. The people will always be something more than the pure opposite of power. There is a Real of the people which resists symbolic integration'" (p. 566). Against this passage Žižek raises the following objection: there is an ambiguity in my formulation, for it oscillates between accepting a formal notion of the Real as antagonism and reducing it to those empirical determinations of the object that cannot be subsumed under a formal opposition. The crucial question, for Žižek, is to find out what in the people exceeds being the pure opposite of power because if it were just a matter of a wealth of empirical determinations "then we are not dealing with a Real that resists symbolic integration because the Real, in this case, is precisely the antagonism A-non-A, so that 'that which is in B more than non-A' is not the Real in B, but B's symbolic determinations" (p. 567).

This objection is highly symptomatic because it shows in the clearest possible way everything that Žižek does not understand concerning the Real, antagonisms, and popular identities. To start with, there are for him only two options: *either* we have a dialectical contradiction (A-not A), *or* we have the ontic empiricity of two objects (A—B)—what Kant called *Real-repugnanz*. If that were an *exclusive* alternative it is clear that any B-ness in

excess of not-A could only be of an empirical nature, and Žižek would obviously have an easy ride in showing that, in that case, we would not be dealing with the Real but with the symbolic determination of the object. But Žižek has missed the essential point. The real issue is whether I have in A everything that I need to move to its opposite (which, as a result, would be reduced to not-A). To go back to our previous discussion: whether I find in the *form* of capital everything I need to logically deduce the antagonism with the worker. If that were the case we would have a contradiction, but not an antagonistic one, because it would be fully representable within a unified symbolic space. And as it would be entirely symbolizable we would not be in the least dealing with the Real. A space constructed around the opposition A-not A is an entirely saturated space, which exhausts through that opposition all possible alternatives and does not tolerate any interruption. That is why the universe of Hegelian dialectics, with its ambition to obtain a complete overlapping between the ontic and the ontological orders, is incapable of dealing with the Real of antagonism that, precisely, requires the interruption of a saturated (symbolic) space. Our notion of antagonism as the limit of objectivity is another way of naming the Real, and its precondition is that we move away from any saturated A-not A space.

However, wouldn't we be in the same situation—that is, within a saturated space—if we move to the second Žižekian alternative, asserting a nondialectizable B-ness of B? We would, indeed, if that excess were identified with the empiricity of the object. That fully symbolized space would no longer be dialectical but differential or semiotic; however, total objective representability would still be its defining dimension. But it is at this point that the full consequences of our analysis of heterogeneity can be drawn. We have asserted, in our previous discussion, that antagonism is not internal to the relations of production but that it is established between the relations of production and the way social agents are constituted outside them. This means that capitalist exploitation has an *interruptive* effect. This effect is, as we have seen, the Real of antagonism. So the presence of antagonism denies to social agents the fullness of an identity; there is, as a result, a process of identification by which certain objects, aims, and so on become the names of that absent fullness (they are "elevated to the dignity of the Thing"). This is exactly what the B-ness of B means. It is not simply an empirical object but one that has been invested, cathected, with the function of representing a fullness overflowing its ontic particularity. So, as we can see, Žižek's alternative is entirely misconceived. First, he conceives the Real of antagonism as a dialectical relation A-not A, in which the full representability of its two poles eliminates the interruptive nature of the Real. And, second, he reduces the B-ness of B to the empirical determinations of

the object, thus ignoring the whole logic of the *objet a*. There is not the slightest substance in Žižek's objection.

On the Genealogy of the People

Having reached this point in our argument, the next stage should be to say something about the way in which constitutive heterogeneity reflects itself in the structuration of social identities. Some dimensions of this reflection are already clear. In the first place, the dialectic homogenization/heterogenization should be conceived under the primacy of the latter. There is no ultimate substratum, no *natura naturans*, out of which existing social articulations could be explained. Articulations are not the superstructure of anything but the primary terrain of constitution of social objectivity. This involves their essential contingency, for they consist of relational ensembles that do not obey any inner logic other than their factually being together. This does not mean that they can move in any direction any time. On the contrary, hegemonic formations can have a high degree of stability, but this stability is itself the result of a construction operating on a plurality of heterogeneous elements. Homogeneity is always achieved, never given. The work of Georges Bataille is highly relevant in this respect. A second dimension following from our previous analysis is that constitutive heterogeneity involves the primacy of the political in the establishment of the social link. It should be clear at this stage that by the political I do not understand any kind of regional area of action but the *contingent* construction of the social link. It is because of that that the category of hegemony acquires its centrality in social analysis. The consequence is that the category of hegemonic formation replaces the notion of mode of production as the actual self-embracing totality. The reasons are obvious. If the mode of production does not out of itself provide its own conditions of existence—that is, if the latter are *externally* provided and are not a superstructural effect of the economy—those conditions of existence are an internal determination of the primary social totality. This is even more clearly the case if we add that the links between different moments and components of the economic process are themselves the results of hegemonic articulations.

A third dimension to be taken into account is that, if heterogeneity is constitutive the succession of hegemonic articulations will be structured as a narrative that is also constitutive and is not the factual reverse of a logically determinable process. This means that the reflection of heterogeneity in the constitution of social identities will itself adopt the form of a disruption (again, the irruption of the Real) of the homogeneous by the heterogeneous. As Marxism was, as we know, organized around the notion of necessary laws of history, it is worthwhile considering for a moment the way in which

a heterogeneous other irrupted in the field of its discursivity and led to the reemergence of the people as a privileged historical actor.

The points in which classical Marxism as a homogeneous field of discursivity was interrupted by a heterogeneity unmasterable within its system of categories are legion. We will only refer, however, to the Leninist experience, both because of its centrality within the political imaginary of the Left and because it shows, with paradigmatic clarity, the type of politico-theoretical crisis to which we want to refer. There were a few principles that organized classical Marxism as a homogeneous space of discursive representation. One was the postulate of the class nature of historical agents. A second was the vision of capitalism as an orderly succession of stages dominated by a unified and endogenously determined economic logic. A third, and the most important for our argument, was an outlook according to which the strategic aims of the working class were entirely dependent on the stages of capitalist development. Russia being in a process of transition to a fully fledged capitalist society, the overthrowing of absolutism could only consist in a bourgeois-democratic revolution that, following the pattern of similar processes in the West, would open the way to a long period of capitalist expansion. All this was perfectly in tune with the political forecasts and the strategic vision of traditional Marxism. There was, however, a heterogeneous anomaly—an "exceptionality," to use the vocabulary of the time—that complicated the picture: the Russian bourgeoisie had arrived too late to the capitalist world market and, as a result, it was weak and incapable of carrying out its own democratic revolution. This had been recognized since the first manifesto of Russian social democracy, written by Peter Struve, and not even a diehard dogmatist like Plekhanov dared to attribute to the bourgeoisie a leading role in the revolution to come. In those circumstances, the democratic tasks had to be taken up by different classes (a workers/peasants alliance, according to Lenin; the working class, in Trotsky's vision). It is symptomatic that this taking up of a task by a class that is not its natural bearer was called by Russian social democrats hegemony, thus introducing the term into political language. Here we already find a heterogeneity disrupting the smooth sequence of Marxist categories. The discourses of Lenin and Trotsky were a sustained attempt to keep those disruptive effects under control. It was not a question that the class identity of the working class changed as a result of its taking up the democratic tasks or that the tasks themselves were transformed in nature when the workers were their bearers. The Leninist conception of class alliances is explicit in this respect: "to strike together and to march separately." And, for Trotsky, the whole logic of the permanent revolution is based on a succession of revolutionary stages that only makes sense if the class nature of both the

agents and the tasks remains what it was from the very beginning. Moreover, the "exceptionality" of the situation was conceived as short-lived; the revolutionary power in Russia could survive only if a socialist victory in the advanced capitalist countries of the West took place. If that happened, the heterogeneous outside would be reabsorbed by an orthodox normal development.

The failure of the revolution in the West, important in its dislocating effecting as it was, was not, however, the only determining factor in the collapse of the classism of classical Marxism (its Russian variants included). In the Leninist vision of world politics there were already some seeds foretelling such a collapse. World capitalism was, for Lenin, a political and not only an economic reality; it was an imperialist chain. As a result, crises in one of its links created imbalances in the relations of forces in other links. The chain was destined to be broken by its weakest link, and nothing guaranteed that such a link was to be found in the most developed capitalist societies. The case was rather the opposite. The notion of uneven and combined development was the clearest expression of this dislocation in the orderly succession of stages that was supposed to govern the history of any society. When in the 1930s Trotsky asserted that uneven and combined development is the terrain of all social struggles in our age, he was extending (without realizing it) the death certificate to the narrow classism of the Second and Third Internationals.

Why so? Because the more profoundly uneven and combined development dislocates the relation between tasks and agents, the less possible it is to assign the tasks to an a priori determined natural agent and the less the agents can be considered as having an identity independent of the tasks that they take up. Thus we enter the terrain of what we have called contingent political articulations and in the transition from strict classism to broader popular identities. The aims of any group in a power struggle can only be achieved if this group operates hegemonically over forces broader than itself that, in turn, will change its own subjectivity. It is in that sense that Gramsci spoke of collective wills. This socialist populism is present in all successful communist mobilizations of that period. Žižek's assertion that populism—understood in this sense—is incompatible with communism is totally groundless. What was Mao doing in the Long March other than creating a wider popular identity, speaking even of "contradictions within the people," thus reintroducing a category, people, which was anathema for classical Marxism? And we can imagine the disastrous results that Tito, in Žižek's native Yugoslavia, would have obtained if he had made a narrow appeal to the workers instead of calling the vast popular masses to resist the foreign occupation. In a heterogeneous world, there is no possibility of meaningful

political action except if sectorial identity is conceived as a nucleus and starting point in the constitution of a wider popular will.

On Further Criticisms

There are, finally, a few minor criticisms that Žižek makes of my work that I wouldn't like to leave unanswered.

Concerning the distinction between my category of empty signifier and Claude Lefort's notion of empty place of power, Žižek writes: "The two emptinesses are simply not comparable. The emptiness of people is the emptiness of the hegemonic signifier that totalizes the chain of equivalences or whose particular content is 'transubstantiated' into an embodiment of the social Whole, while the emptiness of the place of power is a distance that makes every empirical bearer of power deficient, contingent, and temporary" (p. 559). I would be the last person to deny that the distinction made by Žižek is correct. In actual fact, I have myself made it in the very passage from my book that Žižek quotes: "'For me, emptiness is a type of identity, not a structural location'" (p. 559). Over several years I have resisted the tendency of people to assimilate my approach to that of Lefort, which largely results, I think, from the word *empty* being used in both analyses. But that the notion of emptiness is different in both approaches does not mean that no comparison between them is possible. What my book asserts is that if the notion of emptiness is restricted to a place of power that anybody can occupy, a vital aspect of the whole question is omitted, namely, that occupation of an empty place is not possible without the occupying force becoming itself, to some extent, the signifier of emptiness. What Žižek retains from the idea of "every empirical bearer of power (being) 'deficient,' contingent, and temporary" is only the possibility of being substituted by other bearers of power, but he totally disregards the question of the effects of that deficient, contingent, and temporary condition on the identity of those bearers. Given Žižek's total blindness to the hegemonic dimension of politics, this is hardly surprising.

Regarding the antisegregationist movement in the U.S., epitomized by Martin Luther King, Jr., Žižek asserts that "although it endeavored to articulate a demand that was not properly met within the existing democratic institutions, it cannot be called populist in any meaningful sense of the term" (p. 560). Everything depends, of course, on the definition of *populism* that one gives. In the usual and narrow sense of the term, whose pejorative overtones associate it with sheer demagogy, there is no doubt that the civil rights movement could not be considered populist. But that is the sense of the term that my whole book puts into question. My argument is that the construction of the people as a collective actor requires extending the notion

of populism to many movements and phenomena that traditionally have not been considered so.[16] And, from this viewpoint, there is no doubt that the American civil rights movement extended equivalential logics in a variety of new directions and made possible the incorporation of previously excluded underdogs into the public sphere.

I want, finally, to refer to an anecdotic point, just because Žižek has raised it. In an interview I gave in Buenos Aires I referred to another interview with Žižek, also in Buenos Aires, in a different newspaper, in which he asserted that the problem of the U.S. in world politics is that they act globally and think locally and in this way cannot properly act as universal policemen.[17] From this call to the U.S. to both think and act globally I drew the conclusion that Žižek was asking the U.S. to become the universal class in the Hegelo-Marxist sense of the term. In his *Critical Inquiry* essay Žižek reacts furiously to what he calls my "ridiculously malicious" interpretation and asserts that what he meant was "that this gap between universality and particularity is structurally necessary, which is why the U.S. is in the long term digging its own grave" (p. 563). Let us see exactly what Žižek said in that interview. To the journalist's question ("do you think that invading Iraq was a correct decision from the United States?"), Žižek answers: "I think that the point is different. Do you remember that ecologist slogan which said 'think globally, act locally'? Well, the problem is that the United States does the opposite: they think locally and act globally. Against the opinion of many left-wing intellectuals who are always complaining about American imperialism, I think that this country should intervene much more." And, after giving examples of Rwanda and Iraq, he concludes: "This is the tragedy of the United States: in the short run they win wars, but in the long run they end up aggravating the conflicts that they should resolve. The problem is that they should represent more honestly their role of global policemen. They don't do it and they pay the price for not doing it."[18]

16. Whenever there is the definition of the ground organizing a certain area of subjectivity, the limits of the latter change, and, as a result, the referents addressed by that discourse are substantially modified. See, for instance, the following passage from Freud: "By demonstrating the part played by perverse impulses in the formation of symptoms in the psychoneuroses, we have quite remarkably increased the number of people who might be regarded as perverts. . . . Thus the extraordinarily wide dissemination of the perversions forces us to suppose that the disposition to perversions is itself of no great rarity but must form a part of what passes as the normal constitution" (Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality,* in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* trans. and ed. James Strachey, 24 vols. [London, 1953–74], 7:171). The same can be said about populism.

17. See Laclau, "Las manos en la masa," *Radar*, 5 June 2005, p. 20, www.pagina12.com.ar/diaro/suplementos/radar/9-2286-2005-06.09.html, and "Žižek: Estados Unidos debería intervenir más y mejor en el mundo: Pide que asuma su papel de policía global," *La nacion*, 10 Mar. 2004, www.lanacion.com.ar/04/03/10dg_580163.asp

18. "Žižek."

It is, of course, for the reader to decide if I have been particularly ridiculous and malicious in not realizing that when Žižek called the U.S. to "represent more honestly their role of global policemen" he meant to say that "the gap between universality and particularity is structurally necessary, which is why the U.S. is in the long term digging its own grave." If so, the world is full of ridiculous and malicious people. I remember that at the time of the publication of Žižek's interview I commented on it to several people in Argentina, and I did not find a single person who had interpreted Žižek's words the way he is now saying that they should be interpreted. Even the journalist interviewing him confesses to be puzzled by the fact that the one asking for the U.S. to act as an international policeman is a Marxist philosopher. And the title of the interview is "Žižek: The U.S. Should Intervene More and Better in the World." (What is the meaning of giving this advice if failure is considered "structurally necessary"?)

Why, however, is failure structurally necessary? Here Žižek asks Hegel's help: "*therein* resides my Hegelianism: the 'motor' of the historico-dialectical process is precisely the gap between acting and thinking" (p. 563). But Hegel's remark does not particularly refer to international politics because it applies to absolutely everything in the universe. So Žižek's answer to the question of whether the U.S. was right or wrong in invading Iraq is that this is not the important question, for the real issue is that there is, in the structure of the real, a necessary gap between thinking and acting. Anyway, with a lot of goodwill I am prepared to accept Žižek's interpretation of his own remarks. My friendly advice, however, is that, if he does not want to be utterly misunderstood, he should be more careful in choosing his words when making a public statement.

The Ultraleftist Liquidation of the Political

We have put into close relationship a series of categories: the political, the people, empty signifiers, equivalence/difference, hegemony. Each of these terms requires the presence of the others. The dispersion of antagonisms and social demands, which are defining features of an era of globalized capitalism, needs the political construction of all social identity, something that is only possible if equivalential relations between heterogeneous elements are established and if the hegemonic dimension of naming is highlighted. That is the reason why *all* political identity is necessarily popular. But there is also another aspect that needs to be stressed. Antagonistic heterogeneity points, as we have shown, to the limits in the constitution of social objectivity, but, precisely because of that, it cannot be in a situation of *total* exteriority in relation to the system that it is opposing. Total exteriority would mean a topological position definable by a precise

location vis-à-vis that system, and, in that case, it would be part of it. Total exteriority is just one of the forms of interiority. A true political intervention is never merely oppositional; it is rather one that displaces the terms of the debate, that rearticulates the situation in a new configuration. Chantal Mouffe in her work has spoken about the duality agonism/antagonism, pointing out that political action has the responsibility not only of taking a position within a certain context but also of structuring the very context in which a plurality of positions will express themselves.[19] This is the meaning of a war of position, a category that we have already discussed. This is what makes the ultraleftist appeal to total exteriority synonymous with the eradication of the political as such.

It is difficult to find a more extreme example of this ultraleftism than the work of Žižek. Let us see the following passage, which is worth quoting in full:

> There is a will to accomplish the "leap of faith" and *step outside* the global circuit at work here, a will which was expressed in an extreme and terrifying manner in a well-known incident from the Vietnam War: after the US army occupied a local village, their doctors vaccinated the children on the left arm in order to demonstrate their humanitarian care; when, the day after, the village was retaken by the Vietcong, they cut off the left arms of all the vaccinated children. . . . Although it is difficult to sustain as a literal model to follow, this complete rejection of the enemy precisely in its caring "humanitarian" aspect, no matter what the cost, has to be endorsed in its basic intention. In a similar way, when Sendero Luminoso took over a village, they did not focus on killing the soldiers or policemen stationed there, but more on the UN or US agricultural consultants or health workers trying to help the local peasants—after lecturing them for hours, and then forcing them to confess their complicity with imperialism publicly, they shot them. Brutal as this procedure was, it was rooted in an acute insight: they, not the police or the army, were the true danger, the enemy at its most perfidious, since they were "lying in the guise of truth"—the more they were "inno-

19. It is some motive for celebration that Žižek, in his *Critical Inquiry* article, has for the first time made an effort to discuss separately my work and that of Chantal Mouffe, instead of attributing to each of us the assertions of the other. To refer to a particularly outrageous example: after a long quotation from a work by Mouffe, he comments: "the problem here is that this translation of antagonism into agonism, into the regulated game of political competition, by definition involves a constitutive exclusion, and it is this exclusion that Laclau fails to thematize" (Žižek, *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle* [London, 2004], p. 90; hereafter abbreviated *I*). The problem is not whether I agree or disagree with what Mouffe has said; the problem is that it is dishonest to criticize an author for what another author has said.

> cent" (they "really" tried to help the peasants), the more they served as a tool of the USA. It is only such a blow against the enemy at his best, at the point where the enemy "indeed helps us," that displays true revolutionary autonomy and sovereignty. [*I*, pp. 83–84]

Let us ignore the truculence of this passage and concentrate instead on what matters: the vision of politics that underlies such a statement. One feature is immediately visible: the whole notion of rearticulating demands in a war of position is one hundred percent absent. There is, on the contrary, a clear attempt to consolidate the unity of the existing power bloc. As usual, ultraleftism becomes the main source of support of the existing hegemonic formation. The idea of trying to hegemonize demands in a new popular bloc is rejected as a matter of principle. Only a violent, head-on confrontation with the enemy as it is is conceived as legitimate action. Only a position of total exteriority vis-à-vis the present situation can guarantee revolutionary purity. There is only one step from here to make exteriority qua exteriority the supreme political value and to advocate violence for violence's sake. That there is nothing "ridiculously malicious" in my suggestion that Žižek is not far from taking that step can be seen in the following passage:

> The only "realistic" prospect is to ground a new political universality by opting for the *impossible,* fully assuming the place of the exception, with no taboos, no a priori norms ("human rights," "democracy"), respect for which would prevent us also from "resignifying" terror, the ruthless exercise of power, the spirit of sacrifice . . . if this radical choice is decried by some bleeding-heart liberals as *Linksfaschismus*, so be it![20]

We could however ask ourselves, What for Žižek are the political subjects of his *Linksfaschismus*? It is not easy to answer this question because he is quite elusive when the question comes to the discussion of left-wing strategies. So Žižek's book on Iraq is quite useful because there he devotes a few pages to the protagonists of what he sees as true revolutionary action. He refers mainly to three: the workers' councils of the Soviet tradition—which he himself recognizes have disappeared; Canudos—a millenarian movement in nineteenth-century Brazil; and the inhabitants of the Brazilian *favelas.* The connection between the last two is presented by Žižek in the following terms:

20. Žižek, "Holding the Place," in Judith Butler, Laclau, and Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London, 2000), p. 326.

> The echoes of Canudos are clearly discernible in today's *favelas* in Latin American megalopolises: are they not, in some sense, the first "liberated territories," the cells of future self-organized societies? . . . The liberated territory of Canudos in Bahia will remain forever the model of a space of emancipation, of an alternative community which completely negates the existing space of the state. Everything is to be endorsed here, up to and including religious "fanaticism." [*I*, p. 82]

This is pure delirium. The *favelas* are shanty towns of passive poverty submitted to the action of totally nonpolitical criminal gangs that keep the population terrified, to which one has to add the action of the police who carry out executions regularly denounced by the press. As for the assertion that the *favelas* keep alive the memory of Canudos, it involves being so grotesquely misinformed that the only possible answer is "go and do your homework." There is not a single social movement in contemporary Brazil that establishes a link with the nineteenth-century millenarian tradition—let alone the inhabitants of the *favelas*, who have no idea of what Canudos was. Žižek totally ignores what happened in Brazil today, yesterday, or ever—which for him, of course, is no obstacle to making the most sweeping statements concerning Brazilian revolutionary strategies. This is the process of "Martianization" I referred to before: to attribute to actually existing subjects the most absurd features, while keeping their names so that the illusion of a contact with reality is maintained. The people of the *favelas* have pressing enough problems without paying any attention to Žižek's eschatological injunctions. So what he needs are *real* Martians. But they are too clever to come down to our planet just to satisfy Žižek's truculent dreams.