

Lecture June 30, 2017 – 7 pm
Nouvel Building, Auditorium 400

Slavoj Žižek. Lessons from “airpocalypse”

In December 2016, smog in big Chinese cities became so thick that thousands fled into the countryside, trying to reach place where one can still see blue sky – this »airpocalypse« affected half a billion people. For those who remained, moving around began to resemble life in a post-apocalyptic movie: people walking around with large gas masks in a smog where even nearby trees were invisible. Perhaps the most surprising thing about this airpocalypse is its quick re-normalization: after the authorities could no longer deny the problem, they tried to establish a new procedure which somehow would enable people to continue their daily life by following new routines, as if the catastrophic smog is just a new fact of life. The important thing is not to panic and to maintain the appearance that, in spite of all troubles, life goes on...

In order to establish this new mode of relating to our environment, a radical politico-economic change is necessary, what Peter Sloterdijk calls “the domestication of the wild animal Culture.” Until now, each culture educated its own members and guaranteed civic peace among them in the guise of state power, but the relationship between different cultures and states was permanently under the shadow of potential war, with each state of peace nothing more than a temporary armistice. As Hegel conceptualized it, the entire ethic of a state culminates in the highest act of heroism, the readiness to sacrifice one’s life for one’s nation-state, which means that the wild barbarian relations between states serve as the foundation of the ethical life within a state. Is today’s North Korea with its ruthless pursuit of nuclear weapons and rockets to hit with them distant targets not the ultimate example of this logic of unconditional Nation-State sovereignty?

However, the moment we fully accept the fact that we live on a Spaceship Earth, the task that urgently imposes itself is that of civilizing civilizations themselves, of imposing universal solidarity and cooperation among all human communities, a task rendered all the more difficult by the ongoing rise of sectarian religious and ethnic “heroic” violence and readiness to sacrifice oneself (and the world) for one’s specific Cause. The overcoming of capitalist expansionism, wide international cooperation and solidarity that should also be able to transform themselves into an executive power ready to violate state sovereignty, etc. –, are these not all measures destined to protect our natural and cultural commons? If they do not point towards Communism, if they do not imply a Communist horizon, then the term “Communism” has no meaning at all.

Slavoj Žižek

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