Democracy, Globalization, and Difference

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One is tempted to say of democracy what, according to an essay by Immanuel Wallerstein, Mahatma Gandhi said of Western civilization. "What do you think of Western civilization, Mr. Gandhi?" someone asked him. To which he replied, "It would be a good idea". The organizers of Documenta11 were wise to recognize that, in relation to the conditions of existence of artistic practice today, few topics are more significant than the fate and future of democracy. Art today is increasingly "democratic" in a loose sense: more people, from wider conditions of life, are able to practice it, and its subject matter has been radically democratized – whatever invisible symbolic frame the artist is able to weave around a subject makes it count as "a work of art". On the other hand, the "art world" remains a highly exclusive "club", its discourse precious and rarified and more than ever penetrated through and through by money and the market. Documenta11 calls for a timely inventory of democracy's unrealized potential, but I want to kick off by talking about democracy's present vicissitudes. For an inventory of its possibilities is difficult to undertake without immediately encountering its opposite – democracy's *impossibility*. At the end I may try, briefly, to say why this *impossibility* may be democracy's saving grace. But before we make this redemptive move, let me stare its down-side in the face.

I understand its impossibility in two senses, one practical, one more conceptual. The meaning of the word *democracy* is now so proliferated, so loaded down with ideological freight, so indeterminate where it stands at the nexus on different, often mutually exclusive paradigms – liberal democracy, participatory democracy, popular democracy – that it is virtually useless. So unstable that it often cannot sustain meaningful dialogue, so that it is questionable whether it is any longer "good to think with." Increasingly emptied of real content, as the gap between real and ideal widens, it is progressively weighed down by the plentitude of its unfulfilled promises. It is simultaneously too empty and too full. It can only be used in its radically deconstructed form. It is, to coin a phrase, under deep *erasure*.

The second aspect relates to this gap between real and ideal. The discourse of democracy is, to use the language of spectrality, haunted by the ghost of its ideal. The problem is that the gap between any actually existing system of democracy and its status as a universal regulative idea is read teleologically. So that each manifestly inadequate historical example is seen as another stage in the inevitable onward march toward its full realization – a moment of Hegelian reconciliation between democracy's "real" and democracy's "reason". To the contrary, I want to argue that this "lack" is not contingent but constitutive of the democratic idea, which can only function as what Ernesto Laclau calls "a horizon" – without specific, transhistorical content: a necessarily empty signifier. According to Laclau, a horizon is that „which establishes, at one and the same time, the limits and the terrain of constitution of any possible object – and that, as a result, makes impossible any 'beyond'"[1]. I will return to this idea at the end.

The spirit animating democracy through its many actual forms is that legitimate government must rest on the incorporation and the active consent and participation of all, and this "all" implies a radical equality between the totality of its subjects, carrying with it the promise of the leveling of power. When in the historical world has such a system been constructed in any way but across its manifest *lack*? Athenian democracy – small enough to give the appearance of transparency – existed in a tiny circle of light supported by the invisibility of forced labor and surrounded by the immense darkness of the barbarian other. The Lockean ideal enshrined in the American Constitution was the privilege

of propertied men, not the poor, women, the enslaved or indigenous people. The "freedom" of this exclusion was recently once again vividly demonstrated in the US Electoral College, which legitimated the passage of the presidency to the candidate who had lost the popular vote. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, an inspirational democratic document worldwide, could not ensure that the Assembly would recognize the inalienable rights to freedom of black Haitian slaves – the "Black Jacobins" who, paradoxically, had been inspired precisely by the Abbe Reynal, the *philosophes*, and l*iberté, égalite, fraternité*. The popular democracies, in a Brechtian move, elected the Party in place of the People. In Western democracies, the long struggle to reform and expand the franchise inched forward to assimilate a wider and wider tranche of adult men, but fiercely resisted the enfranchisement of women and could not universalize democracy's ideal even to its own poor and powerless citizens. In T. H. Marshall's historicist reading of citizenship, the progressive movement – first, equality before the law, then the franchise, then the "amelioration of class" through the welfare state – comes to a shuddering halt before the frontier of giving socioeconomic rights any deep content: a threshold the international doctrine of human rights found impossible to encompass.[2]

This should not be taken as meaning that the subject of democracy is no longer worth pursuing. It remains a powerful idea animating radical demands everywhere, and a critical idea to bring to bear against and to lever open the actually existing structures of power: though, probably, more in its adjectival sense – the "democratization of social life" – than in its substantive form. These days, when I hear "democracy" I am pretty certain that I am already launched on the treacherous seas of some deep and complex ideological maneuver. This does not mean that it has some already given actual historical content toward which it is always "tending" which one day will be completed in its already known forms. Nor does it mean that its efficacy is limited to the West, though we may have to radically rethink the conditions of existence it may require to become strategically operative in societies where the other conditions of existence in which it has become embedded in the West are not present. Ideas are not limited to their place of origin, though we should expect their radical transformation as they begin to "travel": increasingly so, as cultures cease to be autonomous, self-sustaining, enclosed entities, writing the scripts of their members from birth to death and entering the cosmopolitan condition where ideas, images, as well as forms of life flow across boundaries and begin to indigenize – a topic to which I will also return.

Nevertheless, despite this more qualified optimistic note, the limited inventory I want to offer as a way of starting this investigation is less about democracy's potential, "unrealized" possibilities, and more about its actually existing realization in the contemporary setting. And here my argument is that in recent years, the balance in what we may call the relations of democratic forces has decisively swung against the democratic tide. The gap I referred to earlier between the stuttering incompleteness of its forms of empirical realization and its onward march as transhistorical ideal has been hegemonized. The ideas circulating within democracy's wider frame have been condensed into "liberal democracy", and liberal democracy reduced to the system that now prevails in the Western developed "democratic capitalist" world. This form of democracy is said to have reached such a close approximation to its ideal that it is, for all practical purposes, complete. It may require tinkering here and here, and the sort of regular motor maintenance check to make sure the engine is running smoothly. But generally, in its sublating movement of supercession, the system is close to the complete "exhaustion" of its potential through its "realization"; bringing us, as Francis Fukuyama has argued, at last, face to face with "The End of History", in the sense that there are no great political conceptions of freedom and equality to come, no profound ideological work remaining to be done, no new political goals that are not already within our empirical grasp. Liberal democratic Man is The Last (natural) Man. This is the quasi-Hegelian conflation that underpins Fukuyama's vision of liberal democracy as "the only coherent political aspiration that spans different regions and cultures around the globe"[3].

Fukuyama explicitly connects this completion of the liberal democratic dream within the West to its new, global mission. The link is secured by the fact that, as Fukuyama puts it, "A liberal revolution in economic thinking has [everywhere] sometimes preceded, sometimes followed, the move toward political freedom around the globe"[4]. In short, as Derrida notes acerbically, "The alliance of liberal democracy and of the free market" — their absolute and ultimate interdependence — is "the good news of this later quarter century"[5]. It is this couplet that has made liberal democracy the political advance guard of the tremendous avalanche of neoliberal orthodoxy now sweeping the post-Cold War world with evangelical zeal. Fukuyama does not altogether deny liberal democracy's "dark side", nor that, here and there, the system may need a little light renovation. But these are assigned to the side of the contingent – "the empirical flow of events in the second half of the century"[6]. Their accumulation in no way refutes, qualifies, or undermines the ideal, which remains "perfect" – the only coherent global aspiration to freedom. What Derrida calls "the telos of a progress that [has] the form of an ideal finality"[7].

Of course, the interchangeability of liberal democratic conceptions of political freedom and market freedom is not new. The conjunction of two, mutually qualifying terms – *liberal* and *democracy* – already marks the site of this fateful convergence. But in more reformist times, each was supposed to qualify and in some way limit the other. „Liberal" recognized that the market remained the best „impartial" allocator of economic resources, and one could go only so far in interfering with its „logic": that capital accumulation provided the economic basis of living standards and prosperity, and imposed its limits on how far economic power could be „democratized". Liberal also implied the full panoply of other liberal relations that constituted the conditions of existence of actually existing liberal democracy: individual autonomy; an abstract-equivalent notion of the citizen; a formal not a substantive conception of equality; a neutral, culture-blind state („veiled in assumed ignorance", as they say); and representative government. But „democracy" promised the constitution of public political spaces in which private interests would be required to take account of a wider set of „public" interests. It recognized that government could not be conducted without acquiring the consent of its citizens; that institutions should somehow be „accountable" not only to their owners or governors but to wider social interests; that the power of capital and the inequalities of power, everywhere the inevitable consequence of capitalist market societies, should enter a trade-off against the power of one person – one vote. I am not suggesting that this idealtypical picture – liberal democracy as the best of all possible shells for the development of market capitalism, Lenin might have said – ever prevailed in practice. But I am pointing out the room for struggle, contestation, and negotiation produced by the necessary interdependency but mutually limiting effect of this heavily compromised formation. These are indeed the only spaces in which genuine social reforms have been won.

It is by taking this best-possible reading of liberal democracy and contrasting with it recent developments in three spheres that I constitute my provisional inventory. It is, then, something radically new – we are in a radically new conjuncture – when the two terms are positively advanced, not as an articulation, but as linked by an internal necessary within a single, self-sealing totality. From this perspective I want to discuss, first, the hollowing out of democracy at the very moment of its so-called apotheosis; second, the way the transnational diffusion and flow of power, in contemporary forms of Western-dominated economic, financial, and cultural globalization, short-circuits and undermines even the limited countervailing powers won in the nation-state era; and third, how the emergence of „difference" in every sphere of life subverts and undermines the basic but unspoken assumption of cultural and social homogeneity that underwrites optimal definitions of liberal democracy, piercing the very heart of the concept.

Pluralization and fragmentation of the social and political field are well-advanced features of late modern Western societies. This does not mean that there are no centers of power or that the great inequalities of power, resources, and privilege that used to pass under the general category of „class" have ceased to exist. In most Western societies, the inequality gap between the haves and the have-nots has widened significantly even in the most recent period of sustained economic growth. This is now a constitutive feature of Western „success", and has occurred, of course, in tandem with a parallel trend on the global stage. But the complexities of modern technology, the specialization of labor markets, the advanced character of the division of labor, the expansion of „the political" multiplying the sites of antagonism and diffusing the centers where the operative decisions that affect our lives are taken, are not only, to different degrees in different developed societies, the fate of „late modernity" but have deep consequences for the „settled" forms of citizenship and democratic participation arrived at by the middle of the 20th century. The pluralization of social antagonism and the production of new subjects have, we would argue, positive potential for the struggles to widen political participation and for the deepening of democratic life. But their immediate effect is dislocating: the loss of effectivity and distinctiveness by the old ideologies that articulated different social interests and hegemonized the ideological field, and the waning or ossification of the political parties that were the principal articulating points of mediation and contestation between popular consent in a representative system and the system of governmentality.

Though by no means concluded, I would argue that not the deepening of democratic contestation but the *hollowing* out of liberal democracy has been its principal tendency. In the absence of more developed political ideologies, populism, the market, and different versions of nationalism provide, in principle, articulating grounds. Populism — the use of „the people" as an empty signifier to conflate into a single „big tent" interests that are different and antagonistic — is, of course, especially attractive because it simultaneously replicates and supplants the more democratic alternative it replaces. The people and the popular are such near-cousins, such seductive synonyms, that the sleight of hand involved is hardly perceptible. The second articulating principle is the way market freedom now condenses metonymically every kind of freedom. Why bother with the difficult process of articulating alliances, constructing subjects, and winning political representation when, in our detotalized individuality, we can instantly participate through immediate consumption, or even by a mouse click, in the big „free" bazaar of life? One tiny indicator of the growing „marketization" of social life in Britain, which must here be my main source of examples, is the way the specification of professions, knowledge, expertise, and role is dissolved by the acid of equivalence of „the consumer". We no longer have teachers and students, doctors and patients, social workers and clients, local administrators and citizens, but the all-encompassing *consumer.* My prime minister, confronting the crisis in public education — a „democratic" issue if ever there was one — declared all public-sector workers, including teachers, to be „the forces of conservatism", then, in a more positive vein, encouraged them to boost their confidence by thinking of themselves as „social entrepreneurs" and to acquire something of the status currently enjoyed by „businessmen". This is a telltale symptom of that larger movement which has brought about the collapse of the very idea of „the public", the cynicism which greets the idea that economic ministers making judgments about „competition" should take a wider „public interest" into account, and of course the remorseless drive to „privatization".

The evidence of what we call the short-circuiting of democratic contestation and accountability is overwhelming: the centralization of executive power, even within the so-called parliamentary system, coupled with the erosion of local government and local democracy; the managerialist style of governance, with the country run like a private corporation with the prime minister as its CEO and elect-

ions as occasional meetings of an emasculated body of shareholders; the expansion of an entrepeneurial style of governance, where government functions and departments are increasingly „outsourced" or converted into agencies, with no clear line of accountability, and public servants are recommended to entrepreneurialize their practice and „take ownership" of policy.

Critics who question whether the neoliberal revolution initiated by Mrs. Thatcher in Britain had real practical effects on the governance of the country rarely take account of the role played by American-style management ideology as „the vanishing mediator" in the relay between ideology and practice. Then there is the „mediatization" of politics which, in the present era, has reached a new intensity. I refer to the massive manipulation of public opinion and consent by the swollen echelon of political public relations and focus-group polling; the way special-interest lobbying outweighs the cumbersome practices of public argument; the consistent adaptation of policy to the agendas of the media, which become a more authentic ventriloquizing „voice" for „the people" than the people themselves; and, in the UK certainly, the obsessive use of „spin", which some regard as a mere surface affliction, but which, in the context of the Third Way — determined to square every circle and triangulate every social interest — is profoundly endemic to the system. Finally, there is the drift of liberal, democratic politics to the „radical center", a vacuous concept in itself as even Third Way supporters themselves can see, with its Third Way commitment to a politics „beyond left and right", a politics, as Chantal Mouffe has argued, without antagonism, without enemies — that is to say, a politics without politics: politics as a management technology. Despite various strategies of social amelioration and redistribution by stealth, my government is remorselessly opposed, ideologically, to redistribution *as an idea* — and hence cannot provide a range of deprived and dispossessed groups more generally with an articulating theme or construct a constituency for it.

All of this is, to a very real extent, the consequence internally of the new-liberal orthodoxy as a so-called public philosophy and the advance of transnational global techno- and financial capitalism. It is underpinned by the profound belief that neoliberal forms of globalization are „inevitable": like Fate, they can only be obeyed. The role of government is, therefore, to help create the conditions for private capital to prosper, to pursue at home those privatizing and deregulative strategies calculated to make the nation more competitive in the global environment, to ease the path of transnational capital, and, most particularly, to educate and tutor its citizens to adapt to the new cold climate, to adapt to the logic of market forces, by removing the „disincentives" posed by universal forms of welfare; to encourage the two-thirds who are prospering to make private provision for life's vicissitudes — birth, parenting, education, health insurance, insurance against redundancy in „flexible" labor markets, retirement, care in old age, and death — and to drive down to its lowest level the threshold of the „residuum," who must be rigorously means-tested to receive aid and are invited, US-style, as rapidly as possible, to wean themselves from the infantilism of „welfare dependency". I know that the UK's favoring of the American model of what Michael Walzer calls Liberalism 1 over the more European social-market model, while of course wanting to „play its full part in Europe" — the Third Way always wants to have its cake and eat it — may distort my perspective. Things may not yet be so bad in your neck of the woods, but I am sure this is a nightmare coming your way.

I want to say less, because more is known and more already said, about the impact on liberal democracy as „the only coherent conception of political freedom around the globe" of what the Documenta11 briefing calls „the neoliberal globalist onslaught" and the forces of transnational global capitalism. I focus on one aspect — some consequences for democracy unrealized.

One can see why a Western-driven globalization prefers to operate where liberal democracies have been established. Foreign investment, the transnational movement of finance capital, technology, and corporate bases work best where there is stability of sociopolitical conditions, and where governments that are required to collaborate and be complicit with global penetration have the legitimacy of popular consent. Dictatorships are notoriously unstable; human rights abuses by authoritarian regimes give the international corporations that are taking competitive advantage of divergent labor market conditions a bad name and can stimulate international mobilization. New technologies, labor patterns, cultural models work best where there is a sympathetic basic value orientation toward change, innovation, and modernity: they work best where societies have political systems whose orientation, modes of operation, and basic values are symbiotic with Western ones. Modern mass production and mass marketing on a global scale require indigenization: the local settings must be ones in which the logic of market forces has been socially embedded and culturally internalized. Where nonliberal democratic forms of popular mobilization occur — ultranationalist, theocratic, ethnic, racial, or charismatic — they tend to be anti-Western, antimodernity, and opposed to globalization's free play. In the drive to transform society in Eastern Europe, liberal democracy and the market have been indivisibly linked, dismantling both authoritarian forms of politics and state-oriented economics. In the developing world, the neoliberal tide requires the dismantling of barriers and regulative checks once considered protectively essential to the project of nation-building that characterized the first phase of the postindependence and postcolonial projects.

Increasingly, the transnational exercise of economic and cultural power is beyond the reach of democratic systems limited by the nation-state and has effectively escaped democratic regulation at the global level. How can relatively weak and hard-pressed new nations bargain, with any semblance of equality, with the overdeveloped Western powers, the bases from within which transnational global capitalism operates? How can developing nations, whose futures depend on acquiring the technology and „know-how" of the New Economy, and finding a niche in increasingly free-trade, unregulated financial, commodity, service, media, and cultural markets, find the space to work out some balanced solution between „tradition" and „modernity" in their respective cultures, in the face of the homogenizing cultural assault? I am not so cynical to believe that all international organizations are merely a convenient cover for the free play of American imperializing interests. I know that some developing countries have tried to use what muscle they have in these global forums to win some advantages for the poorer peoples of the earth. But, far from constituting an embryonic transnational regulatory system, they have been dominated by Western interests and the engines driving through a particular version of globalization — deregulating and dismantling the barriers and inhibitions to technological and cultural penetration, imposing structural adjustment programs that intervene directly in the balance of social forces, insisting on free-trade terms that expose fragile markets, using advanced technologies and the Western patent system to destroy local enterprise and social-service provision, for instance, making subsistence farmers totally dependent for seed on Western agrobusiness and blocking the distribution of cheaper generic drugs to poor peoples devastated by HIV and other diseases and chronic infections.

I want to comment on only one aspect of this scenario. Liberal democracy took root in and remains embedded within what David Held calls „a fixed and bounded territorial conception of political community"[8] — the nation-state. Of course, as we have all learned from Immanuel Wallerstein, capitalism as a worldsystem benefited from the extraordinary interdependence and complicated tensions between the growing international capitalist market and the nation-states, and the trend toward national autonomy and the trend toward globalization are both rooted in modernity. Liberal democracy took advantage of this tension to win space and reforms within the political arena of particular nation-states which could not at that stage be generalized across the world-system. Until very recently, it has been within nation-states that the struggles to expand the sphere of representation have been

conducted, and the nation-state, not primarily international law, that has been the guarantor of civic and citizens rights. It is rarely recalled that Article 3 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen (1789) reads, „The principle of all sovereignty lies essentially in the nation; no group, no individual may have any authority that does not expressly proceed from it."

However, as power increasingly flows „across, around, and over territorial boundaries", „the neat correspondence between national territory, sovereignty, political space, and the democratic political community" is disrupted.[9] It is not (yet) the case that the powerful nation-states are disappearing. It is hard to see any strengthening of the international regulatory system which does not have nation-states as key players in the process of reform. However, their „reach" has been curtailed, their capacity to insulate themselves from the cold winds of global forces and influences is greatly diminished, their capacity to sustain sovereign national economies, polities, cultures uncontaminated by global power is profoundly transformed. In addition, they are busy reorienting themselves, their political structures and economic goals, toward success within a wider globalizing horizon. Even within the serious limits of liberal democracy, this is the source of a growing „democratic deficit" on a world scale.

Here I want only to note a troubling ambivalence, which brings us to our last main area. In his recent overview of the logic of globalization, Fredric Jameson notes that although „nation-states today remain the only concrete terrain and framework for political struggle", any temptation to secede from the global system in order to protect oneself from its worst effects seems to provide a counterpoint „where a nationalist politics might rear its head"[10]. In fact, as we have hinted, the many varieties of nationalism, racism, xenophobia, and fundamentalism that have reemerged center stage to global politics are often, in part (though I would argue not exclusively) responses to — reactions against, even — the pressure of a modernizing globalization. Many are the symptoms of a failed nationalist project in hostile international circumstances or of a failed modernization. Many are not all entirely antimodernity but instead, Janus-like, mix past and future in highly unstable amalgamations — combining a search for mythic origins in an invented tradition with a ruthless competition to secure nation-state status in the global power stakes at the very moment when the star of the nation-state is waning. This is the case with Balkan nationalisms and, for example, in the way modernism and traditionalism are combined in the current claims of the Hindu fundamentalists in India. But this would be to suggest that every form of resistance which has to make use of the nation-state space is by definition backward and reactionary — which is to suggest that it has a universally fixed political content, itself a form of „fundamentalism". Also, it implies the binary contrast between „them", who are still prey to irrational and antimodern impulses, and „us", who are thoroughly „modern". I cannot hope to resolve the complex issues of strategies of resistance here. I have only to say that when, during the Asian crisis, President Mahatia of Malaysia suspended all currency exchanges, or if the president of South Africa were now to consciously break international drug-patent law in the name of national survival, these are „nationalist" reprises I can live with. And to note, on the other hand, in the advanced democracies the resistance to a more cosmopolitan outlook — to the increasingly mixed character of our populations and more culturally diverse claims on citizenship — that frequently takes the form of a profoundly „fundamentalist" reaction, an attempt to demonize the strangers in our midst, to close the doors of the culture and to climb back into an embattled and defensive little nationalism, with its clear racist, xenophobic, and culturally differential supplements. This is now evident everywhere in Europe, and is the underlying source of that gut-Europhobia that now afflicts the British soul.

Globalization is not directly responsible for what the Documenta11 briefing calls „the large-scale displacements and immigration that today are reshaping the face of once stable societies" and the „widened horizon of notions of citizenship" this has produced. But it is one of globalization's unintended consequences, in a larger sense. Postwar, it begins with the movements of national independence

and wars of national liberation that triggered decolonization; and has been greatly intensified by the unofficial opening up of borders and boundaries due to a host of factors: globalization itself and the push and pull of economic opportunities; poverty, immiseration, unemployment, and structural underdevelopment; political and military coups, tribal and ethnic conflicts, civil wars; natural disasters or environmental catastrophes like drought, floods, erosion, global warming, and climate and ecological change; more recently „ethnic cleansing," racism, and xenophobia; and across all that, the unsponsored movement of peoples in search of better times.

I want to consider briefly two ideal-typical responses to the demands for, on the one hand, equality, social justice, and inclusion, and on the other hand, for inclusion and the recognition of difference. The first response is essentially *assimilationist*. This can be practiced in weaker and stronger forms, with a tolerant acceptance that the process will take time or the aggressive insistence that foreigners and strangers must either conform to the majority culture and embrace the universal liberal values of modernity or „go back home". But either way, the idea that national identity is not fixed eternally in the myths of historical time but is always a moving feast, constantly being historically redefined, or the recognition that the presence of multicultural differences obliges a society to expand, transform, and enlarge the boundaries and definitions of citizenship and the national community, are strongly resisted. Mr. Hague, the leader of the opposition in the UK, recently described a Britain that is strongly integrated into Europe, hospitable and open to foreigners, welcoming to refugees and asylum seekers, and willing to renegotiate the boundaries of national belonging as fast becoming „a foreign country", alienated from itself. A profound assimilationism is the foundation stone of the revival of nationalist and racist movements and sentiment in Europe, providing the silent legitimation for widespread, if less vocal, forms of national exclusionism, racism, and cultural differentialism, which are more popular today than politicians are willing to acknowledge. The second response is what its enemies call *multiculturalism*, though we know in fact that this is a highly contested term and that there are many varieties which conceive difference in more open, inclusive, and interdependent ways. I am referring to the strongly pluralist conception of difference we find in some versions of „multiculturalism", which not only acknowledge the world significance of different cultural and religious traditions and recognize the strength of religious, cultural, linguistic, and other differences, but regard these as making „cultures" into organic, indivisible „wholes", which saturate entire communities, subordinating individuals to communally sanctioned forms of life exclusively on the basis of their membership within, as it were, a hierarchically arranged pecking order.

One sees here two extreme cases of the struggle between universalism and particularism which has a special salience for the debate about liberal democracy as a global project. The values of liberalism have historically been aligned with those of „modernity". As such, though they were deeply embedded in particular cultures and historical circumstances, they have been re-presented as the sign of universality itself and, in that form, used to insist on assimilation, „trumping" all cultural particularisms. The surmounting of the particularist threshold is often represented as liberal democracy's principal achievement and it is on that basis that it is seen as the necessary precondition for global modernization. From this perspective, all those who resist its universal appeal are represented as permanently mired in tradition and particularity. Thus the world struggle for liberal democracy assumes the form of a sacred struggle between the universalism of the West as the new global orthodoxy and the particularism of the rest.

But as Ernesto Laclau has cogently argued in *Emancipation(s)* and elsewhere, a logic of pure difference is only a viable strategy where an identity wants nothing from, and is not constitutively related to, any other identity. This is logically difficult to sustain, since all identity is constituted with reference to a lack — to that other which is not the same, from which „sameness" must differentiate itself. One cannot, as Laclau says, affirm an identity without also affirming the wider context which establishes

the ground of its difference, or without the constitutive role of power which effects the exclusion that at any point marks off the sameness of an identity from the difference of its others. This of course entails a very particular conception of difference: not the binary of fixed difference that treats ethnicities or cultures as integral „wholes," but what Derrida calls the „logic of *différance*" — „the playing movement that ‚produces'… these differences, these effects of difference," the weave of differences that refuse to separate into fixed binary oppositions, where „every concept [or meaning] is inscribed in a chain… within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences".[11] Identity can only be conceived through difference — present, as it were, only differentially, through its absence. As Laclau puts it, „all differential identity will be constitutively split; it will be the crossing point between the logic of difference and the logic of equivalence".[12] It is difficult to claim equal rights if one is only different from other groups and does not also share something with them which is the basis for the expansion of the claim. A pure logic of equivalence is the abolition of all difference. A „pure logic of difference" can be the basis only of a system of social apartheid and ethnic cleansing. To avoid this, the right to difference „has to be asserted within the global community — that is within a space in which that particular group has to coexist with other groups," which could not be possible „without some shared universal values, without a sense of belonging to a community larger than each of the particular groups in question".[13] If this is not to restore a universalism of the liberal variety, which zooms down from outer space and trumps every particular, it can only be by the recognition of the necessity of living with difference; by continually expanding the *opening to the other* — a reaching from within the particular toward some wider horizon, without the consolidation of some final closure. Universalization in this open sense „condemns all identity to an unavoidable hybridization, but hybridization does not necessarily mean decline through the loss of identity; it can also mean empowering existing identities through the opening of new possibilities".[14] We are dealing with an indeterminate notion of identity and what Chantal Mouffe has called an „agonistic" conception of democracy.

Laclau has argued that, for a minority group to affirm only the identity that it has at that moment, is to confirm its permanent marginalization: „If, on the other hand, it struggles to change its location within the community and to break with its situation of marginalization, it has to engage in a plurality of political initiatives" which not only expands the political field of contestation radically, but transforms that identity itself, taking it „beyond the limits defined by its present identity".[15] If the spheres of antagonism and democratic contestation are widened and multiplied, „universalism as a horizon is expanded at the same time as its necessary attachment to a particular content is broken".[16] That is why — though I cannot replicate the complexities of Laclau's argument here — he insists that democracy as a horizon has no specific or fixed content, since its content and field will change as it is expanded with each attempt to generalize or „universalize" it to wider spheres of application. Like the universal, it is „an always receding horizon resulting from the expansion of an indefinite chain of equivalent demands".[17] Since its role is to bring about this agonistic mediation between particularity and universalism, „there is no content that is a priori destined to fill it and it is open to the most diverse articulations. But this means that the ‚good' articulation, the one that would finally suture the link between universal task and concrete historical forces, will never be found and that all partial victory will always take place against a background of an ultimate unsurpassable impossibility".[18] This is democracy's status as what Laclau calls „an empty signifier."

Democracy in either its liberal or more radical varieties has traditionally counterposed equality to difference, and political theory has been fixated by the impassable barrier between them. What the new situation seems to require is the development of a new articulation, a new political logic. The presence of the stranger presents democracy with this radically new double demand: for equality and social justice and for the recognition of difference, neither existing in a pure state, both qualifying and modifying the other in a ceaseless struggle. Far from marking the apotheosis of democracy itself,

this eruption of difference at its center points to the depth of the transformations democracy — the promise of freedom and equality — has yet undergone and the struggles to come.

I am aware that I have altogether neglected to address how these considerations bear on the issues that most preoccupy Documenta11. I want to do so but only in a concluding footnote. I have spent the recent months working on the text for a selection of photographic images produced by forty contemporary photographers from the margins of the West. They are part of a dynamic creative drive that emerged in the mid-1980s from outside the cultural and artistic mainstream, fueled by the demand to bring their objective conditions and subjective experiences into the frame, to give the invisible visibility and to open a „third space" in cultural representation. This work, which is intensely varied, does not explicitly address political questions, but is preoccupied with its own „differences" and was driven by what was called at the time „the search for identity". What is quite extraordinary about this work is that it is *not* the product of what one might call „identity politics": it is about, and at the same time subverts, identity. It recognizes that we all come from somewhere, speak from some place, are multiply positioned and in that sense „located". But in its many different ways, it refuses to be rendered motionless by place, origin, race, color, or ethnicity. It knows that identity is always constructed within, not outside, representation and uses the symbolic space of the image to explore, construct, and at the same time go beyond identity. It is in some radical sense postidentity without being beyond the reach of its effects. It arises at the overdetermined space where different differences overlap and intersect. It is preoccupied with staging the self only in a way that is „open to the other". It represents a new kind of vernacular cosmopolitanism". It eschews — thank goodness — any reference to political theory. But within its own symbolic time and space, it anticipates what Julia Kristeva calls the recognition of the fact that we are always „strangers to ourselves".

Stuart Hall. Democracy, Globalization, and Difference. In: Okwui Enwezor, Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, Octavio Zaya (ed.): Democracy Unrealized. Documenta11_Platform1. Hatje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern-Ruit. 2002, pp. 21-35.

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