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Errant Counterpublics
'Solidarność' and the Politics of the Weak

ABSTRACT: The essay discusses the notion of counterpublics in the context of the creation of the Solidarność labour union in Poland in 1980. The proposed reading of these events not only offers a feminist recontextualization against the grain of Western liberal triumphalism, but furthermore explores the implications of postcolonial thought for the analysis of the recent history of a Central European country as well as for the discussion concerning the public spheres of the excluded and marginalized. The thought of Eduard Glissant, as well as that of Gloria Anzaldua and Gayatri Spivak, allows for a rethinking of these events and theories in a global perspective, thus facilitating a universalizing practice based on a particular, localized experience.

KEYWORDS: Counterpublics; Counterpublic; Commons; Public sphere; Solidarność; Deleuze, Gilles; Guattari, Félix; Wallerstein, Immanuel; Rancière, Jacques

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> The cyborg incarnation is
> outside salvation history.
>
> Donna Haraway, *Cyborg Manifesto*

> It was not long ago that Poland's name echoed
> throughout the whole civilized world, that its
> fate stirred every soul and provoked excitement
> in every heart. Lately one no longer hears very
> much about Poland – since Poland is a capitalist
> country. Do we now want to know what became
> of the old rebel, where historic destiny steered it?
>
> Rosa Luxemburg, *The Industrial
> Development of Poland* [1898]

> Errant, he challenges and discards the universal.
>
> Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*

This chapter follows the unfolding of a particular event in recent Polish history — the beginnings of the 'Solidarność' movement (1980–81)

— as a transformation of the public sphere by weak, non-heroic, and errant counterpublics. In the following pages I discuss the early days of 'Solidarność' as non-Western, transversal, and emancipatory counterpublics, thus allowing decolonial and feminist arguments. I address theories of Jürgen Habermas, Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, and Nancy Fraser in order to build the notion of counterpublics, and notions of errantry, *mestisaje* and territory, developed by such authors as Édouard Glissant, Gloria Anzaldúa, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari. The work conducted here can be seen as a search for new, transversal political theoretical tools crossing geopolitical borders, as well as overcoming the limitations caused by gender and class inequalities. Jacques Rancière's theory of disagreement is a vital element of this effort. The concept of 'errant counterpublics' suggested here is a result of analysing these theoretical possibilities in connection to a particular political mobilization.

1. ERRANT AS IN POWERLESS

In the famous essay 'Power of the Powerless' by Václav Havel, the Czech dissident and later also president of his country, a description of the former Eastern Bloc is proposed. It allows a reading of 'Solidarność' as a non-heroic and yet radical event, leading to a concept of 'errant counterpublics'. Havel offers 'an examination of the potential of the "powerless"' and argues that it 'can only begin with an examination of the nature of power in the circumstances in which these powerless people operate'.[1] He depicts the existing communist system around 1978 as so overwhelming that nothing can be done within its norms and structures, and a sense of 'dissent' so strong that it needs to be expressed. In the opening paragraph Havel paraphrases the first lines of the *Communist Manifesto*:

> A spectre is haunting Eastern Europe: the spectre of what in the West is called "dissent." This spectre has not appeared out of thin air. It is a natural and inevitable consequence of the present historical phase of the system it is haunting. It was born at a time when this system, for a thousand reasons, can no longer

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1   Václav Havel, 'Power of the Powerless', trans. by Paul Wilson, *International Journal of Politics*, 15.3–4 (Fall/Winter 1985–86), pp. 23–96 (p. 23).

base itself on the unadulterated, brutal, and arbitrary applica-
tion of power, eliminating all expressions of nonconformity.
What is more, the system has become so ossified politically
that there is practically no way for such nonconformity to be
implemented within its official structures.[2]

Havel depicts the world as governed by two superpowers, possessing
claims to historical and ideological legitimacy, which do not need any
'heroic' confirmations. He argues that the Eastern Bloc has a very tacit
and indirect way of inducing its main principles on the population: 'if
an atmosphere of revolutionary excitement, heroism, dedication, and
boisterous violence on all sides characterizes classical dictatorships,
then the last traces of such an atmosphere have vanished from the
Soviet bloc.'[3] Because of these characteristics of the Soviet Bloc, Havel
decides to call it a 'post-totalitarian system'. He suggests a certain
automatism whereby both ordinary citizens and state rulers function
in a completely mechanical way. The image of a greengrocer suddenly
contesting the *status quo* — central for Havel's essay — is not one of
heroic bravery. It comes as a refusal to present a political slogan in the
window and is depicted as 'a threat to the system not because of any
physical or actual power he had, but because his action went beyond
itself, because it illuminated its surrounding'.[4] Living in truth becomes
Havel's formula for a possible political agency in the deheroicized post-
totalitarian system: 'every free expression of life indirectly threatens
the post-totalitarian system politically.'[5] Havel argues that the political
confrontation does not happen between two superpowers in 1968, nor
in the movement around Charta 77. The political power is with the
state apparatus, the people do not have it. This causes a paradoxical
tendency for a far greater political effectivity on the side of ordinary
people, rather than professional politicians.

   Such investment of all political power on the side of the sovereign
is a very typical element of contemporary radical political theory. In
the works of Giorgio Agamben, Slavoj Žižek, and Louis Althusser, the
state apparatus is 'fully operational' all the time, while those submitted

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2   Ibid.
3   Ibid., p. 27.
4   Ibid., p. 40.
5   Ibid., p. 43.

to it are deprived of any power and it is logically impossible to imagine them having any political agency at all. In *Who Sings the Nation-State?*, Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak challenge this one-sided image of political agency, demonstrating that the oppressed and excluded actually generate potential for resistance.[6] In her discussion of Agamben's political theory, Butler stresses the importance of understanding life as political always, even under the restrictive measures of the sovereign. She argues:

> We can argue that the very problem is that life has become separated from the political (i.e. conditions of citizenship), but that formulation presumes that politics and life join only and always on the question of citizenship and, so, restricts the entire domain of bio-power in which questions of life and death are determined by other means.[7]

I believe that there are two important parts of her argument, one insisting on the inclusion of elements of the embodied social life, such as gender or ethnicity/race, in the realm of the political, and another, not detached from the first one, implying that life cannot be stripped of politics even as a bare life (Butler asks, whether life can be bare at all). Thus the notion of biopolitics seems impossible to combine with the concept of *homo sacer*. And what follows is that the very idea of stripping someone from all political agency is simply unthinkable, although the agency remaining after the sovereign's violent execution of his power might be weak, passive, or minimal.

Similarly, Antonio Negri's and Michael Hardt's theory of empire opens ways for the multitude to act even in the conditions of misery and exploitation.[8] In Jacques Rancière's meticulous depiction of French proletarians in the nineteenth century, we witness the same shift of power.[9] My reading of Havel is directly inspired by these authors and their reading of oppositional political agency as coming

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6   Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2007), p. 40.

7   Ibid., pp. 39–40.

8   Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *The Commonewalth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

9   Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. by Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

not just from the structures of existing power, but also from the oppressed. Differently from Havel however, I think that these weak acts of resistance can sometimes lead to massive social mobilizations and political changes, and that they should not be seen as detached from one another, but rather as interconnected.

In Havel's words, genuine politics should happen on the level of 'life'. This sounds strikingly similar to the preoccupation of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge with the lived experience of proletarians in their theory of proletarian counter public spheres, published in 1972.[10] Havel's essay was written in 1978, it was smuggled to Poland in 1979, and in 1980, it performed the fantastic task of inspiring political opposition. Zbigniew Bujak, one of the key figures of the 'Solidarność' workers' unions, emphasizes the importance of Havel's text for the making of 'Solidarność' in 1980. He remembers it in rather heroic terms:

> Then came the essay by Havel. Reading it gave us the theoretical underpinnings for our activity. It maintained our spirits; we did not give up, and a year later — in August 1980 — it became clear that the party apparatus and the factory management were afraid of us. We mattered. And the rank and file saw us as leaders of the movement. When I look at the victories of Solidarity, and of Charter 77, I see in them an astonishing fulfilment of the prophecies and knowledge contained in Havel's essay.[11]

The management could not possibly be afraid of the workers. It had all the means necessary to stop their fight. Instead, what finally happened is a new constellation, a new assembly allowing more dialogical and experimental forms of agency. The direct cause for the strike on 15 August 1980 at the Shipyard in Gdańsk was the firing of Anna Walentynowicz, a crane operator respected and liked by many other workers, just three months before her retirement. Other factors were the rise of food prices and the workers' general sense of disempowerment on the level of their work conditions and their very limited

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10 Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, trans. by Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel, and Assenka Oksiloff (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

11 Zbigniew Bujak in Václav Havel, *Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965–1990*, ed. by Paul Wilson (New York: Knopf, 1991), p. 126.

possibilities of expressing dissent. It was a solidarity strike already in the sense of supporting a colleague and speaking up about basic daily matters. It should be remembered that at that time some 30% of the shipyard workers were women. It would be hard to say how many of them actually stayed in the shipyard for the two weeks of the strike that came later, but definitely many did. The workers of other professions, nurses and local transport drivers in particular, decided to back the Shipyard. What happened later was an avalanche of events, which I will discuss as the making of a proletarian, errant counterpublic.

2. ERRANT AS IN DECOLONIAL AND HETEROTOPIC

Connecting the postcolonial (or, more generally, the history of colonization) and the post-socialist or former East still seems extravagant or new. In most writings making such connection, an article from the year 2001 is quoted.[12] However, there are theories and entire paradigms that draw large-scale comparisons between the history of colonization and the development of Eastern Europe and there also exist direct encounters between individual representatives of these otherwise distant locations and contexts.

Several authors from Eastern Europe use postcolonial theories as a comparative context with the Soviet presence in their countries – politically, it leads to particularly strong anti-communist consequences, like in the work of Mykoła Riabczuk concerning Ukraine.[13] For others, the postcolonial references are necessary to depict Central Europe as a space in-between. Maria Janion analyses Polish history as one of a double experience of being colonized and colonizing, in the process of Christianization (around the year 1000, Christianity came to Poland, first as a conquest, then also as a more peaceful process, and it was spread in later centuries to the East) and industrialization.[14] These analyses emphasize the particularly perplexing routes of colonial processes, therefore shifting the usually linear postcolonial critique into a

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12   David C. Moore, 'Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique', *PMLA*, 116.1 (2001), pp. 111–28.

13   Mykoła Riabczuk, *Ukraina. Syndrom postkolonialny* (Warszawa: Kolegium Europy Wschodniej im. Jana Nowaka-Jeziorańskiego, 2014).

14   Maria Janion, *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2006).

more rhizomatic one. And these approaches seem particularly inspiring and similar to the task of my own project.

In his *Poetics of Relation*, Édouard Glissant emphasizes the importance of 'the thinking of errantry and totality (relational, dialectical)'.[15] This way of combining the systemic dialectics and the antisystemic rhizomatic logics builds a particularly inspiring semantics that makes it possible to unpack the political mobilization of 'Solidarność' in Poland in 1980 without assimilating it to the West. It also enables a shift from an assimilative strategy of subsuming this mobilization as monolithic into a genuinely hybrid event with elements not only coming from different origins, but also never blending in an effort to become one.

Nomadism as presented by Glissant does not have happy and innocent roots. In the conquest, even the voyage — as in Homer's epics — there is an oppressive aspect, which errantry can escape. Between the slave ships and the forced stabilization of the Blacks suddenly transformed into mere commodities by the colonizers, we should imagine the brutalized 'arrowlike nomadism'.[16] Postcolonial thought and politics thus appear as a reactive force, directed at some uncertain prospect of reconciliation via the revisiting of the 'roots'. Errantry on the other hand, is neither renunciation nor frustration about the supposedly deterritorialized origins.[17] It is multilingual, as any relation, Glissant argues further.[18] It is discussed in relation to the famous notion of rhizome, which Deleuze and Guattari propose as an alternative to that of the root, one, which 'is not one', which has no centralized structure, and in which all elements matter. In Glissant, errantry is the 'poetics of relation'. What is perhaps most paradoxical, is the relation between the errant and totality: it is a dialectical relationship, in which claims are maintained and at the same time contradicted, in which the universal is at the same time particularized, and the individual shaped in relation. Such relationality, dialectics understood not as imposition of binary, petrified oppositions, but as a (historical and materialized) process of overcoming what at a given moment appears as contradiction, seems

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15   Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. by Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), p. 18.
16   Ibid., pp. 11 and 5.
17   Ibid., p. 18.
18   Ibid., p. 19.

to be the essence of errantry. It is not guided by a concept of progress, rather by one of liberation or emancipation.

This kind of dialectics is actually quite typical for any form of decolonial thinking. Unlike postcolonial theory, in which the exposure of exclusion and its possibly never ending repercussions is always undermining any possibility of emancipatory projects, critical discourse, and/or reparative action, decolonial theory aims at legitimizing and projecting ways of building an alternative. The decolonial project is therefore similar to the concept of utopia, but leaning towards heterotopia, an alternative based on the existing norms of the often compliant and deeply non-utopian reality. Foucault depicted heterotopia as follows:

> There are also, and probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places, actual places, places that are designed into the very institution of society, which are sorts of actually realized utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements that can be found within the culture are, at the same time, represented, contested, and reversed, sorts of places that are outside of all places, although they are actually localizable. […]
>
> The heterotopia has the ability to juxtapose in a single real place several emplacements that are incompatible in themselves.[19]

Such a multiplicity of spaces is something that decolonial theorists also emphasize and juxtapose to the linear vision of the 'first, second, and third world' as well as to the supposed clarity of the dialectics. This does not necessarily mean rejecting Hegelianism entirely, however the notions of progress or development, central for the dialectics, are questioned or openly undermined. A great example of the vision of 'decolonial subjectivity' built on contradictions can be found in Gloria Anzaldúa, who often explicitly claimed unity in resistance and integrity in struggle: 'Who, me, confused? Ambivalent? Not so. Only your labels

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19   Michel Foucault, 'Different Spaces', trans. by Robert Hurley, in *Foucault, Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, ed. by Paul Rabinow, 3 vols (New York: New Press, 1998–2001), II: *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. by James D. Faubion (1998), pp. 175–85 (pp. 178 and 181).

split me'.[20] This sentence and Anzaldua's theory of *mestizaje* are a non-linear, unruly form of political agency, overcoming contradictions in a labour of emancipation. This seems to be a legitimate depiction of the lived experience of someone inhabiting a heterotopic space 'laden with qualities, a space that may also be haunted by fantasy'.[21] The intense and mixed spaces combined with the contradictory biographies unable to stretch and form a straight line tend to silence certain subjectivities, as Gayatri Spivak has shown, discussing the Subject of the West.[22]

3. ERRANT AS IN SEMI-PERIPHERAL

The beginnings of 'Solidarność' are in many ways twisted and erratic. They contain some major 'errors', such as an effective political mobilization of workers, women included, counting some ten million participants in a supposedly backwards country in Central Europe – all these are unforeseen elements in classical theories of the public sphere. As an early element of the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, which Claus Offe rightly characterized as a-theoretical, they did not bring much theory and perhaps they could not.[23] They have brought however an exciting plethora of erratic, iconoclastic, and contradictory effects, resulting in building one of the most exciting proletarian counterpublics in history.

In the 1950s and 60s, the Warsaw historical school of Witold Kula and Marian Malowist developed comparative studies of South American and Eastern European development in Early Modern times, highlighting not only dependence on the West but also a system of colonial relations with the East, that preserved some key elements of the feudal system much longer than in the West, blocking the development of industrial capitalism and/or constituting these regions of the world as providing supplementary resources for the West.[24] Their theory of dependency was later continued by Immanuel Wallerstein in his world-

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20   Gloria Anzaldúa, 'La Prieta', in *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, ed. by AnaLouise Keating (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 38–50 (p. 46).

21   Foucault, 'Different Spaces', p. 177.

22   Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

23   Claus Offe, 'Capitalism by Democratic Design? Democratic Theory Facing the Triple Transition in East Central Europe', *Social Research*, 71.3 (2004), pp. 501–28 (p. 503).

24   Przemysław Wielgosz, 'Od zacofania i spowrotem. Wprowadzenie do ekonomii politycznej peryferyjnego miasta przemysłowego', in *Futuryzm miast przemysłowych*, ed.

system theory, where the concept of semi-periphery appears in 1976.[25] In Wallerstein's view, the semi-periphery's basic characteristics are: trying to become a part of the core, making all efforts not to be seen as periphery, and being kept in an in-between position while being constantly lured with promises of joining the centre soon. Poland is enumerated as one, along Argentine and Brazil.

From its beginnings, the concept of 'semi-periphery' signified a double function — that of being colonized and colonizing; depending and forcing others into dependency. It actually captures the majority of contemporary states struggling between development and/or crisis and marginalization. In world-system theory, the semi-peripheries are situated between the core countries and the peripheries, between the zones of 'concentrated high-profit, high-wage and high technology diversified production' and spaces of 'concentrated low-profit, low-technology, low-wage'.[26] Wallerstein argued that the semi-peripheries act like peripheries to the core countries and like central countries to the peripheral ones; they are also capable of taking more advantage from global economic crisis than the two other kinds of countries. Wallerstein emphasized: 'In moments of world economic downturn, semi-peripheral countries can usually expand control of their home market at the expense of core producers, and expand their access to *neighboring* peripheral markets, again at the expense of core producers.'[27] He also explained how semi-peripheries that are successful in transforming the economic crisis into their gain need to appropriate the gains of other semi-peripheries to their advantage. The closing sentence of the paragraph where these matters are discussed reads as follows: 'This is simply the state-level adaptation of the traditional "dog eat dog" workings of capitalism. This is *not* "development" but successful expropriation of world surplus'.[28]

by Martin Kaltwasser, Ewa Majewska, and Kuba Szreder (Kraków: Korporacja ha! Art, 2007), pp. 241–53.

25   Immanuel Wallerstein, 'Semi-Peripheral Countries and the Contemporary World Crisis', *Theory and Society*, 3.4 (Winter 1976), pp. 461–83.

26   Ibid., p. 462.

27   Ibid., p. 464.

28   Ibid., p. 466.

Wallerstein's analysis of the semi-peripheral countries in many ways differs from the famous definition of Central Europe formulated by Milan Kundera in his 1984 essay 'The Tragedy of Central Europe', which is still one of the most popular expressions of Eastern European identity. Kundera's definition is built on a metaphysical distinction between the cultural and the social, where culture is understood as a supposedly immaterial realm: 'The identity of a people and of a civilization is reflected and concentrated in what has been created by the mind — in what is known as "culture".'[29] Kundera emphasized that unlike Western Europeans, who seem to partly neglect the values of their tradition, Eastern Europeans are ready to 'die for Europe', as it was proven in all the actions of opposition against communism in Poland, Czechoslovakia, or Hungary between 1945 and 1990. It should be stressed that in the Marxist view presented by Wallerstein in *European Universalism* the precious 'universal' values of the West always prove to be particular or limited to the core countries and their inhabitants; they are constitutive of what Spivak aptly called the installation of the subject of the West as Subject.[30] Those who 'die for Europe' are therefore in fact victims of the ideological apparatus always presenting the West as central and Western values as the most compelling. Unfortunately, the majority of political and sociological analyses produced in the semi-peripheral countries seems to comply with what Wallerstein defined as 'European universalism' and the unquestioned beliefs both in the necessity of 'joining the West' and in doing so 'at any price'.[31]

The semi-peripheral is errant in the very general sense, that it is contradictory and incoherent, its development is not linear, there are feudal and neoliberal aspects in contemporary semi-peripheries, which exceed their counterparts in peripheries and central countries. Semi-peripheral histories proceed in jumps, not as regular progress and their allegiances can shift, just as their economies can suddenly fall. Such

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29   Milan Kundera, 'The Tragedy of Central Europe', *New York Review of Books*, 31.7 (26 April 1984), pp. 33-38.

30   See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271–313.

31   Immanuel Wallerstein, *European Universalism: The Rhetoric of Power* (New York: New Press, 2006).

errancy also allows sudden appearance of emancipation or utopia – as it did in Haiti (then Saint Domingue) in the early nineteenth century or in 1980 in Poland.

4. ERRANT AS IN ICONOCLASTIC, PLEBEIAN, AND FEMININE

The beginnings of 'Solidarność' and its structure are also somewhat perverse insofar as they offer a complete *détournement* of the traditional structures of power. As a directly democratic entity — produced without preoccupation with gender and class distinctions, private and public divide, hierarchies, etc. — it performed precisely the same function as iconoclasm does in the world of art. It is only logical that in history, which has always been written by the victors, a declaration of the oppressed has some iconoclastic value, as in it they would actually overcome the state of exception to which they are condemned, and they actually would produce a claim.

In his analysis of contemporary and historical forms of iconoclasm, W. J. T. Mitchell speaks about its two basic forms:

> [T]he first is the condemnation of idolatry as error, as stupidity, as false, deluded belief; the second is the darker judgment that the idolater actually *knows* that the idol is a vain, empty thing, but he continues to cynically exploit it for the purposes of power or pleasure. This is the perverse, sinful crime of idolatry. Thus, there are two kinds of idolaters — fools and knaves — and obviously considerable overlap and cooperation between the two kinds.[32]

For Mitchell, iconoclasm constitutes a vital element of contemporary politics, since even the war on terror started with an attack on symbols of the Western power — the Twin Towers in New York in 2001. The beginnings of 'Solidarność' in 1980 were iconoclastic in several ways. They were a scandalous demand to create independent workers' unions in a state that had declared itself communist (with state-run unions, which never questioned the institutional powers); they were a transformation of the public sphere performed predominantly by the

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32   W. J. T. Mitchell, 'Idolatry: Nietzsche, Blake and Poussin', in *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality*, ed. by Dick Houtman and Birgit Meyer (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), pp. 112–26 (p. 114).

proletarians, not by the bourgeoisie or 'intelligentsia'. They constituted a grassroots mobilization in a country governed in a centralized way. They were the first Polish massive political mobilization that started not only because of a woman (Anna Walentynowicz's firing made other workers of the Shipyard of Gdańsk begin the solidarity strike with her), but also because an excessively high quota of women were involved and recognized.

My line of thinking about 'Solidarność' was influenced by the work of Jacques Rancière, whose search for agency and autonomy of the French proletarians is an exceptional effort to localize political dissent outside of the social elites.[33] The workers, who decided to go on strike in 1980 Poland, and then united and engaged in a deliberative process of transforming the political order — not only in their work places, but also on the regional and later also national levels, starting on 15 August in the Shipyard in Gdansk — broke several principles of the public sphere's sanctified ideal, as it was defined by philosophers, from Aristotle until to Habermas and later. Their crucial 'offense' was perhaps that they not only entered the domain reserved for upper classes (or — in the supposedly classless Polish society of the time — social elites), sanctified by power position and privilege — the domain of the 'public' — but also that they actually made this public happen in the workplaces, which are – *par excellence* places of 'private' character in liberal political narrative. The public and private divide obviously was questioned by the state ideology of the People's Republic of Poland, but it was also rather well preserved in the social practice, especially after the hard Stalinist era, which ended around 1956.

Both in Aristotle, but to an important extent also in Habermas, labour is private, because it serves the task of sustaining basic needs. If an individual needs to provide this labour on their own, they do not belong to those, who have, as Aristotle aptly puts it, and as Rancière mercilessly criticized it, the freedom to engage in the public matters, in and the debate of the common good.[34] Such exclusivity of politics, later thematized by Rancière as the 'hatred of democracy', works on several levels:

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33   Rancière, *Disagreement*.

34   Jacques Rancière, *The Hatred of Democracy*, trans. by Steve Corcoran (London: Verso, 2014), p. 2. (my emphasis, E. M.).

> Indeed it is as old as democracy itself for a simple reason: the word itself is an expression of hatred. It was, in Ancient Greece, originally used as an insult by those who saw in the unnamable government of the multitude the ruin of any legitimate order. [...] And it is *still today* for those who construe revelations of divine law as the sole legitimate foundation on which to organize human communities. The violence of this hatred is certainly on the contemporary agenda.[35]

The disorderly workers refusing to work and demanding the right to practice politics as well, is an image still threatening the order of things today, it is an error possibly leading to a major system collapse. Obviously, such 'disorder' should be seen as a mere reverse of those who occupy a more privileged position, be it in class- or supposedly classless societies.

'Disorderly' is actually a word used by Jean-Jacques Rousseau to depict women, as Carole Pateman reminds us in *The Disorder of Women*, a book that still provides useful knowledge about the highly non-linear routes of fears patriarchal society develops about women.[36]

The making of political claims and democratic procedures in the shipyards, factories, and other striking workplaces in Poland in August 1980 has moved the political agora from its traditional, exclusive, and central locations within institutionalized political order towards the margins, such as factories or — in the case of 'Solidarność' — shipyards and other workplaces. Rancière takes several issues with what he perceives as evasive pseudo-politics — various forms of Platonism, Aristotelism, and Marxism — all of which consist in not analysing the political by means of evading it by focusing on the future ideals, elitist exclusions, or petrified essentializing.[37] As he argues in *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 'The philosopher's city has one real enemy, a character held in low regard: the parvenu.'[38] For the philosopher, aristocrat, and political activist, the plebeian is the raw material to form, the —

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35   Ibid., p. 2.

36   Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women: Feminism and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

37   See Jacques Rancière, *The Philosopher and his Poor*, ed. and intro. by Andrew Parker, trans. by John Drury, Corinne Oster, and Andrew Parker (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

38   Ibid., p. 30.

here I refer to Gregory Scholette's analysis of the contemporary system of artistic production — dark matter, or — to bring in another context — the 'dark continent of femininity', as Irigaray would depict the mysterious world of women, referencing Freud.[39] Rancière raises an important issue, which constituted the core of debates about the concepts of the public sphere: who participates in the public debate? Who is the public?

The iconoclastic practice of proletarians united under the countless banners of 'Solidarność' consisted also in engaging in politics in a grassroots way, deeply unwanted in the former Soviet Bloc. Such reversal of hierarchy first enacted from a position of a minoritarian counterpublic, which later became the most general transformation of the public sphere imaginable, with ten million Poles officially registered as 'Solidarność' members by March 1981, was unprecedented, it was a scandalous moment. The months between August 1980 and 13 December 1981 would later be remembered as the 'Carnival of Solidarność', because the level and amount of political participation was genuinely unforgettable. I should also mention that the Polish Communist Party (PZPR) had approximately three million members at the time. In a country of approximately thirty-six million at the time this meant a general revolution.[40]

Habermas's early work on public sphere is by his own definition an analysis of the 'bourgeois' public, therefore it might be assumed to have less relevance to the struggles I am depicting here than for example the theory of 'proletarian counterpublics' of Negt and Kluge. Yet, several scholars, including Elżbieta Matynia, claim, that 'Solidarność' should be discussed as a transformation of the public sphere.[41] As much as I appreciate this rich and important suggestion, redirecting the majority of previous interpretations of 'Solidarność' towards the analysis of its discursive impact and general reshaping of the political public in Poland and also globally, I also find it somewhat misleading, as Haber-

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39   See Gregory Scholette, *The Dark Matter:* Art *and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2013); Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 19.

40   Elżbieta Matynia, 'The Lost Treasures of Solidarity', *Social Research*, 68. 4 (2001), pp. 917–36; and Matynia, *Performative Democracy*.

41   Ibid.

mas's theory focuses on the bourgeois public sphere and depicts the proletarian publics as 'historically insignificant'.[42] The transformation of the public sphere offered by 'Solidarność' was one of a far greater inclusivity than any former oppositional agency in Poland and the region, it also surpassed the mobilizations initiated by the communist party. Kluge and Negt critically addressed Habermas's public sphere as ideological, and introduced the concept of proletarian counterpublics as a production-based public sphere, oriented at the experience of labour.[43] Fraser emphasizes the problematic oneness of Habermas's public sphere, as well as the exclusions (of women, workers, and other groups), on which it is based.[44] Both critiques of Habermas's public sphere however focus on Western societies, thus demanding another vision of the counterpublics, in which non-Western countries could be discussed.

While the genuine class antagonism is, as Marx observed, one that can only be resolved by an open conflict, the controversy between the Polish Communist Party and ordinary workers or the society in general was one, in which the class difference was dispersed between both sides. The growing alienation of workers was certainly resulting in a paradoxical reconstruction of the clash between the 'working class' as opposed to the 'ruling (party) elites'. Yet paradoxically the very same communist party elites, whose power, economic situation, and entitlement was far greater than that of the ordinary workers, were providing the workers with a narrative of the 'power of the people'. The communist daily press *Trybuna Ludu* (the Tribune of the People) had the subtitle 'Proletarians of all nations, unite!'. Ironically, they did unite, in a general strike against the ruling party, in August 1980.

Much has been said about the exclusion of women from both: traditional theories of the public sphere and 'Solidarność'. Habermas aptly summarizes the conditions of possibility of this kind of marginalization, when he writes in the context of the ancient Greece, that:

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42   Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: Massachussetts: MIT Press, 1991), p. xviii.

43   Kluge and Negt, *Public Sphere and Experience*.

44   See Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', *Social Text*, 25/26 (1990), pp. 56–80.

Status in the *polis* was therefore based upon status as the unlim-
ited master of an *oikos*. The reproduction of life, the labor of the
slaves, and the service of the women went on under the aegis
of the master's domination; birth and death took place in its
shadow; and the realm of necessity and transitoriness remained
immersed in the obscurity of the private sphere.[45]

We could object that this is Habermas's depiction of the ancient
Greece, not of contemporary society. However, his theory of the pub-
lic sphere (I focus here on his early work) does not give sufficient proof
of any mechanisms revising these sharp distinctions. On the contrary,
Habermas's exclusion of what he contemptuously calls 'plebeian pub-
lic spheres' as historically insignificant, and his argument that only
those with bourgeois education and *habitus* can truly engage in the
matters of the public, show to what extent his vision of the public
sphere was rooted in the exclusivist, aristocratic ideas of such defenders
of oligarchy, much as it was for Aristotle.[46]

In the context of such class and gender bias, Habermas's theory of
the public sphere does not provide the inclusivity necessary for democ-
racy. This argument, in a slightly different formulation, was developed
by Nancy Fraser. For her, however, the central problem of Habermas's
theory of the public sphere from the perspective of democracy was his
preoccupation with the oneness of the public sphere. Fraser argues,
rightly, that the multiplicity of public spheres is crucial for democ-
racy.[47]

'Solidarność' was in many ways a plethora of public spheres —
one could argue, that the multiplicity of strikes, conducted in different
parts of Poland, by different workers, with a variety of social statuses,
professions, etc., was a set of counterpublics and public spheres ra-
ther than one public, event though it — at the same time — can be
seen as one massive transformation of the public sphere. Jadwiga Stan-
iszkis called the events of 1980–81 in Poland the 'self-limiting revo-

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45   Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*, p. 3.
46   See ibid., p. xviii and Chapter 6. I discuss the class bias of Habermas's theory of
     the public sphere in more detail in another article: Ewa Majewska, 'The Utopia of
     "Solidarity" Between Public Sphere and Counterpublics: Institutions of the Common
     Revisited', *Utopian Studies*, 2.29 (2018), pp. 229–47.
47   See Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere'.

lution'.[48] This concept captures a difficulty legal theorists have with the classification of these events. Staniszkis's notion allows to see the contradictions inherent in 'Solidarity', which was: one labour union, composed of many smaller unions, often of very different character, a revolution and a reform at the same time; a non-violent revolution; a non-bourgeois institutional politics (!); an egalitarian, worker's mobilization fuelled by religious references; a rupture and continuation of state socialism etc. etc. The social composition of this counterpublic is also interesting — as women were there all the time, sometimes particularly visibly. The majority of 'Solidarność' activists were workers with very low education, thus not fulfilling the bourgeois *habitus* so emphasized by Habermas in *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

Several feminist attempts have been made to analyse the role and position of women, all of them emphasizing the exclusions and marginalization of women and their role in 'Solidarność'.[49] As much as I appreciate these analyses, I would like to argue for a necessity of contextualizing the situation of women in 'Solidarność', of applying some comparative perspective, and, above all, of distinguishing between the early days of this workers' union (the years 1980–81) and the times after 1981. It is important to know, that 1980 was quite particular for women's political participation also on the institutional level: in the parliamentary elections in March, for the first time in Poland, more than a quarter of the MPs were women; in 1979 Poland signed the UN Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), there was perhaps a general sense of gender equality. The first days of the strikes in 1980 brought to public attention the names of at least three women: Anna Walentynowicz, the crane operator, whose firing became the direct cause of the strike in the Gdansk Shipyard in August 1980; Alina Pieńkowska, a nurse and opposition member; and Henryka Krzywonos, a young tramway driver, who became famous after stopping her tram in the middle of Gdańsk to spread the

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48   Jadwiga Staniszkis, *Poland's Self-Limiting Revolution*, trans. by Jan Gross (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

49   See Shana Penn, *Solidarity's Secret: The Women Who Defeated Communism in Poland* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006); Ewa Kondratowicz, *Szminka na sztandarze. Kobiety Solidarnosci 1980–1989* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 2001).

news of the strike in the shipyard, when telephone communications were cut by the authorities — her words: 'this tramway ain't going any further' became idiomatic. None of the previous Polish uprising had any women recognized by name, apart from someone who could actually be seen as the first Polish drag king, Emilia Plater, who joined the November Uprising in 1830 dressed as a man, with her female companion (which could lead to wild speculations concerning her sexual orientation, which I cannot pursue here). After 1980, some more women became publicly known as important members of the opposition, including the Warsaw-based editors of the 'Tygodnik Mazowsze' magazine, Helena Luczywo, Anna Dodziuk, Anna Bikont, Ludwika Wujec, Joanna Szczesna, and Elzbieta Regulska; the opposition activists such as Barbara Labuda, Joanna Duda-Gwiazda, Grażyna Staniszewska, Jadwiga Staniszkis, Joanna Wojciechowicz, and many others. After the introduction of martial law in December 1981, the 'Tygodnik Mazowsze' magazine became the main underground press of the delegalized 'Solidarność', its members and sympatizers. Without these women's incessant work, courage, and care the continuation of this movement would have been impossible, yet for many years they were excluded from historical accounts of 'Solidarność'.

Shana Penn and Ewa Kondratowicz rightly emphasized the role and involvement of women in the political work of 'Solidarność', yet it is also correct that they criticize the exclusion of women from historical accounts of 'Solidarność', as well, as from political agency after 1989.[50] They should, however, also mention that 'Solidarność' was the first event in Polish history where women were visible and recognized, at least in the first year of the union's existence. Some women were — in the role of the supporters and affective labourers — providing for their partners and relatives. This care and affective labour had tremendous impact on the survival of the opposition, particularly during the years of martial law.

This intense and multilayered political agency of women actually had an anticipating episode, which is always neglected in accounts of the history of 'Solidarność'. As Małgorzata Fidelis aptly recollected, some 500 000 persons went on strike in Łódź in February 1971, and

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50   See Shana Penn, *Solidarity's Secret* and Ewa Kondratowicz, *Szminka na sztandarze*.

some 74% of the textile factories workers were women.[51] By forcing
the men in the government not only to come to Łódź and discuss
their demands, but also exposing them to the unheated factory halls,
leaking ceilings, and broken windows on a freezing winter day, they
undermined the official propaganda of equality, clearly demonstrating
that the poverty of their work conditions is definitely not familiar to
those, who were supposed to be their equals, representatives of the
people. Here again, the ordinary, everyday, and the common entered
the stage of history, as a blasphemy or iconoclasm undermining the
unquestioned absolute of patriarchal, elitist political practice of the
declaratively communist state.

5. ERRANT AS IN TERRITORIALIZING: THE REFRAIN

Borrowing the crucial strategic elements from the striking female
workers of the textile factories in Łódź in 1971, which consisted in
passive refusal of to work and demanding negotiations to be held at the
workplace, the workers of the Shipyard of Gdansk and other striking
workplaces first in Gdansk and then in the entire country performed
a general strike with more women involved, than in any former Pol-
ish uprising, and genuinely Marxist postulates, combined with several
liberal ones, such as demand of freedom of speech and gatherings. In
this sense, they were a perfect hybrid, at least politically, combining,
but not assimilating, elements of a circuit, not a blend. This sudden
unity of all these groups and political currents that would generally
not cooperate, could be seen as a deterritorialization, a *ligne de fuite*,
a subsumption of newly composed elements into a way out of the op-
pressively reterritorialized communist idea, for example. I would like
to explore the image of territorialization instead.

   In *Mille Plateaux* Deleuze and Guattari built their concept of
territory in a chapter about the *ritournelle* (refrain) in reference to
romanticism, as the new beginning — of music, of politics. The very
beginnings of 'Solidarność' could, I think, be very well depicted with
a passage from *A Thousand Plateaus*, the opening paragraph of the
chapter *On the Refrain*, where Deleuze and Guattari write:

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51   Małgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland*
     (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 248.

> A child in the dark, gripped with fear, comforts himself by
> singing under his breath. He walks and halts to his song. Lost,
> he takes shelter, or orients himself with his little song as best he
> can. The song is like a rough sketch of a calming and stabilizing,
> calm and stable, center in the heart of chaos. Perhaps the child
> skips as he sings, hastens or slows his pace. But the song itself is
> already a skip: it jumps from chaos to the beginnings of order
> in chaos and is in danger of breaking apart at any moment.
> There is always sonority in Ariadne's thread. Or the song of
> Orpheus.[52]

As we might remember, the new beginnings in Deleuze's and Guattari's
thinking are not marked by the heroic masculine figures claiming their
rights and fighting for them.[53] They actually start in a moment of dis-
appointment and weakness, in confrontation with an overwhelming
fear, where the scariest is perhaps the possibility of literally anything
happening. The song of the little boy marks a transformation, begins a
new constellation, a new assembly. It is not a triumphant anthem of
a new nation opposed to a clearly defined enemy. It is a silent tune
aimed at survival, not at victory. These are risky practices, of deeply
ambivalent character. Deleuze and Guattari comment: 'This synthesis
of disparate elements is not without ambiguity. It has the same ambi-
guity, perhaps, as the modern valorization of children's drawings, texts
by the mad, and concerts of noise'.[54] They also suggest a particularly
weak character of territorializing practices, arguing, that 'we can never
be sure we will be strong enough, for we have no system, only lines and
movements'.[55]

   In Deleuze and Guattari's description, the territory is a kind of
sublation, an overcoming of the ultimate solitude of the terrified child,

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52   Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*,
     trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1987), p. 311.

53   In his lectures about the *ritournelle* from 1977, Deleuze emphasized the role of the
     non-heroic: 'Wagner, c'est encore d'un bout à l'autre l'éducation sentimentale. Le
     héros wagnérien dit: "Apprenez-moi la peur." Nietzsche ce n'est pas ça. Il n'y a que
     des heccéités, c'est-à-dire des combinaisons d'intensités, des composés intensifs. Les
     heccéités ce ne sont pas des personnes, ce ne sont pas des sujets.' Gilles Deleuze,
     'Anti-Œdipe et Mille Plateaux. Cours Vincennes: Sur la musique' (8 March 1977),
     transcription, *WebDeleuze*, ed. by Richard Pinhas and Benoit Maurer <https://www.
     webdeleuze.com/textes/183> [accessed 14 September 2019].

54   Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 343.

55   Ibid., p. 350.

an artist, possibly also a population in despair, in the creation of some new quality. A boy sings to himself a song to overcome fear. The chapter begins with an image of a scared child, in a moment of weakness, powerlessness, despair. It references the practice of marking territory, by animals, even plants. It is an image of overcoming fear and deprivation, in many ways oppositional to the one we know far better, at least in Europe — that of the dialectics of slave and master, which in the last 200 years became not only paradigmatic, but also petrified in its heroic version of a 'fight'. The beginnings depicted by Deleuze and Guattari are different, they develop as a creative process, beyond any fight, as an expression of sound, and reaction to fear. It would not be hard to imagine such practice as one marked by heroism or aggression, yet this is not the image offered in *Mille Plateaux* and perhaps this is better – not just for the political analysis, which can profit of such weak image of a beginning, but also for the possible reinterpretation of Hegel, in which the struggle between the slave and the master for recognition would not emphasize bravery and heroism, but rather the mundane, the non-heroic, and the weak?

The rather poetic suggestion of opening the territory to the Cosmos might and perhaps should be read as a suggestion of historical change. Deleuze and Guattari are quite surprised by the somewhat Hegelian sound of the chapter they write, which they explicitly mention.[56] A very important characteristic of territory is that it always produces its deterritorialization, thus it seems strangely dialectic: 'Produce a deterritorialized refrain as the final end of music, release it in the Cosmos — that is more important than building a new system.'[57] Possibly against the intentions of Deleuze and Guattari, who discuss artists and children rather than massive social movements, in the chapter '1837: Of the Refrain' of *A Thousand Plateaus*, I would like to think 'Solidarność' as a making of territory, with all the ambivalences of such a process.

Jacques Rancière explored the comparison between art and social practices in his efforts to build a theory of the partition of the sensible. The way I would like to think is more preoccupied with the erratic

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56   Ibid., p. 342.
57   Ibid., p. 350.

status of the territory, the lack of power at the core, actually a deep fear, which is not expressed neither in conservative interpretations of 'Solidarność' as a 'self-limiting revolution' nor in the liberal ones, in which the male heroes once again openly oppose authoritarianism. Even the Marxist depictions of 'Solidarność', recently coined by authors such as Janek Sowa or earlier by David Ost, still dwell on the exceptionality and heroism of this event, which — like so many others — supposedly came from a confrontations of two forces.[58] Well, as we saw in the essay of Vàclav Havel on the power of the powerless, and also in other elements of the making of 'Solidarność', there was no such thing, as 'heroism' or even hope to win. Instead, there was fear, solidarity, and many forms of weak resistance, of powerless agency, which nevertheless allowed a great transformation of the public sphere by means of errant counterpublics. It was therefore from weakness and a sense of failure that this movement emerged.

While deciding to begin the strike, the shipyard workers of Gdansk were not thinking of fighting the Soviet Empire, and they certainly did not hope to win such a fight. On the contrary, their state was one of unheroic mobilization, one that comes from what Jacques Rancièere perceives as the core of the political, namely disagreement, and they began a new territory, singing songs of solidarity and persistence in struggle rather than fight. Their strategy was definitely one of resistance, but also of creating a completely new formula for political agency, of protest, and of political organization. In doing so, they crossed the ultimately critical competences of the public sphere, and produced an alternative, a series of errant counterpublics, which was too diverse and hybridic to only be named after just one group or aspect that seemed crucial.

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58   David Ost, *The Defeat of Solidarity: Anger and Politics in Postcommunist Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

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