

## Excess Memory

Author : **Rastko MOŠNIK**

Translator : **Andrew GOFFEY**

The interferences between historiographical procedures and the personal memory of the historian are a familiar problem for the historiography of the present time. The two cases of such interferences analysed in the present text are interesting in that, as contemporaries, they remember more than their scientific apparatus is capable of integrating. The incapacity to integrate into their presentations and historiographical analyses certain processes and practices that are nevertheless important in their time (and for that reason well remembered by the historian as subject), exposes the historian to the risk of suffering the effects of spontaneous or manipulated politics of memory, arising from the epoch in which he writes his narrative. Starting from the “excess of memory” in the texts of two eminent historians, we hope to be able to tackle some difficulties in the history of Yugoslavian socialist self-management.

The two fragments speak of the same episode or, better, each of the two reduces one of the major processes of the period with which it deals to an episode.

Fragment 1:

“From the beginning of the 1980s, the lawyer Matevž Krivic lead a relatively solitary battle for the democratization of the press; he called on the editorial offices of the central Slovenian daily *Delo* to honour the constitutional right of the citizens to be informed. In 1984, when the court of justice decided in his favour despite the political support that the editors of *Delo* enjoyed, he won a decisive victory in the efforts towards the opening up of public media” [\[1\]](#).

Fragment 2:

“Despite the severity of the evaluation of the opposition, democratization in Slovenia attained a level where certain “bourgeois” rights, were, at least in principle, integrated into the general civic norm. In April 1987, when the political leadership [the Presidency of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia] debated just how far to let the opposition advance, [Milan] Kučan [the President of the Central Committee of the Alliance of Slovenian Communists] defined the bourgeois rights as classic human rights, ‘the meaning of which resides precisely in their being formal [...] When [Matevž] Krivic had initiated the trial in the court of justice regarding the right to publish, we found ourselves in a delicate position precisely because we did not have a pure conscience’ (Since 1984, Matevž Krivic struggled for the right of reply for citizens criticized in the press[...])’ [\[2\]](#)

### Personal memories and the politics of memory

The two authors offer an account of a detail which, although it is apparently worth mentioning, remains an “exception” in their texts: the episode is not articulated with a broader historical process, other than that of “democratization”, which was general one in the epoch, if the authors are to be believed, and which, precisely, furnishes the guiding principle according to which they organize their

discourse. So why mention this detail if it only represents an extravagant idiosyncrasy? And yet if one is signaling it, why abstain from providing it with a context, motives, and repercussions – all the contingencies that would at least testify to the specific atmosphere of the epoch?

In this precise case, the two authors, who are contemporaries of the events they recount, seem to allow themselves to be guided by their memories rather than by the rules of historiography. Why do their memories, by their very preciseness, seem to engender problems with their work? What is more, why are their memories selective to the point of being counter-factual?[3]

It is indeed possible that the personal memories of the two historians might suffer the effects of the politics of memory currently dominant. It tries to present the period from 1945 to 1961 as monolithically totalitarian and consequently censors the political struggles in the socialisms of the period[4]. However, this hypothesis is difficult to verify. An analysis of the logic explaining why the two texts do not integrate the detail in question, whilst nevertheless being constrained not to ignore it, even at the price of inconsistencies, is to be preferred.

### **Historiographical ideologies and the “place” of history**

The two authors reduce [all] historical processes to that of “democratization”, thus to a political process oriented towards democracy.

For Repe, the process of democratization is impelled by conflicts at the heart of the political apparatus, and at the same time, by a continual struggle which opposes functionaries of the political and ideological apparatuses, privileged bearers, according to him, of the ideas of democracy and of nation. According to Repe’s presentation, practically the entire personnel in the ideological apparatuses promote the democratic process, whilst some groups in the political apparatus are opposed to it. Recent history then consists of the displacements that ensue from the line along which democrats and anti-democrats confront each other. In the 1950s and 1960s the battleline opposed democratic ideological bureaucracy and a political nomenklatura that was for the most part anti-democratic. In the 1980s, the confrontation is that of democrats (politicians and ideologues) and anti-democrats (the groupuscules of Party hardliners). What Repe calls “democratization” is thus the progressive reconciliation between political and ideological bureaucracies. This is one possible way of describing the adaptation of dominant groups to the transformation of the conditions of their domination.

Because of the more or less permanent presence of “democrats” in the political apparatuses, a major consequence of Repe’s schema consists in the legitimation of all power throughout the different ages of Yugoslavian socialism. Repe’s historiography is thus *Roman*[5]. It is the legitimate vision of the dominant in each epoch that ensures the totalisation of historical material: a gaze fascinated by its favourite opponent, ideological bureaucracy, can only amalgamate everything that is opposed to it in an “opposition” with which it nevertheless progressively aligns itself.

Vodopivec condenses the diachronic perspectivist pluralism of Repe into a monism based on a single historical event: the “independence” of the Slovenian State. The historical processes then appears to him as a secular progression towards its own truth[6]. The *telos* of history offers certain support to the selection of historical material: processes and events that can be conceived and presented as a contribution to the advent of “national independence” are historical. Since Vodopivec considers

“cultural” [7] bureaucracy as the quasi-exclusive bearer of the teleological moment of national history, alternative politics appear to him only from the angle of “democratization” and are thus fragmented, isolated, “solitary”.

### The Selection of Material and the Blind Spot

What the two historians possibly “forget” as persons and what they certainly don’t see as historians, is the complexity of political processes in socialist self-management. The two texts limit their presentation of political life solely to the tensions, confrontations, and alliances at the heart of State apparatuses. They conceive them as essentially structured in a bipolar manner, organized around the tension between political bureaucracy and cultural bureaucracy. This schema, in any case, corresponds with the perception that cultural bureaucracy had of itself in that epoch.

This perspective easily allows itself to be integrated into the teleological construction of Vodopivec. As it reduces historical processes to the secular affirmation of what it considers to be national emancipation, the diachronic functioning of the bipolar schema is presented by him as the progressive absorption of the politics of the political bureaucracy (“by its *forma mentis* and its conception of politics as prisoner to Bolshevik-communist formulae and representations” [8]) by the politics of the cultural bureaucracy (“the critical intelligentsia [...] which supported and directed practically all the important actions for the democratization of public space” [9]). This dispositif [10] renders everything that happens outside the frame in which political and cultural bureaucracies are opposed and progressively became allied, properly invisible. The mention of the case of Krivic in the text, which confines itself to the frame of the struggles of bureaucratic fractions is remarkable from this point of view: it figures here as an extravagant detail that could just as easily be omitted without that damaging the narrative much. It is perhaps precisely so that it figures as an extravagant and inconsequential detail that he chose to refer to it. Thanks to this montage, the event succeeds in masking its effects: because Krivic’s victory didn’t only consist of a “decisive victory in the efforts towards the opening up of public media”, as Vodopivec pretends. In the course of the winter of 1984-5 the legal actions of Krivic, in concert with the actions of journalist associations, the movement for alternative journalism, the practices of *Radio Študent*, the weeklies *Mladina* and *Teleks*, the political struggles in the publishing houses *Kme?ki* and *Delo* introduced the freedom of expression that has largely been practiced in all media in Slovenia since that time [11]. It is an established fact, without common measure with the conflicts between fractions of the bureaucracy that fascinates Vodopivec, and which, above all, ruins his picture of the progressive disintegration of the Bolshevik-Communist regime by the concerns of the nationalist cultural bureaucracy.

For Repe, who writes from the point of view of legal power menaced with a loss of legitimacy, the Krivic detail is more visible but nonetheless remains opaque. Repe describes how, at the time, the political approach of Krivic and his comrades was taken into consideration by the *Realpolitik* of the established powers, but this description is not enough to furnish the historian of today with the theoretical foundations necessary to attempting a more ambitious analysis. It could well be that it is due to its legalistic character that the episode is mentioned in Repe’s text. That could also qualify it in Vodopivec’s eyes as well. However, if Repe’s ‘Roman’ history validates the Krivic episode from a synchronic point of view and in the name of the legal system in operation at the time, Vodopivec’s ‘biblical’ history interprets it in an anachronistic manner, and from the point of view of the legal system dominant at the time he wrote his text. The paradoxical complementarity of these two

perspectives condenses the historical process of ascension to the hegemony of liberal ideology: its apparently “neutral” horizon furnished the common denominator propitious to the alliance of two groups of apparatchiks – those of the apparatuses of the State-party (from Repe’s perspective) and those of the ideological apparatuses of the National State (from Vodopivec’s perspective).

This retrospective illusion is nevertheless backed up a symptomatic gaffe: the constitutional rights that the approach of Matevž Krivic[12] invoked presupposed the *social property* of the “means of public communication”. Freedom of expression was guaranteed to citizens, then, because they had “common possession” (according to legal fiction, at least) of the means of communication, and the media were obliged to meet their needs in terms of public communication. The legal status of the media was translated by the obligation of editors to “publish socially relevant information and opinion” [13].

### **Self-Management and Freedom of Expression**

In the system of self-management, legal action consisting in asserting one’s constitutional rights necessarily opened up a political dimension linked to the fact that, through such an action, the person who launched the action in his or her capacity as “legal person” at the same time laid claim to his or her status as a member of the “society” that was the subject of social property. By laying claim to a gain from the socialist revolution (the social ownership of the means of production), the legal action mobilized the revolutionary society at the heart of the actually existing society and in this way traced a demarcation line between the forces of restoration (who estimated that revolutionary gains were sufficiently guaranteed by the State apparatuses and their bureaucracies), and the revolutionary process – transformed but still under way in the post-revolutionary situation. Such an action thus activated the central conflict of every post-revolutionary society[14].

In socialist self-management, the political dimension was thus situated in a radically different horizon to that of current political practices. The latter are inscribed in a structure in which the private ownership of the means of production (including the means of production of public space) confine political processes to transactions between groups who are expert in technologies of social governance in the framework of the autonomous political sphere.

The misrecognition of political processes in the two historiographies derives from the authors not grasping the specificity of the structural localization of political practices in workers’ self-management. One can even maintain that they don’t succeed in conceptualizing the differences that, in the articulation of diverse instances (economic, political, legal, ideological), separate the epoch whose history they are narrating from the present, in which they exercise their craft. They remain blind to the processes and political practices of socialism, because they do not try to identify the structural place on which the political dimension hangs in workers’ self-management.

We will try to establish the structural *locus* of political practices in workers’ self-management by advancing the hypothesis according to which the relation of social property produced a structure of a specific mode of production and engendered a legal-political construction proper to the self-managed State. We will show that the structural effects of the social property relation in the dominant type of production, structured around industrial technology, differed from its effects in the cognitive type of production, which was subordinate at the time but is particularly relevant for our topic.

### **Social ownership and the differentiation of political practices**

In the model of capitalism elaborated by Marx in *Capital*, the reproduction relations of production engenders the real submission of labour power to capital, that is to say, the permanent revolution of the labour process and the progressive loss – dramatically accelerated in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – of the capacity of the worker to put to work the instruments of social labour [15]. This process culminates in “Fordist” industry, where the worker ends up being reduced to the status of a supplement to the machine, as on a production line, for example.

The introduction of social ownership in a society dominated by advanced industry makes both the cycle of the reproduction of social conditions, and the relationship between the enterprise and the national economy, collapse. The co-ordination between individual productive processes is no longer propelled by the search for maximum profit on the part of particular capitals.

In the enterprise, the self-management system assigned workers rights that they weren't in a position to [assert], as they were separated from the intellectual capacities [puissances] of the work process, which were incorporated into management [structures]. The management of the enterprise then represented the social nature of work for the workers, by dint of the fact that it took the form of the institution of social ownership: the reality of this “self-management” relation resulted in the manipulation of workers by the management of the enterprise and in the resistance of workers outside the mechanisms of self-management (in “wildcat” strikes, for example) [16]. In the national economy social ownership introduced a hybrid regime of regulation, that oscillated between extensive accumulation (undeveloped components of the Federation) and intensive accumulation (developed components). Figuring amongst the other characteristics of this regime were the sizeable redistribution of the national product, high indirect salaries (public services – free education for all, accessible and high quality public healthcare, reasonable retirement pensions), with, however, the preferential tendency to the growth in direct salaries (under the pressure of the “technocratic” tendencies at the heart of political power) and the politically controlled allocation of capital (directed above all to under-developed regions – Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro).

In society in general, on the other hand, social ownership would have been able to permit the opening up of new horizons in the matter of political practices, if its political potential had not been sapped by the apparatuses of social management. “Social management”, a legal-political category of self-management outside the enterprise, appears as an anticipation of what is currently called “governance”: the management of society by depoliticisation. Without entering in detail into the problematic of the Yugoslavian system of self-management, let us simply retain its “corporatist” character, where the party assured the social integration of “corporations” by linking them together in a transversal manner. “Self-managed communities of interest” maintained the public services (health, retirement, social security, education, culture). These intermediate bodies managed their domains in a more or less technocratic manner, whilst the properly political problematic of their mutual relations and of their insertion into vaster social systems (including the problematics of the special taxes that they collected, of the prices and the benefits that they supplied), was reduced to a sort of pre-established immanence that the alliance of communists took care of (directly, or, most frequently, indirectly, through its extension, the Socialist Alliance [17]).

For the great mass of the population, working in the predominantly industrial economy, the reality of the system of self-management was situated between the impossibility of self-management in the

enterprise and the depoliticisation of relations of domination in the broader society. Trapped between the false promise of self-management, putting into play the mechanism for the reproduction of the technical composition of their labour power, and the management of the depoliticisation of the social, implying the mechanism of the reproduction of relations of domination, the great mass of the population was placed before the radical impossibility of initiating any form of political composition whatsoever[18].

In its static aspect, the system of self-management carried out a corporatist inveiglement of labour power in industrial production, and in this way ensured the reproduction of its technical composition. What is more, it blocked the political constitution of workers as a working class, since the political dimension was already occupied by the mechanisms of self-management, in which social ownership was represented by the of the enterprise's executive managers. In the dynamic aspect of the system, the individual bearers of labour power were integrated as individual consumers, whilst the political dimension was once again usurped, this time by the apparatuses of the State-party that, representing the working class *in general* (as the corporation of corporations), appropriated the management of social ownership in general.

### **The specificity of “cognitive” activities**

However, this was not the case of workers in “cognitive” branches [of work] such as journalists. Being possession of their means of cognitive labour, journalists were perfectly capable of managing their work processes. However, as mass communication had the status of a public service, the management of the media was of the “social management” type, which signified that their organs of management included “representatives of society” nominated by the Socialist Alliance. In the ideological apparatuses (the media but also schools and universities), the management relation took on an appearance that differed from that of industry. Structured by the tension between the representatives of “the interests of society” (the external delegates, and most frequently, the management[19]) and the workers (in possession of the means of work and thus capable of managing themselves), the relation wasn't long in transforming itself into a struggle around what merited consideration as social interest. Management practices were, at the same time and inseparably, political practices. This had at least two direct consequences:

1. The political conflicts were conducted around concrete questions. This amounts to saying that it was possible to politicise concrete struggles. A trivial conflict around a text that an editorial committee had refused to publish implicated the demand for equality that Jacques Rancière conceptualises as the political gesture par excellence[20], and already produced the elements of concrete existence of such equality - that is to say, subverted the relations of domination in place.
2. The engagement for constitutional rights (above all for human rights) was inseparable from concrete struggles for the appropriation of social conditions of production in the enterprise and in society. The valorisation of human rights in this way became an integral part of the realisation of the revolutionary programme - the abolition of the private ownership of the means of production and the abolition of the separation of workers from the social conditions of production.

### **The alternative in the 1980s: a political discourse without ideological interpellation[21]**

One could say that the struggle for the freedom of expression had the structure of the paradoxical statement that Rancière proposes as model for the political gesture[22]. This structure could be

expressed by the statement "we are all *Delo* journalists"[23]. This statement has two different interpretations, that aren't complementary and immediately evident in the epochal context:

1. We all identify with the journalists at *Delo* in their struggle for the appropriation of the social conditions of their work, in particular in the demand to participate in the determination of the "social interest" that their publications promote.
2. As citizens, we demand the status of "journalists" of no matter what publication, including *Delo*, because we are calling for our right to have our opinions about matters with a public pertinence circulate publicly.

The two lines of political struggle presupposed the institution of social ownership as their condition of possibility. This can be seen *a contrario* if one examines the current situation determined by the institution of the private ownership of media. Under conditions of private ownership, the first demand degenerates into a conflict between the privileges of the professional body of journalists and the superior rights of the proprietor[24], whilst the second demand falls back on the classic aporia between a general, abstract right, that is accorded in principle, and the practical impossibility of asserting it in each concrete, particular case.

However, in the struggles of the 1980s, such a slogan was never launched. At this time, slogans were regarded with suspicion[25] and the particular style of discourses indicated well the specificity of the alternative politics. The alternative discourses of the 1980s were either of an extreme simplicity or of a sometimes extremist sophistication[26]. Simplicity and sophistication presuppose the familiarity with certain problematics and the knowledge of certain discourses. They presuppose interpreters who are trained on other texts. They are texts that avoid ideological interpellation.

One sees that these practices were situated at the polar opposite of contemporary political philosophy (at least that represented by authors such as Alain Badiou, Antonio Negri or Jacques Rancière), which places subjectivation at the centre of its preoccupations and only considers those practices in which subjectivation occurs as political practices. The alternatives in the 1980s presupposed a subjectivation accomplished elsewhere, and were discursive practices that, in their very asceticism, were nevertheless polyphonic[27].

### **Some conclusions**

We have shown that the obscuring of certain practices and certain processes in the work of two eminent historians and originates in ideological perspectives that make the structural tensions of Yugoslavian society invisible and operate a distorted selection of [of evidence regarding ] the processes and political conflicts of socialist self-management. In the organisation of historical material that their ideological horizons impose, the elements of the practices and processes otherwise "elided" appear as isolated, contingent and almost arbitrary details. They are given the status of anecdotes and are explained by the grand "pseudo-explication" of "democratisation". For Repe, democratisation is a an automatic deployment at the heart of political bureaucracy, whilst for Vodopivec, it is torn away from a recalcitrant political bureaucracy by a heroic cultural bureaucracy. The two historians pretend to explain a complex historical process by the sole act of assigning it a name. The two different, but complementary, historiographical strategies contribute to producing an amnesia with regard to political struggles in socialism. They offer a "scientific" to the politics of memory that are currently trying to present the socialist past as an ahistorical totalitarian bloc and to

depoliticise the present under the aegis of the reconciliation of the victims of the totalitarianisms of the 20th century.

Translated from French by Andrew Goffey.

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[1] Peter Vodopivec *Od Pohlinove slovnice do samostojne države. Slovenska zgodovina od konca 18. stoletja do konca 20. stoletja* [From Pohlin's Grammar to the Independent State. Slovenian History from the End of the 18<sup>th</sup> to the End of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century ] Ljubljana: Modrijan, 2006 p.460.

[2] Božo Repe *Slovenci v osemdesetih letih* [ Slovenians in the 1980s] Ljubljana: ZZDS, 2001 pp. 36 – 37.

[3] Presenting the judicial approach of lawyer Matevž Krivic (judge in the Constitutional Court of Slovenia between 1991 and 2000) as an isolated act is untrue. His efforts were a part of the “alternative journalism” movement, which was powerful in professional associations and in certain media. A fortiori it is untrue to present Krivic as isolated.

[4] With the exception, it will be seen, of the struggles between different fractions of the bureaucracies of the State political and cultural apparatuses.

[5] In *Society Must Be Defended* Michel Foucault distinguishes between two types of history, *Roman history* and

[6] On the teleologism of national-nationalist historiography, constituted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see Drago Braco Rotar *Odbiranje iz preteklosti* (The Selection of the Past) (Koper: Annales, 2007).

[7] In Yugoslavia, the anti-fascist resistance and the socialist revolution were supported by a popular front uniting masses of people from diverse national, confessional and class belongings. It also united political groupings and intellectuals with very diverse ideological orientations. After liberation, an “division of powers” was established between the political apparatuses, controlled by the communists, and the cultural, educational and ideological apparatuses, directed by the progressive intellegentsia. If that the beginning, the cultural and ideological apparatuses were controlled above all by pre-war anti-Stalinist communists, over time the “cultural bureaucracy” will turn more and more towards nationalism and the right, to establish itself as the principal anti-communist and nationalist political force in the 1980s.

[8] P. Vodopivec *op. cit* p.406.

[9] *ibid* p.460.

[10] To distinguish between the French “appareil” and “dispositif”, which are both often translated as “apparatus”, I have retained “dispositif” in the latter case. See e.g. Gilles Deleuze ‘What is a dispositif?’ in T. Armstrong (ed.) *Michel Foucault Philosopher* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991) [TN]

[11] Control of the media was re-introduced in 1990-1. Besides, after 1984-5 in Slovenia, the state of fact was such as to refute the ideology according to which human rights could not be achieved in a socialist framework. It's an important detail, because that is the ideology that is invoked so as to legitimate the restoration of capitalism in post-Socialist countries.

[12] The Constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia 1974 Article 168: “the press, radio and television are obliged to publish all opinions and information relevant to the public”. The Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia 1974 Article 209: “the press, radio and television and other information media must publish [...] the opinions and views of institutions, organisations and citizens”.

[13] The struggle for the freedom of expression shifted from the actual confrontation with the censor to the debate about what might be considered “socially relevant”.

[14] In this sense, one might maintain that human rights functioned in Yugoslavian workers self-management in the manner that Claude Lefort wished to see them function: as the moment of revolutionary permanence in the post-revolutionary republic. On condition, however, that a political agent *makes* them function in this way.

[15] cf Etienne Balibar ‘The Fundamental Concepts of Historical Materialism’ in Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar *Reading Capital* (London: NLB, 1970). At the level of circulation, the real subordination of labour power, that is to say, its separation from the means of production *and* its incapacity to put to work the instruments of social labour alone, is the structural condition of the double movement that *appears* to ensure the reproduction of the system, that of capital , which seeks maximum profit, and that of labour power, which follows capital.

- [16] On the relations between industrial work and strikes in Yugoslavian socialism, see the work of the sociologist Josip Županov, and the remarkable monograph by Ton?i Kuzmani? *Labinski štrajik: paradigma za?etka konca* [The Labin Strike: The Paradigm of the Beginning of the End] (Ljubljana: Krt, 1988)
- [17] The Socialist Alliance of Working People of Yugoslavia, the successor to the People's Liberation Front.
- [18] We borrow the concepts of the technical composition of labour power and of the political composition of the working class from Italian Workerism (Operaismo). This problematic was produced in the 1960s and 1970s by theorist-militants such as Romano Alquati, Raniero Panzieri, Mario Tronti, Sergio Bologna and others. cf. Maria Turchetto 'Opéraisme' in J. Bidet and E. Kouvélakis *Dictionnaire Marx contemporain* (Paris: PUF, 2001).
- [19] In the media, management generally sided with the "external delegates". But not in the universities: an old corporation like the university was able to salvage its autonomy in a "corporatist" system.
- [20] Jacques Rancière *On the Shore of Politics* (London: Verso, 2007)
- [21] We use the concept of ideological interpellation in Althusser's sense: "ideology interpellates individuals as subjects" 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: Monthly Review Press 1971)
- [22] One of the historical examples cited by Rancière is one of the slogans of demonstration of May 31<sup>st</sup> 1968: "we are all German Jews!" cf Rancière *On the Shores of Politics* (London, Verso, 2007)
- [23] Although the peripeteia at *Delo*, the central journal, were of a particular importance, the centre of the struggles of the journalists was the publishing house *Kme?ki glas*.
- [24] cf the text *Za prenovo medijske politike* [For the renewal of the politics of the media], published by the Union of Slovenian Journalists and the Association of Slovenian Journalists in 2008. See footnote 19.
- [25] It's because aside from the experience of the student movement, one retained the memory of the nationalist "mass movement" in Croatia 1971. (The best analysis is that of the review *Praxis* 1973).
- [26] On the one hand the figure 133 in black crossed through with a red line (against article 133 of the penal code, which criminalized infractions of opinion) and on the other statements like "all the university chambers of Europe are marked with a little red cross" – the Authors Group Studentsko gibanje 1968 – 1972 [The Student Movement 1968 – 1972] Ljubljana, Krt, 1982 p.lviii.
- [27] The parallel between the mass practices of punk rock and the political and cultural context show that they also excluded subjectivation by playing on failed identifications: by procedures of hyper-identification with ideologies of domination or even by processes of dismantling syntheses of identification.

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