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What's Left After Rights?

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Abstract Recent thinking on human rights, at least among the left, has divided along lines that have become familiar from other contemporary political debates. There are those who ground the discourse of rights in an ethical responsibility to fellow human beings in situations of suffering and oppression; for others, suspicion with respect to just such an ethical stance is their point of departure. They see in the ethical perspective at best a radical depoliticization of the struggle for human rights—its biopolitical reduction to humanitarian aid to suffering others who are thereby accorded the status of 'bare life'—and at worst a cover for a quasi-imperialist imposition of neo-liberal values according to which what ultimately deserves political protection and preservation is the right to entrepreneurial initiative and aspiration. Yet another form of leftist critique of the ostensibly post-political, ethical inflection of rights discourse takes aim at a line of thought most often linked to a series of mostly French philosophers—above all Emmanuel Levinas, but also Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and more recently Judith Butler—who in various ways have sought to ground (or perhaps better, unground) philosophy in an 'ethics of the Other'. The essay explores these positions and proposes a new thinking about human rights oriented by what Hannah Arendt referred to as the 'dark background' of human life.

Keywords Bare life · Ethics of the 'Other' · Neoliberal · Post-political

The title of my essay is meant to open up several questions. First, what points of orientation for political and ethical thinking *remain* on the far side of human rights discourse, a discourse intimately linked to the project of democracy? Second, in

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what sense can such an orientation be considered to be part of a still viable tradition of *leftist* thought, assuming that such mappings continue to be consequential? Finally, in what ways do these two questions depend upon a robust concept of the *remainder* and its meanings and uses in various contexts (political, ethical, aesthetic, psychoanalytic)?

I

In reading some of the recent literature on human rights, I have been struck by the ways in which so much thinking on this topic, at least among the left, has divided along lines that have become familiar from other contemporary political debates. On the one side we have those who tend to ground the discourse of rights in an ethical responsibility to fellow human beings in situations of oppression; on the other, we have those whose point of departure is, precisely, suspicion with respect to just such an ethical stance, who see in it at best a radical depoliticization of the struggle for human rights—or, better, its biopolitical reduction to humanitarian aid to suffering others who are thereby accorded the status of 'bare life'—and at worst a cover for a quasi-imperialist imposition of neo-liberal values. According to those values, it is argued, human rights come down to the 'moral' right of every individual to test his or her mettle in the global marketplace and ultimately to be left alone by governments in their efforts to do so. Human flourishing becomes equated with the right to make something of oneself in spirited economic competition and commerce with others without oppressive state interference. What ultimately deserves political protection and preservation is the right to entrepreneurial initiative and aspiration, one that depends, in turn, on the right that was so central to Marx's thought on these matters, the right to sell one's labour-power as a commodity.

One will recognize here the motifs of Slavoj Žižek's repeated critiques of liberal multiculturalism, one of the dominant moral idioms of rights discourse. As he puts it in one of his many discussions of these matters,

> It is as if, since the horizon of social imagination no longer allows us to entertain the idea of an eventual demise of capitalism … critical energy has found a substitute outlet in fighting for cultural differences which leave the basic homogeneity of the capitalist world-system intact. So we are fighting our PC battles for the rights of ethnic minorities, of gays and lesbians, of different lifestyles, and so forth, while capitalism pursues its triumphant march…. Political struggle proper is transformed into the cultural struggle for the recognition of marginal identities and the tolerance of differences. (Žižek 1999, p. 218)

Or as he puts it apropos of queer theory and politics along with the broader proliferation of sexual practices and identities in contemporary society,

> far from posing a threat to the present regime of biopower … [such proliferation] is precisely the form of sexuality that is generated by the present

> conditions of global capitalism, which clearly favor the mode of subjectivity characterized by multiple shifting identifications. (Žižek 1999, p. 226)

The concept so often used to characterize this mode of subjectivity is, of course, 'flexibility'. The claim here is that at a certain point human rights discourse begins to converge with the language of innovative systems management.

In her critique of Michael Ignatieff's conception of human rights as a form of 'negative liberty', Wendy Brown has argued along similar lines, namely that human rights discourse essentially draws

> a line between the space of the individual to choose how she or he wants to live and the space of politics…. In this framing, human rights discourse … not only aspires to be beyond politics …. but carries implicitly antipolitical aspirations for its subjects – that is, casts subjects as yearning to be free from politics and indeed, from all collective determinations of ends. Thus the moral valence of human rights, as well as its positioning of morality outside of and above politics, inflects and positions in its image the individual human that rights would empower and thereby produce. (Brown 2004, p. 6)

The subject of rights is posited, in a word, as a self-investing individual enjoying the right to manage his or her own human capital.

Yet another form of leftist critique of the ostensibly post-political, ethical inflection of rights discourse takes aim not so much at this narrowly neo-liberal idiom but rather at one most often linked to a series of mostly French philosophers—above all Emmanuel Levinas, but also Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and more recently Judith Butler—who in various ways have sought to ground (or perhaps better, unground) philosophy in an 'ethics of the Other'. Such critiques oscillate between two extremes. The first claims that political struggles lose their contour and force in the dark night of universalized alterity in which *all* others are *totally* other. The second claims that the Otherness posited in the Levinasian tradition is insufficiently radical, that it retreats from the 'traumatic real' of human alterity and *thereby* loses its political traction (I tend to see myself in this group).

To take an example of the first line of critique, Jacques Rancière has attacked Lyotard for suggesting that what truly endangers human rights is a forgetting of the dimension of the Inhuman constitutive of the bearer of such rights. In Rancière's critical paraphrase, Lyotard argues that

> forms of repression and cruelty, or the situations of distress that we call 'inhuman', are the consequences of our betrayal of another Inhuman, what we could call a 'good' Inhuman. That Inhuman is Otherness as such. It is the part of us that we do not control…. The Inhuman is the irreducible otherness, the part of the Untameable of which the human being is, as Lyotard says, the hostage or the slave. Absolute evil begins with the attempt to tame the Untameable, to deny the situation of the hostage, to dismiss our dependency

> on the power of the Inhuman, in order to build a world that we could master entirely. (Rancière 2004)[1]

As Rancière continues,

> Crimes against humanity appear then as crimes *of* humanity, the crimes resulting from the affirmation of a human freedom denying its dependency upon the Untameable. The rights that must be held as a response to the 'humanitarian' lack of rights are the rights of the Other, the rights of the Inhuman.

The result, according to Rancière, is the disastrous evacuation of the space of political agency and therewith the principle of hope:

> The obedience to the rights of the Other sweeps aside the heterogeneity of political dissensus to the benefit of a more radical heterogeneity…. This means infinitizing the wrong, substituting for the processing of a political wrong a sort of ontological destiny that allows only 'resistance.' Now this resistance is no manifestation of freedom. On the contrary, resistance means faithfulness to the law of Otherness, which rules out any dream of 'human emancipation'. (Rancière 2004, p. 308)

Rancière goes so far as to draw a connection between this conception of radical heterogeneity with the rationale for the war in Iraq: 'The absolute victim is the victim of an absolute evil. Therefore the rights that come back to the sender—who is now the avenger—are akin to a power of infinite justice against the Axis of Evil' (Rancière 2004, p. 309).

II

It is important to underline here that Rancière traces this line of thinking to Hannah Arendt's famous analysis of the anomalous—or perhaps better, anomic—status of the stateless as those figures with respect to whom the 'right to have rights' first became truly manifest, became, to use Badiou's term, a 'truth-event' the meaning of which I think we are still trying to grasp. For Rancière, the meaning, however, is clear. Arendt's account effectively banishes such figures from the sphere of political contestation or 'dissensus', that process of political subjectivization in and through which a part of the social formation that is not counted as an equal part *performs* its full inclusion, *stages* a demonstration of its full participation. Rancière cites the example of Olympe de Gouges who, he argues, constructed such a dissensus with her 'Declaration of the Rights of Women and the Female Citizen' in 1791:

> A dissensus is not a conflict of interests, opinions, or values; it is a division put in the 'common sense': a dispute about what is given, about the frame within which we see something as given. Women could make a twofold demonstration. They could demonstrate that they were deprived of the rights *that they*

[1] Lyotard's essay was first delivered as one of the *Oxford Lectures on the Rights of Man* in 1993.

> *had*, thanks to the Declaration of Rights. And they could demonstrate, through their public action, *that they had* the rights that the constitution denied to them, *that they could enact* those rights. (Rancière 2004, p. 304; my emphasis)[2]

As Rancière sees it, it is just such a capacity for staging scenes of dissensus that Arendt denies to the stateless by locating them in a state of exception—she calls it 'a peculiar state of nature'—in which they are trapped in the idiocy of bare, private life, a life in which public action, speech, and appearance—all features of truly political, and thus truly human, life—become impossible.

Rancière is, of course, thinking of those passages in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* where Arendt tries to characterize the 'form of life' into which the stateless were thrown by way of the remapping of European borders after World War I and the Russian Revolution (Arendt 1975, especially pp. 267–302). This form of life was, she argues, already provided for in the French Declaration of the Rights of Man insofar as it coupled such rights with the principle of national sovereignty. In the end, then, human rights could only be truly enjoyed by one born or 'naturalized' into citizenship of a sovereign nation-state. When by accidents of history one's entitlements are reduced to those enjoyed by way of the status or *dignitas* 'human', they turn out to be meaningless. The passages are well known but are nonetheless worth citing again: 'It seems', Arendt writes, 'that a man who is nothing but a man has lost the very qualities which make it possible for other people to treat him as a fellow-man'. And further:

> The great danger arising from the existence of people forced to live outside the common world is that they are thrown back, in the midst of civilization, on their natural givenness, on their mere differentiation. They lack that tremendous equalizing of differences which comes from being citizens of some commonwealth and yet, since they are no longer allowed to partake in the human artifice, they begin to belong to the human race in much the same way as animals belong to a specific animal species. The paradox involved in the loss of human rights is that such a loss coincides with the instant when a person becomes a human being in general – without a profession, without a citizenship, without an opinion, without a deed by which to identify and specify himself – *and* different in general, representing nothing but his own

[2] Judith Butler offers another good example of this strategy or what she calls the 'performance of precarity': 'Let me offer an example that directly relates this issue of performativity to that of precarity. Some of you may know that illegal immigrants in May of 2006 took to the streets in Los Angeles and started to sing the national anthem of the United States. In fact, they sang the national anthem of the United States in English and in Spanish, and a Spanish version was widely circulated on the web. They also sang the national anthem of Mexico, and sometimes they would sing one anthem right after the other. What kind of public performance was this street singing? Their aim was to petition the government to allow them to become citizens. But what was the way in which they made their petition? Indeed, what kind of performative exercise was this singing? They were exercising the right of free assembly without having that right. That right belongs to citizens. So, they were asserting a right they did not have in order to make the case, publicly, that they should have that very right. But obviously, they did not need to have the right in order to make a case that they should have that right' (Butler 2009).

> absolutely unique individuality which, deprived of expression within and action upon a common world, loses all significance. (Arendt 1975, p. 302)

One might say that Arendt is describing here the form of life occupied by the man from the country in Kafka's famous parable, 'Vor dem Gesetz', a parable that casts both light and shadow on the situation of the protagonist of *The Trial*, Josef K. Rancière seems to want to ask, why the man from the country does not simply ignore the warnings of the guard and just—and justly—walk through the gates of the law and declare, perform, enact what would prove to have been the case all along by way of that very enactment, namely that this gate to the law along with the enjoyment of the rights afforded by it, was always already meant for him?[3] To put it crudely, Rancière's message to the man from the country would in essence be, 'get a (political) life!' (This 'reading' comes across as one of the many commentaries on the parable presented by the priest to Josef K. in the novel.)

But rather than engaging in further commentary on the parable, I would like to underline what I see as a fundamental ambiguity in Arendt's account of this 'peculiar state of nature' before the law, one that Rancière is quite right to characterize as a state of exception. He is also right to see here the beginnings of Agamben's influential elaborations of this state and its historical vicissitudes. As Arendt sees it, what remains *valid*—but *without meaning*—in this state (a formulation I borrow from Gershom Scholem)—is what she characterizes as 'the dark background of mere givenness, the background formed by our unchangeable and unique nature…' (Arendt 1975, p. 301).[4] She adds that this dark background

> *breaks into the political scene* as the alien which in its all too obvious difference reminds us of the limitations of human activity – which are identical with the limitations of human equality…. The 'alien' is a frightening symbol of the fact of difference as such, of individuality as such, and indicates those realms in which man cannot change and cannot act and in which, therefore, he has a distinct tendency to destroy. (Arendt 1975, p. 301; my emphasis)

One will recall that Arendt also suggests that this alien kernel of human existence—the sheer *thatness* of a person's being-there—not only incites hatred but also offers itself to other kinds of responses:

> The human being who has lost his place in a community, his political status in the struggle of his time, and the legal personality which makes his actions and part of his destiny a consistent whole, is left with those qualities which usually can become articulate only in the sphere of private life—and must remain

[3] Here Rancière is actually repeating Arendt's criticisms in *Origins* and elsewhere of the failure of European Jews to politicize their situation when threatened with experiences of exclusion.

[4] Scholem uses the formulation in a famous letter to Benjamin concerning the status of revelation in Kafka's work: 'You ask what I understand by the "nothingness of revelation"? I understand by it a state in which revelation appears to be without meaning, in which it still asserts itself, in which it has *validity* but *no significance* [*in dem sie gilt, aber nicht bedeutet*]. A state in which the wealth of meaning is lost and what is in the process of appearing (for revelation is such a process) still does not disappear, even though it is reduced to the zero point of its own content, so to speak' (Scholem 1989, p. 142).

> unqualified, mere existence in all matters of public concern. This mere existence, that is, all that which is mysteriously given us by birth and which includes the shape of our bodies and the talents of our minds, can be adequately dealt with only by the unpredictable hazards of friendship and sympathy, or the great and incalculable grace of love, which says with Augustine, '*Volo ut sis* (I want you to be)', without being able to give any particular reason for such supreme and unsurpassable affirmation. (Arendt 1975, p. 301)

III

The problem with Arendt's account as I see it is not that she excludes this realm from the public space, from the space of political contestation, but rather that she underestimates the impact of what she herself characterizes as its '*break* into the political scene', a break-in that, however, can only be fully appreciated by revising her account of what makes the alien truly alien. It is here that the other critique of the 'ethical turn' in human rights discourse begins, the one that sees in the dimension of the Inhuman that Rancière traces back to Arendt an insufficiently robust notion of alterity. What *remains* once those condemned to statelessness have been politically disqualified is not simply an existence belonging to a separate, deprived—and so *private*—sphere beyond politics, but rather an uncanny remainder of the *constitution* of the political sphere. This is a dimension that is not simply post-political, non-political, or not-yet-political—the part that is not yet a part but strives to be counted as one—but rather *unpolitical* whereby the 'un' should be heard in the same way as in *unconscious*, *undead*, *unheimlich*. One might say that the part that is not a part is something like a 'partial object' in the field of the political. Along the same lines one might characterize those who were caught in this extra-legal, extraterritorial zone generated by the reterritorialization of Europe during the years in question as the *unpeopled*. I would even argue that the 'unpeopled' are the very ones at issue in the Judeo-Christian commandment (*not law*) to love one's neighbor. What this means, then, is that the 'neighbour'—the figure Levinas strived to reanimate for modern life with his radical invocation of the Other (love of neighbour was, one will recall, the primary topic of Arendt's dissertation on Augustine)—cannot be accounted for by 'all that which is mysteriously given us by birth and which includes the shape of our bodies and the talents of our minds'.[5]

It is this objection that, as I understand it, informs all of Žižek's (unnecessarily harsh) attacks on Levinas's persistent appeal to the face of the Other. 'What if', he asks,

[5] Here I refer the reader to my discussion of Franz Rosenzweig's concept of the 'metaethical self', a dimension of human life that exceeds what is given to us at our biological birth and is, indeed, born to us *as a remainder* in excess of our talents, our qualities, our predicates. See my *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life* (Santner 2001). One might indeed argue that Rosenzweig's formula for the metaethical self, B = B (a pure point of self-reference meaning: whatever changes about me, I am still me) is directly connected to Arendt's 'discovery' of the right to have rights.

> we restore to the Levinasian 'face' all its monstrosity: face is not a harmonious Whole of the dazzling epiphany of a 'human face,' face is something the glimpse of which we get when we stumble upon a grotesquely distorted face, a face in the grip of a disgusting tic or grimace, a face which, precisely confronts us when the neighbor 'loses his face'? (Žižek 2005, p. 162)[6]

For Žižek the grimace of the neighbour embodies the

> *ambiguity of the Real* … the extreme/impossible point at which opposites coincide, at which the innocence of the Other's vulnerable nakedness overlaps with pure evil…. Is there not, in the very heart of the Judeo-Freudian inhuman neighbor, a monstrous dimension which is already minimally 'gentrified,' domesticated, once it is conceived in the Levinasian sense? What if the Levinasian face is yet another defense against this monstrous dimension of subjectivity? (Ibid.)[7]

Though I embrace this more or less psychoanalytic line of inquiry, the difficult question that remains *unaddressed* here concerns the political valence of the 'radically ambiguous monstrosity of the Neighbor-Thing' (Žižek 2005, p. 163). As Costas Douzinas has recently put this question, is there a radical 'normativity of the real'? (Douzinas 2010, p. 86). Does this ambiguous monstrosity provide any orientation whatsoever for political thought or action? Is there a normative pressure or urgency emanating from the neighbour that pushes, as it were, to the *left*? I am inclined to say yes.

I would put it this way: what makes the neighbor so monstrous is that he or she—or perhaps better, *it*—has gotten *stuck* on, remains *haunted* by, in some strange sense persists in *enjoying*, the radical negativity—the constituent violence—at the origin of every social formation, a violence testifying to its lack of transcendental authorization, its lack of foundation in some sort of knowledge of the real. For Žižek, the name of this stuckness is 'death drive', for Douzinas it is the 'right to revolution'. For both, the normativity of the real is the pressure injected into human life by way of the abstract negativity—the 'night of the world'—at the origin of political power and authority. The neighbour is the figure who in some way embodies this pressure, who keeps failing to repress it *in always singular ways* (we might say that in Beckett's prose and theatre, the neighbour keeps trying to fail *better*). It is this very singularity that, I would argue, is constitutive of what Arendt characterizes as that 'dark background' of mere existence that can arouse both repulsion and attraction, hate and love.

[6] To cite Freud's famous characterization of the Ratman, the face of the Other to whom I am answerable is one that in some form or another manifests a '*horror at pleasure of his own of which he himself was unaware*' (Freud 1981, pp. 166–67).

[7] It is in this context that Rilke's characterization of the neighbour becomes so compelling: 'There exists a creature [*ein Wesen*] that is perfectly harmless; when it passes before your eyes, you hardly notice it and immediately forget it again. But as soon as it somehow, invisibly, gets into your ears, it begins to develop, it hatches, and cases have been known where it has penetrated into the brain and flourished there devastatingly, like the pneumococci in dogs which gain entrance through the nose… This creature is Your Neighbor [*Dein Nachbar*]' (Rilke 1990, p. 168).

When faced with such questions, Žižek himself has the tendency to respond indirectly, most often by invoking examples from film, literature, popular culture, or jokes. In his attempt to characterize more fully the uncanny insistence of the neighbour—the dimension he claims has been gentrified by Levinas and others—he turns to Kafka's remarkable short prose text, *Die Sorge des Hausvaters* ('The Worry of the Father of the Family'). I would like to conclude by showing how Kafka's text links this psychoanalytic line of thought with Arendt's analysis of the stateless—the *unpeopled*—who gathered in the extraterritorial spaces of twentieth-century Europe.

IV

The occasion of the worry of the *pater familias* who narrates Kafka's little story is a strange creature called 'Odradek' who, I would suggest, manifests a family resemblance to the toy referred to in Freud's discussion of the *fort/da* game in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*:

> At first it looks like a flat, star-shaped spool for thread, and in fact, it does seem to be wound with thread; although these appear to be only old, torn-off pieces of thread of the most varied kinds and colors knotted together but also tangled up in one another. But it is not just a spool, for a little crossbar sticks out from the middle of the star, and another little strut is joined to it at a right angle. With the help of the second little strut on the one side and one of the points of the star on the other, the whole thing can stand upright, as if on two legs. (Kafka 2007, p. 72)

Odradek appears to represent an anomaly with respect to any known principles of coherence or purposefulness:

> It is tempting to think that this figure once had some sort of functional shape and is now merely broken. But this does not seem to be the case; at least there is no evidence for such a speculation; nowhere can you see any other beginnings or fractures that would point to anything of the kind; true, the whole thing seems meaningless yet in its own way complete. (Kafka 2007, p. 72)

Or further:

> I ask myself in vain what will become of him. Can he die? Everything that dies has previously had some sort of goal, some kind of activity, and that activity is what has worn it down; this does not apply to Odradek. (Kafka 2007, p. 73)

In spite of—or perhaps because of—this peculiar overlapping of perfection and deficiency, animation and mute woodenness, the creature exhibits a remarkable mobility, as if its recalcitrance to classification were itself a form of motility: 'In any case, it is impossible to say anything more definite about it, since Odradek is extraordinarily mobile and impossible to catch' (Kafka 2007, p. 72).

In the present context, the opening paragraph of the text is of central importance. There the narrator anticipates the uncertainties pertaining to the creature's ontological status by noting the linguistic controversy pertaining to its name:

> Some say that the word *Odradek* has roots in the Slavic languages, and they attempt to demonstrate the formation of the word on that basis. Still others maintain that its roots are German and that it is merely influenced by the Slavic. The uncertainty of both interpretations, however, makes it reasonable to conclude that neither pertains, especially since neither of them enables you to find a meaning for the word. (Kafka 2007, p. 72)

In part because of Kafka's well-known obsession with the semantic resonances of his own name, scholars have largely ignored the warnings issued by the narrator of this short text and struggled to identify specific meanings embedded in the word that names 'Odradek'. This work has, of course, involved considerable research about the possible roots of the name in different Central European languages, above all German and Czech, the two languages in which Kafka was fluent. Max Brod has suggested, for example, that 'an entire scale of Slavic words meaning "deserter" or "apostate" is evoked: deserter from the kind, *rod*; deserter from *Rat* [counsel], the divine decision about creation, *rada*' (cited in Hamacher 1999, p. 319). To this the Kafka scholar Wilhelm Emrich adds the associations with the Czech verb *odraditi*, 'meaning to dissuade or deter someone from something'. Noting the connotations in Slavic languages of *od* (meaning off, away from) and of *ek* (indicating a diminutive), Emrich concludes by suggesting that 'Odradek … would therefore mean a small creature that dissuades someone from something, or rather, a creature that always dissuades in general' (cited in Hamacher 1999, pp. 319–320). Werner Hamacher adds to this list a series of further connotations:

> *Rada* means not only *Rat* (counsel) but also series, row, direction, rank, and line; *rád* means series, order, class, rule as well as advisable, prudent; *rádek* means small series, row, and line. Odradek would thus be the thing that carried on its mischief outside of the linguistic and literary order, outside of speech, not only severed from the order of discourse (*Rede*) but also outside of every genealogical and logical series: a *Verräter*, a 'betrayer' of every party and every conceivable whole…. 'Odradek' means apostate—from the continuum of generation, line, rights, discourse, *ratio*, logic…. 'Odradek' means dissidence, dissense, and a defection from the order of meaning. 'Odradek' thus 'means' that it does not mean… (Hamacher 1999, pp. 319–20)

Hamacher brings this vertiginous exploration of linguistic roots to a point of self-cancelling self-reference:

> Odradek is the 'od-radix': the one 'without roots'; in Czech, *odrodek*, the one without its own kind, the one who 'steps out of the lineage' (*odroditi*—to degenerate, to be uprooted). 'Odradek' is, in short, the one who belongs to no kind and is without counsel, the one with neither a discourse nor a name of his own. *Odradek* is a word from at least two languages, *between* at least two languages, and thus a 'word' belonging to neither – a hybrid word and a hybrid between a word and a non-word. (Hamacher 1999, p. 320)

Finally, noting that Odradek responds to the interrogations of the *pater familias* by claiming to have no fixed abode, Hamacher characterizes Odradek as '"Od-adresa", without address, between body and language, laughter and rustling, living organism and dead writing…. Odradek, an anarchist before all laws, wanders everywhere, even on the border between life and death' (Hamacher 1999, p. 325). Omitted from this inventory of associations are *Unrat* and *Dreck*, words positing Odradek as a kind of excremental remainder.

Kafka published this story in 1919, the moment at which the population of the stateless began to expand exponentially. With 'Odradek' we get something like a name for the *unheimlich* aspect of this population, their status, that is, not as people simply deprived of the rights of enjoyment in the commonwealth—the political economy—of a nation-state but as the *unpeopled* who are radically 'Od-adresa'. And yet—and this is what is of such concern to the master of the household—they are in some sense immortal or, as we might put it, they seem to be an *eternal unpeople*. It is perhaps no accident, then, that it was the so-called eternal people, speakers of a minor Odradekian idiolect at the intersection of Germanic and Slavic who, in the decades to come, came to embody that alien dimension that breaks into the political scene as what is both most alien and most proximate, the neighbour. And as Kafka's work suggests, this creature injects into life a normative pressure that can never be fully satisfied by the granting of rights.

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