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THE VICTORY of THE IMAGINARY LEFT

*The relationship of the media and politics in
the 2000 parliamentary elections in Slovenia*



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published by: PEACE INSTITUTE
edition: MEDIAWATCH
editor: BRANKICA PETKOVIĆ

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translation: OLGA VUKOVIĆ

design: ID STUDIO

typography: GOUDY & GOUDY SANS, ITC

printing

coordination: BOŽNAR & PARTNER

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*The publishing of this book was made possible by the
Open Society Institute.*



*We would like to thank CHS d.o.o.
for providing a Compaq Armada computer.*

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in the 2000 parliamentary elections in Slovenia*

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INTRODUCTORY NOTES

1. THE ALPHABETICAL LIST OF THE PARLIAMENTARY PARTIES IN SLOVENIA:

- desus – The Democratic Party of Slovenian Pensioners,
leader: Janko Kušar
- LDS – Liberal Democracy of Slovenia,
leader: Janez Drnovšek
- nsi – New Slovenia, leader: Andrej Bajuk
- SDS – Social Democratic Party, leader: Janez Janša
- SKD+SLS – Slovenian People's Party, leader: Franc Zagožen
- SNS – Slovenian National Party, leader: Zmagor Jelinčič
- SMS – The Party of Slovenian Youth,
leader: Dominik Černjak
- ZLSD – The United List of Social Democrats,
leader: Borut Pahor

2. THE RESULTS OF THE 2000 ELECTIONS:

NO. OF SEATS	LIST OF POLITICAL PARTIES	VOTES IN %
34	LDS	36.26
14	SDS	15.81
11	ZLSD	12.08
9	SLS+SKD	9.54
8	NSi	8.66
4	SMS	4.34
4	SNS	4.39
4	desus	5.17
2	NATIONAL MINORITIES	3.75

Source: <http://www.sigov.si/volitve/eng/enindex.htm>

SUMMARY

The seventh book in the MediaWatch series comprises five essays on the election campaign for the 2000 parliamentary elections in Slovenia. We chose subjects which in our opinion demonstrate the role and importance of the media in this election campaign and consequently influence political situation and social circumstances following the elections.

In the essay entitled *Crippled and Blinded by Neutrality* BREDA LUTHAR argues that in studying the media coverage of elections, most authors focus on the deviations from the professional standards of journalism, particularly the standard of the objective treatment of individual candidates or political parties, while the professional standards themselves are not questioned. The fetishization of objectivity is still the main feature of the journalist's self-image. In this essay the author explains how the professional mythology of journalistic objectivity affects the 'bias' of elections and the independence of the media from politically constructed 'problems'. She thinks that this is made possible thanks to the assumption that underlies the myth of objectivity, namely that a story may be neutral and related without bias. This implies that it can be told from no one's viewpoint, and that the truth lies somewhere between two (three, five or more) opposing statements.

Since in our example politicians found it more important to control **what** people thought about than to influence **how** they thought about significant issues, the author analyzed the pre-election debates on the Slovenian national TV station and POP TV in light of the agenda that was publicly discussed, while leaving out other significant aspects (iconography, rhetorical conditions and the like). She attempted to show that journalists' thematization of reality was almost completely dependent on politics and its turning of "issues" into "problems". She points out that what is important is not only which social problems are defined as crucial, or who defines the central social problems, but also the language, concepts and conceptual framework within which these issues are treated.

TONČI A. KUZMANIĆ opens his essay *The Extremism of the Center* with the observation that analyzing political extremism has become much more demanding than it used

to be, because extremism has become concealed and is no longer readily discernible. The author concentrates on certain less obvious but more firmly embedded forms of extremism which in his opinion could prove fateful for the future of democracy in Slovenia. Since nothing is any longer as it used to be, also nationalism, chauvinism, cultural racism (which is crucial for the understanding of the situation in Slovenia), and various kinds of extremism are different from those of yesterday. They have “adapted” themselves, become “modernized”, actually “post-modernized” and “post-politicized”.

The author establishes that the entire corpus of Slovenian politics incessantly drifts towards the right, and is now much more to the right than it had ever been during the past ten years. The Right he speaks of is no longer traditional and should not be sought among the supporters of Andrej Bajuk or Janez Janša only. It is post-modernized, lofty and arrogant, and above all anti-political. It is to be found among manager-style Drnovšek’s clique, in phenomena such as the mixture of racism and postmodernism entertained by Zmago Jelinčič, and even in such an anti-political event as was the entrance into the parliament of the Party of Youth.

Kuzmanič concludes that that which is in Slovenia taken as being the left or “really the left” is something radical, fundamentalist, robust and stalwart above all. He argues that fundamentalism has not only assumed the position of the Left, but that the Left is almost non-existent. Any anti-Church or anti-Catholic standpoint is equated a priori with the left-wing. In his opinion the manner in which the media treated the apparent “shift leftwards” of the electoral body is in fact a non-interpretation. It is an appraisal made from a radical and centrist viewpoint, and its purpose is to frighten. Rather than being an “objective assessment of events” it is a political stance.

The author further asserts that in Slovenia it is not possible to find an interpretation which would call a spade a spade and say out loud a very simple fact: at the present undeveloped stage of democracy, Slovenians have no other religion apart from Slovenianness, which is similar to what has happened in Albania, Serbia, and Poland. The developments in post-socialist Slovenia and particularly the 2000 parliamentary elections cannot be fully understood without first saying openly that voters opted for Drnovšek’s way among the choice of non-differences and non-differentiations that were entangled in Sonderweg-style neo-conser-

vative neo-Slovenianness. Slovenia thus ended up with a situation in which Janšaism may become implemented in a “soft” Drnovšek way, which would be tantamount to the victory of Janšaism.

In Kuzmanić’s view, the “real” problem Slovenians have to cope with is not at home either on the left or on the right. The 2000 elections should be considered as a “settling of accounts” with nationalism, but this was not done with the intention to “escape” from nationalism as such or to find “other”, for example political cues for future development. Nationalism has been defeated, but from the positions and in the name of a new nationalism i.e. post-political neo-Slovenianness.

The essay *Religion and Politics* by SREČO DRAGOŠ looks into the presence of the Roman-Catholic Church in the media coverage of the election campaign. Dragoš concludes that the topics that received the most attention (thanks both to the Church and certain political parties) were: the relationship between religion and politics, the provision of spiritual services to the army, the issue of public schools, and the attitude of the Church towards the electronic and print media. He draws attention to three areas, namely the strategy of the Church, the conduct of political parties and the political culture in Slovenia, within which the trends culminated that have been present, to a greater or lesser degree, ever since Slovenia gained independence ten years ago. The author argues that throughout the 20th century the political culture in Slovenia was significantly influenced by the culture war and clericalism. He concludes that the 2000 election campaign revealed a significant shift towards the blending of religion and politics, which was induced by both political parties and the Church. Should this trend continue, it may have negative consequences for the political culture and Christian religion in Slovenia.

In his essay *The Inexpressiveness of Election Posters* MITJA VELIKONJA analyzes the visual language of the election posters for the 2000 parliamentary elections in Slovenia. In addition to the motives, composition, slogans and symbols used on these posters, he also considers their aesthetical features and messages communicated through political propaganda. In his opinion, the basic traits of these posters were the “calmness” of both propaganda and slogans (which befits the relatively untroubled political situation in

Slovenia), the similarity of motives (their large inexpressiveness), the lack of distinct political symbols, and the domination of the portraits of notable party members (the personalization of the party's image). The author points out three things: firstly, that there were many more similarities than differences between the posters – rather than stressing and detailing differences between parties, the posters blurred them; secondly, the posters were exceptionally monotone, boring and uninventive – inexpressive in short; and finally, many aesthetical and propaganda options that are usually employed in the design of political posters were not exploited.

In the essay *The Election Campaign on the Internet*, SANDRA B. HRVATIN and LENART J. KUČIĆ attempt to answer the question whether the web campaign formed an important part of the election campaign. They conclude that most parties simply posted propaganda materials on their web pages and somewhat adapted them to suit the requirements of the medium. Web sites were thus prevalingly used for self-presentation and as an electronic extension of the party's profile. The obvious lack of a web strategy reveals that the campaign on the Internet was just a formal necessity.

The analysis of the pre-election web polls featured on the SLS+SKD and SDS web pages showed that those who voted in these polls were mostly the supporters of these parties. This shows that Slovenians are not yet active web voters and that the significance of the Internet in this election campaign was negligible even with respect to negative propaganda.

The authors further analyzed the participation of Janez Drnovšek, the leader of the LDS, in on-line chats during the election campaign. The analysis showed that even though the public had direct access to the leader of the party, the larger part of the debate did not touch on politics, or the voters did not have relevant questions for the leader. The authors thus conclude that the web portion of the election campaign was probably just one evolutionary step towards the stage at which the Internet will become the main channel for the exchange of data when the content of the messages will finally become adapted to the medium.

Breda Luthar

BLINDED AND CRIPPLED BY NEUTRALITY

This essay is a study of televised election debates on *TV Slovenia* and *POP TV* during the campaigns for the parliamentary elections in Slovenia in September and October 2000. Rather than criticizing problematic journalistic deviations from canonized professional standards, I will consider **the contradictions of the standards and professional mythology of journalism**. The focus of my interest here is the ubiquitous **standard of journalistic objectivity**. The myth of objective journalism implies that a story may be told from no one's (that is to say, a neutral) viewpoint. This bizarre empiricist simplification of the social and symbolic space actually means that truth can only be found somewhere between two subjective statements (or three, five, six etc. conflicting positions).

In this essay I will not address different aspects of the televisual discourse during the election campaign 2000, for example, the iconography or rhetoric conditions that equally contributed to the meaning of the televised election debates, but will concentrate on the agenda of the TV discussion. The distinction between the question "**what do we think**" and "**what do we think about**" is at any rate unproductive when considering the role of the media in an election campaign. Looking from the perspective of the issues that were discussed on TV, we could say that **the meaning and impact of this election genre and discourse was as much the result of the issues that were marginalized and excluded as of those that were discussed**. One of the most important effects of the media on the election stemmed from their power to create problems out of "issues". It is precisely the journalistic ideal and myth of objectivity that enabled politics to virtually **entirely colonize the public debate by creating "national problems" out of "issues"**.

THREE THEORIES OF MEDIA CONSPIRACY

Before I proceed to explore how and why the idea of journalistic objectivity enables politics to colonize the media agenda, I should first take a look, in line with the initially stated purpose of this essay, at how the relationship between media and politics is conceptualized in the public debates in Slovenia. This is indeed a fundamental question as this discourse has significant implication for

the self-image of journalism. By the same token, it influences the concept of journalism and with it the nature of the interaction between these two sub-systems. Various recent conceptualizations of this relationship in the public debates in Slovenia could be classified into at least three “conspiracy theories”: the conspiracy of capital, the conspiracy of the old elite and the conspiracy of the ideological state apparatus.

1. **GOOD GUYS VERSUS CAPITAL:** the first form of the conspiracy theory is a hardcore political economic view. It holds that independence from capital and politics, from the owner and ruler, results in independent journalists as well.
2. **BAD GUYS VERSUS THE “SLOVENIAN SPRING”:** This is a political variation of the first view. It criticizes the supposed political bias of journalists and editors who are seen as remnants of the old system and the “continuity” of the old elites remaining in key positions. This is associated with “indoctrination that is characteristic of totalitarian regimes”, criticism of all minority political opinions, and media oligarchy.
3. **THE IDEOLOGICAL APPARATUS VERSUS ALL:** This is a very general thesis that tells little about the media themselves even though it talks about them quite a lot. The media is generally seen as the ideological state apparatus, or rather the “apparatus of the state of capital”.

The political economic perspective on the conditions of journalistic production is undoubtedly crucial, but the version mentioned above suggests an over-simplification. As a matter of fact this thesis holds that ideology is a direct and automatic effect of the media ownership, or rather political interests. The concept of ideological effect is not thematized at all, but ideology is implicitly understood as a distorted truth. According to this thesis journalists are good guys that are oppressed by either a ruler or owner who obstruct their search for truth. On the other hand, at least one version of the political economic theory about the influence of the mass media in Slovenia holds that in this way the special social status of journalists is constructed - the status of those who have privileged access to the truth.

Similarly the second, political thesis sees ideology as a distorted truth, but it attributes reasons for the bending of reality to political interests – the partisanship of journalists and editors. This thesis is favored by the supporters of

the right-wing who regard themselves as representatives of civil society. In their opinion, the blame for the defeat of the right-wing at the election lies largely with the biased media and their sustained campaign against Bajuk's government. Both the right and the left version of political economic theory point out the concentration of ownership and, as a result, the media serving the interests of its owners (with the right-wing version emphasizing the role of the so called "retention forces" that allegedly control the media). Some even spoke of the necessity of a "revolutionary occupation" of the main Slovenian media or rather, they imagined that a pre-requisite for the democratization of the public debate was "independent" media controlled by themselves.

The first problem of this thesis lies in the fact that it represents an attempt to **colonize the concept of civil society**. What it says actually is that civil society is exclusively theirs, all other voices are just an articulation of the "ruling structure", while "minority opinion" is the opinion of political parties that were defeated at the election. Media marginalization and the exclusion of a whole series of other voices from the public sphere is ignored by the supporters of this thesis. The second contradiction of this view is the very **concept of intention** and interests-driven bias. **This intention is understood as a private mental state of the author i.e. the journalist, and not as a consequence of the author or journalist being embedded in institutionalized discourse systems.** The supporters of the "bad guys versus the Slovenian spring" theory ignore the fact that communication takes place within the context of relationships that exist independently of any particular interest. Ideology does not reside in the journalist's mind only, but in the systems of discourse that comprise journalists (and all others, including those who produce such thesis) alike.

Since the right-wing, which has correctly concluded that "the media was unfair to its administration both before and after the elections", does not see this, it misinterprets the bias of the media. On the other hand, the answer of journalists and political commentators to this objection is usually naively empiricist. The journalists most often assert that the media just impartially record what actually happens in reality. In their opinion all they had to do was chronicle the countless political mistakes of the right-wing government – that is to say, facts – and the story wrote itself. Or, to be more precise, **the story was written by the facts**. This understanding is in harmony with the tradi-

tional notion of objectivity: first we collect facts, and then – but only then – do we write a story or rather produce an interpretation on the basis of the facts. Such a view is problematic because it presupposes that our knowledge and interests are entirely separate rather than inseparable, **while facts and stories are mutually constituent. This means that the type of discourse dictates the kind of data we are looking for.** A deeper analysis therefore cannot inquire into the political views of journalists or the “media oligarchy” but it must: a) problematize **the journalistic myth of the neutral recording of facts devoid of subjectivity** b) establish that in a society in which **media are not placed outside of society but are, above all, a specific articulation of popular mythology** (such as chauvinism or racism, but also, say, an anti-religious sentiment), there is no consensus for right-wing politics. In this concrete example we are thus faced with the “right-wing politicians misjudged the national consensus” problem rather than “the media oligarchy versus minority political opinions”, since the media themselves, as pointed out before, are an articulation of the popular consensus. In much the same way as everybody else does, journalism too makes use of symbolic tools that constitute the dominant ideology when dealing with consensual matters.

“The ideological apparatus versus all” is a summary of the third thesis that is based on an implicit assumption that ideology is not solely a distortion of the truth or an automatic effect of capital production, but is made up of the network of images, symbols, practices and concepts that operate through interpellation. Unfortunately, current articulations of this thesis in Slovenia most frequently treat the media as **a straightforward articulation of the ruling ideology.** Occasionally this simplification goes so far as to see the ruling ideology personified in the party in power. The problem with this thesis is that it does not offer even the slightest hint of how ideology actually operates through the media, nor does it furnish any argument for its own legitimacy. On the contrary, such an explanation simply reproduces its own moral superiority by means of a dramatic rhetoric argument.

The media are a direct articulation of the financial interests or interests of the dominant ideology – as such they acquire a role similar to that put forward by the political economic explanation and the right-wing version of the conspiracy theory. In political terms, this thesis belongs to

the category of the dramatic, Manichean, leftist populist struggle of “good against evil” in criticism that looks for the like-minded “to the left of the left”, as political commentators would put it, and is curiously similar to the right-wing thesis about the rule of the old elite and the conspiracy of the party in power.

THE CRUCIAL FACTORS IN MEDIA HEGEMONY

Various versions of each of the three views implicitly or explicitly assume that the source of domination is invariably personified in, or can be located within a concrete political or economic group. Or, as Laclau would put it, such a perception of power in the public discourse cannot free itself from a sovereign. It cannot imagine that **power may be subjectless** or that it pervades all networks of relationships, practices, routines and most ordinary discourses. It could be said, at least of the first two thesis, that they understand ideology and power in the narrow sense, that is, see them only through their obvious manifestations as state politics. Such a narrowing of the notion of the political is an ideological act in itself.

The second assumption shared by all three thesis is that cultural products are a direct articulation of the system of ownership (dominion of capital) or political dominion. A closer study, however, cannot offer any proof of such a direct relationship. The functioning of the media cannot be understood solely as a struggle of political interests. **When studying media hegemony we must also take into account the intricate network involved in the reproduction of popular mythologies and a number of sedimented institutionalized systems of discourse, journalistic self-perception and professional ideologies.** Viewing the “deep ideological structure” of Slovenian journalism from the perspective of a) **participating interests only (political and economic)** gives an incomplete picture, since it must be considered as an articulation of the relationship between at least two other dimensions of journalistic production, that is, b) **popular ideology/mythology** and c) **professional journalistic self-image and mythology** (of which the myth of objectivity is but one part).

I will look into the election confrontations on both tv channels in Slovenia from the perspective of the professional myth of objectivity. Similar to other aspects of the self-image of journalism that became articulated through

election debates, also the myth of objectivity will be treated from the standpoint of **the fetishization of objectivity as the central aspect of the journalistic self-image**. It is precisely the myth of objectivity that enables politics and its organized and more or less professional PR teams to construct “national problems” out of “issues” for the media and instead of them. Voters do not have access to political “reality” so our perception of politics and political actors can only be based on the media agenda, while the public life is an effect of public transcripts, including media transcripts.

The 2000 election campaign did not significantly influence the election result, or in other words, it did not significantly **influence how voters reasoned out “national problems”**. The media in the first place influenced **what the voters could think about**. In other words, the media defined the topics that were to acquire social significance and the status of national problems. **The only means of influencing what people think is precisely to control what they think about**¹.

THE ILLUSION OF CONSENSUS

It is only through the building of a media agenda that events obtain their interpretative framework and the status of “social problems” that is a pre-requisite if we want to make events socially meaningful. Accordingly, before, during and after the elections the main field of the political battle was the question of **who was to define the “central social problems”** or “... issues that are currently pressing, have received a keen response or are very important for everyday life in Slovenia” (U. Lipušček in his introduction to the election confrontation on SLO TV). **What we have here is not simply the construction of the media agenda and “national problems” from issues, but equally the adoption of the language, notions, sets of concepts and conceptual framework within which a certain issue is discussed and constituted as a problem** (typical examples are concepts such as “Spring Parties”, “Slovenian Spring”, “committed to the values of the Slovenian Spring”, and “Holy Father”). Through election debates the media took over the conceptual framework of reasoning and determined the “central points” of the discourse that favored specific perspectives over certain others.

¹ See Entman in Brian McNair, p. 50

1. My first thesis is that political and interest groups constituted “their issues” as “common social problems” long before the election, through the media and with the help of the media. Journalistic agenda building was subordinated to the political production of problems. **The journalists, blinded by myths of objectivity, neutrality and realism, wrote down what happened in reality (press conferences, pseudo-events and scandals..), shaped the media agenda out of pseudo-reality, and finally turned those issues into “national problems”.** These “problems” hence appeared as an inherent or natural part of reality and not a product of ideological protocols for representing reality. To put it another way, it seems as if a different agenda were not possible at all because the agenda is a reflection of actual events.
2. My second thesis is that this was the reason why the election agenda was limited to consensual issues about governmental politics and **did not touch upon sub-politics i.e. the social agenda that calls into question the consensual values of the “community”.**

What could we think about at the time of the election then? The participants in the election debates answered questions about the budget deficit (it should be reduced), the share of resources allocated to science and technology (it should be increased), Slovenia’s accession to the European Union (we should join the EU yet should decisively defend our interests), the re-establishment of relations with Yugoslavia (of course caution can never be dismissed as redundant), and so on. **There was a general consensus on the “main national problems”.** The only issue that provoked conflict was who should be held responsible or given credit for a specific problem. With all political options agreeing that the budget deficit should be reduced, the argument could only flare up when discussing whose financial policy created such a deficit. All political parties (save for burlesque parties, for example the SNP), were unanimous that Slovenia’s inclusion in the EU was an inevitability. The conflict could thus revolve around the question of who was to be blamed or credited for the process of alignment with the EU requirements. Media-defined “problems” (ranging from the budget deficit, external debt, and the electoral system, to the salaries of judges and strikes by medical workers) were the criteria by which we were to judge political options and the image of candidates’ competence to resolve “national problems”. During the election campaign

the issues that were turned into “national problems” thus became **standards according to which we modeled perceptions (or rather impressions) of political candidates.**

In the election debates, as on all other occasions for that matter, journalists reproduced the political agenda and almost invariably asked questions relating to the topics “... that used to disturb Slovenian politicians in the past and still do” (from an introduction to the election debate on SLO TV, 4 October 2000). The election debates thus re-introduced into public life even those issues that were named and constituted as a “social problem” long before the election (e.g. the majority voting system). A “problem” of this kind that changes the hierarchical position on the media agenda and ends up as a marginal issue, can be repeatedly dragged into the spotlight and constituted as a supreme election criterion. **The voters-viewers therefore could not but judge politicians by the standards that were self-imposed by the politicians themselves.** Politics named and defined the political problems, and set the criteria for determining **what type of the agenda was legitimate in the public discourse.**

THE POWER TO MAKE THINGS INVISIBLE

I find it important to stress that it is not possible to talk about the relationship of the media and politics in the election campaign, or about the nature of the public discourse, solely on the basis of the topics that were discussed and on which politicians took positions. **The meaning of the election confrontations was a result of the network of topics that were suppressed and excluded as much as of those that were discussed.** Rather than judging the media and their role in the election campaign solely against a backdrop of the problems that were discussed, we should pay attention to what was not singled out as a problem, was discursively suppressed and could not be constituted as a standard by which to judge political candidates.

In our example these were sub-political issues that challenge acknowledged and dominant social norms. They are categorized as the “grammar of life-forms” or in other words, they are issues connected with conflicts relating to the “means of identitarian existence”: cultural preferences, attitudes ranging from those towards “immigrants from the south” and refugees to those towards all other “non-authentic” national minorities, women, homosexuals and other

marginalized groups removed from the normative center.

The conflicts of high modernity get stirred around the life-forms seen as **“Weltanschauung” put to practice**. In this sense the refusal of the construction permit for a mosque in Ljubljana is a first-rate political problem. These social topics were not part of the election political agenda though, despite the fact that in societies where inequalities exist beyond an existential minimum, new political disputes arise primarily from struggles over definition, so **they concern the question of who will name and define political problems and what type of issues will be included in the public agenda of social problems**. At the same time, the very exclusion of a problem from the public discourse constitutes that problem as a political problem.

The “social issues” that problematized the supposed communal consensus were discussed in two election confrontations in all. On the national television channel a question about the “status of the homosexual population in Slovenia” was put by a viewer through the internet, so it accidentally found its way onto the agenda of this debate (on 28 September 2000). POP TV (a commercial channel) dedicated one debate to these issues which revealed the location of the currently concealed and suppressed social struggle. The male journalist of the pair hosting the debate, eager for ‘state-building’ topics, concluded the broadcast on “authentic” (sic!!!) minorities, women and gays with the promise: “Dear Sirs (sic!!!) tomorrow we will be political again”. Not one broadcast of the preceding or the following week was as political as this one, but there was certainly much more politicking in them².

Journalistic understanding of the political was thus limited to the processes of decision-making within the governmental sector, with the consensus on these issues being close to unanimous, and politics and journalism coalesced in a clientelistic communion. Such an understanding of the political stems from the assumption that there exists some unproblematic national subject, that “we” all belong to the same “culture”, the same value system, that basically we all have the

² Laclau, for example, argues, that the wider concept of politics understands as political all kinds of decision-making that involve debates or conflicts in which opposing interests or values are brought face to face. “The moment of antagonisms where the undecidable nature of the alternatives and their resolution through power relations becomes fully visible constitutes the field of the ‘political’ ...” (D. Mumby 1997:7) The sedimented forms of ‘objectivity’ make up the field of the ‘social’. The boundary of what is social and what is political in society is therefore constantly displaced.

same interests in society and an equal share of power that becomes institutionalized in parliament through elections.

At any rate professional norms and myths of objectivity in practice mean that **journalists are “neutral” when there is a political conflict between parties where it is possible to clearly locate the “sovereign”, but when it comes to consensual matters, journalism reproduces the discourse of the dominant ideology.** If chauvinism or racism as a legitimate public discourse and a part of a complex collective will are never questioned, journalists make use of this discourse without any reservations when writing about, say, refugees in Slovenia. In their mental representations we are all a part of the same society anyway, we belong to the same culture and hold identical views about events. The choice of the election agenda thus contributed to the reproduction of **normality and not reality**, which is, according to David Chaney, the real subject matter of journalism, so the journalists accomplished their role as “the central agents in the production of order”.

THE FETISHIZATION OF OBJECTIVITY

“National problems” were thus named and defined by politics. Furthermore, politics also determined what kind of issues were to be allocated a place on the election agenda of social problems. The interpretation of the “political” as a governmental sphere of the state and the exclusion of the “social” from public discourse, while at the same time strictly separating the social from the political³, is possible precisely due to the journalistic myth of objectivity. It presupposes that **a story may be told from no one’s viewpoint.** Even though journalists persist in claiming that they select media topics according to their own judgment of **which issues are important and interesting and which are not** (meaning that the standards applied are impartial and professional), rather than **what is wrong and what right** (moral judgments), the selection of the problems to be discussed invariably involves both political and moral judgment. No story can be told from no one’s point of view and no discourse can free itself from subjective views. If we do not have our own story-perspective, somebody else will tell it in our name.

³ Or understanding the social as something simply trivial and suitable for narrating human stories only.

Journalism is the last stronghold of faith in objectivity and neutrality, which has been abandoned by practically everybody, including scientific epistemology. The ethics of objectivity that forbid journalists to take sides or act therefore force them to tell stories devoid of their own subjectivity, or tell stories with “no perspective”. The journalistic mythology of neutrality, objectivity and detachment therefore suggests that journalism is a passive and amoral profession. The myth that journalists are simply fishermen who cast their net into the world and events flow into it and turn into news, overlooks the fact that the fishing net is a product of human craftsmanship. In other words, professional protocols of selection and narrativization are not neutral, and consequently, a journalistic report is never transparently the “thing itself”.

In journalistic practice facts and values inevitably blend or, as mentioned above, stories and facts are mutually constituent. Such a blending is not any technical flaw due to which the opinions, values, political stance or emotions of the writer distort objective facts, but rather **interests and knowledge are inherently interdependent**. The demand that facts should be separated from evaluations cannot possibly be observed even in the case of the most isolated piece of information about the social world. The concept of objectivity with all its constituent parts (non-partisanship or neutrality, detachment, balance, factuality) is however blind to this interdependence. Of course, this does not imply that truth does not exist, but that it should be understood as a result of the process of searching for truth, as the shaping and defense of an assertion and not as a state reflected in that assertion⁴.

There is no such thing as neutrality - every act (and every discourse) leads to consequences in much the same way as undetermined voters influence election results. Consequences are definitely not neutral, even though they may be an unintended product of the absence of one's own perspective. **A neutral discourse is therefore an antipode of neutrality and is invariably loaded with meaning that has practical effects.** The discourses and projects that are based on the neutrality principle are either completely empty (with consequences that we do not want to take

⁴ Of course, this should not be understood in practice as prattling on to the effect “that's what I think, because it seems so to me”, but as an ability to master argumentation (also visual) or figural aesthetic conceptualization as a form of argument.

responsibility for being side-effects), or they conceal an agenda they cannot reveal because they are mechanisms of exclusion and marginalization. If a political party organizes still another press conference to tell the Slovenian voters what problem is currently the most pressing, and journalists rush to the conference because they have to “give an unbiased account of objective events”, then it is no wonder if a political party tells to the voters “what happens in reality” in the name of a journalist. The journalistic myth of objectivity and of the standpoint “what I am telling is a reflection of reality” in practice add to the power of organized and authoritarian sources. Since a story told from no one’s perspective does not exist, the journalists self-reduce their role to the one of a carrier presenting somebody else’s perspective. Therefore if we give up our right to “narrate through the process of searching for truth”, it will be politics, or a corporation, or popular common sense, myths or ideology that will tell the story instead of us.

In election confrontations the balance, meaning the demand for the equal treatment of “all sides”, has proved to be one of the most bizarre components of objectivity. Balance is based on a naïve empiricist belief that the truth can certainly be found somewhere between two contrasting subjective views (or five, six, or eight views, as the case may be in election contests). Journalists are believed to deliver truth by providing two or more competing truths. This does not only appear as a bizarre simplification of the social space, but through this process the privileged position of organized sources to define “national problems” becomes accepted as a truth, which in turn is a dangerous myth and an exclusion of alternative interpretations. **In short, it is not possible to decide what defines a social problem without evaluative or moral judgments. It is not possible to judge what is important without telling what is right.**

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Tonči A. Kužmanić

THE EXTREMISM OF THE CENTER*

In accordance with plans to publish a book of essays about the 2000 parliamentary elections in Slovenia, I undertook the task of analyzing “political extremism” in the election campaign. The experience of past elections led me to believe that extreme discourses would not be lacking, but the 2000 elections fell short of my expectations in this respect. Or it seems so at first glance. The 2000 election campaign was much more even-tempered than campaigns in the past. Consequently, commentators and media analysts who looked forward to pompous media events were downright disappointed. They could not but conclude that the elections were “good-for-nothing” and “boring”. This shows that the media community perceives elections (and indirectly also politics in general) as a peculiar kind of entertainment, so if there is no entertainment, the whole business is “good-for-nothing”.

I cannot agree though that both entertainment and extremism, which is increasingly more often associated with entertainment as such, vanished from the public scene. In my opinion extremism shifted or became concealed, so it is no longer as readily available as it used to be in the past. In the future media addicts in Slovenia will thus not have entertainment so close at hand. Since it is no longer readily available¹, those looking for it in the pre-election period had to make an effort and will have to try even harder in the future. The same holds true for extremism. From now on, our study of extremism will take us to previously neglected areas and lay before us issues we have never imagined we would have to consider in relation to extremism. To put it differently, the study of political extremism has become radically more demanding and it calls for much more than a simple analysis of what someone said. To “monitor elections” now involves more effort than study-

* This is an abridged version of the original essay which was shortened due to technical limitations on the length of this book. The most abridged is the chapter “Janšism and post-political neo-Slovenianness”. The unabridged version in Slovenian is available from the author.

1 Roughly speaking, there were two groups of exceptions. The first is more or less of post-modern flavor (the stress is on the body language and proxemics in general) and it mainly consists of Jelinčič's approach, who bet on “alternative” advertising. On the one hand, these advertisements exploit the contrapuntal position of the sugary and meticulous Mr. Peče, and on the other, they make the use of restroom advertisements that mainly involve allusions to the genitals and other body landscapes. To the second group we could ascribe the orthodox traditional pair *Mag&Radio Ognjišče*, which bet on outdated verbal rotation of topics that reminds of the turning over of “the bones of our boys”, and open cheering for their Spring boat.

ing only proxemics, gesticulation, facial expressions and the verbal communication of some politician, or analyzing televised confrontations or debates. It has been long since the allegedly neutral media corpus (the media, journalists, commentaries...), became the central participant in the political struggle, so it by no means merely acts as an innocuous, disinterested, or Weber-style idiotic accessory without its own interests.

As for the extremes and extremism in the narrow sense of the word, a brief explanation should suffice at this point. The anticipated extremism, which was expected from the followers of Jelinčič, Janša and the like, was replaced by the extremism of the media that were explicitly disappointed with the (lack of) extremism among the actors. Empirical proof lies in the election coverage by the *Mag* and *Družina* weekly magazines, the interjections of commentators on national tv stations, and the escapades of many commonplace radio stations (*Radio Veseljak*² is only the tip of the iceberg) and the like. However, my essay will not address this most obvious type of extremism³. After going through a quarter of a cubic meter of written materials and tapes of recorded tv broadcasts, I was quite convinced that the purpose of the public "statements", "confrontations" and the like, is primarily to conceal. Revelation, which should be the task of interpretation, must look for other paths and different strategies that go beyond rummaging through the smoke bombs of public opinion.

In this essay I will thus be analyzing some less obvious yet deeply rooted types of extremism taken to the level of prejudice, which are definitely not noticeable at first glance. From the standpoint of the future of democracy in Slovenia, such extremism might prove to be fateful. Among other things it obscures even the possibility of comprehending a significant and perfidious process i.e. the transition towards the political right (which coincides with the transition to "post-politics"). This transition took place precisely during the 2000 elections in Slovenia, despite some naive, unintellectual interpretations that the elections were won by the left. The problem lies in the fact that Slovenian commentators, who are aliens to either study or reasoning, fell into the trap of apparently natural conclusions like "if the Bajuk-Janša line lost, then it was the left that won". What

² Jolly fellow (o.v.)

³ For my previous analyses see Kuzmanić (1995), and Kuzmanić (1999).

naive and stupid reasoning this is, and even more disturbingly, how largely self-limiting it is when attempting to decipher the post-political “Drnovšek phenomenon” which is anything but harmless! Instead of offering an interpretation, admittedly a demanding one, of the fact that the electoral body in Slovenia radically shifted towards “the center”, this fact is obscured by a makeshift explanation to the effect that the “shift to the center” is some kind of “non-shift”.

The recent developments in Slovenia can be most simply delineated by saying that the corpus of Slovenian politics incessantly drifts towards the right, and is now much more to the right than it has ever been during the past ten years. However, this is not obvious at first glance. The dominant paradigms that dictate “looking with the head and thinking with the eyes”⁴ simply do not allow for this. The right-wing I have in mind here is no longer the traditional political right-wing, and should not be sought among Bajuk’s or Janša’s supporters only. It is much more post-modern, lofty and arrogant and, above all, it is anti-political (although it calls itself post-political). One should look for it among manager-style Drnovšek’s clique, in phenomena such as the mixture of racism and postmodernism entertained by Jelinčič, and even in such an anti-political event as was the entrance into the parliament of the Party of Youth. These developments are also connected with what I will later refer to as the neo-Slovenian mainstream. To put it differently, since nothing is any longer as it used to be, also nationalism, chauvinism, cultural racism (which is crucial for the understanding of the situation in Slovenia), and various kinds of extremism are different from those of yesterday. They “adapted” themselves, became “modernized”, actually “post-modernized” and “post-politicized”. If I want to make obvious the things that are no longer readily discernible, I have to lay open many issues and bring to light some entirely subdued elements of neo-Slovenianness, and of Slovenian (anti)politics in particular. Unfortunately, this will force me to scratch well under the surface.

POLITICS AND THE EXTREME

When we speak of extremism in politics, we should leave no doubt as to what is meant by politics and what we understand as being extreme. Fortunately, at this point we

⁴ Cf. Eco (1991)

can avoid a long path of detailed analysis and take a convenient short-cut, which entirely fulfills the purpose of this essay. This common-sensical shortcut, which is today frequently employed by the social sciences, is also taken by the majority of unthinking observers, journalists and commentators in Slovenia. In theoretical terms, and starting from the position of the history of the political and the extreme, this point of departure could be named “Schmitt’s point”. Carl Schmitt was a radical Catholic lawyer and philosopher from Germany (in the 1930s he was the “crown lawyer of the Reich”) who in an essay from 1927 entitled *The Concept of the Political*⁵ defended the thesis that everything that is political could indeed be defined quite simply, that is, by way of extremes. For Schmitt almost anything could be political under the condition that it was taken to an extreme, and depending on how much it was extreme. The theory also works the other way round. Something is extreme primarily when it is political. Looking from this perspective, the political and the extreme actually coincide, the two are virtually synonymous. In contrast to Schmitt, who praises the heroism and vitality of politics, against the background of Nietzschean (and later Heideggerian) anti-politics, contemporary sociology uses the same argument (this is a pitfall I’d like to draw attention to⁶) to radically invert Schmitt’s theory, thus turning it first into anti-politics and later into post-politics.⁷ The result is that Schmitt’s conclusion (all that is political is also extreme) is now twisted to the effect that all that is political appears as aggressive and hence redundant and dangerous. Since (all) politics and (all) that is political is also extreme, it is automatically dirty, uncivilized, aggressive and dangerous – and it should be gotten rid off, by hook or by crook.

This explicitly unthinking and anti-political piece of theory (which is a habitual post-socialist attitude in “our” part of Europe) goes together extremely well with the common-sense notion of politics as some natural space. This conception assumes and simultaneously produces additional arguments for the existence of an allegedly non-political center and political extremes. One of the significant products of such a setup, which is obviously trapped in the simple negation (actually radicalization) of Schmitt’s plane of understanding, is the view that the non-political center

⁵ Cf. Schmitt (1994)

⁶ For more cf. Kuzmanić (1996)

⁷ Cf. Mouffe (1999) and Žižek (2000).

has nothing in common with extremes. It is at most some kind of non-extreme, and hence non-political, since solely extremes are political. The more extremism and the greater extremes (or, in Schmitt's view, the more politics), the safer (more non-political) is the center. To be more precise, it is safer in the sense that it is removed from "dirty politics", thus it is pure and non-political, because politics are dirty by definition. After all, politics is a bitch, isn't it?⁸

THE CENTER AS A REFERENCE AND
THE BIRTHPLACE OF EXTREMES

Fortunately things are not as simple as they seem to be or as the modern theoretical and power-wielding engineers of the post-political center would like them to be. The latter ride precisely on the wave of an ideologem that presupposes the managerial non-political nature of the center, which is presented as its legitimate basis. To put it more simply, the problem is that extremism and extremes (political or other) are not self-sufficient. It is an illusion and the product of anti-political and economic (sociological) mythology and stereotypes that "extremes are contiguous" or that they "produce" each other "just like that", without mediation. The problem is that in order for them to function effectively something more is needed, something that is non-extreme, so to speak, or contrary to/different from the extreme. This is so because extremism is a (relational) concept and (relational) reality that exists primarily with regard to a different kind of the other ("different kind" here does not denote quantity or a different prefix only), or in other words, it originates from the relationships with an other that is neither extreme nor extremism as such.

8 Here are some interesting facts intended for the ear of a keen reader and observer of the events at the turn of the nineties. The main "liberal" critique of the new social movements originated precisely from the position of the then and present main LDS ideologists Slavoj Žižek. The critique was to the effect that new social movements avoided being engaged in politics because it was "dirty" and "engaging in politics" meant "getting one's hands dirty". The safe occupation of the center by LDS on the level of political technology and the even safer occupation of the "theoretical center" (mainstream) by Slavoj Žižek is in this context an entirely understandable move by one who pursues non-politics and clean-hands-activities by way of flying away from extremes (left and right) and settling in the safe, non-political (clean) center. The "Mani pulite" (clean hands) ideologem is one of those that is constantly in the background of the liberal, anti-political concept of politics here, and is its constituent. For more on this see Kuzmanić (1991) and (1997), for more on 'politics is a bitch' see Jalušić (1998).

9 This is a stereotype that settled the intellectual landscapes around here through Marx's well-known early emphasis that "extremes are contiguous".

This other, which is not simply a vehicle for the definition of extremism but also a prerequisite for its existence and operation, is something that is in the first place non-extreme. This is so because extremism does not emerge and is not measured in relation to another extreme but – let me lean on Aristotle here – it exists in relation to some midpoint that means something non-extreme *in nuce*. That which produces an extreme is not another extreme but a non-extreme. In the described matrix of the post-political unthinking attitude, this non-extreme, which the ruling bunch sees as a comfortable middle position and which aspires to be “a priori good”, is the center. And this conclusion forms one of the basic theses of this essay.

My thesis is: for the functioning of politics, which for the time being I am trying to consider as an abstract space, neither the left nor the right extreme alone suffice, for the simple reason that these extremes cannot function and do not exist in an empty, or vacated, or decentralized space, or a non-space. Even though political space differs from “natural” space, it is still a type of environment that is – in various ways – determined by some center (gravitational, to extend the metaphor). Precisely this should never be overlooked when speaking of politics, particularly anti-politics, post-politics, extremes and extremism.

The ideological and mythological gesture of every center and every centrality (this is actually the core of power of the rule in general, of every ideology and myth), is based primarily on the indisputability of such a center, around which various extremes revolve, function, and are formed and organized.

If someone speaks of a “vacated center” or “empty space”, it should by no means be taken literally, but *cum grano salis*.

Our question therefore should be: who has vacated the center and why? Or, in a detective-style: In whose interest is it to present this center, or space, as empty/vacated, who would like to prove that such a center is empty or vacant “by nature”, that it is a non-center and non-space?

The denaturalization of such a supposed “non-space” cannot be achieved in any other way but by questioning it, that is to say, through the confrontation with ideologems that function as “surrogates for the center” or stand for the vacated space itself. These ideologems are various: anti-political, post-political, sociological, psychoanalytical, economic, managerial, medical, military, linguistic, and cultural. As a rule they come with adjectives such as “neutral”, “objec-

tive", "interest free", "general", "common", "professional", "certain", "only possible", "our", "exalted", "scientific", "sacred", "intangible", "national". Yet the fact that these ideologems speak of a vacated space and emptiness, or the fact that they themselves are empty and vacated (which, of course, is the point at issue!), should by no means seduce us into believing that they do not exist, and even less so divert us from the study of the internal micro-physics of their functioning. The latter is precisely the subject of this essay.

"THE SPECIAL WAY" (SONDERWEG) –
THE IDEOLOGEM OF SINGULARITY

In the next interpretative fore-step, I will examine a somewhat more concrete, anti-political ideologem that rests on supposed singularity, self-infatuation, intermediacy, and the middle, other, or even "the third way". This is much favored in this part of the world whose name even points to the centrality (Central Europe). But where is the home of this singularity, middle position, this presumably "natural" aversion towards extremes that is the pivot around which almost everything revolves in Slovenia as well? How should one think about this odd "special centrality", which in many cases appears in the form of radical, even extreme, or should I say fundamental anti-extremism?¹⁰ Is this the basis of the conservative post-socialist neo-Slovenianness, one that could as well be named "liberal conservatism", and which in one of my previous analysis of another election I named "liberal Slovenian rusticity"¹¹. How is one to understand the here deeply rooted mentality that shuns every kind of exposure, cherishes "stay-at-home" and "golden mean" ideals, and Slovenian singularity as the central category of this self-absorbed "universe"?

Before I can give answers to these and some related questions, I first have to clarify some "inherited" principles that governed the dominant, anti-Reformationally radicalized Catholic environment/ethos in which generations of Slovenian intellectuals were traditionally educated, with the unthinking and anti-political legacy of this environment still running quite strong.

¹⁰ "Extreme anti-extremism" I refer to is not any "safety valve" against extremes, as unthinking observers around here understand it. It is a much wider concept that could be best defined as an elementary anti-political, post-political stance, which represents by far the best and in European history the most prolific nursery of diverse kinds of extremism.

¹¹ Cf. Kuzmanić (1997).

As a point of departure I will take the still traumatic concept of German origin called *Sonderweg*,¹² which denotes a special, that is to say, our/middle/correct way. In the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century (not to go further back into the past) *Sonderweg* served to provide answers to the question of possible courses of German modernization. A characteristic answer of the first generation, which was shaped through the debates of the time, was: a definite YES to modernity, but not “just like that”, not uncritically; of course we are for modernity/modernization, but not in the sense imposed by the West (the us, England, and France to a lesser extent), and above all not in the sense imposed by the East (Russia). The next stage of negation (and the next generation of thinkers, public opinion leaders, and politicians) took this answer, which was at least minimally realistic (this is related to Bismarck and his time of real-politics¹³) to the level of abstraction where it became a double NO: NO to liberalism and NO to communism. This, even at first sight, sounds like the typically radical, Catholic anti-political technology that flourished during WWII and continues to thrive in the post-socialism of today.

At a glance one would say that what we have here is a matrix of understanding that is based on a nor-nor paradigm, that is to say, a double rejection that should be capable of producing, by virtue of its exceeded negativity, some kind of positivity, or – if we stay with the above paradigm – some positive, special, second, third, or intermediate i.e. “middle path”¹⁴.

The question of what this positive, special and middle course looks like yields an open set of irrefutable answers that are quite densely strewn across the whole of Central Europe and appear in virtually all modern/post-modern epochs. I will quote just a few adjectives that are used to describe this stance: our, special, “specific”, “original”, “domestic way”.¹⁵ The selected elements of modernism, which are seen as being *a priori* alien and external to this milieu, are thus planted into the ready foundation of “our charac-

¹² Here I draw on Wolin (1996).

¹³ Cf. Stuermer (1970).

¹⁴ New age positivity is a product of other and different environments (including the intellectual one that in Europe began with Schopenhauer and found fertile soil in Slovenia).

¹⁵ This is a well-known logic (usually in the form “yes, yes, but...”) that has recently even found expression in the name of a radical, neo-conservative newspaper entitled “But”.

teristics”, even “authenticity”¹⁶ that, by definition, is special and domestic, and its roots reach deep into the past; they grow out of the domestic earth, peasantry, customs, culture, history, language, tradition, and the unconscious¹⁷. To the list of *Sonderweg* apparitions could be added some further similar ones such as “specific”, “authentic”, “original”, “domestic”, “our attributes”, and “properness” that imply the whole gallery of figures so dear to this environment, for example Nietzsche, Schmitt, Heidegger, Jünger, and Spengler. These are the times and names of the so called “German conservative revolution”¹⁸ that essentially determined the fate of all of “Central Europe” for an exceptionally long time. Another largely interesting and extremely disturbing detail is that this tradition is still alive and is being revived particularly in the era of the post-socialist “search for identities”.¹⁹

It is possible to find fervent advocates of the “*Sonderweg* singularity”, and consequently of domesticity, authenticity and finally “ourness”, in Slovenia too. Their advocacy, however, resides on the unconscious level of an abstract matrix, rather than within the context in which they would be aware of potential consequences. It involves a broad set of notions and things, ranging from domestic cuisine, customs, proper practices, authenticity (Slovenian quality) to a “specific course” or “third way”²⁰. To such a notion of centrality also belongs the gibberish about Slovenia’s bridge-like geo-political location which is yet another liberating, *Sonderweg*-style idea of “bridge-building” that implies that Slovenia is “something in between”²¹ so why not put it to advantage in political, economic and other senses.

It is precisely the *Sonderweg* matrix of reasoning that provides the frame of reference within which the 2000 parliamentary elections in Slovenia should be considered and interpreted.

16 Cf. Adorno (1972).

17 Cf. Kuzmanić (1999).

18 For an interesting “youth” detail of this epoch see Laqueur (1984).

19 In Slovenia this is the type of attitude and discourse that has been (and still is) most widely promoted by *Nova revija* (New magazine).

20 Only vain ignoramuses, including those from the advertising field, who never read so much as a page of the Italian and French Fascist writings, can still use decorations such as “Not to the left – not the right, just forward”, “third way” and the like. Had they read any of these writings, they would inevitably have confronted the embarrassing question : how come that our “original, domestic way” took us only so far as the mottos that were first imaginatively put to use by the generation of the Fascists-inclined D’Annunzio, and how come that “not to the right and not to the left” attitude was used precisely by the French Fascist centrists from the late thirties? Cf. e.g. Sternhell (1994).

21 Cf. Kuzmanić (1999a).

THE POST-POLITICAL: THE RIGHT LEFT-WING
AND THE LEFT RIGHT-WING

The matters that came to light during the last elections, and particularly through the prevailing interpretation of the elections (a shift leftwards), are much more serious and incomparably more deeply rooted than one might think.

After the “ten bloody years” (Krlježa) this part of the world went through, one could say that, after all, post-socialist revolutions proved to be some kind of (a) belated echo(s) of the neo-conservative transmutations of the West in the 1970s and the 1980s (Reagan, Thatcher, the criticism of the welfare state)²². Nevertheless, they do have some original and peculiar features and they do contribute an essentially new quality. In simple words, the neo-conservatism of this environment was the foundation onto which were “planted” various anti-political discourses that range from “managerial revolution”²³ (which is at any rate a product of the neo-conservative line of reasoning) to various kinds of radicalism, new nationalism, chauvinism, cultural racism²⁴ and, of course, proverbial machismo and sexism²⁵. This is the kind of overall climate that is dictated, the same as in the West, by authors such as Burke, Schmitt, Heidegger, Hayek, that is to say, the authors whom libertarian and liberating Slovenians promoted towards the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties when they needed them to criticize the self-management of the socialist regime. We have thus defined the context inside which LDS and ZLSD appear to be on the left. However, one should not forget that this “domestic Left” sees and defines itself primarily with regard to the mentioned general context, or contextual meta-definition, which is increasingly drifting towards the right pole. More precisely, it drifts towards anti-politics or post-politics, to use the global, mainstream term.²⁶ Something similar to what could be said of Slovenian democracy, namely that it is much more Slovenian than democratic, also applies to the “Slovenian left-wing” – it is much more “Slovenian” and peculiar (to Slovenia), than left.

²² Cf. particularly Gunn (1989) and Muller (1997).

²³ Cf. Boje et al. (1996).

²⁴ Cf. Malik (1996).

²⁵ See *Hate-speech in Slovenia* (Kuzmanić 1999) for more concrete escapades of this kind that are based on authentic Slovenianness.

²⁶ Žižek (2000).

Without the help of the distanced view that was introduced by means of the *Sonderweg* corpus, we would be, in my opinion, more or less powerless in attempting to understand the potential consequences of a very disturbing fact, namely that that which is here seen as being on the left or “really on the left” is something radical, fundamentalist, robust and stalwart above all. We live in an environment in which fundamentalism has not only assumed the position of the Left, but the Left is almost non-existent. Let me explain this through an example. In the given situation and environment things have been taken so far that we are almost daily faced with a paradox that can be empirically proved: any anti-Church or anti-Catholic standpoint is equated *a priori* with the left-wing. Moreover: the stronger anti-Church or anti-Catholic sentiment one expresses, the more to the “left” one is perceived to be²⁷. The *Delo*’s commentator Boris Jež is perhaps an outstanding example: he calls leftist an attack on the Church, which actually rests on conspicuously racist grounds²⁸. In the categories of the political space problematized here, the same holds true of the phenomenon personified by Zmagaj Jelinčič, who is increasingly regarded as being leftist. It seems that what is at work here is leftist criticism of religious conservatism that rests on the motto “Make this country Slovenian again!”.

Precisely this “left right-wing” or “right left-wing” (theoretically the left Heideggerianism and/or left Schmittism) should be addressed here and now, but the problem does not consist of the Jelinčič phenomenon exclusively. Indeed, the more fiercely one attacks the Catholic Church, Janez Janša or Andrej Bajuk from these positions and this context (note that the context is the most problematic), the less one is left-oriented and the more one is radical, stalwart, fundamentalist, actually robustly anti-political. Because we should be aware that to be on the left is here no longer seen as befitting, so nobody even raises the question of what the Left actually means. Being leftist is simply not acceptable, cultured, special, domestic, middle way or mainstream. It is simply not a Slovenian

27 In this context we repeat “mistakes” of the French intellectual circles of the post-war era which regarded as the left that which came from Nietzsche and later Heidegger. Cf. Wolin (1996).

28 Apart from the notorious “attack” on the Chinese, see also Jež’s articles “The role of canine science in Slovenian politics” (*Delo*, 21 October, 1998), “Getting sober under Triglav” (*Delo*, 7 April, 1997), “The victory of the soft *é* over the hard *ž*” (*Delo*, Saturday Supplement, 28 November, 1998).

way, and does not fit into the dominant *Sonderweg* domesticity²⁹. However, the Left is not ruled out on political grounds (as is the right wing, which is tolerated as an inevitability), but it is designated as being “culturally foul”, or even unhygienic. While the right wing has been accepted as an enforced (or uninvited) political partner, the left wing is “unreasonable” *in nuce*, it is uncivilized, uncultured, dirty, in short. Moreover, it is un-Slovenian or anti-Slovenian. While from the *Sonderweg* position the Right is excluded *ad rem*, the Left is dismissed *ad hominem*.

The above delineation of the context is indispensable if we are to comprehend and interpret how the media understand this supposed voters’ shift leftwards, which should be taken as a symptom only, and the tip of the iceberg concealing something infinitely more profound and serious. “A shift to the left” is in fact a non-interpretation and a radical centrist (currently seen as liberal³⁰) appraisal of the events, whose primary role is to frighten. It is not any “objective assessment of events”, but an anti-political posture expressed from the position of *oikos* logic. In other words, it is the position of a good and rightful father (a moral authority³¹) who appropriated the task of “warning” against “deviations” (to the left or the right), and this can only be done from the position of a “subject who knows”. His moral (patriarchal!) and exalted knowledge thus helps shape the centrality (not to be right and not to the left!) and Slovenian singularity that is manifested as the Slovenian neo-conservative mainstream.

Theoretically speaking, the ideological and even mythological apex of the *Sonderweg*-style Slovenianness is Slavoj Žižek. First of all, one should ask: what is it he actually does there? Is it the “appropriate space” for the great magus of the modern, global mainstream? Why did he step down to the level of Davo Karničar³² (who sent his support to the leader Janša from the Himalayas), and swear *in vivo* his pre-election oath to the great leader Janez Drnovšek

29 Given the archbishop of Sloveniannes Mr. Rode’s statement, uttered from similar positions, that only Catholics/Christians are genuine Slovenians, the Slovenian left with its mainstream Slovenian singularity is just a clone of Rode.

30 See how *Delo*, the independent newspaper for independent Slovenia, wrote about Drnovšek after the elections. *Delo* is the main co-creator of neo-conservative Slovenian *Sonderweg*. Especially worth consideration and analysis are the articles by G. Repovž.

31 This is the pathos whose naked image can be found in every work of J. Lorenci, the editor-in-chief of the *Delo*’s Saturday Supplement.

32 A Slovenian skier who was the first to ski nonstop down the slopes of Mount Everest in October 2000.

directly from New York? The problem involving Žižek is somewhat more complex than ones previously mentioned, yet also clearer and thus easier to understand. On the one hand, it is a characteristic fundamentalization of the mainstream positions³³, while at the same time it embodies, in the best way possible, the fundamentalist pathos of the Slovenian *Sonderweg* logic (a “special course”). Unlike direct prisoners of the workings of neo-Slovenianness, Žižek is a reflexive author whose creativity in this area is vaguely reminiscent of that of early MTV, which was supposedly based on a kind of “detachment” from the mainstream. It is therefore some special post-Slovenian (neo-Slovenian) gesture, and the more it is (or sees itself as) marginal, or creative and free, the firmer it is held in captivity. He is a free-floating designator who is - in contrast to direct prisoners - everything and nothing at the same time, a prisoner and non-prisoner. Žižek (as he himself declares) is an alternative thinker who can be a warrior, Catholic, fundamentalist, Communist, Stalinist, Lacanist, liberalist, and macho all at once. He can be a nationalist *par excellence* ³⁴, but at the same time, if needed, he is a fervent anti-nationalist. Of course, all that we just said does not hold true only for Žižek. It is a much wider, deeper and almost global phenomenon that acquired the traits of an epidemic. It is the unreflected neo-Slovenianness that is above phenomena and the people it involves.

There is another disturbing phenomenon that is at home on the Slovenian scene. Since the post-political scene so radically shifted towards the fundamentalist singularity of neo-Slovenianness, anyone’s search for a way out in the direction of the “general” or the “professional” automatically appears to “us” as leftist or left, or in other words, unusual, foreign, non-Slovenian or anti-Slovenian. To illustrate this, let me mention three outstanding public figures, undoubtedly the most eminent among those who are more or less aware how difficult the situation is. The confusion of roles in the neo-Slovenian games without frontiers brought the country to a situation in which, for ex-

33 Those who at least implicitly ask what is actually Slavoj Žižek’s business inside LDS, usually overlook the fact that precisely Žižek, who is firmly rooted in Althusserian and Heideggerian tradition, was the first on the Slovenian scene in the 1990s to chase away politics into the ghetto of dirty things! He turned that which other social scientists implicitly took as being self-understood, into something that became a (liberal) center. The doors leading to post-politics were thus wide open.

34 In the beginning of the 1990s he explicitly declared in the *Mladina* weekly magazine (not without pride accompanied with adequate pathos) that he was a Slovenian.

ample, Matevž Krivic, the leading figure in the 1980s, functions *a priori* as a leftist solely because he strictly speaks in the name of the law (lawfulness, legitimacy). In such a context one may get an impression that law and lawfulness are left-wing, or leftist, by nature³⁵. Another prominent figure from the 1980s is Tomaž Mastnak. Even though his criticism in the 1980s and 1990s was primarily based on Hobbes and Burke³⁶, many circles regard him as being an “extreme leftist”, which is anything but his own self-image. Inside the circle that could be named the “liberal left” an outstanding example would be, say, Slavko Gaber, whose left orientation in the past decade rested primarily on Hayek³⁷ and Mill. And these are only three out of many more examples. We have thus arrived at a kind of “French” paradox³⁸ (I named it after Wolin), according to which the Slovenian Left is in fact largely legalistic, Burkean, Lacanian, Hayekian, even Heideggerian and Schmittian. In such a context, anyone merely mentioning Hannah Arendt, who never regarded herself as left or leftist³⁹, is taken to be “too left” and is marginalized, or should I say excommunicated⁴⁰, as a consequence (firstly for being presumably leftist, and then for other reasons too).

In the absence of better illustrations, we can attempt to get a glimpse of the perspective that ensues from this context with the help of the Slovenian *desperado* logic. Looking for a “way out” of the predicament in which the present generation found itself thanks to the anti-political behavior of the previous generations, students of the social sciences, whom I work with quite a lot, have resorted to Marx. Similar to some radical intellectuals, from Derrida⁴¹ downwards, they are in a situation in which virtually everybody repeats after Sartre that “Marxism is an unsurpassed horizon of our time”⁴². Since they do not see

35 Perhaps this example alone suffices to explain not only the principles that are used to determine whether something is left or right, but also how much to the right the whole corpus has shifted, so much so that lawfulness itself seems to be as something leftist.

36 Cf. Mastnak (1989) in Burke.

37 Cf. Hayek (1992).

38 Cf. Wolin (1996).

39 Cf. Arendt in Hill (1979).

40 In fact her ‘left position’ should be understood here as pretended ignorance. The “real” criticism of Arendt from the position of any type of *Sonderweg* logic should take into account the elements of the defense of the Zionist position that were used against her in the 1950s and 1960s. Today, these arguments would be quite ridiculous and rather dangerous for anyone who would dare use them!

41 Compare his failed attempt to convert Schmitt’s Enemy into Friend in Derrida (1997)

42 Cf. Sartre (1963:30), quotation from Wolin (1996:235)

any “exit” (although they look for it) they turn to Marx for help. Moreover: those that are somewhat more fundamentalist (but not more on the left, as they naively assume⁴³) have begun to shout old anarchist and even Maoist slogans. They relentlessly criticize everything, particularly whatever is related to the state, even if only vaguely, and in doing so they imagine that they contribute to the fight against the “latest devil”, that is to say, globalization⁴⁴. In short, the environment we talk about is one where those on the left think in the manner of Nietzsche, Weber, even Schmitt. On top of it, we have the champions of new age who speak of the “new politicality” - there are even university subjects on this topic – and moreover they are the leaders of the left-wing parties in Slovenia. The confusion is almost complete, one could say. Is it then any wonder that it is impossible to find any analytical text around here that would attempt to answer the question of how to explain the two glaring contradictions of neo-Slovenianness: first the fact that Janša’s party is called Social Democratic, and secondly, that the Slovenian National Party is presumably left-wing. Obviously the most striking contradictions of the post-political “era” in Slovenia are taken as natural and common, while in fact they are the result of the neo-Slovenian singularity of the 1990s, that should be the subject of an analytical study.

In my opinion the issue at point is not that the intellectuals in Slovenia are too haughty to give a thought to these problems. Rather, the problem lies in an unthinking intellectual environment dominated by unintellectual thieves and more or less densely populated by unoriginal copycats and gurus, who were educated in the climate of the mentioned mainstream (functionalism, positivism, now Lacanianism) and became ensnared by it in the course of the process. Their essays revolve mostly around what somebody said or what some theory holds (“as-Lacan-said” syndrome/methodology!). They are simply not accustomed to independent thinking so they do not dare attempt it (note that the role of a theoretical guru also prevents this, if only in part). The scene is thus dominated by copying and translating, and the most frequently employed technique is re-

43 This in the first place has to do with the childish competition in fundamentalism, which is favorite not only among the students, but also professors and the creators of public opinion in general.

44 For example, the students attending my lectures on political extremism more and more often pose a symptomatic question “why not use violence”!?

capitulation, not so rarely without quoting the source. Outstanding examples of this include many Slovenian books dealing with the “theory” of management that are quite often nothing more than poorly concealed borrowing of the ideas of neo-liberal and new age theoreticians, mostly those from the US. Other areas, for example, social sciences, are not essentially different in this respect. Also journalists, save for some rare exceptions, who write about these things, are no more than miniature replicas of these scientific copying circles and are incapable of any independent intellectual approach.

I would like to stress that the Drnovšek phenomenon can function smoothly thanks precisely to the two suppressed but crucial phenomena/symptoms of post-socialist neo-Slovenianness, that is to say, the Jelinčič and Janša phenomena. It is only in this kind of context that a party such as ZLSD, led by Borut Pahor, can play the role of the left-wing more or less successfully. This is due above all to the fact – and this is the central argument implied by this essay – that both Drnovšek and Pahor are something less (hence, by definition, “better”) than Jelinčič and Janša. In other words, the fact that they are less than right extremists or left extremists (note that Jelinčič occasionally operates as the “left extremist”), makes them the genuine left-wing and genuine center. Nevertheless, we should by no means overlook that the left wing in Slovenia is not left by virtue of some trait that traditionally belongs to the Left with regard to a wider historical or international context, but thanks to the radical and narrow context of the *Sonderweg*, neo-conservative Slovenianness, where the left is left for the sole reason that is not-on-the-right, or not-so-much-on-the-right (as is Janša). Therefore, the question is why something that is “tolerably” right is here called “the center” or, why something that is more of a right-center or the center itself, is occasionally called the left? Overwhelmed by this quick sand that pervades everything including public opinion, one is robbed of every possibility to distinguish between the two.

THE 2000 ELECTIONS AS A
“SHIFT TOWARDS THE LEFT” OR
THE “VICTORY OF THE LEFT-WING”

The glaring symptom of this inability to distinguish is an almost plebiscite⁴⁵ media conclusion that the Slovenian voters voted for the left-wing and that the election result is a shift towards the left. How misleading! Does not being on the left imply that the stress is on quite specific aspects (social, political) of the French Revolution, is not the left-wing the machine that is fueled primarily by social and political equality and social and political freedom (or rights, in libertarian parlance).

Did any speaker in the pre-election circuses so much as mention at least one of these words? Even freedom was not mentioned, even though at the beginning of the 1990s both the liberals and the conservatives redefined it (with the left-wing silently conceding) as the freedom of ownership, and above all freedom of enterprise⁴⁶. Here the very mentioning of freedom, let alone equality, is unbecoming and regarded as “obsolete”. The result of the explicitly liberal and only partly conservative criticism of the socialist self-management was that equality began to function as something that “has been exceeded a long time ago”.

Is it possible to think of anything else more paradoxical than a situation in which the very mentioning of the need (actually “wish”) for freedom and equality is rejected under the pretext that “freedom and equality have already been achieved”? As if freedom and equality were holes that can be filled or eliminated by achieving satisfaction through consumption.⁴⁷

The dominant discourse and the “governing thought of this era” is *oikos*-discourse, that is to say, a discourse that is no longer based on political dialog (as in the 1980s) or

45 There were three exceptions though – contributions by V. Jalušič, R. Močnik and A. Žerdin. All of them published their articles in *Mladina* weekly, which is currently re-emerging from the post-election stupor into which it fell overwhelmed by Žižek’s neo-Slovenian singularity. The fact that a listing of titles and authors who referred to the 2000 elections as a “shift leftwards” would take a whole page of text, is illustrative enough by itself.

46 For more on this see my forthcoming essay *Troubles with Post-socialism or Why Democracy is not the Same as Capitalism* (not published yet).

47 If any concept of the French Revolution has been consumed in the post-socialist era (in Slovenia and elsewhere) then it is *fraternité*. Our over-indulgence in *fraternité* caused us enough headaches and heartburn. Furthermore, precisely *fraternité* was the source of chauvinism, culturalism, and racism, rather than excessive doses of political or other freedom and equality.

public conflict, but on secrets and concealment, profiteering and money, experts and specialists and their command.⁴⁸ It is not based on the political logic of democratic and public confrontations, but on the mechanisms of that which in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, almost 200 years ago, was defined as the master-slave *oikos* logic. Politics, dialog, plurality, political freedom, political equality – an entire hemisphere of life (in ancient Greece this was the hemisphere of the “good life”) was here rendered redundant. The engineers of the Slovenian political profession, or Weberian managers in professional politics, openly state (this is the central argument of both Janša and Drnovšek, and of Jelinčič and Pahor) that politics are not efficient (this is the source of the “need” for the majority voting system that is expected to prove to be much more “efficient”).

Politics, freedom and equality have started to be measured using *oikos* categories of economy (from which has been derived the name oikonomy) because “only they are realistic” and “no other method is possible”.

From the perspective of managerial circles, the future is exclusively tied to the EU and NATO, infinite economic progress and development. It is a race toward a point on the horizon in which the closer we get to the point, the further it actually is.

POST-POLITICAL DRNOVŠEK: A PERSONIFICATION OF THE MAINSTREAM OR A JANŠAIST?

How should we approach these issues then, and how should we cope with them now and in the future? What is most difficult to understand, and in this essay I can only propose it in the form of a hypothesis, is the following paradox: the real problem we have to face up to is not at home on the left nor on the right, among other reasons also because the left is almost non-existent and the right is still fidgeting with its pre-historic forms. The place where all things get concentrated is the mainstream – everything takes place within it, it is the home of the language through which they are re-incarnated time and again, and of persons through whom they become constituted. This place is the center of the political spectrum. In previous chapters I attempted to outline its boundaries through the

⁴⁸ Cf. Kuzmanić (1999b).

Sonderweg metaphor and “our-domestic-singularity” attitude⁴⁹ that is increasingly recognized in Slovenia as the center of “ourness”, that is to say, of “neo-Slovenianness”.

In its simplified and personalized form, this hypothetical setup could be described as follows: the genuine “Janšaist” is no longer Janša but Drnovšek (*Nomen est omen* logic does not work here) and above all, the complex, domesticity-driven, managerial and centrist ideologem that is triumphantly personified by Drnovšek himself.

Before this hypothesis can be entirely understood and additionally argued, many tasks have to be accomplished. For the time being let me just draw attention to some selected details.

Firstly, ever since the introduction of political plurality in Slovenia, it has not been possible to identify any significant differences between parliamentary (or non-parliamentary) parties. A similar situation has been observed elsewhere in Eastern European countries and numerous studies confirm this. How to explain this fact, which is quite unusual at first sight? Note here that I am talking of the fact, and not of the hypothetical situation as some who are not quite familiar with the subject might misunderstand it. What could the absence of the expected differences between parties and their political activities, which are the constituent (even fateful) elements of democracy (also on the level of political programs⁵⁰) lead to? Isn't this fact alarming? No, they say. Quite the contrary. Obviously, the dominant interpretation here is the one that has a pacifying effect on the public. The argument runs to the effect that things are not yet fully developed (“the political scene is not yet developed”...), we have to be patient and things will be fine⁵¹. To put it another way, you will not come across an interpretation that would dare call a spade a spade and say out loud a very simple fact: at this given undeveloped stage of democracy, Slovenians have no other reli-

49 Do not forget: to the set of “our domestic and singular” qualities one should add another notorious invention of domestic intellect, which is Trstenjak's category of “Slovenian honesty”. A deeper analysis of this concept would, however, exceed the scope of this essay.

50 Certain differences have been observable recently though. Unfortunately, these were changes for the worse, as expected. A new party has been established (New Slovenia, nsi), whose program explicitly includes “the right to live” which had been a taboo subject among the political parties up to now.

51 In contrast to this, the methods used by the Slovenian professional politicians to advertise Slovenianness abroad are quite different. Outwardly, the most exploited are “the most developed democracy” and “success story”, which are marketed particularly in relation to others – those, that should be additionally subdued.

gion apart from Slovenianness, which is similar to what has happened in Albania⁵², Serbia, and Poland. Precisely this “civil religion”⁵³ is the “real program”⁵⁴ that has found its way to the platforms of all the parties, which are only ostensibly post-socialist, while in fact they are neo-nationalistic and chauvinistic. This new religion slipped into the programs written by authors of various origins – left, right, and centrist. The almost complete absence of differences between political parties’ programs, on both the the basic and the political level, is compensated for through obviously different styles of management, teams, leaders, and images. However, when it comes to the issue of specific tasks that should be accomplished, even these differences disappear. The reason is that in this context it suffices that somebody utters the magic word – Slovenianness – and everybody understands what should be done, and whatever it is, it is almost *a priori* realizable. The discrepancies, however, may arise when discussing whether neo-Slovenianness should be accomplished sooner or later, slowly or quickly, and at what price and sacrifices. On the other hand, the question that is never challenged is whether neo-Slovenianness is to be the “basis of democracy” and the entire political, social and cultural life.

Slovenianness is the blind spot of this dominant, self-entrapped discourse. If we are to understand fully the developments in post-socialist Slovenia and particularly what happened during the 2000 parliamentary elections, then we have to say openly that voters opted for Drnovšek’s way among the choice of non-differences and non-differentiations that were entangled in *Sonderweg*-style neo-conservative neo-Slovenianness. If we do not confront this blind spot i.e. Slovenianness, our talk of this politically undifferentiated *die Slowenische Gemeinschaft* will be unintelligible (it is usually simply ignored), and the concept will be imag-

⁵² This was long ago explicitly articulated by Maliqui (1998).

⁵³ The term “civil” is used here with a measure of cynicism. I use it to draw attention to that which devoured the “civil society” of the 1980s. Civil society has not “come to power” primarily in the political sense (as was proposed by some too narrow-conceptualized thesis from the beginning of the 1990s) but it rules in the manner of Gramsci’s anti-politics and post-politics through homogenization and hegemony from below. Gramsci’s turn, which was long ago exploited by the extreme right-wing in the West (cf. DeBenoist, Tarchi et. Co. in *Le forme del politico*, 1984), here occurred automatically, in an almost natural way, without knowledge or reflexion. Consequently it functions even more effectively and perfidiously.

⁵⁴ The understanding of politics as our/national matter (Cosa Nostra syndrome) is in this part of the world most propagated by historians and people from the world of culture. For example, take the pathos pervading the arguments in various essays and books by Janko Prunk, starting with Prunk (1986).

inable only in relation to Janša's extremism. And precisely this has actually happened already. We have found ourselves in a very difficult situation in which Janša and Janšism became the criteria for democracy and the democratic, that is to say, criteria according to which it is not difficult to be(come) a democrat or democratic. Indeed everything that is not Janša or not-Janša-style has automatically (this is the problem) become democratic. Moreover, the moment we were left without the possibility to assess Drnovšek's post-politics compared with democracy, which is *in nuce* abstract and open to the new, the moment this possibility was replaced by the closed-field comparison between Drnovšek and Janša (or, Janša vs. everything else), we actually became entangled in something that has nothing in common with democracy. However, this kind of yardstick and "measuring methods" are wrong, distorted, insufficient and extremely dangerous. The bright democracy seen against the dark background of Janša is a false mirror that inverts the images and self-images of our time. It is a deceptive sun in which ever more radical and anti-political Slovenia idles comfortably along with its mainstream neo-Slovenianness.

We are faced with the situation in which Janšism may become implemented in a "soft" Drnovšek way, which would be tantamount to the victory of Janšism. One might object that the difference between the two is neither small nor insignificant. I could agree with that. But this fact should not dim our perspective of the real state of things, in which the bitter tablet of neo-nationalism is coated with a very thin layer of sweet chocolate. A further reason why I want to agree is that were Janša and neo-Slovenianness one and the same thing, we would have ended up with the situation that Croatia had during the decade of Tuđman's rule.⁵⁵ However, despite the gap or precisely because of it, one should not overlook that Drnovšek (& Uncritical Coalition Co.) might fail to primarily pursue a program of democracy, human rights, political freedoms and political equality, and give priority to a program of neo-conservative neo-Slovenianness, which would not be one and the same thing.

55 Cf. my lecture entitled "Tuđmanism and Janšism", at Workers and Punks University in 1999/2000 (to be published soon).

JANŠAISM AND POST-POLITICAL
NEO-SLOVENIANNES

The term Janšaism as I use it in this essay cannot possibly serve to define the contents of the phenomenon. The term is used in a much more complex, almost tautological way. In other words, Janšaism as I use it here, denotes the superior context that meta-determines events/interpretations/understanding. It also enables things that, even though potentially fateful, are more or less ignored, for example:

- The use of closed We-categories (“We-Slovenians”) in “public communication” (actually rendering people dumb en masse through domesticity discourse). This represents an all-devouring meta-linguistic method that turns everything that comes within its reach into domesticity (Slovenianness/Slovenian singularity as an all-embracing centrality).⁵⁶
- The introduction of the honor/pride category into the superficial level of public discourse (at least implicitly); this enables and creates a situation in which everything revolves around self-admiring neo-Slovenian selfhood, where everything is perceived and questioned exclusively through the postures of honor and pride.
- After all, it is precisely the honor/pride topos⁵⁷ that is the point of conflict at which identities clash, and the reason is simple – this point is exclusionary, monolithic and fundamentalist. Inside this self-image an individual cannot be anything but a kind of plant firmly rooted in domesticity, or to put it another way, you are what you are told you are, and you cannot escape it. At best you may adapt to a certain extent, with the help of the concept of so called “tolerance”, but these are emergency exits that are anything but open⁵⁸.

56 The list of things that have been attached the adjective Slovenian since the beginning of the 1990s is amazing. Occasionally, this was taken so far that even “Slovenian bears” that were exported to the Iberian peninsula, and were distinguished from “war-refugee-bears” (allegedly from Bosnia), found their place in the media intent on rendering the nation stupid through propagating domesticity (national tv channel, POP TV, especially *Nedelo*). The tautological battle cry (not so harmlessly stupid) “One who does not jump is not a Slovenian”, which was so often promoted in the media, is only the tip of the iceberg that screamingly points to the mass hysteria.

57 The slogan “Be proud that you are...” is Mussolini’s creation from the second half of the 1920s. For comparison take the Ljubljana graffiti “Be proud that you are a Slovenian” where “a Slovenian” was crossed out and replaced with “a Bantu Negro”.

58 Compare my critique of the concept of tolerance as it was formulated by Žižek (Kuzmanić, 1994). I say “was” because this elusive trend-setter later redefined it and obscured (suppressed) the traces of previous understanding.

THE "VICTORY" OF NEO-SLOVENIANNESSESS
OVER NATIONALISM

The essence of triumphant neo-Slovenianness resides precisely in the center and not only, or not primarily, in images of un-modernity, pre-modernity or anti-modernity (Rode, Janša and Co.). Post-modern neo-Slovenianness provides new life energy, new blood (in the virtual sense), and new land for "old" forms of Slovenianness, particularly Janšaism. The core of the most recent (i.e. neo-Slovenian) trauma should not be sought among extremes but in the heart of the mainstream domesticity which is, as we have attempted to explain, increasingly extremist. To understand the Slovenian mainstream of today means to understand Slovenian singularity in relation to *Sonderweg* as outlined above, and its skillful (aesthetic and ethic) transition to the center/centrality, to the neo-Slovenian, artistically portrayed mainstream. In the same way Helena Blagne or Simona Weiss⁵⁹ type of entertainers may appear together on the stage with Laibach⁶⁰ (on the stage of the main Ljubljana cultural center), Drnovšek should be "read" together with Janša, and Žižek should be understood as belonging to the same domestic, neo-Slovenian and conservative community as Rugelj⁶¹!

There are two more things I'd like to point out in this essay. The first is a warning: LDS as the crest of the neo-Slovenian mainstream, does not only produce extremism outwardly, but it is also artistically imaginative when it comes to creating extremes inside the party-movement⁶². The post-election developments speak in favor of such a conclusion – the logic of soft, post-modern purges inside LDS led to several new "extremes", and we can expect that they will form new (hopefully not post-political) cores in the future.

The last elections in Slovenia were about a significant, almost plebiscite-like decision. The fact that countless

59 Popular Slovenian pop-folk singers. (o.v.)

60 A controversial Slovenian group which in the 1980s was much persecuted by the authorities for the use of Fascist imagery. (o.v.)

61 A controversial Slovenian psychologist notorious for his alternative methods of treating alcoholism and other kinds of addiction. (o.v.)

62 The strongest and also the most sensitive point of LDS, which is led by a post-political leader in the style of Peron, is its still being more of a movement than a party. We will soon be able to see whether a transition from the movement into a party (the exclusion of the elements of movements and individuals who still partly reason in the "old way" originating in the political era of 1980s) will be successful and what consequences it might bring: for the movement/party itself and for Slovenia.

people were not aware of this either during or immediately after the elections, and that now they are even less aware of what actually happened, is of no consequence. My central hypothesis is that the 2000 elections should be considered as a kind of “settling of accounts with nationalism”. However – this is the point that calls for caution – this “settlement of accounts with nationalism” (i.e. with outdated attitudes that are here classified as being right-wing without any further designations) was not done from the position of “escaping” nationalism as such, or nationalism in all its forms of appearance or of any content, nor from the position of searching for “other” (say, political) cues for future development. Nationalism (i.e. the traditional, pre-modern and modern) has been defeated, if only temporarily, but from the positions (this is essential!) and in the name of a new nationalism i.e. post-political neo-Slovenianness. Moreover, in the name of neo-Slovenianness (represented by the LDS post-political mainstream) not only (pre)modern nationalism (Janša, Bajuk, Rode & Co.) was defeated, what was also defeated – for quite some time to come – was every, if only slightly feasible, possibility to step out of the post-socialist neo-nationalistic logic. Post-socialist Slovenia made a plebiscite decision that it will post-politically “defend” and safeguard its “roots”, its “authenticity”, and thus opted for its own *Sonderweg* trip. However, who threatens Slovenia, where are the enemies? And last but not least, what consequences could this have for democracy, political freedom, and political equality? I am afraid that in this sense prospects are anything but bright.

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Srečo Dragoš

RELIGION AND ELECTIONS

In this essay I look into the presence of the Roman Catholic Church (hereinafter referred to as the Church) in the media during the pre-election period. This opening statement also contains my first conclusion. The search for religious topics in the pre-election period has yielded a list of statements and media events, all of them being, almost without exception, connected with the Church, but not also other religious protagonists. This finding seems surprising if we take into account that the number of officially registered religious communities and churches in Slovenia exceeds thirty and that the number of informal ones is probably even higher. On the other hand it is understandable, because the Catholic Church boasts the largest membership, is the strongest, richest, best organized and publicly the most exposed of all churches. Of course, we should point out that not all that is understandable is necessarily (un)acceptable as well. Therefore, the delicacy of the subject calls for an explanation of the values on which our interpretation of the gathered data is based. The explanation follows in the next section, but at this point I would like to draw attention to two things: firstly, that the credibility of empirical data is not the same as the credibility of their interpretation, and secondly, if the same data are evaluated starting from different values, the interpretation will be different. But before I proceed, let me make some introductory remarks about the significance and purpose of this study.

The timeframe of the analysis is the period from mid September to mid October 2000, that is to say, the period of organized campaigns for the parliamentary elections in Slovenia. The subject of the analysis are the printed and audiovisual materials that appeared in the following mass media: *Družina*, *Mag*, *Mladina*, *Delo*, *Nedelo*, *Dnevnik*, *Večer*, *Slovenske novice*, national television channel *Slovenija 1*, private TV station *TV3*, the first program station of *Radio Slovenia* and Catholic *Radio Ognjišče*. The analysis focuses on the presence in the media and media representation of events, issues or problems that the public sees as **disputable**, while from the perspective of religious protagonists (the representatives of churches and religious communities) they are understood as being of **decisive importance**. Since these criteria are conceptualized rather broadly, they are used as the selection criteria only when they appear together. "Issues of decisive importance" are

the issues so defined by the religious protagonists themselves because they connect them with their fundamental religious missions. A criterion for 'disputability' is every publicly expressed disagreement with solutions, suggestions, debates or the bringing up of an issue ('of decisive importance'), or the inconsistency of these issues with legislation.

Let us suppose that somebody expressed a viewpoint in the media that all religious communities must enjoy freedom in their public work. Such a demand would be the subject of the analysis only if it were contradicted or relativized, because that would mean that both criteria were present ('disputability' and 'decisive importance'). Another example would be someone's conclusion that the public appeal for (anti)religious intolerance is essential for the realization of his/her mission. Such an event would be included in the analysis even if it did not stir opposition or critical comments (e.g. it is completely ignored by the media), as it would be in contradiction with Article 63 of the Constitution of Slovenia.

The purpose of the study is to verify, by means of qualitative analysis, the potential presence of the elements of the culture war in the Slovenian mass media during the election campaign. It is an undeniable fact that the culture war has played an important (fateful) role in Slovenian history. Moreover, this historical experience continues to exert an obvious influence on the contemporary political culture in Slovenia. Both the left and the right-wing politicians, i.e. liberals and conservatives, the representatives of the state and religious institutions, largely agree on this, even though they hold different views regarding all other related issues (e.g. the interpretation of the significance, protagonists, events and responsibility for the culture war); as for the currency of the phenomenon and potential dangers, no essential disagreements can be observed, not even within expert circles.

THE CONTEX:

THE CULTURE WAR AND CLERICALISM

Since the terms "culture war" and "clericalism" have more than one meaning, let me first define both terms and give a brief explanation.

CULTURE WAR. Originally this term denoted a historical conflict over interests and competencies between

the Prussian statesman Otto von Bismarck, who as the Prime Minister represented the state government, and the Church as a religious representative of (a supra-national) ruling power whose center was located outside of the country, i.e. in the Vatican. Antagonism escalated in the 1870s when the conflict expanded and became more intense. The conflict initially consisted of political opposition to the concordat (signed by the Austrian emperor Franz Joseph in 1855), but later it turned into opposition between parties (the conservatives/liberals/socialists) and religious conflicts (the religious vs. non-religious), and in this form it reached Slovenia. The beginning of the culture war in Slovenia may be placed in the year 1884, when the politicians Dr. Ivan Tavčar and Ivan Hribar founded a political newspaper called *Slovan*. They used it to disseminate conspicuously nationally affirmative and liberally oriented ideas. Coinciding with this was the appearance of articles by the theologian and later Bishop Dr. Anton Mahnič, in the newspaper *Slovenec*. He demanded a principled and relentless struggle against all who deviated from the strict Catholic (Church's) standpoints regarding both national and political issues. The first two attracted to their side the major part of the lay intelligentsia, and the third most of the clergymen. This was the basis on which the political space has been formed (the emergence of political party blocs), including unions and other civil institutions – as a result, even today we have to struggle against the consequences of such a structure of social conflicts. The culture of ideological war is therefore a modernist resentment that may be of use for mobilization purposes in the post-modern world as well.

The culture war is an amalgam of conflicting relationships within three spheres: politics (the conservative vs. the liberal option), **the state** (the representatives of the state vs. church authorities), and **principles** (believers, heretics, misbelievers and non-believers). By 'amalgam' I mean such a combination of conflicts in which the detection of their sources (the distinguishing between the spheres mentioned above) is of no use for their protagonists and it is obscured on purpose, because it provokes further conflicts between all involved. Precisely this lends a specific quality to the political culture as a whole, here expressed with the syntagma 'culture war'.

CLERICALISM. Originally the term was used to denote the response of church officials to political opponents –

i.e. apologetics in treating the religious ideas and secular interests of religious institutions – in situations burdened by the culture war. It proceeds from the previous definition that in the atmosphere of the culture war some distinctions are essentially obscured i.e. those that are of decisive importance for the consensual solution of the conflicts, for example, distinguishing between the secular and the religious, civil and state, political and non-political, (anti)religious and non-religious issues, problems, and competences. This is the source of many difficulties for anyone who endeavors to make an impartial analysis of clericalism as a social phenomenon. For example, the assessment of its strategy in terms of offensive or defensive conduct is made difficult, as is an evaluation of the (un)justifiability of clericalism in concrete examples. Furthermore, even the identification of the protagonists of clericalism can be unreliable. A biased analysis characteristically ignores the dynamics of the culture war. The latter, however, necessarily involves (at least) two parties, each employing its own punctuation for the chronology of events that are decisive for the interactional operation of conflicts. In other words this means that both sides start from the cause-and-effect explanation of their conflict, whereby each derives the beginning of a conflicting communication from different events or from various implications of the same event. Consequence: what I see as a response to your act is for you the cause to respond to my act, to which I respond and so on. This brought about the early identification and criticism of the “red” (Communist) clericalism in Slovenia, in addition to the “black” (ecclesiastic) one.

Clericalism is the evaluation of non-religious issues using religious criteria (e.g. the evaluation of ethical, aesthetic, political, economic and scientific issues using confessional criteria) **or vice versa**, (e.g. refuting religious truths by appealing to political or scientific truths) **and the use of social power to apply these evaluations in practice**. This definition leads to two admonitions. Firstly, clericalism is not “reserved” for clerics only. Secondly, the calling in of a religious tradition when evaluating non-religious (secular) problems is not necessarily clericalism as long as it does not involve institutional means of pressure, e.g. an appeal to public opinion, connections with political protagonists, negotiations with the state and the like. It is therefore understandable that any combination of religious and political convictions (even though not prohib-

ited) is very dangerous because it can lead to the clericalization of politics and the politization of religion. What makes it dangerous are the standpoints involved and structural reasons. Why is this so?

Convictions are the basis of both political and religious determination. However, precisely the values that we strongly believe in cannot be attested to nor refuted using exact arguments. This, on the one hand, makes maintaining the distinction between the two kinds of convictions obviously difficult, while on the other, the similarity between them is an argument **for** the distinction and not for the blurring of the distinction. A further complication arising from the intertwining of religious and political convictions is of a structural nature and is related to politics as a field specialized in operating with interests (and not, for example, truth, or justice, or the production of goods, all of which are the domain of other sectors). The political system, its protagonists and institutions, are mechanisms of power regulation in the process of the articulation and coordination of interests that are in the service of the ranking of goals aimed at mobilizing people in the desired direction. Therefore, the intermingling of the religious and political spheres – no matter how sincere the former or how democratic the latter – leads to religion becoming inevitably profanized through its very subordination to the play of power and interests, which is a strong **temptation** for the realization of the second condition of clericalism (see the previous definition).

Since this admonition is essential for an analysis of the election confrontations, the temptations mentioned above should be additionally defined as follows: **the tendency towards the clericalization of politics and politization of the religion can be identified in situations where political events or affiliations are supported or criticized using religious arguments.** When a protagonist elevates this type of conduct to the level where it becomes his/her life mission and a substitute for all other possible ways of response, then we have to deal with **FUNDAMENTALISM**:

“The genuine fundamentalist is both religious and political; indeed, he believes that circumstances require him to act politically (and perhaps violently) in order to fulfill his religious obligations.” (Appleby, 1998:280).

AN ANALYSIS OF DISPUTABLE ISSUES

The first impression: given the abundance of the analyzed material, the list of clerical temptations is surprisingly modest. This is good. However, if taken as an indication of the culture war, this impression may be misleading. Therefore I would like to draw the reader's attention to the following connections between problematic areas that arise from the empirical recording of events and statements:



1. Army chaplains – introduced without public or political debate

The representatives of the government and the Church have signed an agreement on the provision of spiritual services to soldiers in the Slovenian army. For this purpose, only priests of the Catholic and (later) Protestant Church, as representatives of the “autochthonous” religious communities, are planned to be engaged, and they are to be paid from the budget in the same manner as other state administration officials, and receive military ranks. The main arguments put forward are: the constitutional rights of the soldiers, the expected accession of Slovenia to NATO, and compatibility with European solutions in this area. Several experts immediately expressed doubts and protests. The agreement has been criticized along the following lines: the introduction of army chaplains is not the only constitutionally approved method of providing spiritual services to the army but it is one of the worst, it is not a condition for Slovenia's accession to NATO (which is, at any rate, uncertain at the moment), there are many other solutions available in democratic societies, religious rights have never

been obstructed in the Slovenian army, the anticipated restriction of the provision of spiritual services to “autochthonous” religions entails the danger of discrimination and could prove to be unconstitutional (there are no non-autochthonous or autochthonous religious communities or churches in Slovenia), at any rate there is no legal bases for this (for the time being), the relationship between the Church and the state is tense, and in any case certain financial issues are still pending, the content of such spiritual services remains unclear (there is a danger of ideologization), the proposed engagement of non-religious experts who enjoy a better reputation among the public is ignored as is the negative experience with army chaplains in WWII; similarly ignored are specific territorial features, for example the fact that army barracks are located close to religious buildings, while leaves of absence are frequent, etc. The agreement was expressly supported by the Church and certain political parties such as the New Slovenia (nsi) and the Social Democratic Party (sds), other political parties criticized it, most notably the United Slovenian People’s Party and Slovenian Christian Democrats (sls+skd), and they drew attention to several disputable issues, while the Slovenian National Party (sns) dismissed the agreement, entirely, radically and in general, stating that “this is a dangerous precedence for the interference of the Vatican in Slovenian territory with the blessing of the Vatican, the Opus association and probably some American intelligence agency too, in collaboration with the extreme right-wing” (*Večer*, 3 October 2000). This opinion was publicly denied by the Ministry of Defense, which rejected the danger of the politization of the army and attributed the negative attitude of the sns to its leader “opposing Slovenia’s accession to NATO” (*Dnevnik*, 26 September 2000). At the same time the Episcopal Conference of Slovenia announced that the same method of handling spiritual “issues” will be extended to other fields too. The Church saw this intention as an additional argument in its efforts to promote this agreement “that could be expanded to health spas, hospitals, and prisons, in short all institutions where the movement is restricted” (*Večer*, 3 October 2000). Protestants added that they too were “autochthonous”, they pointed out that soldiers were free to choose a spiritual service, and thought that equality with the Catholic Church could be maintained only through an agreement that would also include Protestants (*Delo*, 3 October 2000). An explicit

relationship between this agreement and anti-religious standpoints was stressed by *Mag*'s commentators. They emphasize that by signing the agreement this issue has finally been "settled with ease", and they attribute responsibility to the Minister of Defense, Janez Janša, and the Minister of Justice, Barbara Brezigar (both were candidates in the 2000 parliamentary elections); on the other hand, the criticism of some sociologists emphasized the Communist mentality (*Mag*, 39/2000).

CONCLUSION: By signing this hastened agreement with the Church, the Ministry of Defense, which during the short history of the Slovenian army has so far been involved in a number of scandalous affairs pertaining to some essential areas of operation (defense capabilities, irrational cadre and material policies, scandals related to arms, the politization of political parties etc.), gave rise to critical doubts among the public precisely within the field that had not been called into question publicly before the elections. In other words: there are no known examples of objections by either soldiers or officers that their right of religious expression was ever violated; furthermore, no expert studies on this subject have been published nor has there been any public or political discussion staged. The agreement on the army chaplains was signed in the pre-election period, the representatives of the government who signed it were candidates in the elections (all are members of the same party), the agreement has been supported by the right-wing parties quite uncritically, all parties that supported it were in power, with the exception of the SLS+SKD, which was critical but less than other parties, while the pro-government press generally rejected criticism through political pamphlets.

2. Educational system – the issue of religion in schools was not aggravated

It would be unrealistic to expect that the issue of religion in public schools would be ignored during the pre-election period. However, it is somewhat surprising that the subject has not been more exploited by the political parties (which is good). On the whole, the problems pertaining to the educational system received considerable attention in the media. The main reasons were: the unfinished reform of the public schools that has instigated ve-

hement polemics ever since its outset; the conceptual questions pertaining to the introduction of the nine-year elementary schools and the question of how to evaluate this experiment; the traditionally negative attitude of the Church towards the public education system/schools; the criticism of certain recent moves by Bajuk's government relating to schools that was expressed by the Education and Science Union (sviz) and the Association of School Masters, and addressed to the Ministry of Education. How were religious issues treated in this polemics? The response to the survey about "current educational issues" conducted by the *Delo* daily newspaper clearly showed what the parliamentary parties object to and what they find lacking in the educational system. Concerning religious content in the public schools, only the United List of Social Democrats (ZLSD) and the SNS explicitly stated their views. The former stressed the view that "the religious orientations of political parties should not penetrate education", they declared that they were "against politics in schools" and also were of the opinion that school was too delicate an area for the "interests of the Catholic church" to be exercised there, so they oppose "contracts with any international parties" involving the public school system (by "international party" is meant the agreement with the Holy See). A similar view was expressed by the SNS: for them, a good school is a "lay school that is not encumbered by religion or politics" (*Delo*, 6 October 2000); this party is the only one that advocated publicly a reduction in the financing of private schools from the budget (including religious schools) i.e. from the present 85% to 50%. What is interesting here is that the SNS – a party that, in contrast to the others, has based its election campaign on the strict rejection of the Church's standpoints – nevertheless supported generous financing of private and religious schools, even though in the same breath it added that these schools are "elitist or religiously indoctrinating" (*Radio 1*, 23 September 2000). The most powerful parliamentary party, Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS), which is the party most responsible for the existing educational legislation and is hence most criticized by the Church, expressly supported financing private schools up to 85% from the state budget, and has not raised the issue of religion in schools at all. Christian Socialists, who were a coalition partner of the ZLSD – which the Church regards (in addition to the LDS) as one of the most far-left parties and hence the most anti-

church – have publicly stated that they agree that religious education in parishes should be financed by the state, if this was necessary (*Večer*, 7 October 2000).

One would expect that these viewpoints became radicalized towards the end of the election campaign, or immediately before the elections at the least, particularly by new non-parliamentary parties, whose entry into parliament could not possibly be predicted until the last moment. The Party of Slovenian Youth (sms), for example, managed to win decisive votes during the last days of the campaign and thus crossed the threshold. And how did they answer journalists' questions on this subject? With much composure and correctness: in their opinion, "religious subjects do not belong in schools", but they added that the Church "never demanded anything like that". The Democrats, who did not make it into the parliament but similarly fished for valuable votes (particularly towards the end of the campaign), expressed a similar opinion: they oppose the introduction of religious subjects into school because it "also includes non-religious students, so enforcement of religion upon all is not sensible. Religious education should be provided in places intended for such a purpose." (*POP TV* 12 October 2000). Furthermore, attention should be drawn to the election confrontation of the ZLSD and NSI on TV3, in which this topic was one among many others discussed. The representative of the NSI – i.e. the party most favored by the Church of all right-wing parties – stated that she supported the existing subject "Religions and Ethics" (which was, by the way, also the standpoint of the LDS and ZLSD), so the only difference between her and the representative of the ZLSD (also a woman) was their views on who should teach this subject. In the opinion of NSI's representative, religious subjects in public schools can be taught by anybody who has expert knowledge on the subjects, while the ZLSD's representative was of the opinion that teachers should be experts in religion and not active members of any religious group, as this would inevitably make them biased. And what is the significance of this debate? It was a good example of a **cultured dialog** that did not evade delicate issues and clearly exposed both the key differences and common viewpoints thus appealing to voters through a tolerant but decisive address. It is a model example of the election confrontation. One participant was a known public figure skilled in political public appearance, while the other was entirely unknown and

unskilled in political rhetoric, probably appearing before the cameras for the first time – yet both were brilliant! (A suggestion to Church's strategists for their consideration: What would the public image of the Church look like if their functionaries relied on women instead of theologians to introduce the Church's standpoints?)

All other publicly expressed viewpoints by other parties or non-party activists on the subject of religion in the public school curricula were surprisingly composed and none approached the "radicalism" of the SNS (although even the radicalism of the SNS should be taken relatively in this case, i.e. it is radical in comparison to other viewpoints). This is an important item of information for the thesis on the culture war. We know that the Church has been intentionally problematizing the issue of religious education for the past 100 years (from Mahnič onwards) and it will continue to do so in the 21st century (at least judging by synodal documents, see Štuhec 1999, 2000). As said before, the issue of religious education again became a hot topic during the run-up to the elections, and it is understandable that this was reflected in the media. POP TV, for example, dedicated a special broadcast to educational issues (1 October 2000) to which it invited representatives of parliamentary parties and some experts. And how did the debate look like? It prompted wide response that led to its subsequent analysis in the press where three points were stressed: "nothing essentially new was said, but lances were broken anyway", once again we were witnesses to the "old parting of ways between the right and the left wing", but despite this split and the heat of the topic "the guests did not utter one word about the introduction of religious content into school" (*Delo*, 3 October 2000).

CONCLUSION: The problematic issues pertaining to public schools have long been present in the media, Bajuk's government even emphasized problems through some moves of the Ministry of Education, which was reflected in election confrontations – yet the only exception, slight but conspicuous, was precisely the issue of religion. Precisely the field that is the greatest bone of contention between the Church and the state was characterized by calm statements: election candidates could not avoid the topic, but they did not stretch it either. It is quite irrelevant whether such conduct was a result of an opportunist strategy towards political opponents, or of a lack of knowledge

about this demanding professional field, whether they behaved as they did because public opinion is expressly disapproving of this topic, or because they thought that everything else was more important. The fact remains that everybody said what they wanted to and they did it without making things more tense or throwing insults at political competitors, religion or the Church. Now let's imagine that a foreigner who is ill-informed about these matters (Schutz 1976) visited Slovenia during the pre-election period with the purpose of drawing up a political map of the country **solely** on the basis of viewpoints about religion in schools. He/she would certainly encounter the following problems: while the difference between the right and the left wing would be recognizable, it would be much more difficult to establish which party stands closest to the official positions of the Church. To determine this, one would have to read between the lines, which would be a very unreliable method in this example, he/she would strongly doubt the existence of the culture war, and would certainly not understand why official reproaches of the Church were so sharp.

3. *The media – the church and governmental representatives were the most severe critics of the supposed blockade of the media*

Let me stress again at this point that the subject of my study is not the bias of the media, but my intention was to note the issues that were of decisive importance for religious protagonists but disputable in the eyes of the public. In this section I thus consider the mass media, or rather the attitude towards the mass media and (di)satisfaction with them. The following paradox is obvious: the election contest presupposes that the media are both active and diverse (plurality), while the two taken together are in turn a prerequisite for an election contest. If we had only one of those things, there would not be any competition. Only their combination (active+diverse media) makes possible the paradox even though not necessarily. What was the attitude towards the media then?

Attention has been drawn to the absence of pluralism and the bias of the media. Criticism to this effect has been expressed by the *Družina* weekly newspaper and *Radio Ognjišče* – both are Church media – then by the parties on the right of the political spectrum (those parties made up

the government in power and swore to support Christian values), and the *Mag* weekly magazine, which was expressly critical towards non-governmental parties and SKD+SLS, who distanced itself from the ruling coalition. The following conclusions were outstanding: the media are under the influence of President Milan Kučan (an ex-Communist) and Slovenia has the worst form of censorship (*Družina*, 17 September 2000); auto-censorship is prevailing among journalists, the media incessantly attack the Church, and the state's attitude towards the Church is insipid (this being the standpoint of the newly founded governmental party nsi, whose leader, Dr. Bajuk, was the Prime Minister at that time and active in the election campaign; *Radio Slovenia 1*, 18 September 2000); due to the media obstruction, the achievements of Bajuk's government were not sufficiently presented to the public; not one opinion poll is competent because the public opinion is a "monopoly opinion"; the worst form of censorship in Slovenia occurred precisely during the pre-election period; "the Catholic Church lacks the required political weight despite its majority position"; journalists on the national tv channel attempted to break down the "Spring Parties" (*Radio Ognjišče*, 28-29 September 2000); the Apostolic Nuncio stated that Slovenian national tv neglected religious topics and that one of the Slovenian weekly magazines persistently hunted for scandalous events within the Church (*Dnevnik*, 13 October 2000); the latter is a reference to a sexually provocative drawing of Archbishop Franc Rode published by *Mladina* weekly magazine (the drawing was one in a series of other similar ones showing many other reputed politicians equally stripped, both from the right and the left wing, and other media personalities; the same magazine, which is, in the opinion of the Church, expressly left-oriented, criticizes in each issue at least one representative of the left parties, the LDS or president Kučan, and moreover, it is possible to find in it certain standpoints in favor of the right wing; all this applies to the pre-election period as well, see *Mladina* 18 September 2000); the Prime Minister and the leader of the nsi asserted on the national radio station that "in Slovenia, right before the elections, there is a total blockade of the media" (*Radio 1*, 29 October 2000) and stressed in the same breath that he did not trust the public opinion polls that forecast election results, explaining his statement as follows: he does not trust the polls that predict negative election results, nor those that

forecast positive results, he trusts “one thing only, that is, when I walk around our countryside and see people...” (TV 3, 9 October 2000); the Government Public Relations and Media Office criticized the one-sidedness of the media, stating that Slovenian media are similar to those in Serbia, that they foment “firebrand propaganda” and “throw mud at Janez Janša, Andrej Bajuk, Franc Rode and Marjan Podobnik” (ibid. 6 October 2000, POP TV, 6 October 2000); the most nervous of all is the national TV station (Večer, 12 October 2000) etc.

There are some glaringly contradictory points contained in this criticism, particularly that expressed by protagonists who most criticized the media. For example, when Janez Janša appeared on TV Slovenia he stated that “this year’s campaign has been the most correct one so far”, and that “the most correct electronic medium in the election campaign is TV Slovenia” (TV Slovenia, 13 October 2000); the Church weekly *Družina*, on the other hand, proclaimed the same TV channel to be the most incorrect one, because election confrontations were allegedly held “in the absence of political content” so the viewers were “forced” to be the witnesses to “ruthless and uncivilized butchery” (1 October 2000); the representative of the SLS+SKD thought that the media published “low blows” against their party “particularly coming from the SDS”, giving the paradoxical explanation that this was probably due to their “cheering for LDS” (POP TV, 13 October 2000); in the same broadcast the representative of the governmental party NSI stated that the media were “expressly against the right option”, another of its representatives on TV 3 asserted that the 2000 election campaign was “less aggressive than previous ones”, while the representative of the SLS+SKD, which was in a coalition dispute with the NSI and SDS, agreed wholeheartedly with this view (TV 3, 6 October 2000).

Other outstanding media events:

- a **The Delo newspaper dedicated a whole page to the self-presentation of the leaders of various political parties. Only the leader of SDS did not respond** because he publicly boycotts this newspaper. *Delo* left the space set aside for his party empty. *Mag* weekly magazine later commented on this empty column calling it a conspiracy of *Delo* against the said party and designated the president of the state Milan Kučan as the author of the conspiracy. In addition, the president was to be blamed for when *Delo* published a

picture showing the leader of the SLS+SKD with the Pope during his visit to the Vatican (at the time of the election campaign), and also because *Delo* did not feature the picture of the NSi's leader who visited the Pope at roughly the same time, even though admittedly it was a "closed doors visit" (*Mag*, 41/2000).

b **Of all the media, the harshest criticism of the politization of the Church could be found exactly in the right-oriented *Mag* magazine.** It explicitly asserted that the so called forces of nomenclature¹ caused the politization of the "Slovenian church, which is oddly involved in the political dealings of the nomenclature and is consciously its victim" but other media do not see this because they are all "manipulated the same as Serbian media are"; according to *Mag*, this was confirmed by elections confrontations on TV 3, to which were "invited the ZLSD and LDS only". Precisely these two parties, claimed *Mag*, "have in their programs the removal of the Church from public life. This cannot occur and has not occurred by accident" (*ibid.*). *Mag*'s analysts also coined a new word for the symbiosis of two political orientations i.e. the politics of "the stand-by-the-Church and nomenclature lobbies" (that overlap) (*Mag*, 29/2000). Since this is the first appearance of this thesis in Slovenia, one should take into account the following facts when testing it:

- An analysis of the standpoints of the ZLSD and the LDS shows that the political programs of these two parties do not mention the removal of the Church from public life and nothing to that effect could be concluded from the public statements of their representatives.
- In addition to the ZLSD and LDS, other parties also appeared in election confrontations on TV 3 (the pairs were confronted as follows, in order of appearance: LDS/SDS, ZLSD/NSi, SDS/SLS+SKD, LDS/NSi, SLS+SKD/ZLSD, LDS/ZLSD, SDS/NSi, SLS+SKD/LDS, SDS/ZLSD, NSi/SLS+SKD). This was followed by extensive interviews with Andrej Bajuk, the Prime Minister, Franc Zagožen, the leader of the SLS+SKD, Franc Arhar, the Governor of the Bank of Slovenia, and Janez Janša, the leader of the SDS.

CONCLUSION: TV 3 presented all the larger parliamentary parties in individual broadcasts, while the interviews were held with the representatives of right political

¹ In the former system the Communist appointed administrators.

orientations who appealed to Christian values in their election campaign. The only party that in fact was not admitted onto TV 3, even though it had been invited, was the ZLSD. Actually, the party sent in its coalition partner instead, i.e. the Party of Christian Socialists, but the editorial board of TV 3 did not accept it, so only the SDS appeared on the broadcast reserved for the confrontation of the SDS and ZLSD.

- c **The only medium in Slovenia that actually violated the principle of free access to the media by political parties, was the Church owned *Radio Ognjišče*:** its broadcasts of confrontations between political parties before the elections were open to the parties “close to Christian values” exclusively, while all other parties were banned, which was explicitly stated (*Radio Ognjišče* 17 September 2000). Consequently, only “Spring” parties such as the NSI, SDS and SLS+SKD appeared on this radio, so the live “election contest” was staged between the first two parties mentioned on the one side, and the SLS+SKD on the other. Moreover, only the NSI and SDS received positive comments (without exception), while all other parties faced negative criticism (without exception). One should, however, keep in mind that it was precisely this radio station that accused the national TV stations of attempting to break down the “Spring” bloc in its election broadcasts. Furthermore, an article published by *Delo*, which extensively informed readers about the accessibility of political parties in the electronic media, also throws doubt on the alleged bias of this daily newspaper, which the right-wing sees as conspicuously representing the “nomenclature”: in this article 33 radio and TV stations were presented, but there was not so much as a mention of the described practice of *Radio Ognjišče* (*Delo*, 2 October 2000). In *Delo*’s extensive interviews with parties’ top leadership, in which all kinds of subjects were discussed, there was not one question that would in any way point to the relationship between political parties and the Church (*Delo*, 7 October 2000). Given these facts one could justifiably ask whether *Delo* is prejudiced against the right or the left wing.

In addition to the criticism of the media described above the following five facts also deserve attention:

- i. The connections between religious and political representatives
- The reproaches concerning the political bias of the media

were expressed by the representatives of the Church and political parties of Coalition Slovenia – all support Christian options – and by that part of the print media which is inclined towards them. The said coalition was formed before the elections with a very active part played by Catholic priests and intellectuals (this was publicly admitted). At that time Janez Janša, the leader of the SDS, Dr. Bajuk, the leader of the NSI, and Dr. Franc Zagožen, the leader of the SLS+SKD, had the meeting with Archbishop Rode, and the event received considerable media attention. The agenda of this meeting was never publicly explained though.

2. The political bias of the media

In the analyzed media that favor the right-wing political option (*Družina*, *Radio Ognjišče*, *Mag*), there could not be found a single instance of criticism of the conduct or promises of the NSI and SDS; on the other hand, not one of the other media analyzed here restricted its criticism to the right-wing parties only (i.e. the NSI and SDS), while entirely banishing from its pages the criticism of other parties.

3. The reaction of the state to the criticism of the media

The government commissioned a survey of the media before the elections; the most radical reproaches about censorship and media obstruction came from the representatives of the Church and the government, both mentioning the “nomenclature-controlled” media. The costly survey was assigned, without public tender, to a research group in which there was not one member whose scientific work or essays ever included any critical assessment of the politics of the SDS, NSI or that of the Church – their criticism was invariably aimed at the left-wing parties (for more on the first responses to this survey by professional authors see *Delo*, 11 November, 18 November, 25 November and 2 December 2000).

4. Plurality with regard to censorship and (the lack of) freedom of the media.

The International Press Institute (IPI) presented its study on this subject at the conference of the Ministerial Council of OSCE in Vienna. The study comprised the media situation in OSCE member states. No serious violations of freedom of the press were reported for 12 out of 55 member states – and Slovenia was among these twelve countries (the study comprised the period 1999 – 2000; *Delo* 28 November 2000).

5. Plurality of the media with regard to the public expression of religious content

Does the Church have an opportunity to express its view-

points in the Slovenian mass media? In a country with a population of 2,000,000 the following means of public communication are intended for Catholics (the list includes only those Catholic media quoted by the Church on its internet home page): *Družina* (Family) weekly newspaper, *Ognjišče* (Fireside) monthly newspaper, *Mavrica* (Rainbow), a monthly intended for students, *Misijska obzorja* (Missionary Horizons), a monthly about missionaries, *Prijatelj* (Friend), a monthly review for the sick and their friends, *Božje oko* (God's Eye), a monthly dealing with spiritual issues, *Naša luč* (Our Light), a monthly for Slovenians living around the world, *Tretji dan* (The Third Day), a monthly for the educated elite, *Cerkveni glasbenik* (Ecclesiastical Music), a monthly for ecclesiastical music, *Sončna pesem* (The Sun's Song), a monthly for youths, the newspaper of the diocese of Krško *Nedelja* (Sunday), the official journal of Slovenian dioceses *Sporočila slovenskih škofij* (Messages from Slovenian Dioceses); (there are several other church newspapers); the larger publishers and producers of church media are: *Mohorjeva družba*, *Družina*, *Ognjišče*, *Salve*; electronic media: *Radio Ognjišče*, regular religious broadcasts on the national tv station and a private station TV3.

CONCLUSION: The Church and those governmental parties that were helped by the Church in organizing the coalition, all of them appealing to Christian values, were expressly critical towards the media in the pre-election period. The only explicit (declared) ban on an appearance in election broadcasts was issued by the Church radio station, which barred all other parties save for those that are "close to Christian values". All other media provided access to all parties under identical conditions.

4. Religion and politics: the bishop's statement is praised by all political parties even though a notion of duty is incompatible with free elections

A number of caution flags were raised by various print media concerning this subject: a part of the Church press called on the president of the country not to give rise to doubts regarding his political affiliations (*Družina*, 17 September 2000); the media other than those controlled by the Church drew attention to the activities of priests, who even though not candidates in the elections, were politically very active through the Citizens Forum; there was a

warning that Coalition Slovenia is “in fact a branch office of the diocese ordinary’s office” (*Dnevnik*, 23 September 2000, *Delo*, 23 September 2000), that the president of the country has sway over the owners of capital within the Church, and that the ex-Communist “nomenclature” formulates politics (*Mag*, 38/2000). A leading theologian charged the ZLSD with clericalism because it used the color black in its election poster. This statement was later commented on *Radio Slovenia 1* (24 September 2000), when it was said that this same theologian probably borrowed from the ZLSD the double-meaning slogan “voli modro”², because the same poster featured the color blue as well; in the same broadcast there was expressed wonder why “those who are not candidates feel chosen to appeal to the voters to cast their ballots” (i.e. the clergy). Another leading theologian asserted that a part of the right-wing (SLS+SKD) had supported the ex-Communists, that it intentionally split the coalition and made people uninterested in the elections, which led to the establishment of nsi, a party whose function was to re-mobilize those that were disappointed; the same theologian designated the entire juridisdiction as “the transmission” of the Communist forces; in his opinion, the rejection of the majority voting system and Parliament’s decision to adopt the proportional system was a fraud aimed at tearing apart the ruling right-wing coalition; he called the largest party (LDS) “a party controlled by capital” that is related to the ex-Communist regime, and so on (*Radio Ognjišče*, 20 September 2000). In one of the Church newspapers, a renown Catholic intellectual wrote profusely about a curious virus called “antislovenin” whose essential effect is “resistance to Slovenianness”, and concluded that those most resistant to this infection were Christians, while the virus was most aggressive in “people without faith”; the same issue of the newspaper that invented the virus featured Anton Mahnič on the coverpage, that is to say, the theologian who was most responsible for the culture war in Slovenia, and quoted his words: “There is one truth only and it is indivisible as is God himself” (*Družina*, 17 September 2000). Are we to assume that the representative of the election team of nsi had in mind the same virus, “antislovenin”, when he addressed the voters by appealing to the “instinctive” distinction between the good

² In Slovenian, the word *moder* stands for both the wisdom and blue color, so the slogan could be read as “vote wisely” or “vote for the blue”

and the bad, and to an “innate sense of justice”, thanks to which, in his opinion, nsi was going to come off well in the elections, because “Slovenians have an innate sense of honesty and instinctively know whose words are of value” – in short, support to nsi was presumably a consequence of an instinctive feeling and congenital sense in Slovenian people (*Radio Ognjišče*, September 27 2000). On the same day, the participants at an election confrontation commented on a typical Mahnič-style statement that “the one who is not Roman Catholic is not a Slovenian”. The Minister of Culture himself minimized the scandalousness of this statement because in his opinion what was much worse was some sports ad featured in the media at that time, which invited the supporters of the national football team to jump and cheer³ (*TV 1*, 27 September 2000).

In addition, the media noted some illegal acts, for example: a mayor, who was an sds candidate for election, opened some Catholic building in his municipality during the pre-election period. The building in question was an unlicensed construction and the authorities had already issued the demolition order, but the highest municipal official demonstratively denied it (*Delo*, 3 October 2000); the Slovenian embassy in Switzerland attached the Catholic paper *Župnijski list* (*Parish paper*) to the official invitation to the elections (*Mladina*, 18 September 2000); *Mladina* weekly magazine featured an election pamphlet that was handed out during mass containing a prayer for the country and instructions to vote for Mr. Bajuk and his party i.e. nsi (*Mladina*, 17 October 2000). One week before the elections, the Church radio station invited all Slovenians to unite – instead of being split between parties – to take to the streets and demolish the Parliament building following the Serbian example:

“The mistake of Slovenians in comparison with the Serbs is their insipidity. The Serbs are ready to demolish their parliament buildings and spend weeks out on the streets for the sake of a better future. In Slovenia, however, it is not possible to observe a similar perseverance in our goals/..../We adhere to the tradition which is, regrettably, still of the red color, we do not want to try and bring in a new wind/.../But, dear Slovenians, how do you know that it is not worth a try? Why don’t we unite into one nation, why don’t we take Belgrade as our model at least once and decide on the new future all together/.../I hope

3 The slogan is: “One who does not jump is not a Slovenian”.

that some of these sentences will resound in your minds the next Sunday when you go to decide for or against.” (*Radio Ognjišče*, 8 October 2000).

It is a tradition among Slovenian bishops to address the Slovenian people before every election to tell them how to vote. This year they avoided the temptation to directly name the political party or options one should vote for. Instead, the central purport of the statement that was published in and commented on by both the left and the right oriented media (*Dnevnik*, 25 September 2000, *Radio Ognjišče*, 24 September 2000) was a lesson on how the right to vote is not just a right but a duty **as well**. Accordingly, “believers in particular should fulfill their duty and cast a ballot” as “nothing can justify their failure to go to the polls”. Such an explanation of the voting right did not trigger any critical response by the media – nobody called attention to the fact that a right cannot be a duty as well, because it would automatically cease to be a right in such a case (elections that call on the duty of citizens or believers, are not free elections!; at free elections voters must have the right to cast their ballots or not, without any pressures!). In **equating** a right and a duty, the Slovenian bishops actually quoted the provision contained in the Vatican document *Gaudium et spes* (1965:75) while entirely ignoring another document from the same period (*Pacem in terris*, 1963:29) that treats rights more appropriately. The latter document explains the connection between rights and duties to the following effect: the right of an individual is an official duty of others to acknowledge and respect that right (*Pacem in terris*, 1963:29). At any rate, Vatican documents are not applicable for national elections. The appropriate legal documents are the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia and international documents on human rights in which the exercise of fundamental citizen’s rights is never contingent on duties, moreover, any form of enforcement is explicitly prohibited (cf. the Constitution of RS 1992: Article 41; Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948: Article 19; the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen 1789: Article 10; the Protocol to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms 1950: Article 3; the equation of a right and duty can only be found in the Constitution of ex-Yugoslavia, The Constitution of SFRY 1974: Article 173).

Surprisingly, the said Bishop’s statement received public acclaim by all political parties save for the SNS which

retained its negative attitude on principle. The most commendable response was the one by the LDS, which gave three reasons: the Bishop's letter was "incomparably more neutral than any previous one", it contains an "appeal for as massive a turnout at the polls as possible" – in the opinion of the LDS, other civil institution "should do the same" – and "the Bishop's letter represents a great step forward for civil society" (*Delo*, 27 September 2000, *Večer*, 28 September 2000, *Mag*, 40/2000). All subsequent comments on the Bishop's letter by Church's representatives themselves amount to the same effect, only that they enlarge upon the syntagma about the voting right which is also a duty: the "duty of the citizens" to vote is explicitly stressed, as is the central implication of the Bishop's appeal that "the elections should be understood as a fundamental right and the most elementary duty of a citizen" (*Večer*, 28 September 2000). This logic was radicalized even further after the elections: representatives of the Church no longer only speak of the voting right as a duty, but state that this duty is a pre-requisite for the right ("it is not the right but the duty that is in the background/.../the order is inverted: it is not a right that generates a duty, but a duty generates a right"; *Radio 1*, 20 November 2000).

What could be said about the political impartiality of the Bishop's statement? Conclusions can be drawn from commentaries in the Church media that highlighted the points that were only implied in the Bishop's statement: the pressure on Christians voters to cast their ballot originated in the fear that abstaining from the elections would be the most widespread among the supporters of the right-wing parties who would stay at home on election day because they were disappointed over the conflicts within Coalition Slovenia that intensified just before the elections. Calculation: the election catastrophe of the Catholic right-wing could be prevented only by resorting to an authoritative appeal to Christians to go to the elections. The Church *Radio Ognjišče* thus commented on the Bishop's letter: "according to one calculation, the right-wing (the so called "Spring Parties") will certainly win, provided that the turnout at the elections is 80%" (21 September 2000). The same radio also released the ideologically most biased and methodologically disputable survey conducted in the pre-election period: according to this survey, the NSI would receive 50% of the votes, followed by the SDS with somewhat less than 20% of the votes and the SLS+SKD with 15%

of the votes, while all other parties were expected to gather less than this or no votes at all. There was no response to this survey – not from the right nor from the left wing, nor from unprejudiced professionals, despite the fact that the media, as explained before, were very exposed to criticism in the pre-election period.

That the voters were going to abstain from voting was just as much a concern of the LDS, even though according to pre-elections projections its prospects were invariably very good and in the end it won with a strong advantage over all other parties. The apprehension that abstaining was going to affect their advantage was probably the reason why they complimented so much the Bishop's undemocratic statement;

The turnout at the elections was relatively high (70.37%) and the supporters of Coalition Slovenia were not outstanding among those who abstained from voting.

Looking from the perspective of free elections, the most serious mistake was found on the ballots: the instructions opened with the guideline that one candidate (en kandidat) only may be circled. The Slovenian language, however, has different endings for the masculine and feminine gender of the noun, so "en kandidat" is the masculine form while the feminine would be "ena kandidatka". As a matter of fact, there was a number of female candidates, among them the NSI, SDS, and SKD+SLS candidates. The misleading instruction was the mistake of the Election Committee of RS. As for our analysis, I find it important to draw attention to the mistake because nobody took notice – neither the media nor political parties, official monitoring bodies, the Ombudsman for Human Rights, or the Government Office for Women's Policy. Likewise the Slovenian bishops did not react to this mistake.

CONCLUSION: religion and politics were largely intertwined in the election campaign. Both the right and the left oriented media criticized the Church on these grounds. The only difference between them lay in their interpretation of the reasons or circumstances that led to this phenomenon and in the sharpness of the criticism, with the most bitter coming from *Mag*. The politization of religion and the clericalization of politics was most pronounced on the Church's *Radio Ognjišče*. Throughout the election campaign their appealing to Christian values was most conspicuously mixed with political agitation (the acclaim of a

particular political party and criticism of other parties). The weekly newspaper *Družina* holds second place by the same criterion. None of the Church's representatives ever distanced himself/herself from any statement presented by *Radio Ognjišče*, in *Družina* or *Mag*.

CONCLUSION: TEMPTATIONS OF CLERICALISM AND THE ELEMENTS OF CULTURE WAR

In democratic secular societies – where the distinction between state and religious institutions is a social norm or is even stipulated by the constitution – the political engagement of the church or its influence on political parties is **not** forbidden. It is true that only political parties are allowed to compete in the elections, but this by no means implies that they have a monopoly over the shaping of the political world; various interest groups may engage in politics, if they wish to do so, and the Church is one such group. The disputable issue, however, is how various actors see these things, or rather, how they evaluate them. In pluralist societies the actors alone decide on their own strategies (as long as they fit into the legal framework). Since these actors differ with regard to their interests, they use different strategies and different criteria to judge how advantageous these strategies are.

The Church thus decided that it was in its interest to demand, during the election campaign, the introduction of army chaplains, then to strain the relationship with the media that are not close to it (because the latter are allegedly the »nomenclature« media), and not to remain unambiguously neutral towards political parties but to behave just the opposite. Furthermore, it found it necessary to declaratively stress that a differentiation between religion and politics was not possible because both public spheres overlap. On the other hand, it did not carry to an extreme the issue of religion in public schools, which was contrary to expectations if we take into account its reactions in the past decade, even though, admittedly, it did not change its standpoints either.

One conclusion that may be drawn from these facts is that the pre-election contest was flavored by temptations of clericalism and the elements of the culture war. The Church is quite prone to behave in this way, but it is not the sole actor responsible for such an atmosphere. The scope of this analysis does not allow for further elaboration.

tion of conclusions regarding the culture war, while generalization could lead to bias. Therefore, I will restrict myself to drawing attention to three significant points:

1. The core of the conflict involving the Church in Slovenia is not the issue of what is allowed and what not. Freedom of thought, speech and action applies to everybody, including the Church and its political stance. The core of the conflict is the question of what is beneficial and what is not (and for whom).
2. One should not interchange the flirting of the Church with political actors and its attempts to exert influence on them with the struggle for power. The Church renounced such a struggle once and for all at the beginning of the 20th century (when Mahnič's initiative for the direct election of priests into the parliament failed; see Dragoš 1996). Ever since then the Church has been using the strategy that could be named »sitting on two stools«, which is an approach essentially different from its former approach. It is characterized by the Church influencing non-religious spheres but never really occupying them entirely. This enables the Church to reject political criticism of its conduct by branding it an attack on religion.
3. The influence that the Church exerts on political parties should be strictly distinguished from the conduct of political parties that side with the Church. The two are very similar, quite often simultaneous, but they are by no means one and the same thing. Both involve the clericalization of politics and the politization of religion – but the latter manner of conduct is much more dangerous for the escalation of clericalism than the former. The political parties' bargaining with the Church is a dangerous innovation on our political scene, while the politization of religion has not demonstrated any new approaches; whatever the Church does, it has been doing it for the past 100 years. In this sense, the culture war is much more fatefully determined by the conduct of political parties and the government than by that of Church authorities.

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THE INEXPRESSIVENESS OF ELECTION POSTERS

The political poster has remained, despite keen competition posed by visually more attractive media, one of the most important means of political propaganda and advertising in general. It combines two principles that aim at opposite directions: the aesthetic and propagandist-political component must be brought together and harmonized to form an integrated whole. Or, in other words, such a poster must be pleasing and neat while at the same time promoting selected ideas and 'struggling' against others. It must follow the logic »little is much«: be visually simple and straightforward in terms of text, yet not banal; it must motivate, captivate, activate, but not explain or argue (other available media are more suitable for this purpose); it must be eye-catching and conspicuous but not obtrusive (screaming). Propaganda uses posters, as it does other types of media, to disseminate specific ideas as efficiently as possible to the widest possible circle of addressees, and in so doing it employs symbols, words and pictures to influence the attitudes of the audience¹, naturally, within the limits imposed by the cultural context into which it ventures. A good poster, therefore, tells us as much about the commissioner (political party or a group) as about the designer (his/her creativity, innovativeness, artistic preferences).

The contemporary political party life in Slovenia is just over 10 years old. After several rather animated years, the political space is gradually becoming profiled and consolidated: political parties try to swarm around the center (this, however, does not mean that they have given up some extreme standpoints on certain issues).

In this essay I consider the visual language of posters for the 2000 parliamentary elections in Slovenia through four theses.

The first is that political propaganda – election propaganda in our example – is directly related to political developments, orientations of political parties and the prevailing political culture. As a rule, political posters reflect a current situation: a stable political period does not bring any particularly turbulent, spectacular or provocative propaganda, but rather very composed and inexpressive, not to say 'dull' imagery.

¹ Yanker, 1972, 18

The second thesis points out a considerable similarity between the visual language of all posters for the 2000 election campaign in Slovenia, which reveals how relatively close the political parties' viewpoints on the essential courses of the country are, particularly those regarding Slovenia's future accession to the EU and NATO, solutions of the fundamental problems of Slovenian society, and its future development².

The third thesis problematizes Slovenian political parties' notorious lack of political symbols.

And finally, the fourth thesis is: given the lack of controversial strategic issues and symbols, political parties place emphasis on their more or less charismatic leaders. To put it differently, only with difficulty could we imagine the biggest political parties in Slovenia without their leaders; very likely because they have been the heads of these parties for the most part of their short life so far. The fourth thesis thus stresses the practice of »personifying« political parties in Slovenia, a trait that has been well demonstrated by the election posters³. I will test each thesis by analyzing the visual language of the posters of various sizes and technical features, as well as symbols, logos, handouts and slogans.

THE DOMINATION OF PROPAGANDA
THAT BEFITS A POLITICALLY
UNDISTURBED PERIOD

The "tranquility" of propaganda contents and slogans.

Usually, the basic differences between parties come to light also through poster designs. This year's election posters in Slovenia almost completely lack the most common techniques of visual propaganda: there is no contrasting of colors, symbols or motifs (except for the plus and minus sign signifying the confrontation of the positive and the negative in ZLSD posters), no intense, eye-catching colors or dynamic images, nor conspicuous motifs that express perspectives, visions or objectives. All of these techniques and approaches stand in direct relation to the significance of the anticipated or forecasted changes, or to put it another way, the greater the changes, the more dramatic are

² Given these similarities, the main lines of distinction are ideological conflicts, for example, the evaluation of the (recent) past, the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the state and so on.

³ With a touch of irony, we could paraphrase this as *La parti, c'est moi!*

the motifs, colors, and symbols. The monotony of motifs and advertising approaches in this year's posters seems to be a quiet way of making it clear that the strategic course for Slovenia has already been determined.

Tranquility comes to light through the selection of colors. The dominant color on this year's posters is blue, the color that in our cultural context stands for composure, prudence, reason, dignity and the like. It can be found both on the posters and in the logos of the NSI, LDS, SDS, ZLSD (where it is reinforced by the slogan, through a play on words⁴), SMS and DESUS. The SNS poster shows its leader in a blue shirt with the color of the background changing from black to blue.

There is no negative⁵ or excessively aggressive rhetoric in this year's posters. Similarly, the colors, symbols and motifs do not »struggle« with each other with the aim of provoking an emotional response in viewers;⁶ there are no *good and bad guys*: just *our* guys, the *best ones*, of course. »Limiting alternatives«⁷, i.e. a binary out-out choice is present only in a ZLSD poster (a rigid composition showing the minus sign against a black background and the plus sign against blue, which calls to mind the bi-polarity of



4 In Slovenian, the word "moder" means both "blue" and "wise". The slogan that reads *Voli modro* may thus be understood as *Vote for the blue (color)* or *Vote wisely*.

5 For more on the characteristics of the negative, so-called black propaganda, see Jowett, O'Donnell, 1992, 8-13. An example of such a blow "below the belt" from Slovenia's most recent political history was the poster of the Social Democratic Alliance for the spring elections in 1990. It showed photographs of the world's most notorious figures of Communism along with some figures from the Slovenian past and present, while the message read *COMMUNISTS Want another 45 years?* A complementary poster featured the text *SOCIAL DEMOCRATS*, the pictures of renowned socialdemocrats like Brandt, Palme, Mitterand and others together with some figures from Slovenia – Pučnik, Boh, Šinkovec, Magajna, and the message *Vote for the Social Democratic Alliance and Demos!*. See Spahić, 2000, 42, 43.

6 The reactions are different, ranging from feeling victimized, threatened, uncertain, through pity to hatred and triumph.

7 Yanker, 1972, 20

the Slovenian political space); it is, however, exceeded by the sign chosen for the campaign by DS⁸. The sign is composed of an equilateral triangle of a soft violet color – with the name of the party and the slogan »The Third Block« inscribed in it – inserted between red and black planes with a multi-color rainbow near the top.

SMS

It is in a way understandable that the visual language of the posters of bigger political parties is traditional, or rather monotonous, as these parties address the whole electoral body and not any specific, target group⁹. This is the reason why the posters that stand out both in terms of design and color are those of smaller parties that struggle for supporters and political space among the groups and in the fields that are neglected by bigger ones:

- The SNS with its Euro-scepticism (the poster shows its leader holding a chick against his body and a plucked hen in an out-stretched hand, standing under the broken circle of the EU sign, signifying its »imperfection«¹⁰;
- The »youthful« nonconformity of the SMS comes through in the party's logotype, which is the abbreviation of the full name: two rigid S's envelop a more relaxed, »graffiti« style M¹¹;
- Desus chose an unusual, smallish "family" portrait that calls



⁸ It appears on the posters (which are few in number), on its homepage and pamphlets. The sign is composed of a violet triangle extended downwards into a pentagon.

⁹ The catch-all approach in which a party addresses a whole population is characteristic of political propaganda in democratic societies; in totalitarian regimes, however, propaganda actions (and posters) were focused on specific target groups (the middle-class, youths, women, farmers, workers, the military). See e.g. Clark, 1997, 48, 49.

¹⁰ In my opinion this poster stands out for its awkward design; however, the inglorious top prize will probably continue to be held, for quite a long time, by Dr. Križman's poster in his campaign for mayor of Maribor in the fall of 1998. On this poster he is clad in Mother Theresa's garments and has a pious look, while the message reads *Mother Alojzija – Just towards the good, sharp with the weak*.

¹¹ Also the motif on the pamphlet is provocative showing a girl and two boys in a kind of love triangle and suggesting that »three make the best couple«.

to mind the idyll of several generations;

- »New Party« (NS) with its list of female candidates (the poster shows a portion of a woman's pensive face)¹².

The similarity of motifs

A typical feature of propaganda during stable political periods is the similarity of motifs and slogans despite declared differences between political parties. This has been confirmed by this year's election campaign in Slovenia: the rhetoric of the political programs, including the one found on pamphlets, is very much alike and clichéd to such a degree that it defies disagreement.¹³

We shall now proceed to review the prevailing motifs, although they are not articulated in the most convincing way. The most frequent motif is, quite understandably, progressiveness and futurity. The thread that connects all slogans on these posters is movement, dynamism, newness, eyes fixed on the future: such as on the LDS poster with the slogan »Slovenia goes on!«¹⁴; and ZLSD poster promoting »New Energy«; the SDS chose a double-meaning slogan



¹² One can justifiably expect that the next elections will successfully introduce some smaller parties oriented towards groups that are not part of the political mainstream, say, women, the members of other South-Slavic nations living in Slovenia, (the return of) environmentalists, extreme nationalists etc.

¹³ For example, greater economic growth, balanced development, knowledge for the future, new jobs, the reduction of social differences, higher social security and better health care, the rationalization of the state administration, confrontations with the challenges posed by globalization, regionalism, the protection of nature etc. In connection with this, let us mention meaningful objections that appeared during the election campaign, namely that the most heavily competing parties were "copying programs" from each other.

¹⁴ This was also the title and the refrain of the Slovenian football team's anthem during Euro 2000 Championship, popularized during the summer. The authors of this song sold the title to the LDS as a slogan for their election campaign. The "dynamism" of the LDS is further reinforced by the title of their propaganda brochure *10 steps forward* and on the back of the coverpage with the text *The transition period is behind us, the future world lies before us*.

where the words (the) *Future* is appear above the SDS abbreviation, so the message could be read as (the) *Future is SDS*; the SNS ensures that *The Future of the country is in your hands* (both on jumbo posters and on smaller size posters that were put up in restrooms in public places such as bars, cinemas etc.)¹⁵

The picture, text and symbol on a poster should be mutually complementary: each element is expected to explain the other. The contradiction of the posters mentioned above is that the messages mostly do not live up to the dynamism of the motifs: what we have here is in fact an unacceptable gap between the slogan and the image. This is most obvious on an NS poster where the slogan “*Her vision*” is entirely contradicted by a girl’s pensive, sad gaze. The posters that most closely approach the harmony of the two elements are those of the LDS and SDS. The LDS poster shows its leader in the forefront, *primus inter pares* among more or less famous figures from political and public life, all cheerfully¹⁶ marching towards the viewer (the established motif of dynamism shown through approaching). The SDS employed a different logic. First, in the posters featuring flowers, flocks of birds and honeycombs that forecast – in that order – more beautiful times, more unity and more prosperity, then in the posters with a black and white picture of the party’s leader (or candidates in individual constituencies), with the slogan mentioned above and flowers in the upper part of the background, which



¹⁵ The slogan on NS’s pamphlets is *Forward into the future*; on DS’s pamphlets the slogan is *The center for the future*; on SMS’s *We’ll soon have to decide about our future*; NSI’s e-message with the subject “New Slovenia for the friends” includes the appeal *Choose the view forward*.

¹⁶ In addition to the SNS, only the picture of the LDS’s leader shows the whole upper part of his body, not only his head and shoulders, as if the commissioner of the poster wanted to dismiss insinuations about the (concealed) illness that could be heard during the election campaign.

symbolically promise a better and more bountiful future, as well as a revival.

While »flowers in the fall« on SDS posters hint at »the Spring blooming«¹⁷ at the fall election – with an additional dimension furnished through a rather conspicuous contrasting (the only instance!) of the yellow of the flowers and the blue of the background¹⁸ – a similar composition on NSi posters, with the leader, his wife, and a forest cloaked in fall colors, appears much less persuasive. Firstly, the forest has no such positive connotations (in our cultural environment these vary from placidity to complexity, sometimes even danger), and secondly, the colors of the fall simply do not promise an exceptionally attractive future.

The second prevailing motif is the unity arising from the crowd. The motif of interconnectedness (following the logic »one from many«) is obvious in a typical »bridge-building« slogan of the SLS+SKD that runs »Hold together!« and in group images on LDS and DESUS posters. The motifs on SDS posters are attention grabbing: the abbreviation of the party's name is composed of a myriad of red flowers (in our environment the symbol of beauty, perfection and love),



¹⁷ In the ideological discourse (which is also uncritically used by some journalists), the so called "Parties of the Spring" (SDS, NSi and SLS+SKD) refer to the legacy of the "Slovenian Spring", which stands for the democratization process of the late 1980s. According to this binary and over-simplified logic, the "left-center" parties of the political spectrum (LDS, ZLSD etc.) invariably have a Communist past and are thus labeled "the Parties (or Forces) of Continuity".

¹⁸ The same contrast between the blue color of the background and the shining yellow sunflower has been present, since last summer, on the posters and leaflets in one of the advertising actions by Nova Ljubljanska banka with the similar play of words as in the ZLSD's slogan (see note 4).

honeycombs (the symbol of prosperity as a result of diligent work), and a flock of birds in the sky (the symbol of interconnectedness and unity in freedom). After all, also the name *Coalition Slovenia* chosen by the SDS and NSI refers to the country as a whole, and the same holds true for the names *New Slovenia* and *Go on Slovenia*.¹⁹

The third common feature, which I find surprising, is the absence of traditional motifs such as the countryside idyll, which was quite often present in the election posters of the past (this year it could be seen in campaign television spots), and the folklorism commonly favored by some bigger Slovenian parties. Similarly, there is no nostalgic looking back into the past, or stressing of family life (only the NSI poster shows the leader accompanied with his wife, while the DESUS poster features some sort of family meeting). Furthermore, there are no religious symbols, slogans²⁰ or objects²¹, even though three political parties appeal to Christianity through their names and the leaders of two of these visited the pope at the Vatican in the week preceding the election.

The prevailing inexpressiveness of the visual language is reciprocated by slogans that are so clichéd that they could readily be attributed to any party of any political era or from any environment for that matter (only the names would be changed!): e.g. SLS+SKD *For Slovenia with pride*, LDS *Slovenia Goes On!*, SDS *It's time for Slovenia*, ZLSD *Vote wisely!*, DESUS *Vote for yourself! Vote for DeSUS!* and NSI *Words with value!* All slogans point to the deficiencies of the current situation in Slovenia i.e. of the present government; or, in the order mentioned above: the country *lacks pride*, *is at a standstill*, *it has no time for Slovenia*, *it has not been wisely elected*, *it is not for you* and *words are without value* in it (an allusion to the broken promises).

The lack of recognizable political symbols

A symbol is born when a specific motif becomes well established and »familiar« within a group. One of the basic characteristics of the contemporary Slovenian parties

¹⁹ In contrast to other parties whose name includes only the adjective, i.e. Slovenian (e.g. SLS+SKD, SNS), or the noun in the genitive case translated into English by 'of' structure i.e. "of Slovenia" (e.g. SDS, LDS, SMS, DESUS). The inclusion of a country's name in the nominative case in the name of a party is often found elsewhere as well: e.g. *Our Home Russia*, or *Forward Italia!*

²⁰ Like *Children of the Lord*, *sons of the country*, *slaves to nobody*, SKD in 1990.

²¹ For example SKD and SLS posters in 1992 (see, for example, Spahić, 2000, 82, 84).



is that they lack precisely this. Symbols, imagery, songs, recognizable colors and even political figures from the past have largely earned bad names, so much so that modern parties find it impossible to refer to them²². Several attempts have been made in the course of the past 11 years to shape political symbols, but most had a short life (not least because certain parties dissolved)²³. Even the Slovenian flag i.e. its color combination, is absent from this year's posters with the exception of the SLS+SKD logotype, but even there the missing emblem makes it incomplete.

However, certain symbols do persist, for example, the red rose of the SDS that calls to mind the *spring character* and *social-democratic* nature of this party (it does not appear on this year's election posters though, but it can be seen on the leaflets promoting several candidates). The linden leaf, which is one rare ideologically non-compromised symbol of Slovenianness²⁴, appears in DESUS's logo and on the top of the ZLSD's logo (a red heart, a yellow star and a linden leaf) as well as in the most intricately designed logotype - that of the SNS. The boundaries of modern Slovenia are super-imposed over the historical Kozler's Map of *Slovenian Land and Provinces* from 1853 featuring the coats-of-arms of individual provinces, with a linden leaf spread over the whole image. In ZLSD's and SNS's logotypes there is a linden leaf in the top part of the composition, thus playing the role of an integrating element and attempting to show that Slovenianness extends beyond all division lines, political or territorial.



²² Due to this, the symbols of the Slovenian statehood are confined to more "neutral fields": cultural history (e.g. motifs on Slovenian banknotes) and Slovenian natural and geographical characteristics (linden, Triglav, sea, also the "hen" shape of the country).

²³ For example, green ladybug, the panther, bee, sea gull, stylized grain, dandelion, red carnation, the stone of the Carinthian prince and the like.

²⁴ As a symbol of Slovenianness it was revived through the tourist promotion campaign *My country* in 1983 (see Požar, 2000, 45-47).

Personification of parties

Generally speaking, election posters most often feature portraits.²⁵ The parties' »personal« identities more than obviously mark this year's election posters too: they are dominated by the portraits of the parties' notabilities (ZLSD, SDS, SNS), sometimes shown with their close collaborators (LDS, SLS+SKD). This is a combination of three proven techniques of propaganda manipulation that Yanker named image-making, appeal to authority and sugar-coating.²⁶ Firstly, rather than dealing with the competition, they aim to create and promote a positive impression; and secondly, they promote concrete persons and only through this create the recognizability and self-confidence of a party²⁷. In this year's campaign a generally broad range of options for figurative representation²⁸ has been reduced to the photographs of party leaders²⁹ meaning that there are no anonymous faces on these posters with the exception of those on desus and ns posters.

The composition of the poster may employ a hierarchy of motifs or personalities³⁰ – only the latter can be identified in this year's posters. It is obvious on posters showing the leaders of the LDS and NSI. The centrality of their fig-



²⁵ Portraiture, Yanker, 1972, 60-62

²⁶ Yanker, 1972, 19

²⁷ They are thus more intended for image advertising than issue advertising.

²⁸ Another extreme is an abstract, non-figurative representation, e.g. flowers, flocks and honeycombs chosen by the SDS, the minus and plus sign of the ZLSD, blue and white combination of the SMS, and NS.

²⁹ An interesting point is that there are not any outsiders or 'jokers' among them who would have been recruited by the parties a short time before the elections to be featured on the posters for the first time with a view to gaining advantage over others, say, because they are young, unburdened with the past or past engagements, that is to say, because they are "close to people" or something similar. This year's posters thus show familiar faces only.

³⁰ By placing them in the forefront/background, center/margin, rendering them as big/small, conspicuous/inconspicuous etc.

ures is achieved primarily through the gaze of two women who admiringly stare at them: a famous actress on an LDS poster and the leader's wife on an NSI poster. By and large, women do not appear as political protagonists either on this year's posters distributed countrywide or in the top bodies of the parties. When they do appear, their roles are passive: they are either »admirers« as on the posters mentioned above, therefore standing *by* a leader, or completely anonymous, as on the NS poster or in the »safe family environment« featured on the DESUS poster.

The figures shown on posters mostly wear conventional clothes meaning that a (white) shirt and tie are a must (but not also a jacket); a more relaxed, sporty look can be observed only on LDS and SDS posters, which include the party leaders, and on a DESUS poster. The faces usually feature (standard) reserved smiles. The leaders of the two strongest parties, according to pre-election polls and election results, have even adopted similar postures – they both touch the chin with the fingers of the left hand, the same pose as one of the leading figures of the SLS+SKD.

THE POLARITY OF THE POLITICAL SCENE
WAS NOT REFLECTED IN PROPAGANDA

Notwithstanding all the facts stated above, the empirical data show that posters have played an important role in this year's election.³¹ One would expect that – given that the Slovenian political space is presented as being irreparably split between *the left and the right wing*, the *continuity forces and real democrats i.e. non-turncoat politicians of the »Slovenian Spring«*, the *clericals and the Reds*, and similar ideological categories, and that politicians try to persuade the public that this difference is fateful – this would find expression also in the contents of propaganda materials. However, the graphic images of the posters and slogans lead us to a different conclusion, namely that the differences are in fact smaller than supposed. There are more similarities between them than differences: for the most part the posters are so similar that it wouldn't matter indeed if the figures and slogans were swapped between them. This directly contradicts one of the main characteristics of a good poster, namely that it creates and spells out differences between competing parties. A very interesting point

31 See the graph by Gral-Iteo in Žlajpah, 2000, 12.

indeed: as if they did not want to influence the choice of the voters intentionally, as if the voters were pre-determined and this year's campaign was some sort of electoral formality, an uninvited necessity, rather than a real addressing of the voters.

Obviously the inexpressiveness of the political propaganda had an essential impact on the aesthetic side of the posters. The second conclusion is that the posters – considered generally – suggest a considerable uninventiveness on the part of both designers and commissioners: the selection of representation options was very restricted given the wide range of possible solutions and approaches. The simplicity – the basic characteristic of a good poster if it is backed by internal consistency and narrativeness – is rigid, unimaginative, occasionally even infantile. In other words, the messages of the political parties on these posters were not well, or at all, visualized. Accordingly, the poster's principal rhetorical aim, which is to associate the political cause it promotes with various kinds of imagistic appeal,³² was not achieved. In this sense the posters we consider here radically lag behind many commercial counterparts and posters advertising various events, exhibitions etc. While in the second half of the 1980s the Slovenian poster shifted from the cultural to the political realm of communication³³, in the 1990s the political posters did not achieve a convincing level of communication, let alone artistic level, despite substantial investments³⁴.

Thirdly, due to the similarities between these posters, more could be said about what was *not* present than about what was. There were no allegories or metaphors that could evoke even the slightest reflection, no caricatures, witty remarks, parodying or upgrading of existing symbols with new, subversive meanings, no inversions of common constellations of meaning³⁵. No photomontages, save for an extremely clumsy one. Similarly, there were no slogans in the form of a question (for example, *Can you still trust...?*

³² Wernick, 1994, 128

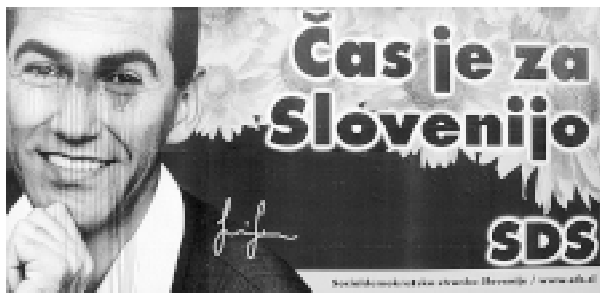
³³ Bernik, 1989, 44

³⁴ Požar, 2000, 71

³⁵ An example of this would be the use of JJ instead of OF (short for Osvobodilna Fronta) in the well-known symbol of the Liberation Front (a WWII liberation movement) during the »Trial of the Four« in the spring of 1988. JJ are the initials of Janez Janša, at that time a journalist for the *Mladina* weekly magazine, who was one of the four people accused of treason by the military in the political trial. The Liberation Front was an anti-Fascist national liberation organization established in 1941 to resist the occupation. Another example would be the use of SQ (Slovenian Quality) on the placards carried at the protests in support of the disposed minister Janez Janša in 1994.

or »*Are you for the future or...?*«) that would likewise arouse attention of the addressee. If the bleakness of the composition and genres on posters promoting specific candidates is tolerable (although not necessary!) – picture, symbol, slogan – it is entirely out of place and unjustified on all-Slovenian posters, that is to say, those that represent the party as a whole to the country as a whole.

POSTSCRIPT: In my opinion, the »corruption« of posters also deserves a special analytical study. By »corruption« I mean the addition of texts or pictures, ironic, sarcastic or arbitrary comments and other postfixes, including the tearing down of posters. The poster, which is a one-way medium, thus becomes interactive, while the space reserved for the party's message becomes the public space: an anonymous inscriber of a text or a picture simply responds to the sender of the message »blow for blow«. It is a special aspect of politicality, an original, unusual, a sort of »graffiti-style« participation in the political discourse, a very direct – spontaneous or organized – feedback on the original message of the poster, but also its undermining. In other words, through this act the inscriber joins the (political) public in his/her own, unconventional way. Such additions may be political – coming from the spray-paint cans of political opponents – or non-political – these include »hair-dressing«, »cosmetic«, »orthodontic«, »tattooing« or »sili-con« touch-ups. They are blends of bitter humor and anti-propagandist anger, engagement and mischievousness, parody and sub-politicality. Given the dismally bad aesthetics, dull compositions, floppy contents and monotony of the texts on this year's posters – they simply invited additions! – such interventions were real aesthetic and message refreshment.



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THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN ON THE INTERNET

The basic question that we will try to answer through this essay is whether the web campaign for the 2000 parliamentary elections was an important part of the election campaign. What makes a web campaign – a web campaign: the medium, the content, the significance that the Internet has in the party's conception of an election campaign, or the characteristic relationship between the medium and its content? Is a web campaign the same as a campaign through the web? Here we assume that the campaign through the web includes e-mail communication between political representatives and institutions on the one hand, and voters on the other, access to the data that the voters need when deciding on a political option, debates in digital forums and techniques of mass voting using computer technologies (Oblak, 2000:122).

When considering political campaigns we must first establish what kind of relationship (or forms of communication) politicians/political parties use to communicate with voters, and what information they offer to the citizens. If a campaign is carried on through the Internet, another important detail is to what extent the political party/politicians take into account the opinions related by citizens. If we agree that the Internet makes possible the introduction of changes to political communication (changing it from a one-way to a two-way communication) and enables citizens to communicate with the party/politicians through new channels, then it is precisely citizens' participation in political communication that distinguishes a web campaign from traditional ones. In such a case the Internet is not a "message board" on which a party pins information that it finds important for the citizens. Such a kind of political paternalism, which is mainly a characteristic of traditional forms of political communication, assumes that citizens are just 'receivers of the news' offered by the media. Accordingly, the use of the Internet in public communication is usually assessed with respect to the effective reach of information (political advertising), and only rarely in light of the possibility of developing new and different forms of citizens' participation. The Internet is not an electronic substitute for the party's bulletin, pamphlet or other propaganda material. It should in the first place enable new ways of communication and new forms of democracy. Dis-

cursive democracy, as it has been named by Nixon and Johansson (1999:135), is a form of discussion between citizens that should support more consensual decision-making. Accordingly, the basic component of discursive democracy is not the provision of information, but communication, exchange of opinions, and debate.

In comparison with the currently prevailing political communication that is effected by means of the traditional media, communication through the Internet enables the parties to exercise greater control over the mediation of selected information. The decision of a party to communicate through the Internet also creates an opportunity to bypass the traditional media and take control of the process of communication (Nixon, Johansson, 1999: 142).

The 2000 parliamentary elections in Slovenia revealed that, at least as far as the Internet is concerned, most parties use their web pages to post their propaganda materials suitably adapted to the requirements of the medium. In other words, most parties use a home page for self-presentation (self-advertising). The same conclusion was arrived at by Vintar et al. (1999:453-454) in an analysis of the web pages of Slovenian public institutions. They mostly use web pages for presentation, announcements and the communication of messages. The content of these pages is often out-of-date, or the pages are incomplete, empty, occasionally even inaccessible. Information mostly serves to strengthen the "positive self-image" of the institution. This attitude of self-sufficiency in understanding political communication on the Internet overlooks the essential feature of the medium, which is the possibility of accepting opinions and critical remarks by citizens (Vintar et al. 1999:462).

Perhaps an election campaign whose conception, realization and content would approach the "democracy-for-all-from-a-distance" is a thing of the future. The web portion of the 2000 elections in Slovenia did not contribute anything unexpected to the "web manner of expression" (with respect to form, methods, or content). In other words, those who are at least partly familiar with the role of web sites/the Internet in the corporate image of the companies and organizations that do build such an image (here we speak of the basic level of approach to this communication channel/medium, and its management, presentation, administering and advertising) could not identify any unexpected elements. Therefore, we will avoid mixing an

analysis of the medium characteristics with an analysis of the use of the medium, and try to restrict ourselves to the latter. Our analysis will thus focus primarily on the transmission and mediation of materials through this channel, and their accessibility. What is the importance of this electronic extension in an election campaign? It probably depends on how accessible the Internet is. In comparison with other forms of campaigning, this is by far the most active form of a person's participation in a campaign. The user must log on, do some surfing to find the site of a political party and finally browse through its contents. Information is not just one click away as with a TV set, or just a glance away as with political posters, nor is it as easily accessible as retrieving a bunch of pamphlets from a mail box.

During the 2000 election campaign in Slovenia, political parties did not directly advertise their home pages, even though it is true that some parties printed their Internet addresses on their campaign posters. Web directories or Slovenian portals did not explicitly invite web surfers to view these sites. Similarly, parties did not use "web pamphlets" to alert e-mail owners to their web pages. From the point of view of users this is indeed user friendly, but it could also be interpreted as a lost opportunity.

When appraising the web sites of the political parties, Nixon and Johansson used the following criteria: the clarity of information, the possibility of public debate, the availability of the content in foreign languages, publications/media and an opportunity to join a live chat. Their analysis showed that only two out of the twelve Dutch and Swedish parties that were included in the study offered an online chat option (Nixon, Johansson, 1999: 144). This indicates the low level of interactivity of the sites. One could argue that political parties perceive Internet communication mainly in terms of the categories that are applied to traditional media (mass and one-way media) and forms of communicating information, and not as a means of or a space for a different kind of communication.

FORM OVER CONTENT

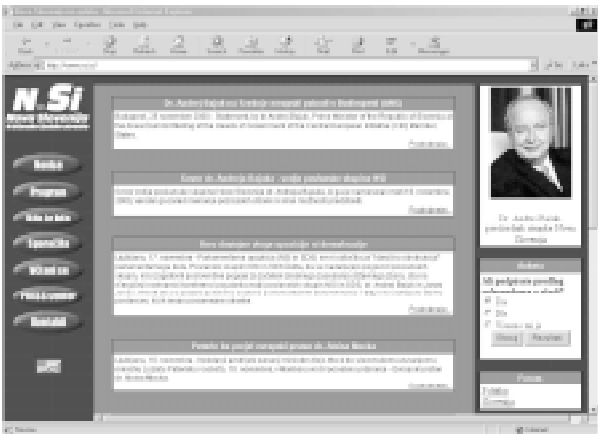
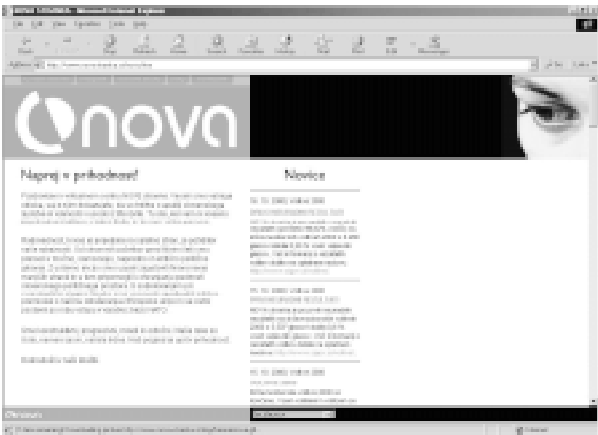
The mentioned elementary level of the approach, management, presentation, administering and advertising of this new channel/medium may be ascribed to the professionalization of the Internet. In our case this may have both positive and negative sub-significance. The posi-

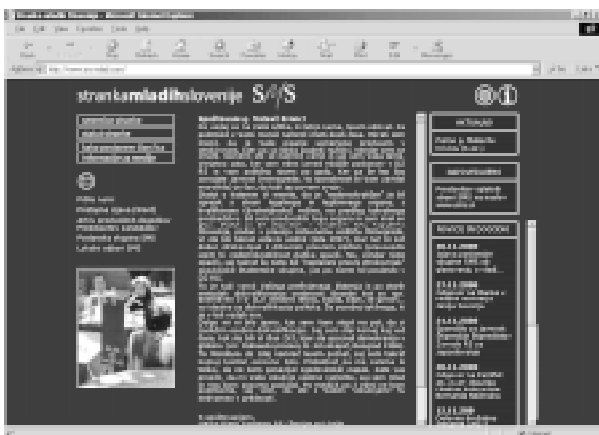
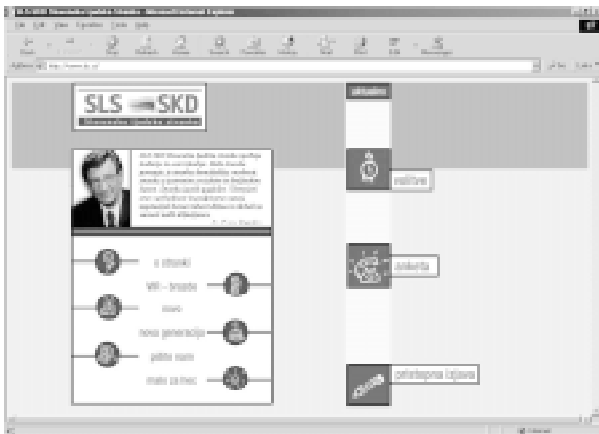
tive consequences are evident particularly when we consider the technical issues of implementation. The parties' home pages¹ (with the exception of the pages of the SNS and the Greens of Slovenia) meet the traditional criteria that reviewers of the web sites most often refer to in specialized periodicals. In other words, the pages do not have an amateurish look (save for SNS), the font is correct (in the sense that local letter characters are displayed correctly), they can be opened by various web browsers (Netscape Navigator, Internet Explorer, Opera, including older versions), the download time is not too long, and users do not encounter technical difficulties accessing the pages (server failures etc.) The form does not affect the fluency of the text and the links are mostly logical. Unfortunately, "professionalism" goes only as far as "correctness", and precisely the absence of every "excess" on these sites could be understood as a negative side of the professionalization of the Internet.

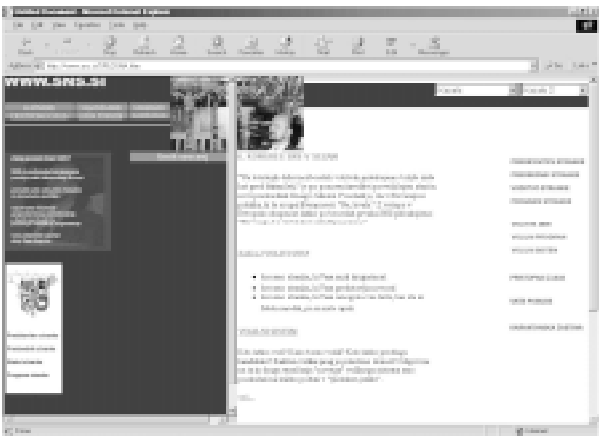
The pages in our sample contained classical, or rather standard elements (once again the Greens of Slovenia were an exception) that include: the introductory page and slogans, the party's profile (the program, statute, leadership, regional lists), contact information, information on changes made to the pages, some form of interaction with the visitors (polls, the possibility of posting an opinion), links to other sites related to the elections, news about parties' ac-



1 www.2000.lids.si, www.sds.si, www.sls.si, www.zlsd.si (www.novaenergija.com), www.sns.si, www.desus.si, www.nova.si, www.sms.si, www.zeleni.si. The web page of the Office for the Administrative Internal Affairs (www.sigov.si/uunz/stranke/index.html) features the register of all political parties.







tivities, a calendar of pre-election confrontations, and photo-galleries.

What can we learn from the survey of the parties' web sites at the time of the 2000 elections? Only the LDS home page offered an on-line chat and a game, the SLS+SKD page featured polls based on a "joke" of the day, the ZLSD invited random visitors to informally cooperate with the party (through the contribution of ideas and the like), the SDS had a forum where the visitor could post opinions relating to various questions². The visitors to the sites of the LDS, ZLSD, SDS, SLS+SKD People's Party and DESUS could view their campaign materials (video spots, radio advertisements, posters, and the anthem³), the LDS, ZLSD and New Party sites were regularly updated not only with the news closely related to the election campaign but other topics as well, and the SLS+SKD's page had links to the majority of European Christian Democratic parties.

The digital versions of the content we referred to as "traditional" have not added any new dimension. The advantage of this method of mediating the content lies in its accessibility, while the target public is less important. Parties' programs, even though published on the web and thus accessible to everybody, are not an efficient method of acquiring new members, yet they can be useful for journalists and those rare (voters?) who, quite uncharacteristically for web users, decide to toil through the long texts. The majority of web sites proved that they became a supplement to the party's profile, or some sort of extension of the registries or telephone directories. A web site thus seems to be some sort of formal necessity, since most of the parties mentioned in their election programs the significance of the Internet for future development. On the other hand, it is obvious that there is a complete lack of any web strategy. The task of the "professional" web page designers was thus of a technical nature exclusively: they converted the

² On the web conference the visitors could give their opinion about the following questions: What, in your opinion, should Bajuk's government accomplish before the end of its mandate? What do you think about the support that the group of MPs of SLS+SKD-The Slovenian People's Party, under the leadership of Dr. Franc Zagožen, gave to the constitutional changes through which the proportional system entered the Constitution despite the result of the referendum and the decision of the Constitutional Court which speak in favor of the two-round voting system? Do you support the proposal of the government of RS to reduce the number of ministerial sectors? Do you approve of the publishing of the names of all who did not pay tax? What do you think about the fact that Milan Kučan and Jörg Haider declared that the AVNOJ resolutions were political issue?

³ Visitors of the SDS page could listen to the party's anthem.

collected materials into a digital form.

All in all, the LDS home page is the most interactive, most informative and up-to-date, while the page of the New Party is somewhat outstanding with regard to its design – its graphic image including the use of dynamic elements quite approaches a design “meant especially for the web”. If we stay with the aspect of the traditional content, the SNS page is lacking in every respect (unclear, technically superficial, poorly designed), and similar could be said of the page of the Greens of Slovenia (poor in content).

What was particularly interesting/significant for our analysis were the sites of SLS+SKD and SDS because of the polls that were designed especially for the web site and published during the election campaign. The polls on the SLS+SKD site demonstrated the expected bias in favor of the own party, and a very negative attitude towards the SDS. The polls featured on the SDS site revealed an expected negative attitude towards the LDS, and a surprisingly positive attitude towards the ZLSD, while the questions were formulated in such a way that they obviously suggested the desired answer.

The results of the polls led us to the conclusion that the active visitors were primarily the supporters of the respective parties (e.g. they voted in the polls). Since the number of those who voted was small, any concerted “attack” by the supporters of an opposing party would have radically altered the results of these polls. It is obvious that Slovenian web users are not yet active “poll participants”. Furthermore, the significance of the web is negligible even for negative propaganda, which explains the complete absence of “diversions”. Voting in polls or sending an opinion to a forum remain restricted to a small number of visitors. In the next section we offer a closer look at some examples.

HOW WOULD BLONDES VOTE?

The SLS+SKD home page featured a humorous poll. If the thesis of Hall Jamieson, that the present day campaigns are characterized by the tabloidization and personalization of politics, politicians and the political, holds true (Hall Jamieson, 2000), then SLS+SKD added a new aspect to the trivialization of political discourse – with a policy of jokes.

There was a man who had an IQ of 173. You wouldn't believe it, but he was unhappy. He thought too quickly, could only talk to several people at once, and was bored by his job... So he went to the Bureau for

Decreasing IQ. The clerk in the office placed him on a certain device and it showed that his IQ was as much as 182. The clerk turned on the decrease switch and the indicators started to move slowly downwards. "This will take a long time before it reaches the normal level" said the clerk and went out for a drink. But he got involved in a long talk and when he came back the indicator showed only 20. Oh, sorry, said the clerk. Don't "sorry" me, get me off the device and let me go to the polls. Which party will a person with an IQ of 20 vote for?

The result showed that according to the opinion of the majority of 435 "jokers", a person with an IQ of 20 would vote for the ZLSD, LDS or NSI. If the electoral body consisted of blondes only (124 visitors voted in this poll) the winner would be the NSI, followed by the SLS+SKD, and SDS in the third position.

A lady walking along Trubarjeva street slips and finds herself sitting on the floor. A polite gentleman passing by helps the lady to her feet. The lady thanks to him and asks how to return his kindness. The gentleman explains to her that he is the leader of a party and her vote would be most welcome. The lady answers: "Well mister, I landed on my rear end, not my head". Who is this gentleman?

123 visitors responded to this joke. The results were as follows: the first place was taken by Zmago Jelinčič, followed by Janez Janša, Andrej Bajuk and Borut Pahor. The last were the leaders of the LDS (Janez Drnovšek) and SLS+SKD (Franc Zagožen).

In another poll⁴ on the SLS+SKD page the visitors were asked to associate notions from a list with individual parties. The list included security, elections, stability, 'state-building', the future, instability, 'non-state-building', lustration and a state of emergency. The SLS+SKD was most often associated with the notions of security, elections, stability, 'state-building', and the future (by 80% of the participants on average). The LDS was the next party most often associated with the same notions, except in connection with elections where the second and the third place were taken by the NSI and SDS, and only the fourth by the LDS. 60% of the participants on average associated the SDS with instability, 'non-state-building' and a state of emergency, and the NSI with lustration.

⁴ The poll was concluded on 19 September 2000, 350 visitors voted (the source of this data is the web page!)

THE SDS WOULD VOTE FOR THE ZLSD,
ACCORDING TO WEB POLLS

The SDS also invited the visitors to vote in a poll. To the question “What argument should Slovenia use within the international community to argue for its statehood?”⁵, 66% of those who voted answered that Slovenia should use the constitutional act dated 25.6.1991 and 31.4% were of the opinion that the relevant arguments were AVNOJ resolutions. “If the elections were tomorrow”⁶, most visitors (33.5%) would have voted for the ZLSD, 32.2% for the SDS, 18.9% for the NSi, and 12% for the LDS. Janez Janša was the definite winner in the poll asking “Which politician do you trust the most?”⁷ (41.2% of the votes), followed by Borut Pahor (16.8%) and Andrej Bajuk (15.3%). According to the same poll, 6.4% of voters trust Milan Kučan, which is more than the total of votes gathered by Franc Zagožen (1.7%), Janez Podobnik (0.2%), Zmago Jelinčič (1.2%) and France Arhar (1.3).

LDS’S GAME

The game entitled “Every vote counts”, which is still available on the LDS home page, looks like this: the visitor has one minute to help Milena and Tomaž convince as many voters as possible to vote for the “right thing”. The



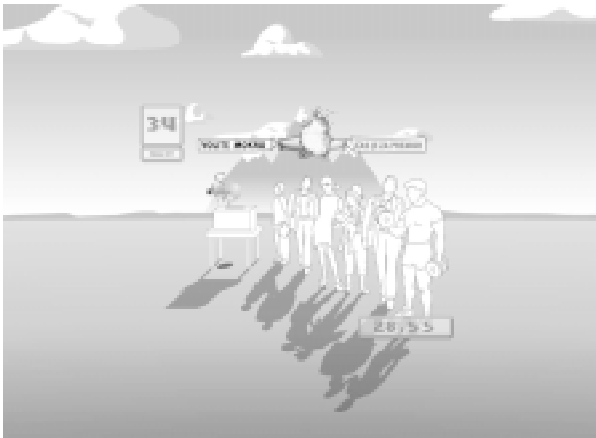
⁵ The poll was conducted on 6 September 2000 and there were 1132 votes.

⁶ The poll was conducted on 1 August 2000 and there were 2995 votes.

⁷ The poll was conducted on 27 July 2000 and there were 1788 votes.

visitor then chooses one or the other of the pair and guides him or her to the passers-by to whom they hand out an election pamphlet. Who are the passers-by in this game? A sportsman, a smart gentleman with a shoulder bag, a girl in a summer dress, a woman carrying a child, and a youth with a skateboard. The green meadow over which they move is scattered with “malevolent obstacles” that they must jump over. The obstacles are: a heap of manure or a haystack with a hayfork (alluding to the SLS+SKD), a wooden cross, a blue-and-black battery (alluding to \pm sign on the posters of the ZLSD), and a red rose with protruding thorns (an allusion to the symbol used by the SDS). If it is true that the parties generally avoided commenting on the performance of their competitors, through this game the LDS pointed to their political opponents quite aggressively.

For every pamphlet successfully handed out, Tomaž and Milena are awarded with the aureole composed of the European Union stars, which is displayed above their heads. Once the game is finished, the player can view his/her result, the “media report” on the party’s performance in the elections (this depended on the number of the pamphlets handed out), and the “catastrophe of nuclear zeppelins” spot. The catastrophe of nuclear zeppelins above the Mount Triglav involves two zeppelins, one with the sign “volite mokro”⁸ and the other with the sign “čas je za premor”⁹. If



8 This is an allusion to the ZLSD’s slogan *Voli modro* (*Vote wisely*), which is itself a play of words as it could be read both *Vote wisely* and *Vote for the blue* (the color on the ZLSD poster). *Voli mokro* means *Vote (for the) wet* (o.v.).

9 *Time for a pause*. The allusion to the SDS’s slogan *Čas je za spremembe* (*Time for changes*) (o.v.).

the player has a score of zero, he/she can still view a “report” on the election result that reads “The LDS garnered only one third of the votes”. In other words, even if the party’s “activists” did not invest any effort in the campaign, the report suggests that the party would have won anyway, the only question being how strong the victory would be. It is believed that what was very conducive to the victory of the LDS, both in this game and in reality, was the passivity of the obstacles, which were obstacles by virtue of their existence and not because of their potential “action”.

A CHAT WITH THE LDS LEADER

Janez Drnovšek, the leader of the LDS, participated in an on-line chat four times during the 2000 election campaign. His party’s program particularly stressed the significance of new technologies for the development of society and the state, among other things through the setting up of a new ministry for the information society¹⁰. He answered most of the questions asked in these chats¹¹.

<>how long have you been using e-mail?

<>when did you first use irc?

<Janez D>to be honest, since I left the government. But I got used to it so much that the government will now be operating through e-mail.

The on-line chat on the LDS home page took place every day between 15 September and 13 October 2000. During that month visitors could pose questions to nineteen of the party’s candidates in the election. The leader of the party participated in a live chat four times (20 and 27 September, and 4 and 12 October 2000).

We have concluded that a certain number of those who joined in these chats were chance participants, some were only passive observers, while active participants frequently returned and as a rule they knew each other (or got to know each other during the chat). We would ascribe the following positive traits to this form of communication: directness, casualness, informality, the opportunity to ask

10 <> *what new or different do you in fact promise in your program? is there anything new that has not existed before and has been added to the program now?*

<Janez D>information society

<> *information society? that one has long since been formed, and that all on its own.*

11 He avoided the question on the work of Bajuk’s government:

<> *Mister Drnovšek, how are you satisfied with dr. Bajuk’s government?*

<Janez D> *no comment.*

additional questions which may be posed by any participant, the debate-like nature of the interaction, free choice of questions, and the clarity of the manner in which the respondent answers questions. Among the negative traits we should mention the prevention of access or "removal" of a disturbing interrogator (who is usually helped by other participants who prevent the exclusion of those who think differently), the person answering may choose to ignore the question (no "public pressure"), the debate may be of a low level in the absence of competent participants (this cannot be spontaneously regulated), the appearance of an organized group whose members often communicate between themselves, the person answering may respond slowly, the questions may be chaotic, and the person answering has freedom to choose which questions to answer.

If a web campaign rests primarily on the opportunity to communicate directly (two-way communication) with a party or politician, then LDS's on-line chat¹² revealed some typical features of this type of debate. Some participants asked the leader of the party concrete questions relating to current social problems. Since his answers were short and often generalized, they asked for additional explanations.

<>If you win the election, will you sell 15% of Telekom to a strategic partner by the end of the year?

<Janez D> if it is possible, at any rate soon.

<>Our Telekom obviously urgently needs a foreign strategic partner as the previous management was not capable of managing the company.

<Janez D> I could not agree more.

<>We know that theoretically you approve of foreign investments, but what concrete steps will you take in this area after the elections?

<Janez D>We'll be removing various administrative barriers.

<>Also concerning portfolio investments?

On the other hand, Drnovšek overlooked the fact that the on-line chat includes several participants, which reduces the transfer of authority. A live chat does not enable only a multitude of questions on various subjects, but also various ways of addressing a politician. The leader of a party who must consult his dog (Artur) about his candidacy in the presidential elections does not understand that such an answer trivializes his own position. As a result, he does not know how to answer the trivial question that follows, namely in what language he talks with the dog.

¹² The discussion took place on 27.9.2000.

<> will you run for president in 2002?
<Janez D> Maybe, that remains to be seen. I have not yet consulted Artur.
<> In what language do you talk to him?
<Janez D> to whom?
<> To Artur.
<Janez D> oh that
<> what election results do you expect?
<Janez D> I would be satisfied with 30% but I need 51%.
<Janez D> kind regards to all of you. I must take Artur for a walk. I leave you with Pavelg.
<> janez, keep away from 'čefurji'¹³ – through the darkness with Artur just like that
<> good night janezd and artur.
<> It's good you don't have any small kids, seeing as Artur keeps you so busy (hah, hah) – good night.

Despite the fact that the participants had a live chat with the leader of the party so that (theoretically) they could ask questions on any subject they thought important, some nevertheless preferred to watch the classical confrontation of the candidates on TV (*"I am leaving to watch POP", "i am going. it's time for the tvs1 show. enjoy yourself"*). Instead of direct talk they decided to view the guided TV debate in which the journalist defines (for them) the agenda for the public debate.

CONCLUSION: THE 2000 ELECTIONS - E-ELECTIONS?

The 2000 presidential elections in the US were announced as the Internet elections a long time ago, implying that the new media was to entirely change the traditional ways of political communication and political presentations. Some compared these 'revolutionary changes' in the management of the election campaign with the changes after the year 1960 – the year of the first ever confrontation before the TV cameras, by Nixon and Kennedy (Weise, 2000:37). Yet, as Elisabeth Weise has established, an analysis of the web sites of the US presidential candidates has shown that they were boring and only exceptionally surpassed their static counterparts in the form of brochures that the voters received by post (Weise, 2000:38). The major part of the election campaign thus took place in the tradi-

¹³ A derogatory term for people coming from the south. (o.v.)

tional media: in newspapers, on radio and television.

Although on 8 November 1999 Bill Clinton participated in an on-line chat, the first ever president to do that, nothing has essentially changed in the method of political communication despite the forecasted changes. Out of approximately 30,000 users that signed in for the debate, only 27 got answers to their questions during the two hours of the debate. Even though the president and his advisors were publicly “accessible” and the participants could talk to him directly, the communication adopted every trait of a classical press conference – the participants, questions and answers were selected. The “edited” public that was given access to the president asked only questions which the president was prepared to answer. In Slovenia, the participants could communicate with the leader of the party almost as in a direct talk. Despite this fact, a large part of the debate did not touch on politics, or rather the voters did not have any questions for the leader. Moreover, the Slovenian politicians have taken the interactive medium as an instrument that they can use at any moment to cut off communication.

The web part of the campaign that we attempted to describe is probably just one evolutionary step – the same as is true for the Internet, in the sense we know it at the moment. Only when the web becomes the main medium for the mediation of the major part of data will the content be adapted to the new medium, with interactive television being one stage of the phenomenon. Therefore, it is difficult to speak of the future development of web campaigns or even web portions of campaigns, because the Internet may prove to be quite different than today even by the time of the next elections. If the new medium introduces the fusion of television and the Internet, to which trends currently point, we will not have to consider “internet campaigns” - because they will be virtually the only ones available. Except, maybe, for good old posters.

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