



Politics as art

Description

Art can bring into sharp relief aspects of life and the world to which people (some of us) previously paid little attention. Art can accomplish this through an ecology of signs — pointing stuff out i.e. by making direct reference. But art also informs by presenting the opposite to what we art lovers might expect as the object of reference. Seen in a certain way, a pile of rubble might draw the viewer's attention to the order of the surrounding space, or what it is to be ordered. Contrast and difference are the operative terms here. That at least is my working definition of the ineffability of the art object. (See [Art challenges life.](#))

As in art, so in politics. One of the consolations of the Trump leadership in the US is that such extreme (and often outrageous) behaviour in public life reveals a whole lot about the communities into which this apparently alien incursion is implanted. Not least, a lot is revealed in how how people respond to the different and the outrageous.

One way to exercise that revealing in the intellectual sphere is to play the Google game of searching for your favourite philosopher-intellectual along with the conveniently singular word —trump.— For example a search on —Bruno Latour— and —trump— reveals Latour's important polemic about the end of global capitalism: [Two Bubbles of Unrealism: Learning From the Tragedy of Trump.](#) On the independent liberal news site [Democracy Today](#) (28 April 2017), Noam Chomsky explains that the Trump administration is —profoundly committed to destroying the planet.— Also see commentary by [Ralph Nader](#), and other living theorists in their own words.

For the neophyte intellectual, such online research helps us access, understand, test, compare and critique what these thinkers are on about, and compare and contrast their views on a range of matters — not just Trump. Perhaps we should make the most of the opportunity before the show ends.

Against understanding

I like the [BBC interview](#) with Slovoj Žižek dated 17 Jan 2017. Žižek delivers the (common Marxist) message that Trump is just a *symptom*. The core problem lies elsewhere than with this hapless individual. Žižek famously advocated for a Trump vote before the US election. He justified

this on the grounds that there's value in the shock, in "radical heresy," tapping into "popular rage," and ultimately further redefining and transforming the liberal left, and society.

Žižek also decries the relegation of commentary and critique to late night comedians: "half joking, very arrogant comic commentary, and so on" this is the ultimate failure of the left for me, this patronising, making fun of the ordinary people. Whereas some of us applaud comedy and satire as a form of therapy (see post [Inmates take over the asylum](#)), that too shows how the presence of the presidential incumbent exposes our particular vulnerabilities.

Žižek also presents a radical position against "tolerance" that I think accords with the function of art. In everyday terms he says the most important thing is "to be nice and kind to each other" in spite of our differences: "The difficult thing for me is to tolerate you in your difference, not trying to swallow you by trying to understand you." To deal with someone or something without insisting that we first understand them is surely an important aspect of the art of politics, and life.



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1. Culture

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1. Art
2. politics
3. POTUS
4. understanding

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