

Object of Political Desire I: My Hypocrite Reader

Article by Rui Tavares

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Let me start by saying something about you. Yes, you. “— Hypocrite lecteur, — mon semblable, — mon frère!” as Baudelaire once called you. There’s one or two things I know about you.

You’re reading this article in the *Green European Journal*, which means that you are interested in environmental questions, European affairs, or ideological debates. You are, in short, interested in politics. You think about politics a lot, you may even be one of those persons who think about politics all the time, and you may justify yourself with that oft-repeated truism, “everything is political”. You are right. Everything is political in the sense that everything in society is social and everything about humanity is human. But everything being political does not mean that everybody cares about politics for the sake of politics. Quite the contrary: precisely because everything can be said to be political for many people (even for most) politics are relevant mainly as a conduit to other objects of political desire.

Let’s now shift into thinking about a third person, one that is neither you nor me. The person who is neither reading nor writing this article nor any other article in the *Green European Journal* and probably does not care for it anyway — a choice that is as legitimate as caring deeply about it. It is much more difficult to guess things about them. Does this person think about politics the whole time? Do they agree that everything is political or would they say that apart from a very commonsensical interpretation of that sentence, they pride themselves in not being political? In any case, everything is also cultural, or social, or communitarian, or even spiritual; may it be the case that this person cares much more about culture, or religion, or the arts, than you care about politics?

You certainly know people that care even more about politics than you and there are surely people who care less. The ones who care more about politics are no better than you and you are no better than the ones who care less. It just a matter of distribution of interest, motivation, and attention that people are bound to care more or less about something, or care less about something now and more about something in the future.

However, the person who thinks about politics the whole time is making a mistake if they think that everyone else is wrong for not thinking about politics with the same intensity, in the same terms, or according to the same categories as they do. If someone reasons like this, explicitly or otherwise, they are actually not thinking about politics as deeply after all. For the political is, as Spinoza once wrote, about people as they are and not as you think they should be.

Whoever thinks about politics the whole time is making a mistake if they think everyone else is wrong for not thinking about politics with the same intensity, in the same terms, or according

to the same categories as they do.

This, in turn, leads to another mistake: thinking that politics should be enough to engage people in politics. Don't get me wrong: I have probably been in as many political meetings, movements, and the like as you have. Politics was motivation enough for me to be interested in politics. But if we are ready to admit a heresy in political circles, the political is never enough of a reason in itself.

History teaches us otherwise. Working people did not form trade unions because of the trade union form itself; they did it because they wanted more pay and shorter working hours. Feminists did not create their movement because of the movement, but because of women themselves: votes for women, legal rights, individual freedoms that would allow them to live their lives more fully. Anti-colonial parties were not created by people who loved being in political parties, but people who wanted to free their peoples from oppression and eradicate colonialism. Some people did feel the joys of extremely long meetings and speeches and dedicating most of their free time to the cause. Most people, however, participate in politics because of an object of political desire.

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But the “object of political desire” in itself is seldom the object of political reflection or theorising. People say they are in politics because they desire justice, or freedom, or equality. But in order to arrive there, they first have to *desire*. And when one reads political theory one reads a lot about justice and freedom and equality — but never about desire. Isn't something amiss there?

That's what this column strives to explore. We desire desire. We are not hypocrites when we say we want justice, or freedom, or equality. But we are a little bit hypocritical when we think that being political is only about the love of high-minded ideals and concepts and refuse to give pride of place to the very mechanics of wanting. This shift in focus will help us, I believe, grasp a much better theory of change, understand the roots of some of the current misunderstandings between progressive politics and our societies, and even identify some of difficulties of contemporary Green European politics.

This is why I hope — desire? — you follow this new column in the *Green European Journal*.

This article is a part of our new monthly column looking at the past, present, and future of political desire. Subscribe to our newsletter to get it in your inbox.



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