

# **On the legacy of Vaclav Havel, introducing The After Party.**

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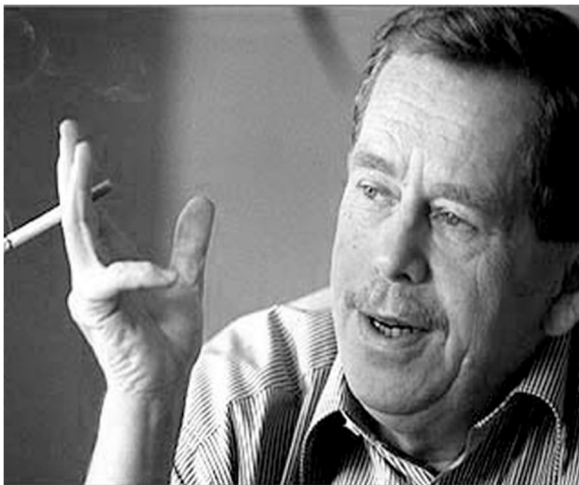
Dear ladies and gentlemen, I will have to break some eggs tonight. I already apologize for the discomfort, but I have to. Really living the legacy of Havel, with its uncomfortable constant request of living in the truth, means, here tonight, breaking some eggs.

*(I drop an egg)*

Oeps sorry. Luckily. By breaking the eggs, I think I express my true loyalty to Vaclav Havel's legacy.



You see: this picture expresses in an eggshell the legacy of Havel: you get to see a landscape of beauty, harmony and peace, a paradise. To make such a beautiful work Havel didn't ask for heroic actions. Havel recognized the revolutionary force of everyday examples: so in order to truly make this harmonious landscape, we need to break some eggs. To break an egg is that clumsy, vulnerable, sometimes unpleasant aspect of daily life. One has to do it, because of the bigger picture. If here tonight I break an egg, please always remind the bigger picture.



I'm not alone in thinking that the legacy of Vaclav Havel is more important today than it ever was and that it needs to be discussed more than ever before. I find

myself in the significant company of, among others, the Republican US Senator and former presidential candidate John McCain. McCain, the man who thought that the Tea Partiers were 'a great addition to American politics' and as a result invited Sarah Palin to be his running mate – yes, Sarah Palin, the woman who said: 'The news makes me sad so I don't watch it'. The woman also who wore her fiery heart on her sleeve when she said: 'The people don't elect US presidents, God does'. McCain, the fervent advocate of the US invasion of Iraq, said it a year ago already at the commemoration conference of the 25th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution in the Library of Congress: 'Vaclav Havel, it's time to renew our vows.'

I radically disagree with McCain on many points, but in this I think he's absolutely right. I agree with McCain and his many sympathizers because Havel embodied like no other the turning point in twentieth-century European history. He symbolized the fall of Soviet totalitarianism. It is very important to keep commemorating this fall: what were the causes, what were the atrocities of the regime, the consequences, the fractures. Havel, the man of the theatre who wanted to live in truth, played a key roll in ripping off the death mask of communism 25 years ago. But whether we can now behold a human face is an open question. Because since that time Vladimir Putin has cast a frightening shadow across the world. Because of this false and dangerous figure, I entirely agree with McCain that we must keep the legacy of Vaclav Havel alive today more than ever. But truly commemorating Havel's legacy has consequences that the dear senator – who in the US political landscape can be called a moderate – would probably rather not see. Living in truth has consequences that are inconvenient, living in truth is a pain in the ass. There's nothing festive about commemorating Havel today. I'm sorry. I'm your official party-pooper.

The year is 2016 and it is now clear: the defeat of totalitarian communism is complete. That is a cause for celebration. Cheers! But that doesn't mean that American false liberalism has won. I prefer the notion of false-liberalism to that of neo-liberalism. Because there is nothing new about this liberalism, and it has less and less to do with freedom. Since the financial crisis of 2008 we have been

living in a permanent state of crisis. Those of us who are present here can probably all continue with our lives relatively undisturbed, but for millions of people in Europe and the US, the precariousness has become intolerable. The false-liberal belief in the laws of the free market has become an ideological foolishness that results systematically and structurally in fatalities. More so still, it is this ideological foolishness that is now undermining the foundations of democracy. Joseph Stiglitz, the American winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics: 'The global crises are the result not of too little market but of too much market. The ideological and non-democratically legitimized interventions of the World Bank, the IMF and the European Council increase the damage, with disastrous consequences for the citizens.'

Since the austerity measures in Greece, the suicide rate spiked with 35%. According to Stiglitz, neo-liberalism has delayed economic development in Africa by at least 25 years, has led to a lost decade in Asia, and in the Eurozone we are on track for more of the same. The euphoria that followed the fall of communism resulted in a triumphalism that has led the West to let itself be dragged into a speculative adventure that has seeped into the deepest fibres of neo-liberal principles of faith.

To live in truth today means just what Havel did: to unmask the false, repressive ideology. During my research into Havel over the past years, I was struck by the kind of people that praise him. His legacy seems to have fallen into the hands of close minded conservative forces. They lionize Havel and congratulate themselves. For the simple reason that he contributed to the fall of the Soviet Empire, the enemy of the West.

If, as we all claim to do today, we want to take the legacy of Havel really seriously, then nothing is more misplaced than these self-congratulations. This is not a time for celebration, but a time for revolt. To live in truth means choosing an uneasy life. And it means presenting the truth to false friends. To describe the age we live in, the notion of a 'post-truth society' is increasingly being used. The truth has become irrelevant. The spectacle, the soundbite, the commercial media mechanisms have taken over from democracy. Just look at Donald Trump and what he says, no matter how ludicrous: the truth is irrelevant. It is only when he

makes sexist remarks – which, don't get me wrong, are scandalous and have at last rightly caused an outcry – that a somewhat broader consensus emerges among the neo-cons to block his path. That he has abused and misused the truth for months – and still does – didn't harm him at any time – on the contrary. The same goes for the pro-Brexit campaign: it could put forward the most blatant lies.



Despite the brave work of experts and intellectuals, their responses to the lies did not have the slightest effect, the plan is to just go ahead with Brexit. We are living in the triumph of the lie. And that the lie can triumph has all to do with a false-liberal state that is increasingly withdrawing from its obligation to democratize education and culture.

The American and British youth that wish to study have to commit to a decade of financial debt. The greatest threat to the West is not so much Russian propaganda –as Madeleine Albright, Havel's special friend, claims – as the results of an ideological foolishness that dictates that government must withdraw more and more from the democratically essential duties of education, culture and scientific research in order to provide knowledge, critical thinking that enable citizens to make the difference between truth and lies. Trump's voters and the Brexiteers are indeed themselves in part responsible for their choice. But if you first sacrifice these citizens to a starved government which trades in democracy for an oligarchy of a handful of speculators, then you can't criticize them on top of that for not making informed choices. They were not handed the means to pursue their quest for the truth. That quest is a slow, annoying and expensive struggle that no one can take on alone. A government, as the redistributing lever

of the general interest, must make possible the citizen's quest. Because a democracy without informed citizens cannot be valid. Affordable access to such education has been brutally cut back in the US over the past twenty years, the very period when the West ended up in a groggy state of victory-induced intoxication because it believed it had beat Soviet totalitarianism. That is not the case. Soviet totalitarianism collapsed. The West won precisely nothing. On the contrary, it disregarded the difficult, annoying relation to the truth in a quasi-totalitarian manner. Let me put it bluntly: the repressive methods of Soviet communism were incomparable – and I here wish to defuse any ambiguity: the common barbarity of communism was horrible – but it has to be said that when it comes down to living in a lie instead of in truth, the West has proved itself to be a good pupil of the Soviets.

I'm sorry to have to go into this but I have simply taken on the task of pursuing the legacy of Havel, that is, to live in truth, and if that means spoiling a party then I'm so sorry, but it's because I have my eye on a bigger, more genuine party. I don't want to limit myself to insinuations, so let me speak concretely. The truth – as Havel knew – does not take place in vague abstract considerations, but in a concrete situation in which a human being has to take on responsibility. So let me use the words of his contemporary and fellow playwright Harold Pinter.



When Pinter was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, he delivered a remarkable lecture, one that is strikingly parallel to Havel's spirit and concern to

live in truth. The difference is that Pinter speaks from his position of the Westerner, as a British citizen.

‘As every single person here knows, the justification for the invasion of Iraq was that Saddam Hussein possessed a highly dangerous body of weapons of mass destruction, some of which could be fired in 45 minutes, bringing about appalling devastation. We were assured that was true. It was not true. We were told that Iraq had a relationship with Al Qaeda and shared responsibility for the atrocity in New York of September 11th 2001. We were assured that this was true. It was not true. We were told that Iraq threatened the security of the world. We were assured it was true. It was not true.’

The US invasion that is jointly responsibly for the current geopolitical crisis was based on lies.



‘Everyone knows what happened in the Soviet Union and throughout Eastern Europe during the post-war period: the systematic brutality, the widespread atrocities, the ruthless suppression of independent thought. All this has been fully documented and verified.

But the US crimes in the same period have only been superficially recorded, let alone documented, let alone acknowledged, let alone recognised as crimes at all. I believe this must be addressed and that the truth has considerable bearing on where the world stands now.’

The motivation for these crimes: they needed oil to keep their false-liberalism running smoothly. The oligarchy runs on their oil. At present the greatest threat

to the West comes from two sides: there are the suicide terrorists of ISIS, a spectacular and immediate threat.

This threat has many causes, and picking out one is doing an injustice to the others: it is the result of primitive movements within Islam such as Wahhabism that are given free rein, it is a consequence of social discrimination of Muslims in the West, it is a psychiatric problem, and it is the consequence of the geopolitics of the West in the Middle East in which the distinction between offering brotherly help and imperialism is blurring, and it is the consequence of the free trade relations between the US and Saudi Arabia; the latter is the greatest exporter and financial backer of the most perverse forms of Muslim fundamentalism.

ISIS is an obvious problem, it appears at first sight to be an external enemy, it is spectacular. And it offers the huge advantage to be a clear and evident enemy. It consists of suicide terrorists that are targeting the West. But there are still more attackers at work that are causing serious harm.

There is the slow asphyxiation of every democratic principle by populists such as Trump and Farage: these are perhaps as dangerous. Their work is more surreptitious, intervenes more deeply, and is more lethal for the entirety of democratic well-being. Trump is asphyxiating the moral authority which the West so badly needs. They are spreading the ideology of the lie. And don't fool yourselves, the post-truth society of the false-liberalism kills, murders just as ISIS fighters kill innocent civilians. The geopolitical crisis with ISIS in which we find ourselves today finds its source in the invasion in Iraq. That invasion was based on a lie. We can disagree on foreign policy options, but we cannot disagree on the facts: they exist, despite what you might believe. Bush and Blair said there were weapons of mass destruction. There weren't.

Iraq was responsible for terrible crimes in Kuwait, yes, but nothing compared to what Indonesia did with the annexation of East Timor. And there was no so-called moral international engagement.

“The invasion of Iraq –as an emblematic starring point- was a bandit act, an act of blatant state terrorism, demonstrating absolute contempt for the concept of



international law. The invasion was an arbitrary military action inspired by a series of lies upon lies and gross manipulation of the media and therefore of the public; an act intended to consolidate American military and economic control of the Middle East masquerading - as a last resort - all other justifications having failed to justify themselves - as liberation. A formidable assertion of military force responsible for the death and mutilation of thousands and thousands of innocent people.

The West has brought torture, cluster bombs, depleted uranium, innumerable acts of random murder, misery, degradation and death to the Iraqi people and call it 'bringing freedom and democracy to the Middle East.

How many people do you have to kill before you qualify to be described as a mass murderer and a war criminal? One hundred thousand? More than enough, I would have thought. Therefore it is just that Bush and Blair be arraigned before the International Criminal Court of Justice. “

Harold Pinter.

Dear Vaclav, with your support for the invasion, you were taken in. You fell for one of the West's greatest lies.

Dear Vaclav, your legacy now has bad friends. Yet they abuse your legacy, I consider it my task to make clear that the claws of the neocons can't get a grip on you. Your own work speaks for itself. Both your essays and plays contain detailed analyses of the workings of the totalitarian system and the way it should be resisted.

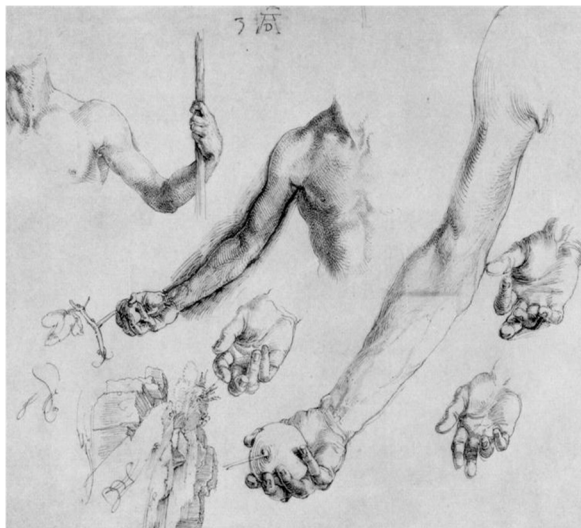
Let's make a close reading of one of your best texts: 'The power of powerlessness.'

**The post-totalitarian system touches people at every step, but it does so with its ideological gloves on.**

Capitalism also affects people in every step they take, except it does so with ideological gloves on. The glove of capitalism is besides quite easy to find: it is the glove on Adam Smith's invisible hand.



The Scottish philosopher is considered the father of modern economics. In 1759 he wrote in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* that an invisible hand is at work whereby the free market does not need to be regulated. The invisible hand would work due to rational self-interest and thus ensure that the inequalities of the free market become harmonised, all by itself, magically, his motto was: "Let do and let pass, the world goes on by itself. For years, our history suffered from phantom pain. The fable of the invisible hand has enchanted and conjured us for centuries. This ideological glove has held us in a stranglehold. And it is a lie. There is a hand: ours.



Havel's analysis is painfully accurate, both in terms of the foolish ideology of communism as that of capitalism. Read on with me, and we will see a brilliant

analysis of our capitalist post-truth society:

**“Life in the system is so thoroughly permeated with hypocrisy and lies: the complete degradation of the individual is presented as his ultimate liberation.”**

The uncontrolled capitalism as it runs for now, has nearly everything for sale. That's true as well for the heart of liberalism: freedom. Freedom became in false-liberalism one of the commodities that is for sale, and if you are affluent, you can have a lot of it. It shows up for instance if you get in trouble with the law. If you accept capitalist system, it makes sense to try to accumulate property, not just because you want material welfare, but because that guarantees your freedom, it makes it possible for you to amass that commodity. This is what it means today: “the degradation of the individual, is presented as his ultimate liberation.”

**“depriving people of information is called making it available;”**

This is how Havel describes the nightmare of the system that he fought against. We see some of this happening as well today in our current dominant false-liberal ideology.

The proposal to live stream the discussions and meetings of the Euro council and the Eurogroup meetings, have been repeatedly rejected. Without knowing how your representatives behave on your behalf in Brussels and in Frankfurt, you

have no control over them. Democracy then becomes a sham.



Secrecy is the last resort of failed authoritarianism. Transparency is a sign of confidence in people, in the demos. Depriving people from information leads to apathy.



And this as well gives way to populists to declare and to say whatever they think they need to say to catch the popular vote.

Let's now talk about the media empire of Murdoch. Fox News. It's not Obama, but Murdoch, the owner of Fox News, who is the leader of the West. When they asked Murdoch why he was so much against EU, he answered: 'That's easy, When I go into Downing Street they do what I say; when I go to Brussels they take no notice.'

**"the repression of culture is called its development"**

In a meritocracy, everyone is responsible for his own development. Cutting back subsidies for art, culture, education and scientific research today is being sold to

us as an act of intended to make us aware of our responsibilities, to activate us: we have to stand on our own two feet. Well, a government pulling back from his duties to protect the common goods like education, culture and scientific research, pulls away the ground under the feet of there own citizens.

**farcical elections become the highest form of democracy;**

Oh no, you might think , is he now even telling is that our elections are farcical ? Yes I do. They are great, we need them, they are much greater then anything under communism, but it is a mistake to believe today that democracy is complete, just because every four years we colour in a little circle on a list that is drawn up by the leaders of a few parties. Our democracies struggle with populist leaders. Because so many people feel exluded, feel not represented. And they are right. Our elections are to a ever growing extent investment opportunities- I mean, to say it in a sentence, elections are occasions in which groups of investors coalesce and invest to have power. We need to improve.

“AGAINST ELECTIONS, video on David Van Reybroucks book”

**“military occupation becomes fraternal assistance. the expansion of imperial influence is presented as support for the oppressed**

If the Nuremberg laws were applied, then every post-war American president would have been hanged. I’m against hanging. This would be a terrible idea to apply Nuremberg laws.

But: It is the fundamental duty of the citizen to resist and to restrain the violence of the state. That is what Havel means with living in truth and taking responsibility in accordance to the truth. Those who choose to disregard this responsibility can justly be accused of complicity in war crimes, which is itself designated as ‘a crime under international law’ in the principles of the [Charter of Nuremberg](#). In Havels first speech as a president, he said that it was shared responsablity that it took so long befor the regime of lies has fallen. How long will it take for us?

This is the legacy of Havel today.

And smug self-congratulations should not belong here. We, ladies and gentlemen, are now once more standing with one leg on the wrong side of history. We, ladies and gentlemen, find ourselves once more already again halfway in the lie. We, ladies and gentlemen, you and I, cannot just continue with our nostalgic commemoration of a great president. If we wish to commemorate Havel today, then we need to get out into the streets. Then we should all become dissidents of this derailed system. Commemorating Havel has nothing to do with self-congratulatory ceremonies with the powers that be. That is misusing Havel to prove oneself right nostalgically.

The party of capitalism-as-we-know-it is over. It's time for an After Party. An After Party that celebrates the enormous qualities and values capitalism has brought to us, but a celebration of the new. We cannot solve problems with the same thinking we created them. Both socialism and capitalism were a political philosophies that limit themselves to material processes, to the economy. The new system will be spiritual, poetically ambiguous, mythically sober – or will not be.

I started with saying that I had to break an egg tonight. I regret the discomfort.

The advantage of breaking an egg is that one liberates what's inside.

This story tonight ladies and gentlemen, has a happy ending.

The broken egg tonight releases a very beautiful bird.

The bird is a free bird. Yes, I'm not crazy, let's renew here and now our vows to liberalism. But as it goes with free birds: you never get them completely, we only

have this wing.



Beauty, consolation, hope for renewal comes with pain.

Under the protection of this wing, I start to make The After Party.

A new morning sun.

(trailer The After Party)

In Divadlo Archa from March 22 onwards.