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Politics and Psychoanalysis in the Times of the Generalized Metonymization

A Politics of Rhetoric

Rhetoric returns today in force, if not with a vengeance in contemporary theorization of politics. This is because some of the most perspicacious political thinkers, not only explain politics by means of rhetoric, but go so far as to say that “metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche (and especially catachresis as their common denominator) are [...] ontological categories describing the constitution of objectivity as such.”¹ Indeed, following Laclau here, one could say that politics is possible only if it is situated in the terrain where tropological movement supplements the hole in the symbolic Other, thereby constituting a groundless ground for the structuration of social life. In raising the value of the catachresis to the level of operational concept with his theory of the hegemonic suture, Laclau, thereby indicated the degree to which it would be impossible to grasp anything of the contingent production of the social link in the space of discursivity that is structurally incomplete, without a necessary recourse to the unsolvable tension between metaphor and metonymy. Politics, in this view, has to be rethought on the basis of the opposition between the contingent character of the instituting moment of society and its enabling conditions of (im)possibility.

While this pivoting of perspectives casts a different light upon politics, it also throws into relief what is at stake in the ancient quarrel between politics and rhetoric. Indeed, setting out from the premise that, as such, the symbolic order, the social order included, has no other basis than the sheer contingency of the laws of language, ultimately, the laws of metaphor and metonymy, rhetoric is supposed to provide a vantage point from which the fundamental groundlessness of the dominant discourse which shapes our reality can be appreciated, that is to say, thrown into question.

¹ E. Laclau, “An Ethics of Militant Engagement” in P. Hallward (ed.) *Think Again. Alain Badiou and the future of Philosophy*, Continuum, New York, London 2004, p. 137.

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In a certain sense, the relationship between politics and rhetoric, which is thus both antinomian and complicit, could be read rhetorically, that is, as revolving around the polarity of metaphor and metonymy. Contemporary rhetoricians namely attempt to show how the unlimited play of displacements and substitutions, which can neither be controlled nor stopped, makes a direct challenge to the politics which stands for the moment of closure, the moment of arrest of this unending movement. The implication here is that the politically subversive and therefore emancipatory potential of rhetoric consists first and foremost in its capacity to reveal what politics tries desperately to conceal: the impossibility of establishing the socio-political order otherwise than through a hegemonic act of closure, an act which is, in and of itself, groundless. This means that the opposition between politics and rhetoric according to which politics is supposed to prioritize the closure of the constitutively incomplete social field, while rhetoric would privilege the metonymic endless displacements, can only be sustained if rhetoric is identified with an operation of de-totalization, an operation challenging the contingency of the closure of the structurally non-totalizable social field. To put the matter in other terms still: by resisting the movement of closure, metonymy brings on a disjunction between being and appearance, that is, the inevitability of slippage, non-correspondence between the being taken in its genericity, as it were, that is to say, devoid of all identity or predicate, and the master's discourse which can only operate through a logic of predication.

However, the polarity between politics and rhetoric is tenable solely if politics is reduced to the institutional moment of the social or, to borrow Lacan's term, to the master's discourse. Having the performative power of the signifier to structure the social field by assigning to the members of a given society a place and a function, a 'mandate', as Lacan calls it, the master's discourse thereby determines what counts and what is of no account, what is visible and what is not, ultimately, what exists and what does not. Bearing in mind this ontological dimension inherent in the discourse of the master, the crucial question for every oppositional politics worthy of the name is of course: how can that come into being which, within the framework of the master's discourse, remains invisible, that which, basically, does not exist?

It is from such a perspective that political implications of Lacan's conception of the symptom can be appreciated. From the start, Lacan namely conceived of the symptom as that which disrupts the smooth working of the social order, betray-

ing the subject's resistance to total alienation in that order. The point here is that the symptom can generate its subversive effects precisely to the extent that it operates like a metaphor,² that is to say, as a quilting point which, by reconfiguring relations between elements of a given situation in a different way, momentarily reveals the possibility of an entirely unprecedented type of the socio-discursive arrangement.

It should be noted that, in contrast to the famous battle between deconstructionists and Lacanians which has pitched metonymy against metaphor, the present debate over the meaning and value of rhetoric for contemporary theorizing of politics is, on the contrary, shaped by the primacy of metonymy over metaphor. Certainly, it is not by accident that contemporary rhetoricians set out from the assumption that metonymy precedes and dominates metaphor. It is not by accident precisely to the extent that rhetoric itself is seen to be putting forward the affinity between metonymy and contingency. In prioritizing metonymy over metaphor, contemporary rhetoric could, thus, be regarded as promoting a logic of the contingent in the field of politics. Against the necessity of the social order put up by the dominant discourse, rhetoric postulates as its axiom the necessity of contingency.

It is in this connection that the primacy of metonymy takes on great interest. In a discursive universe where metaphor is the structuring principle, the metonymic slippage, indeed, provides the only way for the inscription of the inexistent – a term used by A. Badiou, to designate an invisible excess, a remaindered part of a social space which is integral to it but which is unaccountable within the hegemonic articulation of that space. Proceeding from the irreducible incommensurability between the metaphorical closure and the ceaseless metonymic slippage, contemporary rhetoricians set out to track down a point that escapes the imposed discursive arrangement, a vanishing, yet always specific, determinate point of the inexistent that singularizes the given regime of mastery. While it is true that the mere apparition of the inexistent brings into relief the contingency of the transcendental regime of discursivity which constitutes our social reality, it is also true that the decisive issue is exactly how to inscribe the constitutive lack of a signifier in this discursive arrangement for those who have paid the

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² Indeed, for Lacan, “the symptom is a metaphor”. J. Lacan, “The Instance of the Letter”, *Écrits*, trans. by Bruce Fink, W.W. Norton & Company, New York and London 2006, p. 439.

price for the institution of the social order through their exclusion. The question of the inscription of the inexistent is crucial because, in a discursive space organized by the master discourse, the inexistent cannot be presented or, better, represented as such. The inexistent, strictly speaking, can only ex-sist, it cannot exist, for to exist it would have to be articulated in terms of the existing structure of placement. What is at stake in the emergence, within the structure of places provided by the discourse of the master, of that which remains outside its grasp is therefore the question of how to assert the impossibility of the inscription of the inexistent as the sole mode for its inscription.

In this respect, the primacy of metonymy has to be viewed in the context of the multifarious attempts the contemporary theorization of politics makes to come to grips with the constitutive incompleteness of the social, ultimately, with the fundamental groundlessness of the acts of political constitution. In such a context, it is all the more important to take into account the fact that there are two possible ways of coming to terms with the non-closure of the political space of discursivity: the operation of supplementation and the operation of complementation. Situated on the basis of a negation of all grounding in the real, the metaphorical suture and the metonymic displacement represent two different ways of making up for this hole in the symbolic Other, two strategies for dealing with the radical absence of a formula which would inscribe the institution of the social in the real. It could then be said that metaphor succeeds in closing the discursive space of a given situation by producing a suppletory device under the guise of a catachrestic signifier, a semblance, in the very place where the Other is lacking. Giving body to the ineliminable lack of grounding, the catachrestic signifier is ultimately nothing but the metonymy of the hole in the Other. Supplementing the lack in the social Other with a catachrestic signifier, the operation of metaphor effects the saturation of the social, but at the price of concealing the fundamental groundlessness of such an operation. Due to the structural impossibility of the social order thus imposed to subsume the totality of a given social situation, the metaphorical totalization itself is hollowed out. Metaphor, in sum, fails to provide a true solution to the hole in the Other. In fact, inasmuch as the institution of the social order is groundless, every instance destined to supplement the lack in the Other appears to be nothing more than a semblance, a symbolic stand-in for the lacking real grounding.

In contrast to metaphor, where the barrier resisting suturation is crossed, metonymy avoids such a totalizing movement. Oscillating between a radical absence of all order and the institution of an order through the master's catachresis, metonymy indicates a place for a possible, yet unattainable structural closure, as it can only be situated in infinity. A place for the totalization of the social space is thus preserved, reserved, as it were, without ever being realized. Put differently, as the infinite movement generated by the lack in the Other, metonymy, paradoxically, gives rise to a belief in the possibility of a final closure. It could then be argued that whereas metonymy places the bar on politics, more exactly, on every single attempt to politically constitute the social, only to preserve the socio-symbolic Other from being barred, metaphor, on the contrary, by raising the powerlessness of metonymy to the status of structural impossibility, implies that the social Other, as such, is originally lacking, incomplete. Far from sending the question of the final closure back to the Other, and thereby making this Other consist, metaphor sends politics back to the incommensurable difference between the order of the signifier and the order of the real. It is on this basis that it is possible to conclude that, in contrast to metaphor which validates the irreducible hiatus, or chasm, separating the social order from its real grounding, and thus pointing to the Other which does not exist, metonymy, should rather be viewed as running away exactly from what metaphor ratifies, namely that the Other is, from the outset, originally, hollowed out.

This impossibility of defining a space of discursivity as a closed system, this failure of the Other to ensure a stable foundation for the establishment of the social order has ruinous repercussions in both registers, metaphor and metonymy. However, only metaphor, by providing a new master signifier, is capable of rendering a given situation legible, an operation which involves the forcing, the crossing of the bar that separates two incommensurable orders: the symbolic order and the order of the real, whereas metonymy literally lives for the preservation of this bar, which provokes, on the side of metonymy, an infinite quest for the constitutively lacking complement. In order to emphasize the importance of this point, Lacan makes a rather disconcerting assertion: metonymy, in his view, testifies to “a flight in the face of the anxiety of origins”³ exactly at the point, Lacan continues, where “logical rigor” is required.

³ J. Lacan, “In Memory of Ernest Jones: On His theory of Symbolism”, in *Écrits*, p. 591.

This brings us to one of the most important and the most laden with consequences for elaborating emancipatory politics at the present time: the current privileging of metonymy over metaphor. The seemingly ostentatious connection between politics and rhetoric may find confirmation in the involuted relationship between metaphor and metonymy in the present context of globalization: in the present context of the globalized metonymization, the symptom can no more “take on its revolutionary effect”⁴ as it has lost its status of a metaphor.

Expanding on a point which has also been made by Ernesto Laclau, we could take a step further and argue that what prevails in the era of a “general rhetorization”⁵ is a regime of mastery that relegates the metaphoric closure to a relatively subordinate role. In effect, not only is even a provisory stabilization brought about through the metaphorical totalization, radically called into question, worse, it exists only for the sake of generating a whole process of metonymization, which seems to have the effect of generating the perpetuation of the new variant of the master’s discourse, without allowing a truly novel order to come into being.

Our point is namely that the modifications of the discourse of the master, the total hegemony of a discourse that is structurally metonymic, has decisive consequences for the transformative power of the politics of rhetoric, ultimately, for its capacity to change the present transcendental regime of discursivity. In fact, once the dominant discourse itself appears to be structured as an endless series of metonymic displacements, there seems to be no room left for the rhetorical subversion which consists chiefly in showing how the hegemonic, i.e. the metaphorical suture of a given social space, is already contaminated by metonymic displacements.

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No effective subversion of the dominant discourse can be achieved by means of metonymy as this discourse itself, far from being threatened by its incompleteness, literally lives off its own impossible closure. Hence, in the era of the generalized rhetoric, i.e., in the era in which metonymy prevails, rhetoric seems to be oddly incapable of effecting a cut in the dominant discourse and thereby of undermining the state of affairs resulting from it. On the contrary, it seems to be rather a continuation of this discourse. As a result, rhetoric finds itself singu-

⁴ J. Lacan, “Comptes-rendus d’enseignement”, *Ornicar* ?, n° 29, 1984, p. 24.

⁵ E. Laclau, “The Politics of Rhetoric”, in B. Cohen, J. H. Miller and A. Warminski (eds) *Material Events*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2000, p. 247.

larly disarmed when it comes to tackling the chances of an oppositional politics in its contemporary conjecture, i.e. in a discursive universe in which metonymy as the organizational principle prevails.

Raising this objection implies an associated concern about the possibility of changing a discursive universe in which metonymy appears to be the structuring principle, as the constantly renewed attempts to move away from the here and now appear to be always reincluded within the dominant discourse and serve to continuously uphold it. Hence, contemporary oppositional political must pursue a different path if it is to enable us to face the present deadlock where nothing appears to stop the expansion of metonymy. This is why the question of an emancipatory politics that could bring about change capable of breaking decisively with the present impasse of metonymization looms higher than ever in the history of politics.

We can find an understanding of the specifically political consequences of this impasse in Lacan's discussion of the relationship between politics and the unconscious.

"The Unconscious is Politics"

"I do not say 'politics is the unconscious' but simply 'the unconscious is politics'"⁶. What is so striking about Lacan's concessive formulation that will guide us is that, under the guise of continuity, an unexpected inversion is produced, as politics seems to be occupying, contaminating even, the unconscious itself, the sole domain which is within the competence of psychoanalysis. With this intrusion of politics into the unconscious, the very subject-matter of psychoanalysis, something is surreptitiously added that suspends, ruins even, the classic Freudian thesis: "politics is the unconscious"⁷. What this thesis according to which the unconscious dominates politics immediately implies is that the social bond at stake in politics is governed by a certain logic that operates unbeknown to men thus brought together, a logic that "is already operative in

⁶ J. Lacan, unpublished seminar "La logique du fantasme" (1966–67), the lesson of 10 May 1967.

⁷ Although this thesis is not found in exactly this form in any of his texts, it should be attributed to Freud.

the unconscious”,⁸ namely the logic of the signifier. Only in this sense can Lacan himself maintain that the discourse of the master, this being his name for politics, is the discourse of the unconscious. From such a perspective, it may well appear that the formula: “politics is the unconscious”, merely sums up the two preceding, now classic, definitions of the unconscious furnished by Lacan himself: “The unconscious is structured like a language” and “The unconscious is the discourse of the Other”. Yet such a view is rendered extremely problematic from the moment that it appears that the Other itself is challenged, or does not exist at all.

For the claim now seems to be more radical, requiring not just that collective formations in the field of politics be analyzed as unconscious formations,⁹ that is, as resulting from the topological shifts, but that the unconscious itself must be accounted for as being linked to, indeed, dependent upon, the discourse of the master. Thus, when Lacan in his seminar on *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* stresses that “[A]s stupid as this discourse of the unconscious is, it is responding to something that stems from the institution of the discourse of the master himself,”¹⁰ he thereby implies that any modification of the master’s discourse will have decisive consequences for the discourse of the unconscious. To begin with, in fact, it is worth noting that when Lacan claims that “the unconscious is politics”, he is not only taking into account that “something changed in the master’s discourse”¹¹, announcing in that way a suspension, at least in part, of the validity of Freud’s formula, thereby confining it to the era in which the Other still existed. By stating that “the unconscious is politics”, Lacan can be seen to be already suggesting here that in a world in which the Other has become problematic, even nonexistent a new and more radical conception of the unconscious is required. Clearly, it is not the same to designate the unconscious as the discourse of the Other when the latter still existed, or when the existence of the Other is quite obviously, that is to say, at the level of hegemonic discourse, called into question.

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⁸ J. Lacan, “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious,” in *Écrits*, p. 673.

⁹ Freud was indeed the first to show, in his famous *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, that for there to be a group, it is necessary that its members are hooked up to the same identificatory signifier.

¹⁰ J. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, Book XVII, trans. by Russel Grigg, W.W. Norton, New York, London 2007, p. 91.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

This shift in Lacan's theory of the unconscious could thus be seen as a direct effect of the precariousness, in the field of politics, of the very link, the agency of the Other, on which the structural equivalence between the discourse of the unconscious and the master's discourse was founded. Taken further, it is clear that this move from the first to the second formula has direct implications for Lacan's theory of the subject. In the first formula, the emphasis is on the alienated subject, the subject called into being by the Other, ultimately, the subject as an effect of the signifier. The first formula thus makes it possible to account for the fact that the subject is produced by discourse, that is, determined through the "action of the structure", yet manages to retain some capacity for action which will change the structure of which it is but an effect. The second formula, by contrast, is articulated to the barren Other. Consequently, if politics was at the outset viewed by Lacan as the paradigm of the master's discourse, the emergence of a new discourse, the capitalist discourse, problematizes the notion of the Other as a guarantor, thus shaking up the basic laws of the constitution of the social order and changing what constitutes social reality for us.

Hence, if the focal point of this essay is this replacement of the initial Freudian thesis: "politics is the unconscious", by Lacan's new one: "the unconscious is politics", this is because this substitution announces a switch of paradigms, a transition from one discursive regime to another: from a regime in which the political field is structured by the reference to the Other which operates through identification, prohibition, repression, the matrix of this regime being, of course, the master's discourse, to a regime in which politics as a field is articulated to the barred, inexistent Other and where the incompleteness of the space of discursivity appears to be irrevocable and irreparable.

Retroactively, the statement "Politics is the unconscious", can then be viewed as a formalization of the equivalence between the master's discourse and the discourse of the unconscious, as indeed they are both conceived as the discourse of the Other, more exactly, like a language which is organized by the instance of the Other. The second formula amounts to the reversal of the first: if the first formula, insofar as it is centred around the famous *point de capiton*, provides us with a formula of metaphorization, the second formula is one of the generalization of metonymy, or, rather, of the general metonymization. Taking into account the mutation of the discourse of the master resulting from the total hegemony of the capitalist discourse and thus opening a perspective lacking a

quilting point, the second formula can therefore be viewed as a formula forged by Lacan for the era of the nonexistent Other, that of the not-all, an era of a discourse without conclusion.

The difference between the first and the second formula, can therefore be exemplified in a shift that has been taking place in contemporary theorizing of politics over the past few decades – namely, a drift away from a perspective in which the realms of rhetoric and politics are viewed as antinomian towards an understanding of politics in terms of an open-ended, undecidable space of discursivity which requires topological displacements for its very constitution. Now this concerns our problem directly: to evaluate the contemporary possibility of change in the present conjecture while taking into account the mutation of the master's discourse, that namely which is articulated to the lack in the Other, to the barred Other, and which Lacan, as is well known, designated as the discourse of the capitalist.

One of the great merits of Lacan's approach such as it is announced by the statement "the unconscious is politics" lies not only in his highlighting the deadlocks that the emancipatory politics faces in a universe of the inexistent Other. Our claim is namely that in opening the perspective of the not-all, Lacan indicates at the same time the possibility of a fundamentally different politics, one which is not restricted to the resistance to and/or the subversion of the master's closure by uncovering its radical contingency.

What follows is an attempt to outline the space of the problem of the not-all and to show if and to what extent politics and psychoanalysis are able to face and to resist the deadlocks inherent to the generalized metonymization while theorizing and practicing new forms of the non-segregationist collectivity. Our aim in this essay is to contribute towards an understanding of this complex issue, and in particular to look at the political and theoretical difficulties associated with the construction of the universal in an infinite universe, a universe without a beyond.

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From the not-all to the "for all"

We set out from the assumption that, for psychoanalysis and for politics of emancipation, there must be another perspective, another angle under which it

is possible to conceive of a way out while breaking with the prevailing conception of a solution in terms of a subversion of the existing hegemonic arrangement.

In what follows we propose to explore the status of the “for all” in politics and psychoanalysis by analyzing and bringing into question the seemingly self-evident relationship of the mutual exclusion between politics and psychoanalysis. In order to expose an affinity in dealing with the not-all in politics and psychoanalysis, it is necessary to move beyond the traditionally hostile polarities of the singular and the universal and to reverse the usual perspective, according to which there is no passage between the domain of the singular and the domain of the universal. We will then move on to consider the relationship between psychoanalysis and politics from the point of view of the collectivity “for all” constituted through a complex practice of disidentification and production of the generic or, to use Agamben’s term, “whatever” singularities.

Our starting assumption is that politics and psychoanalysis encounter the same structural impasse that of dealing with an irreducible heterogeneity. Indeed, the central issue in analysis is precisely that of a knot which “holds the subject together”, an instance that links together three registers that would otherwise remain disconnected: the symbolic of his or her representation, the real of his or her enjoyment, and the imaginary consistency of the body’s image. What the analysand learns at the end of his or her analysis is that nothing holds together these three instances, the real, the imaginary and the symbolic – except the symptom or *sinhom* as Lacan termed it in his later teaching.

Politics, likewise, irrespective of the type of government, confronts the impossible-real under the guise of a similar impasse: how to hold together singularities which have nothing in common. Modern politics, at least from the French Revolution onwards, has treated this impossibility of the social bond by constructing a form of collectivity which would be “for all”. It is a paradoxical collectivity since the condition for its very constitution requires the exclusion of the exception, of some otherness that is presumed to be evading the universalisation.

One could then say, what is really at stake between psychoanalysis and politics is the issue of heterogeneity. Politics and psychoanalysis thus appear to be two different languages for articulating heterogeneity that are in confrontation with

each other. But is the heterogeneity in psychoanalysis the same as that which we encounter in politics? What is at issue here is precisely the question: under what conditions is it legitimate to bring together politics and psychoanalysis?

Indeed, any attempt to relate psychoanalysis to politics is far from obvious. According to the received idea, there seems to be no common ground permitting their encounter. In this view, psychoanalysis is presumed to be defending the rights of the singular, of that precisely which resists the universal. Indeed, psychoanalysis is by definition the domain of the “not for all”. As such, psychoanalysis cannot, without losing its competence, force the boundaries of confidentiality imposed by its practice to wander into a domain in which, on the contrary, something is valid only insofar as it applies to all. From this view, psychoanalysis has no competence in the domain destined “for all”. Politics, by contrast, designed as the order of the collective, deals with the masses, with the multiple. In so far as politics is preoccupied with the question of that which is valid for all, it can only turn a blind eye to the singular: the proper object of psychoanalysis. For politics, in which there seems to be no place for the singular, it would be an illegitimate step to make the opposite move: from the “for all” to that of the “only for one”. Indeed, if we follow the received idea, what makes their encounter impossible, is a double interdiction of the passage from the register of the singular to that of the multiple.

We propose to reverse this perspective and to examine under what circumstances the relation between these two domains, that of the “for all” and that of the “irreducible singularity”, can be established. So the very fact of posing the question of heterogeneity in politics and psychoanalysis, requires the construction of a site, a scene for their encounter.

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Our guide in this pivoting of perspective, will be Lacan. We will refer, more specifically, to his *Television*, in which he presents both his critique of politics as a way out of capitalism and the task of psychoanalysis in a universe governed by the capitalist discourse: “The more saints, the more laughter; that’s my principle, to wit, the way out of capitalist discourse – which would not constitute progress, if it happens only for some.”¹²

¹² J. Lacan, *Television*, trans. J. Mehlman, W.W. Norton & Co., New York 1990, p. 16.

However, it is important to consider how psychoanalysis can emerge as a way out of the capitalist discourse. It is true that Lacan harboured some ambitions concerning the role of psychoanalysis in our world, as he puts it. First of all it should be noted that to propose psychoanalysis as a solution, as the way out of capitalism, is only possible in the very specific circumstance of the collapse of the belief in the emancipatory power of politics. In this rather enigmatic remark Lacan namely pinpoints one of the greatest problems we face today: the growing impasses of the way out of capitalism, i.e. of a master's discourse that yields to the generalized metonymization. At the same time psychoanalysis, according to Lacan, faces a paradoxical task: to find a way out of a discourse which is considered to be limitless, "eternal", a discourse which precisely knows of no way out. It could, then, be said that what Lacan proposes as a solution is animated by the "passion of and for the real": to invent, to force even, in the situation of an impasse, a radically new solution, that of an immanent transcendence.

It seems that psychoanalysis, according to Lacan, is capable of succeeding there where the politics of emancipation failed: to find a way out of the growing impasses of capitalism. Indeed, one is tempted to say that psychoanalysis emerges as a *tenant-lieu*, place-holder of the impossible, absent emancipatory politics. Or to be even more precise: psychoanalysis is a new name for the politics of emancipation – with all the consequences which follow from this substitution.

Politics of symptom or politics of love?

What then is the politics of psychoanalysis? Indeed, what politics might result from psychoanalysis? Actually, there exist two interpretations of the politics of psychoanalysis respectively termed the "politics of symptom" and the "politics of love". Both of these interpretations which have their partisans and critiques are to a certain extent grounded in Lacan's work in particular as they both take as their point of departure the irreducible heterogeneity inherent in the subject as a kernel of the real resisting the dominant social bond. There is something in the subject which makes him/her other, unlike any other in the community to which he or she belongs. While both of these paradigms refuse the antinomic relation between politics and psychoanalysis, they nevertheless differ in outlining the crucial stake of such a politics proper to psychoanalysis.

According to first reading, the politics of psychoanalysis is a “politics of symptom”. The task of psychoanalysis is to examine contemporary modes of the social bond in relation to the symptom. The symptom here is conceived as a specific fixing of jouissance proper to each subject. The symptom is that which in the subject resists universalisation. The central stake in this politics of symptom is to uncover the tension between the social bond and the symptom. More particularly, to reveal the incompatibility between the allowed and the forbidden jouissance. Thus, there is, on one hand, jouissance, such as is prescribed by the social Other, and, on the other hand, there is the symptom as a mode of enjoyment, particular to each subject and which is as such irreducible to the standard jouissance. Thus, the jouissance under the guise of the symptom is a jouissance which presents a threat to the social bond.

There are two structural consequences that follow from this politics of symptom. The first is that the conclusion to be drawn from the conflict of these two jouissances is that nothing can “hold together” subjects-symptoms, nothing can bring together these irreducible modes of jouissance. From this perspective then, jouissance can be seen as the impossible-real of the social bond. Jouissance, as a symptom, is that irreducible otherness on which no collective logics can be grounded. The final lesson to be drawn from psychoanalysis insofar as it ventures into the domain of the social and politics is then what we would propose to call the “solipsism of enjoyment”. In other words, politics and psychoanalysis are in an antinomic relation.

There is however a problem that this “politics of symptom” cannot solve. Capitalism as the hegemonic social bond brings into question what is supposed to be the central issue of this politics: the tension between the prescribed, standard jouissance, and jouissance provided by the symptom. Thus the politics of symptom may well have been applicable in Freud’s times. Today, however, there seems to be no place for such a politics of symptom precisely to the extent that the capitalist discourse itself dissolves the tension between the singular and the universal. Capitalism is namely that exceptional social bond, indeed, in a sense it could be considered to be an aberration among social bonds, since it realises what in all the other bonds seems to be impossible: its compatibility with enjoyment. Capitalism is namely a social bond which does not demand that the subject sacrifice his/her enjoyment. On the contrary, the capitalist social bond is a bond that adapts itself to the “trifle”, the private enjoyment of everybody. It

is offered as an apparatus which, thanks to the scientific development and the market, is able to provide the subject with the lacking enjoyment.

So, from this perspective, not only does enjoyment not endanger the capitalist social bond, but, on the contrary, capitalism is a discourse in which the “democracy of enjoyment” rules. This is because, in the capitalist discourse, the subject appears to be dis-identified and, consequently, needs to attach oneself to anything that could provide one an identity. The second consequence is that the subject of the unconscious is completed by products thrown on the market. This is why Lacan inamed the subject of the capitalist discourse, “the proletarian”, this being a name for the subject which is inseparable from his or her *plus-de-jouir*, object *a*. We are dealing here with an obscure subjectivation which depends on the conversion of the surplus-value, that is to say any product thrown on the market, into the surplus-jouissance, the cause of the subject’s desire. We would suggest that it is precisely this indistinction between the surplus-value and the surplus-jouissance which makes it possible for the capitalist production of “whatever objects” to capture, indeed to enchain the subject’s desire (its eternal “this is not it!”). From this perspective, it could be said that capitalism, insofar as it promotes the solipsism of enjoyment, promotes at the same time a particular communal figure, that which J.-C. Millner termed a “paradoxical class”, a community in which its members are joined or held together by that which disjoins them, namely enjoyment.

The second paradigm of the politics of psychoanalysis is to a certain extent the reversal of the first one. What is at issue here is to show that enjoyment, precisely as an irreducible heterogeneity, is the point at which psychoanalysis encounters politics. Far from precluding all social bond, enjoyment appears rather as a foundation for that politics which could be termed, for lack of a better term, the “politics of love”. At issue in this paradigm is love for one’s neighbour rather than the solipsism of enjoyment.

The texts of reference here are, of course, *Civilisation and its Discontents* and *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, two texts having as their point of departure the presupposition that what makes the otherness of the other is enjoyment insofar as it is evil. For Freud, the evil jouissance I suspect in the Other justifies my reservations with regard to him, the reason why the Other does not deserve my love since I can give my love only to the one who is like me. For Lacan, on the contrary, it is

precisely this evil jouissance that the Other and I have in common. This irreducible otherness of jouissance is what joins us together. And this is why Lacan can claim that “that fundamental evil which dwells within this neighbour [...] it also dwells in me.”¹³ This is why Lacan in his “Kant with Sade” reproaches Sade, but in an indirect way Freud too, with the misrecognition of his own enjoyment. Sade, just like Freud, Lacan says “*refuses to be my neighbour*”.

The reason for this refusal, according to Lacan, is that “Sade does not have neighborly enough relations with his own malice [*méchanceté*] to encounter his neighbour in it”,¹⁴ backing away, just like Freud, from the Christian commandment: “*Thou shalt love thy neighbour like thyself*”. Nothing then, to follow Lacan, is closer to me than that which I try desperately to avoid, this nameless, evil enjoyment that I encounter not only in the Other but in me too. On the other hand, it is precisely because, like myself, the Other is in the same position in relation to that what Lacan calls *la chose la plus proche*, that thing which is closest to me being of course jouissance, that I can love the Other. What is difficult to swallow here is not the idea that the Other is unfathomable, enigmatic, wholly other. What is unthinkable is this sameness at the level of enjoyment. That which radically separates me from the Other, his or her absolutely particular enjoyment, is at the same time that which we have in common: this immanent otherness. Paradoxically, enjoyment as this extimate otherness is the foundation of sameness.

The crucial point of Lacan’s interpretation of the love of one’s neighbour, far from a postmodernist exaltation of the irreducible otherness of the Other, is designated here as a strategy for handling this irreducible immanent otherness. Love, insofar as it is beyond all transaction, this non-reciprocal love, in the final analysis, as a renouncement of any direct equivalent to be given in return, all promise of payment, this wholly unmotivated, gratuitous love, love as a gift without recompensation, is what Lacan proposes as a solution to the impasse caused by the encounter with the enjoyment in the Other, with the otherness of the Other. This “real” love – real in the sense that it demands the impossible – to love somebody for that which turns hatred and aggression against me – is a possible strategy for handling that otherness in me, for neutralising it.

¹³ J. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, trans. D. Porter, Tavistock/Routledge, London 1992, p. 186.

¹⁴ J. Lacan, “Kant avec Sade”, *Écrits*, p. 666.

It is precisely at this point that the political implications of love of thy neighbour can be drawn out. Love of thy neighbour as a way of dealing with enjoyment is precisely what Derrida perceives as a chance for democracy. According to Derrida, “there is no democracy without respect for irreducible singularity or alterity.” But, Derrida adds, “there is no democracy without a ‘community of friends’, without the calculation of majorities, without identifiable, stabilizable, representable subjects, all equal”.¹⁵

In this second interpretation of the politics of psychoanalysis, only psychoanalysis, by bringing to light enjoyment as the irreducible singularity common to me and my neighbour, as this sameness in otherness, can elaborate a theory of the subject appropriate to democracy. Indeed, a theory of subject that is necessary to democracy.

A nonreciprocal love for thy neighbour severed from all utility, is the point at which politics and psychoanalysis necessarily meet. Indeed, such a love can be seen as a model for a nonsegregationist community. This is because the indifference to the useful which situates love beyond all altruist utilitarianism, signifies a radical mutation in the field of politics, a mutation which concerns precisely the status of the Other. For the break with the useful characterises not only love and friendship, but also hatred, as Freud himself points out in his *Civilisation*, because my enemy is not interested in the profit he might gain from the wrongdoing he inflicts on me. This leads to a somewhat unexpected conclusion: if the refusal of the utility, the indifference as to the possible gain is what friend and enemy have in common then the distinction between the friend and the enemy disappears.

The crucial question here is of course: what consequences can be drawn from the disappearance of the demarcation line between friend and foe, in the final analysis, from the collapse of the figure of the Other for the social bond and, consequently, for politics? This is precisely the central issue in Schmitt’s theory of politics. As is well known, Schmitt situated the friend/enemy discrimination at the core of politics. In Schmitt’s view, a mere agglomeration of fellow men can never bring about the desired homogeneity of the community. At this level, not only is the other not an other at all, but this specular relation is governed

15 J. Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, trans. G. Collins, Verso, London, New York 1997, p. 22.

by a lethal alternation: if it is you, I am not, and if it is me, it is you who are not. Schmitt's greatest merit is to have pointed out the intrinsic complicity between enmity and the Other. If we are to follow Schmitt, for homogeneity to be established at all the existence of an instance of dissimilarity, an element of otherness is required, that which at the level of the relationship between *semblables*, fellow men, is precisely lacking. Schmitt's introduction of the friend/enemy distinction can thus be understood as an attempt at diffusing the hatred that the fellow men would otherwise vent against one another through the "exportation" of this inherent aggressivity elsewhere. From this perspective, the role of the Other is ultimately pacifying.

On the other hand, however, hatred is never completely domesticated. As Schmitt himself is forced to acknowledge, the establishment of such a constitutive Beyond is always incomplete since the Other is always contaminated by another figure of the enemy, the enemy within the community. This other Other, by being unlocatable, indiscernible, corrodes the communal being, threatens the community with its dissolution. From the very start, there are then two figures of the enemy and not simply one: the symbolic enemy that Schmitt calls the political enemy. And there is yet another figure of the Other: the "real" or internal enemy. Whereas the first figure is essentially pacifying, the second activates the absolute destructive hostility leading to a permanent civil war.

In the present constellation of globalisation, we are facing a situation in which, strictly speaking, there is no instance that could play the role of the "constitutive outside", no instance of the "they" that would render possible the construction of the "we", since both "we" and "they" are always already "in", included. It is essential to realise how contemporary otherlessness, paradoxically, opens up the possibility for the emergence of a hatred that nothing can appease. The proliferation of the hated real others in an era of the nonexistence of the Other is necessary since – once the figure of the external, political, "symbolic" enemy is eliminated, once everybody is included – anybody, myself included, can occupy the place of the radical, real other. For what characterises present-day globalisation is namely the denial of all exclusion.

The exclusion of the exclusion did not, however, make the exclusion disappear, it has only become internal and thus invisible. It is precisely because the frontier between the included and the excluded is ultimately invisible, as there is no

sign, no attribute that would help me determine who is “in” and who is “out”, that, in a universe without beyond or limit, a universe that knows of no exception, anybody can, in principle, find himself/herself occupying the place of the real, dehumanised Other.

This is precisely the reason that the “politics of love”, a politics which aims at the impossible articulation of the otherness and the social bond, the impossibility of counting and the necessity of counting, remains forever contained within the perspective of the promise, it is forever “to come”, *à venir*, never in the here and now. In other words, such a politics cannot provide us with a satisfactory answer to the question: how is it possible to justify the legitimacy of the move from the singular to the universal. The politics of love is satisfied with the ceaseless affirmation of the singularity of otherness. That is why it cannot indicate a way in which this singularity could be asserted politically, in which way to politicise the singularity of the singular by introducing another principle of counting: that of counting the uncounted, the uncountable. Ultimately, what such a conception of politics in terms of love misrecognises is precisely the irreducible gap between counting and the impossibility of counting as the sole site in which the politics of emancipation can be situated. We propose to call the politics of emancipation that politics that organises a confrontation between counting and the impossibility of counting, an operation that reveals the constitutive impossibility of institutionalising a collectivity “for all”, a collectivity in which what is at stake is precisely the predicate determining the belonging to the community, the demarcating line between inside/outside, us/them.

It is precisely at this point that the politics of emancipation encounters psychoanalysis. We would argue that psychoanalysis can show us how it is possible, in spite everything, to think and to practice a collectivity “for all” as an open, nonsegregationist collectivity. For the great merit of Lacan’s proposed solution in *Television* consists in recasting the question of the universal, of the “for all”, from the perspective of the infinite. Clearly, the solution proposed by Lacan is a paradoxical solution since we are dealing here with an “interior way out”, if I may say so, a paradoxical way out which implies no transgression, no forcing of a barrier, since there is no barrier separating the outside and the inside. In view of this interior way out, everything depends, of course, on the way in which we understand Lacan’s statement: “It would not constitute progress if it happens only to some”. Does the expression “not only for some” imply “for all” or not?

Our claim is that it points in the direction of the “for all”. To be sure, this is a very peculiar “for all” since, in the not-all, that is, in an infinite universe in which this “for all” is situated, it is impossible to state the universality of the predicate.

To fully grasp the political implications of this articulation of the “for all” to the “not-all”, we must distinguish between two forms of the not-all: the not-all of incompleteness and the not-all of inconsistency. The first not-all is what we usually refer to as the all or the universal, to use its traditional name. This category designates a unity constructed through the limitation, put more precisely, through the exclusion of an exception. And there is another form of the not-all, the inconsistent not-all which can, paradoxically, be obtained, not through the exclusion of the exception, but through its inclusion. By the very fact of subtracting the exception from a series we render it limitless, non-totalizable.

Now, what exactly is the status of the exception in the not-all? We cannot simply state: there is no exception to the universal function, for instance, “All As are B”. We should rather say: if there is an exception we don’t know where to find it. From the perspective of the not-all, the exception is seen as being erratic, it is everywhere, yet nowhere to be found. It could then be said that the exception is generalised. We could also say, for instance, that we are all exceptions.

It then follows that the first figure of the not-all is subtractive or segregationist, because the price to be paid for the constitution of the “all” is the exclusion of those who do not possess the required predicate. A “true” not-all is non-segregationist because, from the outset, all exception is undecidable, indeterminable. Consequently, such a not-all is open, inclusive, in a word: “for all”. We can see here a solution to the impasse that Schmitt confronted: how to conceive of a community when there is no Other from which the members of the community are to be distinguished. It could then be said the politics of the non-segregationist not-all is symmetrically inverted compared to that proposed by Schmitt as it consists in including the Other rather than in excluding the Other. Not of course in the name of respecting the rights of otherness, openness to the Other, but in order to bring into question the communal identity, the supposed homogeneity of the group.

It is this second aspect of the not-all, one in which it is impossible to determine the existence of a totalizing exception that can best be illustrated by the politics

inherent to Lacan's School: *École de la cause*. For there is yet another way of dealing with the problem of the structural non-totalization.

A shift in Lacan's reflections on politics in general and the functioning of a psychoanalytical institution whose principal task would be the transmission of a radical singular experience such as can only be encountered in an analysis, is marked by a paradoxical thesis according to which: a group is the real, that is, according to his vocabulary, a radical impossibility. Yet the real of the group is that which is precisely at stake in the foundation of his School: *École de la Cause*, School of the Cause. If we propose to consider Lacan's thesis about the real of the group seriously, this is precisely because Lacan, while insisting on the impossibility of the group, by founding his School nevertheless succeeded in demonstrating that there is a way of dealing with this impossibility.

Lacan's solution to the impasse of collectivity consists in opening his School "to everybody", which is to say "to anybody". If there is absolutely nothing to define the analyst, no pre-given predicate or property on which his identification could be grounded, then the only solution is to call on all who are willing to work in the Freudian field. By inviting to his school anybody, without any qualification, Lacan created an open, empty space destined to be inhabited only by a special kind of work, the work of the "determined workers"¹⁶, be it analysis or not, as he puts it.

As the expression "determined worker" suggests, it is the work that decides the belonging to the collectivity. This also implies that this work cannot be standardized. The work to be done is by definition indeterminable since it cannot take place unless there is a transference to the cause. This expression, "determined worker", emphasizes the importance of the fidelity to a cause, the willingness of everyone involved in it to risk himself or herself and his or her desire in the pursuit of what is ultimately unknowable. All that the work to be done by everybody requires, and that despite the fact that neither its quality nor quantity can be prescribed, is a new relation to the cause; in the final analysis: the task that everybody is confronted with is that of inventing psychoanalysis.

¹⁶ This expression was introduced by Lacan in his "Fouding Act", in Jacques Lacan, *Television. A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, p. 100.

It is precisely in this sense that in Lacan's School it is impossible to distinguish good, determined workers from idlers. Rather, School of the Cause is to be seen as a collectivity that is profoundly non-segregationist. It is non-segregationist because the presence of an element allegedly heterogeneous to the collectivity, a non-analyst, is not only tolerated but required in order to bring into question the predicate: to be an analyst.

This collectivity "for all" thus serves us as a model for the anonymous egalitarianism in so far as it renders visible the functioning of both universalist, although incompatible logics: the one that is grounded in the exception, and the other that takes as its departure point the axiom according to which: "there is none who has not got it", namely the capacity to be a determined worker.

The paradox of the politics implied in Lacan's School resides namely in the fact that it is situated precisely at the level of that which cannot be represented nor counted as it is what is left after the operation of disidentification. In short, it is situated at the level of the pure, whatever singularity. Yet it is precisely this irreducible singularity that Lacan's School proposes to take into account, to 'count'. For the ambition of Lacan's School is not only to find a way out of the traps of identification. It is above all to find, to force, a passage there where there is a non-passage, an impasse, a deadlock, of the group. What is at stake in the foundation of the *École de la Cause* is a paradoxical project: to universalise the singular.

We can see now that what is at stake in the distinction of the two logics of the universal is eminently political. At issue here is the way in which the logics of the not-all is set to work, made operational there where the segregationist logics operate, there where the exclusion, be it visible or invisible, reigns.

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From this perspective, Lacan's School can be viewed as a special collectivity "for all", that of workers, a collectivity which implies the disidentification practised at the level of the group: everyone ought to become anyone, a whatever singularity. This is not to say that one discovers oneself as already being such. On the contrary, one only becomes such: anyone. This is a subjective transformation that everyone has to accomplish at his/her own risk. This is because the collectivity "for all" is ultimately grounded in a cause that sets us to work. As such, it

includes in the real a radical novelty: a paradoxical collectivity that is at once not-all, non-totalisable and yet at the same time “for all”, offered to all.

Such a collectivity “for all” that is grounded in the real of the group, which is to say in its impossibility, is certainly a forcing: a forcing of saying, because what characterises such a collectivity is precisely the advent of an allegedly mute, uncounted, invisible instance that starts to speak out and, in so doing, asserts its presence: “We are here”. But it is also a forcing of all social order and its counting. For what is at issue here is not to correct the miscount made by the social order by including those who were left outside, those who did not count, but rather to accomplish, in view of those uncounted and counted alike, the operation of transfinitisation, an operation that aims at constituting an open, non-segregationist for all that is governed by the logic of the “one by one”. How many members will count this “for all” of the not-all? It doesn’t matter. It is not about the numbers. On the condition, however, that it remains, just like a Cantorian aleph, indifferent, impervious, to both all addition and all subtraction. This is because this paradoxical interior way out is nothing other than the constitution of a local, temporary, provisional collectivity “for all”. It is not to remain forever. All that remains forever, ultimately, is its name and its call.