

Cindy Zeiher*

The Subject and the Act: A Necessary *Folie à Deux* to Think Politics

Politics is politics, but love always remains love.
– Lacan, Sem VII p. 324.

This paper grapples with a single question: what precisely makes a subject think politics?¹ Although Lacan portrays the repetition of revolutionary politics as an *impasse*, Lacanian theory has since been harnessed in a confrontation with politics. On the face of it a convergence between politics and Lacanian psychoanalysis appears unlikely; invoking unconscious forces in the political realm would seem to be an impossible task. This is because whereas psychoanalysis is concerned with subjective suffering, politics has to do with action and with rational thought. Yet both psychoanalysis and politics deal with the same things, the subject, the social bond, anxiety and with the formation and presence of desire and lack.

It is important to start with an understanding of the subject. Pluth suggests the subject is to be understood as “represented in and for the Other” (2009, p. 78). For Lacan the subject emanates from unconscious forces, is one which does not fully recognise itself and which is therefore divided, castrated and oriented towards lack rather than to the determination of consciousness. In *Écrits*, Lacan is being precise when he states that the subject is a signifier represented by another signifier, meaning that the subject must be a subject of language (2004, p. 835). Lacan’s constitution of the subject also emphasises the implication of Descartes’s *cogito* (Seminar XI, p. 126):

I am not designating the living substratum needed by this phenomenon of the subject, nor any sort of substance, nor any being possessing knowledge in his

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* University of Canterbury, New Zealand

pathos... nor even some incarnated logos, but the Cartesian subject, who appears at the moment when doubt is recognised as certainty.

The subject of politics operates within the particular logic of the symptom. The function of the symptom is to both maintain the structure of the Law and allow the subject to traverse it. For the political subject the symptom is obscure and figurative, manifesting as anxiety. Here the symptom is located at the interface of desire with drive, or as Lacan states in Seminar XIV: *La logique du fantasme* (1966-1967), “the right and the wrong sides” where desire and reality are visible on a horizon which can be only partially recognised. It is only partially recognised because full recognition would render complete freedom from the symptom impossible. The political subject needs the structure of fantasy in order firstly to recognise itself as a political subject and secondly to enable it to harness potential emancipatory power. The functioning of fantasy is crucial because the subject is thereby able to present itself as divided, a position barred by the signifier (the realm of politics) which initially constituted the subject within the social bond. Here, the act has the function of staging a confrontation between the subject and politics. The act frames the political subject as a subject which repeats itself but with the desire for absolute difference (*L'identification*). Lacan states in Seminar XIV that (1966-1967, p. 50)

[i]f [*objet*] *a* is the frame of the subject, this frame falls at the level of the most fundamental act of life, the act in which the subject as such is engendered, that is, the repetition of the signifier.

Before we commence deliberations on what constitutes a political act, we must consider the body as a signifier mediating difference. The body, Pluth states, is not, “a treasure trove of signifiers... it suffers from signifiers and in doing so this body seems to belong, in part, to the Other” (2007, p. 60). Here Pluth is suggesting that the body’s suffering produces a subject-effect, essential for the subject’s continuation as a subject, which in turn provides a context and motivation for identification and recognition. Pluth then suggests that, “... recognition is sought after as a kind of legitimation of my entry into the Other as a speaking being” (p. 61). Here he provides a launching pad from which to consider the political subject as simultaneously an anxious one. The subject-effect manifests as a tension between anxiety and the demand for this anxiety to be harnessed into an act. However, this is not just any act, and the political subject well knows this.

The function of the act is to render affect, in particular that of anxiety. Regarding the function of anxiety, Lacan in *Sem X: Anxiety* (1962-1963, p. 4-6) states that

[a]nxiety then is the signal of the real and of an irreducible mode under which this real presents itself in experience... What is the moment of anxiety? Is it what makes possible this gesture through which Oedipus can tear out his eyes, make this sacrifice of them, this offering, this ransom of blindness in which his destiny is accomplished? Is that what anxiety is, the possibility, let us say, that man has of mutilating himself? No. It is properly that which through this image, I am striving to designate for you: it is that an impossible sight threatens you of your own eyes on the ground.

The political subject must rely on anxiety because it provides a passage to the Real and specifically to the Lacanian conceptualisation of an encounter with the Real as negative enjoyment. For Lacan, anxiety is the only true affect. Given these Lacanian reference points, we can now consider the political act as located within two affective dimensions, the first being that of the speech-act. Here one turns to Lacan's notorious dystopian rebuke to protesting Parisian students in 1968 (1990, p. 126):

[T]he aspiration to revolution has but one conceivable issue, always, the discourse of the master. That is what experience has proved. What you, as revolutionaries, aspire to is a Master. You will have one... for you fulfil the role of helots of this regime. You don't know what that means either? This regime puts you on display; it says: 'Watch them fuck...'

Here, Lacan posits not only a theoretico-political horizon, but also a stern caution to passionate reactionary politics demanding recognition, a caution which now also serves as a timely critique of contemporary hegemonic orders – don't be so quick to boast your victories and fall in love with yourself. Lacan actively resists absolutism in political praxis, but what he offers is a consistent theory of surplus-*jouissance* (the subject's true intention) from which to pivot a praxis of politics wherein the subject is politically interpellated. For Lacan it is imperative to resist the position of *sujet supposé savoir*, the subject-supposed-to-know, because there is no necessary unique relationship between the subject and knowledge. Rather, such knowledge as the subject already possesses will emerge. When it does, it will not necessarily reveal anything new to the sub-

ject but rather affirm what the subject already knows. So, what makes an act specifically political? Lacan maintains that this is not an act that consists of recouping power within the socio-symbolic, that being a rejection of speech in the guise of performative action. Rather, the political act is different from any other act because to whom or to what the act is addressed, whether to another subject, collective or object, is a retroactive condition of the possibility of an act and its first logical appearance, or as Badiou puts it “that [which] brings to light a possibility that was invisible or even unthinkable (2013, p. 9). It is pertinent to here consider Badiou’s claim that politics is one of philosophy’s conditions because it brings about that which was previously ignored (2013). Unlike the classical positions of Laclau, Critchley and Kouvelakis, Badiou rejects the category of ‘the political’ as a philosophical misnomer. Implied here is firstly the importance of how politics is situated as fluid and atemporal, both ‘here and now’ and within the ‘past and the future’, and secondly that the subject cannot be reduced to political singularities. To ‘ignore’ is a precise act which does not demand that the subject attempt to articulate the impossibility of what constitutes the political realm. More so, to ‘ignore’ situates politics as *un-evental* and as unable to produce anxiety *vis-à-vis* the potential for revolutionary questions. Badiou’s insistence that we expose ourselves to the multiplicity of events of politics directly suggests that we, as singular subjects, are called to name the universal of politics in all of its multiplicities. He provides a way to think politics not only as the management of the political economy but also as a possible future politics, *la politique* to come.

The second affective dimension of the act of politics, which I argue is also a dimension of the affect of anxiety, is bodily and located beyond subjectivisation. Here the act can be considered as pure encounter and is retroactively interpellated within the subject. This implies that the act must initially have had no meaning for the subject, that there was no clear agent and that it was the act which produced the subject. Subjectivisation of the act after it has taken place entails that the act and the subject have become inextricably enmeshed and in order for the subject to harness a subjectivisation within politics, the act must mean something, more so it must leave a spectral trace of what took place, a proposition to us of a possibility. Thus meaning is revealed not only *by* the sub-

ject and *through* the act, but also by the subject demanding that others witness and recognise such an enmeshment of act with subject.²

Here, the strategy of situating the *event* via the *act* enables an identification of the subject as politics *par excellence*. Žižek (2005, unpaginated) describes the process of how the coordinates of desire, anxiety and fantasy, are for the subject beyond the demand of the Other:

There is no freedom outside the traumatic encounter with the opacity of the Other's desire: freedom does not mean that I simply get rid of the Other's desire—I am as it were thrown into my freedom when I confront this opacity as such, deprived of the fantasmatic cover which tells me what the Other wants from me. In this difficult predicament, full of anxiety, when I know *that* the Other wants something from me, without knowing *what* this desire is, I am thrown back into myself, compelled to assume the risk of freely determining the coordinates of my desire [emphasis original].

To articulate a demand is to fully enter the coordinates of the Other. But it does more than this as Lacan (Sem VI, 1958-1959, p. 27) states: “[demand] institutes the other to whom it is addressed as the one who may be present or absent”. The demand of the Other to act is made not only as a response to the subject's desire, but also in recognition of it. Yet given that suspension of the Other is impossible, its status in politics manifests paradoxically as a mutual splitting between it and the subject in that the subject supposes the Other to be making a demand (for an act) which at the same time the subject does not want to be satisfied.

The problem facing today's subject of politics evidenced, for example, in the failure of the current Left is that the Other is positioned as uncertain and precarious so that any attempt to prescribed political outcomes results in disappointment because nothing is being proposed, no act, and therefore no imaginable event. Thus the Left is stranded with assemblages, representations and identifications, which with great gusto it harnesses in the form of identity politics.

² Although it is with some tentativeness, I state that such a witnessing invokes Honneth's (1992) deliberation on Hegel's treatment of the subject as in part a struggle for recognition constitutive of reifying social practices (2005). This struggle, Honneth maintains, should be central to the political vocabulary of social conflict.

This monopoly (of possibilities) merely articulates what is or is not possible, for example, the rise of an ineffective postmodern-liberal Left which no longer requires action in order to appear political. By contrast Badiou claims, “[w]ith a political event, a possibility emerges that escapes the prevailing power’s control over possibles” (2013, p. 11). Thus in spite of its posturing and acting out, today’s Left lacks the presence of a motivation which centres on the act as the primary location for entry into the Other. Pluth (2007, p. 140) articulates this when he says that

[i]dentity has become an important term in contemporary political discussions ... An identity politics usually makes a demand for recognition by appealing to notions of justice and equality, but there is often something more in its demands. For this reason, the recognition and victories obtained may be unsatisfying, because for many in the movement the movement was not just about recognition of specific demands.

Identification seizes the subject through the conduits of specific principles, which in turn propagate and reinforce specific acts. This positing of identity politics above the act, rather than reinforcing the struggle merely frames the act within an attempt at consensus. For an act to be political it has to occupy the place of the Other because this is precisely the place where the intersection between demand and desire can be articulated. The act is both a demand and a response to demand, rather than to any specific demand. The act also provides a rupture to this dialectic by opening up desire for a different demand to be articulated. Here demand and desire are not altogether separate but contingent on the Other for signification of the subject as being one of desire. Lacan (Sem IX, 1961-1962) indicates that desire and demand are always connected when he states “[i]t is not that demand separates us from desire [...] its signifying articulation, determines me, conditions me as desire”. Thus the act gives coordination to and recognition of desire, but as Pluth (2007, p. 63) states, the ambiguity of desire is always present: “it always remains in part a desire to be recognised by the Other after an encounter with the Other’s desire, but at the same time it is interested in cancelling out any placing and recognition in the Other”. The function of fantasy is crucial here because through desire it provides a formal passage to the act via the logic of the constitution of the subject. The passage of the act is ambiguous, atemporal and indeterminate. It is important to note that there is *no* one supreme ethical act to which the subject of politics can attribute transformational potential, neither

can it fully exclude itself from the politico-symbolic spaces of power and authority. This implies that there must be that there must be some minimal difference (an irreducible gap) between the subject and the social which supports the act. What I am also claiming is that here there is no suspension of the big Other, there are only acts which either hit the target or do not. Revolution is here understood as surpassing any transitional order and attaining ontological consistency which inscribes the relation between act and event into the order of the Other. Šumič-Riha (2009, p. 249) addresses the problem of ontological consistency facing the subject of emancipatory politics when she states:

The starting point of emancipatory politics is nothing but the irreducible gap between the subject's being and his/her symbolic existence or, more precisely, its departure point is not the alienated subject of the master's discourse, the subject taken up by the master's order, but rather the subject as the failure of the master's discourse to completely absorb or take up his/her being in the imposed system of places and functions.

In this way the act and the subject are constituted as one of mutual interdependency (and of inevitable failure) interpellated within the discourse of the Master. However, the necessary insertion of fantasy through which the act can be deliberately recognised and demanded reconfigures this relation. The act-as-pure (without subjectivisation) designates the subject as possible 'un-being', *désêtre*, a condition to which the subject strives. This *impasse* stages political motivation, impossible desire and confrontation both with the inevitability of alienation and with the desire to supersede it. It is useful to here note Lacan's adoption of Marx in *Seminar XIV: La logique du Fantasme*, when he claims that what becomes enjoyed (*ce dont on jouit*) circulates as an object of *jouissance* and thus becomes a locus of transference of this *jouissance*-value.

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At this point we can return to the problem of desire as also a problem for politics. Pluth (2009, p. 63) conceptualises this well when stating "desire is understood to be something which can free one from determination by and subjection to the Other. Desire, then, would be another word for freedom". Nevertheless an ambiguity manifests, as Pluth points out, since in this quest for freedom another kind of subjection to the Other occurs when desire emerges also as demand. It is here that one can make a distinction between fantasy and the act. Pluth (p. 64) maintains that "[a]n act, unlike the fantasy, does not make a demand

on the Other and is not aimed at acquiring recognition by the Other". For the political subject, this is an unconscious distinction which manifests as demand for response in the form of an act. The desire for an act is insufficient in itself and thus the political subject *must* act both as a recognition of and a response to demand. Šumič-Riha (2009, p. 247) contends that this could be a desire *to be counted* when she says, "[h]ence, if politics itself is viewed as a disruptive excess of equality over to the distributive logic of the State, this signals that a new perspective is opened for the theorization of politics: one that locates the proper place for emancipatory politics, that is, for 'political subjects who are not social groups but rather forms of inscriptions of the count of the uncounted,' within the very terrain in which the statist counting operates."

This leaves the political subject with the counter-problem of refusal (or resisting the Other's demand). What if one refuses to act, instead remaining silent in the face of demand? Here the function of the Other determines that the political subject recognises the Other as constituted in the demand to respond. The political subject positions itself in relation to the demand of the Other and is thus an object of both the Other and of the need to act. For the political subject the Other is the political act regardless of the subject's willingness or refusal; the political subject is political only in relation to the political act. The problem of *what kind of act* is a question directed to the Other: *Che vuoi?* This is unanswerable because the question, anxiously posed to the Other, represents the subject's attempt through the signifying chain to reliably and unquestioningly constitute itself as a meaningful subject. This is problematic for the political subject who relies on the political act to motivate and satisfy both demand and desire. Here we must turn our attention to transference and Lacan's (Sem VIII, 1960-1961, p. 4) notion of 'subjective *disparity*', a necessary distance where "the goal is to relate the notion [the technique of transference] to an experience". What does this mean and how does it apply to the relation between the subject and the act of politics? Here Lacan is not only giving primacy to the signification of the act, but also preserving the relation between desire and action as an ethical mediation. When reflecting on the 'madness' of Socrates, Lacan (Sem VIII, 1960-1961, p. 9-10) stresses "the seething ground of the social infection" as being one's guide within inter-subjectivisation and as a way towards understanding resistance to the social bond (p. 11):

In any case it would be a bad appreciation of things not to recognise at the beginning that psychoanalysis demands from the first, a high degree of libidinal sublimation of the level of collective relationships.

For transference to be apparent requires insertion of the order of the Imaginary together with avoidance of inter-subjectivity. Both the condition and the contingency of politics are here crucially relevant for the political subject which must, like politics, itself exercise indeterminacy and consciously break from political identity politics. Politics being inherently unstable, the political subject needs to wrestle with ideological discourses which may obfuscate the true intentions of political acts. Here, Žižek (1999, p. 211) offers that “today, more than ever, one has to insist that the only way to open the emergence of an Event is that of breaking the vicious cycle of globalization-with-particularization by (re)asserting the dimension of Universality against capitalist globalization.” For Badiou politics provides a possible event to become a political subject through initiating precise and deliberate political actions.

Nevertheless, it is precisely through the act that a political subject is bound to the Other. Zupančič states (2000, p. 255) that “in an act, there is no divided subject ... The subject of an act is not a divided subject – this is another way of saying that there is no subject or hero of an act.” The subject and the political act are entwined and there can be no separation between these dimensions, they are in a necessary *folie à deux*, or ‘madness made of two’. What does this mean precisely? *Folie à deux* is best understood as a shared interior fantasy of excess and lack. Psychoanalytic studies of psychosis suggest that this occurs when the signifier is most powerful and the subject is captured by it to produce a totality which attempts to dispense with the social bond. This provides the foundation for understanding Lacan’s *act* as being differentiated from acting out or not acting. That one pathologically over-identifies with the power both of the Other and of one’s desire, structures not only desire but also demand. The implication of this over-identification is that the act is deemed as that which will finally enable the subject to become who it might be. This political position is one in which the precariousness of the signifier can be understood as nevertheless structuring legitimacy as a form of signification. The intricate relationship between the signifier and the subject inevitably fails and the subject then anxiously, albeit momentarily questions the tenacity of the signifier. Apollon (1996, p. 43) considers the limit of the signifier in the realm of the political when he says that

[t]he psychotic position with regard to the politics of the signifier suggests the function of belief where the key signifier is missing to endow the delusional reconstruction of its legitimacy. It hints at the formation of the relationship of legitimacy and the belief in a political enterprise of reformation for societies based on a common goal. The analyst cannot help taking into account the structural proximity between the delusional reconstruction of the symbolic world on the ground of psychotic belief and the ideological and political enterprise of unifying those differences that split the patchwork of civil society on the ground of a dreamlike common good.

The *contagious* transmission structuring *folie à deux* allows concealment of its pathology and thereby maintains a synchronised, repetitive constellation of demand and desire. The pathos of *folie à deux* is symmetrical in that the subject does not disavow the act. The difference between subject and act is peculiar in that by disregarding the imbalance between the act and the subject (notwithstanding that they are a unity), fantasy is projected as the act itself. For example, the phrase, 'the common good' conjures up a belief, a dream-like signification, in which the subject feels compelled to act in specific ways and to employ specific strategies and iterations which propagate this stance. The subject implicates the Other as operating with such beliefs and defining the limits imposed by the Law regarding affronts to this stance. However, any obstacle to such a stance is not necessarily a manoeuvre against its ideology, rather a case of *jouissance* reckoning against authority. The act which both propagates and resists ideological form and content provides the frame for and operates as the inseparable Other for the political subject; the subject and the act must be fused and the identification of this fusion must be apparent. Furthermore, *folie à deux* between the act and the subject provides an ethical stance for the subject of politics because it fully harnesses the divided subject as one seeking both pleasure and moral obligation within the political realm. Zupančič (2000, p. 21) identifies this division as both Kantian and Lacanian when she states that

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[t]he relationship between happiness and duty is thus not that of a negation but, rather, that of indifference. However, the most important point concerning the divided 'practical' subject is the following one, which can also serve as our point of departure: 'The subject is divided by the fact that he has to choose between pathos and division'. That is to say: the subject is not divided between the patho-

logical and the pure. The alternative to pathological subjectivity is not pure or immaculate ethical subjectivity, but freedom or autonomy.

It can be argued that the contemporary subject by-passes this conundrum (to think politics) to some extent because freedom, being framed as impracticable and unattainable is thrown into crisis and thus avoided. However, what is to be fought for is uncertainty as an ethical and even a rational stance. And yet, like demand, whether if we refuse freedom or appropriate it, we are inevitably interpellated within it because of a compulsion to deliberate it. The Lacanian political subject enunciates this as a freedom within the Real, a freedom which is beyond articulation, unable to be fully disclosed but only enacted. For the political subject the demand of the act lies within the realm of the Other, despite the unclear orientation of such a demand. The 'political' act remains faithful both to an ethic of desire and to the division of the subject as one that demands. Zupančič (2000, p. 144) describes this when she states that

[t]he feeling of respect seizes us when the law becomes visible in an exemplary case of ethical action. What becomes visible in this way is precisely the absence of a cause for such an action.

Subjects of politics are trapped within irresistible Imaginary substitutions which strive to underpin the logic of the *objet a*. As Zupančič suggests, an object which signifies an ethical act must also supplement it. The problem of the logic of *objet a* for the subject is locating this signifying object within the subject's formulation of demand and desire. The signifier has the power to either fully harness or diffuse identification and thus, recognition of the object. The investment of the symptom in being universal enabling us to speak both of it and possible alternatives to it, opens up the conditions of desire and demand. The symptom being the most noticeable is therefore the most able to be managed by the political subject. This posits the subject of politics as a subject *par excellence*, one who is always in sympathy with an act which illuminates an ethical fantasy involving commitment to a intervention as a condition of politics.

The subject and the 'political act' (which must also be read as the Other) are in an inextricable *folie à deux*, a precise political status that could with advantage be taken up by the Lacanian Left because in speaking to the act as being *something more* than recognition the problematic lure of identity politics is confront-

ed. To succumb to the fantasy of the Other is to both surrender to and transgress the law in an essential yet elusive encounter. The power of authority, of the law, establishes a legitimacy which can be resisted and challenged, yet even this ultimate hysterical contestation indirectly appropriates the authority of political power. Authority is the signifier which both legitimises and represses the political subject. As Santner (2013) suggests, it is via the interpellation of authority that a different relation can be possible, and that it is this relation which invites fidelity to interruption of authority.³ For a subject to *be* political, we must turn to Lacan and it appears that some political commentators and activists are already undertaking this critical psychoanalytic turn. Lacanian psychoanalysis speaks directly to lack in politics, insofar as both subjects and the social conditions in which they reside interact through repetition, lack and loss. The realm of the political operates both as a source of and a barrier to enjoyment as Todd McGowan (2013) suggests. McGowan makes a plea for enjoyment as being the preferable political form central to the act, which is always in anticipation. This resonates strongly with Lacan's memorable declaration to the protesting students of May 1968. Although Lacan sympathised with radical politics, like Marx he was also deeply suspicious of its potential to reaffirm dominant structures through interpellation by power and authority. A contemporary example is the espousal of environmental issues by today's Left which merely reaffirm dominant ideological structures wherein no real sacrifice is being made. (Perhaps instead the Left could harness courageous conviction by directing the act towards a counterhegemonic movement). The poignant passage concluding Lacan's *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* examines the complexity of sacrifice which, when framed as a political dimension remains unacknowledged and thus unformed (1977, p. 274-275):

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There is something profoundly masked in the critique of the history that we have experienced... Experience shows us that Kant is more true, and I have proved that his theory of consciousness, when he writes of practical reason, is sustained only by giving a specification of the moral law which, looked at more closely, is simply desire in its pure state, that very desire that culminates in the sacrifice, strictly speaking, of everything that is the object of love in one's human tenderness –

³ Santner deliberates the figure of the 'neighbour' as being eventual and "breaking with the order of the everyday" (2013, p. 106).

I would say, not only in the rejection of the pathological object, but also in its sacrifice and murder.

At this point we can return to my original question: what precisely makes a subject think politics? If we consider seriously Lacan's above passage we can conclude that the subject holds at its kernel an intersection of conflict between desire, demand and sacrifice, which is however beyond precise identification. Because sacrifice is not an endorsement which appeals to the postmodern-neoliberal alliance, what tends to happen instead is avoidance of politics, its possible acts and interventions. Although the libidinal economy of sacrifice has a precise political function, as Žižek (2004, p. 166; with Gunjević, 2012) notes in response to the second mode of Jean-Luc Marion's structure of sacrifice as a conditional gift, sacrifice is far more complex, indeed "one sacrifices oneself (one's honour and future in respectful society) to maintain the appearance of the Other's honour, to save the beloved Other from shame". Here the logic of sacrifice determines that the sacrificial act is problematic and cannot be undertaken simply as a gift because sacrifice is an ideological practice which is not necessarily an offer of devotion.^{4 5}

Demand such as that for social equality circumnavigates the inadequacy of ideological practice where it is obfuscated by sacrifice. Early on in *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, Lacan makes a cogent point which resists the aim of history: it is fully impossible to understand sacrifice because it exceeds the logic of identification: "... there are certainly a few who do not succumb to the fascination of the sacrifice in itself – the sacrifice that, in the object of our desires, we try to find evidence for the presence of the desire of this Other..." (1977, p. 275-276). In light of this, Badiou's claim that one needs to be faithful to a past event (2013, p. 13) in order to prepare for a potential new one appears a somewhat precarious and, at the same time, an urgent plea. Sustaining fidelity to past events is a political conduit, one of whose legacies is the propagation of

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⁴ Žižek refers to atheism when he says that the truth it espouses must be sacrificed for the larger revolutionary project (2003). Žižek also discusses sacrifice in his earlier *Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989, p. 116) where he considers the conflation of love, devotion and sacrifice as a "gentrification" function of the unanswerable, *Che vuoi?*

⁵ Ruda (2014, p. 121) considers Marion's second modality of sacrifice as operating within the political economy "because one expects to be reim-bursed [for one's sacrifice] and thus one can count on the logic of exchange".

identity-politics. Although as Badiou states “political subjects are always between two events” (2013, p. 13), I suggest further that they retain fidelity to what happens in this gap, in particular to how thinking and criticality are organised. Lacan refers to the need for criticality in Sem VIII (1960-1961, p. 13) when making a claim for “impassioned questioning [which] characterises the beginning of the dialectical process”. Here sacrifice is opaque within the desire/demand dialectic and this is precisely where anxiety lies for the subject. At this point, for subjects to think politics they must commit firstly to an invocation of the dialectic of desire via the passage of the act, and secondly to an avowal of the indeterminacy of politics as protection against a new Master being (un)wittingly invoked, for example that of the fall back position of identity-politics. The sacrifice lies in resisting desire for a new Master and remaining in a state of uncertainty. For this to take place, the subject must ironically surrender to the pathos of politics as a truth procedure. Here sacrifice takes on a more subtle hue: what is really at stake is finding the presence of desire of the Other. In this way, sacrifice provides a “way to proceed to the limit of jouissance” (Baas, 2014, p. 257). For Žižek (2003) the particularity of this sacrificial will to jouissance is obscene. Both impossibility and unavoidable repetitive excess of attachment haunt every act and/or intervention of politics. Lacan states that “[t]he key to this insistence in repetition is that in its essence repetition as repetition of the symbolical sameness is impossible” (1970, in Macksey et al). Baas (p. 257) distinguishes the act from fantasy when asserting:

[i]t is within this dimension of sacrifice that it could be understood in terms of a logic of the sublime; the sublime approaches *jouissance as much as it possibly can* – it touches on the limit of impossible enjoyment [...] it is the moment of that ‘anguished joy’ which, however, *is only a moment*, a limited point [emphasis original].

Thus Lacanian psychoanalysis provides a motivation both for the moment preceding the act as well as for the act itself, a sacrificial act which approaches and determines the limits of the Law. It is the experience of sacrifice which renders it as excess and which continually reorients us towards the act. One sacrifices in order to fill a gap in the Symbolic and it is here that the act as sacrificial can be considered an indeterminable political *thing* beyond identification and usually recognition. Wells (2014, p. 3) states that

Lacanian theory is privileged in its focus on this moment of encounter, [with lack and excess] which Lacan argues is a singular motive force in human experience. It is precisely our striving to retrieve our lost objects, to be rid of our excessive attachments or at least come to grips with these impossibilities that moves us.

Let us not underestimate the anxiety-producing effects of both the act and of sacrifice in politics. Hamza and Tupinambá refer directly to the trauma of historicisation and the (im)possibility of the act, or more precisely what they term “the movement for power” (2016, p. 440):

[W]e must be able to face estrangement precisely so that, looking it in the face, and tarrying with it, we might avoid the worst, which is to assign to the possibility of social catastrophe the properties of a natural one: unavoidable, merciless and impossible to change.

Hamza and Tupinambá probe the problem of historicisation of the political event as a symptom which paralyses the subject who is unable to articulate a new political signifier notwithstanding that an enabling structure is already in place to do so. Such historicisation manifests as suffocating, conservative nostalgia. I suggest that another modality could be established via the act, one which presupposes the act to be a necessary pathos of politics, thus requiring specific handling of sacrifice. To remain anxious in the face of politics is an ethical stance because one is always faced with the appearance of lack in spite of the total and overwhelming presence of authority. Sacrifice can be a point for deliberating the political project as one that has the potential to break from ideology and give specificity to the minimal distance required for the subject to *think* politics. Here the act and the subject combine as a source of exchange with which to approach the impossible *thing*, the limit of human experience, without always relying on ideological fantasy. Rather, the subject needs to be anxiously struggling with a fidelity to the past, rather than honouring it. The *thing* – that which propels anxiety – mediates proximity to the Real and allows for *jouissance* to be reinstated through the process of sublimation. As the subject already knows, the act in its repetition will not always be transgressive or result in an event. Badiou offers that “the political is philosophically designated as the concept of the communitarian link, and of its representation in an authority (1985, p. 15). He elaborates, “In order to portray the political as a fiction and orient oneself towards politics, the first task is to disengage the latter from the prescription

of connection” (p. 18). It is the failure and incompleteness of the act as a social connection to think politics which renders it genuinely ‘political’ and in this way is arguably uniquely Lacanian in orientation. As Wells (2014, p. 5) states:

The Lacanian Real is precisely that Thing whose essence is that it simultaneously has no unity, no consistent positive existence and is somehow *there, in the Real*, persisting and antagonising us against all odds [emphasis original].

The act is the *thing* of the political because only through the act can the subject search for knowledge, notwithstanding that knowledge of the *thing* itself is unattainable. Subjects must not be absent from current politics, because to do so is to be caught within the impasse of fidelity to *only* the past. Rather they should maintain connection to the *thing* as a necessary illusion with which they are bound, always presupposing both that there is a demand and that this demand takes the form of loyalty to the integrity of praxis. The *thing* and the subject provide a logic of *the double, a two-some, à deux*, in which an ontological truth of how the subject should think politics requires a devotion to the *thing* without knowing precisely what it is. The act, the *thing* manifesting from an interpellation between fidelity to the past and anxiety about the future, circulates around lack and must be repeated. Such repetition provides the core proposition that knowledge of the Other is impossible with regard to which actions are viable. The act may not result in an event of transgression or emancipation, yet this act is of significance because even in failure it presents as a moment, albeit one of *non-sense*. Here, the subject specifically resists the political as a meta-language through its reworking the structures of demand and of the act. Instead, resultant from this there is the invitation to think politics. Thus, *folie à deux*, the illusion of completeness between the act and the subject remains intact as an ethical stance in its potential to uncover unconscious desires via the act. More than this, *folie à deux* is a symptom of the Other when considered as a pathos of politics because it can allow the act to materialise as a specific and necessary point of deliberation. The subject must grapple with this symptomatic conception of the act, which is one of both politics itself and of being political via the act. Importantly, the act must remain imprecise, indeterminate, atemporal yet context bound because it is the act which orders both approach and substance via signification.

I claim that it is possible to talk about the politics of psychoanalysis as a *thing* of the act, although in psychoanalytic discourse this is usually understood as

a form of sublimation. I also maintain the inverse, that the act enunciates the subject and provides legitimacy through transmission, or as Brennan (2004) puts it, the contagious energy which accompany judgements. Psychoanalysis provides a way to think politics because it critically questions traditions and processes of historicisation through conduits of *jouissance*, demand and desire. Simply put, psychoanalysis allows politics to map lack and demand and thereby break from recurrent, sometimes regressive historical teleology. In this undoing of socially sanctioned, neurotic idealisations, our fetishes and fascinations are thrown into crisis, and more so, those who propagate such sublimations are rendered answerable through the subject repeatedly making revolutionary, even impossible, demands. This kind of transmission, what Lacan calls ‘the field of experience’, puts the symptom to work and from this the act manifests and attempts to undermine the signalling of meaning. Here the subject oscillates between necessary coexisting forces of *love* and *hate* and is usually situated somewhere in between and within cognition beyond love and hate in so far as their unpredictability could provoke either disjuncture or possibly, truth. Love and hate could be seen as standing in for Badiou’s *scene-of-the-two* (derived from the Maoist dictum that *one divides into two*), where although apparently indistinguishable they are nevertheless sufficiently distinct for there to be a third position. This “same difference” (Dolar, 2012, unpaginated), together with the possibility of transmission, must be engulfing and unapologetic, the only interruption being that of the act insofar as the act alone can speak to difference. The act is both concrete and metonymic because the parameters of love and hate are here combined in a single category of demand for an act. Love and hate are not simple affects but complex mechanisms underpinning the desire for and contagious transmission of the condition to think politics. In addition they focus attention on *jouissance* as an affective political agent of transmission. For the subject there can be no *one* universal political act because all political acts are failures of political desire within the structural limits imposed by capitalism, which splits the unitary structure of the subject and the act. In this way Lacanian psychoanalysis has the potential to invigorate Marxism, which confronts antagonistic structures of capitalism as inevitable failures. The failure of an act signifies affective and visceral recognition of and devotion to it. The subject is here compelled to act both by way of a transmission of body (speech) and affect (love, hate and anxiety) and as a projective identification with politics.

The act is thus a contagion which is a point of departure for the subject in that the act combines desire, demand and sacrifice in an explication of political subjectivity. *Folie à deux*, the *scene-of-the-two*, provides a singularity between the act and the subject as a materialist form from which contagious transmission emanates. This kind of affective bodily coercion of the subject *enacting* politically is strangely mad, even erotic, because like psychoanalysis, the realm of the political operates along the same lines as the “analytical cell... [which is] nothing but a bed for lovemaking” (Lacan, Sem VII, 1960-1961, p. 15). For the political subject this is precisely where transmission resultant from the act is located, a contagion which in Lacanian terms involves “the giving of something to another who does not want it”. As Lacan implies, politics is never simply political and love is never just love because both are modalities wherein struggle can be truly thought.

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